

Composition 6: Groin Kicks and White Chicks

Essential Question: What humor techniques do writers use to make audiences laugh?

PROMPT: Analyze how writers and performers of humor utilize several comedy techniques to make audiences laugh. One of your [3] techniques must be satire, citing Rick Reilly's magazine article "The Meek Shall Inherit the Gym" found later in this packet.

Gifted Differentiation: GIEP students must include in their humor analysis at least one literary example of humor, such as a satire.



INTRODUCTION CONCEPT: Tell an anecdote relating the funniest thing you ever witnessed or heard. A mooning incident? A scene from a film? An accident? A joke? Then, explain in a sentence which of the 6 techniques studied in class made it so funny. If you can't get started, begin with the phrase, *I'll always remember the time that...*

CONCLUSION IDEA: What we laugh at tells us a lot about ourselves. Explain which of the techniques is most popular with American audiences--and what might this tell us about us as people?

Focus Skills

1. TS/Subs/Intro/Concl
 2. Frag/Run
 3. Sp
 4. Punctuation
 5. Catchy Introduction
 6. 3.5 Pages Final Copy Calibri or Arial 12
- *1 Citation / MLA Works Cited Required**
from the Rick Reilly article

Mega-Tips for Content Development

- Use quotations to add specific detail.
- Avoid plot regurgitation. Make sure that all of your details relate to the subtopic criterion.
- Select the three techniques you understand the best or enjoy the best.

The Comedy Technique Ladder

<MOST MENTAL...”HIGH” HUMOR>

SATIRE

Deserved ridicule of politicians, music, commercials, snobs, hypocrites, or ideas. Satire is achieved through some degree of exaggeration and parody

>Saturday Night Live commercials and political skits, Weird Al Yankovich, The Colbert Report [Stephen Colbert] and The Daily Show [John Stewart]

Will Ferrell’s Parody on G. W. Bush’s Intellect and Misplaced Priorities

CHARACTER INCONGRUITY

When characters have traits that clash with another character’s or with their own.

Character-Character

2 ½ Men [Allan and Charlie Harper]

Geico—Marine Drill Sergeant Psychotherapist

WORD PLAY

Puns: words that have two meanings, one serious, the other comical.

What did the grape say when he got stepped on?...nothing, just wined a little.

Malapropisms: stupid character misuses big word

The ancient Greeks studied their constipations.

Sarcasm: smart-alecky insults and cuts

“Did your mother have any kids that lived?”

Two and a Half Men IHOP Joke

PLOT COMPLICATION

highly unlikely events

Austin Powers Cryogenic Freezing and Evacuation

VULGARITY

cussing/sex/bodily functions [bathroom humor] or jokes ridiculing those who don’t deserve it.

South Park or Family Guy—

pick any episode—they’re all offensive to someone...so I’m not showing any in class--sorry!

SLAPSTICK

physically outrageous actions or appearances

Monty Python And The Holy Grail - The Black Knight 4 min

<MOST PHYSICAL...”LOW” HUMOR>



Model Essay

~ The Best Medicine ~

I will never forget the time when my friend Missy and I were part of a Stress Management class. When we walked into the room, we were instructed to take off our shoes and to lie down on the floor. We were the unfortunate ones who got to lie down by all of the shoes, some less aromatic than others.. Then weird music began playing, you know, that New Age Yanni stuff, beneath which a man was telling us to “breathe through the crown of your head and out through the tips of your toes,” a physiological impossibility. Right away, Missy and I began laughing, the only two out of about one hundred and fifty, the rest of the class taking their cues from the Yanni-Lord with utmost seriousness. After five minutes of trying to contain laughter, we realized that everyone was asleep but us. The next thing I knew, Missy was poking at my side. Previous to her poking me, I heard the girl to my right snoring. I knew right away that Missy thought I was the source. I began poking her back, hoping that she would know I was silent but awake. After about five pokes and forty-five minutes of inane stress relief, we could finally let out all of our laughter. If anything, Stress Management had added to our stress. Everyday life is filled with moments of humor like this, but rarely do we ask *why* such moments are funny. In this case, it was the incongruity of our teacher’s seriousness against the sheer silliness of his subject matter—and the undignified snoring that underscored how utterly boring his entire subject was. Professional comedy writers exploit not only incongruities from real life experiences like this one but a host of other techniques as well, namely **slapstick, satire, and word play**.

