

ON THE FUNNY SIDE

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Satire

Some comedians use events and people in their own lives to create their stand-up comedy. Others take on new roles, inventing funnier versions of themselves.

Just for a Laugh

TWO STAND-UP
COMEDIANS
SPEAK UP

They Just Don't Get It—

COMEDY SKETCH BY JANE WAGNER

I wish I had a quarter for every time my parents said, “Edith, you are being childish.” Excuse me, but shouldn’t a kid my age have the right to be childish? It’s one of the few perks we have left. Not that I blame them for wanting us kids to act more like grown-ups. I wish my parents would act more like grown-ups, too. But it just does not seem to work. Acting childish seems to come naturally, but acting like an adult, no matter how old we are, just doesn’t come easy to us.

Fire and Bad Clothes

COMEDY SKETCH BY DENNY DILLON

One of my most vivid memories is that when I was a kid our house burned down. “Oh my, you poor thing!” It always gets quite a reaction. Especially if you say “burned down.” It’s so dramatic. People even try to trip you up... “To the ground...?”

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Analyse the use of informal language.
- Follow instructions to perform a comedy sketch.

Let me tell you about my house on fire. I was doing my homework and I saw smoke coming out of the closet...I should have done like the movies and yelled "FIRE!!!" Instead I was a *very cool, laidback preteen*. "Oh Mom, there's smoke coming out of the closet." With that signature preteen disgust..."Just thought you might like to know." My mother raced downstairs. "Oh my God!!! KIDS! Grab your coats and get your hat...there's a fire in the basement" ...Sounded like a song cue. My mother always loved musicals.

Now this next moment crystallizes my childhood. We all ran to the closet to get our coats. But being good kids, we all chose our bad coats. Is this a Midwest thing or what? I was always taught, you come home from school and you take off your good clothes and put on your bad clothes. I never understood this philosophy. But I got so used to wearing my bad clothes that my entire childhood was spent in hand-me-downs, and anything nice was reserved for an audience. In fact, that's why I became a performer. So I could wear my good clothes.

So that night, February 1, 1963 (I have a great memory), *we ran out of our burning house into a one hundred centimetre snowdrift* with our one possession: our bad coats. My brother even picked a bad hat. We didn't think to wear gloves or scarves. It was our first fire. You make mistakes.

I knocked on Helen Fortney's door: "Hi, Mrs. Fortney. Can we come in your house because our house is on fire." Once again, my attitude was a very cool preteen kind of "Sorry for the cheap drama, Helen, but we're in a bind." "Holy Toledo, Earl, did ya hear, did ya hear, did ya hear. The Dillon kids say their house is on fire." Earl Fortney said: "Did you call the fire department?" Duh. Thanks a lot Earl.

Then the fire trucks came roaring down my boring dead-end street. I sat in Earl's recliner chair where the footrest shoots out and stared out the huge living-room window. It was very exciting. The perfect seat to watch my house burn. It was like watching a Fellini movie. The fire trucks, the flashing lights, my hysterical optimist mother screaming: "This means we'll get all new furniture." Positive Thinking or Denial Queen...You decide...

The next day I went to school and told my teacher Sister Boniface: “Hi, Sister. I’m sorry I’m wearing my bad clothes, but last night my house burned down.” She stared at me in pity: “To the ground?!”

Then my classmate, Beanie Gallagher, showed me a newspaper. My house was on the front page! “House on fire...Survivors are Mr. & Mrs. Dillon...and their children Kathe, Laurie, Sean, & Denny Dillon...”

I lit up!!! *My name was in the paper!!* I know it was just a survival mention, but...*my name was in the paper.* It looked great. I imagined the letters popping off the page and onto a marquee:

Broadway Tonight: DENNY DILLON—SURVIVOR!!!

1. RESPONDING TO THE COMEDY SKETCHES

- a. Do you think these comedians capture what it’s like to be a kid? Why or why not?
- b. Reread the teaser, and discuss with a partner which of these comedians has invented her identity. What makes you think so?
- c. With a small group, compare the two sketches. What words would you use to describe either style of humour? Which sketch is the funnier? Why?
- d. What other styles of humour have you encountered?
- e. Who is your favourite comedian or comic actor? What do you like most about his or her style of humour?

2. LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS INFORMAL LANGUAGE

Denny Dillon and Jane Wagner have written their comedy sketches using *informal language*, the kind of language most people use in a casual conversation with a friend. Informal language uses slang expressions, sentence fragments, and exclamations.

With a partner, find five specific examples of informal language in this selection. Why do you think the comedians have chosen to use informal language rather than a more formal form of expression? Share your ideas with the class.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATION PERFORM A SKETCH

Choose one of the sketches from “Just for a Laugh” and perform it as a stand-up sketch. (For “Fire and Bad Clothes” you could work with a group, with each group member performing a paragraph, or you could perform just a few paragraphs of it independently.) Try to analyse why the sketch is funny, then practise delivering it with a humorous tone of voice and gestures.



Comedians generate humour by

- varying their pacing (the speed at which they speak)
- pausing before and/or after an interesting word or phrase
- emphasizing key words
- exaggerating facial expressions and body language

Most stand-up comics work only with a microphone, but you may want to use other props, such as a “bad” coat or hat, or a newspaper. Perform your sketch for your classmates when you’re ready.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: What was the hardest part of performing the sketch? What special performance techniques did you use to be funny?

4. WRITING HUMOROUS SKETCH

Let these stand-up comics inspire you as you write your own humorous sketch, based on incidents or feelings from your own life. Keep the sketch short and use informal language. Some possible topics include

- a funny incident during your last vacation
- something that happened during your last ball game
- crazy things your siblings do
- a conversation with a parent or other relative

For extra amusement, you and a classmate can read one another’s sketches. Perform your sketch for the class, using the tips in Activity 3.

*Remember the one about the girl who kissed a frog,
turning it into a prince? Perhaps the fairy tale
didn't tell the whole story.*

Frog

FAIRY-TALE PARODY

by Vivian Vande Velde

Once upon a time, when princes still set out to seek their fortunes, a prince named Sidney came to a well where an old woman asked him for help in getting water.

Now the old woman didn't have a bucket and Sidney didn't have a bucket. But he'd heard enough fairy tales about three sons setting off down the road and meeting a strange old woman, and the first two sons were always rude and got into trouble, and the youngest son was always polite and then the old woman would give him whatever it was that he needed to fulfil his quest. So—being a middle son—Sidney always did his best to be polite to everybody, even when he wasn't on a quest.

But his best wasn't enough for this old woman, and the next thing he knew he was a bulgy-eyed green frog, which just goes to show that sometimes having a bucket is more important than being polite.

"There, you loathsome thing," the old woman said, which was hardly fair since she was the one who had made him into what he was, "stay a frog until a beautiful princess feeds you from her plate and lets you sleep on her pillow."

Travel goes a lot faster when you're riding a horse than when you're hopping, especially if your feet are less than thirty centimetres long. It took several days for Sidney to find the nearest castle, and when he got there, he didn't even know whose castle it was.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Suggest alternative verbs for *said*.
- Write a parody of a fairy tale.

Everything looked different from grass level, but he was still pretty sure he didn't know the people who lived here. He hoped there was a princess.

Sidney hopped across the drawbridge and into the dusty courtyard. There were horses and dogs and chickens. People, too, way, way high up. And lots and lots of legs. Many of them were walking so fast that he knew he was in danger of getting stepped on. He saw a well in the courtyard, but Sidney had had quite enough of wells for the time being. Hurriedly, he hopped off to the side, where there was a quiet and well-tended garden.

In the garden was a lively, cool-looking reflecting pool, with fresh, clear water and lily pads. Sidney jumped in and it felt like heaven.

Until something bonked him on the head and dunked him.

Sidney came up sputtering, just as a beautiful girl of about his own age came running up to the pool.

"Oh, no!" the girl cried. "My golden ball."

"Excuse me," Sidney said, "are you a princess?"

The girl didn't answer. She just flung herself onto the bench by the pool's edge and began to weep.

Sidney, in the middle of the pool, looked down and could see the ball just settling into the soft mud below him. He paddled closer to the girl. "Excuse me," he said again, "are you a princess?"

"What a twit," the girl snapped, never even looking up. "Of course I am. Don't I look like one?"

"Yes, you do," Sidney admitted apologetically. "And a very lovely one at that. I think the two of us can help each other out."

"I don't want to help you out," the princess said. "I want to have my ball back."

"That's what I mean," Sidney said.

The princess finally looked at him. "You can get my ball?" she asked. Sidney nodded.

"Well, then, do it."

"Yes," Sidney said, "but then, afterward, will you let me eat from your plate and sleep on your pillow? I'm a prince, you see, and I have a magic spell on me, and that's the only way to break it."

The princess's lip curled in disgust. "I need that ball. It's my father's paperweight and I wasn't supposed to be playing with it."

"I don't have to eat a *lot* from your plate," Sidney told her, "and I can sleep *way over* on the side of the pillow and not take up much room at all."

"Oh, all right," the princess said.

Sidney dove into the water. The ball was heavy, but with a great deal of struggling he finally managed to get it up close enough that the princess could reach over and grasp it. As she turned the ball over in her hands to make sure it wasn't damaged, Sidney jumped up onto the bench next to her.

"Now," he said just as she shook the water off the ball, drenching him all over again. He coughed a little bit, and when he looked up again, she was gone.

"Wait," he called, catching sight of her leaving the garden.

But she didn't.

By the time he made it out of the garden, across the courtyard, and into the castle, the princess was sitting down to dinner with her family.

Sidney kicked on the dining room door. "Hey," he yelled. "Hey, princess!"

He heard the king ask, "What's that noise?"

"Nothing," the princess answered.

"Princess!" Sidney yelled.

"It's me, the frog prince. You accidentally left me behind."

The king's voice said, "He says he's



a frog prince. What does he mean, you left him behind?"

"I don't know," the princess said.

"You promised you'd help me." Sidney wasn't used to yelling, and his throat was getting sore.

"You promised you'd help him?" the king asked.

"No," the princess said.

There was no other way. Sidney called out, "In return for getting back your father's golden ball paperweight that you were playing with and dropped into the pool in the garden."

"The golden paperweight that left a wet spot on my papers this afternoon?" the king asked.

"I don't know anything about it," the princess said.

The king must have brought his fist down on the table. Sidney could hear the dishes rattle. "A promise," the king said, "is a promise. Let the frog in."

Servants came and opened the big golden doors.

Sidney hopped into the dining room, which was decorated with mirrors and crystal chandeliers and hundreds of flickering candles. He hopped until he came to the princess's chair.

"What, exactly," the king asked his daughter, "did you promise him?"

"I can't remember," the princess said.

"That I could eat from your plate," Sidney reminded her. "That I could sleep on your pillow. I promised not to eat too much and to use only the corner of the pillow."

"A promise is a promise," the king repeated.

The princess lifted Sidney, not very gently, and plunked him down on the white linen tablecloth beside her china dish.

Sidney nibbled on a piece of lettuce that was hanging off the edge of the dish.

The princess put her napkin up to her mouth and made gagging sounds. "I'm all finished," she announced, shoving the plate away.

"Then you may leave the table," the king said. "Don't forget your little friend."

The princess scooped up Sidney and brought him up the stairs to her bedroom, stamping her feet all the way.

"Thank you," Sidney yelled back down the stairs to the king.

"You horrid beast," the princess growled at Sidney. "You told him about the paperweight. Now I'm going to be in trouble."

"It was your own fault for walking away so fast that I couldn't keep up," Sidney said. "Are you going to put me on your pillow now?"

"I'll put you on my pillow!" the princess shouted. "But I'll put you on my wall first."

