

# Trent Arterberry • Think Bigg • Study-Guide

## Synopsis of Program

*Think Bigg* is an exciting blend of education and entertainment that encourages children to become aware of their bodies and their imaginations as powerful tools of self-expression and communication. Students first learn about the various components of non-verbal communication, and later become involved right in their seats exploring classic mime techniques. In sketches like the *Scuba Dude*, *Roboman* and *Mr. Bigg*, Arterberry creates characters and their environments using storytelling, mime, music and puppetry.

### Roboman

—*Ratcheting Roboman discovers the limits—and reaches—of his own body.*

### Scuba Dude

—*In this undersea adventure, Scuba Dude fends off sharks only to nearly succumb to the pain of a broken heart.*

### TV

—*Who is watching whom in this tale of media manipulation?*

### Balloon

—*The audience learns this illusion in their seats as Trent shows how to use it to create an entire story.*

### Suggest an Object

—*The audience gets a chance to make suggestions which Trent improvises.*

### Easy Mime

—*A volunteer performs a mime duet with Trent and is rewarded with a full white-face make-up.*

### Mr. Bigg

—*Trent creates the “world’s greatest dancer” with a three-foot-tall puppet and a medley of toe-tapping tunes.*

## Educational Content

*Think Bigg* is a program of mime and storytelling which introduces children to humankind’s oldest form of communication. Students learn about gesture, body language, illusion, character and environment. They will learn specific

mime techniques including tug-of-war, the wall and the balloon.

## Educational Objectives

The educational goals of *Think Bigg*:

1. To introduce the concept of a “live performance” structure and what it means to be an audience.

- *How do you know when sketches begin and end?*
- *How do you know when to applaud?*
- *How is this performance different from TV?*

2. To demonstrate and make conscious the expressive ability of the human body.

- *Give examples or show how people communicate without words in everyday life.*
- *Give examples or show how Trent communicated his feelings with his face and body.*

3. To introduce and teach several techniques of classic mime which create the illusion of action and allows the mime to tell a story.

- *Name some of the illusions that Trent used to tell his stories.*
- *Practice some of the illusions the students learned during the show.*

4. To teach elements of theatre such as character, environment and conflict.

- *Identify these elements in the Scuba Dude scene.*
- *Identify these elements in some other familiar stories.*

5. To introduce mime as an art form.

- *What are some of the skills that would be required to be a professional mime?*
- *What are the skills required to be a good mime audience?*

6. To demonstrate story-theatre performance, and the structure of beginning, middle and end.

- *Think of other stories that might make good story-theatre tales.*



### Trent Arterberry

During his 30 year career, Trent Arterberry has performed for thousands of audiences across North America, Europe and Asia. He left pre-med studies at UCLA to study mime, eventually training with the renowned French master, Marcel Marceau.

Arterberry has opened for major recording artists including Marvin Hamlisch, B.B. King, Spyro Gyra and the Kinks. He opened Julio Iglesias’ first North American tour, including four nights at New York’s Radio City Music Hall.

After hundreds of college appearances, Trent was named *Campus Performing Artist of the Year*. He has performed around the world on luxury liners including the world cruise of the QE2 and the SS Norway Comedy Cruise.

Arterberry has entertained at trade shows and meetings for major corporations including AT&T, AETNA Casualty and Life and Rockport Shoes.

In 1998, Trent brought his public performance, *Mime Out Loud* to the Victoria Fringe Theatre Festival where it won *Best Local Production*.

### **Suggested Audience Behavior**

As with any theatre performance, Trent requests that during the show no photographs or video be taken. In order to enjoy this show students must really pay attention. Although Trent will speak to the audience, much of the show is non-verbal, and students will understand it from his facial expressions and body language. It is important that students focus and keep noise to a minimum. We also encourage students to enjoy the show, and to laugh and applaud at appropriate times.

### **Post-Performance Activities**

#### **Frozen Picture Warm-up**

1. Students work in groups of three.
2. The teacher calls out a cue word: e.g. *beach, family, football, zoo, test, on the moon, or underwater.*
3. The first group runs across the room and forms a tableau (frozen group picture) that represents the word.
4. The teacher can comment on what makes the tableau effective, and what can make it more so.

#### **The Adverb Game**

1. Students sit in a semi-circle with a chair in front of them.
2. Each student thinks of an adverb. S/he must then pick up the chair, move it and sit down on it, moving in the style of the adverb. For example, a student might be asked to move the chair *quickly, romantically, angrily, fearfully, clumsily, joyfully, slowly, proudly, rigidly, gently, anxiously,* etc.
3. When the actor is finished, the rest of the class guesses the word.
4. The purpose of this game is to teach how quality of movement can convey emotion, attitude and tone.

