

TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK  
**CERTIFIED  
LUNATIC AND  
MASTER OF THE  
IMPOSSIBLE**

WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER 6 2017  
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM



  
**2017 > 2018  
FIELD TRIP SERIES**  
BROADEN THE HORIZONS  
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.  
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT  
WORLD OF THE ARTS  
AT THE McCALLUM!

LEARNING LINKS

McCALLUM THEATRE EDUCATION  
PRESENTS

# TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK CERTIFIED LUNATIC AND MASTER OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

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“My performance has  
the usual effects one can expect:  
mass hypnosis,  
attempts on my life,  
marriage proposals...”

> TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK

## Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

**HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY** > Czechoslovakia, Moravia, France

**ARTS** > Clowning, comedy, acting, magic tricks, mime

**PHYSICAL SCIENCES** > The human body and how it functions

### EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY

**What is a “text”?** We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum’s Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that “texts” don’t begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

**NON-PRINT TEXT** > any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

# THE WORK OF ART

## A NON-PRINT TEXT FOR STUDY

WHAT'S IT MADE OF? HOW CAN THIS WORK SERVE AS A COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS-MANDATED "TEXT" FOR STUDENT STUDY IN THE CLASSROOM?



Remember the first time you saw someone do a backward somersault while whistling, drinking a glass of water balanced on his forehead, and plucking the strings of a ukulele? The first time is the one you always remember, isn't it? Even so, Tomáš Kubínek, born Czech, raised Canadian, manages to make this standard feat fresh and exciting. And to add a touch of sobriety to the proceedings, he whirls above the McCallum Theatre stage, dangling from a bungee cord, looking like Mozart with bat wings. Well, some art is high, some low. In this elevated performance, Tomáš Kubínek demonstrates dauntless courage as he soars on giant canvas wings in ever widening circles through the air. Moments later, he dances on six feet across the floorboards. Yes, we know it's an old trick – but oh how he enlivens it! One note on theater etiquette: audiences have been heard to laugh occasionally during T. K.'s work. Since he does not seem unduly disturbed by this phenomenon, the usual restrictions against merriment in the theater will be temporarily lifted.

Lest all of this unrestrained hilarity seem a tad lightweight, allow us to point out that underlying Mr. Kubínek's giddy goofiness is depth – even pathos – which seems to spring from the essence of the man himself. Even the way he speaks about his audiences reveals a concern with the beauty and delicacy of life. "People are coming to be healed in a way. They come to the theater with a whole world inside them of feelings," he says. "That's part of being a comedian too; knowing that you're helping to heal people." And in performance there is something in the droop of his eye, the sag of his shoulder, the shuffle of his gait that speaks of the tear behind the grin, the blithe gesture that belies the heavy heart.

"Mainly inspiration comes from constant rediscovering what a miracle it is that we exist and how beautiful and fragile it all is."

> TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK



# THE ARTIST

WHO HAS *PRODUCED*  
THIS TEXT FOR STUDY?

## TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK

Say: Toe-Mosh Koo-Bee-Neck.

No, really, say it!

And who is he exactly? Why, the International Grand Champion of Housefly Catching at the Moucheville Open in Moravia (Moucheville is French for Flytown), beating out competitors from over eleven other nations. Need we say more?

Oh, we do? Well then, Tomáš Kubínek, examples of whose fly catching may be sampled online, has devoted himself to avant-garde theater and clowning. A circus performer from a tender age, he scored his first sizable success as the back end of a horse. In that particular act, the horse came apart to reveal the budding performer in his underwear, an accomplishment leading quite naturally to appearances on TV – a succession of career events much in evidence before the television-viewing public today! In those appearances, Mr. Kubínek shared the small screen with celebrated Czech clown Boleslav Polivska.

