

# IMAGO STUDY GUIDE

## Imago Theatre's ZOOZOOO



This study guide has been designed for teachers who wish to engage K-12 students in the work of Imago Theatre's ZooZoo.

Each topic or question has been written for the older student. You can rephrase the comment or question for the younger student as needed.

The topics in this study guide can be used to develop a class that lasts anywhere from one hour to several hours or days. They cover the basic techniques and methods Imago uses to create work. These topics have kept us busy for over 30 years. Your own creativity will reveal how to communicate them to your students and how much depth you want to go into.

# OBSERVATION



**Imago Theatre's** work is based on the teachings of Jacques Lecoq, who influenced many artists worldwide by examining and observing the world through movement.

*Observation is a key component of all Imago artists—designers, writers, directors, and composers.*

## Observation and Mimicry

Human beings are by nature mimics. As children we learn through copying the world around us. Mime or mime theatre is the art of reflecting the world by imitation. However, the highest form of imitation is not parody. Imitation is an art form of the highest order in which the actor embodies the object, animal, element or form he is attempting to mimic.





# EXERCISES

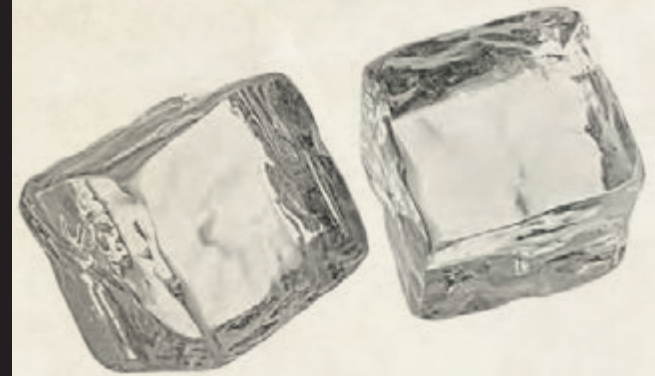


**Trees & Wind** Look at the wind blowing the trees. How would you move if you were a tree in the wind? How would you move if the wind had gusts and lulls? How would you move if there was a faint breeze? Don't just make the shape of the tree. Plant your body firmly into the ground. Feel the trunk, extend your arms. Note how the outer branches will sway more in the wind than parts of the branch closer to the trunk. Look at each other, do the exercise, don't judge who looks like the tree, but determine who is a tree.

**Bacon** Have you ever watched bacon frying in a pan? How does the bacon begin? What is its shape? How does it feel (if the bacon could feel). What happens to the bacon when it begins to heat? What happens to the bacon as it shrivels and becomes crisp?

**Water & Ice** You are a cup of water. The temperature is slowly getting colder and colder. How does the water feel as it becomes heavier? How does it feel when it turns to ice? How does it move when someone turns the cup over and the ice falls through the air and breaks on the ground?

The above exercises sound simple on the surface. They can be approached in a simple way or, with proper instruction, they can serve as a master class for advanced theatre majors. It all depends on how much you think about and explore the ideas and movements. Theatre is like poetry. We all have access to words, but only a great poet can put them together to make great art.





# OBSERVATION

## Observation of Imago's Video

Play the youtube video of ZooZoo at:

<http://www.imagotheatre.com/zoozoo.html>

If you don't have internet access, you may ask for a DVD copy of the video from Opus 3 Artists.

## Video Observation – Memory

Directors, writers and actors use memory to observe the world. They watch and remember, take notes in a notebook they carry with them, or keep a journal at home in which they write their thoughts on what they have experienced in the world.

### Exercise:

Play the Imago video for one minute. Ask the students to write down all the animals and objects they saw. Ask them to describe colors and movements. Compare notes and discuss how memory works, what are the best ways to remember experiences.





# OBSERVATION

Imago created the penguin piece first by watching penguins and then putting the characters in a human situation. After you watch the penguins on the video, engage in the following discussion:

## Questions:

What aspects of the performance were more human than animal? What aspects of the performance was more animal than human? By looking at the mask and costume, what defines the animal of penguin? What stands out the most and best to define the animal in the costume? Describe the human emotions each penguin goes through at different parts of the performance.



# VIDEO OBSERVATION

## Frogs

Play the next section of the video – Frogs.

Imago often places masks on different parts of the head or the body to recreate the animal in an almost illusionistic way.

### Questions:

Where is the actor's face? (Answer: he is looking down at the floor and not through the mask's eyes.) Why did the creators of the show do this? (Answer: to disguise the human form and make the frog look squat. It also creates a great appearance when the frog jumps.) How does the actor know where to move if he can't see? (Answer: Imago uses sounds that the actors create for one another; also, they use marking on the floor to know where they are.) How does the actor bring the mask to life so that it looks like the frog is actually seeing? (Answer: this is called bringing the mask to life and the actor must imagine it. This is done through lots of rehearsal with other actors and directors from the outside guiding the actor.)





