



Theatre Virtual Learning

Acting III & Acting IV

Laughter is the Best Medicine

Date: May 4, 2020



Lesson: May 4, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

Students will explore the elements of comedy.

Laughter is the Best Medicine

Let's Get Started / Warm Up Activities:

What makes you laugh? Does everyone find humor in the same things/concepts? Think of one person in your life that laughs at the same things you do. Does this shared sense of humor strengthen your relationship?

How do
celebrities
stay cool?

THEY HAVE
MANY FANS.



Lesson: Elements of Comedy, What Makes Us Laugh!

Comedy is built around character, situations, or dialogue.

It seems strange to many students of the drama that almost all comedy has its basic appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions. However, this is the reason for the question: “Did the audience catch on?”

There are several types of comedy some causing great belly laughs, some bringing laughter to the point of tears, and some causing only inner smiles or chuckles.





Lesson: Elements of Comedy, What Makes Us Laugh!

EXAGGERATION

The most noticeable characteristic of anything comic is probably **exaggeration**.

One form of exaggeration is the overstatement, or hyperbole. “I can lick you with both hands tied behind my back” is an example of hyperbole.

The opposite of overstatement is understatement. Exaggeration may also be applied to physical characteristics, such as a bulbous nose or **buck** teeth; to mannerisms, such as a strange walk or a twitching eye to mental characteristics, such as the almost-too-brilliant child prodigy or the incredibly-too-stupid person; or to personality characteristics, such as miserliness, prissiness, or fanciful romanticism.





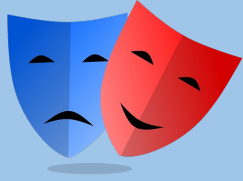
Lesson: Elements of Comedy, What Makes Us Laugh!

INCONGRUITY

Anything that seems out of place, out of time, or out of character is an example of **incongruity**. Human beings have a built-in system of order, and if what they expect does not occur, they laugh.

Someone waltzing to a rumba beat, the hulking fullback who quotes Shelley and Keats, and the “harmless little fellow” who is as brave as an army are examples of incongruities audiences find amusing.





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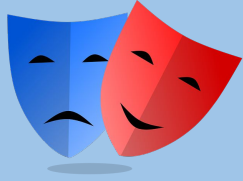
ANTICIPATION

The key to many laughs is **anticipation**, or the looking forward to a potential laugh. The strength of the laugh is determined by how much the audience is in the know.” We wait for the characters of mistaken identity to meet and booby traps to ensnare innocent victims.

The old gag of the banana peel on the sidewalk is an excellent example of anticipation. The observer will start to laugh even before the clown takes that disastrous step.

Many times anticipation is created by the *plant* — an idea, a line, or an action emphasized early in the play that is used later for a laugh. It must be remembered that it usually takes at least **three exposures** to an idea to provoke a laugh one to plant, a second to establish, and the third to clinch, or bring out a response.





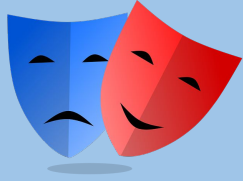
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AMBIGUITY

Double meaning, or ambiguity, is the heart of many humorous lines. Puns and word play depend upon the audience's recognizing the possible interpretations and, almost always, selecting the one least likely.

Mistaken identities, lines meant for one person but "accepted" by another, and ruses and disguises are other ways to create double meaning.



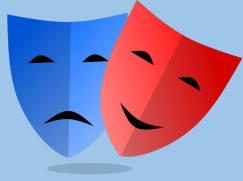
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RECOGNITION

Discovering hidden or obscure meanings is called **recognition**. “Solving the puzzle” especially in a line or passage of wit where the audience must think twice, is the basis of high comedy and satire.

We are amused when we discover what is going to happen just before it does. The rake—the “mouth-agape freeze” of farce — has always brought down the house. The character sees or hears something that apparently does not sink in, takes a step or two, and then “Pow” the meaning hits.





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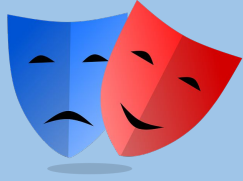


PROTECTION

One of the most important elements of comedy is called the **protection factor**. Cruel, violent, grotesque, and abusive actions and events often cause laughter when the audience is under the protection of knowing these things are not really happening.

The secret of the cartoon in which a character runs off a cliff is this protection factor. The character falls 100 feet to apparent “doom.” but amazingly reappears in the next frame. The old slapstick of pies in the face and beatings with water-filled rubber bags is another example; it made considerable noise but hurt no one.

We are truly amused when we are certain that no one is really being injured, and we can accept the illusion as being real, for then ‘we laugh because it is not happening to us.



Practice: Elements of Comedy, What Makes Us Laugh!

1. List the 6 elements of comedy that you have learned about today!
2. List an example of each. These can come from anything you have experienced: personal life, plays, television shows, films, cartoons, youtube videos, video games, comic books, etc.
3. Choose one of the examples you listed and find a copy/clip of it. Share it with someone in your household or through social media.
4. Discuss the following questions:
 - a. What were the similarities and differences in what you found humorous?
 - b. Many say that “comedy is hard”, based off your discussion in question A, why do you think there may be truth to this quote?