

Who was Bernard Bragg?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Bernard Bragg (1928–2018) studied mime under Marcel Marceau in Paris and went on to become a founding member of the National Theatre of the Deaf. He promoted sign-mime, a fusion of miming and American Sign Language, and taught and performed in dozens of countries.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Brooklyn, a Deaf family, and a father who acted

01 GROWING UP IN BROOKLYN

01 Bragg grew up in Brooklyn, and was fully immersed in the Deaf culture through his Deaf parents, aunt and uncle.

02 Bragg was also involved in the acting culture through his dad's job as an amateur actor.

02 STUDYING AT GALLAUDET

01 Bernard studied theater at Gallaudet University, at the time called Gallaudet College.

While studying, Bragg had lead roles in performances, and gained experience directing.

02 Bragg was also interested in literature and won the *Teegarden Award for Creative Poetry* during his final year.

TEACHING AND MIME

Fifteen years at CSD, a meeting with Marcel Marceau, and a season in Paris

03 LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

01 After he finished his education, Bragg became an instructor at the California School for the Deaf (CSD), and taught there for 15 years.

While he was there, he was also involved in extracurricular activities such as supervising and directing student productions.

02 Bernard also continued to pursue his own opportunities in theater by directing convention shows for the National Association of the Deaf and performing at the Los Angeles Club for the Deaf.

04 AN INTERESTING OPPORTUNITY

- 01 While working at CSD, Bragg had an opportunity to see famous mime Marcel Marceau while he was on tour.

At this performance, Bernard was lucky enough to arrange a meeting with Marcel. This connection opened the door for an audition that resulted in him receiving an offer by Marcel to study under him in Paris.

- 02 Bernard accepted Marcel's offer, and traveled to France once the school year was complete.

05 RETURNING TO AMERICA

- 01 Marcel inspired Bragg to perform more, because, as he said:

If he can do a two-hour show without saying a word, why can't I?

BERNARD BRAGG

- 02 When Bragg returned to the States, he successfully performed as a mime in the San Francisco area, with both set routines and improvisations. He toured throughout the country, visiting clubs, theaters, schools and universities.

Bernard also got his own Bay Area TV show, titled *The Quiet Man*, and eventually expanded his tour to Europe.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF THE DEAF

A master's degree, a founding role, and a new art form

06 A GROWING CAREER

- 01 Somehow, Bernard managed to continue teaching as his career grew. He obtained a master's degree in special education with a drama minor at San Francisco State University.

- 02 Bernard did leave his teaching career when he had the opportunity to become a founding member of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD).

Bernard spent a decade with NTD and promoted *sign-mime* as a theatrical art form, which was a fusion between the art of miming and American Sign Language.

07 AFTER NTD

- 01 After leaving NTD, Bernard spoke and performed in 25 countries and 36 cities. Not long after, Bragg worked with a scriptwriter on a TV movie titled *And Your Name is Jonah*.

Bernard also received an acting role in this show, and was the first to present a realistic portrayal of Deaf culture.

HONORS AND LEGACY

Awards, work overseas, two books, and a debt of gratitude

08 AWARDS AND HONORS

AWARD OR HONOR	WHO GAVE IT
International First-Class Merit and Lifetime Achievement Award	World Federation of the Deaf
Tony Award for Theatrical Excellence	Received with the actors of the NTD
Honorary doctorate	Gallaudet University

09 WORK OVERSEAS AND TWO BOOKS

- 01 Bernard also influenced the Deaf overseas as an artist-in-residence with the Moscow Theater of Mimicry and Gesture, and by educating actors at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts in Sweden.
- 02 Bernard had a biography written about him, *Signs of Silence* by Helen Powers, and he penned an autobiography as well, *Lessons in Laughter*.

10 END OF AN ERA

- 01 Towards the end of his life, Bernard performed a one-man show, *Theater In the Sky*. He also arranged for \$55,000 of his show's proceeds to be donated to the National Association of the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf.
- 02 Bernard died in 2018 when he was 90 years old, and he left a lasting impression on many, including famous Deaf actress Marlee Matlin. She was one of his past pupils, and said:

Every actor who is Deaf and who steps on a stage today or in front of a camera owes a debt of gratitude for the path he forged over 50 years ago.

MARLEE MATLIN

11 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Marcel Marceau	The famous mime Bragg met on tour, who offered to teach him in Paris.
Sign-mime	The theatrical art form Bragg promoted at NTD, a fusion of miming and American Sign Language.
National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD)	The company Bragg left teaching to help found, and where he spent a decade.
<i>And Your Name is Jonah</i>	The TV movie Bragg helped write and acted in, said to be the first realistic portrayal of Deaf culture.
<i>Lessons in Laughter</i>	Bragg's autobiography; <i>Signs of Silence</i> by Helen Powers is the biography written about him.
Marlee Matlin	A past pupil of Bragg's, who said Deaf actors today owe a debt to the path he forged.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

12 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How was Bragg exposed to both Deaf culture and acting as a child?

02 What did Bragg do for 15 years after finishing his education, and what did he do outside of that job?

03 Explain how one performance led to Bragg studying in Paris.

04 What is sign-mime, and where did Bragg promote it?

05 Why was Bragg's role in *And Your Name is Jonah* significant?

06 Marlee Matlin said Deaf actors owe Bragg a debt of gratitude. Using two things from this packet, explain what she meant.

13 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Bernard Bragg's website	Content by David S. Evans · bernardbragg.com
Gallaudet University	gallaudet.edu
<i>Great Deaf Americans</i> (2nd ed., 1996)	Matthew Scott Moore & Robert F. Panara · MSM Productions
The New York Times obituary	Neil Genzlinger
The Washington Post obituary	Emily Langer