Slapstick entails physically outrageous actions or appearances to make viewers laugh. One example of a film that uses the slapstick technique is *Dumb and Dumber*. In one scene, Harry is going on a date with a woman who Lloyd likes, so beforehand Lloyd slips some Turbo-Lax into Harry’s drink. When Harry gets to Mary’s house, he asks her if he can use her bathroom. He scuttles in and does his business -- loudly. While in the bathroom, Mary tells Harry that the toilet is broken and not to flush it. Knowing he cannot in good conscience leave the toilet un-flushed, he immediately tries to fix it. After several attempts at repair, he hears Mary yell in to ask what is taking so long. He tells her that he is shaving and will be ready to go shortly. In the meantime, he is opening a window, frantically waving his arms to vent out the bathroom. Another example of slapstick in the movie is when Lloyd sells a dead parrot to a blind kid. He needs some extra money for the road trip that Harry and he are about to undertake. Unfortunately, the bird that he sells does not have a head. To fix that problem, he tapes the head top the neck so that when the kid pets the bird it will feel like it is attached. This part of the film is funny because at one point in the movie we see the blind kid petting the decapitated fowl, trying earnestly to get it to talk. Also, slapstick emerges when Lloyd and Harry drive a little moped up the Rocky Mountains. They trade in their van because it is too hard on gas, but it is snowing and freezing on the poorly equipped moped. The sight alone is hilarious, but to add humor, Lloyd tells Harry that he has to go to the bathroom. They don’t want to stop, so Harry tells him to just go--and he does. When they get to Aspen and slump off the moped, they are

frozen together by force of Harry's urine.

A more cerebral comedy technique, **word play** often capitalizes on witty insults and cuts. In the movie *Tommy Boy*, Richard is constantly affronting Tommy. For example, in the beginning of the movie, Tommy is talking into a fan saying, "Luke, I am your father." Richard walks in and says he is sorry for interrupting "happy time" but that they actually have to get some work done. He never takes anything that Tommy does or says seriously. It seems as if Tommy is an encumbrance to Richard. After Tommy's Dad died, Tommy and Richard go on the road to sell Callahan brake shoes. More sarcasm appears when they are about to sell some of their products to an auto parts company. Before they enter the building, Tommy asks Richard if the suit he is wearing makes him look bad. Richard, very seriously, says that it is his face that makes him look bad. Later, when the two are driving down the road looking at a map, Richard asks Tommy to find the town where they are headed to make their next sale. Tommy has no idea where they are on the map, which makes it difficult for him to give sage advice on where to go next. After looking for several minutes, Richard says, "Give it here, Magellan." Tommy, not even knowing who Magellan is, did not comprehend the insult. Later in a restaurant, the two are talking about Tommy ineptitude at sales, much unlike his Dad. Tommy's excuse is that his Dad was a much smarter person than he is. Quickly Richard says, "That's true. There are two kinds of smart - book smart and street smart. Book smart waved bye-bye to you a long time ago." Beneath the insults, the fact that Tommy does not know that he is being insulted makes the word play even funnier.

Satire, the most mental of all humor tactics, ridicules politicians, music, commercials—anything or anyone that deserves it. For example, Rick Reilly satirizes the increasingly non-competitive nature of schools and society in general his *Sports Illustrated* article "The Meek Shall Inherit the Gym". Reilly laments that gym classes are outlawing competitive activities like dodge-ball in favor of less in-your-face games like duck-duck-goose. He foresees a future in which little Ambers and Alexanders who never experienced the world of physical competition will be disadvantaged in the business world where cut-throat competition prevails, where those who do not know how to compete will be "serving chalupas...very non-competitive" (Reilly 95). *Saturday Night Live* satirizes politicians regularly, as in their lampooning of George Bush. Of course, Bush deserves ridicule because he is not one of the smartest presidents ever elected. When asked a question during a presidential debate about obscure world leaders, he replies in the skit with such answers as "I have no idea" or "pass." He does say one thing with perfect clarity, however, "Don't mess with Texas." Of course, we know that President Bush is not as stupid as they make him out to be on the skit. The exaggeration of his stupidity is the funny part, exaggeration the cornerstone of effective satire. During the same presidential debate, *SNL* pokes fun at Al Gore's arrogance and artificial, plodding delivery style. During the debate, he interrupts Bush on several occasions, gives lengthy answers that don't make sense, and acts as if he deserves the presidency more than Bush does. Every answer that Gore gives has to do with his social security lock box obsession. The satire clicks because while George Bush is giving farcical answers, Al Gore is waxing grandiloquent. *In Living Color* also makes fun of politicians. In one skit Jim Carrey is dressed as Bill Clinton. There is rap music playing and female dancers all over

the stage. Clinton is singing a song entitled “Humpin’ Around”, alluding to how he cheated on his wife, Hillary Clinton. Clinton contends that there was “no humpin’ around going on” outside his marriage. While singing, he dances around lewdly, making vulgar motions with his hips. This skit is funny because everyone knows that Bill Clinton did, in reality, cheat on his wife. That Bill denied his affairs makes him such an easy target for ridicule.

