

# Study-guide for The Secret Life of Walter Manny

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Written and performed by Trent Arterberry  
Directed by Gregg Goldston  
Story editing by Rob Wipond



**SYNOPSIS** Blending speaking characters with mimed episodes, this play chronicles a day in the life of a misunderstood eight-year-old boy who escapes into adventure-filled fantasies. Secret Agent Manny ascends skyscrapers with ropes and suction cups; Daytona Manny's pit crew races through a crisis; Fire Chief Manny extinguishes catastrophe in a burning building. Walter's frequent daydreaming causes his classmates to reject and bully him. But then, during an actual fire, Walter uses his imaginative resourcefulness to save a life and becomes a school hero.

**STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY** This is a mime show embedded within a play. There are five speaking characters whose dialogue explains what is going on in the "real" world. There are nine fantasies done in mime that communicate what is going on in Walter's imagination.

Walter imagines himself to be, in this order: a cowboy, secret agent, monster-fighter, fireman, racecar driver, trans-Atlantic pilot, baseball star, and the victim of an alien abduction. At the end of the play a fire erupts at school and Walter cleverly devises a way of saving the class rabbit, who is trapped inside a smoke-filled classroom.

Fantasy becomes reality as Walter now becomes a hero. Darla, who snubbed him earlier, now wants Walter to help her with her homework. And Jimmy, who had been picking on him, wants Walter to play on his baseball team.

**AND THE LESSON IS** Walter learns that his constant daydreaming and inattentiveness to “what is really happening” is disturbing to others and even dangerous. He discovers that his vivid imagination must be combined with self-control and discipline in order to solve real-world problems.

Walter's classmates learn to tolerate and appreciate others who seem a bit different. Differences in others are not a bad thing, but rather make our world more interesting.

This is a story of one who is misunderstood and underappreciated, and who overcomes the outside world's limiting expectations to achieve success.

As it was with Orville and Wilbur Wright who were ridiculed in their day for thinking they could make a flying machine, in time they were vindicated.

**PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION** Ask the students if they know what mime is. Think of some examples of ways that they communicate in daily life without words (waving, gesturing to stop, come hither, etc).

Explain that the main character is Walter, and the whole story happens in twenty-four hours. The other characters are his grandmother; his teacher, Mr. Potter; Darla, his wannabe friend; Jimmy, the school bully; and his special friend, Roger.

Explain that the characters will speak to each other, and that they are telling the story of what is “really happening.” And there will also be mimed scenes, which depict what is happening in Walter's imagination. In many of these scenes, Walter imagines himself to be a hero.





POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES  
GRADES K-2

- 1) **Reading:** One of the central themes of this show is differentiating between reality and fantasy. A good book to read with a similar theme is Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (Harper Collins, 1988).
- 2) **Recalling:** See how many of Walter's fantasies the students can remember and list them on the board.
- 3) **Retelling:** Draw a picture of one of Walter's fantasies.
- 4) **Making Connections:** Read Tacky the Penguin by Helen Lester (Sandpiper, 2006). This is the story of an eccentric penguin whose loud habits irritate the other penguins—until they scare off a pack of hunters and save the day. How is Tacky's story similar to Walter's?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES  
GRADES 3-6

- 1) **Critical Thinking:** What did Walter learn during this show? What did his classmates learn?
- 2) **Personal Response:** Write about a time that you felt misunderstood by others. How did this make you feel? Did this situation create a conflict? How did the conflict resolve?
- 3) **Creating:** If you were Walter Manny, what other imaginary adventures might you have? Create a new fantasy for Walter. Can you include the situation that triggers his fantasy? What causes him to come out of the fantasy?
- 4) **Moving Expressively:** Working in groups, choreograph a spy scene. (For example: enter the building, search for the object, find the object, escape with the object as others are chasing you). Use the Mission Impossible theme music and perform the sketches for the other groups.

MORE RESOURCES

More information about Trent Arterberry can be found on his website at <http://trentshow.com>. If you click on the “study-guides” tab and download the “Think Bigg” study-guide, there is information about how to do mime illusions.

**ABOUT THE ARTIST** During his multi-decade career, Trent has performed for thousands of audiences across North America, Europe and Asia. He thought he was going to be a doctor, like his dad, but instead he decided to study mime, eventually training with the renowned French master, Marcel Marceau.

When Trent first started out, he 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. His largest audience was in the old Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto in front of fifteen thousand people.

One unusual assignment was posing for photographs underwater inside the giant ocean tank of the New England Aquarium, where a sea turtle bit him on the bottom. Another photo shoot was for a Capital Records album cover where he appeared on frozen Walden Pond in the middle of winter in a leotard and tights. He had to run inside after five minutes so that his hands wouldn't freeze.

Trent has played at hundreds of colleges in the US, and was named Campus Performing Artist of the Year. He has also played around the world on luxury liners including the world cruise of the QE2 and the SS Norway Comedy Cruise.

Trent currently resides on Vancouver Island, Canada, with his wife, Bev, his son, Nate, and a little black dog named Madison. Trent's hobbies include kayak surfing, bicycling, photography and listening to music.



For more information on Trent Arterberry's shows, contact:  
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**Artists**  
in **Education**

*Trent's son, Nate, at age 5, was an inspiration in the creation of this show.*