

WRITING HUMOUR
A Classroom-ready Creative Writing Module
for the High School Grades

developed for The Leacock Associates

by

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WRITING HUMOUR

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WRITING HUMOUR

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WHAT IS HUMOUR?

As everyone knows, humour is subjective. Different people laugh or smile at different things. Nonetheless, it is possible to make some generalized statements about humour, especially as it compares with comedy. Here are some things that your students need to understand about humour in order to include it confidently and effectively in their writing:

1. Humour is an attitude, a skewed point of view. Unlike the comedian, who tells jokes with punch lines, the humorist gives us special glasses to wear, enabling us to see everyday life as he or she perceives it by bringing its excesses, absurdities and incongruities into sharp focus. Instead of laughing at the unexpected, we are smiling at the familiar, as it is viewed through a humorist's lens.

2. Humour is unstructured and ongoing. It does not rely on timing for its effectiveness, and it doesn't have the *setup-wait-punch line* of a joke. Whereas a joke might begin with three people walking into a bar, a humorous piece would direct our attention to the nature of the bar itself, and the existing relationships between the bar and its owner, the bar and its neighbours, and the bar and its clientele. Humour is ongoing. It's in place and fully operational long before the joke begins; and as long as we keep those glasses on, humour will continue making us smile long after the punch line fades from memory. That is why:

3. Humour has no shelf life. Because comedy presents us with the unexpected – a surprising reaction by a character or an incongruous sequence of events – it can grow old. A joke is only funny if you haven't heard it before. Humour, on the other hand, reminds us of the constantly present absurdities of everyday life and is therefore ageless. We still laugh at the writings of humorists who lived long ago. Stephen Leacock, James Thurber and Mark Twain are but a few examples. Primarily, this is because:

4. Humour derives from characters. Frequently this character is the narrator of the piece, sharing his or her off-the-wall perceptions of life. Sometimes the humorous character is found within a story, putting an absurd spin on what would otherwise be a simple and mundane sequence of events. The point is this: events can be unexpected, incongruous, even ridiculous, but events alone are not humorous; it's the people who initiate and participate in them, or who witness and report them, who make them that way.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS TEACHING MODULE

This module contains fifteen English periods' worth of lesson plans, organized around six humour writing skills and providing three days at the end for revision, editing, proofreading, and the production of a final draft. There is no prescribed order in which to introduce these writing skills, nor is it necessary for you to have your students learn and practice all six of them. As long

as the lesson structure is followed, you may decide to spend three days each on four skill segments or four days each on three skill segments, depending on your students' needs and interests.

The classroom-tested teaching methodology that informs this module is *gradual release of responsibility*. That is, each skill segment begins with an introduction and modeling by the teacher, then moves to guided practice with a partner or in small groups before arriving at independent practice, as follows:

SEGMENT OUTLINE (75-minute periods)

Period 1

Introduction by teacher: The new writing skill is introduced and discussed in whole class. A short exemplar piece is read aloud and discussed.

Modeling: With student participation, the teacher plans and then creates or begins a first-draft humorous story or essay on the board or on an overhead transparency, using the writing skill being taught.

Guided Practice: Working in pairs or in small groups, students either plan and create a humorous piece or complete the one begun by the teacher, using the process and writing skill just demonstrated. Work is shared with other pairs or groups, and feedback is given and received.**

Independent Practice: For homework, each student plans and first-drafts a short written piece that uses the humour writing skill taught in class, then self-edits the completed draft. This piece is to be brought to the student's next English period.

Period 2

Sharing and discussion: Students form small groups and share their homework pieces with group mates, receiving constructive feedback from them.**

Exemplar: A short humorous piece using the writing skill being learned is read aloud to the class and discussed.

Independent Practice: In class, each student plans and first-drafts a written piece that uses the humour writing skill being learned, then self-edits the completed draft.

Sharing and Discussion: Students pair up with editing partners and share their classroom work with each other, giving and receiving constructive feedback.**

**Following the production of each first draft, whether in class or for homework, there must be an opportunity for self- and peer assisted editing. In this way, students get to develop their critical faculties along with their writing skills.

EXTENDING A SEGMENT

Period 2 can be repeated as often as the teacher feels is necessary or desirable for a particular

class. On each day, at the teacher's discretion, students may also be assigned as homework the completion of a further first-draft writing exercise using a different prompt, scenario, or listed item from the one(s) already chosen in class.

PLEASE NOTE: All the exemplars discussed in this module are taken from Literary Lapses by Stephen Leacock. Unless you have exemplars of your own to put in their place, you will need to acquire at least one copy of this book (for reading aloud to the class) or, ideally, a class set of the book in which students can follow along, prior to beginning the module with your English class.

ENTERING THE LEACOCK COMPETITION FOR YOUNG WRITERS

At the conclusion of this module, each of your students should have produced a final draft piece of humorous writing of which he or she can be proud. The next step after that (and admittedly, it's a large one) is to share one's writing with a wider audience. This means submitting work for publication and/or entering it in competitions.

Here is how to enter your students' writing in the annual Stephen Leacock Student Humorous Short Story Competition:

- Entry to this contest is limited to students of Canada's secondary schools, public and private.
- Entry will be a humorous story or humorous personal essay.
- Maximum length: 1,500 words.
- Entry must have a title and be typed, double-spaced and on one side of the page only.
- Pages must be numbered, but no other identifying marks may appear on them.
- A cover page must be included and **must** list the title of the submission, the name of the student, the name of the school attended, and the school's telephone number and email address.
- **Three copies of each entry, plus the entry fee, must be mailed to: Contest Registrar, PO Box 854, Orillia ON, L3V 6K8. The fee is \$5 per entry**
- Entries may be made at any time, but the deadline for each year's contest is the middle of April. Winners are announced by the middle of May. See the Leacock Associates website for specific dates: www.leacock.ca.
- There are cash awards for each year's top three entries, as well as invitations to attend a weekend of events honouring all the Leacock winners. See the Leacock Associates website for this year's specific details.

SKILL SEGMENT 1: Incongruous Comparison (talking about one thing in terms of another)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "Boarding House Geometry" (Period 1)
and "Winter Pastimes" (Period 2)

Blackboard and chalk

A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)

An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. (IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT) Begin by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at www.darwinawards.com/darwin/

WARNING: Online humour is addictive and insidious. It will draw you in, causing you to lose all track of time as you chuckle and chortle an entire afternoon away. All right, you've been warned. Have fun exploring the websites provided above. I certainly did.

2. Explain to your students that the writing technique they'll be practicing in this segment is called "incongruous comparison", which means simply talking about one thing as though it were something totally different and unrelated. In the first exemplar piece, "Boarding House Geometry", the two things are: the vicissitudes of living in a rooming house, and the definitions and axioms of plane geometry. Make sure the students understand what a rooming house is, and that they know some basics of geometry. Then read the piece aloud.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

3. Here are some things to point out to your students about "Boarding House Geometry":

- By using the language and phrasings of plane geometry, Leacock is able to poke fun at the *annoying aspects* of rooming house living. He criticizes the food, the inadequate bed linens, and the morals and ethics of the landlady, all the while sounding like a math teacher making pronouncements.
- Leacock has *compared* a boarding house room to a point (with no parts and no magnitude – that is, very small); the bed linens to parallel lines (never meeting no matter how far you extend them to either side – that is, too small for the bed); and two weekly bills to congruent triangles (with equal sides and equal wrangles – that is, they're the same as long as the boarders get along equally well or poorly with the landlady).
- This is not a list of rules but rather *a collection of statements* describing what it's like to live in a poorly-run rooming house.
- There is *punning and word play* here, based on the double meanings of the words "proposition", "pi(e)", and "square (meal)".
- Notice how a close analysis of humour diminishes its effectiveness. Humour is written to be enjoyed, not critiqued or dissected. However, it may be analysed by student authors who will be emulating the techniques used by a master humorist like Stephen Leacock.

MODELING

1. Write or reveal on the board the following list:

Grammar
Physics
Chemistry
Algebra
Logic
Geometry

Point out to your class that each of these is a discipline with definitions, rules, and words with more than one meaning, making it perfect to use for a short humorous piece similar in format to "Boarding House Geometry".

NOTE: You may wish to spend a few minutes establishing what some of the definitions and so on are for each one before proceeding to the next step.

Grammar – has parts of sentences, verb tenses and pronoun cases; lots of rules about double negatives and where to put things like commas and capital letters; and lovely puns waiting to happen around words such as "proper" and "common" (nouns).

Physics – Think motion, levers, magnetism, electricity, states of matter, heat, light and sound; all the rules and laws that govern the behaviour of the foregoing items; and all the pun-worthy words that come to mind in the process.

Chemistry – There's the periodic table for starters, a virtual hotbed of punning material (the Neon not only uses gas, it is one); add to that all the combinations of elements and the reactions they provoke. Think acid versus base, solutions versus suspensions, substances that combust in the presence of other substances (such as phosphorus with oxygen or sodium with water), and elements that are naturally found in our bodies, like calcium, copper, and iron.