She flung Sidney with all her might against the wall.

"Ow!" Sidney cried, landing in a heap on the floor.

"Now here's the pillow," the princess said, throwing that on top of him.

But as soon as the pillow touched Sidney's head, he instantly regained his normal shape.

"Oh my!" the princess gasped. She was going to be in serious trouble with her father now, she thought. Here she had a man in her room, and her father was never going to believe that this was the same person who had come into her room as a frog. Even now she could hear her father coming up the stairs, demanding, "What's all the commotion?"

But the prince—he was obviously a prince—who stood before her was incredibly handsome, and she was falling in love already, which surely would balance out the trouble she'd be in with her father.

"Oh," she said, clapping her hands together. "I'm so sorry. But my father will make it worth your while. We can get married, and he'll give you half the kingdom and—"

"Are you out of your mind?" Sidney said. "First you break your promise to me, then you lie about it until your father forces you to keep it, then you try to kill me. No, thank you, princess." He strode out of the door, out of the castle, out of the kingdom, returning home, where he eventually married the goose girl.

And the princess was right: her father didn't believe her story.

1. RESPONDING TO THE PARODY

- a. "Frog" is a *parody* (a humorous imitation) of a fairy tale called *The Frog Prince*. Working in a small group, make a list of the ways in which "Frog" makes fun of the characters and plot of a typical fairy tale.
- b. Do you think this parody version of the fairy tale has a more up-to-date message than the original? Explain.

2. LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS VERBS TO REPLACE SAID

When she writes dialogue, Vivian Vande Velde uses many different verbs to replace the verb *said*, for example, "'Oh my!' the princess *gasp*ed." (page 246). Make a list of the other verbs Vivian uses in place of *said*. What does she achieve by using these different verbs?

Rewrite the following dialogue in your notebook, using vivid verbs to replace *said*. In each case, try to choose a verb that expresses the speaker's emotion.

Excuses, Excuses

"I was only coming to borrow the lawnmower," said Mr. Wolf.

"Yeah, sure! That's why you blew down my straw house!" said the First Little Pig.

"I have bad allergies. I just couldn't stop sneezing," said the Wolf.

The Second Little Pig said, "Oh, right! Then explain how you blew down my house of twigs."

Mr. Wolf said, "Well, a bee flew up my nose and I was simply trying to

snort it out. Besides, I still needed to borrow a lawnmower."

"Then how do you explain the fact," said the Third Little Pig, "that you tried to blow down my brick house?"

"Oh, that's easy," said the Wolf. "A huge, ugly, hairy spider was crawling on your front door. I raised my paw to knock, saw it, and instantly began hyperventilating—I mean, huffing and puffing!"

3. WRITING PARODY

Write your own parody of a well-known fairy tale to give it a fresh perspective.

In your parody you might use some or all of the following techniques:

- Change the point of view to that of another character.
- Give the characters contemporary attitudes and behaviours.
- Use a modern setting.
- Give the story a new message and a different ending.

When you have written your parody, share it with the class.



*When it comes to jokes, nothing beats one-liners—
unless it's a rhyme by Ogden Nash or that no-name comedian,
Anonymous.*

Quips & Quotes

VERSES AND JOKES
BY OGDEN NASH AND OTHERS



*Light Verse
by Ogden Nash*

The Fly

God in His wisdom made the fly
And then forgot to tell us why.

The Baby

A bit of talcum
Is always walcum.

The Jellyfish

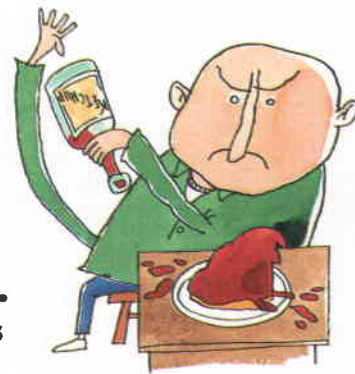
Who wants my jellyfish?
I'm not sellyfish!

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Experiment with rhyme in light verse.
- Revise statements to eliminate ambiguity.

Unsigned Advice

On Tomato Ketchup
If you do not shake the bottle,
None'll come, and then a lot'll.
Anonymous



Be Careful

I'm careful of the words I say,
To keep them soft and sweet,
I never know from day to day
Which ones I'll have to eat.

Anonymous

Sound Advice

When in danger or in doubt,
Run in circles, scream and shout.

Anonymous



And By That You Mean...?

For those who like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they like.

Abraham Lincoln

I wouldn't be paranoid
if everyone didn't pick on me.

Anonymous

People have one thing
in common: they
are all different.

Anonymous

I must follow the people.
Am I not their leader?

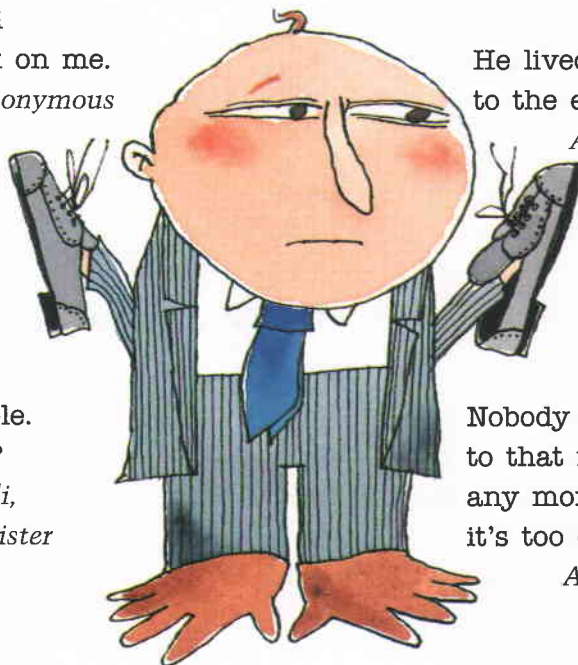
*Benjamin Disraeli,
British Prime Minister*

He lived his life
to the end.

Anonymous

Nobody goes
to that restaurant
any more—
it's too crowded.

Anonymous



That shoe fits him like a glove.

Anonymous

CLASSIFIED GOOFS

Taken from the classified sections of newspapers from across the country:

Now is your chance to have your ears pierced and get an extra pair to take home, too.

VACATION SPECIAL: Have your home exterminated.

DOG FOR SALE: Eats anything and is fond of children.

USED CARS: Why go elsewhere to be cheated? Come here first!

1. RESPONDING TO THE VERSES AND JOKES

- a. What is your favourite joke or verse in the selection? Why?
- b. Which jokes can you imagine using in a speech to amuse an audience?

2. READING CATEGORIZE BLOOPERS

The quotations in “And by That You Mean?” were not meant to be jokes; they are actually funny mistakes called bloopers. They fall into two main categories:

- **stating the obvious** (for example, “He lived his life to the end.”)
- **logical impossibilities** (for example, “That shoe fits him like a glove.”)

For each of the other bloopers, decide which type of mistake it is. When you read the newspaper or listen to politicians, watch out for similar bloopers.

3. WORD CRAFT RHYME

Ogden Nash and the anonymous poets who wrote “Unsigned Advice” use rhyme to create humour. Read the verses aloud to hear the rhymes better. Which are the funniest, in your opinion?

Try making up your own funny rhymes. If you like, coin new words the way Ogden Nash did with “sellyfish” and “walcum.” Make a class display board of your humorous rhymes.

Post your funniest rhymes on the school’s Web site, asking visitors to add their own.

4. LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS AMBIGUITY

The bloopers in “Classified Goofs” can be described as ambiguous because they appear to mean something other than what the writers intended. Working with a partner, decide

- what each statement actually means as written
- what the writer wanted it to mean
- how you could rewrite it so that it actually says what the writer intended

Now, rewrite each statement and share your results with your classmates.

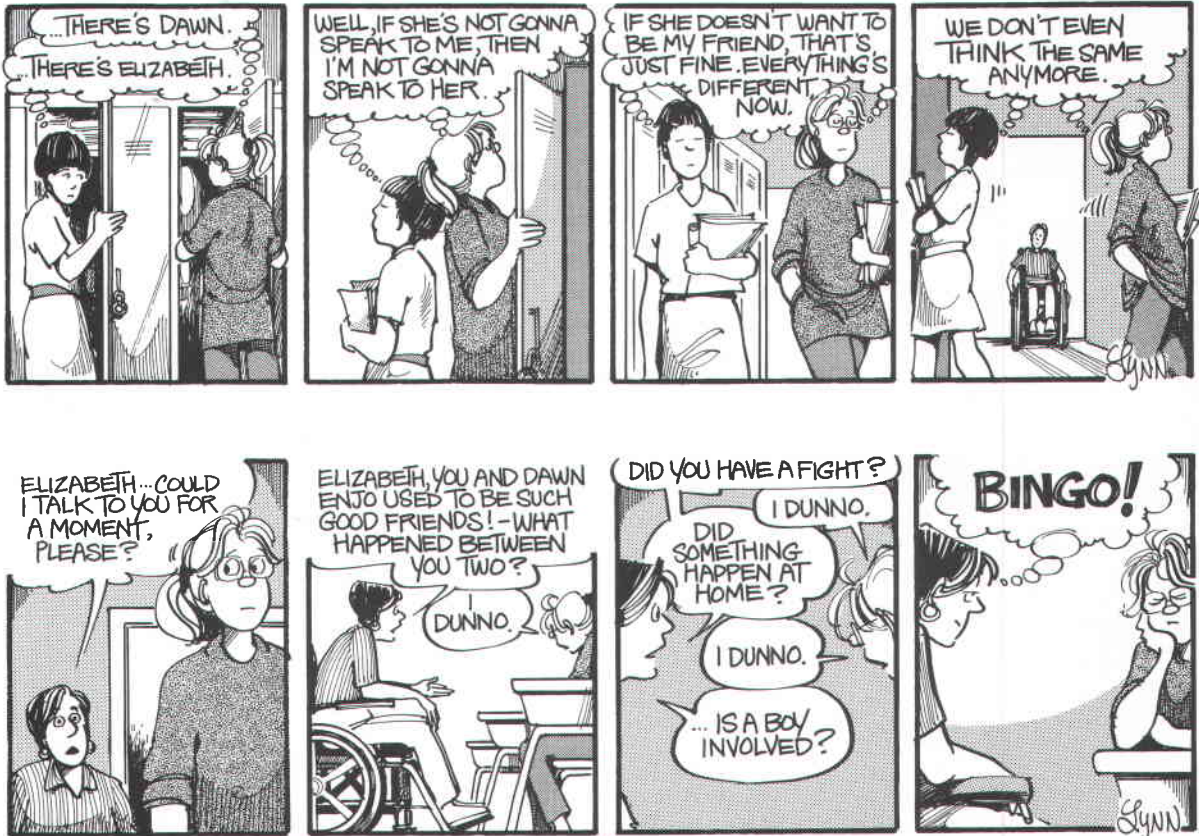
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Check your rewritten version of each statement. Are you sure you have eliminated all ambiguity?



