

BBC COMEDY CLASSROOM

HAVING A WRITE LAUGH

**Teachers – get your whole class writing
comedy with this fantastic, easy-to-use guide!**

FREE TEACHERS' LITERACY RESOURCES
FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

CLASS COMIC

*** CLEVER CAPTIONS ***

HA!
HA!

CLASS JOKER

*** STAND-UP ***

CLASS ACT

*** THE SKETCH ***

Full of curriculum-linked lesson plans, activities
and worksheets to help teachers deliver
KS3 & KS4 (S1-S5) key literacy objectives.

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Welcome to Comedy Classroom from BBC Learning

The BBC's Comedy Classroom provides a brilliant framework to explore comedy writing with students as well as enjoying plenty of laughter at the same time. Started in the summer of 2016 as a national competition for secondary schools across the UK, the project then developed even further in early 2017 with hundreds of pupils from primary schools also getting the comedy bug.

The National Literacy Trust has produced this resource pack with BBC Learning as a way to mobilise great writing within your school and to help your students develop their own skills crafting jokes, sketches and comedy captions.

Focusing on comedy writing is also a perfect match for the core requirements for teaching English across the UK, and it helps deliver the key writing skills listed in this pack.

Designed specifically for students in KS3 & 4 (S1-S5), the lessons in this pack can either be used as stand-alone sessions or delivered in sequence to be explored as a wider unit of work. The activities also flow directly from the resources for primary school students, which can be found on the Comedy Classroom website.

As well as a series of three 60-minute teaching sequences, including student-facing activities that can be launched directly onto the smartboard or printed for homework and extension, the pack also contains top tips from comedy industry producers, writers and performers to help students write the funniest jokes, sketches and comedy captions.

Projects such as BBC Bitesize and the BBC micro:bit campaign, which engage students in digital technology, are two further illustrations of how the BBC continues to assist teachers in the classroom. To find out more about these projects and everything else the BBC does for schools and teachers, please visit www.bbc.co.uk/teach where you can also sign up to receive our newsletter.



Welcome to BBC Comedy Classroom. Building on the success of our previous comedy writing competitions, these literacy resources have been refreshed and updated to ensure the learning materials remain valuable and useful to teachers at any time in the school year. Knowing the huge pressures on your time, we have produced this teaching resource pack to be used as flexibly as possible. The activities are linked to the UK's curricula and they can help teachers meet key literacy objectives in an engaging way in the classroom. This initiative is just one example of how BBC Learning delivers its commitment to education.

Sinéad Rocks
Director of Education, BBC





HA!
HA!

Improving literacy through comedy writing

Since the Comedy Classroom project began in 2016, the National Literacy Trust has been conducting research into the effectiveness of teaching comedy writing both in and out of the classroom. With just over a third of students reading a piece of comedy writing outside class— whether it be a play, script, novel or poem – at least once a month, we know this is a genre that forges a real connection with young people.

One of the most interesting findings from the research was that when it came to reading and writing for fun, it was boys who showed themselves to be more engaged when it came to using comedy texts. One girl in 10 and 1 boy in 6 told the National Literacy Trust that they already write comedy for fun. This shows us that this can be an important approach to use when engaging students in our lessons, especially those who are traditionally hard to reach.

As teachers, you also know that as your students develop, their needs also change over time. As writing comedy focuses on sharing your writing with others, we have found that the self-confidence of those taking part in the Comedy Classroom often improves as they work through the lessons, hints and tips. Feedback from teachers who have been using the resources tells us that performing stand-up routines and writing sketches or even telling simple jokes can help boost the self-esteem of those taking part.

Comedy really can be the spark that inspires your students to find the fun in their approach to writing - this pack can help you deliver key outcomes and fill your classroom with laughter.



Our research shows that using comedy in the classroom is a powerful way to get pupils reading and writing, especially boys who are traditionally harder to engage. The Comedy Classroom teaching resources will help you introduce your pupils to the wonderful world of comedy writing and show them just how easy and fun it can be. We hope the Comedy Classroom activities will inspire your pupils to get writing both inside and outside the classroom and that you all have a thoroughly enjoyable time working through them together.

Jonathan Douglas
Director, National Literacy Trust



The BBC resources are expertly crafted to be easy to use in a classroom or extra-curricular situation. The Comedy Toolbox is an excellent resource as it reduces the mystery around creating well-crafted comedy and links well to the skills students need for GCSE English. The accompanying videos on the website make comedy writing an accessible and exciting prospect for aspiring young writers.

Sarah Bailey
English teacher
Teddington School



The Comedy Classroom resources gave us a fantastic starting point and really engaged and challenged our pupils. Pupils were encouraged to focus on the writing and how to use language to great effect. The unit has even inspired us to create a whole Scheme of Work on comedy in literature!

Louise O'Connell
English teacher
St Mark's Catholic School



About this resource

The teaching sequences in this pack give you a taster of how you might access each area of the pack but remember, this really is only a guide. With the Comedy Captions section, you may choose the ideas in here as a starter activity or as a way to engage learners who struggle with extended writing. You may of course choose to develop a whole series of sketches or to expand the stand-up comedy work into an entire learning cycle. This pack gives you the freedom to plan sessions however you wish.

Each sequence focuses on a scaffolded route into comedy writing and builds on the key reading, writing and speaking skills below. Forms and stimulus material are there as suggestions and can be adapted to suit needs and writing levels. Accompanying classroom slides can be downloaded from the website. Sequences are student-facing and supported by the following:

- Key objectives
- Literacy outcomes
- Starters & main activities
- Plenaries
- Extension activities



If you wish to use the student-facing slides alongside the activities, these can be downloaded from bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom.

