INTRODUCTION TO COMEDY

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English IV Honors
What is Comedy?

Life is a Tragedy when seen in close-up,
but a Comedy in long-shot.
What Is Comedy?

1. Comedy is based on **IRONY**.

2. Awareness of irony is **INTELLECTUAL**, not **EMOTIONAL**.

3. Comedy lifts us out of our emotional responses.

4. With emotional defenses down, we can see a need for change in a comic character.

5. Typically, the comic character is blind to his misperceptions but repeats the rigid behavior.

6. Good comedy allows us to feel **SUPERIOR** to the characters.
What Is Comedy?

7. Despite our superior position, we see similarities between the comic character and ourselves.

8. We sense our own rigidity and blindness are like the comic fool’s and note the laughter that the comic fool arouses.

9. Comedy acts as a way to CHANGE the individual or the society using laughter.

10. Satire, ridicule, and burlesque often work in the service of CHANGE.

11. Comedy uses exaggeration, understatement, role reversal, and the devices of IRONY to make us laugh (and compare).
Comedy

• A dramatic work that is light or humorous in tone, usually ending with a peaceful resolution of the main conflict
A Few Good Terms...

The Comedic Ladder
- Low Comedy
- Farce
- Comedy of Manners
- Comedy of Ideas

The Comic Paradigm
- Comic Problem
- Comic Climax
- Comic Catastrophe
- Comic Education & Change
- Comic Characters
- Comic Language

Tools of Comedy
- Dark Humor
- Types of Irony
- Innuendo
- Malapropism
- Pun
- Slapstick
The Comedic Ladder

• **LOW COMEDY**
  • Dirty Jokes, Dirty Gestures, Sex
  • Elimination (i.e., poop jokes)
  • Range from EXAGGERATION to UNDERSTATEMENT
  • Focus on Physical (long noses, crossed eyes, hunched back, deformities)
  • Physical Actions (slapstick, pratfalls, loud noises, physical mishaps, collisions)
  • Man encountering an uncooperative universe
Low Comedy (Slapstick) Example
The Comedic Ladder

- **FARCE**
- Low OR High Comedy (or Combo)
  - Full of Coincidences, Mistimings, Mistaken Identity
  - Absurd, non-realistic characters who find themselves in ridiculously contrived situations
  - Relies on absurdity and skillful exploitation of a situation
- Characters are Puppets of Fate
  - Wrong Class
  - Too Poor/Rich
  - Unable to Marry
  - Loss of Identity (birth, fate, accident)
  - Twins Separated, Unaware of Double
Farce Example

https://youtu.be/2xqkpP59UgM
The Comedic Ladder

- **COMEDY OF MANNERS**
- High Comedy
  - Amorous Intrigues of the Upper Class
  - Witty Language
    - Clever speech, insults, and “put-downs”
  - Society Made Up of Cliques
    - The In-Crowd
    - The Would-Be Wits (desire to be part of the witty crowd)
    - The Witless (on the outside)
Comedy of Manners Example

https://youtu.be/mqHShwV9THk
The Comedic Ladder

- COMEDY OF IDEAS
- High Comedy
  - Politics, Religion, Sex, and Marriage
  - Use WIT to Mock Opponents in Argument
  - Subtle Way to SATIRIZE People and Institutions
    - Political Parties
    - Government
    - Churches
    - War
    - Marriage

- Low Comedy
  - Farce
  - Low Comedy
Comedy of Ideas Example

https://youtu.be/i02hFj5UZI4
Dark Humor

• Juxtaposes morbid or ghastly elements with comical ones.

Example:
Dramatic Irony

• When the audience has information that characters on stage do not

• Can be used to COMIC or TRAGIC effect (depending on the ending)
  • TRAGIC: Romeo and Juliet
  • COMIC: A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Verbal Irony

• When words express something contrary or opposite of what the person really feels or means

• Example
• A girl walking down the hall trips and almost falls.
• Another student says, “Well that was graceful!”
Situational Irony

• Occurs when actions or events have the opposite result from what is expected or intended

• Example:
If a diabetic, on his way to buy insulin, is killed by a runaway truck, he is the victim of an accident. If the truck was delivering sugar, he is the victim of an oddly poetic coincidence. But if the truck was delivering insulin, ah! Then he is the victim of irony.
Innuendo

• An indirect, subtle, usually derogatory insinuation

• Example:

• Everything Mercutio says in *Romeo and Juliet*
  
  • I conjure thee by Rosaline’s bright eyes,
  By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
  By her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh
  And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
  That in thy likeness thou appear to us!
Malapropism

• The ludicrous misuse of words, especially through confusion caused by resemblance in sound

• Example:
Pun

• A humorous use of a word involving two interpretations of the meaning

• Examples:
Slapstick

• A type of physical comedy characterized by broad humor, absurd situations, and vigorous (usually violent) actions

• Examples:
  • America’s Funniest Home Videos
  • Rob Dyrdek’s Ridiculousness
  • Three Stooges
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC PROBLEM:
  • Romantic (Shakespeare)
    • Focus on young couple
    • Trying to overcome blocking agent
  
  • Satiric (Ben Jonson)
    • Focus on the blocking agent, not what is wrong with the blocking agent

True melancholy breeds your perfect, fine wit, sir.
(Ben Jonson)
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC CLIMAX
  • Confusion at it’s peak
  • Decisions must be made
  • Solutions must be found
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC CATASTROPHE
  • Resolves the problems from the beginning
  • Sets things right on all levels
    • Individuals and relationships reconciled, fixed, made healthy
    • Social order is restored
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC EDUCATION AND CHANGE
  • At least some characters learn something about themselves, society, the way to live, the way to love
    • Education improves them and their world
    • ...OR the audience is educated, and that changes THEIR world
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC CHARACTERS
  • Usually not as deep as tragic characters
  • Usually stock characters that we recognize immediately
The Comic Paradigm

• COMIC LANGUAGE
  • One of the most important elements in humor
  • Extends from elegant and witty language to puns and bawdy humor

• MASTER OF comic language
  • Admire his skillful use of satiric language

• MASTERED BY comic language
  • Laugh out loud and hard at the accidental puns and misuse of language
The Best Comedy Plays with Language

https://youtu.be/kTcRRaXV-fg