

# Film and TV

## TV / Comedy series

### Teacher's notes



**Age:** Teenager/Young adults

**Level:** Advanced (C1)

**Time:** 90+ mins with 30 mins optional webquest

**Activity:** In this lesson, students will:

1. practise speaking about comedy and sense of humour and incorporate useful new vocabulary relevant to this topic;
2. improve listening comprehension of real-life English from TV comedy programmes;
3. utilise new language from this lesson in order to complete a webquest and present it orally.

**Language focus:** speaking, listening, vocabulary, reading

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student, a PC or projector, an internet connection in the classroom (the optional webquest activity will require the use of smartphones or multiple computers)

### 1. Speak (5 minutes)

**Aims:** to generate interest in the topic of comedy, to make students think about words with multiple meanings, to provide spoken practice of joke-telling

**Procedure:** Ask students to read the two jokes. Then decide in small groups whether they understand the jokes. Remind them that jokes are difficult to understand when they are not in your native language. Elicit the double meanings and the ideas of the jokes. Ask students to share other jokes in English. Remind them not to tell offensive jokes! There is a good chance that they won't know any jokes in English so be prepared to share one or two of your own.

**Key:**

*Joke 1: If something is 'a big plus', it means that it is a big advantage (e.g. 'My new job isn't very interesting but the high salary is a big plus'). Also, the white cross on the Swiss flag looks like a big plus (where 'plus' refers to the mathematical symbol '+').*

*Joke 2: The word 'cool' can mean 'fashionable' and also 'at a low temperature'. The stereotype of a hipster is that they say things like 'I was using Snapchat before it was cool' (to express the idea that they discover trends before the general population).*

### 2. Vocabulary, pronunciation and speak (20 minutes)

**Aims:** to expand students' vocabulary for describing different types of humour, to focus on the pronunciation of new words, to incorporate this vocabulary when speaking about comedy, to personalise the topic of comedy

**Procedure:** You could introduce this activity by showing the poster for a famous comedy movie on the board (e.g. *Zoolander*, *Airplane*, *Anchorman*, etc). Alternatively, you could simply write the name of a movie. Get the students to suggest adjectives to describe the type of humour in this movie (e.g. silly, clever, etc). Ask students to work in pairs to complete 2a. Then elicit the correct answers. Also try to elicit slight differences in meaning between some synonyms. For example, 'satirical' is often related to politics, 'twisted' often gives the idea of dark humour, 'witty' gives the idea of clever humour which is also very fast.

#### Notes:

1. WARNING: This lesson refers to two online videos taken from comedy TV series. While these videos don't contain explicit material, you should watch the videos before the lesson to judge whether they are appropriate for the particular group of students.
2. This lesson contains exercises which focus on listening, speaking, reading and vocabulary. If you wish to maximise class time for listening and speaking, you could ask students to complete the reading and vocabulary exercises as preparatory homework before the lesson. It would then only be necessary to quickly correct these parts in class. The exercises which could be done as preparatory homework are marked with a symbol.

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**Key:**

<i>ironic</i>	<i>ridiculous</i>	<i>strange</i>	<i>intelligent</i>
<i>sarcastic</i>	<i>ludicrous</i>	<i>weird</i>	<i>smart</i>
<i>satirical</i>	<i>farfical</i>	<i>bizarre</i>	<i>witty</i>
<i>twisted</i>	<i>preposterous</i>	<i>out-there</i>	<i>sharp</i>

Pronounce all the adjectives in the table, placing the emphasis on the correct syllable. Once you've finished, elicit the strong syllable in each multi-syllabic word. Then allow the students to practise saying the adjectives in pairs. Monitor and give feedback on any incorrect pronunciation. Ask students to briefly discuss the questions in 2c in pairs. Remind them to use vocabulary from the previous tasks. Monitor their responses. If there are students who are not interested in comedy, encourage them to explain why. At the end of the activity give some feedback, drawing attention to pronunciation and good language which students used.

### 3. Listen and speak (15 minutes)

**Aims:** to provide listening practice of understanding a TV show, to provide spoken practice of language related to comedy and cartoons

**Procedure:** Play the video. Ask students in pairs to briefly compare answers to the four questions. Play it again and let students decide their final answers in pairs. Elicit the answers. Ask students to briefly discuss the final questions in pairs. Give feedback. Focus on ideas which students have mentioned which could be relevant to the next task (ironic, self-deprecating humour).

