

of reach.

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Professional Advice on Acting for Theatre and TV

Pierre Lefèvre ON ACTING. Instructional video. Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. Running time: 38 minutes and 38 seconds. Order number C9192017. Order from NFB, PO Box 6100, Station A, Montreal, Québec, M3C 3H5.

Aimed at an audience of secondary and post-secondary drama and theatre arts students, *Pierre Lefèvre on Acting* concisely and effectively covers many essential elements of the acting process that are beneficial to acting instructors and student actors. Using neutral and character masks as the catalysts, the bilingual Pierre Lefèvre guides acting students at the National Theatre School in Montréal through character development and improvisation exercises. Acting teachers are charged with the challenge of encouraging the young, often inhibited actors to get out of their heads and into their bodies. "The mask shields young actors from timidity and self-consciousness, increases concentration, strengthens inner feelings and leads to greater physical awareness and dramatic expression."

This video immediately engages the viewer with the introduction of 24 character masks, which Lefèvre refers to as creatures. The creature does not materialize into a character until "it is on your face." The Master gently cautions the actors not to make quick decisions about character but explore through movement and action and allow the inner life of the character to organically emerge. Lefèvre deftly helps the student actors build their characters through a series of questions and answers and given circumstances. It is fascinating to watch the mask take on its new life and fuse with the actor's body. Once the acting students learn how to express themselves physically and emotionally with the neutral mask they are introduced to the character mask and to vocalization. Using improvisations the actors explore the principles of comedy and construction of character background. These techniques are manifest in a series of entertaining and remarkable improvised scenes involving three characters.

Pierre Lefèvre is a delight to watch. He successfully combines his talents as a professional director, actor, and teacher. His joy and passion for his art and his students is charming and compelling. He describes himself as "an older brother, telling the kids how to get there, based on my experience. I would never ask anyone to do something that I wouldn't have done myself or tried to do myself." Lefèvre also reminds us that acting for theatre is not the same as acting for television. The stage requires a physicality that is fundamental to the communication with the audience. There is no camera to capture close-ups of small eye movements

or facial twitches. Lefèvre informs his class, “We act with our bodies and eventually with voice, we do not act with our brains.” Spontaneity, sensitive coaching and masterful demonstrations are testaments to his proclamation. The students acknowledge his gifts for acting and teaching through a commentary of their personal experiences in the class. Lefèvre closes the video with an eloquent summary of a credible character development process — simple and truthful choices, trust, and belief.

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Little Toby's Big Bad Hair Day

Little Toby and the Big Hair. Kim and Eugenie Fernandes. Doubleday Canada, 1997. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25633-7.

Rapunzel, Medusa, Samson — they all had it; most young girls long for it; little Toby wishes for it, and her wish comes true in spades! Gorgeous thick auburn curls “down to *There!*” But how to manage such a mane? There’s the challenge. In Kim and Eugenie Fernandes’s delightful story, *Little Toby and the Big Hair*, the renowned Canadian mother and daughter author/illustrators team up to tell the tale of the tangling — and taming — of Toby’s hair.

One day, little Toby decides she is going to let her short hair grow. Down to her knees in no time, “it was curly, and twisty, and bouncy, and BIG.” Soon her lavish tresses become a haven for puppies, fodder for baby goats, nesting material for robins, and a magnet for wayward lollipops! Some children tease her. Some adults look askance at her burgeoning bouffant. Despite these minor provocations, Toby still likes having long hair. However, as her hair thickens, so does the plot. Blinded by her unruly bangs, Toby tumbles headfirst into the duck pond and emerges decked out with lily pads and crawdads. “You look like a mermaid,” her mother declares. Mrs. Otto’s twins sadistically tug on her locks with “twenty little baby fingers,” and will only relinquish their newfound toy when plied with cookies. When a well-intentioned barber offers to lighten her load, Toby allows her fancy free rein. She envisions a fantastic besti-hairy [sic], dedicated solely to carrying her hair. When her mother urges her to opt for a cool summer cut, Toby argues that long hair will keep her warm enough in the winter to toboggan in her bathing suit. “And flowers will bloom all around me in the snow,” she imagines.

Catastrophe strikes when Toby’s long-suffering mother finds her daughter’s hair cascading into her apple pie makings as she prepares for a family picnic. Add one spooked cat to the recipe and chaos ensues. Mistaking a flour-covered Toby for a wild beast, a terrified neighbour rushes to call the dogcatcher. A *deus ex machina* with a gentle O’Henry twist, Toby’s grandfather appears just in time to