Algebra – This math is a place of mystery, full of variables and unknowns, permutations and combinations, squares and cubes, ratios and proportions; with plenty of roots and logs to trip up the unwary.

Logic – It's always fun to apply logic to something that defies logic. Try inductive and deductive reasoning. If this is true, then that should follow. If this has repeatedly happened in the past, then it's reasonable to expect it to happen in the future. Create a flow chart.

2. In whole class, ask students to brainstorm a second list of six to eight everyday experiences. For example: going on a date, preparing for an exam, shopping at a busy mall, walking the dog, and so on. These should be recorded on the board to the immediate right of the first list.

3. Alone or with the class, select one item from each column and write the resulting title at the top of a blank panel of blackboard or an overhead transparency. For example: "The Grammar of Dating". Divide the space under the title into a T-chart so that one column is headed "Grammar" and the other is headed "Dating".

4. Remind the students that this is not going to be a list of rules, but rather a collection of statements poking fun at current dating practices and behaviour. The emphasis should therefore be on the negative side. For example, you've noticed that some people on dates let themselves get distracted. They take phone calls or text other people, and this can be very annoying for the person they're with. Record this on the board or transparency under the "Dating" heading:
Distracted date – very annoying.

Instruct students to pair up with "elbow partners" and brainstorm other gripes about dating. *Allow three minutes for brainstorming.* Then elicit items from the whole class and record them under the "Dating" heading. There should be at least six separate ideas written in point form in the right-hand column on the board or overhead transparency.

5. In whole class, briefly discuss with students some of the terminology and rules of grammar, and record a point-form list of these in the left-hand column on the board. One of the items should include the mention of past, present and future verb tenses.

6. Draw a line on the chart from "present tense" to "Distracted date – very annoying" and then turn this combination into a sentence, written beside the chart on the board or under the chart on the transparency:

If a date's mind is not on the present, things can become very tense.

Point out that what you have just done is what the students in groups of three are going to complete, using the material from the chart on the board or screen (and adding to it if something occurs to them as they are working).

GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Organize the students into groups of three and instruct them to continue matching up items and composing sentences. (I recommend against imposing a quota. Just tell them to work quickly and come up with as many statements as they can in the time allotted.) *Allow ten to twelve minutes for this step.* Each student should ensure that he or she has a personal copy of the group's work.

2. Each student should now partner up with a member of a different group. Within each pair, students can take turns reading their own group's work aloud to each other. The listening partner can offer constructive suggestions for making individual sentences more humorous. *Allow about ten minutes for sharing.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the two lists from the blackboard (see Modeling, steps 1 and 2) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.

2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one item from each list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the teacher (*the title, the two columns, the brainstorming to complete first one and then the other, the matching, the composing*), to arrive at a list of six to eight humorous statements that demonstrate the technique of incongruous comparison. The student may select *one* of the same items used in class, but must choose something different from the other list to go with it. When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether individual statements can be better worded to enhance the humorous effect.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of individual sentences. *Allow no more than five to seven minutes for this, and about three more for students to make revisions to their drafts incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.*

2. Dissolve the groups and either write or reveal on the board the following lists:

a game or sport	walking the family dog
a fitness workout	babysitting a neighbour's child
a religious ritual	shopping at a busy mall
a rite of passage	riding public transportation
a test of strength or intelligence	visiting a relative
a battle	attending a birthday party
a staged entertainment	going on a first date with someone

Explain to the class that another form of incongruous comparison is describing one kind of experience as though it were another. This means putting on your special glasses and seeing a babysitting assignment as an I.Q. test, for example, before writing it that way for the reader.

EXEMPLAR

NOTE: Before reading aloud the next exemplar passage from "Winter Pastimes" by Stephen Leacock, you will need to make sure your students know what a trolley car is. You will also need to substitute more modern terms for some of Leacock's words: "penalty" for "philopena", for example. A pre-reading will show you where some updating of language is in order.

1. Read the second exemplar passage, "Winter Pastimes", beginning about halfway through the piece with the paragraph that begins: *Here is another little thing that I have worked out, which is superior to parlour games...*

2. Some things to point out to your class about "Winter Pastimes":

- Leacock is poking fun at all the *annoying aspects* of a ride in a trolley car (the crowding, the sudden stops and starts, the uncaring attitudes of the driver and fare-collector, the attempts by passengers to sneak aboard without paying the fare) by describing these as if they were all part of an extreme game.
- What makes this piece so funny is the narrator's *deadpan delivery*, as though he is speaking to someone who has never ridden a trolley car before and will honestly believe

what he is saying. (Think about it – the best stand-up comedians these days point out life's foibles without cracking a smile.)

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. Direct your students' attention back to the two lists on the board. Point out that each of the experiences on the right is a sequence of events and should be recorded as such on the T-chart when students are working on their next humorous piece.

To illustrate, choose one experience and work together with the students to draw up an order of events, either on the board or on an overhead transparency. For example: walking the dog involves first leashing the dog, then finding a plastic bag, leaving the house, letting the dog pick his or her spot, standing patiently by while the dog does his or her business, bagging said business, and returning to the house to dispose of said business.

The remaining column of the chart should contain a list of the incongruous experience's terms, trappings, rules, and so on. One of these will be matched to each of the events in the sequence. For example, if walking the dog is being compared to an I.Q. test, then finding a plastic bag in a cluttered kitchen cabinet could be a test of visual-spatial recognition.

2. Review with your students the prewriting process that was practiced yesterday in class: the selection of two items, the title, the T-chart, the brainstorming to fill in first one side of the chart and then the other, the matching, the composing. Point out that this is the process students will be expected to follow as they work independently on the following assignment in class:

3. Each student is to select one item from each list on the board (see Introduction, step 2) and first-draft a two- or three-paragraph description of one as though it were the other. As is done in the exemplar excerpt, the opening paragraph should *state* what the narrator is *claiming* to describe (that is, *the incongruous experience*), and the remaining one or two paragraphs should then *reveal* what the narrator is *actually* describing (that is, *the everyday experience*).

Depending on the ability levels in your class, you may want to suggest that students adopt the point of view of an alien visitor to Earth reporting to his commander on the strange customs of humans. *Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting.* If time permits, students should read over their work to fill in any missing words and see whether individual sentences can be made more humorous by the inclusion of punning or word play.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their descriptions aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the piece. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes.*

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 2: Cascade Failure (things just keep getting worse and worse)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "My Financial Career" (Period 1)
and "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones" (Period 2)
Blackboard and chalk
A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)
An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION AND EXEMPLAR

1. (*IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT*) Start by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

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2. Ask your students whether they've ever had "one of those days" -- a day when everything is going well until you make a mistake, which leads to a misunderstanding, which you can't correct in time to prevent a further misunderstanding, which gets you so rattled that you make another mistake, and so on, and so on, until you've managed to make a complete fool of yourself and all you want to do is shrink down to a nub and disappear. Explain to the class that this string of mishaps, this cascade of error and misunderstanding, is the essence of the humour writing technique they'll be practicing in this segment.

3. In the first exemplar piece, "My Financial Career", a young man has "one of those days" while trying to make a bank deposit. Make sure the students know what Pinkerton's was (*a large detective agency, retained by banks to protect their assets and investigate thefts*) and who the Rothschilds were (*a very wealthy and powerful family*). Show them a picture of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century bank so they can appreciate how grand and intimidating banks were back then, and why a fellow might be unnerved by one. (For a picture of the interior of Gringotts bank from the Harry Potter movies that's enough to intimidate anyone, check out the following web address: <https://www.undercvertourist.com/blog/peek-inside-harry-potter-escape-gringotts/>)

Finally, read the piece aloud.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

4. Here are some things to point out to your students about "My Financial Career":

- There is a *pun in the title* of the story, based on the double meaning of the word "career". As a noun, it refers to a planned path of advancement in a chosen line of work. As a verb, however, it describes the rapid and erratic movement of something that is out of control. From the moment the narrator opens his mouth in the bank, a situation is set in motion that is beyond his control.
- The narrator warns the reader to expect that things will not go smoothly at the bank when he describes how nervous it makes him feel. *Anticipation* thus sharpens the humorous effect of the story.
- The cascade in this piece is launched by a single misspoken word ("alone", pronounced in an unnaturally deep voice due to the character's extreme nervousness), and the assumptions people tend to make when they hear it. The narrator is acutely aware of the misunderstandings he is creating but feels helpless to correct them. The cascade continues when he puts the wrong amount on his withdrawal slip. Already a laughing stock, the narrator does what he does at the end out of desperation; convinced that there is no way to back up or start over, he rushes helplessly forward.

