

Educating Children with MAGIC

“Use Your Imagination!”

by David Ginn

Albert Einstein said, *“Imagination is more important than education.”*

I never tell that to children, because they wouldn't understand it. But you will understand it when I remind you that Albert Einstein was a very educated man. In making that statement, Einstein understood that *imagination* goes way beyond *education*. In fact, **imagination enhances education**.

Here's what I tell the children very early in my “Book Your Imagination” school show:

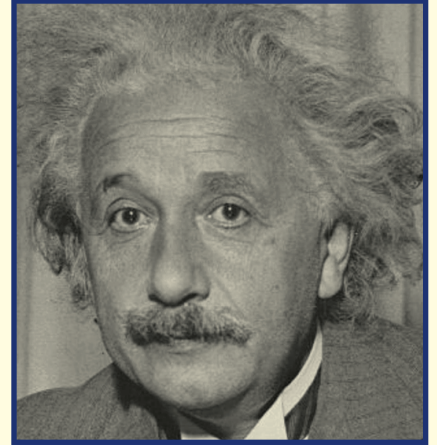
“Your imagination is the most powerful tool in the world. It is faster than a jet airplane and more powerful than the strongest hammer. Depending on your age, education and experience, your imagination can solve problems in an instant and create wonderful things like songs and poems and books and stories.” Then I illustrate that with a performance of Flip Flop Spots — as you can see at **www.ginnmagic.com** on my YouTube **Video #52 Flip Flop Spots** — reminding them to “control your imagination and use it for good things.”

Imagination mixed with words can make people laugh or cry, and through the use of a variety of arts, your imagination as a performer can amaze, amuse and educate audiences of children and adults.

For the past 40 years I have been using my imagination to make a living. By creating, writing, and performing 37 different school shows during that time, I have learned how to mix magic, comedy and messages to present educational assembly programs to over 100,000 children each year. During this article I will share with you some basics of what has worked for me. If you absorb and adapt this knowledge to your own personality, maybe it will work for you.

One more quick note: I will illustrate most of the ideas here with tricks that I personally perform. You can view many of these performances on the **www.ginnmagic.com** website under the menu item “David on YouTube.” Just look for the numbers and titles cited in **bold face type**.

Having explained that much, now I'll share with you 15 secrets of using your imagination to educate children with magic:



1. You learn more when you're having fun. Think of your favorite teachers in school. Why were they your favorites? My answer is they were probably the ones who made learning fun.

My favorite high school English teacher, Gemma Thackston, spent five weeks an hour daily bringing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to life. I am not a Shakespeare fan, but during those five weeks Miss Thackston brought *Hamlet* to life for us, made it real for us, and frankly, *made it fun*. For those reasons, not only did I learn more, *I wanted to learn*.

Consider the question: Why did WE enjoy reading books to learn magic tricks? Our answer should be easy — because we were learning FUN STUFF we could use to have fun and make fun for others.

So you see, when I create educational shows for children, I work hard to *mix magical fun with the educational messages* that I want to put across.

2. Opening warm-up. Harold Taylor started me doing this 40 years ago, and it still works: *The Comedy Warm-up*. You need to get those children clapping their hands and laughing early in the show (Bob Jepson said the first 15 seconds) and do a quick trick or bit of business to show them the fun that will follow.



My YouTube **Video #2 Hot Book** is a good example of the warm-up. The fire is never near the children, but when they see it pop out of my Harry Potter book, they laugh and point and shout trying to tell me about it. I play the look-don't-see role, which causes them to shout even more. Like all my warm-ups, it works to get them excited and tuned in to the show.

3. Important opening statement. After I do my usual three-part comedy warm-up, I make it a point to deliver an important opening statement. This statement establishes the theme and direction of the show.

For example, years ago I created a show all about money. I found my opening statement in a children's library book:



“For thousands of years people around the world have used a variety of things for money. In the South Pacific, islanders have used shark teeth for money. Eskimos have used fishhooks for money. Natives in Africa have used elephant tails for money. American Indians have used *wampum*, seashells strung together to make necklaces, for money.” As I pronounced the word *wampum*, I reached my hand out and produced a seashell necklace from thin air. “In other words, anything considered valuable can be used for money.”

In my “All About Georgia Magic Show,” aimed at grades that study Georgia State history, I open with my key statement: “Good morning, everyone! I’m David Ginn from Atlanta, Georgia — home of Delta Airlines, Coca-Cola, and a partly famous Southern American magician: ME!” Then I go right into my clapping, laughing, and doing something magical warm-up. Following that, I tell the children this:

“Four years ago I was at a big magic convention in Blackpool, England, and a magician said to me: ‘David, have you lived in Georgia all your life?’ I thought about that for a moment and replied, ‘NOT YET!’