By using the resources in this pack, students will be able to address the following generic literacy outcomes for KS3 & 4 (S1-S5) which have been drawn from the National Curriculum in England, The Northern Ireland Curriculum and the Curriculum for Wales, and the Curriculum for

Speaking	Reading	Writing
Take a role within group discussions	Comment on the differences between spoken and non-spoken text	Communicate meaning, adapting their style where necessary
Communicate clearly and confidently with an audience	Consider why texts can change to be applied to specific audiences	Organise their ideas in an easy to understand, coherent way
Verbally evaluate the work of themselves and others	Be able to prepare comedy pieces to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone, volume and action	Demonstrate an appropriate level of spelling, punctuation and grammar
Be able to participate in discussions and presentations	Demonstrate an ability to recognise different forms of comedy writing	Demonstrate they can draft and edit to improve their work as well as critique the work of others
Demonstrate they can gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)	Be able to assess the effectiveness of their own and others' writing and suggest improvements	Be able to plan, draft, edit and proofread
Be able to discuss words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination		Be able to use relevant strategies to build vocabulary, grammar and structure

Comedy at the BBC

Ever since the BBC began broadcasting to the nation, the word 'entertain' has been pretty high up on the agenda. As the UK blinked its way out of the darkness after the Second World War, it turned to the fledgling BBC to bring a smile back to the nation's faces. With early radio programmes such as **The Goons** or **Hancock's Half Hour** proving to be a huge success with the nations, the stage was set for comedy writers to bring us a huge range of television comedy programmes, from sketch shows like **Monty Python's Flying Circus**, **French and Saunders** and **That Mitchell and Webb Look** to shows featuring stand-up comedy such as **Mock the Week**, **Live at the Apollo** and **Russell Howard's Good News**.

An introduction to comedy writing

One of the most important ways we communicate is by making each other laugh. Telling someone a funny joke is brilliant for everyone: the person who hears the joke feels good, and the person who tells it does too. We share jokes among our school friends, at home with our family and as adults in the workplace.

Comedy writing is all about using words and language to make people laugh. If you tell a joke to your friends, only you and your friends get to hear it. If you write some jokes that are performed, published or even broadcast, then they're out there for the whole world to hear, and everyone has the opportunity to laugh along.

Comedy writers take a lot of care over their work. They try to choose the best words to put on the page. They use particular skills and techniques to make their jokes as funny as possible. By trying these skills and techniques for ourselves, we can increase our confidence with words and language, as well as coming up with comedy writing that everyone can enjoy.

There are many different kinds of comedy writing. In this Comedy Classroom pack, we focus on three of them, but you might find a whole new way to make people laugh.

There are many different kinds of comedy writing, but our resources will focus on three main categories:

- **Stand-up comedy** – the writer performs words that put across their own particular view of the world
- **Sketch comedy** – the writer turns a funny idea into a scene that people can perform
- **Caption comedy** – the writer looks at an image and creates a funny line to go with it

What to do next

The next three pages include fact sheets on each of these three styles of comedy writing, with plenty of tips that you can share with your students. We've also provided a Comedy Toolbox and glossary that can be downloaded and printed separately to give to students to refer to whilst writing their comedy.



The BBC Comedy Classroom resources and activities were engaging and fun as all pupils were given the opportunity to share their favourite comedies and jokes. The Comedy Toolbox gave pupils the terms to discuss what makes them laugh and inspired them to have a go at writing their own jokes. It was great to see everyone joining in and to hear a classroom filled with laughter.

Jayne Robson

English teacher
Archbishop Blanch School



CLASS JOKER

*** STAND-UP ***

Russell Howard, Kevin Bridges, Sarah Millican, Omid Djalili, Michael McIntyre
– some of Britain's most popular TV celebrities are stand-up comedians.

In the Class Joker activities, look out for the funniest people in your classroom.
This style of writing can encourage them to get their best jokes down on paper before turning them into a filmed performance. Does your school contain some budding stand-ups?

Stand-up tips for students

- Stand-ups make it look like they're coming up with everything on the spot, but in fact they prepare carefully for every performance.
- It may look like they're just talking naturally, but stand-ups use many elements from the Comedy Toolbox in their performances. Misdirection, metaphor and repetition are particularly important to stand-ups.
- All great stand-ups have their own distinctive way of looking at the world and it's often called their 'comedy voice'. Performing stand-up allows us to express our own personal feelings about the world around us.
- Think about what YOU find funny. The audience will enjoy your set if it looks like you are too. As the great comedian Bill Bailey says when writing jokes: "Start with a laugh and then work backwards from there."
- A stand-up routine can involve telling a story, discussing a particular subject, simply telling jokes or a mixture of all of these. Every stand-up needs to think about what approach works best for them.
- Decide if you want to use a microphone as a prop or to help with your performance. If you do, will you use it in a stand? Things like this can matter if you intend to move around on stage.
- Try to make eye contact with as much of your audience as possible. If there is a connection between you, they are more likely to laugh. Encourage them to see your point of view verbally.
- Be understandable. The audience needs to follow what you are saying, so remember to slow down, try to relax and pronounce your words as clearly as you can.
- Think about the order you are telling your story or joke in. Consciously and deliberately decide what information to leave in or out.
- Delivery is really important. Don't forget, it's not just what you say, but how you say it that can make an audience laugh out loud. Your facial expressions, timing and tone are all important. Can you 'do the voices' of the characters in your routine? Have a play with it.
- The golden rule of stand-up is – be as funny as possible. The more jokes that can be crammed into a stand-up routine, the better. That's one of the reasons why preparation is so important.