MODELING AND GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Point out that there's a pattern in this piece: the young man intends to put his money in the

bank, actually deposits it, but then, carried along by the cascade, ends up withdrawing his money and closing the account. Ask students to supply examples of other similar experiences (such as giving someone a gift but ending by taking it back; trying to return a defective item to the store but ending up keeping the purchase after all; or having a successful job interview but turning down the job when it is offered) and record them on the board or on a blank overhead transparency. There should be about five items in the list.

2. Begin a second list beside the first one by writing "extreme nervousness" on the board or transparency. Ask the students to identify other circumstances or character traits that might cause a person to say or do something that would start a cascade failure (for example, fatigue, hunger, a fear of being disliked, or a compulsion to tell the truth). Add these to the second list.

3. Now begin modeling the process for the class by selecting one item from each list and recording them together on the board. For example, the hungry narrator might be trying to return a broken toaster to the store instead of eating during his lunch break.

Okay, time to brainstorm: What are some of the things that hunger might make the narrator do? (The narrator might: mishear words and think they refer to food; misspeak by substituting food words in place of what he or she means to say; get distracted by a cooking show playing on a demonstration TV in the store and say something about the food that could be misunderstood by the clerk as a rude comment about her....*Bingo!*) Record this on the board as the mistake that will start the cascade rolling.

4. In the exemplar piece, the narrator begins by letting the reader know what his state of mind will be when he enters the bank. The first sentence of the model piece should therefore explain how hungry the narrator is. Compose this sentence and write it on the board, followed by the rest of a paragraph that gets him or her into the store and up to the Returns desk. For example:

I was skipping lunch that day and my stomach was letting me know rather loudly that it disapproved. Too bad – this was the only time I had to take the defective toaster back to the store. The Returns desk was in the Entertainment department, surrounded by TVs and stereos. I stepped up to the counter and placed the offending appliance in front of the bored-looking clerk.

5. Referring to the initial mistake recorded on the board (step 3, above), ask the class to describe what will happen next. Your students might suggest: *There's a cooking show on one of the televisions. The narrator sees it and says something under his breath about lovely plump (chicken) breasts or thighs, or maybe about nice brown skin; or maybe the show is about deep fat frying and he mutters something about fifteen pounds of ugly fat. The clerk becomes indignant, thinking he's talking about her...and the cascade failure is launched. Everything he says or does after this will only make things worse. With a bit of role play, the rest of the scene will write itself, one misunderstanding after another, until everyone in the store is staring at him and the mortified narrator has no choice but to grab the broken toaster and run out the door. You should practically be able to hear the creative juices flowing.*

6. Organize the class into groups of three or four. Working together, the members of each group are to role play and first-draft the rest of the piece. *Allow about twenty minutes.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the two lists from the blackboard (see Modeling and Guided Practice, steps 1 and 2) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.
2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one item from each list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the teacher (the brainstorming to come up with the initial mistake, the establishing first paragraph, the role playing and first-drafting) to arrive at a first-draft short story that demonstrates the technique of cascade failure. The student may select *one* of the same items used in class, but must choose something different from the other list to go with it. When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether the writing can be better worded for improved humorous effect.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of each story. *Allow no more than five to eight minutes for this, and two or three more for students to make revisions to their drafts incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.*
2. Dissolve the groups and either write or reveal on the board the following lists:

"What have you been up to lately?"	always truthful
"What do you think of my new (hat, dress, etc.)?"	always optimistic
"Do you have any plans for (tonight, the weekend, etc.)?"	always complaining
"Are you going to be using your (car, tools, etc.)today?"	always eager to please
"Do you like the gift I gave you?"	always exaggerates

Explain to the students that in many social situations, our responses to questions are dictated by polite convention, whether they're true or not. When someone opens a conversation with "How are you?" the expected answer is "Just fine, thanks." Unless you're close friends with the person asking (and often even when you are), he or she doesn't really want to know about your sinus congestion or the rash on your arm. However, when a stranger or casual acquaintance repeatedly deviates from the expected social response, there is the potential for humour.

EXEMPLAR

NOTE: Before reading aloud the next exemplar passage, "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones" by Stephen Leacock, you will need to explain some vocabulary to your class. Make sure

students understand the terms "curate" (a priest's assistant), "shake-down" (obsolete slang for a makeshift bed, but can also mean a thorough search), and "drawing room" (a room like a parlour or a den for entertaining guests).

1. Read the second exemplar passage, "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones".
2. Some things to point out to your class about "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones":
 - In this story, Leacock has identified a social situation in which people customarily lie and expect to be lied to, and has plunked into it a man who can only tell the truth. *Juxtaposition of opposites* is a mainstay of humour. Here, Leacock lets us follow the situation to its logical (and utterly absurd) conclusion.
 - Jones's ordeal would have ended immediately if only he had bent to social convention and fabricated another engagement, or if his host had just once ignored social convention and been truthful about wanting him to leave. But of course, that can't happen. We are creatures of habit, constantly ending up in traps of our own making. This is what Leacock is poking fun at here. It's a brilliant *satire*.
 - This story contains the potential to be a Shakespearean tragedy (*a hero with a tragic flaw whose poor choices bring about his ruination and ultimate demise*). What makes it humorous instead is the *reactions of the characters* involved – the smiling social demeanour followed by the private cursing and chagrin.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. Direct your students' attention back to the two lists on the board (Introduction, step 2). Point out that each of the questions on the left brings with it an expectation of a particular response. Go down the list and ask students to identify the expected response in each case.

Now have students look at the list of character traits on the right. Explain that each of these is the type of person who may not deliver the expected response, thus initiating a cascade failure similar to what happens in the exemplar story.

To illustrate, choose one of the questions on the left and one of the character traits on the right and work together with the students to imagine:

- a) the social situation in which the question might be asked;
- b) the person who might be asking it;
- c) the relationship between the asker and the responder; and
- d) the responder's unexpected answer.

For example: two co-workers, one male and one female, take the same bus to and from their office building. It's a Friday night and they're the only two people at the bus stop. Making conversation, he asks, "Do you have any plans for the weekend?" She, being eternally optimistic, replies, "I'd love to. What did you have in mind?"

2. Remind your students that brutal honesty is not an option here, and that each attempt by the hapless protagonist to extricate himself without hurting his co-worker's feelings should result in his being even more deeply mired in the situation. Following it to its logical (and absurd) conclusion, the bus ride (and story) should end with these two people talking about where to honeymoon.

Point out that students will be expected to follow the process just practiced (and develop the same sort of scene) as they work independently on the following assignment in class:

3. Each student is to select one item from each list on the board and first-draft a cascade failure story involving a minimum of twelve lines of dialogue (six per character). This story should include contrasting social and private reactions like the ones in the Leacock story, "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones" and should arrive at an absurd but logical conclusion.

Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting. If time permits, students should read over their work to fill in any missing words and see whether the piece can be made even more humorous by the inclusion of punning and word play.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their stories aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the piece. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes.*

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 3: Incongruous Juxtaposition (putting unrelated things side by side)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas" (Period 1)
and "Lord Oxhead's Secret" (Period 2)

Blackboard and chalk

A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)

An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. (*IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT*) Begin by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

WARNING: Online humour is addictive and insidious. It will draw you in, causing you to lose all track of time as you chuckle and chortle an entire afternoon away. All right, you've been warned. Have fun exploring the websites provided above. I certainly did.

2. Write or print the word "oxymoron" on the blackboard, and either provide an explanation or elicit one from the class. (*An oxymoron is a figure of speech in which words with contradictory meanings are yoked together for humorous effect.*) Ask your students to provide some examples and record them on the board as well. (Students might come up with *jumbo shrimp*, *pretty ugly*, and the like.)

Depending on your students' grade level, you might wish to point out that when a speaker is being ironic or sarcastic, an ordinary two word phrase such as *postal service* may become oxymoronic. (In such a case, the speaker is saying that *postal* means the opposite of *service*.)

Explain to the class that an oxymoron is one variety of a humour technique known as *incongruous juxtaposition*, and this is the technique that the students will be practicing during the next two days. In *incongruous juxtaposition*, two unrelated things are yoked together in a context that adds to or alters the meaning of one or both of them, thus giving rise to humour. For example: In the premier episode of the television show *Corner Gas*, new arrival Lacey is being welcomed to Dog River. A local resident points out that even though the town is small, it has a newspaper that provides a forum for people to express their opinions. Cut to a shot of a raw egg smashing against the newspaper office's front door. Clearly, the "forum" isn't found in the pages of the newspaper.

3. Before you read aloud the first exemplar piece, "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas" by Stephen Leacock, it would be a good idea to provide some context for your students. This story was written and published around the turn of the twentieth century, when things cost a small fraction of what we pay today. Thus, the total value of \$150 placed on the items on Hoodoo's wish list to Santa Claus would today be at least \$3000. Some vocabulary will need to be pretaught as well. Your students may not understand what *braces* are (here, they refer to suspenders to hold up one's trousers) or what *celluloid collars* are all about. (People used to protect their shirt collars with detachable plastic covers that could be wiped clean with a damp cloth. As a result, shirts didn't have to be washed as often.) You may also have to explain that when the narrator says he *boards* at the McFiggin's, that only means he rents a room there.