“That’s because I’m still living here in my home State of Georgia — the biggest state east of the Mississippi River. Georgia — 58,000 square miles, 318 miles from North to South and 278 miles East to West. Georgia — 159 different counties, including Gwinnett County where your school happens to be and where we’re all growing up, you and ME!

“And today I’ve brought along a friend of mine who is growing up here too. He lives in my backyard up in a tree. He has four legs and a striped tail, and he is a RACCOON named George. I named him George after our State of Georgia, which was named after King George II of England about 250 years ago. Let’s see if George will come out here and share what he knows about Georgia. . . .”

You see, not only have I opened with a strong statement full of facts (which the teachers love), but I’ve also set the stage for bringing out my Axtell raccoon puppet. Once I get him from behind my backdrop screen (“George, get out of the jacuzzi!”), I plunge into Georgia State trivia using the raccoon to teach the kids while making them laugh.

4. Get the children’s attention early. I do this in two ways — first with my comedy warm-up plus the opening statement, but second with my musical magic. In every show, after those warm-up opening minutes, I put on a short musical selection and perform non-talking pantomime magic to music.

Often the songs I play have to do with the theme of the show. In my Hawaii show I have used the “Hawaii 50” theme, for example. In the money show, Cyndi Lauper’s “Money Changes Everything” worked well. And in my Georgia history show, the opening song is Alabama’s “Song of the South.” Each of these opening songs has a nice beat to it, and I often encourage the children to clap their hands along to the beat while I perform.

The actual tricks I use during this three to five minute segment may or may not have anything to do with my show theme. Most of the time they don’t. But in my Hawaii show, I’ve already stated that in our 50th state flowers bloom every day of the year, tropical birds are everywhere, and each day you see *rainbows*. So it is perfectly logical that I might make flowers or parrots or rainbows appear. That’s why I use the Ultra Tube (a fancy Mas-sel Tube) to cause a 50-foot rainbow silk streamer to instantly appear out of nowhere. See YouTube **Video #81 Ultra Tube**.



5. Combining messages with magic. When creating educational magic for children, there are two ways to make that happen:

A. Start with the trick, then ask the question, “What can I teach them with this?”

B. Start with the message and ask yourself, “What trick, stunt, feat or comedy bit can I use to teach this message?”

In my work I have used both methods of creating routines. Sometimes I see a trick that is perfect for teaching what I want. Other times I must think up HOW I can share that idea, fact or concept using a trick or prop. Having a lifelong knowledge of magic and other skills helps, of course, as well as having a good magic library. But even with these resources, your *imagination* is the tool that combines these ideas and makes them work.

6. The secret to researching your shows — children’s books in the library. To determine what I want to share in these shows, I go directly to the public library. I check out books about the subject from *the children’s section*, not adult books. I find the children’s books easier to read and understand and *easier to share with the kids*.

When I worked out my Lewis & Clark show five years ago, I checked out over 50 books from three different libraries. I had them all over the floor of my den. I read part of this one and all of that one. I got a fact from here, checked that fact for accuracy from another book there. I liked this story and skipped over that one. Bit by bit I learned and absorbed more than I could share. I made notes and more notes and finally decided exactly what I wanted to share with my audiences. Then I started figuring out how to share that information in a 45-minute assembly program.

7. Everything in the show does not have to fit the theme. That’s right. Sometimes in an educational show you can “break away” from the theme for a few minutes and “play a little game” or “do a trick” outside the subject matter. Tell a story about yourself growing up in magic. Relate how you learned this thing out of a library book and show it for fun as an interlude, then return to the educational theme. However, if you can *find a reason* to employ that game or trick *within the theme*, it certainly looks better, and the educators respect you even more.

Often the musical magic I perform has nothing to do with the educational theme. If I am doing my Lewis & Clark 1804-6 show, I’m not going to use a fancy electronic trick and play music from the 2000s. But I did find a Neil Young song called “Far From Home” on the *Prairie Wind* album that perfectly fits the theme, and I used that to close my show.

I will admit that my early educational shows such as *Computerized Magic* in 1983 and *The Magic Racquet* (a sports theme show) in 1980 were not as educational as the ones I present now. Half of the computer show was pure magical fiction, like my robot **RU12** (a circular basket with a trash can lid adorned with colorful reflector buttons), and the only real computer in the show was my own brain!

In the sports show, I performed card fan productions into a red football helmet instead of a top hat; I worked the show in a fancy blue warm-up suit; and my assistant at the time wore gym shorts and roller skates! But in that show I also presented Supreme's "Tulips from Amsterdam," a ring in a nest of boxes routine, and Sword Through Neck. What do those tricks have to do with sports? Well, fencing is a sport in the Olympics and in lots of swashbuckler movies. . . .