*Elizabeth and Dawn
used to be best friends.
What went wrong?*

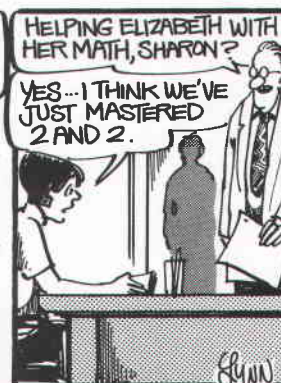
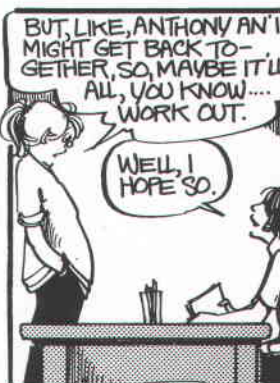
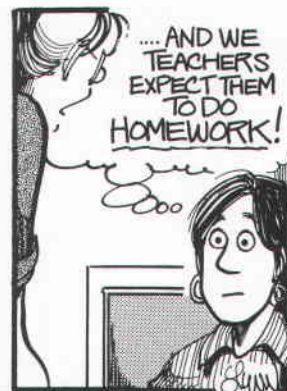
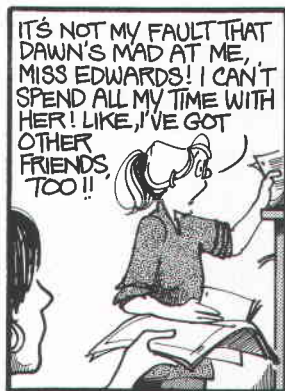
For Better or For Worse

COMIC STRIPS BY LYNN JOHNSTON



GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Analyse visual humour in comic strips.
- Research biographical information.



1. RESPONDING TO THE COMIC STRIPS

- a. Have you ever had a serious disagreement with a best friend? Do you think Lynn Johnston has captured the teens' feelings well?
- b. Lynn Johnston's daily comic strips each have four panels. In each strip, which of the four panels contains the punch line? Which punch line is funniest, in your opinion?
- c. How would you describe the relationship between Elizabeth and her teacher? Do you think it's realistic? Why or why not?
- d. Do you have a favourite newspaper comic strip? Tell why you enjoy it. Which characters do you like the best?

2. VISUAL COMMUNICATION ANALYSE COMIC STRIPS

In comic strips, the humour and interest come as much from the drawings as from the words—even the way individual words are drawn can be important. Choose one of Lynn Johnston's comic strips. For each panel, make notes about how she creates humour and interest visually. Consider such things as



- drawing style (simple or complex)
- point of view (close-ups, medium shots, long shots)
- facial expressions
- body language
- size and position of words and speech balloons

Compare your ideas with those of a partner.

3. RESEARCHING BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Lynn Johnston is a popular Canadian cartoonist. Find out what you can about her work, her interests, and her family by exploring the library and the Internet. (As an alternative, you might conduct the same kind of research about a favourite cartoonist of your choice.) Present your findings in the form of a brief written report. Be sure to include examples of the cartoonist's work.

*So you've always
wanted to create your
own comic strip?*

*This article
could be*

just the

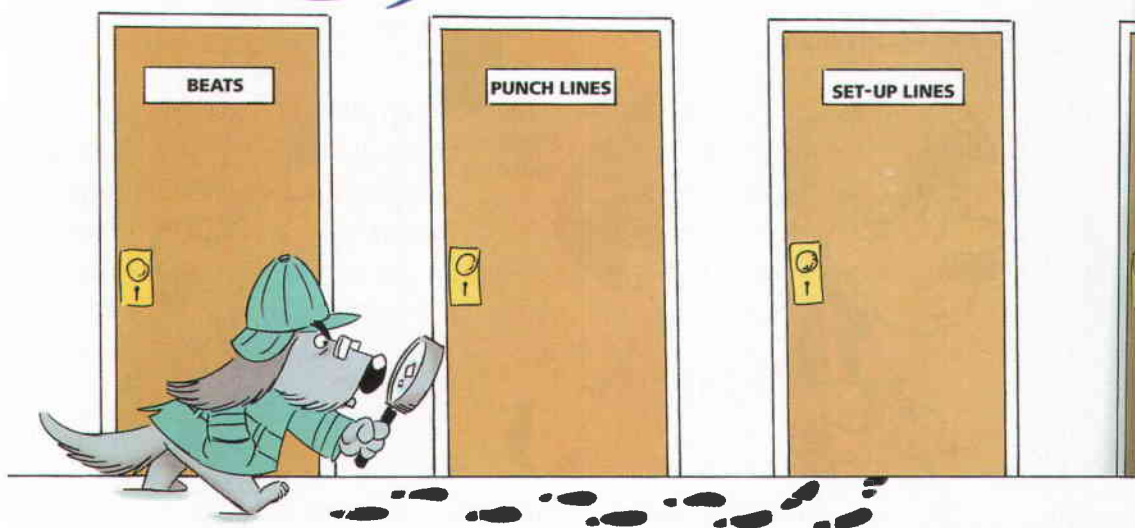
help you've

been waiting for.

WRITING *on* THE FUNNY SIDE of THE BRAIN

**How-to
Article**

by Christopher Hart



I'm not going to dissect humour here. Anyone who asks the question, "What is humour?" isn't funny. Trust me on this. I had a professor in college who taught a course in film comedy. In my opinion, he was the dullest man in the history of the world. Thought I was going to die midway through each lecture. This guy spent all of his pitiful waking hours trying to explain humour. Can't be done. Want to know why? OK, here's my treatise on what humour is: If something's funny. That's it. That's the complete answer. We're done.

So, I'm not going to talk about humour, but I am going to talk about jokes—about how to craft them and how to make them pay off—because unlike humour, joke structure is a skill that can be taught.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Summarize an article.
- Create a comic strip.

What Should I Write About?

Generally, it's easier to write about people your own age and younger, because you've been there. This doesn't mean that if you're a teenager, you must only write about teenage things. However, you'd have an advantage if you approached your subject from an angle that's familiar to you. You could write a comic strip about parents raising kids, but you'd have a better slant if you wrote from the kid's point of view, rather than that of the parents.

You can also write about anything with which you're obsessed. If you've never known a lawyer in your life, you could still write about lawyers if you've watched just about every courtroom drama on television.

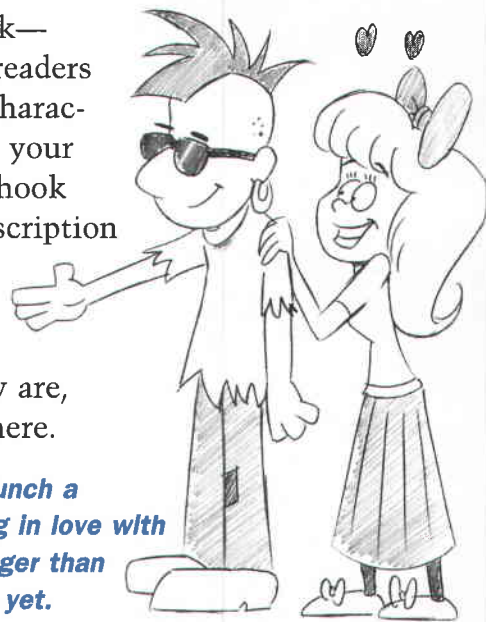
Which Comes First—The Drawing or the Joke?

The Joke. You thought it would be more complicated than that? Sorry. It's the joke. You were hoping, maybe, that it was the drawing? Nope. The joke always comes first. It's just not possible to craft a funny joke based on a few randomly drawn panels. The artist won't have a single visual idea until the writer comes up with the premise for the joke.

The All-Important "Hook"

Any good comic strip needs a hook—a humorous premise that draws readers in. You can create all the funny characters you want, but without a hook, your strip will never sustain itself. The hook should be a one-or two-sentence description of the premise. The best place to find good examples of hooks is in any TV guide. Read the descriptions of the sitcoms. Notice how brief they are, yet everything you need to know is there.

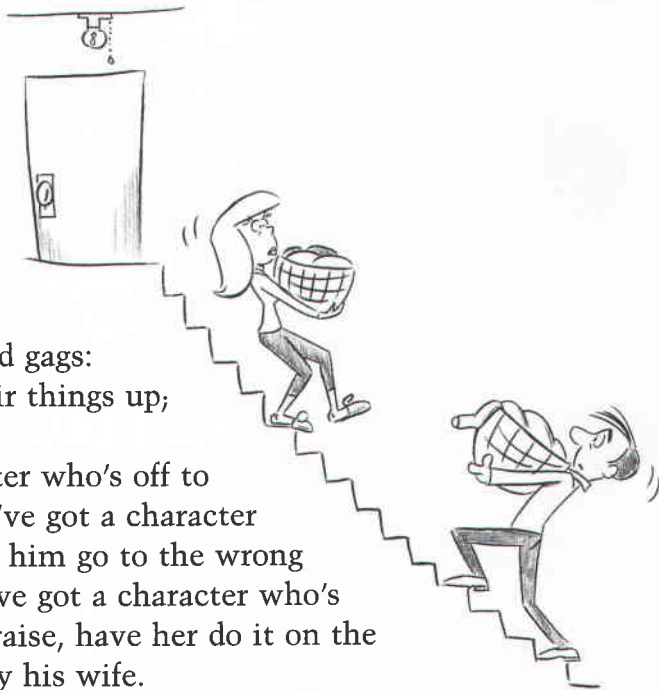
Here's an example of a hook that could launch a comic strip: A teenage girl is always falling in love with guys her parents can't stand. If it takes longer than that to explain it, you don't have the hook yet.



Conflict in Humour

Humour is based on conflict. Whenever possible, make the conflict visual. There's a saying in comedy screenwriting that works equally well for illustrated jokes and gags: Squeeze your characters. Stir things up; raise the stakes.

So, if you have a character who's off to work, make her late. If you've got a character who's going on a date, have him go to the wrong address to meet her. If you've got a character who's going to ask the boss for a raise, have her do it on the day her boss got yelled at by his wife.



Assembling a Cast

All right. You've got your idea for a comic strip. What do you do next? Start assembling a cast. You've probably

thought about the main characters, and maybe one or two supporting characters.

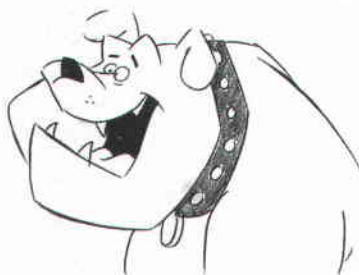
However, in order to create a world into which your readers can dive, you're going to have to weave together a few more players.



SISTER—SUPPORTING



BOY/OWNER—LEAD



DOG—LEAD



BOY'S MOTHER—SUPPORTING



NEIGHBOUR —
ANCILLARY

There are three types of characters: lead, supporting, and ancillary. Leads appear in almost every comic strip. Supporting characters appear less often, but regularly. Ancillary characters may not appear for weeks at a time, but must re-occur with enough frequency so that they won't be forgotten. Pages 257 and 258 show some typical cast members for an animal comic strip. There should be many more supporting and ancillary characters than there are leads.

If you have too many lead characters, your strip will lose its focus. You must determine who the strip is about.



NEIGHBOURHOOD CAT — --
ANCILLARY

The Set-up Line: The Key to Writing Jokes

Everyone “knows” that a good punch line is the key to a funny joke, and everyone is wrong. The punch line is the easy part. It's the set-up that's really the key. Given the right set-up, anyone can think up a punch line.

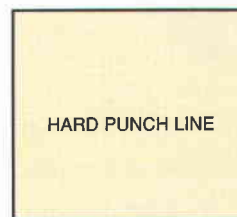
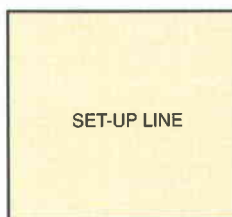
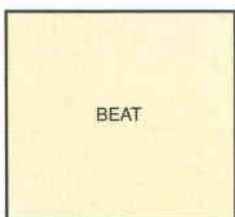
Hard Punch Lines vs. Soft Punch Lines

There are two basic types of punch lines: hard and soft. The *hard punch line* has a sharp edge. It's the “You mean blah, blah?”/ “No, I mean, blah, blah,” type of joke. The hard punch line panel is preceded by the all-important *set-up line* in the panel before.

