

The Magic of Mime

by ReadWorks



Becky Baumwoll never forgets her lines. That's partly because there aren't any lines in the plays she performs. Becky and her theater company, Broken Box, tell stories without using words. They wear white face paint and dress in black. Their plays are performed on an empty stage and without any props. But when the show begins, the empty stage suddenly looks like a desert, a castle, a forest, or a dining room. Without changing her costume, Becky transforms from a wiry old ogre, to a sparrow, to a cup full of Jell-O. Though her hands are empty, she seems to be holding a sword, a can of beans, or the reins of a horse. How can this happen? Are we under a spell? Does Becky know magic?

Becky is a kind of actor called a mime. Ever since she was in college, Becky has been practicing and perfecting her art. A mime tells stories silently and creates objects and landscapes using just his or her body. "If we're telling a story about fighting a dragon," Becky explains, "we can't say, 'LOOK THERE'S A DRAGON OVER THERE!' We have to come up with ways to show the audience there's a dragon, by

either making one out of mimes like a big moving sculpture, or miming an invisible one."

It's not quite magic, but close. Becky and her company of mimes know how to excite the imagination of their audience. The audience's imagination provides the stories with words, props, costumes, and stage sets. "The audience can imagine a more amazing dragon than we would ever be able to describe with words." Becky knows that everyone has an incredible imagination. Broken Box helps us use ours. Our imagination is where the magic comes from.

Sometimes the mimes are so successful that members of the audience can forget that the props and scenes are imaginary. When Becky was in college, she performed a story about a guardian angel. The angel, who was played by another mime named Tasha Milkman, wants to become a human being, and to do that she has to tear off her wings. "About a week after our performance," Becky says, "Tasha's friend called her and asked if she could borrow Tasha's angel wings for a project she was doing. She had forgotten they were mimed!"

Some stories are very difficult to tell in mime. "Watching a play in mime is like piecing together a puzzle," Becky explains. "The audience has to follow every gesture and movement to understand what's going on." The mimes practice and practice to make all of their movements perfect, otherwise the audience might not know what to imagine. Once, Broken Box performed a play about a fortune-teller at a carnival. They had a great story, but how could they ever get the audience to imagine the carnival? "A carnival is a very specific place. It's busy and bustling, outdoors, big, dirty, bright, and loud." They didn't have nearly enough actors to portray all the people in the crowd, and since they couldn't shout, they couldn't make the stage very loud. Finally, they found a solution: "We had the main characters walk back and forth on the stage, and every time they walked, the rest of the mimes behind them would make a new group pose around a different carnival act: a strongman, a sword-swallower, and performing sisters." The audience imagined a bustling carnival full of people. It was so noisy we could hardly hear what the characters were saying!

Though Becky claims to not know magic, she does know how to conjure things out of thin air. Once, when she was very sad, she created a story about a woman who is so sad she can hardly stand. A second mime played the part of the woman's soul. In the play, the soul tries very hard to help make the woman feel better, pushing her with all her might. Finally the soul succeeds in helping the woman stand. After weeks of working on the performance, Becky started to feel less sad. Creating the performance made her feel better. In a way, mime is magical. "It's like I created my own medicine."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Becky's job?

- A. being a mime
- B. being a singer
- C. being a dancer
- D. being a musician

2. How does the author describe the art of mime?

- A. easy to do, because there are no lines to forget
- B. performed by only one person at a time
- C. requiring lots of exercise and physical training
- D. performed on an empty stage with no props

3. A good mime can make audiences forget that the props and scenes are imaginary.

What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

- A. "The audience imagined a bustling carnival full of people. It was so noisy we could hardly hear what the characters were saying! "
- B. "'Tasha's friend called her and asked if she could borrow Tasha's angel wings for a project she was doing. She had forgotten they were mimed!'"
- C. "Becky knows that everyone has an incredible imagination. Broken Box help us use ours. Our imagination is where the magic comes from."
- D. "'We have to come up with ways to show the audience there's a dragon, by either making one out of mimes like a big moving sculpture, or miming an invisible one.'"

4. Based on the passage, which of the following skills would a mime need most?

- A. a clear and loud voice that can fill a room
- B. sewing and costume-making skills
- C. control and awareness of their body
- D. a talent for singing and dancing

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. how mimes tell stories using their bodies and imagination
- B. how Becky trained to be a mime in the theater company Broken Box
- C. a successful performance where Broken Box mimed a carnival
- D. the difficulties of telling stories without words, props, or stage sets

6. Read the following sentences: "But when the show begins, the empty stage suddenly looks like a desert, a castle, a forest, or a dining room. Without changing her costume, Becky **transforms** from a wiry old ogre, to a sparrow, to a cup full of Jell-O."

As used in this sentence, what does the word "**transform**" mean?

- A. stay the same as before
- B. make something from nothing
- C. change from one thing into another
- D. become more beautiful and attractive

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Mimes do not use their voices when performing scenes. _____, they rely on their movements and facial expressions to tell a story.

- A. Finally
- B. Instead
- C. Notably
- D. In the end

8. Why do mimes practice to make all of their movements perfect?

9. Explain why an imaginative audience is necessary for a mime performance to work.

10. Explain whether mime can be seen as magical and why. Support your answer using information from the passage.