What we laugh at tells us much about ourselves. What do most Americans laugh at? If you trust box office sales and Neilson Ratings, we tune into vulgarity and slapstick comedy more than any other forms. Perhaps Americans would rather have their humor obvious and naughty rather than having to think about why they are laughing. As Mark Twain once quipped, “No one ever went broke underestimating the taste and intelligence of the American people” (Twain 1).

Works Cited

Reilly, Rick. “The Meek Shall Inherit the Gym”. Sports Illustrated. 12 October, 2000: 95.

Twain, Mark. Bartlett’s Famous Quotations. Ed. John Bartlett. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.

Reilly, Rick. "The Meek Shall Inherit the Gym". Sports Illustrated. 12 October, 2000: 95.

Not to alarm you, but America is going softer than left-out butter. Exhibit 9,137: Schools have started banning dodgeball. I kid you not. Dodgeball has been outlawed by some school districts in New York, Texas, Utah and Virginia. Many more are thinking about it, like Cecil County, Md., where the school board wants to ban any game with "human targets." Personally, I wish all these people would go suck their Birkenstocks.

Human targets? What's tag? What's a snowball fight? What's a close play at second? Neil Williams, a physical education professor at Eastern Connecticut State, says dodgeball has to go because it "encourages the best to pick on the weak." Noooo! You mean there's weak in the world? There's strong? Of course there is, and dodgeball is one of the first opportunities in life to figure out which one you are and how you're going to deal with it.

We had a bully, Big Joe, in our seventh grade. Must have weighed 225 pounds, used to take your underwear while you were in the shower and parade around the locker room twirling it on his finger. We also had a kid named Melvin, who was so thin we could've faxed him from class to class. I'll never forget the dodgeball game in which Big Joe had a ball in each hand and one sandwiched between his knees, firing at our side like a human tennis-ball machine, when, all of a sudden, he got plunked right in his 7-Eleven-sized butt. Joe whirled around to see who'd done it and saw that it was none other than Melvin, all 83 pounds of him, most of it smile.

Some of these New Age whiners say dodgeball is inappropriate in these times of horrifying school shootings. Are you kidding? Dodgeball is one of the few times in life when you get to let out your aggressions, no questions asked. We don't need less dodgeball in schools, we need more!

I know what all these NPR-listening, Starbucks-guzzling parents want. They want their Ambers and their Alexanders to grow up in a cozy womb of noncompetition, where everybody shares tofu and Little Red Riding Hood and the big, bad wolf set up a commune. Then their kids will stumble out into the bright light of the real world and find out that, yes, there's weak and there's strong and teams and sides and winning and losing. You'll recognize those kids. They'll be the ones filling up chalupas. Very noncompetitive.

But Williams and his fellow wusses aren't stopping at dodgeball. In their Physical Education Hall of Shame they've also included duck-duck-goose and musical chairs. Seriously. So, if we give them dodgeball, you can look for these games to be banned next:

Tag. Referring to any child as *it* is demeaning and hurtful. Instead of the child hollering, "You're it!" we recommend, "You're special!"

Red Rover. Inappropriate labeling of children as animals. Also, the use of the word *red* evokes Communist undertones.

Sardines. Unfairly leaves one child alone at the end as the *loser* -- a term psychologists have deemed unacceptable.

Hide-and-seek. No child need hide or be sought. The modern child runs free in search of himself.

Baseball. Involves wrong-headed notions of *stealing*, *errors* and gruesome *hit-and-run*. Players should always be safe, never out.

Hopscotch. Sounds vaguely alcoholic, not to mention demeaning to our friends of Scottish ancestry.

Marbles. Winning others' marbles is overly capitalistic.

Marco Polo. Mocks the blind.

Capture the flag. Mimics war.

Kick the can. Unfair to the can.

If we let these PC twinkies have their way, we'll be left with:

Duck-duck-duck. Teacher spends the entire hour patting each child softly on the head.

Upsy down. The entire class takes turns fluffing the gym teacher's pillow before her nap.

Swedish baseball. Players are allowed free passage to first, second or third, where they receive a relaxing two-minute massage from opposing players.

