

Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens

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You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in anything - even poverty - you can survive it.

~Bill Cosby

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to notice how students seem to smile and laugh in elementary schools but for various reasons, in middle school the smiles and laughter rarely occur in a classroom setting. Some obvious differences between elementary and middle schools include students having different teachers teaching specific content classes, and greater academic demands placed on them. Also in elementary school students are primarily *learning to read*, but as they progress through the grades that skill switches to a focus on *reading to learn*. The resources students are reading in middle school differ as well, with passages that generally lack visual appeal, seldom incorporate humor, are lengthier, and include more expository passages versus narratives.

I have taught at the same urban middle school campus for eleven of my thirteen years of teaching. Our school is a Title I campus where over 84% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch. My seventh-grade Language Arts students are predominantly Hispanic and African American youth, who for the most part are labeled “at-risk learners.” Many of my students have attended summer school more than twice in the past due to academic weaknesses, and a number of my students have barely managed to pass with minimum grades and test scores.

In the past, I have been successful in reaching even resistant, reluctant learners, and though I am making some progress with the majority of my present students, it is not the amount of progress I am used to achieving with at-risk learners. Though the ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of my students have not changed drastically, the students entering the classroom this year resist learning more than the group before them. Teaching has become more of a struggle trying to reach the students academically, and is emotionally draining, leaving me feeling each day like I “was fighting to teach.”

Other teachers may also be facing the dilemma of how to teach the students entering the classroom who are more challenging to reach each year. Though I have attended many workshops, including those focused on teaching children of poverty, I still struggle with watching my students struggle academically. With this unit I intend to take Bill Cosby’s saying one step further, to go beyond surviving poverty with humor, to the level of having impoverished students also succeed academically with the aid of humor.

After being accepted into the Houston Teacher Institute’s *Health, Illness, and Medicine in Houston: A Cross-Cultural Exploration* seminar led by Professor Joseph Kotarba, I realized that I had to go beyond examining my students’ academic weaknesses and begin to examine how at-risk my students were when it came to their emotional health. From this seminar I also learned more about one of the roadblocks to learning – depression. It would be unrealistic for me as a

teacher to expect my students' minds to be open to ideas and learning if the students were dealing directly or indirectly with depression of differing degrees of severity. In order for me to be able to design more effective lessons, I also had to increase my own awareness and understanding of emotional health issues, specifically depression, which could be affecting my students. During the course of our seminar and from information acquired through research, this unit materialized into a unit that not only addresses specific learning objectives but also better enables me to address mild depression by focusing on and including humor.

The primary educational intent of this unit is to include resources that would interest my students and allow their academic skills to be developed and reinforced. I am also hopeful that by exposing my students to various humor elements that surround their lives, the benefits of humor and the ability to use it appropriately, the students will also be strengthening their own resilience towards the harsh realities that exists in life. According to Steven Sultanoff, PhD, in his article "Creating Resilience through Humor," "Resilience is the ability of the human organism to spring back from stressors in the environment." This unit should help strengthen my students' resilience to life stressors by improving their coping skills which will also empower students to handle the many challenges that they face in the school setting, in their home environments and within their community. Implementing this unit in my classroom next year will allow me to accomplish two things, strengthen students' literacy skills and nurture the development of students' life skills.

UNIT OVERVIEW

"Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens," includes information and research on adolescent depression and research which notes the benefits of humor in an academic setting. This unit is designed to meet the needs of my seventh grade students, both academically and emotionally. My unit will include two novels, and various print resources as well as television as a media resource. Using literature to help children cope with problems is not a new concept. In fact professional therapists have been using literature to help children for quite some time and the term commonly associated with this approach is called *bibliotherapy*. Trained bibliotherapists have an in-depth knowledge of psychology and are able to select books with a therapeutic value to meet the needs of their patients. My unit will not utilize literature exactly in the same manner as professional therapists use literature because I am not a trained therapist. Nor would I want to unintentionally do more harm than good. Humor therapy is a slightly different approach from bibliotherapy when it comes to helping troubled youths. Humor therapy mainly focuses on using humor for therapeutic purposes. This unit reflects parts of my professional background which includes a Masters in Reading and Language Arts, and thirteen years of first hand experience witnessing the "power" of books as well as what I learned from research.

