The Challenge of Comedy

Essential Questions

- How is humor created?
- How do people respond to humor, and why do responses vary?

Unit Overview

If laughter is truly the best medicine, then a study of challenges would not be complete without a close examination of the unique elements of comedy. Overcoming challenges is often easier when we are able to look at the humorous side of life. However, finding humor is not always easy; it can be a challenge in itself. This unit explores the common elements found in humorous writing, as well as the difficulties encountered when attempting to write or perform comedy. This unit defines common features of humorous texts through short stories, play excerpts, anecdotes, essays, poems, comic strips, and film clips. You will use a variety of learning strategies to focus on the characteristics and specific challenges of comedy as you read, write, view, analyze, and perform humorous texts.
# The Challenge of Comedy

## Goals
- To use vocabulary associated with humorous texts
- To differentiate between high and low comedy
- To analyze the elements of humor found in a variety of print and nonprint texts
- To analyze a humorous text and write a critical analysis essay
- To perform a comic scene emphasizing the elements of humor

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
- Anecdote
- Elements of Humor
- Levels of Comedy
- Performance

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Learning Focus: Defining Comedy

One of the first and strongest impulses of human beings is to laugh. Laughter lightens our mood, makes us feel good, and unites us with others. Laughter can stem from something that occurs spontaneously, or from something that has been carefully created. Comedy is a literary or cinematic work of a comic nature or that uses the themes or methods of comedy. Comedy comes in many forms, such as anecdotes, jokes, TV shows, stories, plays, and cartoons. We all know what makes us laugh, or do we? Do you laugh more at witty dialogue, slapstick, comic situations, or caricatures? Do you prefer high comedy or low comedy?

The more you understand about how comic writers create humor, the more you will be able to appreciate the skill that goes into creating comedy. Comedy uses common themes and methods to create a humorous effect. It often depends on incongruity, wordplay, and comic situations to make us laugh. We may find that a well-told anecdote or joke produces guffaws of laughter in us. Or we may be drawn to comic caricatures and the hyperbole or wit that is characteristic of cartoon humor.

Learning to understand what makes something funny is the first step in being able to analyze the power of humorous writing. George Bernard Shaw, a great comedic writer, loved to create comedy because as he said, “The power of comedy is to make people laugh and when they have their mouths open and least expect it — you slip in the truth.” As you laugh at and enjoy the texts of this unit, you will also begin to analyze how humor is created so you can better identify the elements of humorous writing and appreciate the craft of creating humor. Enjoy your foray into comedy, both high and low.

Independent Reading: Humor takes many forms. Look for a collection of humorous essays, short stories, or poems, and explore the variety of ways authors can make you laugh.
Essential Questions

1. How is humor created?

2. How do people respond to humor, and why do responses vary?

Unit Overview and Learning Focus

Predict what you think this unit is about. Use the words or phrases that stood out to you when you read the Unit Overview and the Learning Focus.

Embedded Assessment 1

What knowledge must you have (what do you need to know) to succeed on Embedded Assessment 1? What skills must you have (what must you be able to do)?
**What Makes You Laugh?**

**Anticipation Guide:** Chances are you encounter humorous events, stories, movies, and people on a fairly regular basis. You probably find some things extremely funny and other things not funny at all. For each item below, circle or highlight the response that best describes your typical reaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>I almost always laugh.</th>
<th>I sometimes laugh.</th>
<th>I almost never laugh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading something funny on a T-shirt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching a stand-up comedian on TV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading a comic book</td>
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<td>Listening to a radio DJ</td>
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<td>Seeing someone trip and/or fall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching a fictional TV show or movie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching a TV show that captures real people doing funny things</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading a humorous book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to friends tell jokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing someone making fun of someone else</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching a humorous play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to someone tell a story</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing someone act silly in class</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the comedy profile below to explore your sense of humor.

1. Read through your responses to each item on the survey you just completed. What patterns do you notice in your responses? What tends to make you laugh easily?

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2. Recall the last time you enjoyed a really good laugh. Explain what happened and what made you laugh so hard.

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3. Do you laugh more often at real-life or at fictional events and situations? Explain.

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4. Do you ever laugh at the misfortune of others? Explain.

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________________________________________________________________________________________
5. Describe someone you believe to be funny, and discuss why he or she makes you laugh.

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6. Describe types of humorous writing or situations that you rarely find funny.

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7. Describe your sense of humor.

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8. Bring in a copy of one humorous text (such as a joke, comic strip, T-shirt, bumper sticker) accompanied by a written response that explains the humor.

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________________________________________________________________________
Would you like to know a language everyone in the world understands? You already do—because you laugh. Any two people from vastly different cultures who don’t speak a word of the other’s language still know exactly what is meant when the other person laughs.

Think of laughter as the unofficial language of Earth. Yet how much do any of us really understand about humor?

On the Laugh Track

What makes things funny? READ asked John Ficarra, the editor of MAD magazine. After all, he should know. Here’s what he said: “Monkeys. They’re unbeatable. For example, show a photo of a dentist—not funny. Show a photo of a dentist with a monkey in his chair, and it’s comedy gold. Try this theory out on a few of your family photos, and you’ll see.” OK, so monkeys are funny. What else? How about this?

Two hunters were in the woods, when one collapses. He didn’t seem to be breathing. The other called the emergency number and said, “My friend is dead! What can I do?” The operator said, “Calm down, I can help. First, let’s make sure he’s dead.” After a second of silence on the hunter’s end, the operator heard a gunshot. The hunter came back on the phone and said, “OK, now what?”

If you laughed, you’re not alone. In the year 2001, that joke was voted the funniest in the world as part of a project called LaughLab.
Psychologist Richard Wiseman's goal was to determine what makes people laugh and what is found to be funny among men and women, older and younger people, and people from different countries. His research team tested people in person and asked others to submit opinions online using a “Giggleometer,” which ranked jokes on a scale of 1–5. More than 40,000 jokes were tested.

You may be saying to yourself, “Studying jokes? Is that science?” But plenty of smart people say yes. Laughter is a biological function. It has a certain rhythm; laughter syllables build, then trail off, and they come out in a repetitive, not random, sequence. For example, “ha-ha-ho-ho-he” is typical, but “ha-ho-ha-ho-ha” or “he-ho-he” just doesn’t happen.

Babies begin to laugh instinctively when they’re about 4 months old, perhaps to form a connection with parents. Those born blind and deaf also laugh, so laughter is not dependent on sight and hearing. Other animals, notably chimps, exhibit laugh-like behavior when playing with one another. Even rats, when tickled, make high-pitched squeals that can be interpreted as laughter. (As you might guess, only a dedicated few know this firsthand.)

Comedy Is Serious Stuff

Comics know that the same jokes are not funny to everyone everywhere. Ed Hiestand, a writer for comedy great Johnny Carson, told READ, “Everyone who writes comedy needs to know the audience. On the Carson show, everybody would laugh on a Friday night. Nobody would laugh on a Monday.” Even within one state or town or family, senses of humor are as varied as the people are. Professional comics do not assume a 10 p.m. audience will like a joke because a 7 p.m. audience did.

Comedians who test jokes for a living say it’s hit or miss. “It’s a tough gig, and you have to have a large threshold for pain,” said stand-up Jay Nog. Performers whose jokes get a two-second laugh consider that a significant accomplishment.

Timing is critical. Starting stand-up Zubair Simonson said he’s learning the hard way that “good timing can cause a weak joke to soar, while poor timing can cause a strong joke to falter.” Authors and film actors do not often get immediate public feedback. But comics do.

