

Teacher Guide

Dan Kamin



The Pantomime Man

The *Pantomime Man* demonstrates how the audience becomes an important part of the show in live theatre. Students affect Dan Kamin directly by doing things such as blowing him off the stage or beating him at tug-of-war with an invisible rope. They also become actively involved by listening carefully as Dan guides them through pantomime movements, and by watching closely to see how he creates his illusions. In this way, children learn the basic rhythm of theatrical give-and-take. They learn that they become the “soundtrack” of the show, and that the performer is listening. They also see how theatre is based on pretending, something they do very well already.

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Classroom Activities

Your students will want to talk about the show and try doing pantomime themselves. You can steer their interest into lessons in vocabulary and English (write a “newspaper article” describing the show, a letter about it, or a thank you note to Dan), science (several of Dan’s illusions contradict gravity), art (draw a mime; do some face-painting or make a mask) or, of course, drama (create new pantomime stories or do parts of the show).

Discuss: What is pantomime? *Telling stories and speaking without words.*

Discuss: How can we speak without words?

Do some everyday pantomime!

Examples:

Gestures indicating:

- “Yes”
- “No”
- “Come here”
- “Go away,”
- “Hello”
- “Goodbye”
- “This tastes terrible”

Can you think of any more? Make a list!

Discuss: What is an illusion? *Something that looks real but isn’t.*

Examples:

- A mirage (like water on a hot road)
- A photo (looks 3D but isn’t)
- A movie (the people look real but aren’t)

What are some other illusions?

Do some pantomime illusions!

In pantomime the performer pretends there are things there that aren’t, by showing their size, shape and weight.

Examples for children to try in their seats:

- Drink a glass of water
- Throw a ball around the room
- Pretend a bee is buzzing around their faces.

Examples for one child to demonstrate in front of the class:

- Lift a weight
- Chop down a tree

Examples for two children to do together:

- Have a tug-of-war (*hint: you need to cooperate to make the illusion work; it doesn’t matter who wins, only if the rope looks real*)
- Be on a seesaw
- Be a mirror to someone (*hint: can you do this so well that the audience can’t guess who is the mirror?*)

Activity: Who am I? *In pantomime one person can pretend to be anyone.*

Examples:

- Guess my age (crawling, walking with a cane, etc.)
- Guess my job (a doctor, a bus driver, a teacher) (*Hint: Be sure to change your face, your movement and your posture to become different people.*)

Activity: Where am I? *Show where you are by your action.*

Examples:

- Brushing your teeth (bathroom)
- Shoveling snow (outside in winter).

Activity: What is my feeling? *The body always shows what you are feeling inside.*

Examples:

- Freeze like a statue and have the other children guess what feeling the statue is showing.
- Name a feeling, and think of what situation would make a person feel that way. *Example: Scared—being in a haunted house. Invite a volunteer to silently act out this emotion and situation.*
- (For older children) Show how a person can go from one feeling to another. *Example: A person walks along the street and stubs his toe (happy to sad).*

Activity: Practice makes perfect.

- Practice your favorite part of the show in school or at home, and show it to the class.

Press Conference

It might also be fun to hold your own press conference. Have one student stand in front of the room as Dan Kamin, answering the questions in the interview below. If everyone has a copy of the interview, “Dan” can choose which reporter gets to ask the next question, just like at a real press conference. You can even put “Dan” on the spot by asking questions that aren’t in the script!

Q: What is pantomime?

A: Pantomime is saying things and telling stories without using words. Everyone does pantomime, every day! For example, when we wave goodbye, nod our heads "yes," or shake our heads "no," people understand what we mean even though we're not speaking. Without saying anything, the expression on our face tells people how we're feeling. Our body movements show many things about us as well--like when we're happy, or tired, or scared.

Q: If everyone does pantomime, what's so special about it?

A: In a stage show, a pantomime performer, or mime, can use movements to pretend amazing things. He or she can make invisible walls, ropes, and balloons look very real to the audience. These pretend things become part of the stories the mime tells.

Q: What made you start doing pantomime?

A: Two things. First, I saw an old, old movie starring a funny little man with big shoes named Charlie Chaplin. Years ago, before movies had sound on them, Charlie Chaplin made people laugh without saying a word. I thought, I'd like to do that, too. But I didn't know how. Then I saw a mime do a show without talking. He could do things like lean on thin air without falling over. The mime and Charlie Chaplin were both doing pantomime. I began studying with that mime to learn how to do it myself.

Q: What was his name?

A: Jewel Walker.

Q: How did he teach you?

