

Knock-Knock! Who's There?

The world's funniest joke has been revealed by a scientific study in which 30,000 jokes were told to almost 2 million people. In the yearlong study, Internet users were asked to submit their favourite jokes and then **rate** five others from a database of previous entries. All the jokes were in English.

- 5 The winning joke scored an approval rating of 65%. It scored so well because it **appealed** to both sexes, to all ages and to a range of different nationalities. Many of the jokes received higher ratings from certain groups of people, but the winning joke had the most universal appeal.

- The study also revealed **distinct** national differences. People from Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand preferred **puns** and wordplay. Most other European countries, particularly the northern European ones, liked **surrealism**, and Americans and Canadians tended to go for jokes which are told at someone's expense and those which **make light of** death and marriage. Germans, according to the research, are more likely than any other nationality to find a joke funny. In the study, German participants rated more jokes as 'very funny' than any other nationality. Further research is needed, however, to determine whether this means that the Germans do actually have a better sense of humour than the rest of us. The least favourable response to the jokes was
- 10 from the Japanese. This is primarily because Japan doesn't have a culture of telling jokes in the way we do and their humour is much more visual.
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Many of the jokes were about animals and the study revealed that the duck is by far the funniest animal.

Activity 1

What do the highlighted words and phrase in the text mean? Match them to the definitions below. Check your answers in the Macmillan Online Dictionary.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. to treat something as not serious. | _____ |
| b. separate and different in a way that is clear. | _____ |
| c. if something appeals to you, you like it or want it. | _____ |
| d. humorous use of words that have two meanings, or of words with the same sound but different meanings. | _____ |
| e. to consider that something has a particular quality or has achieved a particular standard or level. | _____ |

Activity 2

The verb **go** can become a phrasal verb. Check the Macmillan Online Dictionary to complete the sentences correctly. Then write a new example sentence for each phrasal verb.

along down for off over through together

a. Do my shirt and tie *go* _____?

b. The alarm *went* _____ at just after 6.30 this morning.

c. I'll *go* _____ *with* whatever you want to do. I don't mind what we do tonight.

d. Your suggestion *went* _____ very badly at the meeting, I'm afraid.

e. I think we need to *go* _____ these figures again. Something's not quite right.

f. He's threatened to resign, but I don't think he'll *go* _____ *with* it.

g. Do you think I should take the new job? Yeah, *go* _____ it!

Activity 3

These words all have a similar meaning to *humorous* or *funny*. What do they mean? Check your answers in the Macmillan Online Dictionary.

a. amusing

b. comical

c. hilarious

d. light-hearted

Activity 4

The words in the box are frequently used with *humour*. Complete the definitions below with the correct word. Check your answers in the Macmillan Online Dictionary.

Black

Dry

Sardonic

Slapstick

Tongue-in-cheek

- _____ humour is based on physical actions, such as people hitting each other or falling over.
- _____ humour is concerned with sad or unpleasant things, such as death.
- _____ humour shows a lack of respect for what someone else has said or done.
- _____ humour is saying funny things in a serious way.
- _____ humour is intended to be humorous and not meant seriously.

For discussion

Ask and answer the questions with a partner.

- Think of some films, TV programmes, books or people you know which can be described using the words or phrases in Activities 3 and 4. Tell your partner about them.
- What kind of humour do you like? Who are your favourite comedians and comedy actors? What are your favourite comedy films or TV programmes?
- Do you know any jokes in English? Tell them each other.