4. Read the piece aloud.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

5. Here are some things to point out to your students about "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas":

- By *contrasting* Hoodoo's expectations with what he actually receives for Christmas, Leacock is *setting up the context* for the incongruous juxtaposition in the narrator's description of the child's reactions to his various gifts. Hoodoo is disappointed and angry. However, the narrator attaches the opposite meaning to the child's facial expressions. His jaw drops...with delight. His face cracks up...with pleasure. He gives a dry sob...of satisfaction.

- After all the gifts are opened, the narrator continues to describe Hoodoo's activities as though the child had received items he really wanted. He plays with his toothbrush and his collars, and has "immense fun" playing with his pants. This is further incongruous juxtaposition.
- There is a sort of *foreshadowing* in the fact that Hoodoo gives his mother a seventy-five-cent "diamond brooch". Diamonds have never been that inexpensive – these are rhinestones. However, Hoodoo probably believed he was giving his mother diamonds, just as he believes before opening each of his gifts that there must be a toy inside; and just as the rhinestones will never transform into diamonds, Hoodoo is doomed to find something he didn't want, every single time.
- Notice that the price tags are left on the shoes (\$.95) and the pants (\$1.40). Ever practical, Hoodoo's parents want to be able to return the merchandise to the store if it turns out not to fit. They also don't believe in wasting paper, since they've written "from Santa Claus" directly onto the price tag. The narrator must already know how cheap these people are, since he wakes Hoodoo early on Christmas morning in anticipation of an "interesting" scene. (This is classic *schadenfreude* – deriving enjoyment from someone else's pain.)
- Again, notice how fine the line is between humour and pathos, as shown in this story.

MODELING

1. Write or reveal on the board the following list of situations:

- A first face-to-face with an online friend
- Being on a long-awaited holiday in an exotic foreign country
- Walking into your surprise birthday party
- Babysitting your boss's child

Point out to your class that in the exemplar story, there is a contrast between what is expected and what is delivered, setting up the contrast between what the main character is hoping to feel and what he is actually feeling. Each of the items in the above list has the potential to set up a similar pair of contrasts, which will form the basis for the incongruous juxtaposition in today's writing assignment.

For example: The person meeting his or her online friend will be *expecting* what was advertised -- a good-looking individual with an interesting background and many sterling qualities. He or she will be *hoping* to feel happy and comfortable spending time with this new friend.

2. In whole class, discuss with your students where and when this first meeting might be taking place. Select a setting and record it on the board, along with two or three descriptive details. Then ask the students to imagine all the ways this example situation could go wrong, *disappointing* the main character's expectations and causing him or her to feel the *opposite*

emotion to what was hoped for (such as *disgust* or *anger*). In whole class discussion, elicit some possibilities and record their details on the board as well, being sure to name the negative emotion that each possibility would inspire. Reduce the list to the three potentially most humorous choices.

Finally, discuss and decide with the class: Which would make for the most humorous scene as told by a narrator -- the character hiding his or her actual feelings (*She smiled at him with utter disgust.*), or the narrator purposely misinterpreting the character's demonstrated feelings (*He shuddered with joy.*) as is done in "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas"?

3. On a fresh panel of blackboard or on a blank transparency, supply the first sentence or two of a paragraph about the ill-fated first meeting. This opening should place the main character in the setting and establish both his/her expectations and his/her hoped-for emotion(s). For example:

Lucy gazed happily around the coffee shop as she waited for @PrinceCharming to arrive for their first face-to-face meeting. His online profile had been amazing; she'd spent the past two days imagining what their children might look like.

Point out that what you have just begun is what the students in groups of three are going to complete, using the material recorded on the board or screen (and adding to it if something occurs to them as they are working).

GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Organize the students into groups of three and instruct them to continue first-drafting the scene begun on the blackboard or screen. Each group's scene is to end with a sentence explaining what the main character is going to do differently next time a similar situation arises. (You may want to refer back to the concluding sentence of "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas" as an exemplar.) *Allow ten to twelve minutes for this step.* Each student should ensure that he or she has a personal copy of the group's work.

Circulate around the room meanwhile, providing assistance where necessary.

2. At the end of the allotted time, dissolve the groups and instruct students to pair up with someone from a different writing group. Partners are to take turns reading their completed scenes aloud to each other. The listening partner can offer constructive suggestions for making the scene more humorous. *Allow about ten minutes for sharing.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the list of situations from the blackboard or screen (see Modeling, step 1) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.

2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one of the situations from the list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the

teacher:

- establish the setting, the main character, and his/her expectations and hoped-for emotions;
- brainstorm and list all the things that can go wrong, disappointing the character's expectations and making him/her feel something quite different from the hoped-for emotion;
- reduce the list to the three strongest and most humorous possibilities;
- decide whether the main character will be concealing or showing his/her actual emotion;
- first-draft an opening that places the main character in the setting and reveals his/her expectations and the hoped-for emotion(s), followed by the rest of the scene;
- conclude with a sentence that describes what the character will be doing differently the next time he or she is in a similar situation.

The student may choose the situation that was written up in class, but must redraft it, making the other person the main character, with a different set of expectations and hoped-for emotions.

When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether individual sentences can be reframed to include punning or other word play for increased humorous effect.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of each scene. *Allow no more than five to seven minutes for this, and about three more for students to make revisions to their drafts incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.*

2. Dissolve the groups and either write or reveal the following lists on the board or overhead screen:

Character is saying:

"I'm so happy for you."

"I will love you forever."

"I trust you."

"You won't regret your decision."

"I hope grandmother gets well soon."

Character is thinking:

This should have happened to me instead.

...or until your money is all spent.

...about as far as I can throw you.

...until it's too late to change your mind.

I wish the old girl would pop off already.

Explain to the class that when there is a contrast between a character's spoken words and what the character is actually thinking, this produces another form of incongruous juxtaposition. The character's every action acquires a double meaning and the entire situation becomes humorous. An excellent example of this technique is found in the story, "Lord Oxhead's Secret" by Stephen

Leacock.

EXEMPLAR

NOTE: Before reading aloud the next exemplar story, you should probably give your students an introductory lesson on heraldry. For example, on a coat of arms, "rampant" means an animal is rearing up on its left hind leg with the other three legs raised. "Dexter" and "sinister" mean right and left, respectively, from the onlooker's point of view. And "a field of gules" is heraldic-speak for a red-striped background. Everything else on the Oxhead family coat of arms is nonsense, including the motto, which is lifted from a beginner's Latin textbook and means, "this one (masculine), this one (feminine), this one (neuter), of this one, of this one, of this one". Like the pseudo-genealogy that Lord Oxhead likes to spout, this escutcheon (or shield) is pure poppycock.

1. Read aloud the exemplar story, "Lord Oxhead's Secret: A Romance in One Chapter".
2. Some things to point out to your class about this story:
 - Yes, Leacock is making a joke about flatulence in the first paragraph.
 - Notice the *irony* of the story's subtitle. Since both Edwin and Gwendoline are gold-diggers, misrepresenting themselves in order to snare a wealthy spouse and each thinking the other is rolling in money, this tale is anything but a romance.
 - There are actually two sets of incongruous juxtapositions in this story, and they're connected by the contrast between the noble idealism of romance and the self-interest of reality. The first set is based on the discrepancies between the outwardly heroic deeds of Lord Oxhead's ancestors and the cowardly reason for each one. The second revolves around the discrepancy between the characters' expressed love for each other and the greed that actually motivates them. *Appearance versus reality* is the predominant theme in the story.
 - Just as the narrator of "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas" knew ahead of time what the child would find in his stocking and took delight in juxtaposing Hoodoo's hoped-for and actual emotions, the narrator of "Lord Oxhead's Secret" knows exactly what game Edwin and Gwendoline are playing but is *sharing a smile with the reader* by describing their words and actions as though he doesn't.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. Direct your students' attention back to the two lists on the board or screen (Introduction, step 2).
2. Point out that each of the quotations on the left should suggest at least three additional things that a character might say or do to give the outward appearance of confidence, love, sympathy, and so on; and the private thoughts on the right should suggest an incongruous word or action that can be juxtaposed to each of those noble speeches or deeds by a knowing narrator, revealing to the reader what the character's actual feelings or plans are. All of these will need to be

recorded by students as they prepare to work on their next humorous piece.

2. To illustrate, choose one line and work together with the students to decide on a setting and a context for the quotation on the left. For example, the first quotation might be spoken backstage at an awards ceremony, where the first runner-up is congratulating the winner. Record this information on a clean panel of blackboard or beneath the list on the transparency.