As a classroom teacher I have no intention of providing intervention counseling or specific problem-solving solutions to students, and as I have done in the past - any student who gives me indication for concern, will be referred to professionally trained personnel within our school or school district. There are some situations best left not having to learn from first-hand experience, but are safe to examine though the safety net of books especially when it comes to exploring different outcomes. This unit will tap into the power of books and the media thus allowing students to examine themselves in a safe arena, and from a safe distance. Initially I will need to get my students to be able to recognize and acknowledge their own varying emotional states before they can come to an understanding that they are not alone with their feelings or experiences. The next thing I will need to do is get my students to identify the elements of humor so that they will be able to recognize humor and note the effects humor has on them. Students will come to realize that humor can help them keep their problem in a proper perspective and guide them in developing positive ways of handling situations. This unit hopefully also empowers students to use humor to lift their moods when they are feeling depressed.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Dr. Harold Koplewicz, author of *More Than Moody*, claims that 3.5 million teenagers in America have depression. Dr. Steve Arnold in his article, *Children in Emotional Jeopardy – Educators can Help Fight Childhood Depression*, states that “According to the U.S. Surgeon General, between 10 and 15 percent of children and adolescents display symptoms of depression.” The number of children that are affected by depression is alarming and definitely warrants some action. In his article Dr. Arnold suggested the likelihood exists for some teachers seeing more depressed adolescents on a daily basis than even professional therapist treat in a week.

Researchers have tried to locate causes, correlations and explanations for adolescent depression. Some of the more popular explanations include: increase in the divorce rate; increase in drug use; increase in exposure to or involvement in violence; rising academic expectations; and social pressure. Sometimes what is the cause and what is the effect is not so easy to identify. For example, does drug use lead to depression or does depression lead to drug use? Does an overweight child become depressed or did depression lead to the child to becoming overweight?

“To medicate or not to medicate,” is a question best left to trained professionals. Anti-depressants such as Zoloft, Prozac, and Paxil (which has been of concern recently due to the potential increased risk of suicide) are being used to treat depressed children. However, there are risks and possible side effects to these drugs, as noted by Dr. Karen Wagner, “We have very little information about what’s safe and effective for treating this disorder in youth” (Tanner).

This unit will start with an introduction and inclusion of humor. The value of humor and its relevance to my unit is represented best by what Mark Twain once said when he described humor in the following way:

Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritation and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place.

As a teacher I have experienced moments in my classroom where though I was upset at a situation or a student, something brought a laugh forward. That chuckle even if it was held in, made the situation more bearable to handle and on occasion it even played a role in the irritable situation disappearing completely. So what is humor? According to the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor website Rollo May, Humanistic Psychologist states:

Humor is the capacity to perceive, appreciate, or express what is funny, amusing, incongruous, ludicrous, etc.

Humor is the healthy way of feeling a "distance" between one's self and the problem, a way of standing off and looking at one's problem with perspective.

Humor can act as a de-stressor in a stressful situation, and it can help us regain emotional control over a situation. By increasing my students’ awareness of humor, how to utilize humor and how to aim humor at themselves; then the results that humor can render will be realized by my students and they will be empowered with another tool in which to help them handle different situations.

According to the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, some reasons why humor is important are:

1. Humor helps us connect with others.
2. Humor gives us a different perspective; it shifts the way we think.
3. Humor replaces distressing emotions with pleasurable emotions.
4. Humor changes the way we behave by increasing our energy.

“Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens” is a unit that will allow my students to heighten their awareness of different forms of humor that exist, while increasing their awareness of their own moods with the knowledge of what they find humorous so that they are empowered to bring themselves out of a down mood.

“Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens” will include activities such as journal writing, feeling logs, reading logs, advice-column writing, and poetry writings. Students will examine humor as depicted through jokes, riddles, puns, cartoons, commercials, and sitcoms. The final project will consist of a class book titled *Laugh and Learn* which will contain accumulated student work including: anecdotes, poetry, jokes, riddles, cartoons and comic-strips, advice columns, humorous sayings, and advertisements for mock products.

LITERACY SKILLS

“Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens” is one unit that will help strengthen listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Listening skills that are strengthened include listening actively and purposely in a variety of settings and listening critically to analyze and evaluate a speaker’s message(s).

