

The Evolution of Comedy
As a Literary Genre
Michelle A. Broskovich
Schenley High School

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OVERVIEW

The curriculum unit I have developed by participating in The Pittsburgh Teacher's Institute course "Comedy from Aristophanes to the Present" will examine the evolution of comedy as a literary genre. At the beginning of the course I knew nothing about comedy. Maybe that it was supposed to be funny. Ha-ha.

My proposed research project will consist of three areas. The first segment of my unit will provide a unit lesson plan to bring the genre comedy into the classroom. Many schools teach tragedies, yet very few schools teach comedy. I knew nothing about comedy at the beginning of the course. I have broken down the research into manageable and presentable blocks of information for teachers and students to experience comedy.

The second section will focus on the history of comedy. This section will provide detailed, background information on the origins and development of comedy through history. Secondly it will examine the literary elements of comedy. This portion will evaluate and explain the essential elements and ideas of comedy.

The final segment will provide a unit lesson plan to bring the genre comedy into the classroom. Many schools teach tragedies, yet very few schools teach comedy. I knew nothing about comedy at the beginning of the course. I have broken down the research into manageable and presentable blocks of information for teachers and students to experience comedy.

The genre of comedy lends itself into many applications. Currently I teach tenth grade mainstream English. I could modify and adjust many aspects of the genre for my students to grasp the concepts the genre of comedy.

Everyone has the connotation comedy is supposed to be funny. However, comedy is a social tool in which writers criticize and reflect on society. This has many plausible applications in an educational environment.

Traditionally speaking I would recommend a study of comedy to college prep, PSP, CAS English class at the secondary level. Yet with adjustments and adaptations you could manipulate this research into many academic disciplines, objective, age and grade levels for which you desire.

RATIONALE

Education and learning are activities I am involved with daily. As a teacher I highly value these ideals. A colleague of mine suggested I take a course with the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute. I was little apprehensive, but I am working on my permanent certification and needing credits. I agreed to take the course. I registered for two choices and was assigned my second choice, a course called Comedy from Aristophanes to the Present. My initial impression was this should be fun. It is about comedy it has to be funny. Everyone I told about my class said the same thing funny, ha-ha.

Needless to say I had an eye and brain opening experience. The course was offered at Carnegie Mellon University. We had a wonderful, knowledgeable professor who was very funny. The professor gave the class his syllabus including the works and authors we would be studying. The only name I recognized on the syllabus was Shakespeare. This was not funny. Then I found out about a thirty-page research paper. I was starting to feel very overwhelmed and intimidated. I felt frustrated. I did not know where to begin. I felt like a frustrated student. I had this overwhelming task to accomplish and no clue about the material, comedy. Funny. Ha-ha.

The idea came to me to start at the very beginning and learn about the genre of comedy. I researched the history of comedy to understand the beginnings, how it came into being and evolved into the genre we know today. As I began my research and study a timeline and chronology evolved.

Another facet steamed from my research quest. That being what made something a comedy? What elements and traits were associated with comedy? This is a crucial point in comedy. Recognizing and identifying these elements in the literary work aides in the study and comprehension of this particular genre.

The reading and researching I did on the specific writers aided in my comprehension on the genre. Examining a writer's life and experience allows the reader a clearer understanding of the

writer and the work. My unit will provide background information on all key authors as well as a synopsis of their specific work.

The unit lesson I have designed will outline and detail the study of the genre of comedy. The unit will provide a prescribed curriculum that may be followed or adjusted to meet individual needs of teachers and students lesson plans, objectives, activities, standards, projects and rubrics will be included and available to utilize in your classroom.

The unit lesson plans are geared towards an English class at the secondary level. However, adaptations and modifications can be implemented to suit and tailor to your individual needs.

The Pittsburgh Public School District is a standard driven district. The secondary English curriculum focuses and revolves around meeting and achieving The Pennsylvania Chapter Four Communications Standards. We are to accomplish this by our students scoring proficient; a 3 or better on the New Standards Reference Exam, and the PSSA Reading and Writing exams. These exams now determine if a student will graduate with a high school diploma or a certificate of attendance. Educators are constantly stressing the importance of literacy, especially with the initiative and directive of Literacy Plus within the district. Exposing students to various genres and writers that are academically rigorous will hopefully prepare students for these challenging exams that determine their future success. Reading and writing are crucial for the success of our student in the Pittsburgh Public Schools as well as across the country.

Teachers plan and focus on the standards while they prepare units of study for their classes. Students work on portfolios to demonstrate their competency and proficiency at meeting and exceeding the standards. Students are required to read twenty-five books and complete many types of writing assignments. Teachers utilizing a new genre will allow for a fresh approach and activities in their class. Initially it might seem like a lot of work especially if you are not familiar with the genre or works. Yet the results will be worth all your hard work. I know personally from my own experience.

Good luck on your experience with the genre of comedy. Hopefully I have been able to help provide you with idea or activities that will engage your students and enable them to walk away with an understanding of the genre of comedy.

The first three sections of my curriculum unit were designed to provide a detailed, in-depth, coverage of information relating to comedy. This information presented is a result of my research. I selected information, elements, and key ideas from various sources to present the backbone of information needed to study Comedy. I utilized their expertise and professional opinions to produce the necessary background information for my curriculum unit. I cite their work with the text as well as fully in my work cited section.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of my comedy curriculum are two-fold. The first purpose would be the instructional value in planning and teaching the content of the lessons. My second purpose is to aide in

accomplishing district-mandated initiatives in achieving standards by demonstrating proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Pennsylvania State Law Chapter four details the communications standards. I have designed this curriculum unit to correlate with the PA state standards. The reading standards mandates that students read 25 books, read and comprehend at least four about one subject, four books by a single writer, or four books in one genre, and produce evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the context and craft. By utilizing this curriculum I would be able to incorporate a new genre not previously covered in existing curriculum with in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Teaching the Comedy unit will help to ensure students are capable of achieving the standards as well as growing academically and personally enriched.

Students will be able read and understand the works of literature pertaining to the genre of Comedy. The students will be able to comprehend and evaluate the history of comedy.

