



### ***THE NOT SO QUIET LIFE OF MARCEL MARCEAU***

Written by JENN BAILEY and SHERRY BUSHUE

Illustrated by PAMELA ZAGARENSKI

**RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 7–14 YEARS OLD (YEARS 2–6, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON YEARS 5–8, LOWER–UPPER PRIMARY/LOWER SECONDARY)**

**GENRE:** Picture Book Biography

**THEMES:** WWII, the Holocaust, the French Resistance, censorship, hope, history, courage, culture, true stories, biography, mime and the life of an artist

#### **CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:**

- Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)
- English: Literature, literacy and language
- The Arts
- Visual Arts

**NOTES WRITTEN BY:** Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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## INTRODUCTION

This exquisite and moving picture book about Marcel Marceau's courageous acts in the French Resistance, and how he became a famous mime artist, was written by Jenn Bailey and Sherry Bushue, and illustrated by two-time Caldecott Honoree Pamela Zagarenski.

Marcel Marceau was the most famous mime artist of the twentieth century. But before that, he was a young Jewish Frenchman growing up in the shadow of World War II. Born in Strasbourg as Marcel Mangel, he fled to Paris before the Nazi invaders and joined his brother in the Resistance.

This is the thrilling true story of Marcel's courageous youth and how his work against the enemy not just saved lives but led to his debut as a mime artist.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Marcel Mangel was born in 1923 in the French city of Strasbourg. He was drawn to the flickering images of Charlie Chaplin in the movies, and he had a gift for imitating the birds around him, the people, and even the wind! But his safe, creative childhood was shattered by the advent of World War II and the anti-Jewish laws that demonised his Jewish family. Before long, his family was forced to flee in the wake of the advancing German army. His artistic talents were applied to forging papers and passports for those trying to escape. He disguised himself as a scout leader in order to lead younger children over the border to safety, keeping them calm with dancing, singing and stories told in mime. Even border guards were swayed and distracted by his entertaining antics. Surviving the war, this talented young boy became renowned around the world as Marcel Marceau, the most famous mime artist of the twentieth century.

## BEFORE READING

- Invite students to outline whether they've heard of Marcel Marceau and what they know of him.
- Discuss why students think the title includes the words 'Not So Quiet'.
- What does the cover suggest about the story that will unfold?
- Is the cover effective in drawing the reader's attention and encouraging them to open the book? If so, which elements are most effective?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

- **World War II:** 'the largest war in history. It involved more than seventy countries and territories and lasted for six years.' Research the origin of the conflict and invite students to summarise what they have learned about it.
- **The Holocaust:** one of the most devastating events in world history. The scale of the extermination of millions of Jewish people was catastrophic. This book has been published to mark Holocaust Survivor Day which is on 4 June. After reading the book, share with students some of the other resources listed below under Corresponding Literature and discuss.
- **The French Resistance:** Marcel was a member of this brave and secret group of people dedicated to saving the lives of their fellow countrymen. Such bravery often came at a cost as this was dangerous work. Discuss this movement.
- **Censorship:** 'Germany is threatening its neighbours and passing anti-Jewish laws. Jews in Germany can no longer go to school, publish books, or perform in German plays or movies.' Marcel's change of name from Mangel to Marceau no doubt saved his life. Discuss the quote and how such censorship can gradually erode a whole people's rights. Discuss in the context of some of the laws being passed by right-wing governments today, and of actions such as banning certain books and prohibiting peaceful protest.
- **Hope:** This book celebrates the capacity to maintain hope, even in the darkest of times. It also shows children that they can assume power in a world where they are often rendered powerless. The ability to 'act' and the importance of making choices are celebrated, as is the central idea of empathy and kindness. Discuss these themes as they are presented in the book.
- **Courage:** The virtue of courage or bravery is displayed by Marcel and his fellow Resistance members. Invite students to discuss the challenges of exercising bravery in dangerous situations.
- As a class, discuss and record novels that students have recently read. Can they think of any books that share similarities in terms of themes, characters or storylines?