Reading skills strengthened include: using their own knowledge and experience to comprehend; establishing and adjusting purposes for reading (to find out, to understand, to interpret, or to solve problems; paraphrasing and summarizing to recall, inform or organize ideas; and conducting research using a variety of sources.

Writing skills strengthened include writing to: influence such as persuade, argue, requests and to inform such as to explain, describe, argue, and request. Students will also respond in written form to journal prompts in their journals, write poetry and anecdotes.

Reading resources in this unit for students include: poetry (humorous and serious toned), short stories, two humorous novels with protagonists dealing with realistic problems. Lessons and instruction will include whole class work, group work, partner work and individual work. Selection for groups and partners will occur during the second week and be comprised of mixed ability students based on past performance data accumulated.

Humor in Novels

The Pigman by Paul Zindel and *The Watsons Go To Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis are included in this unit because of their humorous elements and because students will be able to examine characters’ interactions, reactions and actions in situations dealing with peers, teachers, family members and new acquaintances. Both novels will allow students to compare their lives with the characters in the stories. Both of these novels contain serious situations, many of which are revealed through humor.

The Pigman is a story about two high school students, John and Lorraine, and their experiences with Mr. Pignati, which continued past the telephone prank that first brought them in contact with him. Mr. Pignati is a lonely older man who is easily befriended by John and Lorraine (the narrators), and they share jokes, spend time together and are affected by their interactions with each other. John and Lorraine accept gifts from Pignati, accompany him to the zoo, and are greatly affected by his death. Both narrators have less than near-perfect parents and come to appreciate the respect, trust, freedom, as well as the good times that Mr. Pignati offers them. This novel is unique in that it is narrated by two people providing a female perspective and a male perspective on the events that they reveal.

Examples of humor in *The Pigman* include the original phone marathon episode where outrageous fibs are told to keep strangers on the phone. Mr. Pignati tells Lorraine a joke about what the best get-well cards are – four aces. Some nicknames are funny, such as “marshmallow

kid” for Norton who got caught stealing a bag of marshmallows from a grocery store and “cricket” for the overweight librarian whose tight fitting clothes cause her nylons to make a scratchy noise. School humor and pranks included the fruit roll prank played on substitute teachers which involved accumulating apples from the cafeteria and upon being signaled by John, everyone rolls their apples when the substitute was not looking. The initial meeting of John and Lorraine occurred on the school bus when he sat next to her and started laughing for no reason at all; she was embarrassed and thought he was laughing at her, so finally she tells him to stop before people think he is a lunatic. John laughs more and loudly keeps repeating, “I am a lunatic.” They both ended up laughing and became friends. When John and Lorraine were alone in Mr. Pignati’s home, Lorraine outrageously dresses in clothes she found upstairs, and John pretends to be a handsome businessman with Lorraine being madly in love with him. They both were laughing so hard but end up exchanging their first serious kiss.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963 is a story about the Watson family told from the point of view of fourth grader Kenny with many of the experiences of his family revealed through humor. Kenny’s older brother Byron, younger sister Joetta, and the parents all provide experiences that lend themselves to discussions and comparison. Because Byron has been getting into trouble the family takes a road trip to Birmingham intending to leave him with his grandmother. In part due to the bomb going off at the church, the family is reunited safely, and they return home with Byron.

Some of the humor in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* helps reveal relationships within the family and their poor economic situation. The life Kenny’s mother could have had if she hadn’t married his father is revealed in a humorous description of the guy whose head was shaped like a hambone that their mother almost married. An example of humor revealing the sibling relationship between Kenny and Byron occurs when Byron who was always admiring himself kisses the car mirror that is on the outside part of the car during freezing weather and gets his lips frozen to the mirror.

Humor in Short Stories and Poetry

“Priscilla and the Wimps,” by Richard Peck, deals with a serious issue (bullying) in a humorous manner. Two students who don’t seem to fit in are Melvin--one of the smallest kids in the school--and Priscilla who is described as a very large but quiet female. Melvin falls prey to Monk and his gang but unexpectedly, Priscilla finally speaks and intimidates Monk by pretending not to know who Monk is or what he represents. Priscilla swiftly intercepts the hold Monk has on Melvin and quickly stuffs Monk into a locker. The school empties, and a blizzard causes school to be closed for a week which leaves the reader wondering if Monk was stuck in that locker for a week. Some of the humor in this short story is created with detailed descriptions of the characters and the characters’ movements.