What keeps the funny guys going? The laughs and after-effects. “The best humor has some sort of layer to it; it makes a statement of some kind or comment,” said Margy Yuspa, a director at Comedy Central. “An example is [Dave] Chappelle. His comedy is funny on the surface and also often comments on race or social issues.”
Funny You Said That

Comedians have their own theories about humor. “What makes us laugh is a surprise change in perspective that connects an unknown with a known idea in a unique manner,” said Ronald P. Culberson, a humorist at FUNsulting.com. “For instance, a three-legged dog walks into an Old West saloon and says, “I’m looking for the man who shot my paw.”

Ask an average person why humans laugh, and he or she would probably say, “Because something was funny.” But comics need to know what gives the giggles; their livelihood depends on it.

Comedian Anthony DeVito told *READ* that “people tend to laugh at things that reinforce what they already believe. Comedy tells them they’re right.”

Gary Gulman, a finalist in *Last Comic Standing*, a reality TV show and comedy competition, gave specifics. “Sometimes it’s a keen observation about something you thought you lived through. Sometimes it’s a juxtaposition of words. Sometimes it’s a gesture or a sound. An encyclopedia couldn’t do this question justice.”

What Are You Laughing At?

Yet laughter is not always a planned response to a joke. One study found that 80 percent of the time, we laugh at something that just happens. People often laugh just because someone else does. Like a yawn, a laugh is contagious. That's why some sit-coms use laugh tracks.

Laughter is also social, a way to bond with others. After all, how often do you laugh alone? When two or more people laugh at the same thing, it is as if nature reminds them of what they have in common.

Behavioral neuroscientist Robert R. Provine conducted a 10-year experiment in which he eavesdropped on 2,000 conversations in malls, at parties, and on city sidewalks. He found that the greatest guffaws did not follow intentionally funny statements; people laughed hardest at everyday comments that seemed funny only in a certain social context.

“Do you have a rubber band?” is not in and of itself humorous, but it is if it's said in response to “I like Amelia so much. I wish I could get her attention.”

Theories of Funniness

There are three main theories about humor.

**Release theory**—Humor gives a break from tension. In a horror movie, as a character creeps through a dark house (often idiotically) to follow an eerie noise, he might open a door to find a cat playing with a
squeezing toy. The audience laughs in relief. Humor also lets us deal with unpleasant or forbidden issues, such as death and violence. People are often more comfortable laughing at something shocking said by someone else, though they would never say it themselves. Comedian Keenen Ivory Wayans once said, “Comedy is the flip side of pain. The worst things that happen to you are hysterical—in retrospect. But a comedian doesn’t need retrospect; he realizes it’s funny while he’s in the eye of the storm.”

Superiority theory—Audience members laugh at those who appear to be more stupid than they judge themselves to be. Slapstick humor, such as seeing a guy slip on a banana peel, often falls into this category. This theory dates back to Plato in ancient Greece and was prominent in the Middle Ages, when people with deformities were often employed as court jesters.

Some comedians exploited this theory by building a routine—or even a persona—around the idea that they were losers who couldn’t catch a break. Larry David, David Letterman, and Woody Allen are comedians who have done this, each in his own way.

Incongruity theory—People laugh when things that are not normally associated with each other are put together. Many comedy duos, from Laurel and Hardy to David Spade and Chris Farley, feature a thin man and a fat man, a visual contrast.

People also laugh when there is a difference between what they expect to happen and what actually occurs. They are being led in a certain direction, and then that direction abruptly changes, and the unpredictability makes them laugh. Children see birds all the time without reaction, but if one flies into their classroom through an open window, they will probably explode in giggles.

Got Laughs?

What we laugh at changes as we age. Here are some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Often Likes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young children</td>
<td>Slapstick, or silly physical humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary-school children</td>
<td>Puns, simple jokes that play off the sound rather than the meaning of a word, such as “Lettuce all go to the salad bar”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Generally, children laugh more than adults. One study found that adults laugh 20 times a day, while children laugh 200 times!

### The Secrets of Humor

Certain comedic devices turn up again and again in jokes, comic strips, and filmed entertainment—because they succeed.

“There were tricks,” said Hiestand of his days writing for *The Tonight Show* hosted by Johnny Carson, “things you would see, certain things always got laughs.” One of the most popular is often called the rule of threes. That is a pattern in which two nonfunny elements are followed by a third that is funny (yet still makes sense within the context).

Many jokes start off with a list of three, such as “A rabbi, a lawyer, and a duck walk into a bar.” As the joke unfolds, the rabbi says something straightforward, then the lawyer does as well, but the duck finishes with something witty or absurd.

Three guys were stranded on an island. An antique lamp washed ashore. When the guys touched it, a genie came out. “I’ll grant each of you one wish,” the genie said. The first guy said, “I want to go home,” then disappeared. The second guy said, “I also want to go home,” and he too disappeared. The third man suddenly looked sad. He said, “I want my two friends back to keep me company.”

Certain concepts seem to be more amusing than others. If you tell any joke involving an animal, and it doesn’t matter which one you use, think Donald and Daffy. In the LaughLab experiment, scientists determined that the funniest animal is the duck. (It’s not arbitrary that a duck was used in the rule-of-threes joke.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teens</th>
<th>Jokes about topics that authority figures would consider rebellious, a way to use humor to deal with nerve-racking subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults, particularly well-educated ones</td>
<td>Satire, which makes fun of the weaknesses of people and society</td>
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</table>
Do Tell—But Do It Right

There are also known techniques for telling jokes well.

- **Keep it short**—Don’t include any details that are not necessary to bring you to the punch line. In the genie joke, there was no need to specify it was a tropical island or to name the castaways. The quicker you tell a joke, the funnier it will be.

- **Be specific**—Some comedians swear that a joke is funnier if you say “Aquafresh” instead of “toothpaste.” The attention to detail makes the story seem more real.

- **Keep a straight face**—Deliver the joke *deadpan*, or without emotion. That way, any strangeness in the joke will seem even stranger because the person telling it doesn’t seem to notice.

- **Don’t laugh at your own joke**—Let your audience decide whether it is funny or foolish—or both.

Theories and techniques aside, much about humor remains a mystery. According to Hiestand, Carson many times said, “I don’t understand what makes comedy a sure thing. There’s no 100-percent surefire formula.” Meanwhile, for most of us, laughter is never a problem. It does not need to be solved, just enjoyed.
### Humorous Vocabulary

**SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES:** Graphic Organizer, Previewing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Humor</th>
<th>Definition/Synonyms</th>
<th>Connotation - or +</th>
<th>Context (humorous situations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic</td>
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<td>laughable</td>
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<td>witty</td>
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<td>ironic</td>
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<td>irreverent</td>
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<td>mocking</td>
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<td>hysterical</td>
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<td>cute</td>
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<td>mirthful</td>
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<td>amusing</td>
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<td>light-hearted</td>
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</table>
### Humorous Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Response</th>
<th>Definition/Synonyms</th>
<th>- or +</th>
<th>Context (humorous situations)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>outburst</td>
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<td>guffaw</td>
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<td>giggle</td>
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<td>chuckle</td>
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<td>groan</td>
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<td>smile</td>
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<td>smirk</td>
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</table>
Humorous Anecdotes

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Graphic Organizer, Word Map, Brainstorming, Notetaking

Anecdotes are shared because of their humorous nature, but anecdotes can also help illustrate larger ideas and concepts.

As you watch the Jerry Seinfeld film clip for the second time, take notes on your assigned section.