**Key:**

- a. *The assistant describes the boss as funny and attractive (and there's a rumour that he's also rich).*
- b. *The little man first says that everything will be great but then panics when he realises that he is in front of a big audience.*
- c. *The assistant asks if he should release the hounds (this expression gives the idea of police dogs who aggressively chase and catch the criminal).*
- d. *They feel entertained by the aggressive dogs and conclude that this year's seminar is rather good.*

### 4. Read, vocabulary and speak (30 minutes)

**Aims:** to practise understanding of a short text, to expand vocabulary and expressions related to comedy and sense of humour, to understand and tell funny stories

**Procedure:** Tell students that they are going to read a short text about British humour. Allow them about five minutes to read the text individually. Remind them not to worry about expressions which they don't fully understand. Monitor and explain problem words to weaker students. Then ask them to talk in pairs to decide the answers to the initial three questions. Elicit the answers to the three questions.

**Key:**

- *Self-deprecating comedy is when you make jokes in which you are the target of the joke. This means that you make yourself look bad so that other people can laugh.*
- *Honesty is funny because facts are usually much funnier than fiction.*
- *A good joke can be funny and make people laugh a little but a good story can be hilarious and make people laugh a lot.*

Give students about five minutes to complete 4b in the same pairs. Remind them to refer to the text from the previous task as it provides the context for each expression. Elicit the correct answers. Encourage students to think about whether each expression has an equivalent in the students' native languages.

**Key:**

Vocabulary from the text	Definition
1. <i>a loser</i>	(G) <i>a person without success</i>
2. <i>to do stand-up</i>	(D) <i>to perform comedy monologues in front of an audience</i>
3. <i>to giggle</i>	(A) <i>to laugh a little</i>
4. <i>to crack up</i>	(E) <i>to laugh a lot</i>
5. <i>a punchline</i>	(B) <i>the funny sentence at the end of a joke</i>
6. <i>a one-liner</i>	(I) <i>a very short joke or a brief, funny comment</i>
7. <i>to have dry humour</i>	(H) <i>to be very funny but without showing emotion, often in a sarcastic way</i>
8. <i>to have (somebody) in stitches</i>	(F) <i>to make another person laugh a lot</i>
9. <i>to bomb</i>	(C) <i>to tell a joke which nobody finds funny</i>



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Allow students to read the instructions for 4c. Perhaps you could tell them a funny story from your own life to inspire them to do the same. Give them 2–3 minutes to think of a story and how to incorporate information from the text in 4a (e.g. what was the conflict of the story?). Give each student a few minutes to tell their story to their partner. Monitor and help students with vocabulary where necessary. Finally, provide some overall feedback. If you have noticed any particularly funny stories, ask these students if they would like to share their story with the whole class (if appropriate).

#### 5. Listen and speak (15 minutes)

**Aims:** to provide further listening practice of understanding a TV show, to provide spoken practice of reacting to a comedy scene and incorporate expressions from previous tasks

**Procedure:** Play the video. Ask students in pairs to briefly compare answers to the four questions. Play it again and let students decide their final answers in pairs. Elicit the answers. Ask students to briefly discuss the final questions in pairs. Give feedback, focusing especially on language to describe types of humour and on varying opinions of what students find funny.

**Key:**

- a. *The first instruction is to stand the extinguisher upright (this means that the extinguisher must be vertical, not horizontal). The man thinks that the instruction refers to him so he stands upright.*
- b. *The extinguisher is now on fire so he thinks it would be a good idea to put the two fires together.*
- c. *He phones the wrong country. He needs the emergency number for the UK. We imagine that maybe he has phoned his company's technical helpdesk which is located in a different country.*
- d. *He decides that the initial email was too formal so he writes a second email. The second email still sounds very formal but he uses many exclamation marks to give a sense of urgency.*

#### 6. Speak (10 minutes)

**Aims:** to allow students the chance to personalise the topic of the lesson by talking about shows that they find funny, to incorporate language from previous tasks into a speaking activity

**Procedure:** Students work in pairs. Allow them to read the instructions of Task 6. If certain students simply don't know about any sitcoms, encourage them instead to think of a comedy movie. Allow students a few minutes each to describe their chosen sitcom to their partner. Monitor and provide feedback.

#### 7. Webquest (optional, 30 minutes)

**Aims:** to research information online, to prepare and give a group presentation, to provide further spoken practice of expressions related to laughing and comedy

**Procedure:** Split the class into groups (ideally six groups in total). Assign one viral video from the table to each group. Before students begin to look for their assigned video online, ask them to discuss whether they are familiar with it (there's a high chance that they will have seen it before). Allow each group a few minutes to complete Step 2. Monitor to make sure that each group has found the correct video for their group. While various versions of each video exist, the original links are the following:

JK Wedding Entrance Dance

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLEiN0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLEiN0)

Professor Robert Kelly's BBC interview

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh4f9AYRCZY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh4f9AYRCZY)

Ultimate Dog Tease

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGeKSICqkPw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGeKSICqkPw)

Oilly the Jack Russell at Cruft's Dog Show

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4N7G29GWQI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4N7G29GWQI)

Charlie Bit My Finger

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_OBIGsz8sSM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OBIGsz8sSM)

Matt McAllister's Most T-shirts Worn at Once

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6tlw-oPDBM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6tlw-oPDBM)

Allow each group another few minutes to complete Step 3. Explain to them that they will need to present the information to the class so they will need to compile it in a way which is easy to understand. Encourage each group to present their video and information to the class by dividing the content of the presentation between the members of the group (e.g. one student gives an introduction, another talks about why the video became famous, etc). At the end of each presentation, encourage the class to ask questions to the presenting group. Provide feedback on the presentations and have a vote for the funniest video.



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### Worksheet

#### 1. Speak

Look at the jokes in the box. Each joke has an underlined part which has a double meaning. With your partner, try to decide the double meaning.

<p><b>Joke 1</b></p> 	<p><b>Joke 2</b></p> 
<p><b>Question:</b> What's the best thing about Switzerland?  <b>Answer:</b> I don't know, but their flag is <u>a big plus</u>.</p>	<p><b>Question:</b> How did the hipster burn his mouth?  <b>Answer:</b> He drank his coffee before it was <u>cool</u>.</p>

Do you know any jokes in English? Tell the class!

#### 2a. Vocabulary

TV comedy series have many different types of humour. The table below suggests three synonyms for each of the four title adjectives. Complete the table using the words given.

ludicrous / weird / smart / sharp / preposterous / sarcastic

ironic	ridiculous	strange	intelligent
_____	_____	_____	_____
satirical	farcical	bizarre	witty
twisted	_____	out-there	_____

#### 2b. Pronunciation

Now listen to your teacher's pronunciation of the words. Underline the strong syllable. Compare with your classmate and practise saying the words.

#### 2c. Speak

Discuss the items below with your classmate.

Describe a famous comedian from your country and his/her type of humour.

Describe a comedy TV programme from your country. What is your opinion of it?

Describe a person you know who you find funny (from your friends, family, workmates, etc).



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## Worksheet

### 3. Listen and speak

You are going to watch a scene from the American series *The Simpsons* (Fox). It shows the awful moment when you need to make a speech but the previous speaker has already used the joke that you prepared. Watch the video and answer the questions below.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM1g53KOAaY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM1g53KOAaY)

- How is the boss described by his assistant?
- What contradictory message is given by the little imaginary character?
- When the speech goes wrong, what question is asked by the boss's assistant?
- What conclusion is made by the audience members?

Discuss with your classmate:

Are you a fan of *The Simpsons*? If so, describe another funny moment from the series.

Describe the basic stories of other famous TV cartoons (e.g. *South Park*, *Tom & Jerry*, *Family Guy*, *Bugs Bunny*, *Road Runner*, *Daffy Duck*, *Futurama*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *Shin Chan*, *The Flintstones*, etc).

Modern-day cartoons are much less violent than old cartoons. Do you think this has made cartoons less funny?

### 4a. Read

The text below describes some comedy tips. Read the text and then talk to your partner to answer the three questions below.

What is self-deprecating comedy?

Why is honesty funny?

What is the difference between a good joke and a good story?

#### The Art of Self-Deprecation

Let's face it, success isn't very funny. In the UK, often the most effective way of making people laugh is to tell a story that makes you look like a bit of a **loser**. So if you're looking to begin your career as a **stand-up** comedian, follow these tips of how to self-deprecate with style:

1. Choose your story. Fact is usually much funnier than fiction so honesty is probably the best policy. Forget your ego and think about an embarrassing moment from when you were a child or a teenager. Or even think of something that



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has happened to you in the last few days: an email you sent, a conversation with a workmate. Remember to judge your audience correctly. Will they find it funny if you refer to alcohol or nudity? If not, you'll need a rethink.

2. Set the scene. Where were you? Who were you with? Comedy almost always includes conflict between the scene and the comedy action. Maybe you were in a formal context where your later actions would be inappropriate. Maybe you were with people who you didn't know very well. Maybe you needed to keep a secret.

3. Describe what happened. A rule of comedy is that a good joke can make people **giggle** while a good story can really make people **crack up**. Don't get distracted with **punchlines** and telling funny **one-liners**, simply tell the story. It's also useful to remember that comedians usually don't laugh at their own stories. In fact, the **dry humour** of a serious narration is even more likely to have your audience in **stitches**.

4. Include your audience. For example, if you describe an angry boss, ask your audience: 'Do you know anyone like that?' Get the audience to help you by suggesting words: 'He was such a terrible boss, you know? Like really ...' (*Audience member*): 'Nasty!' Try to make the audience feel like you're all telling the story together. Oh, and don't panic if your story **bombs**. Not everybody will appreciate your comic genius!

### 4b. Vocabulary

Now match the words or expressions from the article to their definitions.

Vocabulary from the text	Definition
1. a loser	(A) to laugh a little
2. to do stand-up	(B) the funny sentence at the end of a joke
3. to giggle	(C) to tell a joke which nobody finds funny
4. to crack up	(D) to perform comedy monologues in front of an audience
5. a punchline	(E) to laugh a lot
6. a one-liner	(F) to make another person laugh a lot
7. to have dry humour	(G) a person without success
8. to have (sby) in stitches	(H) to be very funny but without showing emotion, often in a sarcastic way
9. to bomb	(I) a very short joke or a brief, funny comment

### 4c. Speak

Talk in pairs. Follow the instructions in the text to help you describe a funny story that happened to you.



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#### 5. Listen and speak

You are going to watch a scene from the British series *The IT Crowd* (Channel 4). The series tells the story of two IT technicians who love technology but have very bad social skills. Watch the video and answer the questions below.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EBfxjSFAxQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EBfxjSFAxQ)

\* vocabulary note: an extinguisher is a metal cylinder which contains a substance for stopping fires

- Why is the man confused when he reads the first instruction on the extinguisher?
- Why does he put the extinguisher in a different part of the room?
- What is the problem when he makes a phone call?
- Why does he rewrite his initial email?

Discuss with your classmate:

How would you describe the type of humour in this clip? Explain.

Do you personally like this type of humour? Explain.

#### 6. Speak

A 'sitcom' is a situation-comedy TV series. Each episode usually lasts for about half an hour. Work in pairs. Each student needs to think of a sitcom (you could choose one from the box below if you wish). Then talk for a few minutes about the following three points:

- Describe the main characters
- Describe the setting
- Describe the basic story of one episode that you remember

#### Popular sitcoms

*Seinfeld / Cheers / Friends / Big Bang Theory / New Girl / That 70s Show / The Office / How I Met Your Mother / The Fresh Prince of Bel Air / Modern Family / Malcolm in the Middle / Mr. Bean / Absolutely Fabulous / Fawlty Towers / Yes Minister*

#### 7. Webquest (optional)

You are going to research funny online videos.

**Step 1:** Work in groups. Each group is going to research a different online video which went viral because many people found it funny. Your teacher will tell you which video corresponds to your group.



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#### Videos:

- JK Wedding Entrance Dance
- Professor Robert Kelly's BBC interview
- Ultimate Dog Tease
- Olly the Jack Russell at Cruft's Dog Show
- Charlie Bit My Finger
- Matt McAllister's Most T-shirts Worn at Once

**Step 2:** Use a computer or smartphone. First find the viral video on YouTube. Many of the videos have different versions so it's useful to look for the video with the highest view count (as this is probably the original). Watch the video. Discuss with your group whether you found it funny.

**Step 3:** Search for more information about the video (e.g. using Wikipedia or news websites). Try to answer some of the questions below. Make some notes.

- Who is the person/animal in the video?
- How did the video become so famous?
- Why do you think it became so popular?
- What were the consequences of the video's popularity?

**Step 4:** In your groups, present the viral video to the class. Give a brief introduction, show the video on the board/projector, explain further information about the video, answer any questions which your classmates may have.

**Step 5:** Have a class vote to decide the funniest video.