### ASSESSMENT:

- Answer this question in essay format: Was Marcel Marceau a hero? If so, why?
- Censorship and prejudice before and during World War II was pervasive in Germany. How did this progress, and were there any protests against the government's actions?

- What values does this book celebrate?

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

- Genre: This is a biography of an artist or performer but also of a war hero. Discuss the conventions of structuring a biography and how this one exhibits those conventions.
- Comparative Literature: Have your students read other biographies of Marcel Marceau? How were they the same? How did they differ?
- Literary Responses: Invite students to write their own summary of Marcel Marceau's life.
- Literary Responses: How does/can the use of our imagination get us through difficult times? Areas to consider include: how imagination provides comfort, hope, problem-solving strategies, or resilience during challenging situations. Use examples from the text, other literature, real-life experiences, or historical events to support your ideas.

## LITERACY

- Comprehension: Read the quote at the beginning of the book and discuss what Marcel Marceau may have meant by it.
- Critical Literacy: What inspired Marcel to become a mime artist?
- Knowledge Building: What did your students learn about biography writing in reading this one?

## LANGUAGE

- Literary Devices: The book includes examples of Alliteration: '*bustling busyness*' p 6; '*whispers of war*' p 9; '*clanging clattering rhythm*' p 14; '*BRUSHSTROKES AND BOMBS*' p 15; '*concentration camps*' p 18; '*flapping flags*' p 31, and Repetition: '*No more guns. No more bombs. No more war.*' p 33. What other devices did you notice in this text?
- Narrative Structure: The story traces the chronological course of Marcel Marceau's life. How else might it have been structured?
- Narrative Voice and Point of View: The text is written in third person 'omniscient' point of view, present tense. The latter makes the story more immediate for a reader. Why was it written in third and not first person?

**ASSESSMENT:**

- Write a review of this book with reference to other biographies in picture book form.
- Write an acrostic poem using the letters in MARCEL MARCEAU.
- Write a description of Marcel Marceau, employing several literary devices.
- Develop and deliver an oral presentation exploring the following question: How does/can the use of our imagination help us get through difficult times?

**THE ARTS**

- **Mime:** The art of mime was at the heart of Marcel's life. The book tells us that as a child Marcel not only copied Charlie Chaplin's antics but also that '*Marcel imitates everything – birds, people, plants and even the wind.*' Research the art of mime and how a performer prepares to become a mime artist.
- **Mime Artists:** Marcel loved movies and was inspired by the great film actor Charlie Chaplin. Buster Keaton and the Marx Brothers including Harpo Marx are mentioned in the dedications at the end of the book. Research the lives and art of these highly skilled filmic mime artists.
- **Mime and Clowning:** This is also a theme in this book; for example, Pierrot is mentioned in Marcel's interviews and is a stock character of pantomime and *Commedia dell'arte* dating back to the seventeenth century. Pierrette, Harlequin and Columbine are further stock characters of mime. What other famous clowns can you discover in your research?
- **Alter Ego:** Bip was Marcel's 'alter ego'. He wore a costume which became internationally symbolic of not only Marcel but of mime itself. How important is it to develop an alter ego? Base your answer on the performers you have researched.

**ASSESSMENT:**

- Produce a detailed report on the art of mime and some of the artists who have made it famous.
- From your research, which other artists adopted an alter ego? Choose one and write a short report about them.

**VISUAL ARTS**

- **Medium:** Zagarenski's mixed-media illustrations are evocative. They have been said to 'heighten the interplay of quiet and urgency. Soft colour palettes and generous white space evoke fragility and endurance. ... A visually sophisticated and thematically resonant portrait that situates artistic mastery as both refuge and

principled resistance.' (*School Library Journal*) Her work has been compared to Marc Chagall, another French-Jewish refugee from the Nazis, and whose work was said to defy classification, in combining Cubism, Fauvism and Symbolism as influences.

Encourage students to study Zagarenski's medium employed here and the various influences they can observe in these paintings.