### Activity 5.4

| 1. Describe Seinfeld’s facial expressions, tone, gestures, volume, pacing, and inflection. **What is the effect on the audience?** |
| 2. Record Seinfeld’s **transitions** between topics within his anecdote. |
| 3. List details that describe the Superman costume. **Why does Seinfeld include these specific details?** |
| 4. How does the speaker’s **attitude shift** when he becomes almost too old for Halloween? **How does Seinfeld communicate this shift?** |

**Wordplay:** During the monologue, Seinfeld uses humorous wordplay when he describes child/parent use of “up” and “down” words. List the phrases that he uses.

**Up:**

________________________________________

________________________________________

**Down:**

________________________________________

________________________________________

### Academic Vocabulary

**Anecdote** is a brief, entertaining account of an incident or event.

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Seinfeld's monologue is a humorous account of a somewhat ordinary event. Finding and describing the humor in the people, places, and events you encounter can enrich your conversations as well as your writing.

Families sometimes share anecdotes about the humorous things family members have done. Frequently, the stories become more and more outlandish as the details are exaggerated with each retelling.

**How is Seinfeld able to create laughter among the audience by telling such a simple anecdote?**

To brainstorm ideas for your own humorous anecdote, create lists of the people, places, and activities that you associate with laughter. Next, brainstorm a list of humorous memories or experiences associated with specific people, places, and events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/Place/Event</th>
<th>Humorous Memory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

**Anecdote** comes from the Greek word anekdotos, meaning “unpublished.” The root -dot- combined with the prefix ek- means “to give out.” The root -dot- is found in antidote and, spelled -dos-, in dose.
**Essay**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jon Scieszka (b. 1954) is the second oldest of six brothers. He became an elementary school teacher and found that his students liked the funny stories that he enjoyed telling. He has since published a number of children’s books, which are illustrated by his friend Lane Smith. In 2008, the Librarian of Congress named him National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature.

---

**From**

**BROTHERS**

by Jon Scieszka

Brothers are the guys you stick with and stick up for.

The Scieszka brothers are scattered all over the country now, but we still get together once a year to play a family golf tournament. We named it after our dad, Lou, and his favorite car—his old Cadillac Coupe de Ville. It is the Coupe de Lou Classic. We all grew up playing golf, because Dad Lou, an elementary school principal, taught Junior Golf and gave us lessons during summers off. And I’m sure my brothers would want me to point out the amazing fact that I am the winner of both the very first Coupe de Lou 1983 and the latest Coupe de Lou 2004.

But of all the Scieszka brother memories, I believe it was a family car trip that gave us our finest moment of brotherhood. We were driving cross-country from Michigan to Florida, all of us, including the family cat (a guy cat, naturally), in the family station wagon. Somewhere mid-trip we stopped at one of those Stuckey’s rest-stop restaurants to eat and load up on Stuckey’s candy.

We ate lunch, ran around like maniacs in the warm sun, then packed back into the station wagon—Mom and Dad up front, Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, Jeff, and the cat in back. Somebody dropped his Stuckey’s Pecan Log Roll® on the floor. The cat found it and must have scarfed every bit of it, because two minutes later we heard that awful ack ack ack sound of a cat getting ready to barf.
The cat puked up the pecan nut log. Jeff, the youngest and smallest (and closest to the floor) was the first to go. He got one look and whiff of the pecan nut cat yack and blew his own sticky lunch all over the cat. The puke-covered cat jumped on Brian, Brian barfed on Gregg. Gregg upchuckked on Tom. Tom burped a bit of Stuckey lunch back on Gregg. Jim and I rolled down the windows and hung out as far as we could, yelling in group puke horror.

Dad Lou didn’t know what had hit the back of the car. No time to ask questions. He just pulled off to the side of the road. All of the brothers—Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, and Jeff—spilled out of the puke wagon and fell in the grass, gagging and yelling and laughing until we couldn’t laugh anymore.

What does it all mean? What essential guy wisdom did I learn from this?

Stick with your brothers. Stick up for your brothers. And if you ever drop a pecan nut log in a car with your five brothers and your cat . . . you will probably stick to your brothers.
### Degrees of Humor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Humor</th>
<th>Intended Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Least Intense)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Most Intense)</td>
<td>(Most Intense)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVITY 5.6

Finding Truth in Comedy

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Graphic Organizer, Metacognitive Markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote by George Bernard Shaw</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Personal Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The power of comedy is to make people laugh, and when they have their mouths open and they least expect it — you slip in the truth.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why might authors use comedy to discuss serious or important topics?

<p>| Dave Barry’s “A Couple of Really Neat Guys” |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Examples</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Element of Truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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If you were to ask me how I came to be running after litterbugs in downtown Miami while wearing bright-red women’s tights, I would have to say that the turning point was a visit to my optometrist.

My optometrist is named Dr. Jeffrey Jeruss, and although he looks like a normal human being, only slightly larger, it turns out that when it comes to littering he is—and I mean this as a compliment—insane. So am I. I HATE littering. I hate it when you go to a park or the beach and the day is suddenly destroyed by the arrival of The Picnic People from Hell. You know these people. They have a large nuclear-powered radio and enough food to supply several Canadian provinces, and they immediately transform themselves into a high-output litter machine, cranking out potato-chip bags and beer cans and sandwich wrappers and chicken bones and dirty diapers weighing more than the infant that generated them.

And when it’s time to leave, these people simply . . . leave. They pick nothing up. They just WALK AWAY from what looks like the scene of a tragic dumpster explosion. And on the way home flick their cigarette butts out of the car window. Of course! You wouldn’t want to mess up a sharp-looking ashtray interior, not when the entire planet is available! Ha ha! Good thinking, you SLIME-EXCRETING MORONS. WHY DON’T YOU TAKE YOUR CIGARETTE BUTTS AND—.

Forgive me. I get carried away. But I never did anything about it except mutter and seethe until my fateful visit to Dr. Jeruss for an eye exam. He was shining his little light into my eyeballs and making
that “hmmmmm” noise that doctors are trained to make, when I happened to mention littering. Suddenly Jeffrey started stomping around the examination room, neck muscles bulging, denouncing the beer-can tossers of the world and waving his eyeball light around like the Hammer of Thor. Watching him, I realized that I had finally found the perfect sidekick for Captain Tidy.

Captain Tidy is a concept I have fantasized about for many years. He is a masked avenger for the forces of neatness. When a person litters, Captain Tidy comes swooping out of nowhere and explains to the litterer, in polite terms, that he or she is being a jerk. What kept me from acting out this fantasy was the fear of being embarrassed, by which I mean having my nose punched into my brain. But I knew that if Captain Tidy had a SIDEKICK, a LARGE sidekick, a large, TRAINED OPTOMETRIST sidekick, that would be a whole different story.

And thus Jeff and I became Captain Tidy and Neatness Man. We assembled costumes consisting of the aforementioned red tights (size triple-extra large), plus red Superman-style boots, plus blue shorts and shirts with our superhero names professionally lettered on them, plus white gloves, plus capes made from garbage bags, plus utility belts from which were suspended feather dusters, dustpans and rubber gloves.

Also, of course, we wore hoods and masks to preserve our Secret Identities. If you had seen us wearing our outfits and standing in our official superhero stance—hands on hips, chest thrust out, garbage bags blowing out dramatically behind—your only possible reaction would have been to say, with genuine emotion in your voice, “What a pair of dorks.”

