

The last laugh

LINKS TO:

Stage 3, Module 6

Learning Object 2: *What's so funny about that?*

Exercise 1

Sample answers:

- 1.1 Use the table below to list some of the books, movies and television programs that you find humorous.**

Personal answer.

- 1.2 Do you know any great jokes? Write your favourite joke below.**

Personal answer.

- 1.3 Look at your list in Exercise 1.1, and at your joke and in Exercise 1.2. Can you identify any common threads?**

Personal answer.

- 1.4 Compare your sense of humour with your friends or family. Are there differences, or do you share the same sense of humour? Use examples to illustrate your answer.**

I asked my parents about their favourite comedies, and they nominated *The Hollow Men* (an Australian political satire) and *M*A*S*H* (a black comedy set during the Korean War) as their top choices. Both these programs use irony and 'black' humour to highlight social and political issues, and my parents enjoy the clever dialogue and strong characters. Neither of them like gross-out humour, or humour that focuses on 'stupid' characters doing foolish things.

Generally, my parents prefer satire, with a focus on contemporary issues, rather than American domestic comedies such as *The Big Bang Theory*, which I love.

I share my parent's preference for clever comedies with smart characters, rather than slapstick humour, although I suspect that my parents might find some of the language and subject matter in contemporary television sit-coms a bit confronting.

We all enjoyed *The Chaser*, an Australian satire about politics and social commentary, but often disagreed on which skits were funny. My parents thought that some of the really cheeky skits were 'embarrassing', while I enjoy watching pompous people being put on the spot!

- 1.5 What does your sense of humour, as demonstrated by your selections in Exercise 1.1, say about your personality, and your personal attitudes, values and beliefs?**

Personal answer.

Exercise 2

Sample answers:

- 2.1 How would you explain the differences, if any, between Australian and Indonesian humour?**

Indonesians enjoy a wide variety of styles of humour, like Australians, but the biggest difference would be their preference for slapstick humour. The style of slapstick probably stems from the comic relief provided by the clown-servants of the shadow puppet plays and includes practical jokes and 'silly' antics. Australian humour is based more on our own historical past and includes influences from British, American and Indigenous humour.

Indonesians and Australians both enjoy political satire and making fun of people in positions of authority. This probably stems from the fact that both countries have a colonial past.

2.2 What values, attitudes and beliefs are reflected in the dominant types of Indonesian humour?

Indonesians enjoy slapstick, which involves loud vocal and physical antics, poking fun at others and practical jokes. This suggests that they share what is probably a universal desire to entertain themselves and others by using ridiculous situations that go against the ordinary and mundane aspects of reality.

From the political humour of word play and insinuation, we can learn that Indonesians are comfortable with social criticism and poking fun at those in authority. In this respect, Indonesians share similar attitudes to Australians who also enjoy this sort of humour.

2.3 An ability to appreciate Indonesian humour is a strong indicator of one's increased understanding of Indonesian language and culture. Do you agree with this statement? Why, or why not?

I would agree with this statement generally. While some humour is fairly universal (the classic 'slipping on a banana skin' routine), other elements are culturally and linguistically specific. Australian children, for example, would understand the joke 'Why do mother kangaroos hate it when it rains? Because their joeys have to play inside!'

Humour about the history and politics of a country relates specifically to the national context, although other audiences would get the general idea.

Because a lot of humour works by inverting or subverting reality, you need to have a comprehensive understanding of what is considered 'normal' to appreciate the humour that comes from poking fun at it.

I also think that some humour is very difficult to understand if your understanding of the language is limited. This is partly because humour often relies on clever word play, such as puns, or *plesetan* in Indonesian. Without a sophisticated understanding of the language, many jokes that rely on word play would be difficult to understand. Understanding a witty pun in another language is one indicator that you have acquired a more complex and sophisticated understanding of that language.

The following are some examples of *plesetan*:

Harmoko = *Hari-hari Omong Kosong* (Harmoko was the Minister for Information during the Suharto era.)

KUHP = *Kasih Uang Habis Perkara* (KUHP stands for *Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana* or Book of Criminal Law.)

Timor = *Tomy Itu Memang Orang Rakus* (Timor is the first car produced by what used to be the only Indonesian car-manufacturing industry, PT Timor Putra Nasional. The industry was owned by Tomy, Suharto's youngest son. Not only did he hold the sole right to produce national cars, he was notorious for being a jet setter.)

Humour often uses word play such as puns, for example 'What happened when the chicken saw the lettuce leaves? Chicken Caesar salad!' Understanding a witty pun in another language is one indicator that you have acquired a more complex and sophisticated understanding of that language.