Again, the point is that *not everything* in the show must fit the educational theme. But over the past 10 or 15 years, I've gotten better at adapting and adopting tricks to fit what I want to teach in my shows. So these days most parts of my shows *do* fit the theme.

8. Three choices about science. Many magicians and clowns use science to make tricks work. I know I do. But in doing so, we can use that science in three ways, depending on our purpose:

A. Pass off the science as magic. In other words, do the trick as "magic," but secretly it is science that causes it. You may be using a scientific principle that the children don't understand, and that's fine. A good example is the use of G-Powder or Slush Powder, that super-absorbent polymer that congeals water in seconds and makes it a solid. That allows you to make the water "disappear" in many tricks. As long as the children don't know you had the powder in the cup before the show, and as long as they don't see the solid lump in the cup after the performance, you're able to get away with miracles.



Another example is the way I present the Magic Belt Hook, which is based on the center of gravity principle. See my YouTube **Video #64 Belt Hook**.

B. Explain the science behind the magic. In the case of a science magic show, you may wish to present the trick first as magic to *wow* the kids. Then you explain the principle behind it and use that to educate them. You can explain how they can use science principles to *appear to do magic* and accomplish many other things, but the students must know and understand what is behind it. Educating them in this way allows the students to go either way with their knowledge — the magical way or the science way.

C. Show the trick, explain the science, then fool them again. This version goes a step beyond science. A good example is the old hydrostatic glass trick. Pour water into a glass, cover it with a piece of paper, and turn it upside-down. The paper prevents the water from pouring out. Explain the real science behind it. Then, remove the paper and the water still remains in the glass, until you give the "magic word" making the water cascade down out of the glass.

Mark Tripp shared with me the best version of this ever, which I shared with readers in my book *Putting Yourself in God's Hands*. You can also see me perform it in my YouTube **Video #99 Water Suspension** on the website. Another good example is the banana or boomerang principle. You can see me do this with a twist ending in YouTube **Video #82 Baffling Boomerangs**.

9. Use visuals to help educate. For the past 30 years or more I've used a simple system to provide visuals to help educate student audiences.

First, I find pictures of what I need in library books or on the internet.

Second, I print out those pictures or color copy them from books.

Third, I enlarge them at the local office supply store or printer.

Fourth, I often laminate them for protection in hundreds of shows.

Fifth, I mount them on foamcore or corrugated cardboard to keep them stiff as I use them and as children handle them in shows.

You'll find a good example of this on YouTube **Video #68 Picture Frame Magic**. I borrowed the artwork for the four animal pictures from a deck of children's playing cards and used that to create the animal version of "Charlie's Invisible Message." More extensive use of this system you'll see on my *David Ginn's Invisible Message DVD*, which features a dozen ways to mix messages with magic. Routines like the Denzel Washington Favorite Book, Pluto Planet, and Alaska Animals will all be found there, including not only pictures blown up and laminated, but also three ways to force giant cards and pictures.

Remember, the old adage is true — a picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes I use those pictures purely to show students how something looks. Other times I actually use the pictures in the tricks themselves. Either way, actual pictures and artwork help children visualize and remember what I teach them.

10. Have an Educational Core. One of the major building blocks to my shows is to have a solid educational CORE to the theme. I often use the picture blow-up method described above to accomplish that, and you can see several of these performed on *David Ginn's Invisible Message*.

In my Georgia show I have ten laminated pictures of places around the state that children should visit; I also show seven famous Georgians in our history.

The "Frozen Magic" library show employed seven pictures of cold and frozen things like ice, snow, blizzard and even a TV dinner! We played a game to reveal those, then my rabbit Frosty the Snow Bunny revealed his magical prediction using a Dairy Queen "Blizzard" ice cream treat.

My "Book Your Imagination" show features eight children on stage in the upper grade version. Each child holds a Narnia book cover, size 11 x 17 inches, backed with a Harry Potter book cover. I explain how each author wrote his or her series, then we play the PATEO game (force) to reveal the book cover hidden inside the large magic wand held by the 8th child.



In “Magic Down Under,” my Australia show, I use nine pictures of Australian animals to connect with the children and do a trick.

Each time I use the pictures to illustrate and reinforce what I am trying to teach within the theme of that particular show. This also allows me to stick with the next important concept of education magic for children —

11. Put the message INSIDE the routine. Yes, keep the educational material *inside* the trick, *not before or after it*. Karl Wagner, in his book *Safety Magic for Children*, stressed this important principle: **Make the message part of the trick.** In other words, don’t do the trick, then deliver a follow-up line like “Kids, don’t do drugs!” after the trick is over. Instead, deliver the education as an important part of the trick. Watch some of the routines on my *Invisible Message DVD*, and you’ll understand what I mean.