The second type of joke makes use of the *soft punch line*. The soft punch line typically derives its humour more from character and quirkiness than from situations. It has a softer edge to it and usually presents itself in the form of a comment, rather than a strong retort. The soft punch line is set up by a preceding weak punch line, which is mildly funny or ironic, but not funny enough to carry the joke. It needs a “topper.” So the soft punch line in the last panel tops it.

THE HARD PUNCH LINE

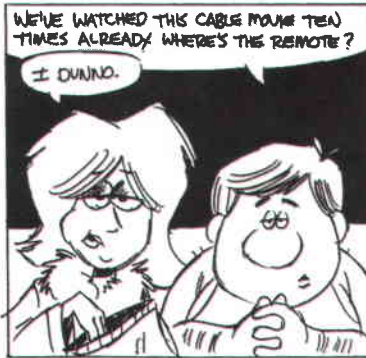
Here's an example of the hard punch line in use. Notice that the first panel establishes the premise: kid wants to borrow money from Dad. The next panels develop the joke. The second-last panel delivers the set-up, which begs for the punch line. And, the last panel contains the hard punch line. (Note that jokes are basically composed of two different things happening simultaneously on different levels. Here, the kid's dialogue progresses in one direction, while the father's goes in another.)



THE SOFT PUNCH LINE

On the next page is an example of the soft punch line. Again, the first panel establishes the premise. You see that the scene is in the living room of a couple who are couch potatoes. The second panel is the weak punch line. It's funny but not funny enough to sustain the whole joke. It needs a topper, the soft punch line, which occurs in the last panel.

ESTABLISHING PANEL



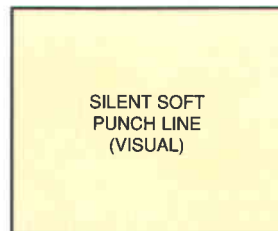
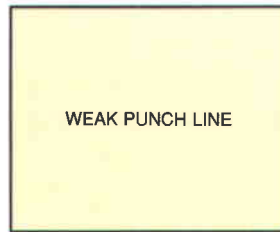
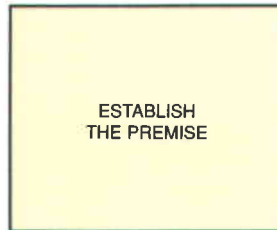
WEAK PUNCH LINE



SOFT PUNCH LINE



THE SILENT PUNCH LINE
 Sometimes a silent punch line is the funniest. If you can say it with pictures, don't say it again by adding redundant dialogue. Note the economy of words in this example. In addition, note that the strip ends exactly where it began, with the parents reading the book on the couch.



Last Laugh: Funny Words

Some words are funnier than others. Always search for the funnier word to express what you want your characters to say. Listen to stand-up comedians; they're masters at selecting funny-sounding words with which to pepper their routines. The difference between regular and funny words is that funny words are more specific, funny or zippy sounding, and/or slightly gross.

Ordinary

full
four
food
house
child
foot
smart
sandwich
money
spot
person

Funnier

bloated (slightly gross)
five (odd numbers are always funnier)
snack (zippy sounding)
condo (more specific)
kid (zippier sounding)
toes (slightly gross)
genius (more specific)
pizza (more specific)
credit cards (more specific)
smudge (funny sounding)
guy (funny sounding)

1. RESPONDING TO THE ARTICLE

- a. Do you agree with the author that humour can't be explained? Why, or why not?
- b. What was the most interesting thing about how to write comic strips you learned from this article?
- c. You could think of a comic strip as a very short story. What are some of the elements that comic strips and stories have in common?
- d. Summarize the information in the article, jotting down the main points in your notebook. Use your notes to create a short, step-by-step outline that someone else could easily follow.
- e. Christopher Hart says that "joke structure is a skill that can be taught." Do you think his article successfully teaches people how jokes work? Explain.

2. READING COLLECT COMIC STRIPS

Clip examples of comic strips you enjoy from the newspapers. Make a class display with the headings “Hard Punch Line,” “Soft Punch Line,” and “Silent Punch Line.” Pin each comic strip you clipped under the appropriate heading. If you’re unsure of which category a strip belongs to, discuss the punch line with a classmate. Add other headings to your display if necessary. How would you categorize Lynn Johnston’s comic strips in the previous selection?

3. VISUAL COMMUNICATION CREATE A COMIC STRIP

Work with a partner for this activity; one of you is the writer, and the other is the artist. Follow the advice in the article and in your own summary to create a four-panel comic strip. When you dream up a cast of characters and a story line, remember to stick to things you know well. Once you have your story line, turn it into a joke with a punch line. Plan your four panels. To complete the strip, the artist draws the characters (in black and white or colour), and the writer fills in the speech balloons. Exchange your finished comic strip with one created by another pair of students.

PEER ASSESSMENT: Does the comic strip have a hook? conflict? a good set-up line? A funny punch line? Is it clear who the main and supporting characters are? Are the pictures and words easy to see and understand? What suggestions would you make for improvements?

4. WORD CRAFT HUMOROUS WORDS

Discuss the list of funny words on page 261. According to Christopher Hart, what makes some words funnier than others? Do you disagree with any of his specific choices? Add your own examples of funny and not-so-funny words to the list.

*In this Chinese-Canadian
folk tale about hard times,
good triumphs
over evil.*

The Friends of Kwan Ming

**FOLK TALE BY
PAUL YEE**

When his father died, the peasant Kwan Ming was forced to sell his little plot of paddy and the old family house to pay for the burial. After the funeral, Kwan Ming looked around at the banana trees surrounding his village, and saw that he had nothing left to his name—not even one chipped roof tile. He had just enough money to buy a steamship ticket to the New World, where he had heard jobs were plentiful.

“I can start a new life there,” he told his mother. “I will send money home.”

The voyage lasted six weeks, over rocky waves and through screaming storms. Kwan Ming huddled together with hundreds of other Chinese deep in the ship’s hold. There he became fast friends with Chew Lap, Tam Yim, and Wong Foon—men from neighbouring villages. If one friend took sick, the others fetched him food and water. If one friend had bad luck gambling, the others lent him money to recover his losses. Together the four men ate, told jokes, and shared their dreams for the future.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Identify the elements of a folk tale.
- Design a movie poster.

When they arrived in the New World, everyone scattered throughout the port city to search for work. Kwan Ming hurried to the warehouse district, to the train station, and to the waterfront, but doors slammed in his face because he was Chinese. So he went to every store and laundry in Chinatown, and to every farm outside town. But there was not a job to be found anywhere, for there were too many men looking for work in a country that was still too young.

Every night Kwan Ming trudged back to the inn where he was staying with his three friends. Like him, they, too, had been searching for work but had found nothing. Every night, as they ate their meagre meal of rice dotted with soya sauce, the friends shared information about the places they had visited and the people they had met. And every night Kwan Ming worried more and more about his mother, and how she was faring.

"If I don't find work soon, I'm going back to China," Chew Lap declared one evening.

"What for, fool?" asked Tam Yim. "Things are worse there!"

"But at least I will be with my family!" retorted Chew Lap.

"Your family needs money for food more than they need your company," Wong Foon commented, "Don't forget that."

Then a knock was heard at the door, and the innkeeper pushed his way into the tiny attic room.

"Good news!" he cried out. "I have found a job for each of you!"

The men leaped eagerly to their feet.

"Three of the jobs are well-paying and decent," announced the innkeeper. "But the fourth job is, well..." He coughed sadly.

For the first time since they had met, the four men eyed one another warily, like four hungry cats about to pounce on a bird.

"The biggest bakery in Chinatown needs a worker," said the innkeeper. "You'll always be warm next to the oven. Who will go?"

"You go, Chew Lap," Kwan Ming said firmly. "Your parents are ill and need money for medicine."

"The finest tailor in Chinatown wants an apprentice," continued the innkeeper. "The man who takes this job will be able to throw away those thin rags you wear."

"That's for you, Tam Yim," declared Kwan Ming. "You have four little ones waiting for food in China."

"The best shoemaker in Chinatown needs an assistant," said the innkeeper. "He pays good wages. Who wants to cut leather and stitch boots?"

"You go, Wong Foon," Kwan Ming stated. "You said the roof of your house in China needs repair. Better get new tiles before the rainy season starts."

"The last job is for a houseboy." The innkeeper shook his head. "The pay is low. The boss owns the biggest mansion in town, but he is also the stingiest man around!"

Kwan Ming had no choice but to take this job, for he knew his mother would be desperate for money. So off he went.

The boss was larger than a cast-iron stove and as cruel as a blizzard at midnight. Kwan Ming's room was next to the furnace, so black soot and coal dust covered his pillow and blankets. It was difficult to save money, and the servants had to fight over the leftovers for their meals.

Every day Kwan Ming swept and washed every floor in the mansion. He moved the heavy oak tables and rolled up the carpets. The house was so big, that when Kwan Ming finally finished cleaning the last room, the first one was dirty all over again.

One afternoon Kwan Ming was mopping the front porch when his boss came running out. In his hurry, he slipped and crashed down the stairs. Kwan Ming ran over to help, but the huge man turned on him.

"You turtle!" he screamed, as his neck purpled and swelled. "You lazy oaf! You doorknob! You rock-brain! You're fired!"

Kwan Ming stood silently for a long moment. Then he spoke. "Please, sir, give me another chance. I will work even harder if you let me stay."

The boss listened and his eyes narrowed. Then he coughed loudly. "Very well, Kwan Ming, I won't fire you," he said. "But I will have to punish you, for you have ruined this suit, and scuffed my boots, and made me miss my dinner."

Kwan Ming nodded miserably.

"Then find me the following things in three days' time!" the boss ordered. "Bring me a fine woollen suit that will never tear. Bring me a pair of leather boots that will never wear out. And bring me forty loaves of bread that will never go stale. Otherwise you are finished here, and I will see that you never find another job!"

Kwan Ming shuddered as he ran off. The old man's demands sounded impossible. Where would he find such items?

In despair, Kwan Ming wandered through the crowded streets of Chinatown. He sat on the raised wooden sidewalk because he had nowhere else to go.

Suddenly, familiar voices surrounded him.

"Kwan Ming, where have you been?"

"Kwan Ming, how is your job?"

"Kwan Ming, why do you never visit us?"

Kwan Ming looked up and saw his three friends smiling down at him. They pulled him up and pulled him off to the teahouse, where they ate and drank. When Kwan Ming told his friends about his predicament, the men clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't worry!" exclaimed Tam Yim. "I'll make the woollen suit you need."

"I'll make the boots," added Wong Foon.

"And I'll make the bread," exclaimed Chew Lap.

Three days later, Kwan Ming's friends delivered the goods they had promised. An elegant suit of wool hung over a gleaming pair of leather boots, and forty loaves of fresh-baked bread were lined up in neat rows on the dining-room table.

Kwan Ming's boss waddled into the room and his eyes lit up. He put on the suit, and his eyebrows arched in surprise at how well it fit. Then he sat down and tried on the boots, which slid onto his feet as if they had been buttered.

Then the boss sliced into the bread and started eating. The bread was so soft, so sweet, and so moist that he couldn't stop. Faster and faster he chewed. He ate twelve loaves, then thirteen, then twenty.

The boss's stomach swelled like a circus tent, and his feet bloated out like balloons. But the well-sewn suit and sturdy boots held him tight like a gigantic sausage. The man shouted for help. He tried to stand up, but he couldn't even get out of his chair. He kicked his feet about like a baby throwing a tantrum.

But before anyone could do a thing, there was a shattering *Bang!*

Kwan Ming stared at the chair and blinked his eyes in astonishment. For there was nothing left of his boss.