TOP PERFORMANCE TIPS:

When performing stand-up, always remember the three Ps:



- **PAUSES:** Using pauses in stand-up helps to hold the audience's attention.
- **PACE:** Going faster in some places and slower in others can help make a routine more interesting.
- **PRACTICE:** The more times you perform a routine, the funnier it gets.



SUPPORTING MATERIAL ONLINE
BBC.CO.UK/COMEDYCLASSROOM

bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom

CLASS ACT

*** THE SKETCH ***



From *Walliams & Friend* to *Horrible Histories*, we all love sketches. For a sketch, what you need is one big funny idea that you can turn into a scene, then pack it with big characters, plenty of action and, of course, jokes.

The Class Act sequence will give your students the tools and opportunity to write some brand new sketches about anything they wish. Think of weird scenarios, unusual characters or crazy things going on in life.

Sketch tips for students

- All the best sketches start with one great idea. That's the acorn from which the comedy tree grows. Brainstorming is a good way to come up with that great initial idea. You may come up with 20 before you settle on the one you want.
- Try to identify where the laughs are likely to come in your sketch. You only have a short amount of time so try to cram in as many opportunities for laughter as you can.
- Sketches often involve strong characters who speak and behave in interesting or unusual ways. Thinking about funny characters can help when coming up with ideas for sketches.
- Thinking of interesting and unusual situations is another good way of coming up with sketch ideas. Are there particular places or times when funny things might be more likely to happen?
- A sketch should start with a good idea and build towards an unexpected ending. The ending is particularly important in a sketch because everyone loves a great punchline.
- Sketches don't just have to be about people talking. Action can help to make things more interesting and entertaining. That means using stage directions, as well as writing dialogue.
- Topical sketches can be very funny, but remember, by the time you perform your sketch it may not be quite so topical anymore. Try to find 'timeless' laughs.
- When writing your sketch, try to look at the situation from a new angle, play devil's advocate. Santa Claus may be a lovely guy, but he breaks into your house while you sleep, wanders around and eats your biscuits. Every story has another viewpoint.
- There's no need to make a sketch too complicated. Most of the best sketches keep things simple, with just a few characters and a single situation.



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TOP SKETCH TIPS:

Each sketch should have:

- A BIG IDEA
- A beginning, a middle and an end
 - Dialogue
 - Action (as stage directions)
- JOKES!

HA!
HA!



CLASS COMIC

*** CLEVER CAPTIONS ***

You might have seen comedy captions on TV, in shows like *Mock the Week* or *Have I Got News for You*? It's a great way to get a big laugh from an unexpected combination of words and pictures.

The Class Comic activities can uncover some fantastic laugh-out-loud captions to go with each of the images we've supplied on student-facing slides.

Caption tips for students

- The best comedy captions make us look at the pictures they describe in a whole new way. The obvious is not always that funny.
- Ask yourself lots of questions about the picture before you start writing. Answer all the "Who? What? Why? When? Where? How?" questions before you start.
- One good way of coming up with a funny caption is to decide what the people in the picture are really thinking. Do they have secret thoughts they wouldn't want us to know about?
- Metaphor can also be a useful tool in writing a comedy caption. Does the picture remind us of anything else? Can we use that idea to come up with a funny caption?
- A comedy caption might take the form of a headline describing what's going on in the picture or it might be a line of dialogue from one of the people in the picture.
- Comedy writers will come up with lots of alternative captions for a single picture, then spend time editing their favourite one. Can you convey your comic idea in fewer, plainer words?
- With the growth of social media, memes have become a popular way of telling jokes through the internet. If there are any memes you have seen, what made them effective and made you laugh?
- Great comedy captions tend to be short. They make a strong and funny point using as few words as possible. Try to get everything across in the space of a single sentence.



TOP TIP ON DRAFTING AND REDRAFTING

As with any piece of work, first thoughts and ideas are not always the best. Go back to your work and get others to give you feedback on what works well and what needs improving. Even the most experienced comedians will try out new material on a test audience before they go out on tour, so you should do the same.



SUPPORTING MATERIAL ONLINE
BBC.CO.UK/COMEDYCLASSROOM



TOP CAPTION TIPS:

Change our view of the picture and make us think about what's really going on

- Can be a headline or piece of dialogue
- Be short... and funny

Using SPAG for comedy writing

There are a variety of ways that your pupils can use the rules they have learned for spelling, punctuation and grammar in their comedy writing. The trick is knowing when to use those rules and then when to subvert them. Here are a few hints and ideas to get you going.

Full stops

Perfect for punchlines, the full stop gives you a definite end to your sentence and is hopefully the cue for your audience to laugh.

Exclamation marks

Was your funny story a little bit shocking for your audience? It was! Use an exclamation mark to tell them.

Question marks

Do you want to ask your audience some rhetorical questions? If you do, you'll need to remember to add some question marks for them. Won't you?

Elipsis

Does your joke have a natural punchline or do you want to leave your audience hanging so they draw their own funny conclusions? You may wish to use an ellipsis to let them know that you're leaving them to think for themselves...

Noun phrases

A noun phrase will always get you a bigger laugh when telling your funny story. Was your character wearing a suit? Or was she wearing a bright yellow sequin-encrusted banana suit? Get those adjectives in to give your audience those comedy descriptions.

Commas & semi colons

Lists are always funny, especially when we are using repetition in our work. If we remember to space them out using commas or semi colons, then we can slowly build a laugh for our audience. We can make boring lists with endless dull descriptions to send them to sleep; dark, brooding sentences which go bump in the night to scare them; or bright, funny and exciting lists to make them laugh. It's up to you!

