

## **“Have Courage and Be Kind”<sup>1</sup>**

This simple and beautiful message is what I want my acting students to take away from my classroom when they leave. I want them to realize that the best acting comes from an empathetic, compassionate connection to other human beings, and from a courageous willingness to commit to their imaginations and to try new things.

In my time spent as a coach and judge in the Mexican Debate Circuit, I kept hearing young judges rip the debaters apart, telling them the debate had been a massive failure, or that they had never been so bored in their lives. Because of that harsh criticism, I don't believe those debaters were in a place to receive any feedback at all. They were not in a place to learn from their mistakes and improve. Many of them might not have wanted to debate again. I want to do the opposite of what those judges did. This eye-opening experience solidified my personal view on teaching, especially since much of acting is about attempting a monologue or a scene, receiving feedback, and trying again. I want to acknowledge the student's efforts (without offering empty praise), and give them constructive feedback and encouragement so that they will want to keep trying, and keep growing.

I had a student who, after her first time performing a monologue in front of the class, broke down from the overwhelm of having spoken publicly. She had a deep connection to the scene and a genuine desire to become an actor, but felt exposed anytime she performed. Slowly, however, after giving her the space to recover — supporting her using Susana Bloch's neutral breath — after encouraging to try it again, and again, she became more confident. Having been offered that space and encouragement, and seeing that her peers cheered for and with her, she gained the confidence to commit to pursuing acting as a career.

That is what I want for my students. A recognition that acting can be challenging, but it does not mean we stop trying, on the contrary, we grow stronger and bolder every time we do it. Coincidentally, I believe having this philosophy is the only way to maintain a career as a professional actor; otherwise the constant rejection would become too heavy a burden.

I wish to encourage curiosity and thoughtful discussion, opening the space up to different, even opposing ideas. Questioning themselves, myself, and the books we read will make the students more critical thinkers and more engaged members of society. That critical thought will also trickle into their art, hopefully helping develop artists who will have a strong point of view, and who will express it creatively. I also believe in expecting excellence. By this I mean expecting full commitment in their own work and a genuine desire to learn. I believe that having high expectations pushes students to become the best they can be. I always remain open to flexibility for students who are struggling or need accommodations. Following this philosophy, I can always keep courage and kindness at the heart of my teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA:Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures), Starz.