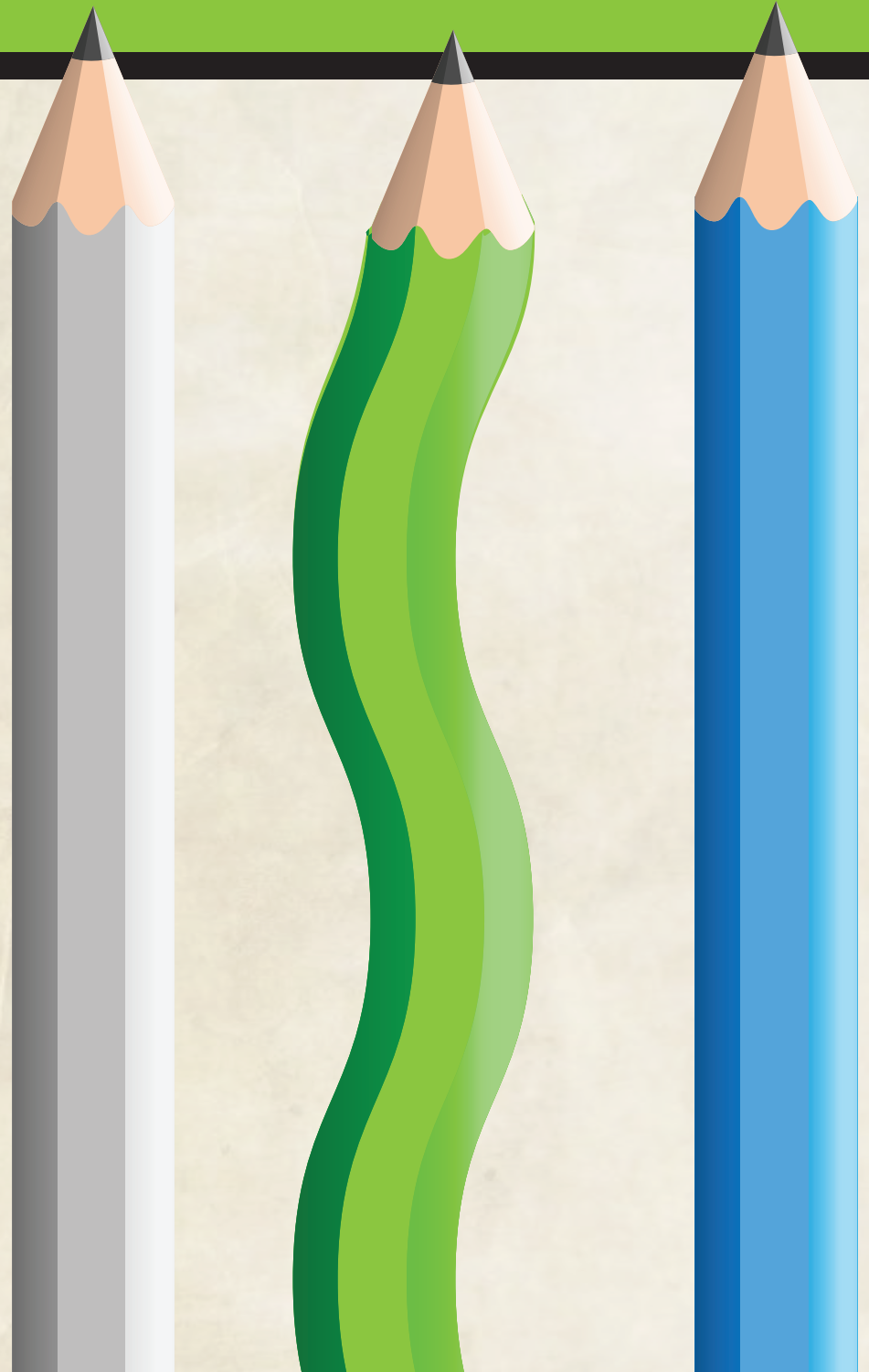
# EXERCISES

Bringing objects to life Children partake in this kind of play naturally. When children play with toys many times they give them life and speak for them. You can take this one step further by examining with the student actor how to bring an inanimate object to life:

Have the student actor choose a prop, something he can carry in his hand; for example, a pencil. Look at the pencil. What is its shape? (Answer: long and slender.) How would a long and slender shape move through the space? (Answer: in long and sharp moves, cutting the space like a space ship.) What is the opposite move? (Answer: curves and soft moves.)

Have the student actor bring the pencil to life by going from one extreme to the other. Start with sharp, fast moves and then change to slow, curvy moves. Have the actor add sound to each of these two extremes.

This can be repeated with any household object that easily moves. This is the kind of approach Jacques Lecoq used to have actors bring objects to life—an examination of the physical nature of the object and then finding its opposite nature.



# DESIGN OF MASKS



Pass out the images of the masks in the study guide.

Point out the attributes of the masks.

See how the mask designer has taken a single element and made it the most prominent in the design. What is most prominent in each mask—the nose, the chin, the cheeks?



After you identify the most prominent feature, notice how the mask designer has taken each line of the mask and highlighted the prominent feature.



# EXERCISES

## **Exercise:**

With paper and pencil, have the students think of a prominent feature on the face – nose, ears, forehead, cheeks, or eyes. Have the student draw that feature first with no other part of the mask drawn. After the feature is drawn, ask the student to now draw the other features of the mask but to try to support the prominent feature. For example, if the student has drawn a pointed nose, then the lines of the cheek should lead to the point. Perhaps the lips are pointed. Perhaps the eyes are diagonal. All the lines of the mask are to support the prominent feature.

## **Advanced Exercise:**

With art students or advanced students, have the artists draw the mask from different perspectives: profile, three-quarter, bird's eye view.

## **Mask making:**

This process can be used to create three-dimensional masks. This study guide does not provide a mask making technique, but suggests you find books or websites that are appropriate for your students.



# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## Further Study

Imago's work stems from numerous sources. If you would like to develop an in-depth study of the work that has inspired Imago, we suggest you research the following topics:

Jacques Lecoq

Jacques Copeau

Commedia dell'arte

American Vaudeville

America's Silent Film Era

Jacques Tati

Buster Keaton

Charlie Chaplin

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