But we didn’t care. We were on a mission. We rented a black Tidymobile with very dark windows, and we spent a day cruising the streets. When we saw people litter, we’d leap out, rush up to the perpetrators, pick up their litter, hand it back to them and say, with deep but polite superhero voices, “Sir, you don’t want to litter, DO YOU?” Inevitably, they’d look ashamed, take their litter back and dispose of it properly. One possible explanation for this, of course, is that they thought we were dangerous escaped perverted tights-wearing lunatics. But I like to think that they were genuinely
impressed with our message. At one point, a tough-looking street crowd actually APPLAUDED us for making a man pick up his cigarette butt. And remember, this was in MIAMI, a city where armed robbery is only a misdemeanor.

By the end of the day, thanks to our efforts, Miami had been transformed from a city with crud all over the streets into a city with crud all over the streets. But at least SOME litterers had been chastised, and Jeff and I felt a LOT better. I strongly recommend that you consider becoming a litter avenger in your particular city or town or random suburban area. What's the worst that could happen to you? OK, death. But probably you'd do fine. Just remember to be polite. “Speak softly and carry a large sidekick—that's Rule Two of the Captain Tidy Code. Rule One, of course, is: “Always visit the bathroom BEFORE you put on your tights.”

Writing Prompt: What truths about life does Barry convey in this essay? Be sure to include a variety of sentence structures (e.g., adverbial phrases and clauses) in your response.
1. Use the following Venn diagram to compare and contrast comic strips and political cartoons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic Strip</th>
<th>Political Cartoon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Describe the use of text features in comics and political cartoons.

Dialogue: ____________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Frames: ____________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Narration: _________________________

______________________________

______________________________
2. Your teacher will give your group a comic strip or cartoon. Analyze it and respond to the following questions.
   • Who are the characters? What is humorous about these characters?

   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________

   • What is happening in the comic or cartoon? How is the action humorous?

   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________

   • What is the theme (the author’s “truth” about life)? Is it humorous or serious? Explain.

   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________

3. Work together with a partner to create a comic strip or political cartoon. Use the following guidelines to assist your planning:
   • Think about the characters, plot, and theme. What humorous characters or actions will you create?
     Characters: _________________________________________________
     Plot: _____________________________________________
     Theme: _____________________________________________

   • Visualize your comic strip or cartoon. Choose your images and words carefully.
     Images: _____________________________________________
     _____________________________________________
     _____________________________________________
     Words: _____________________________________________
     _____________________________________________

   • Make your comic or cartoon visually appealing. Let creativity and collaboration guide you as you work. Be prepared to discuss your choices.
1. Closely examine the informational passage on either high or low comedy (assigned by your teacher). As you read, underline or highlight key information in the passage, and use the appropriate chart to take notes.

2. Share your information while your partner takes notes, and listen and take notes as your partner shares information with you.

3. After both charts are complete, work with your partner to generate at least one example of low and high level comedy.

**Low Comedy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Common Subjects</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Intended Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

__________________________ is an example of low comedy because ________________________________

__________________________ is an example of high comedy because ________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Common Subjects</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Intended Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

________________________ is an example of high comedy because ____________________________.
LOW COMEDY

Low comedy refers to the type of humor that is focused primarily on the situation or series of events. This represents the lowest level of the comedy ladder. It can include such things as physical mishaps, humor concerning the human body and its functions, coincidences, and humorous situations. With low comedy, the humor is straightforward and generally easy to follow and understand.

Since the primary purpose of most low comedy is to entertain, the action is frequently seen as hilarious or hysterical and filled with slapstick. The laughter that can result is often riotous, side-splitting guffaws. Many times, the characters are grossly exaggerated caricatures rather than fully developed characters. These caricatures are likely to be caught in unlikely situations or to become victims of circumstances seemingly beyond their control. Thus, the plot takes priority over the characters. Examples of low comedy might include Dumb and Dumber, Scary Movie, and America’s Funniest Home Videos. Shakespeare’s comedies, such as A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Twelfth Night, are full of low humor.

1. Think about recent television shows, movies, or online videos you have seen. Choose an example of low comedy from one, and give examples to support your classification.
HIGH COMEDY

High comedy refers to the type of humor that is focused primarily on the characters, dialogue, or ideas. This form of comedy represents the highest level of the comedy ladder. It can include such things as clever wordplay, wit, and pointed remarks regarding larger issues. Many times, high comedy takes an irreverent or unconventional look at serious issues.

Sometimes, the humor of high comedy is not immediately obvious; it can take a bit of reflection in order to realize the humorous intent. Frequently, the purpose of high comedy is to express an opinion, to persuade, or to promote deeper consideration of an idea. Often described as amusing, clever, or witty, high comedy typically results in chuckles, grins, and smiles rather than loud laughter. Clever use of language and interesting characters receive more attention than the circumstances that surround them. Examples of high comedy might include *The Office*, *Scrubs* and, at times, *The Simpsons*. Shakespeare’s tragedies, such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, also include instances of high comedy.

2. Brainstorm a list of comedies you watch regularly, and identify the comedy as high or low comedy. Select one comedy from the list, provide examples to support its classification as high or low comedy, and explain your response to the humor using humorous vocabulary words from Activity 5.3.

An analogy can show a relationship of function or purpose. What word would complete the following analogy?

Slapstick : guffaws :: wit : _________

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Explaining why something is funny can be a challenge, but there are some commonly used devices that usually make people laugh. Although sometimes we may not see the humor in a text, it is important that we are able to recognize the elements of humor and appreciate the attempt.

Use the graphic organizer to explore common elements of humor in upcoming activities. In discussion groups, express opinions about the humorous elements identified using newly acquired vocabulary in context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Element</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Level of Comedy</th>
<th>Examples from Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comic Characters and Caricatures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic Situations</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Level of Comedy</th>
<th>Examples from Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic Language: Wordplay</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Level of Comedy</th>
<th>Examples from Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• One-liners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Puns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic Language: Hyperbole</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Level of Comedy</th>
<th>Examples from Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Elements of Humor — Comic Characters and Caricatures

**Characters**  
Sketch the caricature.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>Bart is writing sentences repetitively on the board that say....</td>
<td>He is being punished for inappropriate behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion Groups:** Use the graphic organizer to express ideas and to reflect upon the larger ideas presented through these images. What truth about life is the author conveying through humor?

WORD CONNECTIONS  
The word *caricature* derives from a Latin word meaning “to overload” or “exaggerate.” The Latin root *car-* meaning “wagon” or “car,” appears in words like cargo, carry, and carriage.

**Writing Prompt:** On a separate piece of paper, write a well-developed analytical paragraph that examines the comic characters/caricatures and explains the author’s purpose. Use examples from the text to support your ideas and use humorous vocabulary words from Activity 5.3 in your analysis.
### Unfamiliar and Unlikely Situations

Take notes on this graphic organizer as you view the film clip.

#### Character in an Unfamiliar/Unlikely Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film:</th>
<th>Director:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic Character</th>
<th>Comic Situation</th>
<th>Film Techniques That Create Humor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance/Facial Expressions:</td>
<td>Setting:</td>
<td>Framing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions:</td>
<td>Humorous Events:</td>
<td>Angles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sound:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Analytical Paragraph

**Writing Prompt:** How do the writer and director create humor? On a separate paper, write a well-developed analytical paragraph that examines the elements of humor—comic character(s) and situations—and the level(s) of comedy in the text. Explain the intended humor. Use examples from the text to support your ideas, and use humorous vocabulary words in your analysis.

