

Who is Howie Seago?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Howie Seago (1953–present) was born Deaf and raised orally, and first performed in a church play his mother directed. He became an award-winning stage and screen actor, and he built three programs in Washington that give Deaf young people a way into theater.

EARLY LIFE

A Deaf family, a church play, and a childhood without sign language

01 FAMILY LIFE

- 01 Seago was born Deaf with a hearing mother, a hard-of-hearing father and two brothers and two sisters who all have some form of hearing loss.

Howie also had other Deaf individuals in his family, including four uncles with hearing loss, the result of a genetic link on his father's side.

- 02 Howie's mother is responsible for inspiring him to get into acting, directing him in a church play in his youth.

During this performance Howie did a pantomime to a voice over, and his ability to express himself through his physicality and facial expressions has remained a skill for the rest of his life.

- 03 Seago was raised orally, so he did not initially learn sign language, but later utilized it to great effect in his work.

02 UNIVERSITY AND THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

- 01 Howie attended California State University as a psychology major, but his hometown is Tacoma, Washington, and he has stayed in the Pacific Northwest for most of his life.

PROGRAMS FOR DEAF YOUTH

Three programs built to give Deaf young people a way in

03 THREE PROGRAMS SEAGO HELPED BUILD

- 01 Shared Reading Video Outreach Project.** This program was part of the Washington School for the Deaf. It uses videoconferencing technology in order to support and enhance the learning experiences of Deaf children in more isolated school districts. Through videoconferencing, Deaf children can connect with Deaf kids, tutors, and others to help improve their literacy and communication skills.
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- 02 Deaf Youth Drama Program.** Howie was the co-founder of this program at the Seattle Children's Theatre, where he has directed productions.
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- 03 Deaf Teen Leadership Camp.** Howie has lent his directing talents to this camp in Washington as well, another offering available to empower young Deaf people.

STAGE, SCREEN, AND TEACHING

Sign Mime, Ajax, and a case for Deaf actors in Deaf roles

04 TEACHING AND WORKSHOPS

- 01** Seago was also a *Sign Mime* instructor at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), teaching acting courses and high school ASL.
- He also conducts acting and creative ASL workshops, and has assisted with local ASL productions.

05 LARGER PRODUCTIONS

- 01** Howie has also done some larger productions, including his role in a Peter Sellers production of the play "Ajax" which earned him international recognition.
- He's also appeared on "Star Trek: The Next Generation," co-starred in the film "Beyond Silence," which was nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar, appeared in "Wonderstruck," a film based on a popular young adult novel, and "Rainbow's End," an Emmy Award winning show Howie helped to create for Deaf children.

06 DEAF ACTORS IN DEAF ROLES

- 01 Seago has received a number of awards, most notably the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Actor.
- 02 Howie feels strongly that Deaf actors should play Deaf roles and has commented that if producers and directors do not find a good Deaf actor, then they need to look for another one rather than simply pull from the hearing pool. In Howie's words:

A huge bane for Deaf talent is the persistence of hearing actors being cast for Deaf roles... it seems to never end.

HOWIE SEAGO

- 03 His philosophy is to promote productions that are truly built for Deaf audiences and actors. Again, in Howie's words:

We are entertaining a new era of what we in the Deaf community call Deaf Talent. Someone on Facebook called it 'Deafenaissance.'

HOWIE SEAGO

07 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Sign Mime	The performance style Seago taught at NTID, built on the physicality and facial expression he first used in his mother's church play.
Shared Reading Video Outreach Project	The Washington School for the Deaf program that connects Deaf children in isolated districts by videoconference.
"Ajax"	The Peter Sellars production that earned Seago international recognition.
Helen Hayes Award	The award for Outstanding Actor that Seago is most notably recognized for.
"Deafenaissance"	The word Seago repeats for the new era of opportunity he sees for Deaf Talent.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

08 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 Who in Seago's family had hearing loss, and where did it come from?

02 How did Seago's mother start him on the path to acting, and what skill came out of it?

03 Seago was raised orally. Why is that surprising, given the work he became known for?

04 Choose one of the three programs Seago helped build and explain who it serves and how.

05 What does Seago believe producers and directors should do when casting Deaf roles?

06 Seago calls this moment a "Deafenaissance." Using his career as evidence, explain what he means.

09 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

"Billy and Howie Seago To Receive Gregory A. Falls Sustained Achievement Award"

BWW News Desk · Broadway World

Howie Seago biography

Internet Movie Database · imdb.com

Howie Seago, Deaf People of the Month

DeafPeople.com

"Out of Deafness"

Matt Slovic · Washington Post

"Seen and Heard"

Gemma Wilson · Sound Theatre Company