Now brainstorm with the students a list of things this first runner-up might say or do if s/he were feeling genuinely happy for the other person (such as bestow a kiss or a hug, smile at him or her, or say, "Enjoy this – you really worked hard for it."). Record this list on the board or transparency as well.

Finally, look at the character's actual thoughts while all the smiling and hugging are going on and select an incongruity to add to each item in the list above. For example, the hug might be intentionally too tight, so that the trophy clutched in the winner's hand presses painfully into his or her ribcage; or, the runner-up who says, "You really worked hard for this." could at the same time be imagining the winner seeking out and sucking up to each of the judges.

Point out that this is the process students will be expected to use as they work independently on the following assignment in class:

3. Each student is to select one line from the list on the board or screen (see Introduction, step 2) and first-draft a paragraph-long description of a scene told by a narrator in which the outward noble appearance and the private, ignoble thoughts of a main character are humorously contrasted using the technique of incongruous juxtaposition..

Depending on the ability levels in your class, you may want to provide a context for each line of the list before letting your students loose on this assignment. *Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting.* If time permits, students should read over their work to fill in any missing words and see whether any punning or word play can be included for greater humorous effect.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their scenes aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the piece. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes.*

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 4: Ductio Ad Absurdum (logically leading a situation to an absurd conclusion)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "The New Food" (Period 1)
and "Helping the Armenians" (Period 2)
Blackboard and chalk
A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)
An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. (*IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT*) Begin by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

WARNING: Online humour is addictive and insidious. It will draw you in, causing you to lose all track of time as you chuckle and chortle an entire afternoon away. All right, you've been warned. Have fun exploring the websites provided above. I certainly did.

2. Write or print the phrase "What if...?" on the blackboard, followed by the question, "What could go wrong?" Then tell the class about a student who spent the month before final exams condensing down the contents of his notes for a particular course. He wanted to be able to remember everything, so he synopsised a hundred pages of notes in a paragraph, then summarized the gist of the paragraph in a single sentence, then expressed the meaning of the sentence in a single word. That word was going to unlock the student's memory, giving him access to everything contained in his course notes. All the current brain research confirmed it. However, on the day of the exam he had a fit of nerves and forgot the word.

Explain that everything the student did was quite logical and should have worked. Unfortunately, we live in a universe governed by Murphy's Law: If anything can possibly go wrong, it will, regardless of logic. And therein lies a rich vein of material for humour.

3. Loosely translated, *ductio ad absurdum* is Latin for "leading to absurdity". As with the thwarted plan of the student described above, a chain of logic is followed, developing a situation that ought to work but doesn't. In this segment, students are going to practice two variations of the *ductio ad absurdum* technique. In the first variation, the focus is on the absurd mishap at the end of the chain, as shown in the exemplar story called "The New Food" by Stephen Leacock.

4. Read "The New Food" aloud to the class.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

5. Here are some things to point out to your students about "The New Food":

- This is a *humorous science fantasy* story. The three genres are not mutually exclusive. Science fantasy is simply fantasy that comes with a pseudo-scientific explanation. And humour can infuse any kind of writing, be it fiction or nonfiction.
- The *structure* of this piece is important. It begins with a paragraph touting the benefits of Professor Plumb's invention, goes on to warn that there will almost certainly be "drawbacks", then finally tells the story of the baby who ate thirteen Christmas dinners.
- What makes this story humorous is the baby's reaction at the end. It's *unexpected* and incongruous, given the child's horrific fate, to find a satisfied smile on his lips. And yet, this is what babies do – they stuff things in their mouths – making this at the same time a *familiar* situation viewed through a humorist's funhouse mirror lens.

MODELING

1. Write or reveal on the board the following list:

What if there were...

...a device that could translate the thoughts of a family pet into spoken words?

...an artificial intelligence app for anything containing a computer chip?

...a personal low-gravity field generator that could be clipped onto an individual's belt?

Point out to your class that in the exemplar story, there are benefits and useful applications for the "new food"; however, putting it on a table in front of a baby is just asking for trouble. Each of the items in the above list also has benefits and useful applications...and invites disaster in certain situations. In today's writing exercise, you will be selecting an item from the list on the board, imagining the most absurd possible accident that could happen involving that invention, and describing it in a humorous first-draft story.

2. In whole class, pick one of the listed inventions and discuss with your students some of the logical benefits it brings. Record these on the board. Then ask the class, "Assuming that this item is being used as intended and nobody has sabotaged it or altered it in order to cause damage, what could possibly go wrong?" Record the details of your students' answers on the board as well, being sure to include information about the setting in which each mishap occurs.

Finally, discuss and decide with the class: Which would make for the most humorous scene as told by a narrator who is in on the joke and sharing a smile with the reader? For example: The family dog equipped with a translation device might blab embarrassing personal details about his or her owner in front of the boss at the company picnic.

3. On a fresh panel of blackboard or on a blank transparency, supply the first sentence or two of a paragraph about the benefits of the invention and the hopes and expectations of the company that developed it. For example:

Thanks to the work being done at PetSpeak Laboratories, we'll never again have to guess at what our family pet is trying to tell us. A simple chip implanted in Fido's brain, linked to a vocalizer on his collar, will transform his thoughts into spoken words.

Point out that what you have just begun is what the students in groups of three are going to complete, using the material recorded on the board or screen (and adding to it if something occurs to them as they are working).

GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Organize the students into groups of three and instruct them to continue first-drafting the story begun on the blackboard or screen. (You may want to refer them back to the structure of "The New Food" – Introduction, step 5.) *Allow ten to twelve minutes for this step.* Each student should ensure that he or she has a personal copy of the group's work.

Circulate around the room meanwhile, providing assistance where necessary.

2. At the end of the allotted time, dissolve the groups and instruct students to pair up with someone from a different writing group. Partners are to take turns reading their completed stories aloud to each other. The listening partner can offer constructive suggestions for making the disaster more absurd and therefore more humorous. *Allow about ten minutes for sharing.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the list of inventions from the blackboard or screen (see Modeling, step 1) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.

2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one of the inventions from the list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the teacher:

- brainstorm and record a list of logical benefits of using the invention;
- brainstorm and list all the things that can possibly go wrong (assuming there has been no sabotage or malicious tampering with the device), being sure to include setting details for each incident;
- select from this list the most absurdly humorous possibility;
- structure the story in three parts – list of benefits, warning of potential for disaster, story about the disaster;
- first-draft the entire piece.

The student may choose the invention that was written up in class, but must redraft it to focus on a different possible mishap.

When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether individual sentences can be turned into puns or people's reactions can be made more incongruous for improved humorous effect.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of each story. *Allow no more than five to seven minutes for this, and about three more for students to make revisions to their drafts incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.*

2. Dissolve the groups. In whole class, tell the students about a feature that would regularly appear in Mad Magazine, giving instructions to the reader for converting tools or objects into different ones. The problem is that once you've turned your file into a screwdriver, you're short one file and must modify a third item from your toolkit in order to replace it, and then a fourth

item to replace the altered third item, and so on, until the chain comes full circle with the modification of your screwdriver to replace a previously changed tool. This exercise in absurdity illustrates the second variation of *ductio ad absurdum* that the students are going to be practicing today, focusing on the chain that either ends where it began or falls humorously apart, as happens in the exemplar story, "Helping the Armenians" by Stephen Leacock.

EXEMPLAR

NOTE: Before reading aloud the next exemplar story, you should probably pre-teach three terms that would be meaningless to students in the twenty-first century. In this story, a "general public subscription" refers to a town-wide fundraising drive, a "curate" is an assistant to a parish priest, and a "magic lantern" is an early version of a slide projector.

1. Read the second exemplar story, "Helping the Armenians".
2. Some things to point out to your class about this story:
 - The title of this story is quite *ironical*, since it's the Armenians who are helping the church, rather than the other way around; and in so doing, they are making things worse for both the church and themselves, because the parish ends up owing them money it does not have and cannot pay. (You may want to remind your students of the saying, *The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*)
 - Notice the *lack of description* in this piece. The emphasis is thus kept on the entire chain, rather than letting the reader's attention focus too long on any one link.
 - Leacock waits to surprise the reader with the fact that all the people the church owes money to as a result of the parish's fundraising efforts are Armenian. The absurdity of the debt chain is humorous in its own right, but this little "kick" makes the piece even funnier.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. In whole class, write or reveal on the board or on an overhead transparency the following list of goals, each of which could trigger a *ductio ad absurdum*:

To find a doctor who will confirm a patient's self-diagnosis
To procure something through government channels
To correct a "computer error" on a credit card statement
To install a new piece of furniture in an already-full house

For each one, briefly discuss with your students the type of chain that might be involved (such as a chain of favours, a chain of furniture moves, a chain of documents to be provided, a chain of prescriptions to be filled, and so on) and the absurd situation at the end of it. Record all this information on the board.

2. Working independently, each student is to select one goal from the list above and first-draft a tale that illustrates the technique of *ductio ad absurdum*.