- **Visual Literacy:** Another reviewer has described these images as 'surrealistic'. There is rich symbolism in the images – for example, the circle, or the globe or balloons held by Marcel. Encourage students to observe each image closely and to interpret what they find there. For example, the lion appears in many images in this book. What does it signify? Charlie Chaplin also appears several times in these images. What is the significance of his appearances? The spread headed '*June 22, 1940*' includes images of the Swastika worn by Hitler's followers, and the yellow Star of David forcibly worn by Jewish people to distinguish them from other citizens. Bicycle wheels, barbed wire and birds flying in formation are further images found on this muted grey double-page spread. The overall effect is disquieting and ominous. Closely examine other images in this manner.
- **Examine the Cover:** The cover features Marcel holding a butterfly. There are also several other symbolic images included in the image, such as the red bloom above Marcel's head, the figure on the back cover wearing a crown, the moon in a starry sky. All these images appear in a circle which also appears in the endpapers and in several spreads in the book. What do each of these images signify?
- **Examine the Endpapers:** They feature evocative paintings of Marcel. What do the two endpapers suggest to your students?
- **Colour:** The use of colour in this book is noteworthy. Some spreads are in ochre tones, some in shades of muted yellow or green, some in shades of charcoal grey or black. One page is in a strikingly rich red. Discuss the significance of the various colours and how they enhance the meaning of the text on that page.

### ASSESSMENT:

- Create a comic art version of one of the scenes in this book.
- Create an alternative cover for this book.
- Create new endpapers for this book.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**JENN BAILEY** is the author of the beloved series that began with *A Friend for Henry*. Her work has received the American Library Association's Schneider Family Award in 2024, and the Theodore Geisel Honor Award in 2024. She is also an editor, a documentarian, a blue-ribbon pie baker, and an eager traveller. She lives in Kansas with her husband, Kevin. Visit her online at [jennbailey.com](http://jennbailey.com)

**SHERRY BUSHUE** is an author, entrepreneur, and founder of Kuzidi, a nonprofit charity serving children who suffer trauma. Once a medical social worker, she continues her lifelong advocacy to empower children and to share untold stories. Sherry lives in Kansas, captivated by Midwest thunderstorms. Visit [Kuzidi.org](http://Kuzidi.org)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**PAMELA ZAGARENSKI** is the winner of two Caldecott Honors, for *Red Sings from Treetops* and *Sleep Like a Tiger*. As well as illustrating picture books, she is the creator of Sacredbee, a gift card line. She lives in Stonington, Connecticut. Visit her online at [pzagarenski.com](http://pzagarenski.com) and on Instagram at [@sacredbee](https://www.instagram.com/sacredbee)

## ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia.

## CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

(In alphabetical order of authors)

### Picture Books and Graphic Novels

Bisson, Michelle *Hedy's Journey: The True Story of a Hungarian Girl Fleeing the Holocaust* Ill. by El Primo Ramon. Capstone Press, 2017.

Brown, Elizabeth *The World Entire: A True Story of an Extraordinary World War II Rescue* Ill. by Melissa Castrillón. Chronicle Books, 2025.

Cohen-Janka, Irne *Mister Doctor: Janusz Korczak and the Orphans of the Warsaw Ghetto* Ill. by Maurizio A. C. Quarello. Annick Press, 2015.

Do, Anh and Do, Suzanne *The Littlest Refugee* Ill. by Bruce Whatley. Allen & Unwin, 2011.

Jako, Eddie *The Happiest Boy on Earth* Ill. by Nathaniel Eckstrom. Pan Macmillan, 2022.

Gallaz, Roberto and Innocenti, Roberto *Rose Blanche* Creative Editions, 1985.

Hoyt, Megan *Bartoli's Bicycle: The True Story of Gino Bartali, Italy's Secret Hero* Ill. by Iacopo Bruno. HarperCollins US, 2021.

Kacer, Kathy *Masters of Silence (The Heroes Quartet) 2* Annick Press, 2019.

Pincus, Meeg *Miep and the Most Famous Diary: the Woman who Rescued Anne Frank's Diary* Ill. by Jordi Solano. Sleeping Bear Press, 2019.

Roy, Jennifer *Jars of Hope: How One Woman Helped Save 2,500 Children During the Holocaust* Ill. by Megan Owenson. Capstone Press, 2015.