Students will be able to identify, discuss, and apply the key concepts and elements of comedy as they read the works. Upon completion of the works students will be able to write, interpret and reflect on these analysis in a writing process assignments.

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the meaning and elements of comedy in their writing. The students will produce writing in a literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre of comedy. They will analyze the relationships, uses and effectiveness of literary elements used by the comic writers including characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view, tone and style in their writing.

Students will view and listen to various forms of comedy in print, video and live performances. They will demonstrate proficiency in communicating in informal and formal discussions highlighting on important, relevant information about Comedy.

STRAGETIES/CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

To introduce the Comedy Unit I would create a schema. The purpose of creating a schema is to activate prior knowledge of students regarding comedy. Recalling prior knowledge and facts aide in learning new materials by making connections to previously learned material. I would conduct a discussion about what is comedy. What makes something funny, the difference between Comedy and Tragedy, elements of Comedy, literary terms involved and the writers of comedy. I would canvass the class and solicit their responses hopefully tapping into prior knowledge. This is typically a brainstorming session. I would have schema on the board or overhead projector. Students would copy the schema; I would have copied the schema for them.

Familiarizing students with new vocabulary and literary terms are critical in the comprehension and processing of new information. By teaching vocabulary in context allows for rigorous and intense learning. Learning vocabulary in context allows for the ownership of words enabling the students to make the terms part of their repertoire. Interactive word walls serve this purpose

well. Teachers should model this process for students. A term is selected. A dictionary definition is presented, a working definition in the students' own words, as well as synonyms and antonyms. A prescribed list of vocabulary words and literary terms relating to the unit of comedy are dispensed to the class. Students can work in a pairs or small groups and come up with their definitions. Once the definitions have been acquired groups assemble their word wall. Each group will present their word wall to the class. Word walls will be posted around the classroom to become part of the students' repertoire and serve, as reminder while studying the comedy unit. Rubrics will be generated for interactive word walls. All four categories must be included in their definitions. The word wall should be creative and pleasing in appearance. Students will present to class and be evaluated on their content and presentation skills. Students are required to keep a vocabulary/ literary term section in their notebook. All word wall information should be recorded in this section. Students will receive credit for their entries.

A lecture providing the history and origins of comedy will give students a conceptual understanding of the genre. The teacher will distribute graphic organizers to students. Students will fill out the graphic organizers. Questioning and discussions will occur during background / origin lecture. Students will receive credit for completing the organizers. Students will be assigned a homework assignment. Students will complete questions relating to the history and origins of Comedy lecture. A viewing activity, such as showing a video on the origins of Comedy would be a great clincher activity for introductory phase of the unit. The Allegheny Intermediate Unit and libraries are great resources. A guided viewing sheet will ensure students are on task and accountable. I would give students a quiz on the origins of comedy, Vocabulary, literary terms to assess student progress and mastery.

The next step in the unit would be to conduct a meet the author day. Brief biographical and literary synopsis of the comic writers' works would be provided to students. Students continue to take notes on their graphic organizers for credit.

The essential elements and ideas of comedy will be presented to students in a lecture format to students. What are the characteristics of Comedy, how can you identify these elements, what traits will identify a comedy? Students will complete an organizer for credit. The completed organizers are kept in the English notebook for a tool and resource for the student to utilize in their writing and assignments.

Students will select a specific writer of Comedy from a given list of comic writers. Students will spend two days in the library locating and researching information on their writers. They will locate and check out a work of comedy by their writer. Students will read this their chosen book for half an hour nightly. They are required to keep an annotated reading log summarizing their readings. Once the student has completed the work they will begin to work on their writing assignment titled a man and his work, Students are required to write an essay depicting a biographical account of the author's life as well as focusing on how the theme of Comedy is addressed, interpreting the text by expressing and supporting their opinion about the text with evidence. Students will question the author on the quality of his writing. Students are required to complete prewriting, a rough draft and final draft. Students will complete assignment independently with a checkpoint midway. The writing assignment will be graded with a writing

rubric and students will complete and attach the Pittsburgh Public Schools Portfolio entry slip number one, Reading Accomplishment in literature.

Upon supervising students completing research the teacher will provide a thorough introduction to William Shakespeare and his romantic comedy the Twelfth Night. Students will be assigned parts/ characters in the play. Students will receive credit for class participation for reading aloud. Students will participate in class discussions centering on the play and elements of comedy. A quiz will be administered following Act I & II and Acts III & IV to ensure comprehension and mastery of materials presented.

A viewing activity will precede the completion of the play. A video of the Twelfth Night will be played for the class. Students are required to complete a viewing guide sheet for the video.

Students will complete a writing assignment that serves as a response to literature in the student's writing portfolio. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the literary work by suggesting the interpretation, analyzing the author's craft and making connections to issues in society reflected in the work. This is a writing process paper requiring a prewriting, rough draft and final draft. The final draft will be evaluated by a predetermined rubric reflecting state communication standards. This will serve to fill the requirement of the portfolio writing entry slip number one, a response to literature.

Students will have the opportunity to study all graphic organizers, study guides and notes to study for a final test on the Twelfth Night. Multiple choice, identification, short answer, true and false questions as well essay will constitute the types of questions existing on the final test.

Local theater groups perform Comedies year round. I would like to utilize their services and make arrangements for my class to go on a field trip to see a play preformed. It is a great experience for students to be members of an audience of a live performance in the theater. Students really enjoy going to see live plays preformed.

A final viewing activity I would like the students to accomplish is viewing the video of Shakespeare's Midsummer's Dream. Students will be provided a viewing guide sheet to complete while watching movie. Students will be tasked with a writing assignment of comparing and contrasting the two Shakespearean Comedies. They will be describing similarities and differences recognized in the two comedies. This writing assignment would serve as an entry for the viewing section of the student's portfolio.

Students will have the option to participate in an extra credit bonus project in which students write their own One Act Comedy Play. Students could also perform their play for the class. This would be a great piece for their writing portfolio entry slips number two a literary genre.

