

BRINGING COMEDY INTO THE CLASSROOM



DIGITAL EDUCATION RESOURCE

**MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL
COMEDY FESTIVAL'S
CLASS CLOWNS PROGRAM**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's Education and Teaching Resource for young people.

There has never been a more critical time to encourage our young people to think and write creatively; to amplify and uplift their voices, and to have a good laugh while doing so.

The prompts, examples and exercises in this resource are designed to compliment existing classwork and curriculum, and to enrich the experience of both teachers and students alike.

Comedy is an essential and enjoyable vehicle for communication, analysis, reflection, social commentary and provocation. While this resource primarily features exercises and lessons for incorporation into live performance, sound understanding of comedic principles can help you find your voice in a range of contexts both in and outside of the classroom.

Comedy can be found (or used) almost anywhere; in writing, journalism, visual arts, politics, courtrooms and across social media to name a few. Beyond these tangible career pathways, learning to nurture your comedic voice and ability to communicate with confidence can have ripple-on effects into your every day life, your ability to find and connect with people, to get on well with fellow students and future colleagues. It can improve your mental wellbeing and feeling of belonging. And just as important, it can ensure that you're seeing the lighter side of things in a world that can sometimes feel hard to navigate.

Melbourne International Comedy Festival would like to extend our deep thanks to Dr Meg Upton and Kamarra Bell-Wykes for their insight and knowledge that has helped to update and frame this resource.

Enjoy.

Roan Johnson
Education & Family Programs
Melbourne International Comedy Festival

"How grateful we are to have had our students share in this fantastic and unique opportunity! Each of them loved the experience of workshopping and performing in front of industry professionals, stepping out of their comfort zone and above all else, making people laugh."

Erin Hull, Teacher, Palm Beach Currumbin State High School, Queensland

"Any program that enhances young people's perspectives and experiences we are happy to partner with, the comedy workshops introduced another dimension and aspect of performing Arts."

David Law, Indigenous Academy Manager Community Development at Anglicare

"Class Clowns is about brand-new talent and ideas, building confidence in young people and watching them experience the pure joy of being on stage"

Anne Edmonds, Comedian, Writer, Podcaster

"We love Class Clowns. So much. We get to hang with the next generation of Aussie comics and help them take their talent to the next level."

Aunty Donna, Sketch Comedy Group



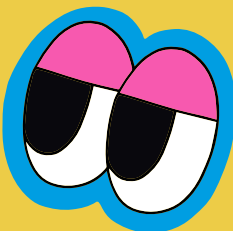
WHAT IS IN THIS RESOURCE

This resource is for both teachers and students. In it you'll find:

- Definitions of comedy, humour, funny and laughter – feel free to agree or disagree with them.
- How humour and being funny makes you feel good and builds self-esteem.
- How the Class Clowns program relates to the Australian curriculum for Years 9-10 and senior Drama syllabi in Australian states and territories – this section probably best for teachers.
- A brief history of comedy with links to some examples – see if you can find more.
- An overview of contemporary and diverse comedy styles and practices with links to examples.
- Introductory activities for getting into comedy and exploring a range of comic forms.
- Post-workshop activities to build on students' ideas, encourage them to write, rehearse and refine their comedy routines.
- Links to visual resources and recent articles that are all about comedy.

Teacher talk – Let's talk curriculum links. At the end of this resource is a comprehensive table that draws links to the Australian Curriculum between the resource activities and learning. Believe it or not learning about comedy and learning what makes people laugh can be considered as academic learning. If you are a teacher reading this, feel free to select and apply the links as appropriate.

NOTE: If you find links are broken or don't open, don't call us, we'll call you. No, seriously, please let us know.



WHAT IS CLASS CLOWNS

Class Clowns is Melbourne International Comedy Festival's national development program for teens. Comprising a competition, workshop and mentoring program, Class Clowns plays a valuable role in supporting the confidence and creativity of young Australians – providing a channel for self-expression, a platform for amplifying the voices and perspectives of young people and a pathway for emerging Australian talent.

The Class Clowns National Secondary School Competition is Melbourne International Comedy Festival's annual search to uncover Australia's funniest teens! Events are held across the country in Term 1 of each school year and participation is free. Students attend a 2-hour workshop with a professional comedian to rehearse and refine their act, and then get an opportunity to perform in front of a live audience. Special guest judges select the funniest from each state and territory events, with finalists invited to participate in the Class Clowns National Grand Final, held as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

The Crash Course program sits under the Class Clowns banner, however it is not part of the competition. Crash course workshops are one-off, tailored workshops for secondary school students around Australia. The workshop is presented by a professional comedian and can be brought to your school or delivered entirely online via Zoom, at any time of the school year.

Class Clowns competition & Crash Course workshops aim to:

- Help young people develop their comic writing and performance skills
- Provide recognition and exposure for budding comedy talent
- Enable young people to work with, and learn from professional comedians
- Build appreciative comedy audiences for now and in the future
- Promote mental health and agency

The Class Clowns program enables young people to set goals, build self-esteem, practice positive self-talk, relax and “exercise” their mind and sense of humour.



Laughter brings us together. Did you know when you laugh you improve your health, boost your energy and reduce stress – it's true. Laughter is also free, fun and easy to use.

When you laugh you CAN'T feel anxious or angry or sad. Laughter reduces your stress and anxiety. Laughter and humour allow you to see things from a more positive and realistic perspective.

IS CLASS CLOWNS FOR YOUR STUDENTS?



In the video above, we asked a selection of previous Class Clowns participants why they joined the program. Here's what they said:

"You get to be a clown, BUT you get taken seriously"

"Comedy can change lives like no other"

"It's a great experimental environment"

"I'm kinda addicted to being on stage"

"You've got nothing to lose"

"It's fun... it's really fun... it's quite really, really fun... did I say fun?"



Need further convincing?

Hear from experienced comedians Rhys Nicholson, Dane Simpson, Cal Wilson, Ivan Aristeguieta, Michelle Brasier, Geraldine Hickey, Claire Hooper and Annie Louey on why you should try comedy!

Students who sign up to Class Clowns can access all 8 videos in this series, that cover a range of topics including how to write material for your comedy set, what to do before you hit the stage, how to recover if you "bomb", and comedy stagecraft.

TAKING THE COMEDY PATH

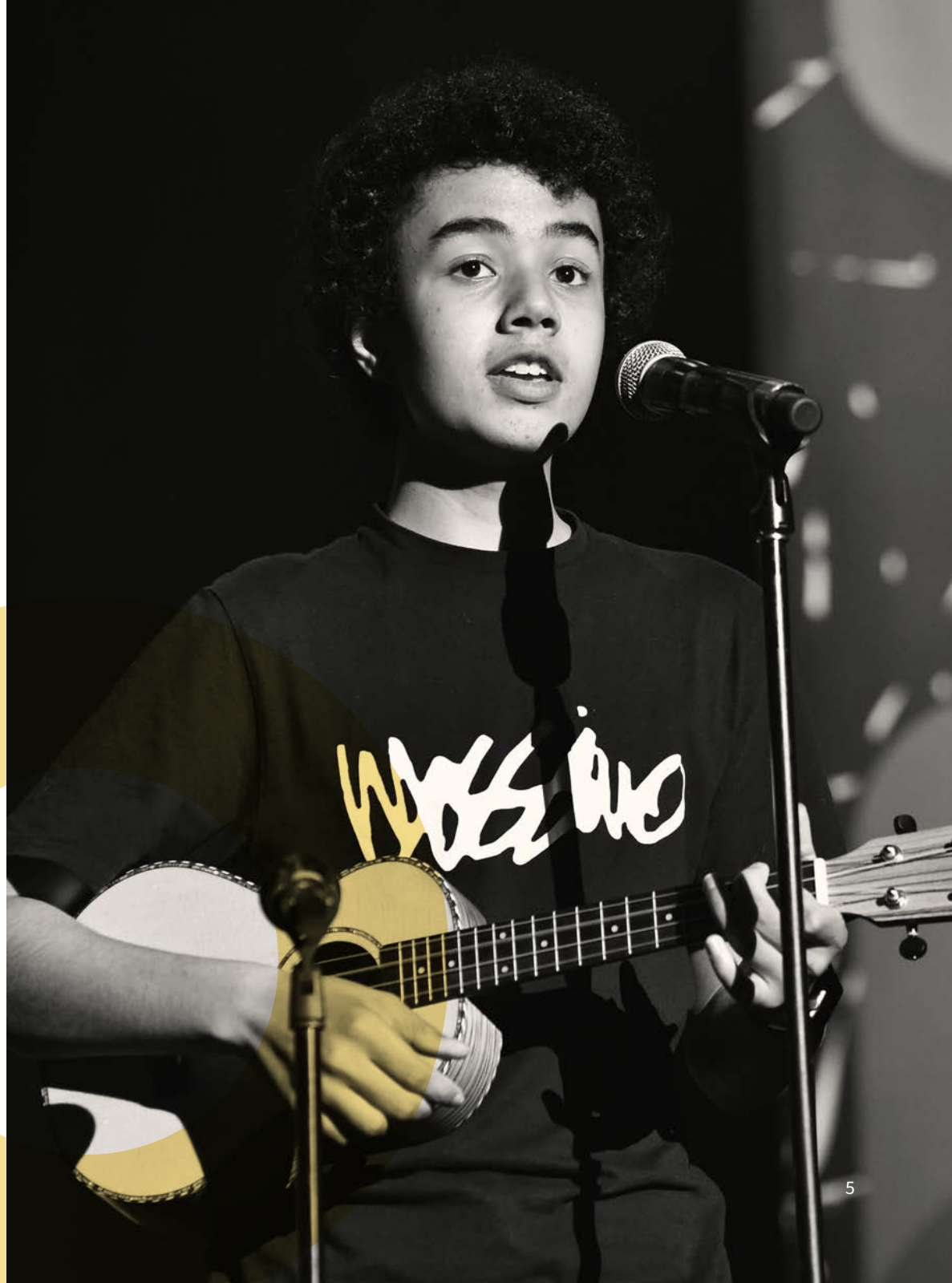
The introductory videos above present some strong arguments for taking the comic path. Making comedy and making people laugh is the ultimate feel good. You're doing the world and the people in it a huge service.

If you decide to take the comic path, you'll make many discoveries. For instance, audiences. You need them, especially to try out your ideas. You'll write, and you'll improvise. You'll notice that your take on life and what's funny differs from others across culture, gender, age. Suddenly something that makes you laugh is considered not so funny by others.

If you take the comic path, you'll engage with BIG ideas and consider 'who am I' in this crazy world. You'll get to do any of the following: writing comedy, performing comedy, producing comedy on stage, on social media, on television or even in film. Everyone has a story, so you'll want to tell yours and you'll listen to others' stories. Participating in Class Clowns and the world of comedy enables you to take risks, build confidence, dare to fail, laugh, and cry with laughter. When you take the comic path, you'll recognise that while life can occasionally pose challenges, it can also be awesome, especially when things are hilarious.

AM I FUNNY? WHERE DO I EVEN BEGIN?

It's always good to ask yourself what YOU find funny and why. Keep a journal/ note of jokes or ideas you have that you can keep returning to. Note that in the video "Why should I try comedy?", some of the comedians talk about writing stuff down on paper or in their phone as soon as they think it or hear it. Test your material in front of friends, teachers, or your family – they're your first audience. Ultimately, it's the unique perspective of every single comedian that really makes their audience laugh.



DEFINING COMEDY

Later in this resource we cover [comedy across cultures](#). In Western civilizations, from ancient times, right up to the present, two types of drama/performance have been recognised – tragedy and comedy – both of which have always been regarded as being equally important. Think about the traditional masks that depict the theatre – the comic and the tragic – which have their origins in Ancient Greek Theatre.

Tragedy and comedy are sometimes said to be two sides of the same coin. The difference between them is not what they deal with, but how they deal with it. Both deal with ideas such as love and hate, ambition and failure, trust, betrayal, lust, greed, delusion, hate, conspiracy, weakness, betrayal and death, but, while tragedy invites us to look upon these ideas with grief, comedy invites us to laugh at them.

What do you think of these statements about comedy? What would you add?

Comedy is anything that makes you laugh

Laughter is the best medicine

Humour is what keeps everyone happy

TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON COMEDY

There's an old Broadway musical called *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The opening song is entitled *A Comedy Tonight*. In this song Stephen Sondheim (the lyricist) describes comedy as something that is:

Familiar, peculiar, appealing, appalling, convulsive, repulsive, aesthetic and frenetic.



ACTIVITY

- Watch the clip [Comedy Tonight performed by the Muppets](#)
- Discuss the words Stephen Sondheim uses in the Muppets video.
 - Can comedy be all these things?
 - At the same time? At different times?
 - What would be an example of each of these types of comedy?
- Check out this clip [Why Comedy Matters | The School of Life](#)
 - How does this convey the purpose of comedy?
 - What type of comedy do you think it is?
 - Whose perspectives are presented?

CONTEMPORARY COMEDY MOMENTS – GETTING IN THE ZONE

Hopefully you are now thinking about what comedy is, what it is for you, what makes you laugh and, importantly, why you might want to participate in Class Clowns or generally give comedy a go!

In this section of the resource, we want to expand your thinking and get you laughing. Importantly, this section asks you take a critical approach – not necessarily to criticize, but to think deeply and critically, question and challenge your own thoughts and current beliefs.

On the following pages you'll find links to contemporary comedians, many of them Australian. We invite you to pick and choose from the links with your class or your teacher or in your own time and make note of the styles, approaches and topics. Teachers, please note there are warnings on some of the clips.



ACTIVITY

Put on your critical comedy hat and watch the clips on the following pages.

- What made you laugh? Why did you laugh?
- Was the routine familiar to you? Did you learn something new?
- What style of comedy do you think the performer used?
- Was there a social or a political message in the routine? What was that message? Did it challenge you?
- Was there something you could take away from that routine and adapt?

COMEDY EXAMPLES

LIVE MELBOURNE COMEDY FESTIVAL PERFORMANCES

Kylan Ambrum

Introduction about why comedy, tinder

Aaron Chen

Fitbit challenge and apple crumble

Dane Simpson

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Didgeridoo

Mawaan Rizwan

A nice tracksuit and a new 'walk'

Jude Perl

Sharehouse – blending music with narrative (a couple of barely audible swears)

The ONGALS: Box of Toys

physical comedy, clowning, circus and a few fart jokes

The Listies

Rich's funny joke – silly toilet humour

Melanie Bracewell

Dating as a long person (two swear words)

RECENT CLASS CLOWNS COMEDIANS

Dhruv Rao

How not to pronounce my name

Sophia Marosszeky

Friendship groups, politics, being regional

Patti Fawcett

Hairy legs

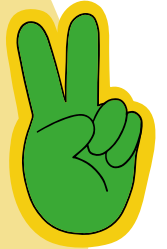
Colleen Mukonorwi

What's in a name, all girls' schools

Awkward

A trio present awkward situations

2024 Class Clowns National Grand Final



WRITING FOR ADS

Live performance, movies and television are not the only mediums you can write comedy for. Check out the following ads that use humour to sell a product or an idea.

eBAY

Get it for Less Tuesdays

Gruen Transfer – The Pitch

An ad for getting rid of your mobile phone

MELBOURNE COMEDY FESTIVAL'S LOL SQUAD

Comedy in the Digital Space

The following links are a collection of comedy sketches from the LOL Squad – a collective of Class Clowns alumni. The sketches are made for the digital space; written and performed by Lol Squad and directed, filmed and edited professionally.

Watch the three selected pieces and discuss the type of comedy being created and how the medium of film might change your role as an audience.

The Spatula

somewhat based on the reality tv show The Bachelor/ette

How To Fake Your Own Death

a satire

Xtreme Cooking

extreme version of the familiar cooking show genre



CULTURE & DIVERSITY

FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS COMEDIANS

Australia's First Nations peoples are the oldest living culture on the planet. Historically and politically their culture has been eroded but despite the impacts of colonisation, First Nations peoples' resilience and culture remains strong. Many First Nations artists see comedy as one way to redress the past and ensure their experiences are very much part of the now. This section of the resource gives focus to First Nations comedians. You might have heard of Deadly Funny which is Melbourne International Comedy Festival's national program celebrating the comic talents of First Nations peoples across the country. The Deadly Funny platform has been an important way to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders find and amplify their voices and perspectives.

Celebrated First Nations comedian Steph Tisdell speaks to the importance of First Nations voices being in the mix. Discuss her idea that a comedian's role is to 'disrupt and distract'.

People want to see perspectives they haven't seen before. I think people now feel, this is what clowns are for and what court jesters are for – to disrupt and distract. We're in a time where things need disrupting and people need distracting

Steph Tisdell



Read the following quotation from First Nations comedian Bel Mac. How does Bel's perspective on comedy differ from Western definitions of comedy discussed earlier in this resource ([Defining Comedy](#))?

It's very vulnerable to do comedy. You're really putting yourself out there. It's not like "I'm doing this music, or I'm doing this play", it's like "This. Is. Me. 100% all me." And you're putting it out there and you're able to tell your stories. And that's what we do as a culture, we're storytellers. And so to be able to have the contemporary and traditional culture blended in with this magnificent and supportive stage, with likeminded people who have either walked the walk themselves, or respect the walk in itself, you do get a greater sense of "I can breathe now... I can breathe". And I came back breathing.

Bel Mac

DEADLY FUNNY COMEDY SETS

Steph Tisdell

2019 Festival Gala

Ghenoa Gela

2017 Deadly Funny Winner

Jay Wymarra

2019 Why I love comedy and coming out as “Torres Gay”

Andy Saunders

2014 Stand Up

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE: Created by Ilbijerri Theatre Company, teachers and students can find advice and guidance about working with First Nations content: [Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the classroom](#)

ACTIVITY

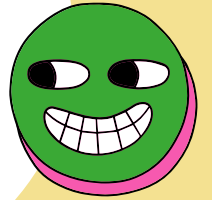
Watch the Deadly Funny comedy sets

- What new stories do you hear?
- What new perspectives were presented?
- What are some of the ideas these comedians presented in their routines?
- What differences/similarities with non-Indigenous comedians were there?
- Were there any common themes present?
- Were you able to relate to the humour?
- What jokes did you find funny?
- Were there some jokes you didn't understand?
- How did these comedians use humour to emphasise racial and social issues in Australia?
- Who was your favourite and why?
- How would you describe each comedian's personal style?

IS COMEDY CULTURALLY SENSITIVE & CULTURALLY

Our sense of humour is deeply seated in our nationhood, our shared view of the world, and the norms that are so familiar to us

– Leap



ACTIVITIES

Brainstorm in pairs

- What do you think are the characteristics of an “Australian” sense of humour?
- Is there a typical “Australian” humour?
- Who would you think of when you think about Australian comedians?
- Has your understanding of what an Australian sense of humour is changed since exploring some of the clips in this research?
- Do you think that what makes us laugh is dependent on our culture?
- Discuss the idea of one culture making fun of another. Is this okay? When is it okay? When is it not?

READ: [Culture Shock: Humour Across Cultures](#)

This article presents a perspective on how humour differs around the world but notes that humour and comedy can also unite us, “Although somebody’s sense of humour may seem alien, impenetrable, or downright odd at first glance, it only takes a little patience and persistence to be able to see the commonalities in all of us”.

- What are your thoughts on this?
- Consider who the author is.
- Discuss the idea of how humour and comedy can differ across culture and why.

RAINBOW COMEDY AND GENDER DIVERSITY

Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby is one of the most well known comedians in the world thanks to her Netflix Special, Nanette. She has had a successful stand-up career winning top awards at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Just for Laughs Montreal, not to mention an Emmy Award! Hannah's brand of humour draws from her lived experience and from peoples comments and reactions to her.

Watch Hannah Gadsby: Kiss Me Quick - I'm Full of Jubes (Warning: a tiny bit of strong language)



Comedic writing and performance is an excellent tool for self expression, and to foster conversations that can be difficult to have in other forums.

Gender identity and gender expression can be tough subjects for people to navigate with their families, communities or audiences. Using humour to disarm and educate people can have a positive (and hilarious) effect.

Watch Cassie Workman's 2021 Opening Night Comedy Allstars Supershow set (warning some strong language and a drug reference)



Watch Scout Boxall - 2021 Comedy Rooms of Melbourne (warning some language)



COMEDY AND DISABILITY

Most of my comedy is focused on the ridiculous things that happen to me because I'm a disabled person, and most of that material is from the stupid things people say to me in response to disability

Stella Young, 2014

Australian comedian, Stella Young, who sadly passed away in December 2014, was a passionate advocate for the rights of people who identified as having a disability. Stella's use of comedy was dark, political, satirical, sometimes uncomfortable, and very funny. Stella used comedy to draw attention to what it means to be a person living with a disability. She drew on personal experiences and observations of the world around her. Importantly, Stella Young's use of comedy made her audiences really think.



American comedian Josh Blue who lives with cerebral palsy auditioned in June 2021 for America's Got Talent: Here is his audition -



Pay attention to the judges and their reactions, and also note the host who is seen in the wings. Do they seem uncomfortable? Discuss



Take a pause; words of wisdom from Steph Tisdell

People want to see perspectives they haven't seen before.

Pretend as if you have already made it.

I say to myself, I'm going to practice these five minutes of material until it is so bullet proof I can add in extra jokes and test them out.

Think of it as an opportunity not a competition.

The last time I bombed... It was so hard

[Watch the full "Getting to Know Steph Tisdell" video here.](#) Let's consider comedian Steph Tisdell's words of wisdom about becoming a comedian and starting out in comedy.

Performing comedy can be a richly fulfilling experience, but as Steph mentions, you may experience what it feels like to "bomb" in front of an audience.

We asked 8 other professional comedians how they deal with and recover from the concept of their material "bombing". [Click here to watch it.](#)

NB password is **hH^!3B**

GOOD COMEDY

WHAT IS “GOOD” COMEDY? WHAT IS “BAD” COMEDY?

At this point, this resource we have invited you to explore comedy across diversity, ability and culture. But what makes good comedy and are there any rules or guidelines to consider?

Making people laugh is not necessarily an indicator of good comedy. You can get a laugh by throwing a pie in someone’s face or even tripping over. That doesn’t mean it is good comedy.

GOOD COMEDY

- is irreverent
- is clever
- makes you laugh
- takes a lot of work
- tries to be fresh / new
- is unique or original

Good comedy is original. It makes us laugh at something we may not have laughed at before. Good comedy makes us realise something is funny for the first time. There is skill in making good comedy. It often asks the comedian to make fun of themselves, to be vulnerable.

Bad comedy is comedy that makes fun of things we already know. Bad comedy tells old jokes or makes fun of easy targets – referred to as “punching down”.

The following comments are offered as a way to consider the difference between good and bad comedy.

BAD COMEDY

- is offensive
- is someone just trying to sound smart
- makes you groan
- takes the easy way out
- uses old formulas
- is boring or uninventive

More watching: we asked 8 professional comedians to give you some advice around what to avoid in comedy writing and performance. [Click here to watch.](#)

NB password is **hH^!3B**

ACTIVITY

Split into groups and read one of the following articles:

Article 1

From *The Conversation*, **What is good comedy?** By Sam Friedman

The answer probably depends on your social background

Article 2

From *The Atlantic*, **The Dark Psychology of Being a Good Comedian** by Olga Khazan.

Psychologist Peter McGraw has a long-held theory that comedy is equal parts darkness and light. Go purely light-hearted and you risk being toothless. Too edgy, and ... you'll make people uncomfortable.

Article 3

From *SMH*, **What makes a good joke?**

Why do some gags land, while others fall flat? How important is timing and non-verbal communication? And when does “edgy” humour cross the line into bad taste?

Discuss some of the ideas within the article you chose

- What is GOOD COMEDY? What does your selected article say about being a comedian?
- What points does your article make about comedy that is offensive?
- Which points do you agree with, and which ones don't you agree with? Why?
- Do you think that comedy can go “too far”? When do you draw the line?
- What do these articles tell you about your own sense of humour and comic style?

COMEDY, POWER AND CENSORSHIP

The Muslims are Coming

Trailor for comedy show in the US midwest (some swearing, sexual references)

ABC Black Comedy

A series exploring humour and comedy from an Indigenous perspective, this clip uses comedy to explore Indigenous dance.

SBS The Feed

Watch this clip from SBS's The Feed . The clip explores how comedy and comedy shows in Australia have or have not represented cultural diversity. It includes representations across the years (teacher guidance strongly recommended)

ACTIVITY

Watch/read each of the clips/articles, consider and discuss the following:

- What is political correctness? Who decides?
- Should comedy be censored? By whom?
- Can people tell jokes about themselves and their own community culture?
- Is comedy time-bound – if we accept forms of comedy at one point in time but then, across time we learn more and become more aware, do we need to challenge particular comedian's work?
- Does some comedy no longer have a place, e.g. blackface, culturally inappropriate accent work, etc?

REVIEWING COMEDY - WHAT'S IN A WORD

Imagine being a reviewer for the Melbourne International Comedy Festival! Sounds amazing. You would get to see a whole lot of shows and write about them. You would also need to be pretty good at determining what makes good comedy and what makes you and others laugh. Possibly not as easy as it may seem. Maybe being a comedy review writer is a comic act in itself?

The following are headlines and comments from past Comedy Festival reviews:

- **Fast and fearless hunter of funny**
- **Whips up whimsy overload**
- **Join forces in “nerdery”**
- **Cultivates gloom**
- **Traditional and modern**
- **Smart, sharp, a little sad, riotously funny**
- **On a roll in engaging riff on day job**
- **Serves up a surreal tour de force**
- **Deliriously silly**
- **Antics subvert expectation**
- **A giggle generator**
- **The purest form of comedy**
- **With a sting in the tail**
- **Deadpan bordering on absurd**
- **Has audiences in stitches**
- **Celebratory, unapologetic and compelling**
- **Makes skilful use of props**
- **The best bits are surreal, inspired**
- **Trip to the dark side**
- **Delivers shtick and chills**

ACTIVITY

Part 1 - Work in pairs and pick three of the above headlines / comments and discuss:

- What are the key words used?
- What do you imagine the comedy routine is like?
- What does the headline suggest about the routine?
- Take the plunge, see if you can create a routine that represents the headline
- Perform the routine in front of the other groups, see if they can guess the headline?

Part 2 - Choose a comedy routine (you can use any of the links in this resource)

- Watch the routine again
- Write a headline that describes the routine
- Compare your headline with other students
- Discuss the differences

COMEDY STYLES

We're encouraging you to watch as much comedy as you can to find your own "style". The following table offers a description of comedy styles with links to examples (most are PG but please check for warnings which is usually coarse language). Write down your favourites and why you like them. Consider characters, style, dialogue, voices, structure, topics, stories, and anything else that leaps out at you?

COMEDY STYLES INDEX

Absurdism	A form of humour based on bizarre characters and/or nonsense logic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Swedish chef from the Muppets makes meatballs• Sam Campbell - lozenges
Character	This type of comedy generates humour from the creation of a caricature or persona.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Bean - Goes Swimming• FISK - Helen, George, Ray, Roz• Vicar of Dibley, character of Alice
Cringe	Comedy that evokes embarrassment. The humour comes from inappropriate actions or words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lizzy Hoo - Where are you from? (some coarse language)• ABC Black Comedy - Therapist's First Aboriginal Client
Dark Humour	Comedy that deals with dark or tragic subject matter in a humorous way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black Adder goes forth - we are your firing squad

Double Entendre

Comedy that uses sayings that can be understood in two different meanings – one obvious and the other more subtle.

- [Fry and Laurie - double entendres](#)
- [Fast Forward – Kelvin Cunningham double entendres](#)

Improv

Improv (improvised comedy) sees comedians devising scenes on the spur of the moment, often with little direction or with only a title or single stimulus.

- [Who's line is it anyway - best moments?](#)
- [Loose Moose Theatre – word at a time](#)

Music Comedy

This form of comedy involves the combination of song, music, story telling and wit. Artists who have worked in this form of comedy include Bill Bailey, Sammy J & Randy, Doug Anthony All Stars, Lano & Woodley, Bo Burnham, Flight of the Conchords.

- [Lou Wall - Illuminati](#)
(warning course language)
- [Auntie Donna - Chuffed](#)
- [Sammy J - So Close \(the mask song\)](#)

Observational

Comedy that pokes fun of things that happen in everyday life. The comedian can focus on small / trivial things that humans do, incidents they have observed or more important issues.

- [Laura Davies - Up Late](#)
- [Nazeem Hussain - Fairy Tales](#)
- [Steph Tisdell - Sorry Day](#)

Parody

Comedy evoked from performing an imitation of something or someone. To work, parody must not only be a good/recognisable imitation of something, it must also be funny.

- [Amateur Hour - Gender Reversed Guitar Shopping](#)
- [Alec Baldwin as Donald Trump](#)

Physical

This is a type of slapstick that uses physical movement and is influenced by clowning.

- [Tape Face](#)
- [The Wonderful Genius of Charlie Chaplin](#)
- [The Umbilical Brothers](#)

Satire

Exposing or criticising an event or situation, by exaggerating or ridiculing the absurdity of it. Often the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

- [The Katering Show – We quit sugar](#) (some coarse language)
- [Sammy J - Anti Vax](#)
- [If Life were a musical – The Chaser](#)

Sitcom

A scripted dialogue show that generally follows the same group of characters in each episode, tracking their interactions with each other and the world through a series of situations.

- [Schits Creek - Fold in the cheese](#)
- [Ted Lasso - Dart Game](#)

Sketch

A short comic scene or series of scenes, often between 1 and 5 minutes long, performed by individuals or groups. Sketch can be performed on stage (eg. Double Denim) or on TV as stand alone episodes (eg. Sammy J, ABC) or as a part of a series (eg. SNL or Mad as Hell).

- [The Shovel - Contact Tracies](#)
- [Aunty Donna – Roll Call](#)
- [The Project - Tech Support](#)

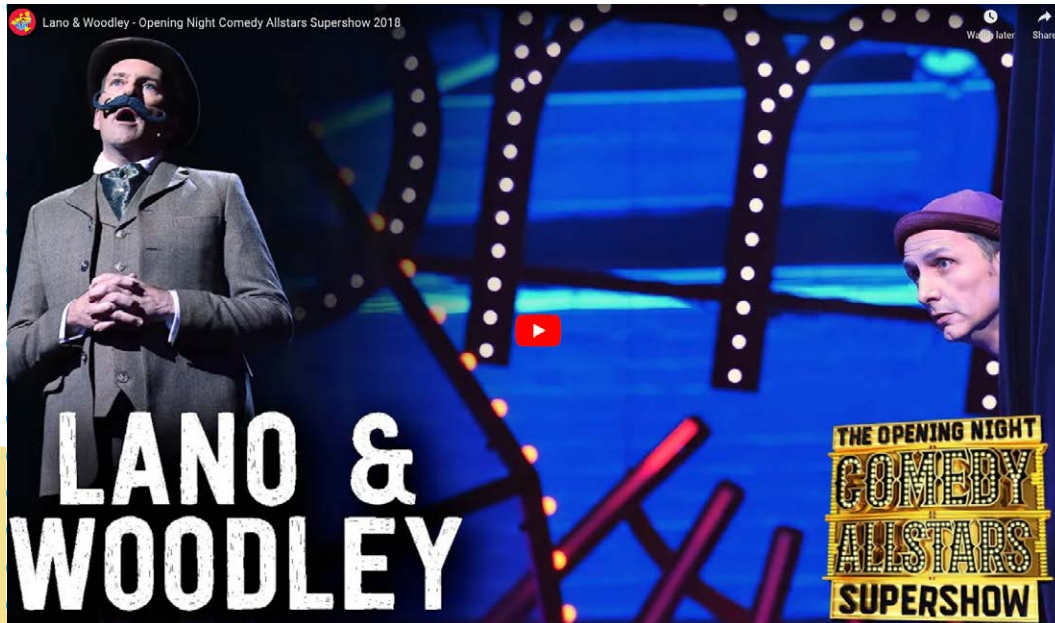
Stand up

Involves a single comedian speaking directly to a live audience. Many comics use personal experiences and stories to inform their style, some draw from other styles listed above (e.g. observational, physical, character).

- [Dane Simpson - wedding vows](#)
- [Annie Louey - Allstars stand up set](#)

BLENDING COMEDY STYLES

You have probably noticed, you don't have to be limited to a single style of comedy. Comedians often blend multiple comedy styles together for a "bit". Lano and Woodyly combine character, observational and physical comedy in this 2018 sketch



Aunty Donna combine character work, absurdism, musical comedy, observational humour and sketch in their Netflix show "House of Fun" and much the same in their hilarious performance for the [Comedy All Stars Opening Night](#). You'll see Satire often takes the form of sketch, and stand-up comedians use different styles of comedy in their routines.

OTHER COMEDY STYLES - WORDPLAY

There are numerous other forms of comedic wit and wordplay that you may be familiar with. These can be found across comedic performances, newspaper headlines, GIFs and memes. Here are some examples of wordplay that may be familiar to you.

Limericks – a form of humorous poetry that has five lines and a rhyming convention:

There was an Old Man in a tree
Who was horribly bored by a bee;
When they asked, 'Does it buzz?'
He replied, 'Yes, it does!'
'It's a regular brute of a bee'

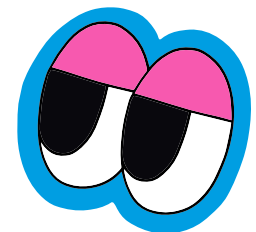
By Edward Lear

Riddles – a type of amusing brainteaser that exists as a question or statement to be solved

Q: I'm tall when I'm young and I'm short when I'm old. What am I? A: A candle

Q: It belongs to you, but your friends use it more. What is it? A: Your name

Q: What two things can you never eat for breakfast? A: Lunch and dinner



Puns and one liners are a play on words for comic effect. A one liner can be similar in that it is a joke delivered in a single line – short and punchy

- He became a maths teacher because of some prime factors.
- I'm reading a book about gravity. It's impossible to put it down.
- To the person who invented zero, thanks for nothing!
- Somebody stole all my lamps. I couldn't be more de-lighted!
- Waking up this morning was an eye-opening experience.
- Being a vegetarian is one big missed 'steak'.
- Don't you hate it when someone answers their own questions? I do!
- Most people are shocked when they find out how bad an electrician I am.
- I was addicted to doing the Hokey Pokey, but then I turned myself around.
- Never trust an atom, they make up everything!
- People who use selfie sticks need to take a good, long hard look at themselves.

Puns in Memes

Puns aren't only used in live performance, they are all over the internet as a core part of meme culture. Think about a pun-based meme you have seen online recently. Can you explain the wordplay / why it made you laugh?

Consider creating your own meme about something you have seen in the news, or online recently.



WHAT KIND OF COMEDIAN DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Begin by thinking about:

- What interests you.
- What makes you laugh.
- What abilities you have.
- What you observe about life.
- What stories you want to tell.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Do I enjoy transforming myself into different characters?
- Do I have the ability to use different voices?
- Do I have the ability to imitate famous people?
- Can I write good parodies of TV shows or funny lyrics?
- Can I write funny conversations between people?
- Can I tell funny stories about things I have seen?
- Are there things in my life that drive me crazy and I just want to send them up?
- Am I good at visual or physical comedy?
- Do I have an unusual take on things?
- Do I enjoy working solo, in pairs or in a small group?

If you can identify what it is you enjoy, then you can make a start on creating a comedy routine/sketch. We are all good at something so be honest when you consider the comments above. Acknowledge your strengths.



COMEDY EXERCISES

Comedy is also about using learned skills and technique. Just talking about a topic usually isn't enough. You have to make it funny. There are a number of techniques which comedians use to put the comic "spin" on a topic. Most of these involve some sort of comic exaggeration. The following activities allow you to explore a whole range of comedy styles and techniques. This section is all about MAKING comedy.

What follows are some beginning exercises and activities to explore a range of comedy styles, play with lots of ideas and build your confidence.



1. I AM THE GREATEST PERFORMER IN THE WORLD

And this is my act! (Physical Comedy / Improv)

Group stands in a circle

Instruction is to think of a simple “act” to perform

Anything is possible, everything is right (e.g. waving, conducting an orchestra, moon walking, sitting on the floor crossed legged, brushing your hair, doing yoga, miming, whistling)

One at a time each person comes in and says: I am the greatest performer in the world and this is my act!

They perform their act and bow

The group gives thunderous applause

Next person comes in, etc.

Skills: improv, absurdity, physicality, risk, trust

2. THE SHOPPING CHANNEL PRESENTS

(Working collaboratively)

Brainstorm the types of products that home shopping channels sell

Discuss the ‘types’ of presenters who sell products on these channels – a great opportunity to play with caricature, voice-work and physicality

Brainstorm a whole heap of products that would be completely ridiculous to sell

In pairs select a ridiculous product to sell – skateboards for dogs/cats/rabbits

Create a parody of a shopping channel advertisement selling the most ridiculous product possible with the most ridiculous presenters possible

Remember the rules of Good Comedy!

Helpful links for this activity: In the 1960s and 1970s a company called K-tel was a pioneer in television shopping. The comedy used television to sell some rather interesting products. Check these out:

- [Hair Magician](#)
- [Record Selector](#)
- [Car cleaner, glass cleaner, wonder cutter](#)

3. FINISH THIS LINE

Using the oldest joke – Why did the chicken cross the road?

Work in pairs or small groups of 3 to 4 and create a short routine that provides 3 or 4 answers to the joke.

Generate ridiculous answers – better than these suggestions please

It was the Lollypop Lady's day off, Red Rooster closed down, It needed a change, The sign said walk, Chicken's don't need to explain, It was a roasting hot day, It was feeling stuffed.

4. WHAT IF?

- Often a good way to create a comic routine is to ask the question WHAT IF?
- Work in pairs or in small groups to improvise and then create one of the following scenes.
- What if you were at a party and gravity suddenly stopped existing?
- What if superheroes were the nightly news reporters?
- What if you were at a wedding and the priest is the groom/bride?
- What if you were at a supermarket and see your lost pet dog with a new owner?
- What if you were at school, you open your lunch box and find a bloodied dagger inside?
- What if you on a tram/bus/train and you get a text from an unknown number saying, “Get off the tram/bus/train immediately”?
- What if you are in the bath and your rubber duckie takes on murderous tendencies?
- What if you are in the science lab at school and the floor becomes lava?
- What if you are on the footy field and the goal posts keep shifting?
- What if you are in a dance class and you needed to dance on the ceiling?
- What if all the adults in your life suddenly acted like small children?
- What if everyone in the room became invisible?
- What if you got sucked into your computer with your mum/dad?
- What if everyone could only mime?
- What if you opened the front door and you were in space?
- What if your take-away/Uber delivered meal suddenly began to speak to you?

5. PERSONIFICATION/CHARACTERS

In this activity you imagine what it would be like if inanimate objects (objects that are not alive but are part of our everyday existence) were alive and indeed had lives!

Think firstly about how you might portray them

How would they speak? How would they move? What sounds would they make?

Improvise a short scene in pairs or small groups where the objects/items that live in one of the following environments are alive and a situation occurs:

- The fridge – a jar of chutney
- Laundry cupboard – washing powder, a peg bucket, rubber gloves
- Stationery aisle – a stapler, a packet of whiteboard markers, a ream of paper
- Vegetable bin – two apples, a mushy banana, a past its use-by date piece of cheese
- Undies department – so many opportunities here!
- The bathroom -a toothbrush, a toilet brush, a piece of soap, a toilet roll, a mirror
- Party supplies – balloons, party hats, serviettes a cake
- Inside a smart phone- , the blue tooth option, alarm, an app
- The garage/shed – shovels, whipper snipper, lawn mower, rake, broom, abandoned tools,
- Kitchen utensil drawer – go for it – open the drawer and be inspired
- A pet shop – pet food, pet toys, pets themselves.

Some suggested plot lines: A crime has been committed, A job interview, A messy love scene, A funeral – consider how the ‘character’ you have selected could be part of one of these plot lines.

6. EXTREMES

Use the following starters to create a highly exaggerated or extreme example.

Have you ever noticed how restaurants cater for all sorts of allergies these days? I found one that catered for my allergy to food/customers...

You can buy anything online now – shoes, clothes, music, furniture, holidays... why the other day I ordered a new body part...tax free

7. CHANGING CONTEXTS:

Sometimes we can show how strange certain behaviour is by moving it into a different context. Considering again the “what if” idea... what if the following professions spoke and acted at home exactly like they did at work?

Police officer, model, sports coach, newsreader, surgeon, auctioneer, teacher, orchestra conductor, court judge, surgeon, auctioneer.



8. THE UNEXPECTED TURN

A joke/comic routine can work by creating an expectation and then turning it around for example: The first school I went to was very rough. People were punching each other in the playground, setting fire to the buildings, slashing car tyres...and that was the teachers!

Here is a sketch that works by taking an unexpected turn.

POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER.

A rough looking person enters and stands against a police line-up wall with height markings on it. A uniformed Police Photographer is standing in front with a camera on a tripod.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Okay, stand against the wall.

The crim stands against the wall.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Hold up the sign.

The crim holds up the card with a number on it. The camera flashes.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Now turn to your right.

The crim turns in profile. The camera flashes again.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Turn your head towards the camera.

The crim turns their head slightly. The camera flashes again.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Drop your shoulder.

The crim, drops their shoulder.

PHOTOGRAPHER: No, tougher, look tougher.

The crim snarls.

PHOTOGRAPHER: That's good. That's good. And again. Even tougher. Really snarl. Yes, that's great. Now clench your fists. That's fantastic. That's beautiful.

The photographer takes the camera off the tripod and starts moving around the room taking dozens of photos as the crim poses in different positions. It is like a fashion shoot for a magazine.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Just drop the shoulder, and chin up and... beautiful, and give me sinister, really sinister, good and creepy, sneer, sneer like you've just bashed someone, fantastic...gorgeous

What other understood situations can you think of that might take unexpected turns?

What about a politician making an announcement that unexpectedly becomes an episode of Survivor?

What about a cooking demonstration or audition that unexpectedly becomes a police interview?

9. CHAIR RE-ARRANGING

(Absurd)

Resources: 10-12 classroom chairs

Have the chairs set in the space in any arrangement - random

Halve the group – one participating, the others watching

Students stand on the edges of the space on two sides

One at a time they are invited to enter the space and move/reposition just ONE CHAIR and then return to the side

It must remain in the space but can be moved anyway they like and positioned anyway they like

Increase this to 2 or 3 students at the one time – what happens if they choose the same chair?

Then use the whole group, all at once, within perhaps a time limit.

What did the audience observe? What was comic? Why?

Swap over and repeat with the other group

Discuss how simple, mundane activities can have great comic effect

Additions – move the chair with haste, as if in love, with suspicion, obsessively, casually

10. WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

We are all aware that different professions use what we call JARGON – words, phrases, acronyms and terminology that is unique to what they do.

IT/Technology: RAM, byte, hard disk, ISP, OS, www, interface, cookie, phishing, router, surfer, zombie, worm, and hacker.

Surfers talk about stuff like barrel, ding, cutback, phazer, point break, ripping, zipper, nose, pipeline, pumping, radical, shacked, shubie etc.

Gamers talk about: aimbots, bullet sponge, cheesing, cooldown, lag, ragequit

Now Imagine that you are a new social group or profession within society that has its own unique language. Make up a name for that social/subgroup or profession. It can be absurd and quite ridiculous.

- Pancake-eans – those people who are experts in making pancakes;
- Topiareans – those people who practice topiary (shaping bushes and trees into creatures or shapes),
- High-heel-eans – those who practice the art of wearing and walking in high heels;
- Spyvarians – those who are experts in spying and the use of incredible gadgets OR a completely made up group.

In your group create as many terms or phrases you can think of that may be used by the new group. Improvise a short scene that uses only these words/phrases/terms. Try to keep it as AUTHENTIC as possible – as if it could really happen. Present the scene to an audience.

- Did the audience laugh? Why/why not?
- What was challenging about this task?
- Absurd comedy can still offer a message or make a comment on the human condition even if it seems completely ridiculous – do you agree?
- What message does/could this activity offer?



TIME TO REFLECT

Earlier in this resource we asked you to consider taking the comic path by exploring if comedy is for you and if Class Clowns is for you. Remember, if take the comic path, you'll make many discoveries, tell your story, listen to others' stories. When you take the comic path, you'll recognise that while life can occasionally pose challenges, it can also be awesome, especially when things are hilarious.



TEACHER TALK - CURRICULUM LINKS

The following table draws links to the Australian Curriculum from the resource activities, and learning.

Learning Area / Subject	Content description - Year 9 & 10
The Arts / Drama	ACADRM047: Improvise with elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas and explore subtext to shape drama - USING COMEDY!
	ACADRM048: Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters – USING COMEDY!
	ACADRM049: Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces – INCLUDING COMEDY!
	ACADRM050: Structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles – AS A COMIC PERFORMER!
	ACADRM051: Perform devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices – PARTICULARLY COMEDY!
	ACADRM053: Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich drama making starting with First Nations Peoples

Learning Area / Subject Content description - Year 9 & 10

English

ACELY1740: Interacting with others

Listen to spoken texts constructed for different purposes, for example to entertain and to persuade, and analyse how language features of these texts position listeners to respond in particular ways - USING COMEDY!

ACELY1811: Use interaction skills to present and discuss an idea and to influence and engage an audience by selecting persuasive language, varying voice tone, pitch, and pace, and using elements such as music and sound effects – USING COMEDY!

ACELY1741: Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements for aesthetic and playful purposes – USING COMEDY!

Cross Curriculum Priorities

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES (FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES).

- All the Australian Curriculum can contribute to this priority and should.
- Class Clowns aims to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of First Nations peoples. This knowledge and understanding enriches all students' ability to participate positively.
- In the Arts – students explore the stories and perspectives of First Nations artists including comedians.

**General Capability:
Personal & Social
Capability**

Learning Continuums – Years 9 and 10

Considering, creating and performing Comedy can allow students to:

- Reflect critically on emotional responses to challenging situations in a wide range of learning, social and work related contexts
- Assess their strengths and challenges (my comedy works) and devise appropriate strategies to achieve future success
- Reflect on feedback from peers and adults to analyse personal characteristics that contribute to social capability (and the comedy routine)
- Consider, control and justify opinions, beliefs, values, and choices
- Establish personal priorities, manage resources effectively and demonstrate initiative to achieve personal goals and learning outcomes (create a comedy routine)
- Evaluate ways to contribute to civil society at local, regional, national and global levels – THINK BIG!

**General Capability:
Intercultural
Understanding**

Learning Continuums – Years 9 and 10

Considering, creating and performing Comedy can allow students to:

- Understand how local, regional, national and international groups shape their identities (is comedy culturally specific?)
- Analyse the complex relationship between language, thought and context to understand and enhance communication (considering what is appropriate comedy for certain cultural audiences)
- Understand the importance of mutual respect in promoting cultural exchange and collaboration (working in groups to create those comedy routines)
- Recognise the effect that empathising with others has on your own feelings, motivations and actions (consider your audience too)
- Reflect critically on the effect of intercultural experiences on your attitudes, beliefs, and those of others (is what makes you laugh the same as what makes others' laugh – is that important?)
- Critique the use of stereotypes and prejudices in texts and issues concerning specific cultural groups (a brilliant offer for developing a comedy routine!)

Comprehending texts through listening reading and viewing

Class Clowns contributes to this area of literacy by engaging students in the process of navigating, reading and view texts (multiple comedy routines, multi-modal versions), listening to, and interpreting and analysing (REVIEWS)

Comprehending texts through speaking, writing and creating

Class Clowns contributes to this area of literacy by engaging students in expressive language, the composition of text for a particular purpose, using language to interact with others (AND AUDIENCE), and deliver presentations.

**Learning continuum
of Literacy**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & ADDITIONAL LINKS

VISIT THE CLASS CLOWNS WEBSITE

BOOK A CRASH COURSE WORKSHOP

This resource has been adapted from the original *Are You Trying to Be Funny?* created by Ian McFadyen

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