#### **Do You See What I See?**

1. Students sit in semi-circle on the floor, and perform on at a time.

2. One student walks into the playing area, looks around, sees something imaginary, and communicates what s/he sees by his/her expression.
4. When s/he returns to his/her seat, the other students guess what it is.
5. As an extension to this exercise, students can handle the object. Remind students to take a minute to see the object in their mind's eye and to use slow, precise movements to show size, shape and weight.
5. Other evaluation criteria include:



Marcel Marceau, the great French mime, as his alter-ego, Bip. (Courtesy of Ronald Wilford)

- using the whole body, keeping the presentation uncluttered, short and simple.
6. The teacher can help guide the students to notice what kinds of gestures, facial expressions, etc. help to communicate clearly and what gets in the way of audience recognition. If students are really shy, then no talking is allowed until everyone has presented. This helps to create a safe and focussed environment.

#### **Character/ Conflict/ Narrative**

This is a long narrative process and can easily take two 40 minute classes. It does, however, help with understanding story and structure in other disciplines and can be linked to the curriculum in a number of ways.

1. Students work in pairs.
2. Together they choose characters that might be in a scene together. One character can be an animal, but not a television character.
3. The next question is "What are we doing?" The students answer this by finding a conflict between the two characters. This can be physical (a farmer trying to move a spirited horse) or emotional (a child wanting an ice cream cone from a parent).
4. If students are stuck for ideas, have them focus on some object in their scene. Remind them that a conflict is not always a "fight," but can be a problem that needs to be solved. Usually, conflict comes out of opposing objectives.
5. To help the students create a clear narrative, try making a "comic strip" first:
  - a. Students form a frozen picture that begins the story. Who are the characters? Where are they?
  - b. Students create a middle frame or two, to show the conflict.
  - c. Students show the outcome or ending in a final frozen frame.
  - d. These physical tableaux will capture the essence of a scene and help students to use strong, uncluttered gestures and expressions.
6. Have students perfect these tableaux until they can move quickly from one to the next and hold them in stillness for the count of five.
7. Students can then fill in the transitions between the tableaux, creating a smoothly flowing narrative.

## Glossary of Terms

**Mime**—the art of telling a story through movements of the body.

**Gesture**—a movement of the hands or body that communicates or emphasizes an idea or feeling.

**Posture**—a shape of the body that expresses an attitude or character.

**Illusion**—the appearance of something happening that is not really happening.

**Isolation**—moving one part of the body separately from the rest.

**Character**—a type of person. A participant in a story.

**Conflict**—the dramatic struggle of a story created by opposing needs or desires of the characters.

**Environment**—the place or setting where a story occurs.

**Improvisation**—the act of performing a scene without preparation.

## History of Mime

### The First Mimes

In a sense, mime was humankind's first language. From ancient cave paintings, we speculate that primitive people acted out the hunting of animals, to insure



Charlie Chaplin, star of silent films, as the Little Tramp in *City Lights*. (Courtesy of Institute International du Theatre)

success in the real thing. Perhaps he acted out his ideas of the elements and the origins of the world.

### Mime in Ancient Greece and Rome

It was in ancient Greece that real theatre emerged, and this theatre utilized mime. The Greek plays used central characters and choruses who mimed as they spoke, and reacted physically to the action of the main characters. These plays were performed in vast amphitheatres and the use of mime increased the comprehension for those too far to hear.

Mime flourished in the Roman empire.

Often performed by slaves, themes ranged from the serious enactment of myths and legends, to the farcical depiction of sporting events and local celebrities.

### The Middle Ages

In the tenth century, the church recognized the value of theatre as a teaching tool, promoting the mystery, morality, and miracle plays. Their themes consisted of biblical stories, histories of the saints, and the common moral dilemmas of the everyday person. They were performed in the churches in the forms of tableaux and pantomime and were linked with dialogue.

There were also ritualistic spoken plays called mummers plays acted out by village folk during celebrations.

### Commedia dell'Arte

In the fifteenth century Italian comedy theatre known as Commedia dell'Arte emerged. Commedia was performed by travelling troupes of players, who improvised shows based on stock characters

and loose, largely improvised scripts. The Commedia style was broad and slapstick, with characters having exaggerated costuming and body posturing.

By the sixteenth century, commedia troupes had travelled throughout Europe and enjoyed great popularity for over two hundred years.



Red Skelton, television star of the 1950's, as Freddy the Freeloader.

