



Reeling

by Barry Kornhauser
directed by Peter C. Brosius

ENJOYED BY
ALL
AGES

Imagine a night at the movies...

in 1924! The lights go down, the curtain parts, we hear the whir of the hand cranked camera and the lights begin to

flicker. On the screen we read the title and our lips curl in a smile. Our Hero is a silent movie star, the Little Fellow, the Nobody that is Everybody, and we know we're in for the story that is as old – and as new – as the human heart. Simple. Sweet. And slip-on-a-banana peel funny! Now imagine it all onstage. Imagine **Reeling**.

• A SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY •

Scene 1: We Meet Our Hero. This is the Little Fellow we recognize, in tie and collar, porkpie hat standing by. He never speaks, but we learn all we need to know by reading the occasional title sign. In this scene it could read: "He's poor, but in love." He is readying himself to deliver a proposal. When he exits his room we learn a great deal about the impossibly unpredictable world he inhabits. Things are not always what they seem: a wall may be a backdrop, or a window a painting! But one way or another Our Hero will prevail.

Scene 2: The Proposal. We meet the Little Fellow's Beloved, but his proposal goes awry. She can't marry him. She longs to be a movie star, and she's headed to the big city. Therefore, he is city bound as well.

Scene 3: City Life. Our Hero is a street sweeper. He has a run in with the Big Man, a man in a hurry. After a cat and mouse routine the Little Fellow escapes - exhausted.

Scene 4: Where Is He? Our Hero takes a breather when suddenly the world around him begins to deconstruct. Furniture is removed, the wall disappears, where is he???

Scene 5: In the Studio. The Little Fellow explores an empty film stage. He encounters everything from glue to a wind machine. Then...

Scene 6: Lights, Camera, Action. A glamorous film star arrives with her entourage. Lo and behold, his Beloved is the star's "Girl Friday." Our Hero is mistaken for the director. When the company breaks for lunch, the Little Fellow secretly films his girl playing a scene. Then...

Scene 7: The Director Arrives! The Big Man charges in. He is the true director of the film. Hold on to your hats! Chaos ensues. It's a cavalcade of confusion. The outraged star walks out and Our Hero's Beloved is chosen to replace her. There is a chase sequence that includes every classic pratfall in the book plus two, until against all odds we find the Little Fellow standing unscathed, all alone giving the thumbs up to...

Scene 8: The Happy Ending. The Little Fellow escapes one last time into the scene he himself filmed earlier and at last proposes to his girl. She accepts, and they walk into the sunset together as only Our Heroes can. **The End.**

Things to imagine, think about and do

Find out a little about silent movies and its stars.

Here's a start: Buster Keaton is one of the two most famous silent movie actors (the other is Charlie Chaplin). He made films from 1917 to 1927, the year in which the first Talkie was made, (*The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson). He was famous for his almost expressionless face. Many people have said he used his face almost like a movie screen within a movie screen on which the viewers could project their own thoughts and feelings. The world he walked through on film was a challenging place: Unpredictable events happened like clockwork, and he walked through catastrophes he often didn't notice. Why wouldn't he? He could overcome any obstacle. He had no money, no power, and no credentials. Usually, he didn't



even have a name! But he had confidence, humility, and ingenuity.



If Our Hero walked across a bridge reading a paper and it collapsed, a truck would stop under it just long enough for him to cross to the other side – or maybe he'd have to invent a bridge out of an umbrella and the string of a kite. Who knows?! **Tell about a time that you had to use imagination and ingenuity to get yourself out of a sticky situation.**

See how many movies, books, or other things you can think of that tell a story without using words. **How do you "hear" a story without words?**

Check it Out!

If at all possible, see a silent film. One video available through the library system is: **The Art of Buster Keaton: Our Hospitality; Sherlock, Jr.** (Call # VIDEO 791.437A)

What are silent movies and who made them?: a really comprehensive site. <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~pringle/silent>

These books remind you that the world is often put together differently than you expect, and that often stories are told without words:

Bamboozled, by David Legge. *A young girl on a visit to her granddad feels that there is something out of the ordinary but can't quite figure out what it is.* (any age)

Look-Alikes, by Joan Steiner. *A miniature metropolis is meticulously, ingeniously crafted from everyday objects. Not what it seems at first glance!* (ages 5 to 105)