Research Materials For Comedy Unit

Background Information For

History of Comedy

Since the beginning of the written word the Greeks have tantalized and entertained the world with their gods, myths and wonderful epics. The leader, Zeus of the gods on Mt. Olympus had a way with beautiful, mortal women, much to his wife, Hera's chagrin. Hera was incensed by all of Zeus infidelities and maintained a full-time job punishing his conquests.

Zeus had a liaison with the beautiful Princess Semele. The princess, now with child was tricked by jealous Hera to see Zeus in all his glory. In Zeus's flaming splendor Semele was utterly and ecstatically consumed, but her child Dionysus was delivered before his time and was saved by his father Zeus. Zeus sewed his son into his flesh. After maturing Dionysus was born from Zeus a true god. The Greeks had myths for the creation of all their gods. (Chenney, XIII)

The Greeks had a very special relationship with the god Dionysus. Dionysus was the god of the common man. He was their god of the fields, fertility, nature, wild things and all human-divine wild impulses. (Chenney, XIII). The Greeks honored Dionysus with joyous festivals, rituals, and wild revels. Dionysus gave the people wine and mystical inspiration that brought people to spiritual intoxication. Dionysus entered them and they became gods in his name. Everyone shared in his ecstasy. They celebrated by dancing, marching and singing. (Chenney, XIV)

Drama originated from ancient festivals honoring Dionysus. The participants wore masks and carried torches in consecrated places called "theatre". The celebrants became priests, who later became known as actors. Some participants lead songs. Those who could invent songs would later become poets. (Chenney, XIV)

The Greek word *komoidia* means "the song of the *komos*" A *komos* is a communal ritual carouse: similar to party crashing and barhopping rolled into one. It was similar to Mardi gras with the costumes; the ancient rites were more orderly and scripted. This was the time when normal social rules and inhibitions were cast aside. The ancient *komos* often involved wearing masks and costumes, but also was marked by another practice *aischrologica* or the ritual abuse of individuals. Another addition to *komoi*, was the phallus: an imitation penis, often too large for one person to carry. These rites occurred in the spring or mid to late winter. They may have served a number of psychological, social or political ends. (Porter, Online)

Greeks were the masters of high tragedy. They had perfected the art. The playwrights would lift up the reader or spectator, kindle the imagination, to open the gates to divine pity, light up the soul with exact emotions in sorrow and leave one cleansed with orderly action and noble poetry. The ancient Greeks would lead us from beginning expectancy to radiant satisfaction. (Cheney, 70)

Greek comedy is divided into three ages, Old Comedy, Middle Comedy and New Comedy. Old Comedy occurs in the fifth century BC. Greek Old Comedy differs slightly on form compared to Greek tragedy. The time and location of when the works were produced are different. The Greek comic playwrights produced their works at two festivals of Dionysus: The city Dionysia in March and Lanaea in January. (Porter, Online) Greek tragedies typically had three actors and a chorus composed of twelve to fifteen members. The tragedies possessed *aparados*, a prologue

that includes the entry of the chorus; *episodes* that are separated from one another by fixed elements as well as the *exodus* marching away song. Comedy has four actors and a larger chorus of twenty-four members. (Porter, Online) Comedies followed a similar format with *parados*, *episodes*, and *exodus*. In addition comedies also possessed debate and *Parabasis*. *Parabasis* in which the chorus comes forward to speak for the playwright. The actors wore padded costumes as well as red, protruding phallic shapes. The writer may justify his work, defend himself against rivals or attack them. He may comment on whatever abuses the contemporary scene he may wish to animadvert upon. (Hadas, 5)

Old Comedies were original material of the poets. Comedies were not derived from traditional myth or legends such as tragedies. The comedies were characterized by free comic fantasy where the most outrageous projects are presented as plausible solutions to contemporary problems. (Dunkle, Online) The role of the chorus was prominent as well as the use obscenity in language and gesture in this genre. The poets placed strong emphasis on political and social satire coupled with a vigorous concern with current events during the first age of comedy. (Dunkle, Online)

Cratinus, Eupolis and Aristophanes are the great comic poets recognized by ancient literary critics. Aristophanes is the only poet to have had his work survive as examples of Old Comedy. He wrote over forty plays but only eleven have survived through the ages.

He wrote *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Birds*, (his masterpiece), *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusa*, *Frogs*. The comedy of Aristophanes is memorable due to its exquisite lyrics and serious commentary on politics, poetry, education and good citizenship. (Hadas, 7)

Comic poets were competing for the favor of the *demos* in an institutionalized forum for civic discourse during the period of radical democracy; they sought to and in fact did influence the civic ideology and the standing of certain individuals in Athens. Old Comedy is thus at the same time serious as it is humorous. (J. Henderson, *The Demos and Comic Competition*.)

A function of old comedy was ridicule. Obscenity was deployed to ridicule recognizable figures without naming names or exaggerated *demos* (a figure for something related to a civic value or political issue). The social function of comedy was to enforce social norms. (J. Henderson, *The Demos and Comic Competition*.)

In old comedy there is a serious contrast with the dignity and seriousness of tragedy could not be more marked. Slapstick action, scatological and sexual jokes and every other device of humor known to man are found in old Comedy. The purpose of the genre, however, goes beyond low farce. Political and social satires along with literary parody are also characteristics of Old Comedy. With regard to parody, the language of Old Comedy often mimics the high-blown style of tragedy for comic effect. (Dunkle, Online) The language and meters of comedy are less formal than those of tragedy and much closer to actual speech. (Porter, Online)

A transition occurred in the genre of Old Comedy with the fall of Athens in 404BC. Due to the fall of Athens and the rise of Macedon the confidence and self-identity displayed by Aristophanes began to diminish. Comedy turned from highly confrontational, topical humor of

Aristophanes to mythological burlesque (mock reenactments of famous myths) or as we know it today, the comedy of manners. (Hadas, 10)

The decline of Old Comedy gives rise to Middle Comedy in Greece during 400-323 BC.

