

CRCRTH 612: Seminar in Creative Thinking (humor)

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

"I'm convinced that If people stopped thinking of humor as a toy and started seeing its usefulness in life, they would find themselves with something every bit as wonderful as the wheel." (John Morreall)

Welcome, to what should be a required course in every college and university! But first, did you hear about the guy whose wife went through a red light and said, "Didn't you see that red light?" "So what", she said. "You see one red light you've seen them all."

Your turn. What's a quick one of your own!

one more! - A doctor says to a man: "Your pregnant!" The man says, "How does a guy get pregnant?!" The doctor says, "The usual way. A little wine, a little dinner..."

and one more!! - how about this epitaph from a colonial graveyard in Massachusetts: I TOLD YOU I WAS SICK.

"Okay, Knock it off. "Get to the point and tell us what this course is *really* about!" All right already!.. (but I'd rather fool around some more). You can breathe a sigh of relief because this course is not an endless series of one-liners. (Although who knows what could happen once we start "seeing" from humorous perspectives.)

While laughing it up, we'll delve into how and why humor works and why it's one of our greatest survival tools. (Don't sweat it, we won't kill it in the process.) To maximize the clout of this journey each of you will make a contribution (with a buddy and individually) to our understanding of humor based on **what you think is interesting to learn about**. Guaranteed, (yes!) are provocative readings and discussions, and activities and exercises that rev up our sense of humor and plunge us into forays of thought about the connections between humor and creativity,

insight and "smarts" development, conflict resolution, effective communication and interpersonal relations, optimal health, well-being - name it!

For openers, the first 4-5 weeks, I'll take the lead and get us thinking about some humor basics: e.g., the nature of humor, origins and theoretical bases, relationship to creativity, "survival" benefits, etc. (I'm excited - and you?)

Requirements: (scary word)

I. Humor Buddy presentations: In pairs (after the first 4-5 weeks) now you and a partner take the lead. Plunge us into an exploration of a shared interest about humor. As part of your presentation, ***get us involved in experiencing ideas*** you want to emphasize. One week before your presentation, give us two high quality, thoughtful readings pertaining to your topic. Online articles (printable with citations) and **other** (!) sources are fine.

II. "Laughing Matters" journal: This is a **weekly** opportunity to reflect on and write about how humor is playing beneficial roles in your own life based on what you are learning. For example, how might humor help you zero in on and solve problems more creatively, take a different view on something, reduce stress, deal with difficult people, etc. Feel free to include zany ideas you might have about who knows what, clippings, cartoons, drawings and other "provocatives" you come across. Bet you'll revisit what you write about in this journal in years to come - many times over! (**due: week 6 and week 11; use a word processor - please!**)

III. Individual ha-ha! This is your own unique application of humor to something of interest. The focus can be something written, something visual you create, something bodily/kinesthetic, (e.g., a "take-off" on something) something purely whimsical, a spin-off of your pairs presentation - whatever floats your boat as the say goes. Think: which of my multiple intelligences am I very comfortable in expressing myself? (We'll talk more about this) Think: what aspect of this outcome will I be bursting to share with everyone? (**due: weeks 13-14**)

TEXTS:

Morreall, John. *Humor works*, HRD press, 1997.

Critchley, Simon. *On Humour*. Routledge Press, 2002

Sept. 2: **Frames of Reference for Understanding Humor**

"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, **think about:** 1) Why is humor *a complex phenomenon* (e.g. there is no general theory or even an agreed upon definition)

2) Bring a list of humor topics that interest you. 3) readings: Morreall (chapters 1,2, 5); Critchley pgs. 2-20

Sept 9: **Frames of Reference for Understanding Humor**

"Humor makes us mentally flexible"

- origins of humor
- creativity and humor (humor: one of the three fundamental manifestations of creativity besides scientific discovery and artistic creation)
- possible humor explorations (list of your interests)
- "humor buddies" intros

for next time, **think about:** 1) What makes us laugh? Bring examples! 2) readings: Morreall (chapters 3, 6) Critchley (chapters 3,4) 3) bring a video clip that makes you laugh!

Sept 16: **Frames of Reference for Understanding Humor**

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

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

for next time: 1) How can humor reduce, even eliminate stress? Your thoughts? examples? 2) Think about: humor and "rule-debunking 3) readings: Morreall (Chapter 4, 6)

Sept. 23: Frames of Reference for Understanding Humor

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

- superiority, relief and incongruity theories
- videos
- buddy pairs meetings

for next time: 1) Bring some favorite jokes to share 2) readings: Critchley (chapter 6); article from Nina

Sept. 30: Cerebral Elements in Perceiving Something as Funny

- anatomy of a joke ("Something is likely to be funny when it is at some moderate level of difficulty.")
- videos and discussion
- buddy pairs prep
- distribute readings for pairs presentation

Oct. 7-14 Humor Buddy Presentations

Each one hour presentation should include an audience participation component to illustrate key points, stimulate discussion, reflection, etc. **Related readings provided one week ahead to the class** should include material from respected (!) publications. (Please also include a short annotated bibliography of additional relevant readings.)

Following these presentations and for the duration, I'll piggy-back on your contributions with associated themes plus some of my own favorites: e.g., humor in the college classroom, in formal communications, in the workplace, gender-based humor.... all depends on what you do and what continuing and/or spin-off interests everyone has.

Oct. 21 (special theme); supplemental readings provided in advance

Oct. 28 (special theme): supplemental readings provided in advance **Due:**
Laughing matters journals (first 7 weeks)

November 4: **Special Guest Presentation!**

November 11: **Veteran's Day holiday - no class**

November 18: **special theme** ("think about" readings given in advance)

November 25: **December 2:** **Final project sharing**

Due: Laughing Matters journals (weeks 8-11)

for next time: Morreall (chapter 10)

December 9: **How's your laugh life?**

Taking stock of what's important! Let's celebrate humor with incongruities from goodies to goodness knows what (provided we won't need legal counsel afterwards!)

Final projects due (if written)

Resources:

International Journal of Humor Research (serious publication!)

The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS)

The Humor Project, Inc., Sarasota Springs, NY 12866 (518.587.8770). (The Humor Project is on the web -learn about conferences and other resources they offer!)

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 Moody 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