Smear the mirror. Students take turns using whipped cream to smear parts of their reflection they don't like, e.g., the fat they have accrued from never doing a damn thing in gym class.

Satire results from ridiculing those who DO / DON'T deserve it and usually EX _____ S the ridiculed trait to turbo-boost the comic effect.

Example 1: "The Meek Shall Inherit the Gym" article by Rick Reilly

Who does Reilly "target" with his satire? _____

How do the quotations below communicate Reilly's ridicule of his target?

- "Personally, I wish these people would go _____ their Birkenstocks*." **a popular sandal brand worn by hippies*
- "Some of these New Age** _____ say dodgeball is inappropriate in these times of horrifying school shootings. Are you kidding?"
***like the hippies, New-Agers believe in peace, love, cooperation, and spiritualism and discourage capitalism's obsession with industrial competition, winning, wealth-building, and domination.*
- "I know what these NPR***-listening, Starbucks-guzzling _____ want. They want their Ambers and Alexanders to grow up in a cozy _____ ...You'll recognize those kids. They'll be the ones filling up chalupas. Very non-_____."
****National Public Radio, a station accused of being ultra-liberal if not communistic and anti-capitalistic, with the core message that powerful nations like the USA should do more to cooperate with less-powerful nations and individuals through welfare handouts and humanitarian relief efforts*

List a few examples of exaggeration that turbo-boost the satirical humor for you:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Example 2: George Bush skit by Will Ferrell

Who is the target of Ferrell's satire? _____

- "I'm here at my ranch in Crawford, Texas, putting in a little ___ & ___—relaxing, growing out my soul-patch, playing a little _____-golf with Condi Rice and Dick Cheney, but still keeping my eye on ball." *A Frisbee is thrown to him.... "Not right now, Condi...we'll play later."*
- "Let's talk about something that really matters, like keeping _____ out of _____."
- "Mr. President, you asked me to tell you when the _____ is on—it's already on..." "What inning is it? It better not be past the third inning!"
- "I think the polar _____suck. Who cares about a place a bunch of penguins can have an _____?"

Based on the preceding quotes, what is the president's main priority? _____

What should be his main priority? _____

Based on the following quotations, what else about Bush is Will Ferrell exaggerating and satirizing?

- "For centuries the sun's rays have warmed the surface of our earth's _____, and apparently, those rays are intensifying, in such a way that it's increasing _____ flow...I'll be honest, I don't know what the hell I'm _____."
- "Mr. President, you can't say their using _____. Because _____ are real, they're not disputed.".... "How do you _____ that?"
- Why do you think Adam and Eve were _____? ...You didn't hear Adam and Eve talking about emission standards and _____ cars. In fact, Adam and Eve _____ an Excursion."

Punctuation

MARK	WHEN TO USE / EXAMPLE	WRITE YOUR OWN SENTENCE BELOW
.	To end a sentence or abbreviate> <i>The U.S.A. won.</i>	
?	To ask> <i>Who farted?</i>	
!	To show intensity; use just one> <i>Wow!</i>	
: or --	To list after a pause> <i>Marriage has three enemies: money, infidelity, and boredom.</i>	
;	To eliminate connector words like and, but, or within a compound sentence> <i>I like you; you like me.</i>	
,	To separate three or more items in a series> <i>I like apples, pears, and oranges.</i>	1
	To separate back-to-back describers> <i>He threw me a greasy, grimy wrench.</i>	2
	To precede conjunctions like and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so in compound sentences> <i>I like you, but you don't like me.</i>	3
	To set off prepositional phrase openers ("location words" like <i>under, over, behind, in, on, to, away, through, around</i>) from the rest of the sentence> <i>Under the stars of July, we kissed.</i>	4
	To set off clause openers (that begin with words like <i>because, since, when, although, if, unless, while</i>) from the rest of the sentence> <i>Because I like you, you like me.</i>	5
	To set off renaming phrases (appositives)> <i>Michael Jordan, a famous athlete, played several sports.</i>	6
	To set off interjections (<i>Gadzooks, Alas, Dammit, Yes, No, Wow, You know, Oh my,</i>)> <i>Golly gee, you're gorgeous.</i>	7
	To set off those you are directly addressing> <i>Billy, pick up your toys. Listen to me, guys.</i>	8
	To set off words like <i>however, nevertheless, therefore</i> which always create pauses> <i>He won. However, he lost his cool.</i>	9
	Dates/years and towns/states: <i>I was born in Tyrone, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1963.</i>	10