### Mime Goes to France

In France, commedia competed with the established local theatres, the Comedie Francaise and the Opera. These theatres persuaded the

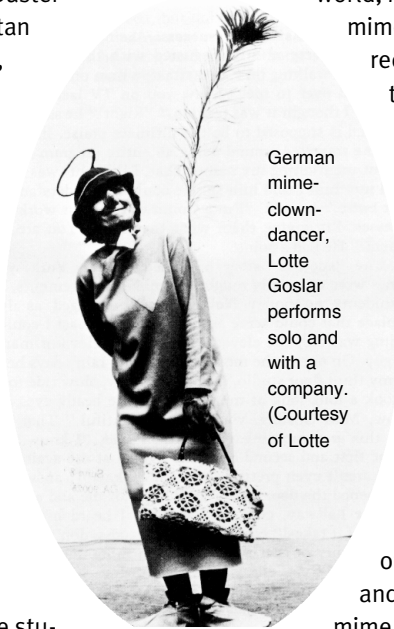
authorities to restrict their Italian rivals to performing without words. In doing so, they forced the resourceful commedia companies to rely on pantomime, and by the 18th century, pantomime had become a genuine theatrical genre with its own actors, characters, and composers.

In Paris in the 19th Century, the Boulevard du Temple was the center of theatre, and it was a perpetual fair with acrobats, animals, musicians, and bizarre acts. One Boulevard theatre, the Theatre des Funambules, produced pantomime plays starring Jean-Gaspard Deburau. Deburau played a Pierrot character called Baptiste—a slender, pale, elegant jack-of-all-trades who was involved in fantasy farcical situations. Deburau was tremendously popular with Parisian audiences until his death.

### Silent Movies

When the moving picture first came into being, it was silent. Early films relied on action rather than word, and early film stars were great mimes because of their

skill with physical communication. These mimes included Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, and the greatest of all, Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin created a Pierrot-like character called “the little tramp”, a humble, penniless optimist who was always getting in trouble but trying to make the best out of every situation. Chaplin’s films were a great success and played around the world.



German mime-clown-dancer, Lotte Goslar performs solo and with a company. (Courtesy of Lotte

#### **Etienne Decroux**

In 1923, a French theatre student named Etienne Decroux became interested in the meaning, beauty, and drama of the human body. He developed a form of mime called “mime corporeal” (mime of the body).

Decroux had two famous students, Jean-Louis Barrault and Marcel Marceau. Barrault appeared in the 1945 film “Les Enfants du Paradis” (Children of Paradise) as Jean-Gaspard Debureau, the famous 19th century mime.

#### **Marcel Marceau**

Decroux’s other great student was Marcel Marceau. Marceau began performing in 1946 and has toured a solo show which has made him famous the world over.

In his show, Marceau portrays Bip, a Pierrot-like character reminiscent of Chaplin’s Little Tramp. Bip plays as an artist, bullfighter, and baby sitter, attempts suicide, and travels by train. He is an everyman character with whom we all can identify.

Marceau is the greatest theatrical mime of the 20th century as Debureau was during the 19th. Through his television appearances and hundreds of year-

ly concerts in great halls around the world, Marceau has brought mime to a new level of recognition and popularity. Today, in his 70’s, Marceau performs, teaches, and directs a mime company in Paris.

#### **Mime on Television**

During the 1950’s while Marceau was popularizing mime on the stage, mime was also being performed during the golden age of television. Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca played mime sketches on “The

Show of Shows”, and Red Skelton made famous his silent clown, “Freddy the Freeloader.” Dick Van Dike began as a mime performer in night clubs. During the late seventies, the husband and wife team of Robert Shields and Lorene Yarnell had a brief-running television show devoted entirely to mime.

#### **Jacques LeCoq**

There was another great French mime named Jacques LeCoq. founded a school in Paris whose teachings include Commedia, mask work, and a personal approach to clowning. Several of LeCoq’s students have had great success including Dimitri, the clown, and Mummenshanz, the mask-mime company.

#### **Women in Mime**

There have been many wonderful women mimes. Collete (1873-1954), who was known throughout the world as a writer, also performed as a mime in music halls. Angna Enters (b. 1907) was a painter, dancer, writer, composer and was the first American concert mime.

Mamako Yoneyama, a contemporary Japanese mime developed a special genre which she calls Zen Mime. Lotte Goslar, a mime-clown-dancer from Germany who came to the US in 1939, works both solo and with a company, The Pantomime Circus.

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Trent as Mr. Bigg; Rob Destrube photo