

Warmer – types of joke

Work with a partner to match the sentences with the examples your teacher gives you. Then try to define the words in bold.

1. It's an old children's joke based on a **pun**. Do you think it's funny?
2. Lizzie's got a bit of an **earthy sense of humour**, hasn't she?
3. I was always playing **practical jokes** on my sister when I was a kid.
4. Have you seen any of the *Mr Bean* films? They are so **slapstick**!
5. I do enjoy a bit of **witty banter** with my colleagues!

**Task 1 – Reading: making predictions**

You are going to read a student's blog post about Shakespeare's comedies. Tick the things you think you will read about.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. witty banter | d. singing and dancing |
| b. a policeman | e. puns |
| c. <i>The Simpsons</i> | f. an earthy sense of humour |

Task 2 – Reading a blog post.

Now read the blog post on the next page. Were your predictions correct?

Class clown's latest blog entry
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What's so funny about Shakespeare?

(1) _____ Mum says she doesn't know how I'm ever going to get my degree in English Literature when all I do is sit and watch the comedy channel. She should relax: little does she know that most of the comedy we watch today is inspired by Shakespeare. Don't believe me? Then read on to find out how Shakespearean-style comedy is alive and well.

Fools

(2) _____ Take *The Simpsons*, for example. For me, the star of the show is Homer, Bart Simpson's dad. Homer's **prototype** appears in Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado about Nothing* where foolish policeman Dogberry has much in common with Bart's **inadequate** dad. Like Homer, Dogberry mixes up his words and makes a mess of his police work (just as Homer **screws up** his parental responsibilities). Yet, both characters do good in the end without ever realising quite how they did it, often speaking words of truth and significance to the audience.

Singing and dancing

(3) _____ Think of your favourite **romcom** and nine times out of ten a song and dance number will come to mind. Take the movie *Ten Things I Hate About You*, for example. Not only was this movie inspired by Shakespeare's comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, it features a memorable song and dance number where the male lead **serenades** the girl of his dreams on a soccer field.

Absurdity

(4) _____ Look no further than *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and you'll find a character called Bottom being turned into an ass (yes, really!) and Tom Snout playing the part of a wall in a play within a play.

Happy endings

(5) _____ Actually, happy endings define Shakespearean comedy where it ain't over till the young couples, having overcome their **obstacles**, end up happily married (unlike in tragedy where they end up dead on the floor). In this way, our romantic comedies aren't so very different from Shakespeare's. Throw in a few puns, some **witty banter** and truckloads of **sexual innuendo** and you'll find that what you're laughing at today is pretty similar to what Shakespeare's audiences were **chuckling** at hundreds of years ago. It looks like 450 years later Shakespeare continues to have the last laugh. That's what I tell my mum anyway ...

Task 3 – Reading: topic sentences

Read the sentences below. Insert them into gaps 1–5 in the text you have just read. What effect does this have on the text as a whole?

- a. Shakespeare's comic fools can be found in all kinds of comedy today.
- b. Don't you just love it when it all turns out all right?
- c. Our most wacky and surreal comedy has its roots in Shakespeare.
- d. Music was an important part of Shakespearean comedies and this is also true in contemporary romantic comedies.
- e. My parents are always worrying about me.

Task 4 – Writing: topic sentences

Read an extract from another blog post by the same writer. Write a topic sentence for these paragraphs.

- a. _____ . It all started when my mum took me to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when I was seven years old. The costumes, the humour, the magic: all of these things combined to form me into a diehard fan.
- b. _____ . They think it's boring and old-fashioned, something you have to read in school to keep your teachers happy. I think they should open their eyes. Shakespeare's work is so much more than that.

Task 5 – Reading: checking your understanding

Read the text again and answer the questions.

- 1. Why does the writer think that his mum should relax about his TV-watching habits?
- 2. Name two things that Homer Simpson and Dogberry have in common.
- 3. What kind of jokes feature in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
- 4. How do Shakespearean comedies tend to end?

Task 6 – Vocabulary

Match the definitions below with the words in bold in the text.

- a. Shortened form of *romantic comedy* **romcom**
- b. Sings romantically to someone
- c. Things which get in your way and cause problems
- d. Not good enough
- e. Makes a mess of
- f. Amusing conversation
- g. When something someone says has a double meaning (this is earthy humour)
- h. Laughing
- i. The very first version of something

Task 7 – Vocabulary practice

Complete the sentences using the correct forms of words or phrases from **Task 6**.

- a. The audience couldn't stop _____ – it was a great comic moment.
- b. We were eating our pizza when the handsome waiter took out his guitar and started _____ us.
- c. We can't take my grandmother to see that film! There's lots of _____ in it!
- d. I think I _____ my exam yesterday. I was nervous and I couldn't concentrate.
- e. I'm afraid I must complain about the _____ service I received at your hotel.
- f. If we stick together, we'll get past any _____ in our way!
- g. I don't think I want to go out tonight – let's stay in and watch a nice _____.
- h. We have such fun in our office – I love the _____ my colleagues and I have together.
- i. The scientists had finally produced a _____ vaccine for the deadly disease.

Task 8 – Creating a Shakespearean comedy

Work in small groups. Make a list of the main ingredients of Shakespearean comedy. Now create a trailer for your own Shakespearean comedy. Think about the following things:

- Who are your main characters?
- What obstacles are in the way of your main characters?
- Where is your comedy set?
- What type of humour will you use?

Choose one scene from your comedy and act it out to the rest of the class.