12. Make your performance personal in some way. Go beyond the basic instructions of tricks and add personality to your performance. Years ago I developed the following formula:

MAGIC + COMEDY + PERSONALITY = ENTERTAINMENT

For educational purposes, take the same formula and add your educational message. Then you’ll have FUN LEARNING!

Here are three ways to make your performances personal:

A. Use students to help on stage. In every 45 minute show I present at schools, at least 30 minutes involves audience helpers on the stage with me. When kids become a part of the show, they vicariously allow all the students to help with the tricks. That means everyone becomes a part of the show, and that makes everyone feel good. It becomes personal.

Even though it is a close-up trick, take a look at my YouTube **Video #100 Thumb Fun**, Sid Lorraine’s ingenious little card trick I’ve done for 45 years. Touching the other person’s thumb (usually a lady) makes that personal connection without going overboard, and the magic in this case is passed off as science.

B. Use yourself as an example. Tell a story about yourself or your childhood; use a prop that your grandmother made for you; illustrate a trick or principle with something that belonged to your father. This makes the magic more personal. Two examples:

In my opening warm-up on the *Sure-Fire Kidshow Magic DVD* I share the Yellow School Bus story from *Gene Gordon’s Magical Legacy*, delivered as though it happened to ME on the way to the school. You can use too!

Watch my YouTube **Video #83 Mother of All Diamonds** for my take on Barry Mitchell’s classic storytelling trick and how I personalized it (thanks to Tom McDonnell). The children really believe the story, the magical ending is strong, but they get the message at the same time.

C. Use a teacher to help on stage. One of the best examples I can offer is my routine with Cleopatra's Necklace, seen on my YouTube **Video #19 Rajah's Necklace**. Here is a true mixture of magic and message, and the kids love seeing a teacher on stage. Remember to treat a teacher with respect. Do not embarrass a teacher in any way because that makes YOU look bad and could affect your return bookings.



13. Use additional arts outside of magic. That's right. Employ music, art, comedy, ventriloquism, stories, juggling, costuming, and skill feats to get your ideas across. Embellish your tricks and make them into routines.

I close my "Book Your Imagination" show with the Table Cloth Stunt — something I always *imagined* I could do — but I add music and movement and my live rabbit into the mixture. Watch YouTube **Video #15 Table Cloth Stunt** to see the version I am doing these days. Yes, kids love it when I add Harry the Rabbit!

14. Use correct English and grammar. If you're doing any kind of educational magic for children, educated adults will most likely be present. Therefore, to insure your credibility with the adults and to set a good example for the children, you must speak properly and correctly. You should avoid using slang or poor grammar (except maybe for humor), and never use any kind of foul or vulgar language, blue material or sexual innuendo. In most schools and library situations, considered family audiences, talking "dirty" in a show could cost you your job.



One of my favorite themes for shows is *books* and *reading*. That means you can work in words, grammar and spelling into such shows. My newest example of that type thing is David Goodsell's "You're the Star" spelling trick, reminiscent of my "Lobster Cards" from *Live Kidbiz #1*. You can see me present Goodsell's trick on YouTube **Video #92 You're the Star**.

15. Close your show with FUN. It's okay to stay within your educational theme all the way to the end of the performance, *but make your closing FUN and EXCITING for the children*.

In 40 years of doing school shows and libraries, I've only created one year-long show that did *not* close using music. I believe that music creates fun and excitement anytime during the show, but especially at the end and especially if the music is of the exciting, clap-your-hands-to-it kind of music.

Watch the closing musical routine of my *Live Kidbiz 1 DVD* and you'll see what I mean. The children are clapping, laughing, jumping with excitement — and simultaneously the magic is happening for them on stage.

Most of my closings involve productions, such as the surprise appearance of Harry the Magic Rabbit. If he has appeared earlier in the program, I bring him back on stage at the end and do something else with him. He either makes the botania bloom or the silk fountain appear or sits on a plate with the table cloth stunt dishes — after I've made him dance around and maybe fall asleep on his back.

In a nutshell, I want the ending to be filled with that theatrical “TAH-DAH” moment, that last minute of excitement that leaves the children on a magical high. Oh, yes, I do calm them down after that moment is over. I have Harry say goodbye, and I turn over authority to the teachers to lead the kids out. But I still have that “Tah-Dah” style of finish.



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In the final analysis, combine all these elements of messages and magic — **education and entertainment** — in a blend mixed with your personality. Use your own individual *imagination* in putting the whole together from the parts.

Have fun yourself while you are performing, and — **make learning fun.**

The children you educate and entertain will love you for it.

David Ginn

*David Ginn, February 2011
At home in Loganville, Georgia USA*