Very Little of Middle Comedy has survived through the ages. Middle Comedy is characterized with a diminishing role of the chorus and less direct social and political comment. Interests in daily life and attempts to develop characters more fully are present in Middle Comedy. (Plautis, Online)

The term comedy of manners originated from the evolution of the Greek New Comedy genre. Due to the political situation in Athens writers turned to a safer arena of daily life rather than topical issues or political situations Aristophanes and others dramatized. (Porter, Online)
The age of New Comedy lasted from about 320 BC to about the mid third century BC. (Dunkle, Online)

Characteristics of New Comedy illustrate the decline of the chorus and political issues of Old Comedy. New Comedy is less obscene. This new form of comedy focused on family matters with complications in love relationships. Love is an important theme New Comedy introduces into literature. New Comedy concentrated on everyday life. (Porter, Online)

The Greek playwright, Menander (342 BC –292 BC) works represent the age of Greek New Comedy. One complete play of Menander, “The Bad-Tempered Man” or the “Misanthrope” has survived completely and fairly large portions of six of his other plays. These are the only known existing works of Greek New Comedy. (Porter, Online)

The focus of Menander’s comedies illustrates domestic situations, troubles with husband/wives or particularly fathers and sons. Comic writers would present genial, mildly philosophical reflections of human comedy. (Porter Online) Menander displays a keen interest in human characters revealed in an individual’s moral choice. Menander’s characters are placed in difficult situations through their own failings and the characters must make difficult decisions. The characters’ dilemmas reflect on various issues of Athenian society or Athenian attitude. (Porter, Online).

New Comedy has had the greatest impact on Modern Comedy. Human relationships, the essence of New Comedy translated well first to Rome then to Renaissance Italy, and England and eventually our stages, movies and television screens. Old Comedy with its political and social milieu could not be as easily transplanted. The spirit of Old Comedy survives in modern political cartoons, occasional music comedies and comedy skits on television satirizing political figures and current. (Dunkle, Online)

The Romans had their own native form of drama like the Greeks. Early Roman forms of comedy were very primitive compared to the Greeks. The Romans became familiar with the Greek culture in the third century BC. New Comedy suited the citizens of Rome and flourished between 323 BC and 260 BC. (Artemis, Online)

The new Comedy had but eliminated the chorus and as well as placing less emphasis on slapstick and farcical humor and more of interest in the interactions between observable social types. New Comedy tended toward generalities of social interactions and explored the comedic nature of those interludes. Stock characters that can be expected to behave in a specific manner in any situation characterized new Comedy. Utilizing a mixture of standard and nonstandard response creates subtle humor in NewComedy. (Artemis, Online)

Roman Comedy evolved from the merging of Greek Comedy and the slapstick Italian farce. (Artemis, Online). Plautis (254 to 184 BC) and Terence (185 to 159BC) were the most famous Roman Comedians. The works of these two playwrights are the only surviving Roman Comedies. Their comedies were more than just translations of Greek originals. Plautis was very creative and original in his adaptations turning them into Musical comedies. (Dunkle, Online)

The *Fabulae Palliatae* was the term Roams coined for the adaptation for Greek Comedies. The *Fabullae Palliatae* had characters with Greek names and Greek settings but was understood to be Roman. This enabled the Roma Mores writers to turn Roman Mores upside down with out upsetting the audience or undermining Roman morality.

(Dunkle, Online)

A common inversion technique employed by Roman writers was the mockery of the father. This was unheard of in real Roman society due to a fathers' (*patria potestas*)

absolute power. In comedy the son with the help of a brave slave outwits the father and makes a fool of him. (Dunkle, Online)

The Middle Ages (500-1500) provided a dormant period in the development of the Comedy genre. Following Terence death in 159 BC comedy comes to a stand still. Little evidence of comedy exists in the Middle Ages. Towards The late Middle Ages comic elements resurfaced in the church's morality and mysteries plays, as well as interludes. The focus was to teach about God and the bible to the common people since they were not literate. (Xrefer, Online)

Commedia dell' arte emerged during the Renaissance in Italy. Historians believe it evolved from take offs of Terence and Plautus of New Roman Comedy in combination with Italian Farce and commedia erudite, learned comedy performed by amateurs. (Furman, Online) The plots of these early comedies revolved around everyday happenings and mythology. One character would mime while another narrated. Four principal characters are associated with this art form each with a respective costume and mask. Pappos is a silly old man, Bucco a comic know it all, maccus the fool and Dossenus the sly hunchback consistent of the stock characters. (Furman, Online)

The Renaissance was a time period in history that was a transition from the Middle Ages till modern times. The word Renaissance means rebirth. It symbolized a great intellectual and cultural movement that produced a revival of interest in classical culture. The extensive Latin

dominations in the eastern Mediterranean after the fourth crusade were credited for the Renaissance. (Renaissance, Online)

The Renaissance period was based on two key principals; a revival of classical forms originally developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans and an intensified concern with secular life, an interest in humanism and the assertion of the importance of the individual. The Renaissance Era corresponds with the Great Western Age of Exploration and discovery in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. (Renaissance Art, Online)

The Renaissance began in Italy and began a revolt for intellectual freedom. Petrarch is noted as the first poet of the Renaissance. Petrarch is credited with the rediscovering Greek. Scholars searched for ancient volumes in Greek and ancient Latin. Libraries and schools were founded to teach Greek and Latin in their classic forms. (Renaissance, Online)

Guttenberg changed the world with the invention of the printing press in 1445. Prior to Guttenberg's invention all books were made by hand. The process was very labor intensive and expensive. During the Middle Ages clergy had been the only readers and owners of books. (Printing, Online)

In the Renaissance the middle class could now afford books due to Guttenberg's invention. They demanded books in their own languages. As the demand grew for books the book trade and elated industries thrived. The result was a more literate populace and stronger economy. (Printing, Online)

Books helped the Renaissance scholars to return to the works of ancient writers. The Middle Age scholars had been guided by the church and focused on actions leading towards heavenly rewards. The writings of ancient, pagan Greece and Rome were known as the Classics. (Printing, Online)

The secular view brought on by the Renaissance stemmed from the idea that the church should not rule civic matters but should guide spiritual ones. The church held an opposing viewpoint. The humanists believed wealth-enabled citizens to perform fine and noble deeds, that good citizens needed a well -rounded education and moral and ethical issues were related to more secular society than spiritual concerns. (Thinking, Online)

The resurgence of Classical studies contributed to the development of all forms of art during the Renaissance. Literature was probably first to show signs of classical influence. Petrarch is attributed as one of the premier humanist writers. (Printing, Online)

In Italy Humanism developed principally in the fields of art and literature. Scholars Johann Reuchlin and Melancthon extend the movements into fields of theology and education. This occurred in Germany and was a major cause for the Reformation. (Humanism, Online)

Desidererius Erasmus, a Dutch cleric played an important role introducing this movement into England. Humanism was definitely established at the university by English Scholars William Grocyn and Thomas Lincare and at the University of Cambridge by Erasmus and English Prelate

John Fisher. From these great universities Humanism spread through out English society and paved the way for the great flourishing of Elizabethan Literature and culture. (Humanism, Online)

Due to the Renaissance a new and vital drama emerged. During the 16th century in England the interlude developed by John Heywood blended with Latin classic comedy produced the greatest Elizabethan Comedy with great playwrights such as Shakespeare and Ben Johnson. Shakespeare's comedies ranged from farcical to tragicomical, however he was the master of the romantic comedy. Johnson's writing was strongly influenced by the classics and he was noted for his satires. Many of literatures most famous work come from this time period. (Encyclopedia.com, Online)

Following the hay day of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, a Puritanical movement lead by Oliver Cromwell took over Parliament and the morals of London. Cromwell shut down all the theatres on September 2, 1642 under the guise of public health and safety.

Actors had two options either join Charles I in civil war against Cromwell or defy the law and continue performing. Theatres were gutted and burned. Actors were imprisoned; spectators were fined for watching performances. Thomas Killigrew survived under Cromwell's strict moral guides. Davenant was successful in this time. A woman first appeared on a stage in London in Davenant's Siege of Rhodes. (Evans, Online)

Davenant renewed a friendship with the exiled aristocracy in France. He befriended Charles II and when the king made a triumphant return to Power Davenant was given a monopoly on all the theatre in London, which he shared with his friend Thomas Killgrew. Theatre came back with a vengeance. (Evans, Online)

People who remained in England during Cromwell faced years of strict moral repression. Those who escaped to France acquired decadence bred across the channel. The combination of these two groups created a nation of wealthy, witty, amoral hedonists that were reflected in Restoration Tragedy and Comedy of Manners. (Evans, Online)

In Restoration Comedy the audience were treated to a true picture of themselves. This world of class and manners is people by stock characters. The characters existed in a world of debauchery covered by a veneer of decorum. The audience for the theatre was upper class. It was expensive and a place to be seen. (Evans, Online)

The patronage of the theatre began to diminish during the reign of William and Mary.

The Restoration theatre began to shift to the eighteenth mode, dominated by the middle class. William Congreve's Way of the World is on of the most brilliant comedies of the English Language, but with it came an effective end to Restoration Comedy. Theatre is a continuing evolving entity. (Evans, Online)

France was a prominent during the seventeenth century in the evolution of comedy. Classical influence combined with commedia del arte prompted the drama and satirical writings of

Moliere. Moliere is credited with being one of finest dramatist in history, the creator of high French Comedy. Moliere talent lay in exposing the hypocrisies and follies of his society through satire.

France continued the tradition of excellence in comedy with Voltaire. Voltaire's intelligence, wit and style made him one of France's greatest writers. Voltaire had difficulties in getting along with his family. After collage he began associating with the Parisian aristocrats. His writings got him into trouble with the authorities the French Government. While imprisoned he wrote his first successful theatrical piece, "Oedipie".

Through out his career Voltaire was getting into trouble because of his viewpoint. He was imprisoned and exiled several times. This writer was an outspoken critic of religious intolerance and persecution. His writings reflect the issues occurring in society. (Voltaire, Online)

Oscar Wilde brought England into the modern era of comedy. Oscar led a decadent life with much personal drama. Oscar Wilde reintroduced the comedy of manners to the stage in England. The Importance of Being Earnest is hailed as the first modern comedy. Wilde's plays served as a catalyst in creating the modern era. His works forced Victorian society to reexamine its hypocrisies and delineated with wit and humor, the arbitrariness of many moral and social taboos to the unreflective eye appeared eternal. (Wilde, Online)

Evelyn Waugh brings Comedy into the twentieth century in England. Waugh is credited for his scathing satires of upper- class society. Waugh led quite an interesting life. He was a teacher, a soldier, a journalist, a writer, a husband, a father and a catholic convert. All of Waugh's roles are evident his writing. Waugh writes about American mortuary customs in the novel Loved One as well as confronts issue in society such as mortality, British veneer, and the shallowness of love. Brideheads Revisited is said to be Waugh's greatest work by the critics. It was made into a television series in 1981

Elements and Characteristics of Comedy

Part Two

The universal characteristics of comedy include: the presence of lovers, the defeat of an imposter figure and subsequent assimilation into restored social fabric, an inverted oedipal pattern, son triumphs over father, the presence of violence with out consequences. These ideas represent thematic significances rather than structural. (Corrigan, 3)

The constant in comedy is the sense no matter how many times a man gets knocked down, he pulls himself up and keeps going. Tragedy celebrates a man capacity to aspire whereas comedy celebrates man's ability to endure. (Corrigan, 3)

Aristotle defines comedy as an artistic imitation of men of inferior moral bent; faulty, however not in any or every way, but only in so far as their short comings are ludicrous; for the ludicrous

is a species part, not all, of the Ugly. It may be described as that kind of shortcoming or deformity which does not strike us as painful, and causes no harm to others; a ready example is afforded by the comic mask, which is ludicrous, being ugly and distorted without any suggestion of pain (Corrigan, 4)

Aristotle believed comedy as well as tragedy derives positive attitude toward values.

Comedy is negative in its definition . . . an audience will refuse to laugh to any presentation in a ludicrous manner of which they believe to be true, good or beautiful. We laugh at an absent-minded professor because of the erudition. For example a beautiful woman is not funny, a beautiful woman who opens her mouth speaking in a high voice is funny. Because she fails to meet up the standard of her appearance previously established. (Corrigan, 5)

Laughter cannot be defined in simple terms of incongruity. Incongruity is a technique effectively used in drama. Comedy operates in the middle zone between serious and absurd which Aristotle called ludicrous. This area excludes nobility of character, painful consequences and the consummation of any events that are likely to offend our sensibilities (Corrigan, 7)

In life we assign meaning to any situation based on our experiences. But our response to events in a play will be the product of the causes built in by the playwright. In both cases it is the value assigned to which determine we consider serious or comic. (Corrigan, 8) This is illustrated in the battle of the sexes in *Lysistrata* on to today's Broadway, the reversal role. (Corrigan, 8)

Comedy is an escape, not from truth but despair: a narrow escape into faith. In tragedy we suffer pain, in comedy pain is a fool suffered gladly. The difference between tragedy and comedy is the difference between experience and intuition. In the experience we strive against every condition of animal life, death, frustration of ambition, against the instability of human love. In intuition we trust the arduous eccentricities we born with and sees the oddness of any creature never acclimatized to being created. (Corrigan 15)

In Wylie Sypher's essay the meaning of comedy Bergson is attributed to the belief comedy is a game that imitates life. George Meredith, an English contemporary of Bergson thinks of comedy as a game as dealing with human nature in the drawing room.

Comedy seems to be a more pervasive human condition than tragedy. Tragedy not comedy limits its field of operation and is more closely regulated form of response to the ambiguities and dilemmas of humanity. (Corrigan, 27) For example the "Wife of Bath is at the bottom of the comic scale where the human becomes nearly indistinguishable from the animal and where the vibration of laughter is the longest and loudest because of a dirty joke or gesture. (Corrigan, 28) One of the deepest paradoxes in comedy is thus it reveals itself in obscenity. People are ashamed of the flesh (Corrigan, 29)

Bergson view on comedy centers on automatism, physical mishaps, pratfalls, and loud collisions. It is hard to distinguish pleasures in glee at physical deformities. Mechanical comedy is farce,

mistaken identity coincidences, mistiming. Comedy can be a mechanism of language, the repartee that sharply levels drama and life to sheen of verbal wit. (Corrigan, 29)

Comedy and tragedy intersects the orbit of tragic action without losing its autonomy. Authentic communication is a sacrifice and feasts a debate and a passion; it is by the same token a saturnalia an orgy, an assertion of the unruliness and vitality. (Corrigan 29)

Comedy is essentially a carrying away death, a triumph over mortality by some absurd faith in rebirth, restoration and salvation. Comedy is a release, a taking off the masque to deal with that we have to put on the deal with others who put on decent masks to deal with us. Comedy is no less mithridatic in its effects on the self and has its own catharsis. Like tragedy comedy is homeopathic. It cures folly by folly. (Corrigan, 38)

The tragic law works a transformation: from sin and suffering come calm mind and resistance to disaster, to fears that weaken us. The transformation in comedy is equally miraculous from license and parody and unmasking or putting on another mask come renewed sanity and responsibility. (Corrigan, 38)

The comic rites are necessarily impious for comedy is sacrilege as well as release; this is why comedy is intolerable to the sober moralist Rousseau who protested the women of Geneva would be corrupted by going to the theater to see Moliere satirize virtuous men like Alceste. (Corrigan, 38)

In the oldest comedy there was a struggle or agon with the imposter (*Alazon*) who looked with defiling eye upon sacred rites that must have not be seen. The *Alazon* was put to flight after a contest known as the *eiron*, "the ironical man" who professed ignorance to reduce the *Alazon* to bring him to confession. Ritual comedy was a combat of the king *eiron* against the imposter intruder *Alazon*. (Corrigan, 42)

Syphir continues in his essay describing how comedy is a process of safeguarding pleasures against denials of reason, which is wary of pleasure. (Corrigan, 50) Comedy is a momentary and publicly useful resistance to authority and an escape from its pleasures; and its mechanism is a free discharge of repressed psychic energy or resentment through laughter. (Corrigan 51) Meredith of course emphasized more strongly than Bergson comedy is the ultimate civilizer. Comedy has the strongest impulses of the social self is our hatred for aliens. The treatment of Shylock is a prime example (Corrigan 51)

Comedy can be a means of mastering our disillusionments when we are caught in a dishonest or stupid society. After we recognize the misdoings, the blunders we can liberate ourselves by a confident wise laughter that brings a catharsis of our discontent. If we laugh wisely at others, and ourselves sense of guilt, dismay, anxiety or fear can be uplifting. Unflinching and undaunted we see where we are; this strengthens us as well as society. (Corrigan, 53). To be able to laugh at evil and error means we have surmounted them we need the help of the comedian to help rebel against things as they are. We escape with him by laughing at imperfections. Tragedy accepts these flaws. The comedian refuses to accept this and is general, in the resistance movement with the human experience. (Corrigan 54)

In Sypher's Essay on Comedy he defines George Meredith and Henri Bergson's ideas on comedy. These two individuals are notable experts in the literary field. Their views and ideas define and express comedy. In order for society to appreciate Comedy they must 'be cultivated men and women with quick and open minds.

In George Meredith's opinion comedy banishes "monstrous monotonousness." Comedy teaches us to be responsive, to be honest, to interrogate ourselves and correct our pretentiousness so the comic spirit is born out of united social intelligences. The comic spirit is the "ultimate civilizer". (Sypher, IX) Bergson idea of Comedy falls into line with the philosophy of vitalism. Bergson view takes a mechanical approach with him citing comedy as the quintessence of pedantry. Bergson felt Comedy requires insensitivity on the part of the beholder "an anesthesia of the heart." (Sypher, XII)

Meredith assigns to Comedy richer values than Bergson, "and to love Comedy you must first know the real world and men and women well enough not to expect too much of them though you may still hope for the good. (Sypher, XIV)

Meredith agrees with Bergson on the French Dramatist Moliere to find the quintessence of Comedy. Meredith dares to turn the eye of comedy inward upon the vanities that are exposed to the public. (Sypher, XIV) Meredith believes Moliere has the "Wit of Wisdom 'throwing fresh light everywhere. Meredith explains that the life of Comedy is in the idea and the idea is a vision of how ridiculously we behave when we are uncivilized, when we are not sane. Whenever ever we are elf deceived, overblown, blinded by our own pedantries we deserve the scourge of the satirists or the grave verdict of the moralist. (Sypher, XIV).

Meredith illustrates your talent for Comedy is measured by your being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes and accepting the correction, their image of you proposes (Sypher XV)."The specific remedy for vanity is laughter and that one failing that is essentially laughable is vanity." (Sypher XV)

Both Bergson and Meredith are inclined to think of Comedy, as being Comedy of Manners, would have the comedian shun what is gross. Both gentlemen take comedy

as a game played in society and use it as a discipline of self. (Sypher, XV) Bergson says comedy can make us human and natural in the midst of mechanical societies. Meredith implies that comedy can enlighten us and redeem us from our worst stupidity and original sin of pride and compliancy. Comedy is a premise to civilization. (Sypher XV)

A society of men and women who are cultivated and possess quick wit are necessary components of comedy. Comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit. The heroines of Comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless from being clean sighted; they seem so sentimentally reared, only for the reason that they use their wits and are not wandering vessels searching for a captain or pilot. (Sypher, 15)

Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men and that of men with them. However divergent similarity of their impressions must bring them some resemblance. Celimene, Dorine and Millamant are examples of strong women characters in Comedy.

The laughter of satire is a blow to the back or the face. The laughter of Comedy is impersonal and of unrivaled politeness, nearer a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humor of the mind. (Sypher, 47)

Henri Bergson shares his ideas of comedy in his essay titled "Laughter". In this essay Bergson illustrates his beliefs on the foundations of Comedy. A man falls down, that is funny because it is an accident. The accident is a result of rigidity or momentum, mechanical inelasticity, practical jokes. What causes laughter is the premises for Bergson's essay.

A deformity that may become comic is a deformity that normally built by that person, a deformity one could imitate successfully imitate such as a hunchback. (Sypher, 79)

The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine. (Sypher, 79)

Twins are funny elements of Comedy. Pascal thought two faces that are alike although neither one excites laughter by itself, makes us laugh together, on account of their likeness. The gesture of a public speaker, no one of which is laughable by itself, excites laughter by its repetition. Whenever there is repetition or complete similarity we always suspect some mechanism at work behind the living. The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as the body reminds us of a machine. (Sypher 82)

Disguises are funny elements in Comedy. A garment can be ridiculous depending how it is worn. A character can use a garment to disguise himself. We laugh because something is different, it surprises us. Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned. A person is embarrassed by his body. (Sypher, 93)

Bergson's central point in his essay is the mechanical focus of comedy. We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing. Any arrangement of acts or events is comic, which gives us in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement. (Sypher, 97) Bergson illustrates this point with a reference to a jack in the box toy. It is funny. It represent a struggle between stubborn elements; one of which being simply mechanical generally ends giving into the other.

Repetition is another key ingredient in the comedy recipe. Repetition is comic in classical comedy. The repetition of a word is never laughable itself. It makes us laugh only because it symbolizes a special play of moral elements (Sypher, 108) In a comic repetition of words we generally find two terms: a repressed feeling which goes off like a spring and an idea that delights in repressing that feeling anew. A repetitive action is a funny thing in comedy. (Sypher 108)

Bergson continuing with his mechanical theme in his essay illustrates a point by alluding to a dancing jack toy. In Innumerable comedies in which one of the characters think he is speaking and acting freely, consequently, retains all the essentials of life whereas he appears as a toy in the hands of another. (Sypher, 111) Keeping in line with the mechanical realm Bergson continue with a snow ball effect such as toy soldier, snow balls rolling, house of cards, where things are standing erect and fall down because of a chain of events.

The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect o human events which through its peculiar inelasticity conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection that calls for an immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and events (Sypher, 117)

Repetition, inversion and reciprocal interference of a series are the methods comic writers use to write comedies. (Sypher, 118) Repetition is a situation with a combination of circumstances, which reoccurs several times in its original form and thus contrasts with the changing stream of life. For example if you meet a friend you have not seen in ages and you keep running into during the day, that would be a coincidence you would laugh at. These repetitions are produced on stage for comic effect. (Sypher, 118)

Inversion is another technique used by comic writers. Picture certain characters in certain situations and reverse the situation and invert the role, you know have a comic scene. An example would be a child presuming to teach a parent or a prisoner lecturing a judge. It is like topsy turvydom. (Sypher, 121) The villain is a victim of his own villainy or the cheat who was cheated forms the stock in a good many plays. The idea involves an inversion of roles and a situation that recoils on the head of the author, the theme of the robber robbed. (Sypher, 122)

A reciprocal interference of series is a situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two all together independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time. (Sypher, 123) An equivocal situation permits two different meanings at the same time, the one merely plausible, which put forward by the actors; the other a real one is given by the public. The contradictory ideals make us laugh because it reveals to us the reciprocal interferences of two independent series, the real source of the comic effort. (Sypher 125)

The stage misunderstandings is nothing more than one particular instance, one means, perhaps the most artificial of illustrating the reciprocal interferences of series, but is not only one. (Sypher, 125) Bergson states whether we find reciprocal interferences of series inversion or repetition we see the objective is always the same to obtain what we call the *mechanisation* of life. You take a set of actions and relations and repeat it as it is or turn it upside down, or transfer it bodily to another set with which it partially coincides all these being processed that consist in looking upon life as a repeating mechanism, with reversible action and interchangeable parts. Actual life is a comedy just as far as it produces, in a natural fashion, actions of the same kind; consequently just as far as its forgets itself, for were it always on the alert, it would be ever changing continually irreversible progress undivided unity. (Sypher, 126)

Language can be comic. Wit has two meanings. A comic meaning is invariably obtained when absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase form. Types of comedy can be projected in a simplified form on the plane of speech. (Sypher, 135) A comic effect is obtained whenever we pretend to take literally an expression, which was used figuratively. Once our attention is fixed on the material aspect of a metaphor the idea expressed is comic. (Sypher, 138)

Bergson continues through his essay with the idea life is a machine, with repetition inversion and reciprocal interferences can also be applied in language. The three fundamental laws can be called comic transformation of sentences. Inversion, the flip order of words and sentence provide comic meaning. (Sypher, 138)

The reciprocal interference provides amusing varieties of text assisted by puns. Puns are two sentences with independent meanings, but it is only an appearance. The play on words we are confronted with a set of words, but an advantage taken is taken when the words are used figuratively instead of literally. A play upon words always betrays a momentary lapse of attention in language and it is precisely on that account that it is amusing. (Sypher, 139)

Transposition is too ordinary language is to comedy. Repetition is a reoccurring method. The comic author by arranging events that a scene is reproduced either between the same characters under fresh circumstances. Scenes are reacted out by the slaves that were preformed previously by their masters for comic effect. This can be transferred into language. The ideas and language itself playing a comedy language, itself made comic. (Sypher, 140) There will be no need, moreover actually to set before us both expression and the natural one. A comic effect is always obtainable by transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key. The two keys are at extreme ends of the scale. One is solemn and the other familiar. When you flip flop/transpose the two opposite currents of comic fancy. The transposing of the solemn into familiar the result is parody.

The philosopher Alexander Bain discusses the comic in parody. By defining the comic in general as a species of degradation. Bain defines the laughable as causing something to appear mean that was formerly dignified. Degradation is the only form of transposition and transposition itself only one of the means obtaining laughter. Transposition occurs in two forms physical and moral. Exaggeration is a form of transposition, very large or very small, the best the worst, low class high class contrasts. (Sypher, 142) Laughter only attains laughable results because it is a human product modeled exactly as possible on the forms of the human mind.

Comedy can only begin at what point where our neighbor's personality ceases to affect us. Begins with a growing callousness to a social life. Alceste in Moliere's Misanthrope is an example of a comic character. He is an honest man who withdraws from society. It is in his rigidity society views with suspicion. This rigidity makes us laugh. The faults of others make us laugh. Provided we add that they make us laugh by their reason of their unsociability rather than their immorality. (Sypher, 150)

Comic characters whether good or bad is of little importance, granted he is unsociable we see the seriousness of the case whether serious or trifling, it still can make us laugh, provided not to arouse our emotions. Unsociability in the character and insensibility in the spectator are the

essential conditions. (Sypher, 155) The third condition of comedy is automatism, what is laughable is done automatically. This occurs in a vice, even virtue the comic element in which the person unwittingly betrays himself or makes an unconscious remark. (Sypher, 155) The obliviousness of the characters to their own actions inattention to self and consequently to others what we see. The inattention results in the characters as being seen as unsociable. The chief reason for their rigidity is the neglect to look a round especially within oneself: how can a man fashion his personality after another if he does not first study others as well as himself. (Sypher, 156)

Rigidity, automatism, absentmindedness, and unsociability are inextricably entwined; they are the key ingredients in creating a comic character.

A character is never ridiculous except through some mental attribute resembling absentmindedness. This state of mind is observable from without and capable of being corrected. But on the other hand, laughter aims at correcting, it is expedient, it is expedient that the correction should reach as great a number of persons possible, (Sypher, 170) this is how comedy is seen as an art. This is the reason comic observation indistinctly proceeds to what is general. It chooses such peculiarities as admit of being reproduced and consequently are not indissolubly bound up with individuality of a single person by transferring to the stage it creates works of art to please. Comedy lies between art and life. By organizing laughter comedy accepts social life as a natural environment; It even obeys an impulse of a social life. In this respect it turns its back upon art, which is breaking away from society and returning to nature. (Sypher, 171)

Vanity is an important element of comedy. Laughter is a remedy for vanity. Vanity is a higher form of comedy; it is an element we unconsciously search for to laugh at, for example, a short man bowing his head to get into a tall door or raise one self taller. Professional vanity merges into solemnity in preparation for quackery. Comic rigidity allows for professional callousness to turn into professional ludicrous. (Sypher 175)

Thomas Gautier said the comic in its extreme form was the logic of the absurd. We see that absurdity when met with the comic is not absurdity in general. It does not create the comic; rather we say the comic infuses into its own particular essence. It is not a cause but an effect, an effect of a very special kind, which relates the special nature of the cause. The absurd is comic. Consider Don Quixote reading about monsters, then sees windmills and thinks they are monsters. This effect is a molding of ideas. (Sypher, 180)

At the root of the comic there is the rigidity, which compels us its victims to keep strictly on one path, to follow it straight, to shut their ears and refuse to listen. Again Don Quixote provides examples of comic absurdity. Comic absurdity is the same nature as that dreams. (Sypher, 180) So comic absurdity gives us from the outset the impression of playing with ideas that relieves us from the strain of thinking. (Sypher, 187)

Laughter is above all corrective being intended to humiliate it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter society avenges itself for liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness. Laughter is simply the

result of a mechanism set up by using nature or what is almost the same thing by our long acquaintance with social life. It goes off spontaneous and returns it tit for tat. (Sypher, 188) The function of laughter is to intimidate by humiliating. It would not succeed had nature not implemented in men with a spark of spitefulness or mischief. (Sypher, 188)

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Pittsburgh Public School

Content Standards

All students use effective research and information management skills, including

Locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging technologies.

All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex text.

All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational text and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

All students write for a variety of purpose, including to narrate, inform, and persuade in all subject areas.

All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately and promoting effective group communications.

All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.

All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that is designed to persuade, inform or describe.

Arts and Humanities

All students describe the meanings they find in various works from the visual and the performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.

All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand the features of the works.

All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature

To the historical culture context within they created.

All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater and describe the meanings their own work has for them.