He had exploded into a million little pieces.

1. RESPONDING TO THE FOLK TALE

- a. Why do you think the four men became such good friends during the voyage to the New World?
- b. What do you think of Kwan Ming's selflessness towards his friends? Would you have been so generous in the same situation? Explain your reasons.
- c. As a class, make a list of the elements of a typical folk tale, for example, one-dimensional characters that are all good or all bad. Reread "The Friends of Kwan Ming" looking for examples of the elements you listed.
- d. What are the humorous moments in this folk tale? What words would you use to describe the humour?

2. ORAL COMMUNICATION PERFORM A SCENE

Working in groups of five, develop a scene that takes place after Kwan Ming's boss explodes. In this scene, the four friends explain to a police officer what happened to the boss. Write out the dialogue in script form. Assign a part to each member of the group, memorize your lines, and perform your scene for the class. You might use a video recorder to tape your performance.



3. MEDIA DESIGN A POSTER

Imagine that you are helping to promote a movie version of "The Friends of Kwan Ming." Your job is to create a poster for the movie that will intrigue people, but not give away the explosive ending. Successful posters have one powerful image, bold colours, and a few well-chosen words that can be easily read from a distance. Enter your poster in a class poster contest!



SELF-ASSESSMENT: After you have finished a rough sketch of your poster, take a step back to have a critical look at it. Is the title prominent and easy to read? Have you chosen an eye-catching image that tells something about the movie? Will your poster make a strong impression?

On *The Red Green Show*, *Red* runs *Possum Lodge*, and *Harold* is his goofy sidekick.

Red's Mail Call

GOALS AT A GLANCE: Analyze *The Red Green Show*

Harold is sitting in the den in his chair with a mailsack beside him and a couple of opened letters in his hand. He starts to talk when he sees *Red* coming in.

Harold: We have a really interesting letter today, Uncle Red. Came from the Yukon. I put the stamp in my time capsule.

Red: The Yukon—the land of the Midnight Sun. Dog sleds. Six months of daylight. Gold Rush. Polar bears and penguins. Quite a place.

Harold: Yeah, oh yeah. “Dear Red, Living up here in the Yukon is real great. The only problem is the people from the South who stereotype us Northerners. They think of the Yukon as the Land of the Midnight Sun, with everyone on dog sleds, and hunting seals for six months of daylight. Tourists ask us where the Gold Rush is or where they can find the polar bears and penguins. What kind of idiot doesn’t know that penguins are only at the South Pole? How can we break away from these stupid stereotypes?”



GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Recognize stereotypes and explore their effects.
- Analyse TV comedy shows.

Red: I think the main problem is the foreigners. They come here expecting to see nothing but snowmobiles and Mounties. When was the last time you saw a Mountie? I mean, I wonder if there even is such a thing as a Mountie. Have you ever seen one? Mr....did he sign his name?

Harold: Yeah, oh yeah. Corporal H. Benson of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Whitehorse Detachment.

Red: Oh. Sorry, Corporal Benson, nothing against the Mounties, you're a great bunch of guys. You men carry on a great Canadian tradition, and Corporal H. Benson, if we do have one stereotype, let it be the Canadian Mountie in his bright red uniform. I salute you, sir.

Harold: The *H* stands for Helen.

1. RESPONDING TO THE COMEDY SKETCH

- a. The humour in this skit could be called "putting your foot in your mouth." What are the places in the skit where Red says something foolish?
- b. Do people from other countries or other regions of Canada have stereotyped ideas about the place where you live? What are the stereotypes, and how do you know they exist?
- c. What are some possible negative results of misconceptions Canadians might hold about other countries?

2. MEDIA ANALYSE TV SHOWS

Make a list of comedy shows that are currently running on TV. Sort the shows into categories, such as sketch comedy (*The Red Green Show*), situation comedy (*Third Rock from the Sun*), and animation (*The Simpsons*). Add other categories if necessary, and write an explanation of how each category is different from the others. Which category seems to be most popular? How would you account for this? Finally, choose your favourite comedy and tell why you enjoy it.

HOW TO IMPROVISE AND ROLE-PLAY



Goals at a Glance

- Analyse character thoroughly.
- Prepare to perform in role.

What's the difference between acting a part in a play, and role-playing or improvising a character? When you act a part, you have a script that tells you exactly what to say. Many scripts contain stage directions that suggest what tone of voice and gestures you should use, and even how you should use facial expressions. When you role-play or improvise, you don't have a script to help! You have to rely on your imagination to create your character. Even so, there are some practical strategies you can use to make improvising easier.

Get to Know Your Character

In most cases, you'll have time to prepare before you improvise. Use some of that time to think about the character you will be playing. Your goal is to become that character so that your audience will believe you are that person and not yourself. Answering the following questions will help you to get to know your character:

- What adjectives would you use to describe

your character's personality? Try to find words that truly capture what your character is like, such as confident, generous, angry.

- What is your character's background? Where does she live? How old is she? What are her family and friends like? How does this background affect her feelings and attitudes?
- What skills, education, and interests does your character have? What is his position in society?
- What motivates your character? Does she have specific goals?
- Is your character a likable person? Why or why not?
- Does your character have specific mannerisms? What do they reveal about him?
- What kinds of relationships does your character have with the others in the scene?

Set the Scene

When you have a good idea of your character, start to think about the scene you are going to improvise. Usually you'll be working with one

PROCESS

or more of your classmates. Although you won't be writing a script, it's a good idea to plan the scene with your partners.

- Identify the central idea or message of your scene. How can you best communicate your message to the audience?
- Determine what mood you want to create, for example, comic, serious, or mysterious. This will help you decide how to deliver your lines.
- Make a general plan about what your characters are going to say to each other at different moments of the scene. Decide on the actions the characters will perform, and what gestures and facial expressions they might use.

Practise Improvising

Practice will boost your confidence. When you practise improvising, your goal isn't to memorize a series of lines. Instead, focus on becoming comfortable in the role. With your partners, improvise a variety of situations in which your characters interact. This will give you a chance to experiment with different lines and actions.

If you have lots of time for practice, you might try the following suggestions:

- Practise on your own. Throughout the day, slip into role to help you imagine how your character would behave in different situations.
- Get your friends and family involved! Tell them about your character, then interact with them in your role.

Focus Your Performance

When you improvise, try to keep your performance focussed. Here are some tips that can help:

- Professional actors say makeup and costume help them get into role. Find at least one item of costume that your character would wear — for example, a pair of shoes, a hat, or a piece of jewellery. Choose an item that gives a strong impression of who your character is.
- A single prop, such as an umbrella or a tool kit, can reveal your character and help you stay in role.
- Most people have expressions and gestures that they often use. Choose one or two behaviours that will characterize the person you are playing—for example, your character might have an obnoxious laugh or a funny way of blinking.

Self-Assessment

Use the following checklist to determine whether you are well prepared for your improvisation:

- I got to know my character by imagining his or her appearance, background, relationships, and goals.
- With my partners, I planned the scene to be improvised.
- I strengthened my improvising skills by practising with my partners and on my own.
- I identified costume items, props, and behaviours that will help me bring my character to life.

*Have you ever met the
penetrating gaze
of a cow's big brown eyes?*

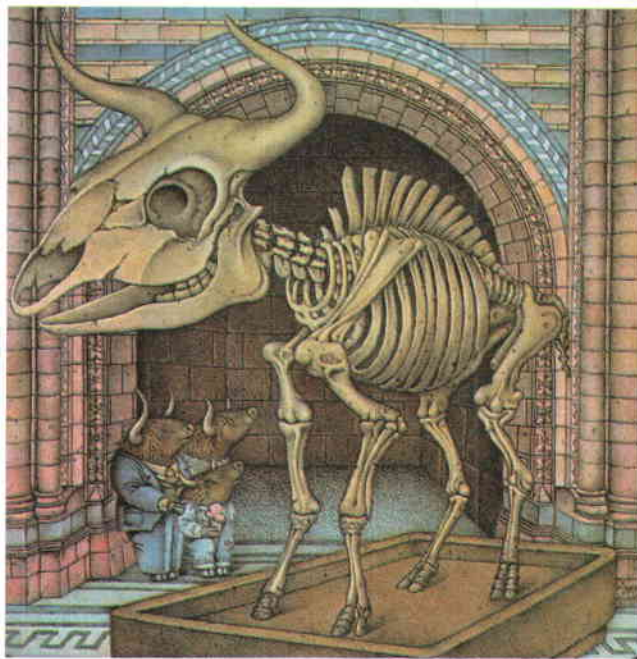
*What was it
trying to tell you?*

Great Cows of History

ART CONCEPT BY MARC GALLANT

In *The Cow Book*, Marc Gallant of Prince Edward Island has created a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of important cows throughout history. His book is illustrated with paintings created by artists from around the world. No longer just a silent witness to events, the cow takes a bow at the centre of the canvas of history.

Cows Visiting the British Museum
Wayne Anderson, Great Britain



GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Recognize humour in a painting.
- Analyse a painting in terms of basic visual elements.

**Viking Cows on Their Way
to the New World**
Jean-Christian Knaff, Canada



American Cowboy on Texas Longhorn
Boris Vallejo, United States



Tanzanian Cow in Moonlight
Bushiri, Tanzania



Elsie Borden in a 1950s Kitchen
Mark Hess, United States



1. RESPONDING TO THE ART

- a. Which painting do you find to be the most humorous? Why?
- b. Suggest a subject for an additional humorous cow painting. What style of art would you recommend for your painting?

STRATEGIES

2. VISUAL COMMUNICATION ANALYSE A PAINTING

When you look at a painting, you might feel at a loss for the right words to describe why you like it. There are a number of elements an artist plays with when creating a painting. Knowing what these elements are can help you to understand and describe your response.

- Artists use lines to create edges, borders, outlines, and shapes. Lines can be thick or narrow, sharp or fuzzy, straight or curving.
- Artists choose their colours carefully to help them communicate emotion. Soft pastel colours, for example, have a different effect from rich, deep colours.
- Through perspective, artists create the illusion of three dimensions on the two-dimensional surface of a canvas.
- Composition refers to the arrangement of the different parts of a painting. For example, through the arrangement of shapes and colours, artists can create a sense of balance or imbalance in a painting.

Choose one of the cow paintings and explain why you like or dislike it. Your explanation should include some of the terms defined above, or other technical terms about painting with which you are familiar.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Did you consider the different elements of the painting when you were thinking about your response to it? Were you able to mention these elements in your explanation? What was the hardest thing about writing the explanation?

*It's a thankless task, writing a thank-you note
for a gift you wish you'd never received.*

Thank You, Uncle Ben

SHORT STORY BY MAGGIE GRANT



I usually manage to finish writing my Christmas thank-you notes by January 31 at worst, but this year I've bogged down on Uncle Ben. That's my rich uncle, the one who's going to leave me a nice legacy if I survive him. Which seems doubtful at the moment.

There is also this about Uncle Ben: he's the type who would cut a person out of his will if that person failed to thank him for a Christmas present, or even failed to be adequately enthusiastic about it. My problem this year is that—well, just glance at these unfinished notes and perhaps you'll understand.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Write a letter in role.
- Create an illustrated how-to manual.

December 28

Dear Uncle Ben:

We had a lovely Christmas with all sorts of exciting presents, particularly yours. At first we were puzzled about its use, since no instruction sheet was enclosed, but suddenly light dawned—an electric bean pot, what a marvellous idea! To be able to plug in and bake old-fashioned beans right at the table is such an innovation we've invited a few friends in to participate in your gift's debut. At this very moment the feast is hissing away in the dining room and...

January 3

Dear Uncle Ben:

I know you'll be amused to learn that when we opened your lovely present we jumped to the conclusion it was a bean pot. We realized the error of our ways when some beans we were cooking exploded all over the dining room. The pattern they made on the ceiling looked exactly like Santa Claus and his eight tiny reindeer! Fortunately our insurance covers the cost of repainting the room and repairing the chandelier.

Now our neighbour has told us your present is actually a bed-warmer and we're pleased as punch because both John and I suffer from cold feet these winter nights, and as a matter of fact he is now snoring peacefully in bed with the warmer toasting his...

January 5

Dear Uncle Ben:

Excuse the scribble, but I'm writing this in my lap so I can stay close to John's bed in case he needs anything. He's under sedation after burning both his feet (I won't bother you with the details of how it happened), but will soon be able to get about on crutches. Luckily a personal injury clause in our insurance policy will pay his salary while he's off work.

I must delay no longer in thanking you for the lovely humidifier; it was so generous of you. About an hour ago I set it going in the living room and already...

January 20

Dear Uncle Ben:

At last a peaceful moment to write you! We've been higgledy-piggledy lately due to the living room broadloom having to be torn up and taken away to be dyed. It got badly stained in a foolish little mishap we had with steam and boiling water, and my Sheraton table had to be refinished. But it's an ill wind, etc., because I love the rug's new colour and insurance paid for everything.

Now to business! We are simply delighted with your Christmas present though I'm going to confess that at first we were unsure about its function. Then John's office manager dropped in and told us it's an outdoor barbecue. How silly of us not to realize it at once! To celebrate the new look in the living room we're going to prepare dinner there tonight, with John acting as chef. As I write he is fussing around with steaks and things...

January 31

Dear Uncle Ben:

As you can see by this letterhead, we are staying at a hotel. We had a fire at the house, but don't be alarmed, it wasn't too bad, mostly smoke damage. A marvellous cleaning crew is at work busily washing walls, shampooing furniture, and so forth. I understand this is a frightfully costly operation so thank goodness we were covered by insurance. In connection with this, I am expecting the company's adjuster to call at any moment, but meanwhile am dashing this off to thank you for...

February 1

Dear Uncle Ben:

If a Mr. Smither, an insurance adjuster, should try to get in touch with you in any way, I do beg you to disregard him. He called in to see me about some claims we've had recently, and suddenly started screaming and shouting dreadful things about the lovely Christmas present you sent us. Well, really! No man in his right mind would act that way about an inanimate object! The only thing to do is ignore him. And now, my darling uncle, I hope you are going to forgive the long delay in writing to thank you for the...for the... ♦

1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- a. Were you able to figure out what Uncle Ben's gift might have been? Do you think the author did have a specific gift in mind? What are your reasons?
- b. Why do you think Maggie Grant chose to write her story using a one-sided series of letters? In your opinion, was her approach funny? Explain.
- c. Have you ever received a gift that you didn't really want? How did you handle this awkward situation? Would you do the same thing again?

2. WRITING HUMOROUS LETTERS

Write the letter Uncle Ben might have sent in reply to one of the thank-you letters from his niece, if she had actually mailed it. Before you begin, reread the first paragraph of the story to get an idea of Uncle Ben's circumstances and character. Share your letter with a partner. After one of you reads the narrator's letter aloud, the other could read Uncle Ben's reply.

3. VISUAL COMMUNICATION EXCUSES MANUAL

Create a humorous, illustrated Excuses Manual that offers great excuses and/or polite tricks to help people handle three difficult social situations, such as

- being invited somewhere you don't want to go
- coming home later than you said you would
- explaining why your homework is not finished

When your Manual is complete (no excuses!), share it with your class and your friends.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Does your Excuses Manual offer advice that is funny but polite? Did you include humorous illustrations? Will you be able to use some of your own advice in real life?

*Forget everything
you've ever heard about
creatures from outer space.
This story reveals
the truth
about our
friends,
the aliens!*

Introducing Norbert

Short Story by Richard Scrimger

It sounds like an easy topic for a science report. The Moons of Jupiter. Lots of books on Jupiter in the library, lots of stuff on CD-ROM. Pictures, articles. Might even be interesting. But I'm having just a heck of a time writing it, because Norbert is very sensitive on the topic.

—*I am not sensitive*, says Norbert.

“Yes you are,” I tell him. “You’re very sensitive. All I have to do is mention the word Jupiter and you start to twitch.”

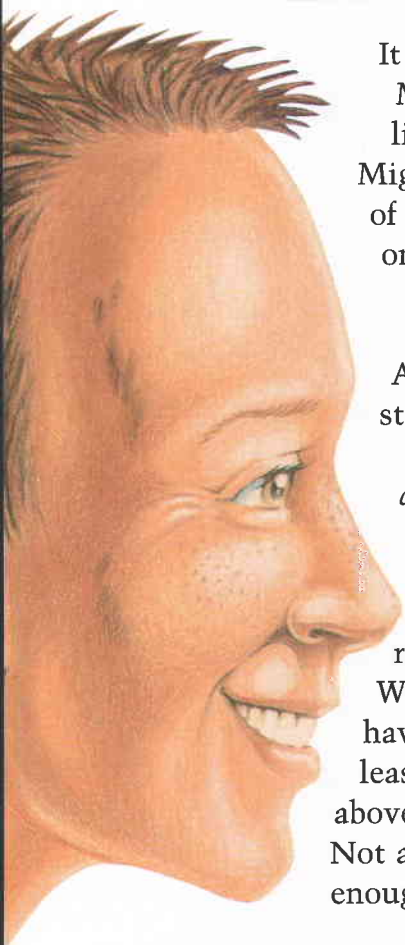
—*That’s because I know so much about it. After all, it’s where I come from*, he says.



I'd better introduce myself. I'm Alan. I live in a small town in Ontario. Actually my notebook reads Cobourg Ontario Canada North America The World. I'm thirteen years old and in Grade Seven. I have brown hair, and brown eyes, and a big mouth, at least that's what my friend Victor tells me. And just above my mouth, in the regular place, I have a nose. Not a regular sort of nose though. Oh, it looks normal enough—couple of freckles, occasional smudge of dirt.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Perform dialogue in role.
- Prepare a TV series proposal.



It drips when I have a cold, and wrinkles up when I'm thinking hard, or when there's cabbage for dinner, but...well...I don't know how to put it, except to say I'm trying to do some research for this science project only my nose won't let me. His name is Norbert.

—*Do I say hello now?*

“If you like,” I say.

—*Hello. My name is Norbert Nose. I'm from the biggest planet. And the nicest.*

Norbert is talking about Jupiter. He usually ends up talking about Jupiter. And he says the craziest things.

—*Craziest?*

“Oops. Sorry, Norbert,” I say. I forgot he was reading this.

—*What kind of crazy things?*

“Well, you said that Jupiter is full of noses.”

—*It is.*

“The noses have little feet apparently, and no arms. And they hop everywhere. They have telephones, and spaceships, and all sorts of technology, but all they want to do is hop. And when they get tired of hopping, they put up their feet and take a nap. I'm sorry, Norbert, but it really does sound crazy to me.”

Norbert gives a little satirical laugh: it sounds like this—*heu heu. You should know about crazy, he says, you're the one talking to his own nose!*

He may have a point there.



I found out about my nose about a year ago, when he sneezed (that's what I think now; at the time I thought I was the one sneezing) and then said—*Bless me*. In a little tiny voice. Norbert isn't very old, three or four years, but as he's constantly reminding me, a year on Jupiter is really four or five of ours, so Norbert is really almost twenty years old. Quite old, to be drinking cocoa and taking afternoon naps.

—*I like cocoa. On Jupiter everyone drinks cocoa. It's our national drink.*

Can you guess what I asked him first? No, nothing about colds, or sunburns, or what it feels like to have a fingernail poking in your living room. I asked him what had happened to my own nose. I mean

my real nose, the one I had until he came along.

—*Your nose is still there. That's why you look the same as before. And I'm here too. It's a big place, your nose. There's a back room, and a kitchen and bathroom, and a garage.*

I still have trouble understanding this. But my nose wrinkles up the way it used to, and feels itchy in the summer. It's still my nose—but it's Norbert too. I don't know how to explain it, and neither does Norbert.

"What's in the garage?" I had to ask.

—*A spaceship, you fish! Norbert can be quite arrogant. He thinks a fish is the ultimate insult—maybe because fish don't have noses. I must remember to show him a picture of a swordfish one of these days. How else do you think I got here from Jupiter?*

I asked him about other people. Do their noses come from Jupiter too? He snorted, unless it was a sigh.

—*No no, I'm kind of a gypsy. Most noses are happy on Jupiter, but ever since I lost Nerissa I've wanted to travel.*

"Oh," I said, kind of serious, because he seemed so sad. He sniffed a bit—usually he hates sniffing. I wondered about his story. An unhappy love affair, it sounded like. Forget Nerissa, I wanted to tell him. No nose is worth it. What is she?—a rag and a cartilage and a hank of hair. But I never did tell him.



Let's get back to the project. I'm in the library now, staring at the cover of a book about Jupiter. I've been staring at it for a while.

—*A beautiful picture, Norbert comments. I think I can see the street where I used to live.*

"Come on, Norbert. The project is due tomorrow." I open the book to the chapter on Jupiter's moons and start reading. Pretty soon Norbert is twitching and making funny noises. "What is it?" I whisper.

—*Wrong, he says. All wrong. Wrong wrong wrong.*

I ask what's all wrong.

—*Everything. The part you have your finger on right now.*

"Where it says there are at least thirteen moons?" I whisper.

"What's wrong with that?"

—*There are only three moons.*

"Norbert," I say, "this is a picture from the *Voyager* spaceship. There are lots of moons circling Jupiter."

—*Three. I know.*

"Then what are the other moons all doing in the picture?" I ask.

—*They're there for a birthday party.*

"That's ridiculous."

—*There are pictures from your last birthday party, Alan. A dozen kids, waving at the camera and holding balloons. Are they all in your family?*

"Wait a minute. You're saying that if *Voyager* had taken the pictures later on, there'd have been only three moons?"

—*That's right. Ganymede, Hyperion, and Sid.*

"One of the moons on Jupiter is named Sid? I can't believe it."

—*That's what we call him. In Jupiter's legends Sid is known as the Bringer of Cocoa.*

"Norbert, I cannot report to my class that one of Jupiter's moons is called Sid. Remember, we have to read these projects out loud. Can you imagine what Ms. Scathely would say?"

—*What if I read that part?* he says.

"No," I say firmly. "Remember the bath."

Norbert has a charming voice (I have to be nice because he's reading this), but it's a little bit high and squeaky. I was taking a bath, and my mom came right up to the door and asked if everything was all right. "I heard two voices," she said. I don't know what she thought was going on. I told her I was fine, and then Norbert said that actually he preferred showers. *Everyone on Jupiter takes showers*, he said. There was this long silence from outside and then Mom said, "Oh." She didn't come in, but I heard her muttering to herself about puberty.



"Oh, hi, Alan," I look up from my book. It's Miranda. She's in my class at school.

"Hi," I say. I must be more worried than I thought because I didn't notice her coming over to talk to me. I usually notice Miranda. She has these great big eyes and a really pretty smile. She's taller than I am, and she can run faster and jump higher and hit a baseball farther than I can. And she's smarter.

Actually, I kind of like her. But I didn't think she even knew I was around.

"Still working on your project?" she asks.

"Huh?"

"Jupiter." She points to the book in my hand.

The librarian frowns over at us. You wonder if maybe they were born with that expression on their faces. I've never seen them look any other way.

"Oh." I smile at Miranda. "Right." Silver tongue, that's me. I remind myself of those teenage guys on afternoon TV. "How about you? You're finished your project, I bet." I'm smiling so hard my face hurts.

"Yes. Last week." She turns away, touches the tip of her nose. Her eyes are closed. She looks like she's going to sneeze. "Excuse me." She sneezes.

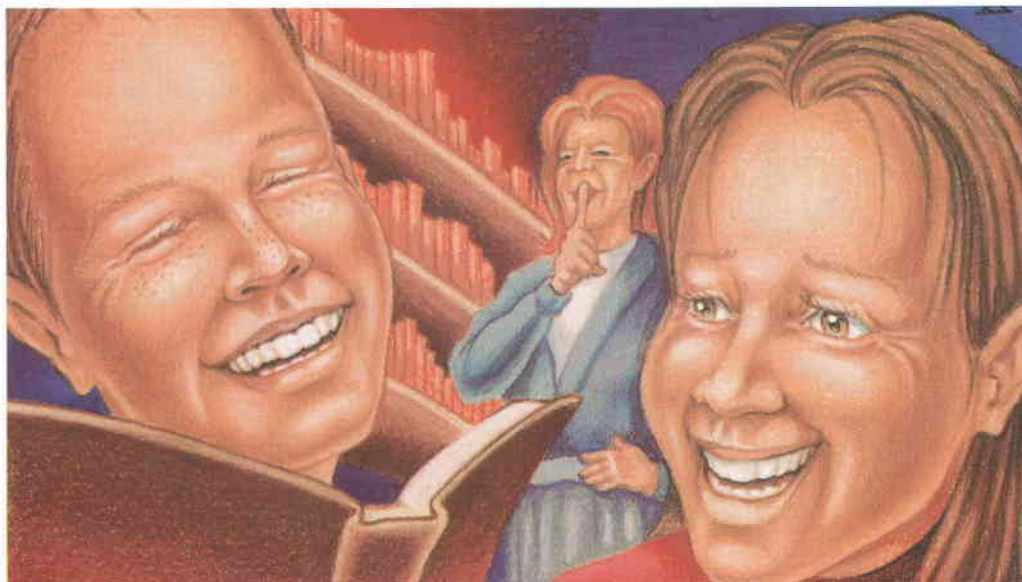
—*Bless you*, says Norbert.

"Shut up," I tell him in a furious whisper.

"What was that, Alan?"

"Nothing." She stares at me. I can feel myself getting red.

"Young man." It's the librarian. Who else calls you "young man"? She points to her lips. "I must ask you to be quiet."



I don't know how long I sit there reading the book. Not very long. I try to pay attention to what I'm reading, but Norbert won't let me. He starts fizzing and spitting and getting all worked up. The librarian tells me to be quiet again. I tell her I'm sorry, and whisper at Norbert to be quiet. People are staring at me from behind their books. I now know how a mom feels when her baby is acting up. I lose my temper and threaten Norbert with a Kleenex—but nothing works. He starts shouting.

I'm reading about the poisonous atmosphere of Jupiter and its moons, and Norbert is screaming at the top of his voice, telling me what a great atmosphere it was, that noses come from all over Jupiter to breathe in the atmosphere of the moons. That's when the librarian kicks me out. She says she's sorry, but she isn't, not really.

Miranda is waiting for me at the door. "Alan, I'd like to talk to you," she says.

Ordinarily I'd have fallen over myself at this point, but I'm really upset. Also, I'm mad at Norbert. "I'll see you at school," I say, brushing past her and jumping on my bike. Ever had an argument with your nose? Don't try it, you'll lose. I yell at Norbert, and he drips on me. I pinch him, and he sneezes, explodes all over me. Yuck. I give up. "All right, Norbert," I say, finally. "You win. Just answer me this. What am I going to do now? I have to hand in the project tomorrow. I'll have to write it all tonight. I'll have to stay up late, and I'm already tired. And I have no idea what I'm going to say. There's no data at home on Jupiter, no encyclopedias or *National Geographics*. We have an old computer—no Internet, no CD-ROM. And they won't let me back in the library. What am I going to do? You got me into this mess—now get me out of it!"

—*All right, he says, I will.*



"Did you finish your project?" Mom asks me at dinner time. Liver and cabbage. Not my favourite, but I know Norbert likes it. Nice and smelly. I hope he's happy.

"No," I say. "I'll have to work some more on it after dinner."

I yawn. Her face softens. She knows it's due tomorrow. She knows I'm tired. "Is there anything I can do to help?" she asks.

I smile at her. She means well but she has no idea. "You could get me a cup of cocoa," I say.

"I didn't know you liked cocoa, Alan."

"Just trying to get in a Jupiter frame of mind," I tell her.



Norbert is so confident. —*Don't worry, he says. I know more about Jupiter than any encyclopedia. Your space probe took pictures of the moons, but I was there.*

"You were?" I must be crazy, I'm believing him here.

—*Of course. Just sit back and type what I tell you.* He sounds like he really does know what he's talking about. I relax a little bit. I turn on the computer, take a sip of cocoa, and flex my typing fingers—both of them.

"Ready when you are," I say.

He clears his throat—that sounds silly, a nose clearing its throat, but that's what it sounds like—*Hmm hmm. Ganymede, the largest of Jupiter's satellites, is a forbidding place,* he says. That sounds pretty good. I start to type. He keeps talking and I keep typing. At the back of my mind I'm a little worried about what's going to happen when we get to Sid, but I'll go along for now. It doesn't sound bad. —*High basalt cliffs and barren dusty plains are sterile and lifeless...* I type away. I'm yawning like crazy, I make a couple of mistakes, blink a bit. I hear Norbert's voice as a kind of singsong. —*Lullaby, and good night.* I sit up straight. Did he say that, or did I dream it? Mom comes in to wish me good night and good luck. Back to the keyboard. I concentrate on my typing. Norbert drones on. I'm paying more attention to my two fingers than to my ears, typing without listening. I shake my head and blink. Sleepy. So sleepy...



I wake up with my face on the keyboard. Two in the morning. I've been asleep. I'm tired, and I have to go to the bathroom. I look up at the screen—and I can't believe my eyes. Somehow the project is done. I've printed up ten pages and the words at the bottom of the last page are THE END. Wow. I yawn.

My nose hurts. Last time it felt like that was a couple of years ago when I walked into a glass door. Poor Norbert has been wearing himself out, working so hard. He must be sleeping now, with his feet up in the back room. I wash my face in cold water, and he wakes up briefly.

"Thanks," I tell him.

—*Ouch.*



If Mom hadn't knocked on my door next morning I'd probably still be sleeping. "School bus in ten minutes," she says.

I almost forget the project in my rush to get ready. Norbert reminds me. There's just time to staple the sheets together and cram them into my knapsack.

"Did you get it done, Alan?" asks Victor, as we're bouncing over the railway tracks.

"Oh sure," I say. "No problem." What a liar I am.

"I tell you, I am not looking forward to reading mine out loud," says Victor. "My project is so...*boring*. Everyone is going to fall asleep."



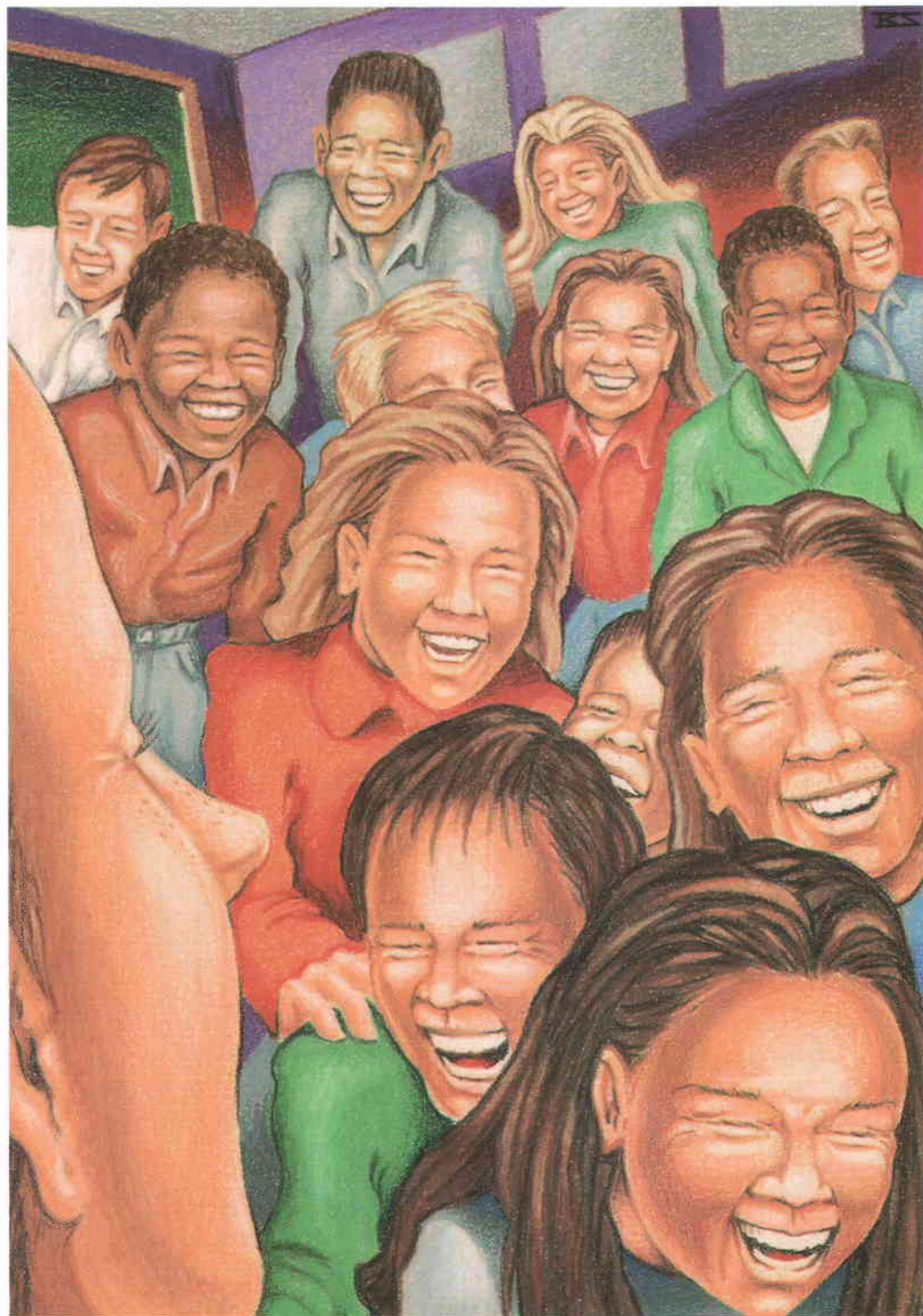
No one falls asleep during my reading.

No one looks bored. No one coughs or fidgets. For the first minute or so, the only sound apart from my voice is a collective intake of breath.

And then the whole class starts to laugh.

Ms. Scathely leads the way with a restrained little tee-hee, hand over her face, then a couple of girls in the front row snicker to each other. When I get to the part about the beaches on Hyperion, with fountains of cocoa and bright warm sun every day except Thursday, when Ganymede gets in the way, Ms. Scathely's shoulders are shaking. She's trying to control herself but she can't, she's laughing too hard, and she slips right off her chair and falls to the floor going, "Whoop...whoop...whoop." The class erupts like a one-room volcano, shouts of laughter, pencils and notebooks flying in the air. I stop reading at about this time, because no one can hear me. I'm about done anyway. My face is red and glowing, like lava, I guess. Appropriate. I'm not embarrassed though—well, I am of course, but that's not all I am. I'm mad. Ms. Scathely is on the floor, sobbing with mirth, my friends are shouting and carrying on, and I'm wondering how I go about punching myself in the nose. Wait until I get Norbert alone: I'll blow his ears off, I'll put a clothespin on him, I'll stick an entire box of Kleenex—yes, it is pretty funny, I suppose, but I'm not in the mood.

If only I'd stayed awake. If only I'd checked the project last night, or this morning.



—*What's a clothespin?*

"Never mind." I keep forgetting Norbert can read.

—*You aren't really angry, are you, Alan? Not now that it's all turned out so well. If it weren't for me writing your project, think what you'd have missed!*

"You too," I say.

—*Yes. Me too.*



"How did it go today?" Mom asks.

I'm not mad any more. If you want to know, I'm bursting with excitement and happiness inside, but I don't tell Mom. I'm casual. "Got an A+," I say. Like this happens all the time.

"ALAN!"

"Ms. Scathely said it was the most...original piece of work she'd ever heard." She also said it was the goofiest, but I didn't pass that on. "She wants me to send it to a magazine. Maybe it'll be published."

"Oh Alan, I'm so proud of you!"

I perch myself on the counter, push back my hair. "What's for dinner?"

"What would you like?"

"Spaghetti," I say. "And," very cool now, "I'd like to...um...invite someone over."

"Miranda?"

How do moms do that? I haven't talked about her more than a couple of times. I close my mouth, nod. "She's asking her parents. She doesn't think there'll be a problem."



Miranda came up to me in the hallway after class, her eyes shining. I was still mad and embarrassed. The rest of the class was on its way to history, still laughing. The bell rang. "I knew it, Alan," she said. "I knew it yesterday in the library."

"Huh?" I may have mentioned how suave I get around Miranda. "Knew what?"

"Knew you were like me." She put her hands on my shoulders.

"That stuff about Jupiter. I know about it too. I was too scared to put it in my project, but you weren't."

"Huh?"

"Oh, Alan, I know. I know where your data base is." She arched her eyebrows and gave a squiggly smile. Modern flirting. When they're interested in your data base, you've got them.

"Oh yeah?" I say.

"Yeah." And right there in the empty hallway, though we were both going to be late for our history class, she leaned down and, well, we rubbed noses.

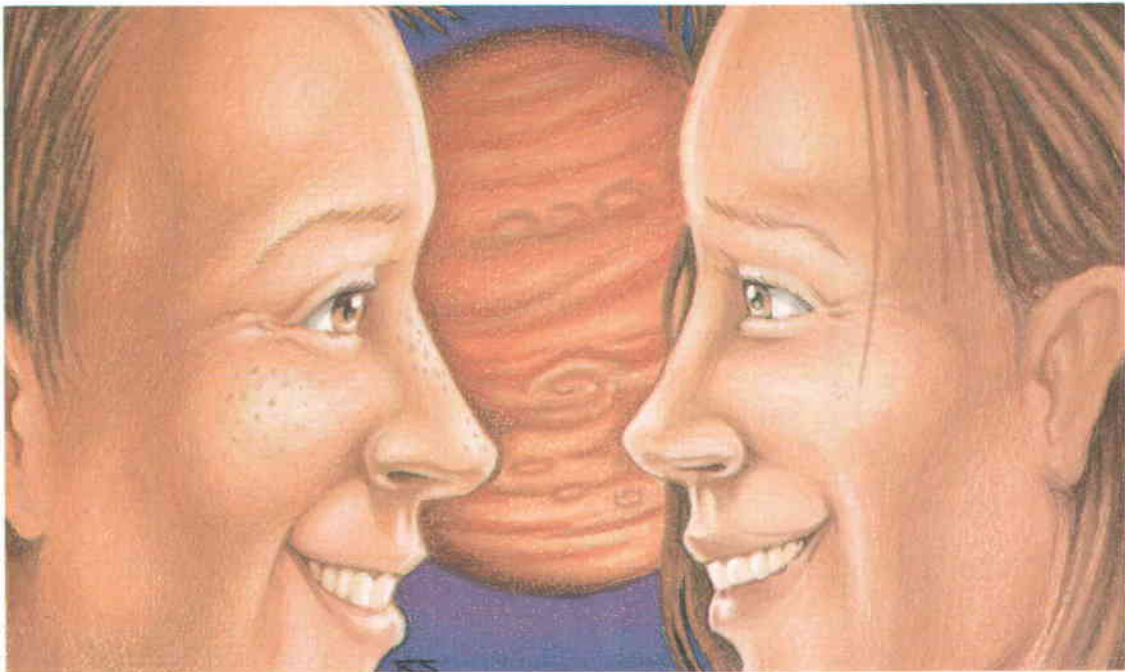
—*Hey!* Norbert must have been napping. I'd forgotten about him.

Miranda giggled. And this teeny weeny little voice shrieked out —*Norbert! Norbert, is it you? Oh Norbert I've missed you so.*

Another nose from Jupiter.

—*Nerissa! I've missed you too.*

We walked down the hall, the four of us, talking all the time. The late bell rang. Nerissa and Norbert exchanged telephone numbers. Miranda and I ran to class. ♦



1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- How did Alan feel about having an alien living in his nose? How would you feel?
- Were you surprised that Miranda also had an alien guest? Why or why not?
- Who was your favourite character in the story? What did you like about him, her, or it?
- Do you think “Introducing Norbert” could be the start of a good science fiction novel? Give reasons for your answer.

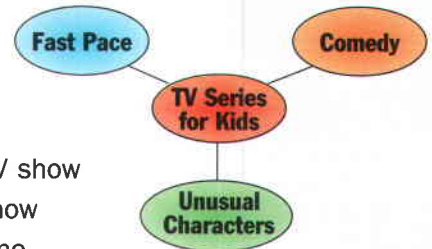
2. ORAL COMMUNICATION PERFORM DIALOGUE

In groups of four, discuss what Norbert and Nerissa might talk about after their long separation. What will Alan and Miranda say to each other and to their alien friends? Develop a humorous conversation these four characters might have. Remember that the characters have distinct personalities, which should be reflected in their words. Choose roles and practise your lines, then present your dialogue to an audience.

GROUP-ASSESSMENT: Did your dialogue capture the different personalities of the four characters? Did you practise your lines so your performance sounded like a natural conversation?

3. MEDIA TV SERIES PROPOSAL

Brainstorm some ideas about what makes a good TV series for young people. Try using a web like this for your ideas:



Your task is to convince a producer to make a TV show starring Norbert and his pals. Decide whether the show should be live or animated. Write a short memo to the producer, in which you

- summarize the plot of the *pilot* (the first show) based on “Introducing Norbert”
- give at least three good reasons why this story could be turned into a successful series
- describe each of the main characters
- suggest the names of actors who could play the various roles (or do the voices if your series is animated)

What special features could you add to your memo to make it even more persuasive?

REFLECTING ON THE UNIT

SELF-ASSESSMENT: VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As you worked on this unit, what did you learn about

- analysing drawings?
- creating a comic strip?
- designing a poster?
- expressing your response to a painting?
- illustrating your writing?

Do you find it easier to express yourself in visuals or through words? Why?

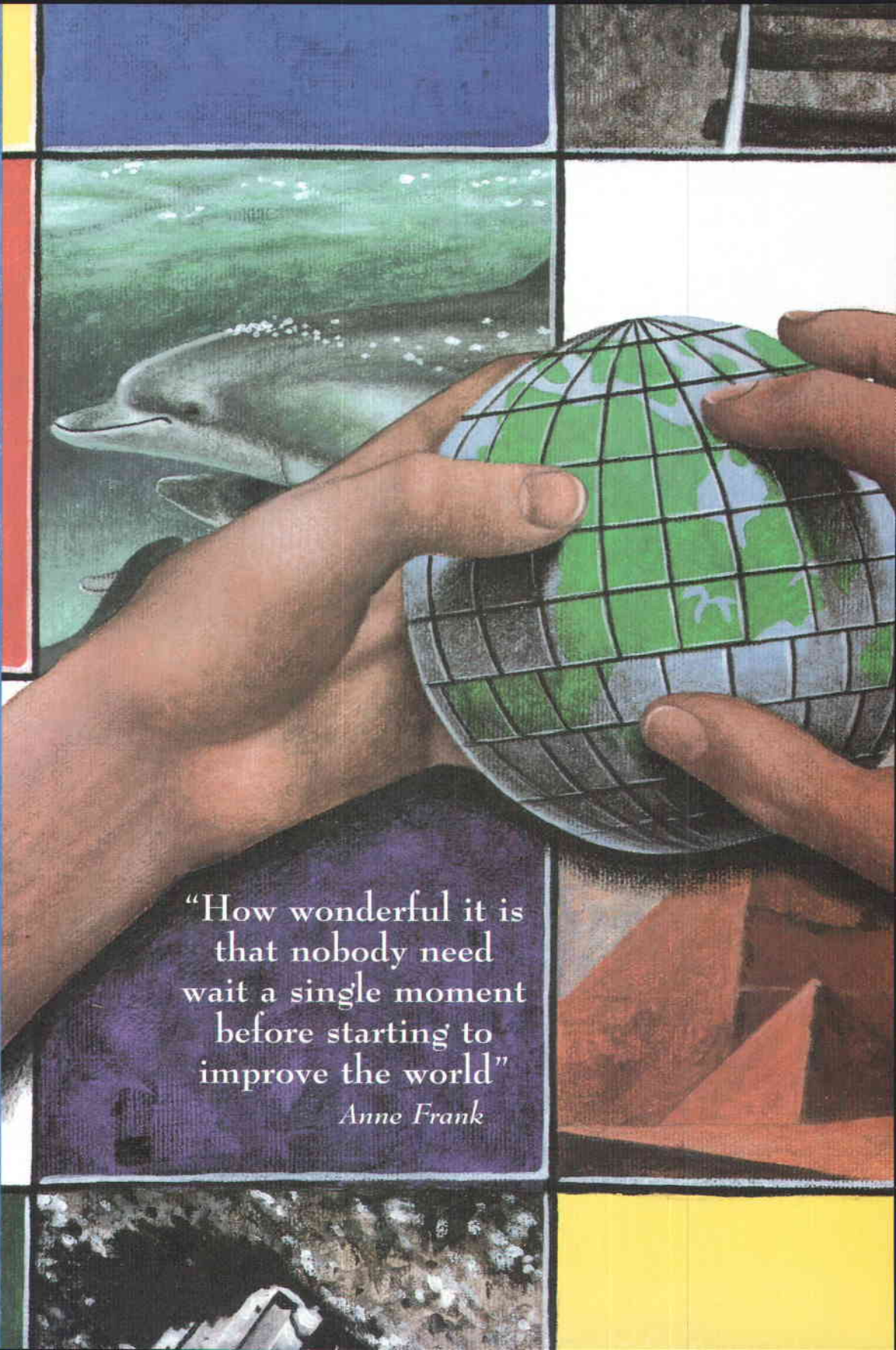
ORAL COMMUNICATION TELL A JOKE

Step up to the microphone...it's your turn to be a comedian! Memorize a favourite joke and prepare your own unique way of telling it. You might find it helpful to write your joke down so you can make notes about emphasizing particular words, pausing in key places, and using humorous gestures. When you've perfected your performance, tell your joke to the class.

MEDIA HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING

Gather several different magazines and flip through the pages looking for humorous ads. Choose the two ads you think are funniest, and write an explanation of how the humour is created. In your explanation, comment on both the visual and text components of the ads. Why do you think advertisers use humour to sell products? Do you think humour is an effective advertising technique? Explain.

ISSUES



“How wonderful it is
that nobody need
wait a single moment
before starting to
improve the world”

Anne Frank