Depending on the ability levels in your class, you may also want to provide a context for each goal on the list before letting your students loose on this assignment. *Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting*. If time permits, students should read over their work to fill in any missing words and see whether any punning or word play can be included for greater humorous effect.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their stories aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the piece. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes*.

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 5: Wilful Misunderstanding (taking literally what is meant figuratively)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "How to Make a Million Dollars" (Period 1)
and "Reflections on Riding" (Period 2)

Blackboard and chalk

A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)

An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. (*IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT*) Begin by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

WARNING: Online humour is addictive and insidious. It will draw you in, causing you to lose all track of time as you chuckle and chortle an entire afternoon away. All right, you've been warned. Have fun exploring the websites provided above. I certainly did.

2. Explain to your students that a mainstay of humour is misunderstanding, in particular the taking literally of something meant figuratively, or the turning of something literal into a figure of speech. Discuss with the class the humorous things that could happen if you were to:

- snap at a stressed-out server to "Bring me a piece of cherry pie, and step on it!";
- decide to show an obnoxious blind date that you really are his or her "baby"; or
- complain in the presence of a literal-minded person about not having been high in days.

This technique of wilful misunderstanding is displayed to hilarious effect in the exemplar story titled "How to Make a Million Dollars" by Stephen Leacock.

3. Read "How to Make a Million Dollars" aloud to the class. If time is short, read only these two sections: paragraphs 5 to 7, and paragraph 16 to the end of the piece.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

4. Here are some things to point out to your students about "How to Make a Million Dollars":

- The narrator of this piece is a newspaperman who is purposely "playing dumb" for the sake of humour. He pretends not to understand that the bit about wheat rising and four cents being made has to do with the stock market, and appears to take quite literally the comments about "phoning New York" and about taking [money] out of widows and orphans by grinding them under his heel.
- The narrator has no respect for millionaires. He delights in pointing out their laziness, greed, and ignorance. He ironically claims that these qualities are the keys to financial success and should be emulated by young men who are just starting to work and would like to stop. Notice the verbal irony here: "stop" could mean *get rich and retire*, but actually means *get themselves fired*. So, yes, if you want to lose your job, just copy the behaviour of a self-important, self-indulgent millionaire.
- It's not only the millionaires' lifestyle getting skewered here – Leacock is also poking fun at the "working stiff" who envies the outward benefits of wealth without understanding how (or even *that*) it was earned. The narrator takes this attitude to an absurd extreme, making himself a target for the thoughtful reader's laughter.

MODELING

1. Write or reveal on the board the following list:

How to be a superhero(ine) or supervillain(ess)
How to win an election (or run for office)
How to get an A in [*insert name of course*]

How to make people think you're a [*genius, nerd, tough guy, ancient god, etc.*]
How to acquire [*a sports trophy of some kind -- Olympic medal, Superbowl ring, etc.*]
How to become a celebrity

Point out to your class that in the exemplar story, the narrator is talking directly to the reader, a wannabe, providing tested "tips for success" that are based on *wilful misunderstanding of partial information* or on *taking literally a figure of speech* related to high finance. In today's writing exercise, you are going to select an item from the list on the board and first-draft a "how-to" piece addressed to a wannabe reader that illustrates the use of both of these humour techniques.

2. In whole class, pick one of the listed items and discuss with your students some of the trappings associated with success in this area and some of the work involved in achieving it. Record these on the board or on an overhead transparency, making note as well of any specialized vocabulary that could be misinterpreted or taken literally for humorous effect. For example: in an election year, politicians rely heavily on polls (poles? *Poles?*). Ask your students to imagine the possibilities for humour of each of these.

Then brainstorm with the class (and record on the board or transparency) a list of things that a narrator might overhear and wilfully misunderstand. For example: a newscaster might talk about an incumbent losing his seat if he doesn't move higher up in the polls, leading the narrator to conclude that running for office can be a real pain in the (*ahem!*), or that the penalties for failure in politics can be extremely painful. Or a candidate might be described as "throwing his or her hat into the ring", causing the narrator to speculate as to what sort of hat and what sort of ring these might be.

Finally, discuss and decide with the class: Which two or three of the recorded examples written up on the board would make for the most humorous piece as delivered by a narrator who is in fact poking fun not only at politicians trying to get (re)elected, but also at the ignorance of many voters regarding the election process?

3. On a fresh panel of blackboard or on a blank transparency, supply the first sentence or two of an introductory paragraph about the narrator's (tongue-in-cheek) admiration for those who seek public office. (You may want to reread the opening paragraph of the exemplar piece, "How to Make a Million Dollars" aloud to your students at this point.) For example:

I have always wanted to be elected to something. To that end, I have carefully studied our local political scene.

Point out that what you have just begun is what the students in groups of three are going to complete, using the material recorded on the board or screen (and adding to it if something occurs to them as they are working).

GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Organize the students into groups of three and instruct them to continue first-drafting the piece begun on the blackboard or screen. *Allow twelve to fifteen minutes for this step.* Each

student should ensure that he or she has a personal copy of the group's work.

Circulate around the room meanwhile, providing assistance where necessary.

2. At the end of the allotted time, dissolve the groups and instruct students to pair up with someone from a different writing group. Partners are to take turns reading their completed pieces aloud to each other. The listening partner can offer constructive suggestions for extending the misunderstanding, making it more absurd and therefore more humorous. *Allow about ten minutes for sharing.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the list of "how-to" topics from the blackboard or screen (see Modeling, step 1) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.

2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one of the items from the list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the teacher:

- brainstorm and list some of the trappings associated with success and some of the work involved in achieving it;
- make note of any specialized vocabulary that could be misinterpreted or taken literally for humorous effect;
- brainstorm and list things that a narrator might overhear and wilfully misunderstand, and select from this list the two or three most absurdly humorous possibilities; and finally,
- first-draft the piece, beginning with a paragraph expressing admiration for the "role model" you will be skewering.

The student may choose the "how-to" that was written up in class, but must redraft it to focus on a different type of achievement (such as a different type or level of government, a different sport, and so on).

When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether individual sentences can be reframed to include punning or word play, or whether the misunderstanding can be made more absurd in order to amplify the humorous effect of the piece.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of each story. *Allow no more than five to seven minutes for this, and about three more for students to*

make revisions to their drafts, incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.

2. Dissolve the groups. In whole class, remind the students about a category of riddles that begin "Why is a [object A] like a [object B]?" Elicit some examples from individual students, then point out that the most effective riddles use word play and punning to create similarities between two quite disparate objects. For example: How is a bell like a banana? (*They both have appeal – that is, the bell has a peal and the banana has a peel.*)

3. Tell the students that a narrator who compares two dissimilar things as though actually believing that they are similar or equal is demonstrating a variation of the humorous technique of *wilful misunderstanding*. This is what the students are going to be practicing today, and what is shown in the opening paragraphs of the exemplar piece, "Reflections on Riding" by Stephen Leacock.

EXEMPLAR

1. Read aloud the first five paragraphs of the exemplar piece, "Reflections on Riding".

2. Some things to point out to your class about this excerpt:

- There are actually ways to compare a horse to a bicycle, but that's not the direction the narrator of this piece chooses to take. Inspired by the incongruous wording of the debate society's resolution, in which a bicycle is referred to as an animal, he turns the comparison around and discusses the horse as though it were a machine. He does it deadpan, as though both he and the reader honestly believe there is a rational basis for this analysis. And therein lies the humour of this excerpt.
- Not only is the narrator describing the horse as though it were a machine, he is reviewing its performance as though a horse were a type of bicycle: how well it coasts, how the "pedals" (i.e., the stirrups) compare, and how the lack of handlebars is compensated for on the "1910 model" by the "strings" (i.e., the reins) on either side of the head.
- Leacock is showing us the humorist's knee-jerk response to an absurdity in his environment. His imagination latches onto incongruities and grows entire scenarios out of them, as he's done here.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. In whole class, write or reveal on the board or on an overhead transparency the following list:

For emphasizing a point – hammer or pencil?
For trimming new growth – mower or scissors?
For conveying messages – small child or answering machine?
For cleaning a teen's bedroom – teenager or [robot, backhoe, etc.]

2. Working independently, each student is to select one item from the list above and first-draft a

piece that assesses the performance of one method as though it were the other, as demonstrated by the exemplar excerpt from "Reflections on Riding".

Depending on the ability levels in your class, you may want to discuss each pair of alternatives with your students -- to determine which would be the more effective choice and establish the sort of vocabulary one would use to describe its performance -- before letting them loose on this assignment. *Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting.* If time permits, students should read over their work to see whether any sentences can be reframed to include punning or word play, in order to enhance the humorous effect of the piece.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their completed pieces aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the work. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes.*

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 6: Parody (caricaturing other styles of writing)

YOU WILL NEED

Exemplar short pieces: "Society Chit-Chat" (Period 1)
and "A New Pathology" (Period 2)
Blackboard and chalk
A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)
An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. (*IF YOU ARE BEGINNING THE MODULE WITH THIS SKILL SEGMENT*) Begin by reviewing with your students the differences between humour and comedy, as explained under the heading WHAT IS HUMOUR? on page 4 of this module.