Humor in Sitcoms

By examining sitcoms students will use active viewing and listening skills. Students will examine past and present sitcoms and maintain a humor log for each episode they view. Notes will include examples of the jokes or funny situations in each show with details of the lead-ins to the funny part (build-up to the humor) and the punch lines (climax of the humor). Humor logs will also include personal connections and notation about the serious side of the situation that was revealed through humor.

Humor in Commercials

Students will evaluate humorous commercials noting some of the elements companies use to create the humor, as well as details of the product or services that are revealed in each commercial. Analyzing the effectiveness of the commercial will involve identifying the targeted

audience and distinguishing among appropriate humor for various audiences. Students will apply what they learned about commercial humor by creating ads and commercials for a real or mock products or services.

Humor in Comedy Routines

Each student will be paired with another student and read “Who’s On First?” which is a comedy routine performed by Abbott & Costello over fifty years ago. Following the first read, students will listen to a taping of the routine then do a repeat reading with their partner. The second reading should show signs of improvement in delivery. The humor in this classic routine stems from the play on words. The humor in many one line jokes and riddles stem from a play on words. Students will be provided with some guidelines to follow for creating a mini-routine they will perform in class. Students will be provided with a list of ideas to use then they will search and select material they plan on using for their routine.

Humor as a Teaching Tool

When humor is a part of an exam it can help relieve and diminish some students’ stress anxiety. Strategically placing a silly or comical question in the beginning, middle and at the end of an exam can relax one’s fears of taking tests, making it easier for recalling information. Placing a humorous question at the start of the exam acts like a movie trailer, enticing the tester to continue forward with the exam with some level of excitement. Placing a humorous question in the middle of the exam acts like a snack, perking-up and energizing the student to continue forward with the exam. Placing a humorous question at the end of the exam acts can like an after dinner mint that leaves behind a good taste, but in this case it would be a good feeling that the tester leaves with after taking the test, possibly even carrying over into less anxiety with future exams.

Humor can also become part of daily warm-up activities, possibly even motivating students to arrive to class promptly and focus on a task. Silly or comical sentence corrections used as warm-ups can have learning value along with residual value, allowing students to remember the material long term. For example, punctuation practice the following:

Woman without her man is nothing

Punctuation variations:

Woman, without her man, is nothing.

Woman, without her, man is nothing.

Humor can be included with teaching language arts skills. For example you can expand students’ vocabulary and have fun with words by having students create a *sillyonary* – a dictionary with comical illustrations and with silly sentences using each word. Students can also practice editing skills using commercial or teacher-created humorous passages. The parts of speech can be applied with humorous fill in the blank sentences or passages. Misusing homonyms in passages can be a humorous learning experience. The possibilities of integrating and including humor in the classroom, is as limited and endless as one’s imagination.

Humor can also become part of your teaching approach. Teachers are as close to live entertainment as many students will get to prior to reaching adulthood. If we practice what we teach in composition writing – to take your audience into consideration – we have to acknowledge that our *captive* audience (students) needs to be captivated.

Grand Finale Project

This unit will have resulted in students writing poems and anecdotes; student-created ads and commercials; a compilation of jokes, riddles, and tongue twisters; humorous illustrations and cartoons; entries in a *sillyonary* (humorous dictionary); comedy routines and the readings of

humorous material. The final project will be a published book which will include selected, edited and revised student work. At the end of the unit, a *Laugh and Learn* parent event will be hosted by the students and highlight their books along with student presentations and performances.

CONCLUSION

Creating “Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens” has been an inspirational experience for me and it led me to re-examine my own classroom practices. My desire to reach out to my students so I could actually teach them resulted in this usable, vital, and practical unit, which can be easily adapted to meet the needs of other classrooms. The cliché *live and learn* can be used to describe reflective teachers who re-evaluate their classroom practices and add, adjust and adapt resources to meet the needs of their students. This unit reflects my research and my own *live and learn* experiences. This unit will allow teachers to reach and teach with less stress for both the teacher as well as for the students.

LESSON

Overview

Week	Resources	Activity
Week One	Feelings Word List Joke/Riddle Wall	<u>Introduction to unit</u> : Feelings vocabulary / faces illustrations Feeling Logs for recording thoughts and feelings. Oral reading followed by discussion on bad day experiences. Laugh and Learn theme (Humor discussed and a bulletin board started by students for posting of jokes/riddles). Students record what they find humorous).
Week Two	Journal Format Introduced <i>The Pigman</i>	Free-thought and reflective entries made in journals following reading sessions. Novel is introduced and readings will vary with oral readings, partner readings, as well as silent readings.
Week Three	<i>The Pigman</i> Humor Poetry/ Short Stories	Novel continued and completed in a two-week time frame. Students respond to printed material and evaluate its affect on them as readers. Mirroring structures read, students write humorous poems and/or short anecdotes.
Week Four	<i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham</i> Serious Toned Poetry/Short Stories	Novel is introduced and readings will vary with oral readings, partner readings, as well as silent readings. Students respond to printed material and evaluate its affect on them as readers. Mirroring structures read, students write humorous poems and/or short anecdotes.
Week Five	<i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham</i> Sitcoms/ Commercials	Novel continued and completed in a two-week time frame. Students note humorous elements in sitcoms and commercials.
Week Six	Presentations Booklet Collection	Stand-up comedy routines (jokes, riddles, anecdotes, imitation of sitcoms or commercials) Student anecdotes, joke collections, and poetry revised and bound.

Activity Feeling Words: A partial word list describing feelings

Place words on index cards cut in half. Students will first separate the cards into two distinct stacks, one representing *positive feelings* and one representing *negative feelings*.

Partial Word List

lazy	loving	motivated	friendly	peaceful	confused	delighted
shy	embarrassed	stubborn	optimistic	tired	regret	sad
doubtful	mad	ashamed	frustrated	happiness	upbeat	wonderful
silly	enthusiastic	attacked	bored	playful	hopeful	discouraged
alert	mean	focused	panic	proud	remorse	worried
drained	excited	nervous	calm	uncertain	respected	disgusted
eager	mellow	stunned	furious	quiet	hungry	jealous
loved	stressed	offended	terrified	unfocused	hyper	joyful
sleepy	explosive	betrayed	goofy	hatred	defiant	
angry	fearful	suspicious	grateful	heartbroken	hysterical	

Activity Thesaurus and Dictionary Use

Dictionary and thesaurus used to expand the initial word list.

Thesaurus Activity

In the sentences below, replace the over-used word **good** with another word that is more precise and vivid. Use a thesaurus to find the words you need.

1. The child's behavior had been **good** all day.
2. It is a **good** day today.
3. They sell **good** clothes in that shop.
4. He is a **good** runner.
5. They all had a **good** time.
6. His results in the test were **good**.
7. She was a **good** mother.
8. It was a **good** walk from school to home.

Write one of your own sentences that includes the word "good," then write the same sentence after replacing the word "good" with another word found in the thesaurus.

Thesaurus & Dictionary Use for Feelings

On your own paper, define each word then write two alternative words for words listed.

- | | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------------|---------------|
| 1. lazy | 6. drained | 11. loving | 16. excited |
| 2. shy | 7. eager | 12. embarrassed | 17. mellow |
| 3. doubtful | 8. loved | 13. mad | 18. stressed |
| 4. silly | 9. sleepy | 14. enthusiastic | 19. explosive |
| 5. alert | 10. angry | 15. mean | 20. fearful |

Select five feeling words from the list. Write a sentence for each of the five words selected that describe a time you experienced the feeling. Then draw a picture illustrating what the feeling looks like.

Activity Negative and Positive Feeling Words: Oral Readings

Goal: To have students become aware of negative and positive feelings.

Resources: *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst and *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Prior to the readings students will brainstorm words that describe feelings. Students will use listening skills during the reading of the story and make a list of words used within the story that describe feelings. Have students take minimal notes during the oral reading by prewriting on their paper the following: Who are the characters in the story?

What happened to the character(s)? How did what happen make the character(s) feel? Identified words are categorized as follows:

Feeling Word	Positive attribute or Negative attribute	Example of situation that evokes it.	Illustration / Sketch
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Following each reading, students will reflect in the journals about their personal experience with things going wrong or an example when they fought an internal battle with right and wrong. Students can make one of their entries into a mini book and illustrate it.

Activity: Writing Limericks

Students practice using rhyming words and follow outlines creating limericks. Since limericks tend to be humorous this activity should also help students develop their sense of humor.

Limerick Format One	Limerick Format Two
<p>There once was a _____ from _____. All the while she (he) hoped _____. So she (he) _____. And _____. That _____ from _____.</p>	<p>I once met a _____ from _____. Every day she (he) _____. But whenever she (he) _____. The _____. That _____ from _____.</p>

Teacher from Texas By Shirley Lyons	Boy from France By Shirley Lyons
<p>There once was a teacher from a city in Texas. All the while she hoped of owning a Lexus. So she tried not to have her money on students spent. And when that failed, she kept her car with the dent. That silly spending teacher from Texas.</p>	<p>I once met a student from France. Every day he would dance, dance, dance. But whenever he saw a girl go by his head would turn. The falls and bumps that followed were none of his concern. That dancing, prancing boy from France.</p>

Activity: Mirror Published Poems

Resources: Humorous Poetry Collections

Students will read and select a humorous published poem. Student notes the rhyme scheme, lines and structure used in the poem selected.

1. Student will create a blank format to follow which mirrors the published poem.
2. Students will create two poems following the format, one poem focuses on a school experience and the other a home experience.
3. Students will illustrate their finished poems.

Activity More Poetry Writing

Students will have read upbeat and sad poems before doing this activity. Two poetry formats will be examined, a teacher sample provided and then students will write their own original poems reflecting their feelings.

I AM Poem Format

I am (two special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

I pretend (something you pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you sad)
I am (the first line of the poem)

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually hope for)
I try (something you make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

To write an **acrostic**, pick a subject and make it the title of your poem. Write this title in a vertical row **DOWNWARD**. Then write the lines of your poem, starting with the letters you have written. Each line can be a word, a phrase, or a sentence.

Depressed by Shirley Lyons

Depression and teenagers can be a volatile mix
Emotions sporadically fluctuating cannot be dismissed
Parents unfortunately are often blinded to what exist.
Professional teachers however need to be willing to assist
Reach out to others and try to hear what is not said
Every student can learn from examining internal conflicts
Selected stories, carefully chosen can be a source to enlist
Should there be cause for alarm, outside help one needs to persist
Everyone benefits when warning signs are not missed.
Depression and teenagers can be a volatile mix

I am Sad and Alone by Shirley Lyons

I am sometimes sad and feel all alone.
I wonder if others can tell how I feel.
I hear others laughing, but it's hard for me to echo those laughs.
I see others acting like nothing has changed.
I want to believe that things will again be as they once were.
I am sometimes sad and feel all alone.

I pretend that nothing is wrong, even to my closest friends.
I feel that if they knew what I was feeling, they would disappear.
I touch the tears descending upon my cheek, hoping no one sees.
I worry that the tears will never end and others will see.
I cry softly when others are in another room, loudly when no one is around.
I am sometimes sad and feel all alone.

I understand that tomorrow may be brighter, and tears can disappear.
I say to myself stop acting like a baby, in time it will get better.
I dream of how different my life could be, if only the sadness would flee.
I try to think positively, but it never seems to last long.
I hope that others do not feel this horrible sadness like me.
I am sometimes sad and feel all alone.

To increase students' self-awareness of their individual emotions, both ends of the spectrum of emotions, from laughter to sadness, need to be explored. Using published poetry and student generated poetry students will be able to express events or situations that make them sad as well as those that make them laugh.

Students will select one format to follow and write two emotionally contrasting poems.

Activity: Evaluating Humor in Commercials

Review common propaganda devices used in advertising prior to having students view and evaluate commercials containing humor. Students will record their reactions to different commercials they view and design a commercial for either a product or service that already exists or for a product or service they create.

Propaganda Techniques

1. Bandwagon: Persuading people to do or buy something because others are doing it or bought it.
2. Testimonial: Persuading people by using the words of a famous person to convince you.
3. Transfer: Persuading people by using the names or pictures of famous people.
4. Repetition: Persuading people by having the product name repeated at least four times.
5. Emotional Words: Persuading people using words that will make you feel strongly.

Television Commercial Review

1. **Name of Product or Service**
2. **Target Audience**: Describe the audience the commercial is likely to appeal to. (Age group, economic status, education level, gender, active or passive lifestyle, etc.)
3. **Details of the Product or Service revealed in the commercial**
4. **Description of the commercial**
5. **Humor in the Commercial**: What was humorous in the commercial? How was humor developed?

Student Created Humorous Commercial

You may create a commercial for a product or service already on the market or you can also create your own product or service for your commercial that will be presented in class.

1. **Name of Product or Service you are creating a commercial for**
2. **Target Audience**: Describe the audience your commercial is likely to appeal. (Age group, economic status, education level, gender, active or passive lifestyle, etc.)
3. **Details of your Product or Service you will reveal in your commercial**
4. **Description what will happen in your commercial**
5. **Humor in the Commercial**: What do you intend to be humorous in the commercial? How will you develop humor in your commercial?
6. **Items you will need to present your commercial in class:**

Activity:**Sitcom Analysis**

Date	Time	Sitcom Title	Channel

Targeted Audience: What characteristics of the sitcom help you identify the audience?

Sitcom schedule (frequency):

Summary of episode:

Circle the number of times you reacted to the humor present in the sitcom episode.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11+

Detailed description of one humorous moment or situation: Identify the situation and lead in to the humorous moment or situation.

Respond to the following questions in your humor journal.

1. What made a situation in this episode humorous?
2. What is one possible serious side of the situation that was presented through humor?
3. Who might not find the situation humorous and why?
4. What situation was presented that you can relate to in this episode?
5. Describe facial expressions and body language that added to the humorous effect.
6. Additional thoughts, comments and reflections.

Humorous Situation SKETCH

Illustrate one situation in the sitcom that was humorous.

Activity: Anecdotes

An anecdote is a short written recollection of an experience or event that generally relates a personal experience and ends with a punch line. The teacher can model by sharing original anecdotes and published anecdotes such as those that appear in the *Readers Digest*.

Student guidelines for writing humorous personal anecdotes:

1. Brainstorm personal experiences that made you laugh.
2. List the details that lead up to the humorous moment.
3. Eliminate details that are not necessary to making your point clear.
4. Embellish details in your anecdote by using exaggerations, quotes or by including examples.
5. Conclude your anecdote with a punch line.
6. Have someone else read or listen to your anecdote and note the effect it has on the reader (listener).

Anecdote Format

Beginning	Middle	Ending
Starting point places you in the center of the event or experience.	Avoid excessive information or details not relevant or absolutely necessary for the reader to know.	Ending takes the reader (listener) by surprise.
Identify setting and the situation or event.	Builds anticipation for the reader as to what might happen.	Occurs immediately after the climax of the story.
Grab reader's attention	Hold reader's attention	Ends with a punch line.

Teacher Example of an anecdote

By Shirley Lyons

One day I found a beautiful Afghan dog wondering around with a chain dragging behind her. This beautiful dog was aimlessly roaming my neighborhood where she could be harmed by cars or taken for keeps, so I took her home hoping to locate her owner. Two weeks of posting signs and placing ads in the lost and found section didn't produce a call from the owner. This was possibly one of the dumbest dogs ever; she wouldn't listen to any commands to come inside each time she was in the backyard. Besides not listening, she had a healthy appetite and was destructive – tearing my patio drapes along with chewing non-edible items. The owner finally called after returning from vacation. My excitement rose at the prospect of this dog going home, so I could start cleaning up her destruction. It was unbelievable when the owner gave commands that her dog obediently followed. This dog was far from being dumb; she only understood Spanish commands not the English commands I had been saying to her.

Topics to Brainstorm for Anecdote Writing

School experiences; holiday or special occasion celebrations; experiences with a family member or at a family events; embarrassing moments; first experiences, such as starting kindergarten or changing schools; or nervous situations.

Activity: Silly Directions Quiz

This silly quiz will allow students a humorous opportunity to experience the need for reading directions. By placing a time restraint of seven minutes on the quiz, students are more likely to mirror the “rush through an exam,” behavior that needs to be avoided. Obviously this quiz does not warrant grading. Warning: Observing students testing may cause laughter to erupt from the teacher.

You will have only Seven Minutes to Complete This Quiz

Each question is worth 7 points which includes five bonus points.

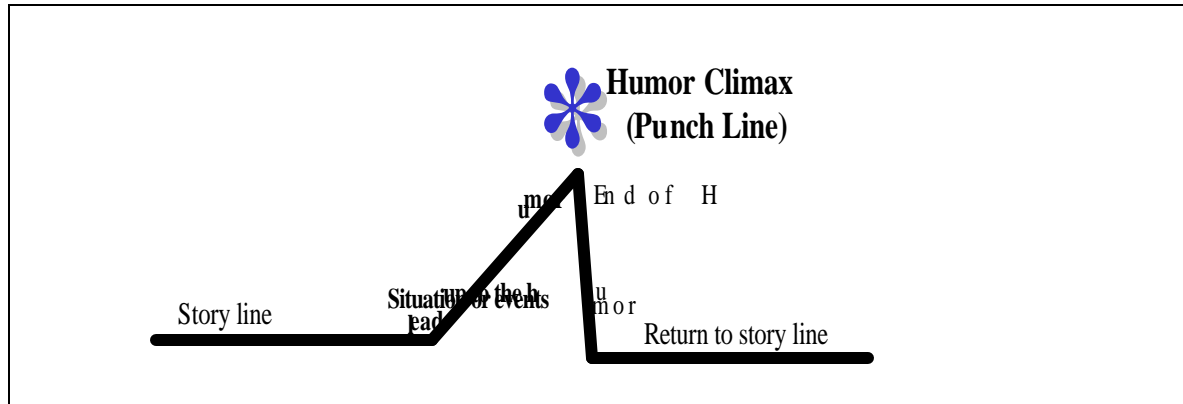
DIRECTIONS: Read all questions before beginning with question one.

1. Put your name on this paper in the upper left corner.
2. Put the date in the upper right corner.
3. Put the total number of questions on this test under the date.
4. Tilt your head back and look at the ceiling for three seconds.
5. Take a deep breath.
6. Scratch your head. Be sure your teacher sees you do this so that he or she knows you are following the directions.
7. Stand up.
8. Turn around three times.
9. Hop on one foot twice.
10. Sing Happy Birthday to your teacher while standing on one foot.
11. Be seated.
12. Write the 26 letters of the alphabet at the bottom of this page.
13. Stand up. Bend over and touch your toes.
14. Fold this paper in half.
15. Only complete questions 1, 2, 14, and 15.

Activity: Format for Novel Journal Entries

Following each reading session, students will make journal entries that will reflect their understanding of each reading. Students will also identify, chart, evaluate and analyze humorous elements present in each reading session. Copy the following box to guide students with making journal entries.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be sure to write your name, the date, title of the novel you are making a journal entry for, and the pages of the novel read for each entry.2. Write a summary over the pages read including important details.3. Illustrate what you read with a summary sketch.4. Make a prediction to what you think might happen in the next reading.5. Relate (connect) what you read to your life and people you know.6. Identify any humor present from the pages you read. Describe the events or situation that lead up to the humor and the climax of the humor.7. Illustrate the humor presented in the reading.8. Evaluate, chart and analyze the humor present. |
|--|



Grading Journal Entries Containing Humor:

Summary: 20 Points
 Summary Sketch: 20 Points
 Prediction: 10 Points
 Connection: 10 Points

Humor Details: 10 Points
 Humor Illustration: 10 Points
 Humor Chart: 10 Points
 Evaluation: 10 Points

Grading Journal Entries With Humor Not Present:

Summary: 25 Points
 Summary Sketch: 25 Points
 Prediction: 25 Points
 Connection: 25 Points



Feelings/Thoughts/Sketches

DAY	Student's Feelings/Thoughts/Sketches
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

Student Name _____ Class _____

Laugh Record

	<u>Never</u> 0	<u>Once</u> 1	<u>Twice</u> 2	<u>Three or More</u> 3
<u>Monday</u>	Joke		Situation with You	Situation with Others
<u>Tuesday</u>	Joke		Situation with You	Situation with Others
<u>Wednesday</u>	Joke		Situation with You	Situation with Others
<u>Thursday</u>	Joke		Situation with You	Situation with Others
<u>Friday</u>	Joke		Situation with You	Situation with Others

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