Rubin, Susan Goldman *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* Ill. by Bill Farnsworth. Holiday House, 2012.

Ruelle, Karen Gray and DeSaix, Deborah Durland *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust* Holiday House, 2010.

Schubert, Leda *Monsieur Marceau: Actor Without Words* Ill. by Gérard DuBois. Macmillan, 2012.

Spiegelman, Art *The Complete Maus* Pantheon, 2003.

Spielman, Gloria *Marcel Marceau Master of Mime* Ill. by Manon Gautier. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2011.

Wild, Margaret *Let the Celebrations Begin!* Ill. by Julie Vivas. Candlewick Press, 2014, Omnibus Books, 1991,

See also: '10 Essential Graphic Novels about the Holocaust: Visual Philosophy on Survival, Meaning & Memory' Ben Argon Comics

<https://benargon.com/graphic-novels-about-holocaust-essential-guide/>

## Non-fiction

Borden, Louise *The Journey That Saved Curious George Young Readers Edition: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey* Ill. by Allan Drummond. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2016.

Friedman, Tova *The Daughter of Auschwitz: The Girl Who Lived To Tell Her Story* Ill. by Manuel A. Umberac. Wren and Rook, 2024.

Gruenbaum, Michael with Todd Hasak-Lowy *Somewhere There Is Still A Sun Aladdin*, 2017.

Iturbe, Antonia *The Librarian of Auschwitz* Translated by Lilit Thwaites. Henry Holt, 2018.

Leclaire, Marcel *How to Mime: Your Comprehensive Guide to Mastering Silent Expression and Captivating Storytelling* Independently Published, 2023.

Martin, Ben *Marcel Marceau Master of Mime* Nancy Yeast Literary Agency, 2023.

Vegara, Maria Isabel Sanchez *Anne Frank (Little People, Big Dreams Vol 17)* Ill. by Sveta Dorasheva. Frances Lincoln Children's, 2018.

## ONLINE LINKS IN FULL

*Auschwitz-Birkenau*

<https://www.auschwitz.org/en/>

Blakemore, Erin 'The French Resistance's Secret Weapon? The Mime Marcel Marceau' *History.com*

<https://www.history.com/articles/marcel-marceau-wwii-french-resistance-georges-loinger>

*Contemporary Mime*

<https://www.contemporarymime.com/>

*Holocaust Survivor Day*

<https://www.holocaustsurvivorday.com/>

'Marcel Marceau' *Britannica Kids*

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Marcel-Marceau/329104>

'Marcel Marceau (1923-2007)' *Encyclopedia of Mime*

<https://www.mime.info/encyclopedia/marceau.html>

'Marcel Marceau facts for kids' *Kiddle Kids Encyclopedia*

[https://kids.kiddle.co/Marcel\\_Marceau](https://kids.kiddle.co/Marcel_Marceau)

'Pierrot' *Wikipedia*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierrot>

Roller, Sarah '5 Heroic Women of the French Resistance' *History Hit* 30 May 2023

<https://www.historyhit.com/heroic-women-of-the-french-resistance/>

Sydney Jewish Museum

<https://sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/>

'The Resistance of France' *Britannica*

<https://www.britannica.com/place/France/The-Resistance>

'Using mime to convey meaning and narrative' *PETAA*

[https://petaa.edu.au/litportal/litportal/Resources-for-Curriculum/Curriculum-Literacies/The-Arts-Drama/using\\_mime.aspx](https://petaa.edu.au/litportal/litportal/Resources-for-Curriculum/Curriculum-Literacies/The-Arts-Drama/using_mime.aspx)

[See also the list at the back of the book.]

## Videos

'Le Mime Marceau' *YouTube*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEspRrfXf4>

'Marcel Marceau: A silent hero of the Holocaust' *World Jewish Congress*

<https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/cn/videos/holocaust-legacy/marcel-marceau-a-silent-hero-of-the-holocaust>

'Marcel Marceau Bip at a Society Party' [1975] *YouTube*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ebo1Ks\\_nF\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ebo1Ks_nF_U)

'Marcel Marceau: Language of the Heart [1975]' *YouTube*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGYC6XSSZE4>