Speaking of avant-garde theater as an influence on Kubínek's art, we want to add that he has worked at the HBO Workspace in Los Angeles in guerilla-style absurdist theater sketches. (Think of them as Mad TV with a political edge!) Not only a performer with highly developed physical skills, but a writer as well, he has penned the plays *Moose*, *Bed* and *Not Yet, At All*. We haven't seen those – have you? Oh you have? In that case, it may come as no surprise to you that these works, among the many by Mr. Kubínek, have garnered praise worldwide. He claims to receive a new award every week, but from the looks of the list, they must come in considerably more often than that.

Once again, we don't want to short the serious side of the artist. Without the sober aura that shadows the comic bit, would he be Kubínek? In speaking of his mother who was a nurse, he points to her lifelong caring for people as the example he follows. As a performer, weaving together strands of comedy, acrobatic skill, and storytelling, he sees taking care of his audiences, caring for them, as the through line, his mission you might say. One must understand this about the artist in order to grasp what he is about. Otherwise we may hold our sides with laughter and come away impressed with technical skills but not have a clear idea of what it is we have just seen.

# CONTEXTS

WHAT INFORMATION SURROUNDS THIS TEXT FOR STUDY & COULD HELP MAKE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH IT MORE POWERFUL?

## MIME

Teacher Jacques Lecoq made a practice of telling his students as they graduated from his school for mime: "Now your job is to get over me." From the beginning, he had been wary of hidebound tradition and slavish adherence to the way things had always been done.

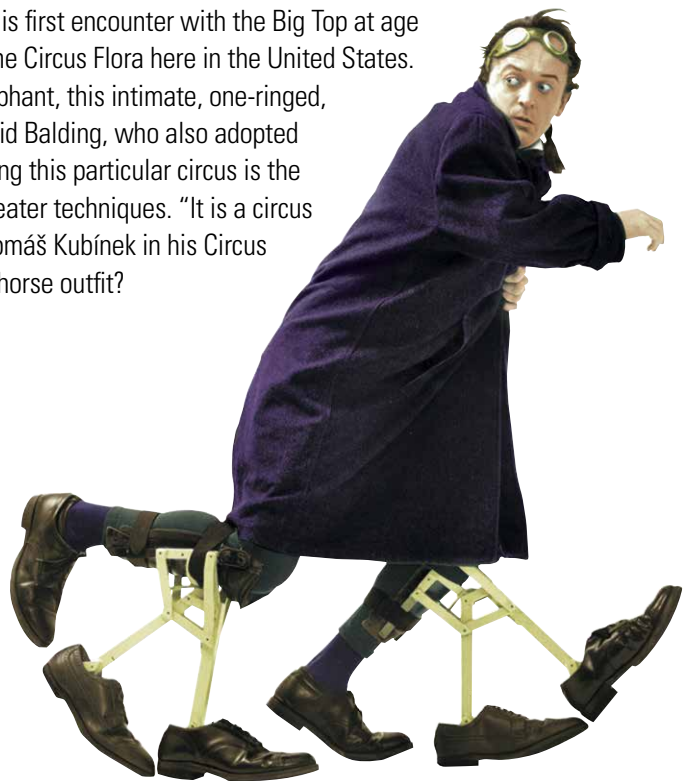
He was looking to discover a revitalized form of mime that could take its cue from the interior worlds of the performer. In striking out on this exploratory path, he ended by founding his own school. This is the acclaimed Ecole Lecoq. A hugely influential "voice" in the discipline of mime, Lecoq explored the boundaries of physical discipline, emotional and comedic content, and spontaneity. "Like Grotowski, Lecoq was a master," wrote Jack Lang, former French Culture Minister, referring to the theater director Jerzy Grotowski. "He inspired others." Among those he inspired was Tomáš Kubínek.

## CLOWNING

Czech actor-playwright-mime-screenwriter Bolek Polivka has come up with an idea or two in the course of his various careers. A short list must include that international housefly catching contest we mentioned a short while ago when enumerating Mister K's sundry accomplishments. (We hasten to add that the flies are released afterward, unharmed.) Apart from fly catching, these two funny men share other connections as well. Born in Eastern Moravia, Polivka studied acting at the national dramatic academy. He's done film. He's done TV. In the latter, he's had his own long-running show, *Manez Bolka Polivsky*, a cavalcade of loopy, off the wall sketches and comedic skits. He's a beloved clown, and Tomáš Kubínek, appearing with him in annual television specials, identifies this Czech institution as a mentor and teacher.