Then introduce examples to help students understand the nature of humour:

- Murphy's Law (*If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.*) has spawned an entire tribe of corollary rules that sum up the many and varied absurdities of life. We smile with recognition whenever we hear one. (We laugh out loud if it's cleverly phrased and contains a play on words as well.) Available in book form and online at <http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-laws.html>
- Humorists like Bill Engvall ("Here's your [*I'm stupid*] sign.") and Jeff Foxworthy ("...you may be a redneck.") end-punctuate their humorous observations on life with a personal catch phrase. Available on CD and posted and reposted online. Check out <http://www.city-data.com/forum/other-topics/750248-heres-your-sign-lol.html>
- The Darwin Awards are given posthumously to those who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it, generally in some spectacularly stupid fashion. (In this case, the smile is accompanied by a sad shake of the head.) Read a few of these items aloud to your class and they'll laugh themselves silly – mine always did -- because we all recognize, deep down, the limitless human capacity for doing incredibly dumb things. A complete listing of past awards (20 years' worth) is available online at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

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2. Write or print the words *parody* and *satire* on the blackboard, then explain to the class that although these two types of humour both use exaggeration to poke fun at something, they have different kinds of targets: a parody is a caricature of a *product*, while a satire is a caricature of the *process* or *industry* that created the product. For example, the Mel Brooks film *Spaceballs* is a parody of another movie, *Star Wars IV*. However, the movie *Get Shorty* has its own original plot and characters and takes potshots at the entire film industry, and it is thus a satire of moviemaking. The James Bond books by Ian Fleming were written during the cold war as a *satire* of espionage in general. In the films based on the books, the character of Bond himself *parodies* everyone's idea of a super-cool secret agent. More recently, authors have begun to *parody* classic works of fiction by adding zombies and vampires to their plots. (*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was among the first such titles to appear on the book store shelves.)

Ask your students to contribute other examples of parody and satire. Then explain that in this segment, students are going to practice writing both.

NOTE: Before reading the first exemplar piece, "Society Chit-Chat", it would be a good idea to give the students some background. When this material was written, it was a common practice to have a Society section in the newspapers in which the doings of the socially prominent were described in detail. In the large cities, it was considered quite a coup if your social event attracted the notice of a society reporter, or if a society columnist mentioned your name in print. Small town newspapers had a correspondingly smaller pool of socially prominent families, and very few of them would qualify as "rich and famous"; however, the reading public had an appetite for gossip and the paper strove to satisfy it with whatever was at hand.

3. Read "Society Chit-Chat" aloud to the class.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to rehearse the reading beforehand, to ensure that you're able to get through it without going speechless with laughter. Seriously, Leacock is that funny.

4. Here are some things to point out to your students about "Society Chit-Chat":

- It isn't necessary to understand French in order to appreciate the humour of this piece. Much of the "French vocabulary" is actually English, italicized and made to sound like French. The few words that aren't have been put into a context that makes it easy to guess at their meaning. In either case, the inclusion of French in a description of the morning-after breakfast at the De Smythes', or a rowdy dinner at the McFiggins' boarding house, or the screaming match and knock-down fight at the Robinsons' when Junior comes home drunk, serves to make each of them wickedly funny.
- As the narrator points out in the first paragraph, gossip for most of us isn't about what the mayor's wife served at a society tea -- it's about what goes on behind your next-door neighbours' closed doors. That's what this piece delivers, and also what makes it both a parody and a satire.
- Notice the words and set phrases that tend to be used in society page descriptions:

delightful, charming, the menu was *handsome*, the conversation was *sustained and lively*, *general expressions of good-feeling, pleasant*, and so on. It's precisely these set phrases that enable Leacock to create such biting irony. For example, Mrs. McFiggin's dining room is "prettily decorated with texts", which probably means there's graffiti scribbled on the walls.

MODELING

1. In whole class, brainstorm with your students (and record in a list on the board or on a transparency) a variety of ordinary, everyday events. For example: *a house league hockey game, a trip to the grocery store, a visit to the dog park*, and so on.

Point out that each of these can be humorously described using the language of the society page, and ask students to suggest appropriate words and phrases. Record students' responses in a second list beside the first one. (Depending on the grade and ability levels of your class, you may wish simply to reveal this list – taken from the exemplar piece – on the blackboard or on a transparency.)

Explain to your students that in today's writing exercise, you are going to select an activity from the list on the board, imagine something happening to disrupt the ordinariness of that activity, and write the entire thing up as a parody of a society columnist's description, complete with French or pseudo-French words to give the event an added air of classiness.

2. In whole class, pick one of the listed activities and discuss with your students some of the mishaps or interruptions that could occur. For example: a children's hockey game could be disrupted by a dispute between a parent and the ref; by a hard body check on the ice; by a player's urgent need for a washroom break during the game; or by the arrival of a second group who have booked the same ice time (*oops!*). You may want to list these on the board or transparency as well.

Finally, discuss and decide with the class: Which of these disruptions would make for the most humorous scene as described using the terms of a high society write-up? Highlight or underline the selected disruption.

3. On a fresh panel of blackboard or using a blank space on the transparency, supply a title and the first sentence or two of a paragraph introducing the event and the disruption. For example:

A CHARMING FACE-OFF AT TRIPLERINKS ARENA

The Smith Pharmacy Cyclones hosted a delightful little contest last Tuesday at TripleRinks Arena in honour of the visiting Hardware City Tigercats.

Point out that what you have just begun is what the students in groups of three are going to complete, using the material recorded on the board or screen (and adding to it if something occurs to them as they are working). As well, students are to attempt to include at least three French (or French-sounding) words in their description.

GUIDED PRACTICE

1. Organize the students into groups of three and instruct them to continue first-drafting the story begun on the blackboard or screen. *Allow ten to twelve minutes for this step. Let each group select its own disruption from the list if the members wish.* Each student should ensure that he or she has a personal copy of the group's work.

Circulate around the room meanwhile, providing assistance where necessary.

2. At the end of the allotted time, dissolve the groups and instruct students to pair up with someone from a different writing group. Partners are to take turns reading their completed stories aloud to each other. The listening partner can offer constructive suggestions for making the language even more pretentious and therefore more humorous. *Allow about ten minutes for sharing.*

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (for homework)

1. Students should be instructed to copy the list of activities and the list of words and phrases from the blackboard or screen (see Modeling, step 1) into their notebooks, in preparation for completing the homework assignment.

2. That evening for homework, each student is to select one of the activities from the first list and repeat the writing exercise that was practiced in class, following the process modeled by the teacher:

- brainstorm and list some of the mishaps or interruptions that could occur during the activity;
- choose the disruption that would make for the most humorous scene as described using the terms of a high society write-up;
- compose a title that could serve as the headline, ensuring that it contains one of the following words – *charming, pleasant, or delightful* ;
- first-draft the entire piece.

The student may choose the activity that was written up in class, but must redraft it to include a different disruption.

When done, the student should read over his or her work to see whether individual sentences can be reframed to include punning or word play, and whether the "high society language" can be made even more extreme for maximum humorous effect.

PERIOD TWO

SHARING AND INTRODUCTION

1. Immediately upon entering the classroom, students should be instructed to assemble in groups

of four and take turns reading their homework pieces aloud to their group mates. Listening group members can offer constructive suggestions for increasing the humorous impact of each story. *Allow no more than five to seven minutes for this, and about three more for students to make revisions to their drafts incorporating their group mates' suggested changes.*

2. Dissolve the groups. In whole class, explain to the students that just as some people sprinkle French words into their speech to make themselves sound higher-class than they are (think Miss Piggy, of Muppets fame), others use a lot of Latin words and phrases to sound more scholarly and knowledgeable. This is both satirized and parodied in the exemplar piece, "A New Pathology" by Stephen Leacock.

EXEMPLAR

1. Read aloud the exemplar piece, "A New Pathology".
2. Some things to point out to your class about this piece:
 - Leacock is describing the sorry state some people permit their clothing to fall into (or in some cases, that the clothing manages to achieve all by itself) as though the clothing were diseased. (Pathology is the study of diseases.) While it's tempting to believe that this is his humorous way of saying that he's surrounded by people who don't care about their appearance, it's much more likely that he was poking fun at the dry and weighty tomes he had to read while studying at university.
 - The Latin words he uses are for the most part real. In Leacock's day, ancient Greek and Latin were compulsory subjects at school; however, a modern reader doesn't need to understand Latin in order to appreciate the humour of this satirical piece of writing.
 - Any English word can be made to sound Latin by adding a Latinate suffix: *us, i, is, a, ae, um, ensus, osus, alis, alum, oria, orium*, and so on.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

1. In whole class, write or reveal on the board or on an overhead transparency the following:

A New Oceanology (classifying things found on the beach)
A New Dermatology (classifying body art, piercings, etc.)
A New Zoology (classifying visitors to the zoo)

Ask students to suggest additional new "ologies" for the list and record them on the board or transparency as well. Briefly discuss with the class the kinds of things that might be classified in each case, and as what. For example, things found on the beach could be classified as newly-discovered life forms, and tattoos and piercings could be classified as hitherto unknown skin conditions. Depending on the grade and ability levels of the students, you may want to record all this information on the board for their reference.