Speech marks & colons

Beware of the speech mark. They are definitely useful when writing stories but, when we are writing scripts, we replace them with a colon to show who is speaking next. Have a look at the example script in the pack to get the hang of how to use them in your own writing.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are great for surprises. If you want your audience to expect one thing and then get another, you'll need a conjunction to link your sentence together. They might be expecting a character to walk into a room, but they get a man wearing a walrus outfit juggling oranges instead!

adjective

for and
but

Comedy Glossary

Alongside the definitions in the Comedy Toolbox, here are some really useful words that you might find helpful for assembling your own pieces of comedy writing.

Call-back

A call-back is when a comedy writer refers back to an earlier joke to get a second or even third laugh from the same joke.

Caricature

This is a character that uses a distorted or exaggerated version of a person's features or personality to create a comic effect.

Deadpan

A type of comic delivery with all the usual emotion taken out. Usually a deadpan comic will also keep their facial expressions to a minimum.

Dialogue

A scene which has at least two characters speaking to each other.

Escalation

The process of turning a small joke into a bigger and funnier story, usually with an exaggerated and over-the-top conclusion.

Farce

A fast-paced piece of set comedy that involves a lot of slapstick and usually contains people entering and exiting quickly or mistaking character identities.

Homophone

Words which may have the same pronunciation but different meanings, often used to make a pun or misdirect someone in a joke.

One-liner

A joke which is a single sentence but packs the punchline in straightaway: "Hedgehogs – why can't they just share with everyone else?"

Pace

The speed at which a scene or routine is run. Controlling the pace means controlling when the audience laughs.

Pun

A homophone that "sounds like" another to try and make a cheesy joke: 'Making this omelette is really EGG-citing!'

Punchline

The end line or final joke in a funny story or sketch. Sometimes referred to as the 'big laugh'.

Satire

A type of comedy that pokes fun at a serious issue or tries to undermine people in authority, like the government.

Simile

When a comparison is made for comic effect: "Your feet smell worse than a skunk's underpants!"

Stereotype

An instantly recognisable 'type' of person which isn't always based in reality. For example, a doctor is posh and wears a white coat; a school caretaker will be grumpy and jangle keys.

Suspension of disbelief

The idea that an audience will always believe in your story, despite it normally being unbelievable.

Wit

The idea that words can be played around with verbally to get a funnier meaning. Wit can use twisted logic, puns or double meanings to make things funny.

Comedy Toolbox

As any good comedian will tell you, there is more than one way to get a belly-aching, side-splitting laugh from your audience. In this Comedy Toolbox, we have brought together some of the many different techniques that can be used to create a fantastic piece of comedy. Just like when you are building something, you'll need to use a variety of comedy tools for different comedy jobs. All comedians use these tools – and they should come in handy when you are writing for all the categories we explore in this resource. We have coloured them to match with the learning sequences in this pack.

HA!
HA!



Repetition

This is when you use the same word or phrase over again to make what people say sound funnier.

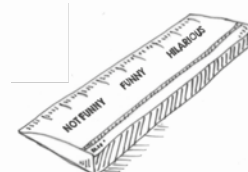
"I like beans. Runner beans, broad beans, kidney beans, baked beans, big beans, small beans, even washed-up old has-beens. I like beans."



Inversion

This is where you take a normal situation and make it the opposite of what it usually is.

"If this business deal is to go well, we have to look utterly professional – so I've brought us all skintight bumblebee costumes to wear to the interview."



Metaphor

This is when you highlight a characteristic of something by describing it as something it is not – and if you choose the right metaphor, you can get a very funny result.

"It's an hour of torture in the most brutal prison known to man. Or as I call it, double physics."



Absurdity

This is when you get a laugh by doing or saying something completely unexpected – in fact, something completely random.

"Teacher: What is the capital of France? Student: Badgers?"



Juxtaposition

This is when you combine two things that don't normally go together and the unexpectedness of the combination makes it funny.

"My name is James Bond 007, licence to kill. I used to work for MI5, but now I run my own shoe shop."



Put downs

Being cheeky can sometimes be funny, as long as we don't make the jokes too personal. Put downs are often used in dialogue when one person thinks they are more important than the other.

"Right now, you're about as much use to me as a snowman in a heatwave!"



Misdirection

This is when you lead an audience to expect one thing, and surprise them with an unexpected ending.

"I used to throw up every day on the school bus. That's when I realised I wasn't cut out to be a driver."



Slapstick

This is when you use physical humour – falling over, dropping something, bumping into someone – rather than dialogue to get a laugh.

"The headteacher is walking down the corridor. She sees a banana skin on the floor, steps round it, and carries on walking. Then she slips on a huge patch of grease and falls backwards with her legs in the air."



Sarcasm

This is when you say something that isn't true, and everyone listening knows that you don't think it's true.

"Oh joy! Oh fun! Another maths test! Hooray hoorah!"



SpooF

This is when you make your own funny version of a TV show, film or situation that already exists.

"Welcome back to the eggs factor! Where we find out if chickens really can sing!"

CLASS JOKER

*** STAND-UP ***

Teaching sequence 1 – stand-up (60 mins)

Key objective To create a short comic story that can be performed as a stand-up comedy routine.	Description In this lesson students will work in pairs to identify opportunities from their own experience that they can develop into a piece of stand-up comedy for a family audience.
Literacy outcomes *Presenting ideas in list and diagram form *Using metaphor, descriptions of physical comedy and sarcasm in writing *Presenting confidently in front of an audience	Teacher notes on delivery This lesson is very much about challenging students to observe the world around them and then transform what they know into stories that will make a family audience laugh. Students may be nervous about sharing their work at the end of the lesson, so it is important to nurture a supportive audience environment that is non-judgemental. A simple round of applause before and after the sharing of a routine can work wonders in building students' confidence. The microphone and stand at the end of the lesson is simply a useful prop to help give focus to the performance. A working sound system would be a bonus, but is not a necessity.
Resources *Clip: Josh Widdicombe – Live at the Apollo *Comedy Toolbox sheet *Microphone and stand prop (a bonus if it's working, but not compulsory) *Student-facing activity slides	Differentiation Those students who struggle to access traditional texts should enjoy being able use their own experience as a stimulus, while those who are already confident with developing narrative work have the opportunity to use a range of techniques from the Comedy Toolbox to produce a quality piece of comic writing.

STARTER (15 mins)

- On your own, make a list of locations you are likely to see on your journey home from school this evening (public buildings/shops/parks/houses/others).
- Share your list with the person sitting next to you. Are there any places that you have a shared experience of? Choose one that you think the other people in the room would also understand as part of a story.
- Now make a spider diagram of any activities or events that might happen at your chosen place, including even the most mundane of tasks. For example, if your choice is a takeaway restaurant, you might see staff cooking meals, using the till or mopping the floor, or customers queuing and ordering their food.
- Again, choose one of these activities or events to focus on in your work – which one do you think has the most comic potential? Could something go wrong that would make the activity funny?

MAIN ACTIVITY (30 mins)

As a class, watch the stimulus clip of Josh Widdicombe talking about doing a charity walk in Wellington boots filled with hot custard. **View the clip online at bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom on the Secondary page.** As you watch, try to identify where Josh has used the techniques of metaphor, sarcasm and slapstick in his routine. When the technique is finished, discuss this with the class.



Josh's story takes one aspect about something we all understand (charity fundraising events) and uses a variety of comedy tools to explain to us how funny his Wellington boot experience was.

- Take your chosen location from the starter activity. Write an exaggerated metaphor that describes your chosen location. "I was in X the other day. It was like being in..."
- Now write down a slapstick funny incident that could have happened in your location that you think might cause people to laugh. Try to describe the event in two or three sentences that are punchy and get straight to the point.
- Finish your short routine with a sarcastic comment that you think sums up how you felt about the whole situation.
- Now practise speaking your routine with your writing partner. Try to give each other tips and advice about moments where you think that the audience will laugh and where you might use your own gestures and facial expressions to make it even funnier.

PLENARY (15 mins)

- Q&A: What makes a piece of performance suitable for a family audience? Encourage students to check their work doesn't contain any bad language and isn't likely to be offensive to anyone watching. Also, talk about what makes a quality, supportive audience and creates the right atmosphere for a stand-up to feel comfortable.
- Share some of the short routines with the rest of the class using a microphone and stand at the front of the class if you would like to. After each routine, ask the class to pick out moments they think worked well in the story and moments they think could be improved. Include as many as will fit into the remainder of the lesson to give students a chance to compare and contrast the work.

HOMEWORK/EXTENSION

Develop your routine further by using other techniques in the Comedy Toolbox. Is there a way that your routine could include absurdity? Could you misdirect the audience to think one thing then tell them another? Perhaps you can lead into a second story in your routine.

Getting engaged

Could joke telling be the way to help your students progress with their speaking skills? Learning short jokes could be a stepping-stone to developing much longer recited pieces or even give a student the self-confidence to stand up in front of the whole class for the first time. Try some joke telling in your classroom and watch their confidence grow.



How you say the joke is so important. Try saying it fast, and try saying it slowly. Pause before the punchline... Timing is everything! And if your audience is laughing, wait till the laughter dies down before you tell your next joke. They need to be able to hear everything.

Sara Pascoe
Comedian



CLASS ACT

*** THE SKETCH ***



Teaching sequence 2 – sketch (60 mins)

Key objective To understand how to create a spoof version of a popular BBC TV show	Description This lesson encourages students to engage with television genres and then invert their knowledge of them to find a fresh, comic angle. By the end of the lesson they will have produced the basic mechanics of a short spoof sketch.
Literacy outcomes *Identifying genres and conventions *Understanding features of a piece of script *Presenting as a character	Teacher notes on delivery This lesson leans heavily on pupils' prior knowledge of television genres and the conventions which they use within their programmes. We have chosen current affairs (news), sports, talent shows and science fiction as examples from BBC shows but pupils may also wish to bring their knowledge of other programming of different types into your discussions. Pupils are likely to have at least one preferred type of show which they would like to focus on in their own writing, hence the variety of show types on offer to use to create a 'spoof'. The starter section focuses on collaborative learning to pool ideas and by using different coloured pens teachers should be able to easily observe if any groups may be struggling with generating ideas at an early stage in the lesson. As with the stand-up session which also focused on performance, it is important to remember that pupils may feel uncomfortable sharing their work at first and that creating a supportive environment amongst pupils is paramount in helping pupils who may be nervous about performance.
Resources * <i>That Mitchell and Webb Look Numberwang</i> sketch clip and script *Comedy Toolbox sheet *Flipchart paper and pens *Sticky tack *Student-facing activity slides	Differentiation By pooling student ideas at the start, lower ability students will be able to easily access the discussions regarding television genres. They should then be able to create a simple piece of script based on one of the four suggested genres. If teachers find it useful, they can expand or reduce the number of genres available depending on class size. It is also possible in the case of very low ability groups that teachers can lead the discussion and focus on just a single genre. Higher ability students will have access to the other areas of the Comedy Toolbox and can be encouraged to identify where other techniques could be used both in the script writing and evaluation stages.

STARTER (20 mins)

- Q&A: What we would expect to see on a TV game show of any kind? Think about things that would be the same in every one. For example, presenter, rounds, contestants, prizes, music, etc. Ask a student to note responses on the classroom board.
- Watch *That Mitchell and Webb Look Numberwang* sketch. View the clip online at bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom on the Secondary page. This is an example of a spoof quiz show. Note down anything that happens or is said in the sketch that is different from a usual show and from what we would expect to see. Using the Comedy Toolbox as a reference, discuss how the sketch used misdirection, inversion and put downs to make the audience laugh.

- Place four pieces of flipchart paper around the room labelled "Current affairs – *BBC News*", "Talent show – *Strictly Come Dancing*", "Science fiction – *Doctor Who*" and "Sport – *Match of the Day*".
- Divide the class into four groups, each with a different coloured pen, and ask them to rotate around the room, noting down on the spider diagram things they would expect to see when watching those types of programmes. Groups should have one minute at each station and change scribe each time.
- Quickly summarise the conventions the groups have noted down and stick these to the wall as a reference, using sticky tack.

MAIN ACTIVITY (30 mins)

- Look at the example script from the *Numberwang* sketch. What features can you see in the structure of a TV script which are different from other texts?
- Choose one of the four TV shows/genres that were explored on the flipchart paper in the last activity. Write a spoof script for the TV show given or a different show of your own choice. Try to use misdirection, put downs and inversion in your script to help generate plenty of comedy lines. Keep your script to a maximum of two characters for now, so that you will be able to perform it with the person sat next to you, finishing with a big punchline at the end of the scene.
- Rehearse your scene with the person sat next to you, thinking about the characters you are playing and how you might make them entertaining for your audience. Do you need to change your voice? Are there any gestures or movements that will make the sketch funnier? What facial expressions will you use?

PLENARY (10 mins)

- In your pairs, share your sketches with the class. Audience members can try to spot where misdirection, inversion and put downs have been used.
- After each performance, members of the audience can report back on parts they found funny and suggest ways that the sketch can be developed further. Are there any new jokes you could add in? What about extra characters?

HOMework/EXTENSION

Develop a sketch that you might want to perform. Use other comedy techniques from the Comedy Toolbox to develop your sketch, which can include up to four characters and focus on any subject that you please.



Joke telling on the school timetable has been an ambition of mine since getting detention in Year 9 for a Billy Connolly impression during double French. Comedy Classroom is full of great ideas to start writing comedy... So why not get your head down and start learning something worthwhile?

Patrick Kielty

Stand-up comedian and television presenter



Getting engaged

Could looking at comedy scripts be another method to enhance the reading skills of your students? Looking at speech is a great way to develop understanding of informal speaking and demonstrates to students how they could use their own speech in their writing. You could work in pairs or groups sharing some famous sketches or some comedy pieces you have all written yourself.



Example script

This is how your written script should be laid out...



Numberwang

Written by Mark Evans
and James Bachman

The idea was thought of
by Mark Evans, James
Bachman and David
Wolstencroft

MUSIC: AN UPBEAT SLIGHTLY MAD THEME
THE SET IS A BRIGHTLY LIT GAMESHOW SET
BUT WITH NUMBERS EVERYWHERE

Stage directions
are clearly marked
in a different form
for the reader to
know it is not part
of the dialogue

HOST

Hello and welcome to Numberwang, the maths quiz that simply everyone is talking about.
Our contestants tonight are Julie from Somerset and Simon from Somerset. Okay,
if you're ready, let's play Numberwang.

DRAMATIC MILLIONAIRE-STYLE MUSIC

Spoof – the
game show
sounds almost
the same as any
other on TV

JULIE
Three.

SIMON
Nine.

JULIE
Sixteen.

SIMON
Twelve.

JULIE
Err... Eight point two.

Inversion – the
game appears
to have no
real rules

SIMON
Four.

HOST

That's Numberwang! Round two, Simon to play first.

SIMON
Twenty-seven.

JULIE
Thirty.

SIMON
Nineteen.

JULIE
Eighty-four.

HOST

That's Numberwang! Let's go to the Maths Board. Julie.
THERE IS A BOARD. IT HAS LOTS OF NUMBERS ON IT

JULIE

I'll take the four... the six... and the three point four.

HOST

That's Numberwang! We love those decimals, Julie. Simon?

SIMON

I'd like the root fourteen... and the twelve.

HOST

That's Numberwang! Round three. Julie to play first.

A DIFFERENT BOARD APPEARS. IT IS STILL JUST FULL OF NUMBERS. EVERY TIME A
CONTESTANT SAYS A NUMBER, AN UNCONNECTED ONE LIGHTS UP ON THE BOARD

JULIE

Eight minus four.

HOST

That's Numberwang! Simon?

SIMON

A hundred and nine times seventeen.

HOST

That's Numberwang. Julie.

JULIE

Forty-seven...



HOOTER

HOST

That's the Numberwang bonus! Triple Numberwang to Julie. So, Julie you're ahead on seventy-seven and
Simon, you're trailing on eighty-three. Everything hinges on this final round. It's time for Wanger-numb.
Let's rotate the board.

THE BOARD ROTATES BLANKETY-BLANK STYLE REMOVING JULIE AND
SIMON AND REVEALING TWO MORE CONTESTANTS.

HOST

Let's play Wanger-numb. Clive to go first.

CLIVE

Forty-three.

HOST

Ian?

IAN

Nineteen.

CLIVE

Two... hundred.

IAN

Three.

CLIVE

One.

IAN

One.

CLIVE

One.

IAN

One.

CLIVE

One...

HOST

Oooh...

IAN

One...

HOST

Ah...

CLIVE

One?

HOST

Eeee...

IAN

Er... one?

HOST

That's Wanger-numb!!!

CRAZY MUSIC, FLASHING LIGHTS, GLITTER EVERYWHERE. TWO SPARKLY DRESSED
MODELS COME OUT AND DRAPE A ROBE COVERED IN NUMBERS ON IAN. THEY PUT
A BAG OVER CLIVE'S HEAD. IT HAS THE WORD 'NO' WRITTEN ON IT
THE HOST HANDS IAN A MASSIVE CHEQUE. IT HAS 'CHILDREN IN NEED' CROSSED OUT
AND 'NUMBERWANG' WRITTEN IN. IT IS FOR THE SUM OF £12.67

HOST

Bad luck Clive – you've been Wanger-numbed. But Ian – you are today's Numberwang. That's all from
Numberwang, but until tomorrow's edition stay Numberwang. Goodnight!

CREDITS ROLL AT SIXTEEN TIMES THE NORMAL SPEED. THEY ARE
MOSTLY THE WORD NUMBERWANG

[POSSIBLY A TITLE BOARD AT THE END WITH TWO DANCING NUMBERS
AND THE WORDS "A NUMBERWANG PRODUCTION" WITH A VOICEOVER OF A VERY OLD
AMERICAN MAN SAYING "THAT'S NUMBERWANG"]

BB

This sketch was very much based on **Countdown**
– there's a numbers board and a Maths-undrum.
The main idea we had was that the phrase "That's
Numberwang!" repeated over and over and
seemingly randomly would be funny, which it turned
out it was. There appear to be rules that it's assumed
everyone knows. The sketch 'world' should have
assumed rules that mean what happens is kind of
normal. So there appear to be rules in **Numberwang**
even though there are of course none!

James Bachman

Co-writer, **Numberwang** sketch





Teaching sequence 3 - captions

Key objective To understand how to create short, effective comedy captions	Description This lesson requires students to engage with a series of images that will help them to develop the skills needed to write comedy captions.
Literacy outcomes *Understanding how juxtaposition and absurdity can create humour for a reader *Be able to use speculative questioning with a partner *Understanding how to edit work	Teacher notes on delivery This lesson concentrates on creating short, punchy writing which is designed to quickly engage a reader. Ideally the pace of the lesson should reflect this, in order that pupils do not 'overthink' their responses when answering the questions. The session contains a number of verbal question and answer tasks led by both the teachers and also pupil to pupil, so you may wish to consider appropriate pairings if you know this may cause issue with less confident students.
Resources *Starter pictures and descriptions *Countdown timer *Comedy Toolbox sheet *Handouts of pictures with space for captions *Student-facing activity slides	Differentiation As stated above, this session contains a large number of short tasks as the intended product is a single sentence. This leaves teachers free to amend the time spent on each task as they see fit. Lower ability students may spend more time enjoying the initial activity of muddling up definitions, and only focus on creating a caption for a single image in the main body of the lesson. Students who are more confident with the task will be able to develop a greater number of story examples for the pictures and gain greater experience of editing their paragraphs down to a single caption.

STARTER (10 mins)

- On the student-facing slides, look at the five images of everyday items and their descriptions (saxophone, elephant, toilet brush, bobble hat, banana). Discuss whether any of them are inherently funny. (Expect a frank conversation about bananas and their comic value.)
- In your writing pairs, rearrange the definitions of the pictures to see which combinations you find the funniest. For example, an elephant... something you put on your head to keep yourself warm. Write down your three best findings.
- Report back. Discuss why juxtaposition and absurdity can make what is usually an ordinary statement funny for an audience.

MAIN ACTIVITY (30 mins)

- Look at Picture A. Try to forget any information that you may already know about the characters or the sort of people they are. Pretend this is just an ordinary scene with ordinary people.
- Write down the five Ws and the H of questioning. (Who? What? Why? When? Where? How?)
- Write down six speculative questions to ask your partner, one for each of the question types. For example, who are the people in the background? What is the object that the woman is holding? Why is the grey-haired man looking worried? When will they realise there is someone behind them? Where in the world are they? How did those bars get on their heads?

bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom

Give the class one minute to ask their six questions to their partner, noting down their answers. Be strict with time so that they give short answers and do not think for too long about their response. Remember that we are aiming for comedy so the more absurd, the better. After a minute, swap over with your partner and ask the questions from the other member of the pair.

Repeat the task for picture B. Students now have some new information about the pictures which although in reality may not always be true, can help them to develop a new angle for creating their comedy captions.

- Choose one of the two pictures. Using the absurd answers you were given by your partner, write a short paragraph explaining who the characters are, what is happening, when it takes place, etc.
- Share some of the more absurd stories with the rest of the class. Identify between you which parts of the new descriptions are funniest.
- Now try to sum up your story in one sentence. It might be a sentence describing something happening in the picture from outside or you might choose to sum up what is going on as one of the characters in the picture. Either way, remember to make it short and to the point.
- Write down your finished caption underneath your picture.

PLENARY (15 mins)

- Using sticky tack, create a gallery around the edge of the room of all the pictures and captions in the class. Students should look at each one and pick their favourites.
- Nominate two students' choices and one teacher's choice as good examples.
- What was it that people enjoyed about these captions? Do they have anything in common in the way they are written?

HOMework/EXTENSION

Try looking through some magazines and newspapers and find some pictures that catch your eye. Does it make it harder or easier to make a caption for a picture if you already know who the characters in the picture are? Try bringing in other techniques from the Comedy Toolbox that may draw out the humour in the pictures.



There is nothing like making people laugh, so just enjoy the process and don't put too much pressure on yourself. At the end of the day it's meant to be fun.

John Bishop 
Comedian



Getting engaged

Could this be the stepping-stone to develop writing for fun in your class? Now your students have begun coming up with wild and wacky stories about the pictures they have been looking at, could they develop this into a longer piece of writing? We know that many students are already writing for fun outside the classroom. Could you work this style into future lessons?



Worksheet – captions

Can you create some clever captions for the characters in the photos, or even come up with a catchy headline?



BBC's Doctor Who



BBC's Planet Earth II



BBC's EastEnders



Take it further

How can you use comedy writing across your school?

You've written some excellent pieces of comedy, so what now? Well, the fun doesn't have to stop here. Take your work further and celebrate by doing something awesome around your school.

- Could your students use their Comedy Classroom work as part of a wider arts programme or award? You might choose to use this as evidence for another qualification they are working on or as a contribution to an arts festival. You could find their work being performed on a professional stage. Have a think about the opportunities outside the classroom which comedy writing might help your students discover.
- Create a classroom display of your comedy captions. Try to find some pictures in magazines and newspapers and give them a comedy twist. Fill your walls with fun!
- Perform a special assembly or run a lunchtime comedy club showing off some of your best sketches and stand-up routines. You could even create a whole show filled with hilarious skits and scenes to share after school with staff or parents. This is a great way to bring everyone together to celebrate comedy.
- It doesn't only have to be the English department that joins in the fun. Think cross-curricular. Is there a way that other subjects could use comedy to develop students' learning? What about writing some historical sketches, or performing some stand-up about science experiments that went wrong? Perhaps business studies could run your comedy club for you – the school really is your oyster! Bring your departments together for one huge festival of comedy.
- For any questions regarding these resources or for more information, you can contact schools@literacytrust.org.uk

Enjoy creating your new comedy pieces and remember...

have a write laugh!



I judge quite a lot of children's writing; various different competitions. I do a lot of work in schools, so I've seen a lot of kid's writing, so I knew that the standard would be pretty high; because we're all told that kids are stupid and they don't know how to speak English and that education is failing them, but actually, when you let them write what they want to write they come up with some amazing stuff. I was not disappointed; we had some fantastic entries.



Charlie Higson
Comedy Classroom judge 2016
comedy writer and author



The standard of writing in the 2016 secondary school competition was extremely impressive, scarily so. When I think back... my sense of humour at that age probably was not developed, if it has even now. It was really impressive considering their age and some of them were very sophisticated with a wide range of references, and they were very funny.



Katy Wix
Comedy Classroom judge 2016
Comedy writer, actor and star
of BBC One sitcom Not Going Out



Alongside the clips used in the accompanying lesson plans, there are a host of clips in the BBC comedy archive to help your students understand the mechanics of both stand-up and sketch comedy. There are also examples of how captions can be used to turn an ordinary picture into a comedy gem. The following clips can be found at bbc.co.uk/comedyclassroom under the Secondary tab.

★★★ STAND-UP ★★★

CHARACTERISATION AND PERFORMANCE

Noel Fielding
Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow, BBC One
Open Mike Productions
Written & Performed by Noel Fielding

SATIRE OF MODERN CELEBRITIES

Katherine Ryan
Live At The Apollo, BBC Two
Open Mike Productions
Written & Performed by Katherine Ryan

OBSERVATIONAL COMEDY

Rhod Gilbert
The Royal Variety Performance 2008, BBC One
BBC Productions
Written & Performed by Rhod Gilbert



★★★ THE SKETCH ★★★

REPETITION AND SPOOF

That Mitchell and Webb Look, BBC Two
BBC Productions
Performed by David Mitchell
Written by David Mitchell and Robert Webb

INVERTING EXPECTATIONS

Goodness Gracious Me, BBC Two
BBC Productions
Written by Richard Pinto and Sharat Sardana
Performed by Sanjeev Bhaskar and Kulvinder Ghir

SPOOF & CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

The Javone Prince Show, BBC Two
BBC Productions
Writing team includes Phil Bowker, Javone Prince, Jon MacQueen, Akemnji Ndifornyan, Samson Kayo and Brian Birigwa.
Performed by Javone Prince, Samson Kayo, Ann Akin and Akemnji Ndifornyen

★★★ CLEVER CAPTIONS ★★★

CAPTION

Have I Got News for You, BBC One
Hat Trick Productions
Writing team includes Kevin Day, Dan Gaster, Ged Parsons, Shaun Pye, Colin Swash and Natt Tapley
Performed by Charlie Brooker and Paul Merton

Due to copyright restrictions, some of the archive clips referred to in this resource may not be available to view on the Comedy Classroom website indefinitely.



“

Did you know I slept with Mr. Bean aka Rowan Atkinson? It's true. Growing up almost every night I would listen to his comedy while in bed. You have to live and breathe this stuff, let it enter your pores. My top tip for writing and performing comedy is find your favourites and listen, watch, listen, watch, listen and watch and listen again!

”

Adil Ray

Comedy writer, performer and star of BBC One sitcom *Citizen Khan*



**Great comedy writing
starts in the classroom**

BBC
COMEDY
CLASSROOM
HAVING A WRITE LAUGH



BBC Learning



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