## CIRCUS

A lifelong clown and devotee of the circus – since his first encounter with the Big Top at age five – Tomáš Kubínek served an apprenticeship at the Circus Flora here in the United States. Named for the orphaned offspring of a poached elephant, this intimate, one-ringed, European-styled circus was founded in 1985 by David Balding, who also adopted the orphaned pachyderm. One of the key ideas driving this particular circus is the blending of elements of traditional circuses with theater techniques. "It is a circus with a soul" the website tells us. Can you picture Tomáš Kubínek in his Circus Flora days prancing soulfully about – in boxers and horse outfit?



# TO GET READY FOR THE PERFORMANCE, STUDENTS COULD RESEARCH THESE:

- > MIME
- > CLOWNING
- > ACROBATICS

HERE'S A 60-MINUTE LESSON IN COLLABORATION & PROBLEM-SOLVING YOU COULD TEACH TO HELP PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THIS WORK:

**LINE OF INQUIRY – LOI is an essential question that generates a lesson:**

How does Tomáš Kubínek explore the beauty and fragility of life by juxtaposing the comic and the soulful?

Start by acquainting students with a basic idea found in Tomáš Kubínek's work: that comedy and soulfulness can live side by side in the same moments within a work of art. How can you adapt the term soulfulness so that the idea registers with your grade level? Does it become seriousness? Do you show a clip of Charlie Chaplin as the Little Tramp? [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DV7gn1V3lw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DV7gn1V3lw)

Or maybe even this promotional clip of Tomáš Kubínek:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkKe1Vj\\_2rU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkKe1Vj_2rU)

Will concepts like –

- > something that makes us laugh and touches us at the same time
- > smiling through tears
- > sad clown
- be useful here?



Students then – working in table groups or in pairs collaboratively, or individually – write short stories or poems which contain funny things but some seriousness, too.

As you help students think about comic things they might write about – as well as how they might embed a bit of seriousness, you may want students to consider the idea of balance, as in: how can we find a balance between comedy and seriousness? What does it mean to strike a balance? Why try to balance comedy and seriousness? How does seriousness affect the comedy? How does comedy affect seriousness?

For younger grades, the written part of this project could be supplanted by a visual arts activity in which students draw pictures of people maintaining a serious face while doing funny things or perhaps comic facial expressions while doing something serious?

After stories, poems, or pictures have been created, these are shared in the whole class. You might spur some great thinking about the works they're looking at by asking some questions. What are the funny bits and what are they made of? Which parts are serious? Are any parts both things at the same time? How does/would that work?

# AFTER COMING TO THE THEATER, STUDENTS COULD RESEARCH THESE:

- > COMIC TIMING
- > OTHER HALLMARKS OF COMEDY
- > COMIC WORKS OF ART AND LITERATURE WHICH FEATURE A SERIOUS SIDE

## HERE'S A 45/60-MINUTE LESSON YOU COULD TEACH AFTER STUDENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED THE WORK:

### DISCUSSION

Lead a discussion, asking students what they noticed in Tomáš Kubínek's performance. Have them describe all of the "acts." How would they characterize his movement? Which moments were comic? What made them so? Where was there any seriousness/soulfulness in the performance? What was going on in his facial expressions, his posture? What was up with those moments in which he spoke directly to the audience? And so on.

Students individually select a moment from the show that was both comic and serious in some way and either write about it or draw it. Writing could include a detailed description, as well as some thoughts about the juxtaposing of comedy and soulfulness.

These are shared in table groups perhaps – and each group is charged with some ideas about what they think Tomáš Kubínek might be trying to tell us through his performance.