A: I had to learn to move each part of my body separately from the other parts, sort of like you learn to play musical scales by playing one note at a time. It was hard at first, and took a lot of practice. But that's how I learned to take movements out of real life and turn them into pantomime--by moving one part of me at a time.

Q: Did you read books or go to libraries to learn as well?

A: Before I discovered pantomime, I loved to do magic. I found many books on magic in the library with the number 793.8 in the Dewey Decimal System. When I got interested in pantomime, I found books about Charlie Chaplin and other movie mimes, but not too many about doing mime on the stage.

continued



Charlie Chaplin

Q: Who are your favorite mimes?

A: Charlie Chaplin is still my very favorite. I also like other silent movie stars like Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Douglas Fairbanks. Jim Carrey does a lot of pantomime, and I like some of his movies. I also like a famous French mime named Marcel Marceau, who performs on stage in white makeup like me.

Q: Why do you wear white makeup?

A: Because it helps people see the expression on my face, even if they're sitting far away. Also, it's a little like a clown, and since I do lots of funny things, I like that look.

Q: Did you ever make a movie or appear on television?

A: Yes. I taught several movie stars to do pantomime—Robert Downey, Jr. for the movie *Chaplin* and Johnny Depp for *Benny and Joon*. I played small parts in those movies, too. Believe it or not, I played a movie monster—a wooden Indian who came to life in the film *Creepshow 2*. I also was on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The puppets there called me “K-Man.”

Q: Do you like doing pantomime?

A: I love doing pantomime. I love doing my special kinds of shows, where I tell stories without words and make people laugh.

Q: Did you tell those children what to do when they came on stage?

A: No, they were simply very wicked children.



Marcel Marceau

Meet “The Pantomime Man”



Dan Kamin has performed all around the world and created comedy pantomime sequences for several films, including *Chaplin* and *Benny and Joon*. He once played a movie monster—the wooden Indian that came to life in the film *Creepshow 2*—and he helped to create the Martian movement for Tim Burton’s *Mars Attacks!* Dan often performs with symphony orchestras, and sometimes walks in slow motion through crowded shopping malls and arts festivals. He wrote a book about Charlie Chaplin called *Charlie Chaplin’s One-Man Show*. Your students can learn more about Dan and see more of his antics on his website, www.dankamin.com.

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Further Exploration

BOOKS ON CHARLIE CHAPLIN

Most people agree that the greatest mime of all was Charlie Chaplin. Here are several books on Chaplin written especially for children:

BROWN, Pam: *Charlie Chaplin/Comic genius who brought laughter and hope to millions*, Gareth Stevens Children's Books, Milwaukee, WI, 1991.

DIAMOND, Arthur: *The Importance of Charlie Chaplin*, Lucent Books, San Diego, CA, 1995.

KAMEN, Gloria: *Charlie Chaplin*, Atheneum, NY, 1982.

TURK, Ruth: *Charlie Chaplin, Genius of the Silent Screen*, Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, 2000.

DVDs AND VIDEOS

Showing a silent comedy film in class is a wonderful way to draw your students deeper into the art of movement. Many great silent films are short (twenty minutes), making them easy to show in a class period. Your students will enjoy these films, which feature daredevil physical comedy and memorable stories. You can use the films to stimulate art projects (draw a scene from a film), writing projects (describe what you have seen) or class discussion (compare the films to cartoons and other familiar contemporary comedy films).

Here are some silent classics you might want to show. They are readily accessible through libraries and rental outlets.

The Adventurer (1917). Charlie Chaplin plays an escaped convict who becomes the guest of a wealthy family. 20 minutes.

A Dog's Life (1918). Chaplin can't find a job in this film, but finds a canine friend to share his adventures. 35 minutes.

The Kid (1921). Chaplin adopts an abandoned baby in one of the first feature length comedies, a worldwide blockbuster in 1921. 68 minutes.



Buster Keaton

The Scarecrow (1920). Buster Keaton lives in a house with amazing automated devices. Keaton's mechanical ingenuity and daredevil stunts are amazing to behold. 17 minutes.

Cops (1922). Buster innocently causes a chain reaction of disasters that gets every cop in the city chasing him. Keaton's acrobatic comedy still makes audiences gasp. 22 minutes.

The General (1927). Keaton's Civil War comedy is so authentic it's like Matthew Brady photographs come to life. This is considered by many to be Keaton's masterpiece. 82 minutes.

ON THE WEB

www.dankamin.com – Dan Kamin

www.chaplinreview.com – Charlie Chaplin

www.busterkeaton.com – Buster Keaton

www.haroldlloyd.com/legal.asp – Harold Lloyd

pubpages.unh.edu/~mgg/index.html – Bert Williams, famous black mime artist and singer