---

**Grammar & Usage**

Remember *not* to use first-person point of view in analytical writing. Avoid the first-person pronouns *I, me, my,* and *we.* Instead, present your analysis in the third-person point of view, using *he, she, they,* or *it.*
Unlikely Circumstances
Take notes on this graphic organizer as you view the film clip.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film:</th>
<th>Director:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comic Character</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comic Situation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance/Facial Expressions:</td>
<td>Setting:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions:</td>
<td>Humorous Events:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analytical Paragraph

**Writing Prompt:** How do the writer and director create humor? On a separate paper, write a well-developed analytical paragraph that examines the elements of humor—comic character(s) and situations—and the level(s) of comedy in the text. Explain the intended humor. Use examples from the text to support your ideas, and use humorous vocabulary words in your analysis.
Is traffic jam delectable,
does jelly fish in lakes,
does tree bark make a racket,
does the clamor rattle snakes?

Can salmon scale a mountain,
does a belly laugh a lot,
do carpets nap in flower beds
or on an apricot?

Is traffic jam delectable,
does jelly fish in lakes,
does tree bark make a racket,
does the clamor rattle snakes?

Around my handsome bottleneck,
I wear a railroad tie,
my treasure chest puffs up a bit,
I blink my private eye.

I like to use piano keys
to open locks of hair,
then put a pair of brake shoes on
and dance on debonair.

I hold up my electric shorts
with my banana belt,
then sit upon a toadstool
and watch a tuna melt.

I dive into a car pool,
where I take an onion dip,
then stand abroad the tape deck
and sail my penmanship.

I put my dimes in riverbanks
and take a quarterback,
and when I fix a nothing flat
I use a lumberjack.

I often wave my second hand
to tell the overtime,
before I take my bull pen up
to write a silly rhyme.

The word *clamor* comes
from a Latin word meaning
“to call out.” The root
*-clam-*—also spelled
*-claim-*—appears in *exclaim*
and *exclamation, proclaim*
and *proclamation,* and
*acclaim* and *acclamation.*
Elements of Humor — More Wordplay

ACTIVITY

One-Liners
A one-liner is usually a short sentence. An example is “Five out of four people have trouble with fractions.” Write a definition and additional examples for a one-liner.

Definition: 

Examples: 

Puns
A pun plays on different meanings of words. An example is “Don’t let Cinderella play baseball. She always runs away from the ball.” Write a definition and additional examples of puns.

Definition: 

Examples: 

1. What do puns have in common, and what makes them different from other types of wordplay?

2. Explain how perception of humor may depend on one's understanding of wordplay. Give examples.
I started on a journey just about a week ago
For the little town of Morrow in the State of Ohio.
I never was a traveler and really didn’t know
That Morrow had been ridiculed a century or so.
I went down to the depot for my ticket and applied
For tips regarding Morrow, interviewed the station guide.
Said I, “My friend, I want to go to Morrow and return
Not later than tomorrow, for I haven’t time to burn.”

Said he to me, “Now let me see, if I have heard you right,
You want to go to Morrow and come back tomorrow night.
You should have gone to Morrow yesterday and back today,
For if you started yesterday to Morrow, don’t you see
You should have got to Morrow and returned today at three.
The train that started yesterday, now understand me right,
Today it gets to Morrow and returns tomorrow night.”

“Now if you start to Morrow, you will surely land
Tomorrow into Morrow, not today you understand,
For the train today to Morrow, if the schedule is right
Will get you into Morrow by about tomorrow night.”
Said I, “I guess you know it all, but kindly let me say,
How can I go to Morrow if I leave the town today?”
Said he, “You cannot go to Morrow any more today,
For the train that goes to Morrow is a mile upon its way.”
Hyperbole
Definition:

Examples:
My dog is so big, he beeps when he backs up.

I'm so hungry, I could eat a ________________________________.

My cat is so smart that ____________________________.

She was so funny that ____________________________.

Original Humorous Text

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Priscilla and the Wimps

by Richard Peck

Listen, there was a time when you couldn’t even go to the rest room around this school without a pass. And I’m not talking about those little pink tickets made out by some teacher. I’m talking about a pass that cost anywhere up to a buck, sold by Monk Clutter.

Not that mighty Monk ever touched money, not in public. The gang he ran, which ran the school for him, was his collection agency. They were Klutter’s Kobras, a name spelled out in nailheads on six well-known black plastic windbreakers.

Monk’s threads were more . . . subtle. A pile-lined suede battle jacket with lizard-skin flaps over tailored Levi’s and a pair of ostrich-skin boots, brass-toed and suitable for kicking people around. One of his Kobras did nothing all day but walk a half step behind Monk, carrying a fitted bag with Monk’s gym shoes, a roll of rest-room passes, a cash-box, and a switchblade that Monk gave himself manicures with at Lunch over at the Kobras’ table.

Speaking of lunch, there were a few cases of advanced malnutrition among the newer kids. The ones who were a little slow in handing over a cut of their lunch money and were therefore barred from the cafeteria. Monk ran a tight ship.

I admit it. I’m five foot five, and when the Kobras slithered by, with or without Monk, I shrank. And I admit this, too: I paid up on a regular basis. And I might add: so would you.

The school was old Monk’s Garden of Eden. Unfortunately for him, there was a serpent in it. The reason Monk didn’t recognize trouble when it was staring him in the face is that the serpent in the Kobras’ Eden was a girl.
Practically every guy in school could show you his scars. Fang marks from Kobras, you might say. And they were all highly visible in the shower room: lumps, lacerations, blue bruises, you name it. But girls usually get off with a warning.

Except there was one girl named Priscilla Roseberry. Picture a girl named Priscilla Roseberry, and you’ll be light years off. Priscilla was, hands down, the largest student in our particular institution of learning. I’m not talking big. Even beautiful, in a bionic way. Priscilla wasn’t inclined toward organized crime. Otherwise, she could have put together a gang that would turn Klutter’s Kobras into garter snakes.

Priscilla was basically a loner except she had one friend. A little guy named Melvin Detweiler. You talk about the Odd Couple. Melvin’s one of the smallest guys above midget status ever seen. A really nice guy, but, you know, little. They even had lockers next to each other, in the same bank as mine. I don’t know what they had going. I’m not saying this was a romance. After all, people deserve their privacy.

Priscilla was sort of above everything, if you’ll pardon a pun. And very calm, as only the very big can be. If there was anybody who didn’t notice Klutter’s Kobras, it was Priscilla.

Until one winter day after school when we were all grabbing our coats out of our lockers. And hurrying, since Klutter’s Kobras made sweeps of the halls for after-school shakedowns.

Anyway, up to Melvin’s locker swaggers one of the Kobras. Never mind his name. Gang members don’t need names. They’ve got group identity. He reaches down and grabs little Melvin by the neck and slams his head against his locker door. The sound of skull against steel rippled all the way down the locker row, speeding the crowds on their way.

“Okay, let’s see your pass,” snarls the Kobra.

“A pass for what this time?” Melvin asks, probably still dazed.

“Let’s call it a pass for very short people,” says the Kobra, “a dwarf tax.” He wheezes a little Kobra chuckle at his own witiness. And already he’s reaching for Melvin’s wallet with the hand that isn’t circling Melvin’s windpipe. All this time, of course, Melvin and the Kobra are standing in Priscilla’s big shadow.

She’s taking her time shoving her books into her locker and pulling on a very large-size coat. Then, quicker than the eye, she brings the side of her enormous hand down in a chop that breaks the Kobra’s hold on Melvin’s throat. You could hear a pin drop in that hallway. Nobody’s ever laid a finger on a Kobra, let alone a hand the size of Priscilla’s.
Then Priscilla, who hardly ever says anything to anybody except to Melvin, says to the Kobra, “Who’s your leader, wimp?”