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## WHAT'S YOUR READ OF THIS NON-PRINT TEXT?

### HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS - AND HOW COULD THEY BE ADAPTED AS GUIDING QUESTIONS TO SPARK STUDENT DISCUSSION?

- > What acts does he perform? How were they sequenced throughout the show?
- > How would you characterize his movement? Which movements stand out particularly for you – and why?
- > How does he do that???
- > What do you notice about the use of sound?
- > What's an example of the body – rather than the voice – speaking?
- > Which moments made you laugh? Why was that?
- > What kinds of posture and facial expressions were employed?
- > Which moment or moments seemed to be connected especially to the skill of clowning? To mime? To acrobatics?

- > How do theatrical elements (lighting, sound effects, staging choices like levels and placement on stage, for example) enhance the presentation?
- > In which moments are familiar things juxtaposed with unfamiliar usage? What is the effect?
- > How does this work explore human boundaries?
- > Which moments strike you as having required of the artist the greatest degree of imagination? Why?
- > Which moment had the greatest impact on you – and why?
- > What emotions were called up? When? How?
- > What do you think Kubínek is up to here?
- > What effect does his work have on you?

## INTERNET

### INTERVIEW WITH KUBÍNEK

[www.kubinek.com/interview.htm](http://www.kubinek.com/interview.htm)

Q: The most common description of you is “Certified Lunatic and Master of the Impossible” but how would you describe yourself?

A: Fool, clown, visual poet, solo performance artist...

### WATCHKNOWLEARN.ORG

[www.watchknowlearn.org/Category.aspx?CategoryID=6009](http://www.watchknowlearn.org/Category.aspx?CategoryID=6009)

Four kid-friendly instructional videos on miming.

### MIMING IDEAS FOR CHILDCARE PROFESSIONALS & TEACHERS

[www.kidactivities.net/?tag=/mime](http://www.kidactivities.net/?tag=/mime)

## BOOKS

### *I'M HAPPY SAD TOGETHER: A BOOK TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN UNDERSTAND COMPLEX FEELINGS*

By: Lory Britain PhD

Reading level: Ages 3-8

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012

ISBN-10: 1479281336

At last! A book to help young children understand and express their complex and sometimes conflicted feelings without having to choose between one feeling or the other. Using developmentally appropriate language and issues that children can identify with, *I'm Happy Sad Together* speaks to the inner world of young children and gives them concrete tools and ways to express themselves.

### *BE A MIME*

By: Mark Stolzenberg

Reading level: Young adult

Publisher: Sterling, 2001

ISBN: 0806964170

“The performance is unique and personal in that I am simultaneously author, director, and performer in every moment being created before the public’s very eyes.”

> TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK



***FUNNY BONES: COMEDY GAMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS***

By Lisa Bany-Winters

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: Chicago Review Press, 2002

ISBN-10: 1556524447

The acting teacher and author offers nearly 90 activities including tips on creating memorable characters, using props and developing a stand-up routine.

***FUNNY BUSINESS: CLOWNING AROUND, PRACTICAL JOKES, COOL COMEDY, CARTOONING, AND MORE***

By: Helaine Becker

Reading level: Ages 8-12

Publisher: Owlkids Books, 2005

ISBN-10: 1897066406

Young readers learn how to prepare a comedy routine and how to draw their own comic strips. They discover what separates a good clown from a stupendous one, and how to perform clown routines like juggling and pratfalls.

**“Over the course of numerous performances, a new idea keeps being refined and shaped. It’s all very delicate, instinctive work. Faith and listening are a big part of it.”**

**> TOMÁŠ KUBÍNEK**

**LEARNING LINKS HAVE BEEN  
CREATED BY:**

**MARK ALMY**  
RESEARCH AND TEXT UNLESS  
OTHERWISE NOTED

**MARK DUEBNER DESIGN**  
DESIGN

**MICHAEL FLANNIGAN**  
FIELD TRIP SERIES COORDINATOR

**KAJSA THURESSON-FRARY**  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION