

"Like a welcome summer rain, *humor* may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air and you." (Langston Hughes)

CRCRTH 612: Seminar in Creative Thinking (an exploration of humor)

Nina Greenwald (nlgreenwald@comcast.net) (617-287-6523)

office hours: Tuesday, 2-3:30, Wheatley 142-10

Welcome to what should be a required course in every college and university! In the process of exercising our capacity for humor, we'll delve into how it works and why it's one of our greatest survival tools. (For example: "We went for a ride and my wife went through a red light. I said, "Didn't you see that red light?" "So what", she said. "You see one red light you've seen them all." (if you don't like this one write one of your own!)

Okay, now let's talk about the course. (but first, did you hear the one about the doctor who says to a man, "Your pregnant!" The man says, "How does a man get pregnant?" and the doctor says, "The usual way. A little wine, a little dinner..."

Okay. Now let's *really* talk about the course. This is a true seminar course in which each of you make contributions to our understanding of humor based on **what YOU consider to be interesting to find out**. Guaranteed, we'll wind up with quite an anthology of classic and current readings in the field! So go ahead, knock us out with what you learn and how we can benefit from this!

COURSE STRUCTURE (and requirements):

**"Humor is a pervasive feature of human life -- yet its nature is elusive."
(LaFollett & Shanks 1993)**

For the first several weeks I'll lead us in exploring some basic tenets for understanding humor though mindful of the above quote! We'll talk about the nature of humor, its origins, theoretical bases and its relationship to creativity, among some ideas for consideration. Then, beginning the third week (or maybe the 4th) each of you takes the lead in the following ways:

1) **Collaborative excursions:** In pairs you'll lead us in an *active* exploration of your special interest in humor (one full class). **One week ahead please provide us with two well-founded articles to read pertaining to your topic.** They can be online articles (professional quality) or you can provide hard copies from other sources. Be sure to provide citations.

2) **Individual ah ha ha!** This is your own unique application of humor to an area of interest based on what you've learned. This can be something you write, something oral, visual, a "take-off" on something, something purely whimsical, a spin-off of your pairs work or something entirely different. You'll turn in a written paper that discusses your idea (citing relevant literature) and share your idea with us orally.

3) **"Laughing Matters" journal:** Here's a golden opportunity to cut loose and play with humor via weekly reflections on what's happening in your life, the course, the readings, etc. Feel free to include clippings, cartoons, drawings, funny stuff you come across in daily life, funny ideas you have about things -- should crack up to be (forgive the pun) a therapeutic collection of ideas you'll be inclined to revisit in years to come. (If so inclined, feel free to knock us out with some of your entries.)

CLASS SESSIONS:

Key Frames of Reference for Understanding Humor

Sept. 5: "Like beauty in the eye of the beholder, humor is the funny bone of the receiver of experience."

Messing around:

- laugh it ups
- humor self-assessment
- What do we think we know about humor?
- for next time: 1) an article from each of you -- one that has something to say about humor *as a complex phenomenon* (e.g. there is no general theory or even an agreed upon definition) 2) make a list of aspects and/or applications of humor that interest you

Sept 12: "Of all the phenomena which come under investigation of empirical and philosophical psychology, humor is easily one of the least understood."

- creativity and humor (humor as one of the three fundamental manifestations of creativity (beside scientific discovery and artistic creation))
- origins of humor
- humor explorations (list of your interests)
- meeting "humor buddies"
- readings: 1) one from me 2) one from you that explores the nature of laughter

Sept 19: "Laughter: a "sabbatical let-out" so that we can reconsider..."

- what's laughter?
- origins of laughter
- relationships between laughter and humor
- humor theories : Bergson's "Klutz" theory; Miller's stability theory
- videos
- buddy pairs prep
- readings for next week

Sept. 26: "Laughter and humor allow us to stand back from those rules by which we live and inspect them."

- Koestler's bisociative theory
- superiority, relief and incongruity theories
- videos
- buddy pairs prep
- readings for next week

Oct. 3: "Something is likely to be funny when it is at some moderate level of difficulty."

- cerebral elements in perceiving something as funny (anatomy of a joke)
- videos and discussion
- buddy pairs prep
- distribute readings for pairs presentation

Humor Buddy Presentations: Each presentation is one hour and should have an interactive component that helps illustrate key points and stimulates discussion and reflection, etc. Related readings, provided one week ahead to the class, should include some material from more scholarly publications. (It would also be helpful to provide a short annotated bibliography of additional readings for us.)

The International Journal of Humor Research
(a serious publication to know about!)

more to learn about:

The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS)
The Humor Project, Inc., Sarasota Springs, NY 12866 (518.587.8770). (Look The Humor Project up on the web to learn about conferences and other resources they offer.)

some oldies but goodies to add to our reading forays:

Anatomy of an Illness (Reflections on Healing and Regeneration): Norman Cousins, 1979, Bantam Books, NY. (a classic!!)
The Book of Women's Humor, Regina Barreca (Ed.), Penguin Books, 1996
Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour, John Durant and Jonathan Miller (Ed.), Longman Group UK, 1988
Funny People, Steve Allen, Stein and Day, 1981
Humor: It's Origin and Development, Paul McGhee, Freeman, 1979
The Cartoonist's Muse: A Guide to Generating and Developing Creative Ideas, Mischa Richter and Harald Bakken, Contemporary Books, 1992
Laugh After Laugh: The Healing Power of Humor, Raymond Moddy Jr., MD. Headwaters Press, Jacksonville, Florida, 1981
The Laughing Classroom, Diane Loomans and Karen Kolberg, HJ Kramer INC, Tiburon, California, 1993
Comedy Writing Secrets, Mel Helitzer, Writer's Digest Books, 2005
Celebrating the HUMOR in Life's Uncomfortable Situations, Segel et al, Specific House, Burlington, MA., 2001
The Great Comedians Talk About Comedy, Larry Wilde, Citadel Press, 1968

Humor Buddy Presentation Schedule (tentative)

Oct. 10

Oct. 17

Oct. 24

Oct. 31

guest: Director of the (new!) Comedy Archives at Emerson College (and guess what else?.. journals are due!)

Nov. 7

Nov. 14

Nov. 21

Nina presents (special topic)

Individual Final Presentations

Nov. 28

Dec. 5

Dec. 12

laugh it up wrap up!
final journal due