This practically blows the Kobra away. First he’s chopped by a girl, and now she’s acting like she doesn’t know Monk Klutter, the Head Honcho of the World. He’s so amazed, he tells her, “Monk Klutter.”

“Never heard of him,” Priscilla mentions. “Send him to see me.” The Kobra just backs away from her like the whole situation is too big for him, which it is.

Pretty soon Monk himself slides up. He jerks his head once, and his Kobras slither off down the hall. He’s going to handle this interesting case personally. “Who is it around here doesn’t know Monk Klutter?”

He’s standing inches from Priscilla, but since he’d have to look up at her, he doesn’t. “Never heard of him,” says Priscilla.

Monk’s not happy with this answer, but by now he’s spotted Melvin, who’s grown smaller in spite of himself. Monk breaks his own rule by reaching for Melvin with his own hands. “Kid,” he says, “you’re going to have to educate your girl friend.”

His hands never quite make it to Melvin. In a move of pure poetry Priscilla has Monk in a hammerlock. His neck’s popping like gunfire, and his heart’s bowed under the immense weight of her forearm. His suede jacket’s peeling back, showing pile.

Priscilla’s behind him in another easy motion. And with a single mighty thrust forward, frog-marches Monk into her own locker. It’s incredible. His ostrich-skin boots click once in the air. And suddenly he’s gone, neatly wedged into the locker, a perfect fit. Priscilla bangs the door shut, twirls the lock, and strolls out of school. Melvin goes with her, of course, trotting along below her shoulder. The last stragglers leave quietly.

Well this is where fate, an even bigger force than Priscilla, steps in. It snows all that night, a blizzard. The whole town ices up. And school closes for a week.

**Writing Prompt** What truths about life does Peck convey in this essay? Be sure to include a variety of sentence structures (e.g., adjectival clauses) in your response.
### Analysis of a Humorous Text: “Priscilla and the Wimps”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Element</th>
<th>Examples from Text</th>
<th>Comedic Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comic Characters and Caricatures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Situations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Language: Wordplay</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• One-liners</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• Puns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comic Language: Hyperbole</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Levels of Comedy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Comedy</th>
<th>Explanation (Paraphrase)</th>
<th>Evidence from “Priscilla and the Wimps”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Humor and/or the Intended Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Vocabulary Word</th>
<th>Detail from Text</th>
<th>Commentary (how the detail demonstrates the vocabulary word)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>witty</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Writing Prompt: Write a critical analysis of “Priscilla and the Wimps,” explaining how Peck uses humor to communicate a truth (universal idea about life), and evaluating his effectiveness.

Essay Organization

A. Introduction

Begin with a hook and then provide some general background information about “Priscilla and the Wimps” (brief overview of the characters and plot). Finally, craft a thesis statement that clearly identifies the level(s) of comedy and the elements of humor in the text.

Sample Thesis: Richard Peck’s short story “Priscilla and the Wimps” is a _______ level comedy that uses _______ and _______ to convey the idea that _________________________________.

B. Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph should contain a topic sentence, examples from the text to support your topic ideas, and commentary that describes the humor or explains the intended response (effect).

First Body Paragraph: Write a topic sentence that identifies the level(s) of comedy and states how humor is created in the story. Provide examples from the text to support the topic sentence and explain the effect on the text and/or reader.

Additional Body Paragraphs: Write a topic sentence that identifies how an element of humor functions in the story. Provide examples from the text to support the topic sentence and explain the effect of that element on the text and/or reader.

C. Concluding Paragraph

Discuss the universal truth revealed through the text, and evaluate the effectiveness of the author’s humor to communicate this truth.
Writing an Analysis of a Humorous Text

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Drafting, Self-Editing

Assignment

Your teacher will give you a copy of a humorous short story. Write a critical analysis of the assigned text, explaining how the author uses humor to communicate a universal truth, and evaluating his or her effectiveness.

Steps

Prewriting
1. As you read, take notes on the author’s use of humor. Identify the level(s) of comedy and at least two elements of humor. Make connections, analyze important passages, and note the intended comedic effect on the reader.
2. Use a prewriting strategy to explore, focus, and organize your ideas for the essay.

Drafting
3. Write an introduction that contains a hook, background information, and a thesis statement.
4. Move into the body of the essay. Identify and analyze the level(s) of comedy and at least two elements of humor. Be sure to include examples from the text to support your ideas and commentary to explain the author’s intended effect. Use humorous vocabulary words in your analysis.
5. Finish your draft with a conclusion that discusses the universal truth revealed through the text and evaluates the effectiveness of the author’s use of humor to communicate this truth.
Revision Through Self-Assessment

6. Review the revision skills studied in Unit 3. Pay close attention to the internal and external coherence of your essay and revise your text accordingly. Use a variety of complete sentences incorporating parallel structure and appropriate rhetorical devices.

7. Read through your draft and look for places to include appropriate words from the Comedy Word Wall to enhance your critical analysis.

8. Look for places to enhance sentence structure by adding adverbial phrases and clauses or adjectival phrases and clauses to your draft. Review the grammar and usage tips in this unit or other grammar references as needed.

Editing for Publication


10. Prepare your final draft in the format specified by your teacher.

TECHNOLOGY TIP If you have access to word processing software, use it to create your publishable draft and give it a polished look.
### SCORING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ideas**        | The essay insightfully:  
• identifies and analyzes two or more elements of humor used in the text  
• uses detail from the text to support the analysis  
• uses humorous vocabulary to discuss the humor  
• identifies and explains the level(s) of comedy represented in the text  
• evaluates the author’s effectiveness in communicating a universal truth through humor.  
| The essay accurately:  
• identifies and analyzes two elements of humor used in the text  
• uses detail from the text to support the analysis  
• uses humorous vocabulary to discuss the humor  
• identifies and explains the level(s) of comedy represented in the text  
• evaluates the author’s effectiveness in communicating a universal truth through humor.  
| The essay:  
• identifies one element of humor used in the text  
• does not use detail from the text to support the analysis  
• uses only common vocabulary or inaccurately uses humorous vocabulary  
• insufficiently or inaccurately identifies and explains the level(s) of comedy represented in the text  
• insufficiently evaluates the author’s effectiveness in communicating a universal truth through humor.  
| **Organization**  | The multi-paragraph essay is logically organized to enhance the reader’s understanding.  
It includes an innovative introduction with an insightful hook, relevant and concise background information, and a strong thesis; well-developed body paragraphs; and a perceptive conclusion.  
| The multi-paragraph essay is organized.  
It includes an introduction with a hook, relevant background information, and a clear thesis; detailed body paragraphs; and a conclusion.  
| Organization is attempted, but key components are lacking.  
It may include an introduction with an unfocused thesis, undeveloped body paragraphs, and/or an inadequate conclusion.  
| **Conventions**  | Writing is virtually error-free. Direct quotations are punctuated and formatted properly.  
| Writing is generally error-free. Direct quotations may contain minor punctuation or formatting errors.  
| Writing contains errors that distract from meaning. Direct quotations contain many punctuation or formatting errors.  

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## SCORING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of the Writing Process</td>
<td>There is extensive evidence that the essay reflects the various stages of the writing process.</td>
<td>There is evidence that the essay reflects stages of the writing process.</td>
<td>There is little or no evidence that the essay has undergone stages of the writing process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Criteria</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

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________________________________________________________________________
Learning Focus:
Performing Comedy

Now that you understand how humorous texts are created, you are ready to tackle an excerpt from the Shakespearean comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare uses familiar elements of comedy to create humor, but before you can identify and analyze these elements, you must first work to make meaning of Shakespeare’s language.

When you read an act or an entire scene from a Shakespearean play, you may get the general idea of the scene. When you read to prepare for a performance, you are reading for a different purpose and close reading is needed. The first and most important step is to identify unfamiliar words and replace them with synonyms. Remember, language changes over time, so even words that look familiar to you may mean something completely different in the context of the play. Next, paraphrase each line in modern English to make sure that your translations make sense and to ensure that you comprehend the text. Finally, reread the text and put a box around each punctuation mark. Plays are based on dialogue between characters, and punctuation marks signal tone of voice, a crucial element of performance. When you deliver your lines using an appropriate tone of voice for the character, you help your audience comprehend the text.

Collaboration is the key to a successful performance. After you work with your group to make meaning of the language and to analyze the elements of comedy in your script, you will work together to generate creative ideas for the performance of your scene and to make decisions about your set, props, costumes, and movement on stage. In addition, as you rehearse your scene, it is important that you provide each other with constructive feedback, identifying ways to improve your performance.
Complete the sentence starters about William Shakespeare in the first column below. Support your responses to the statements, and note any questions you have about him.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Shakespeare?</th>
<th>How Do I Know This?</th>
<th>Questions I Have About This</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare was an author.</td>
<td>I have seen a movie based on one of his plays, called <em>Romeo and Juliet</em>.</td>
<td>How many of his other works have been made into movies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare lived _____</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare accomplished _____</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare _____</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Questions:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Additional Notes:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
**Scenario One**

The person you are in love with has invited you to your high school dance. Your parents, who disapprove of this person, lay down the law, saying, “You are absolutely not allowed to attend the dance with this person. If you wish to attend, you may go with X. Your choices are to go to the dance with X or not go at all.” You are now faced with a dilemma. You are forbidden to go to the dance with the person you love, but you are permitted to attend with X, who has been in love with you forever and whom your parents adore.

**Consider this:** Would you still go to the dance under these conditions? Why or why not?

---

**Scenario Two**

Since you were forbidden by your parents to attend the dance with the person you love, the two of you devise a plan to sneak out and attend the dance anyway. All of a sudden you notice that your love is nowhere in sight. You begin to search the room for her or him. Eventually, you find him or her in the corner of the room talking with your best friend. You happily interrupt the conversation only to be horrified to discover that your love is confessing his or her love to your best friend.

**Consider this:** What would you do if you saw your boyfriend or girlfriend confessing his or her love to your best friend? How would you feel?

---

**Scenario Three**

You confront your love after seeing him or her kiss your best friend. Your boyfriend or girlfriend loudly announces that he or she is no longer interested in you, and no longer wants anything to do with you. Your best friend seems confused about the situation as she or he has always been in love with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but the feeling was not shared.

**Consider this:** What would you do if your girlfriend or boyfriend treated you this way? Would you be mad at your best friend?
Connection to the Play

In Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, four characters—Lysander, Hermia, Helena, and Demetrius—are entangled in a very complicated love relationship that leaves them open for all sorts of comical mishaps. Lysander says in the play, “The course of true love never did run smooth.” Do you agree with Lysander?

Comedy is

---

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Little is known about the early life of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) except that he was born and grew up in Stratford-on-Avon in England. What is known is that he went to London as a young man and became an actor and playwright. He wrote thirty-seven plays (comedies, tragedies, and histories) and is considered one of the greatest playwrights who ever lived. Performances of his plays occur regularly in theaters around the world.
Directions: Using the information about the characters from the play, create a visual that shows the relationship among the characters listed below. Practice pronouncing the characters’ names. Mark the long and short vowels and silent letters as a guide to facilitate your oral pronunciation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>I am...</th>
<th>I love...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hermia</td>
<td>Hér-me-uh</td>
<td>The daughter of a wealthy nobleman</td>
<td>Lysander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lysander</td>
<td>Lie-sánd-er</td>
<td>A prominent businessman</td>
<td>Hermia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetrius</td>
<td>De-mé-tree-us</td>
<td>Hermia’s father’s choice for her husband</td>
<td>Hermia too!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Héll-en-uh</td>
<td>Hermia’s best friend</td>
<td>Demetrius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shakespeare’s play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a comedy. Based on the elements of comedy examined earlier in this unit and the scenarios presented in this activity, explain why comedy is an accurate classification of the play.
Use the close reading process to make meaning of each line below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Quote/Insult</th>
<th>Paraphrase (Modern English)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lysander says to Hermia...</td>
<td>“Get you gone, you dwarf, You minimus of hind’ring knotgrass made...”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena says to Hermia...</td>
<td>“I will not trust you, Nor longer stay in your curst company.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lysander says to Hermia...</td>
<td>“Out, tawny Tartar, out! Out, loathed medicine! O, hated potion, hence!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermia says to Helena...</td>
<td>“You juggler, you canker-blossom! You thief of love! What, have you come by night And stol’n my love’s heart from him?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena says to Hermia...</td>
<td>“Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you puppet, you!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once you have made meaning of the lines, select one and complete the chart below. Rehearse your line in preparation for a performance. Practice pronouncing your line by carefully articulating the vowel sounds and consonant clusters. Then, move throughout the room and deliver your insult with flair. Be sure to allow time for peers to react to your delivery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write the insult you have chosen below.</th>
<th>What words will you stress when you speak your lines?</th>
<th>How will you alter your tone when you deliver your line?</th>
<th>What gestures/movements will you use to enhance your line?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Reflection**

1. What challenges did you face as you delivered your lines?
   
   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

2. Did you deliver your lines as effectively as you planned? Explain.
   
   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

3. What might you do next time to improve your delivery?
   
   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY**

**Performance** is acting a role or telling a story or other piece for an audience.

**Particularly in poetry and plays, punctuation gives clues on how lines should be performed.**

An **exclamation point** shows surprise, or extreme happiness or anger.

A **question mark** shows confusion on the part of the speaker or shows that the speaker is questioning another character’s actions.

A **comma** marks a pause, sometimes for dramatic effect.

A **semicolon** marks a pause, usually one that is longer than a comma pause, without the finality of a period.
A Guided Reading of a Scene

**SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES:** Rereading, Scanning, Summarizing, Paraphrasing

---

**GRAMMAR & USAGE**

Just as an *apostrophe* is used in modern English to mark the absence of a letter, so it was used in Shakespeare's time.

Example: “Fine, i’faith!”
Translation: Fine, in faith!

---

**Play**

*From A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

Act 3, Scene 2, Lines 282–305

*by William Shakespeare*

**HERMIA** Oh me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?

**HELENA** Fine, i’faith!
Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

**HERMIA** Puppet? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
Now, I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures; she hath urged her height;
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem;
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? speak;
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

**HELENA** I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me: I was never curst;
I have no gift at all in shrewishness;
I am a right maid for my cowardice:
Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,
Because she is something lower than myself,
That I can match her.

**HERMIA** Lower! hark, again.
A Close Reading of a Scene

Work collaboratively in your group to make meaning of your assigned scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Conduct a close reading, following the steps below.

1. **Scan** the text and circle unfamiliar words. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to replace each unfamiliar word with a synonym.

2. **Reread** the scene and **paraphrase** the lines in modern English.

3. **Summarize** the action. What is happening in the scene?

4. **Reread** the scene and **mark the text** to indicate elements of humor (caricature, situation, wordplay, hyperbole).

5. **Mark** the punctuation, and determine how the punctuation affects the spoken lines. Discuss tone of voice and inflection.
6. Analyze the movement in your scene:
   • What is each character doing?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   • When should characters enter and exit?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   • How should characters enter and exit?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   • What could you do to exaggerate the humor or create a humorous
     spin?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

7. Analyze the blocking in your scene, that is, the movement and
   placement of characters as they speak:
   • Where is each character standing?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   • To whom is each spoken line addressed?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
**ACTORS**: In your focus groups, read your character’s lines aloud and interpret what those lines reveal about your character. Record your insights on the graphic organizer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character:</th>
<th>Detail from Text</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What does this reveal about the character?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoughts/Feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others’ Reactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedic Actions / Words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DIRECTORS: Select key action sequences, and consider possible stage directions to determine how this scene might be performed on stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Action Sequences</th>
<th>Stage Directions and Movement on Stage</th>
<th>What This Reveals About the Overall Scene (Comedic Effect)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
**ACTORS:** Record your observations as you view different versions of your scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version of <em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em> (Director/Year)</th>
<th>Physical Gestures and Movements</th>
<th>Costume and Makeup</th>
<th>Interpretive Choices in the Delivery of Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Why might these particular choices have been made, and what effect do these choices have on the viewers’ understanding of the scene?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How do your character’s gestures, movements, and language achieve a comical effect?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
**DIRECTORS:** Record your observations as you view different versions of your scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version of <em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em> (Director/Year)</th>
<th>Placement of Actors in Relationship to Props, Scenery, Each Other</th>
<th>Music or Other Sound Effects</th>
<th>Set Design, Lighting, Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

Why might these particular choices have been made? What effects do these staging and technical choices have on the viewers’ understanding of the scene?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

How do the staging, set design, lighting, sound, and props achieve a comical effect?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
Work with your acting company to complete the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Played By</th>
<th>Contribution to Set Design</th>
<th>Prop(s)</th>
<th>Costume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Individually, think through the details of your performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Performance</th>
<th>Ideas for Character</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lines to Emphasize</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blocking</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Movements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Facial Expression(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comedic Emphasis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Complete this section if you are the director.

1. I want to create a _______________________ mood. To accomplish my goal, I will . . .

2. The scene will end when _______________________ so the audience will be left with a feeling of . . .

3. I will focus on the comic effects listed below to ensure that . . .
Performing a Comic Scene
SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Marking the Text

Assignment
Your assignment is to perform your assigned scene from William Shakespeare’s comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, emphasizing at least two of the following elements of humor: *caricatures* (disguises or costumes), *situations* (stressing physical actions), *wordplay* (delivery of witty dialogue), or *hyperbole* (exaggerated gestures and movements).

Steps
Use these steps as an individual checklist as you complete the activities that prepare you for your group performance of a scene.

Planning and Rehearsing
1. After your group has made meaning of your scene and roles have been assigned, thoughtfully discuss your scene with your acting company and decide which elements of humor you would like to emphasize in your performance. Brainstorm ways to bring these elements out in your performance: through the delivery of lines, characterization, gestures, movements, props, or setting.
2. Mark your script so that you can deliver your lines smoothly. Be sure you know how to pronounce unfamiliar words and characters’ names correctly, and practice effective delivery of witty dialogue, emphasizing elements of comedy. As you practice, work to memorize your lines.
3. Decide on appropriate placement and movements for your character, and mark your script to indicate when, where, and how to move on stage. Use blocking to decide where to stand and in which direction to speak to characters. Rehearse the movement in your scene several times so that it is a natural process when you perform it on stage. Continue to memorize your lines and complete a performance plan.
4. As your teacher directs, use costumes and props to add to the performance. Be creative! Props can be literal or figurative.
5. Practice moving on stage with your group, and block out your scene so that your back is never to the audience and all lines can be heard clearly.
6. Rehearse! Use all rehearsal time wisely. A formal dress rehearsal will be on __________________________.
7. Review the Scoring Guide before delivering your final performance to ensure you will meet specific criteria. Be prepared to perform on _________________.

8. After your performance, complete a post-performance reflection in which you comment upon your choices as an actor or director and discuss your emphasis on the elements of comedy to enhance the humor in your performance. Explain the challenges you faced in this performance and how you met (or did not meet) them.

**TECHNOLOGY TIP**  If possible, have someone record your performance. Use the video to reflect on your choices as an actor and director and how they influenced your performance.
### SCORING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
<td>The comedic focus is clear and effective, skillfully using elements of humor to elicit laughter from the audience. The actors perform a polished scene with clever use of facial expressions, gestures, movements, costumes and props to provide a natural fit for the dialogue and to expand upon comedic elements.</td>
<td>The scene contains a clear focus on low and/or high comedy, incorporating comedic elements. The actors' facial expressions, gestures, movements, costumes and props adequately represent the characters and allow for a quality performance.</td>
<td>The comedic focus is unclear and demonstrates a limited understanding of the elements of humor. The actors' minimal use of facial expressions, gestures, movements, costumes and/or props greatly detracts from the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence of Rehearsal</strong></td>
<td>The performance is well-planned, successfully presented, and effectively coordinated to enhance the comedic effect. The actors clearly have command of the language and deliver their lines smoothly, creating an effective portrayal of the characters.</td>
<td>The performance is cohesive, and adequate collaboration is evident. The actors move appropriately on stage and deliver lines smoothly and knowledgeably, demonstrating a clear understanding of the characters.</td>
<td>The performance is disorganized. The actors are unfamiliar with the text and/or the lines are not delivered smoothly. The movement on the stage is not well coordinated. Performance lacks collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Plan</strong></td>
<td>The performance plan shows insightful interpretation of the characters, actions, and humor in the scene and demonstrates thoughtful reflection.</td>
<td>The performance plan shows accurate interpretation of the characters, actions, and humor in the scene.</td>
<td>The performance plan shows inaccurate or minimal interpretation of the characters, actions, and/or humor in the scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Criteria</strong></td>
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</table>

Comments:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Reflection

An important aspect of growing as a learner is to reflect on where you have been, what you have accomplished, what helped you to learn, and how you will apply your new knowledge in the future. Use the following questions to guide your thinking and to identify evidence of your learning. Use separate notebook paper.

Thinking about Concepts

1. Using specific examples from this unit, respond to the Essential Questions:
   • How is humor created?
   • How do people respond to humor, and why do responses vary?

2. Consider the new academic vocabulary from this unit (Anecdote, Levels of Comedy, Elements of Humor, Performance) as well as academic vocabulary from previous units, and select 3–4 terms of which your understanding has grown. For each term, answer the following questions:
   • What was your understanding of the word before you began this unit?
   • How has your understanding of the word evolved throughout the unit?
   • How will you apply your understanding in the future?

Thinking about Connections

3. Review the activities and products (artifacts) you created. Choose those that most reflect your growth or increase in understanding.

4. For each artifact that you choose, record, respond to, and reflect on your thinking and understanding, using the following questions as a guide:
   a. What skill/knowledge does this artifact reflect, and how did you learn this skill/knowledge?
   b. How did your understanding of the power of language expand through your engagement with this artifact?
   c. How will you apply this skill or knowledge in the future?

5. Create this reflection as Portfolio pages—one for each artifact you choose. Use the model in the box for your headings and commentary on questions.

Thinking About Thinking
Portfolio Entry

Concept:

Description of Artifact:

Commentary on Questions: