

WRITING HUMOR IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

A Curriculum Framework

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INTRODUCTION

Reading, writing, and arithmetic have been the core of many teaching principles. Non-written communication is the basis for all skills as it is the skill necessary to receive the training in the other three. Being able to communicate is how comedians make a living, by expressing their lives in humorous forms to entertain the masses. The core of their abilities begins with non-written communication but includes reading and writing to create the scripts they use on stage.

Comedy writing includes the important aspects of both non-written and written communication skills. One must be able to flesh out a story based on their own lives or the lives of others, put it on paper in an organized manner, and then present it to a group of people who seem to be quicker to judge than any other audience in the world. If a writer can handle producing and performing comedy writing, they can handle just about any other stressful environment thrown their way.

Comedy writing touches on the core concepts of writing, such as knowing the audience, developing ideas, organizational skills, and choosing the right words for the job. Therefore, in a technical sense, comedy writing can be just as rigid if not more so than other styles of fiction and/or nonfiction.

Humor, in and of itself, is actually quite good for the soul. Comedy writing would help put humor in the classroom for both the students and the teacher. Humor helps create an environment of less stress and better communication.

Putting humor together with the English curriculum, especially at the beginning of a school year, will create an environment of students ready to learn and still provide the discipline and technical skills necessary for the development of the students' knowledge.

SUPPORT

According to Tanner and Tanner, “one of the most important developments toward a system based on building the best for all was the study of English in American schools” (2007, 9). This sentiment is presented throughout educational history by individuals such as Dewey and represented well by the conventional “reading, writing, and arithmetic” concepts considering English would take up two-thirds of that core.

“Normal people express their sense of humor by memorizing jokes; comics transform their life experiences into punch lines and write their own jokes” (Carter, 2001, 34). Comic writing requires self reflection. According to Tanner and Tanner, an existentialist believes that a person must find meaning for their own existence through reflection (2007). So, in a sense, a comic writer is an existentialist. According to Kentucky’s core content for assessment, in writing, related reflections are important tools in developing ideas (1999).

The core content assessment also outlines that purpose/audience, idea development, and organization are half of the criteria assessed for writing. Carter provides chapters for finding and assessing ideas, figuring out who your audience is or what the purpose of the joke is, and entire sections on organization. Therefore comic writing fulfills major portions of the requirements for learning to write well.

To speak of comic writing means one must speak of humor. To speak of comic writing in the classroom means one must speak of humor in the classroom. Mitchell did an entire study on using humor in an interactive classroom. She found through the use of quantitative and qualitative instruments, that humor can create a less stressful

environment, increase student to teacher to student communication, and help students with learning, retention, and attention problems (2005).

Girdlefanny, which is not the editor's true name but a comical one created to make a point, lists and explains numerous examples of teachers who have successfully used humor in their classrooms to help keep the attention of the students and to help relieve the stress in the learning environment. One example is Tom Luck who impersonates Elvis while singing "Happy Birthday" to his students. Phone calls prove the parents love him. Another example was Linda Smith who fell flat on her face then turned the embarrassing situation around on the laughing students by changing it into a learning experience. She asked "so what if people laugh at you in class?" (2004, 24). A sense of humor is actually a serious matter. Girdlefanny spoke of Marilyn Mitchell who stated that executives and managers with a sense of humor are promoted faster than those without (2004).

With Kentucky choosing writing as an important assessed skill by using the portfolio concept, they are saying that writing is a core requirement (1999). One of the pieces required in the portfolio is a piece called "personal writing." This can include a personal narrative and some of the important aspects of the piece include development of ideas, the student's feelings, a first-person point-of-view, and dialogue when it is necessary. Comic writing includes all of these and more as Carter explains that writing comedy means "looking for the funny, writing the funny, performing the funny...documenting your perception of the world through your unique filter" (2001, 203).

Some of the basics of progressivism state that students need to be able to “go with the flow” and that electives should be provided that help students learn things they want to learn. Progressives even go so far as to say the students should be able to govern their own educational experiences (Tanner, 2007). Comic writing would fit well into the progressives’ ideals. Students would rather laugh than cry, so why not give them a class that teaches them not only to write, think, and create, but also to love life, have a sense of humor, and understand that they are not the only ones who have crazy families, as inspection into family life is a large requirement of learning to write comedy.

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

GOAL:

To enable students to demonstrate the ability to reflect on their own lives and generate humorous writing based on those reflections.

BENCHMARKS:

- Students will understand the conventions of keeping journals and writing freely to generate ideas.
- Students will select appropriate moments to organize into humorous experiences.
- Students will understand the conventions of comic writing.
- Students will understand a few conventions of public speaking.
- Students will understand the conventions of evaluating work done.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:

- The learner will use free writing to provide a flow of ideas useful for generating humorous writing.
- The learner will use relevant and related reflections to mold their ideas.
- The learner will narrow ideas to create focus on their writing.
- The learner will analyze and address the needs of the audience.
- The learner will use suitable and logical language to express their ideas.
- The learner will organize their ideas using language tools such as order and transition.
- The learner will comply with the form and characteristics of comedy writing.
- The learner will perform their written comedy and evaluate themselves and others.

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WRITING HUMOR



Hundreds of ideas and memories flow from the brain onto paper.



Underdeveloped ideas and memories are molded and organized.



Molds are written in an organized and formatted manner.



Oral presentation of the humor commences.



Respectfully, peers and the teacher analyze the humor.