2. Working independently, each student is to select one new "ology" from the list above and first-draft a piece that parodies a scholarly article about it, giving a Latin-sounding name to each item being classified and describing it in painfully elevated language. *Allow about twenty-five minutes for planning and first-drafting.* If time permits, students should read over their work to see whether any sentences can be reframed to include punning, word play, or even more scholarly-sounding language for maximum humorous effect.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Instruct your students to pair up and take turns reading their completed work aloud to each other. The listening partner can suggest ways to heighten the humorous impact of the piece. *This should take about ten or fifteen minutes.*

NOTE: If you should decide to extend your students' practice with this humour technique beyond the two periods described above, you may wish to use a different student author's writing (with his or her permission, of course) as the exemplar on each of the third and fourth days.

SKILL SEGMENT 7: Completion (preparing the final draft)

YOU WILL NEED

All independently written pieces by individual students (Period 1)
Selection criteria on the board (Period 1)
Peer-assisted editing checklist -- class set (Period 2)
Dictionaries and thesauri – for peer-assisted editing (Period 2)
Teacher assessment criteria handout – class set (Period 3)
Blackboard and chalk
A blank overhead transparency and markers (optional)
An overhead projector and screen (optional)

PERIOD ONE

SELECTION

1. Each student should have brought to class all of his or her first drafts previously written during the module (there should be at least eight completed pieces in total). Write or reveal on the board the first selection criterion:

Which of these drafts are the most humorously written?

Explain to the class that they will be doing their preliminary selection in groups of three, and that their assignment is to help one another to *identify the three most humorous pieces* written by each group member. Within each group, students may opt to read their own or a group mate's work aloud to the other two members, to pass work around the group for silent reading by the other two members, or a combination of these methods. It should become obvious to each student author as the reading proceeds which of his or her pieces are most effective at making people smile. *Allow thirty minutes for this step.*

2. Dissolve the groups and instruct students to pair up with a partner who wasn't in their group in the previous step. Then add or reveal the following selection criterion below the one already on the board:

Which of the top three drafts best illustrates a particular humour writing technique?

Below this criterion, write or reveal a list of the techniques that students have practiced during the module: *incongruous comparison, cascade failure, incongruous juxtaposition, ductio ad absurdum, wilful misunderstanding, parody/satire.*

Instruct the students that their task will be to look critically at each of the selections made in the previous step, both their own and their partner's pieces, and determine which does the best job of

employing its particular writing technique. Again, students can read their or their partner's work aloud or simply exchange and read it silently. At the end of the allotted time, each student should be able to identify his or her best first-draft piece of humorous writing, to be revised, edited, proofread, and finally handed in for teacher assessment. *Allow up to fifteen minutes for this step.*

ENHANCEMENT

1. Remind your students that each of the exemplar stories by Stephen Leacock made use of more than one writing technique, and suggest that each student's selected piece might have room in it for more than one of the practiced techniques as well.
2. Explain that the rest of this period (and possibly this evening for homework) is to be spent by student authors in going over their drafts to see whether the humorous effect can be enhanced by revising the piece to include an additional humour technique, as well as some punning, *double entendre* or other word play to "kick it up a notch".
3. Revised drafts should then be recopied onto one or more fresh sheets of paper, written or printed out on every other line to permit editorial changes. This second draft is to be brought to class for the next phase of the writing process.

PERIOD TWO

PEER-ASSISTED AND UNASSISTED EDITING

1. Instruct students to pair up (with a different partner than in the previous period), designate themselves as Author A and Author B, and equip themselves with pencils and erasers for the peer-assisted editing step of the writing process. Hand out a copy of the editing checklist to each student and briefly discuss with the class each of the criteria on it and how the checklist is to be used:
 - Each pair of students is to work together, first on Author A's piece and then on Author B's. *This is a cooperative activity, so students are NOT to simply exchange papers and mark them up.*
 - Author A's piece is read aloud as both partners discuss and compare it to the criteria on the checklist. Meanwhile, Author A uses a pencil to make initial changes and improvements to his or her own work based on the discussion. *Peer-editing partners can make suggestions or offer ideas, but only the author (as owner) of a piece should make actual revisions to the text.*
 - As each item on the checklist is addressed, Author B checks it off in the left-hand column of Author A's sheet.
 - This entire process is then repeated for Author B's work, with Author A making suggestions and checking off the criteria on Author B's sheet.

If done thoroughly, this should take about *twenty to thirty minutes per author*. Dictionaries and thesauri should be readily available, to permit students to check spellings and improve word choices.

2. If class time permits, student authors can spend the rest of the period working independently to review their edited drafts and make final changes and improvements, checking off items on the editing checklist as they are addressed. If time is short, this activity can be begun in class and/or completed for homework.

PERIOD THREE

FINAL DRAFT PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

1. Hand out a copy of the assessment checklist to each student and go over each of the criteria to ensure that everyone in the class understands how his or her submission will be evaluated.

2. Explain to the students that they are in the final stage of the writing process. They are to spend their time in class today making a final editing and proofreading pass of their written work, comparing it with the criteria on the teacher's assessment sheet and making whatever changes are necessary in order to ensure that you will find what you're looking for when you evaluate their writing. *Students should be instructed not to perform a self-evaluation using this handout – it is to be left blank and included in the submission package.*

3. Allow students as much time as they require this period for final draft preparation. On the completion of his or her final pass, each student should be instructed to make a clean final draft copy of the work to be assessed. Final draft product should be neatly written out or printed out on one side only per sheet of letter-sized paper. The title should appear centred at the top of the first page. If written out, the text should be double line-spaced. If printed out, it should be in an easily legible font and may be single or 1.5 line-spaced. In either case, there should be at least 2.54 cm. of margin all the way around the page.

4. Finally, each student will need to create a submission package to your preferred specifications. For example:

*A cover page on top, indicating the assignment title, student author's name,
course code and submission date; THEN*

The final draft product; THEN

The teacher's (blank) assessment checklist; THEN

The edited second draft of the piece; THEN

The (completed) peer-assisted editing checklist.

The submission package should then be stapled together and handed in for teacher assessment.

**EDIT AND PROOFREAD WITH A PARTNER
HUMOUR WRITING CHECKLIST**

AUTHOR'S NAME: _____

EDITING PARTNER'S NAME: _____

Checked by Partner	EDITING AND PROOFREADING CRITERIA	Improved by Author
	The piece has an interesting, appropriate title.	
	The piece begins with an introductory paragraph that sets up the situation or main idea for the reader.	
	The piece ends with a logical and satisfying concluding paragraph.	
	There is coherence to the writing: the author has skilfully linked each paragraph to the one before it and the one following it in order to create a flow of words and ideas.	
	The sentences in each paragraph are in the most logical and effective order.	
	There is unity to the writing: the author has remained on topic throughout the piece. A single main idea and a single dominant humour writing technique tie everything together.	
	There are no misspelled words in this piece, unless purposely done for humorous effect. Capital letters have been correctly used.	
	There are no punctuation errors in this piece, unless purposely included for humorous effect. Commas, semi-colons, apostrophes and dashes have all been correctly used.	
	The level of language used in this piece is appropriate to the topic and the author's purpose. Words have been carefully and correctly chosen and placed in the most effective order.	
	The author has shown respect for the reader by making the piece easy to read and understand. There are no missing words, long and confusing sentences, or unclear pronoun references, unless purposely included for humorous effect.	

Remember to attach this checklist (filled out) to the back of your edited draft when assembling your package for submission.

WRITING HUMOUR EVALUATION SHEET

AUTHOR'S NAME: _____

TITLE OF PIECE: _____

HAS THIS AUTHOR:

1) opened the story or essay with a paragraph that effectively introduces and establishes the main idea and/or situation?	5	4	3	2	1
2) skilfully employed a principal humour writing technique that runs through the piece?	10	8	6	4	2
3) enhanced the piece by including additional humour devices that strengthen its impact on the reader?	5	4	3	2	1
4) ensured that all words, sentences and paragraphs are well-organized and in the most effective order?	5	4	3	2	1
5) written a piece that flows from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph?	5	4	3	2	1
6) thoroughly edited and proofread the piece to identify and correct any unintentional spelling, grammar or punctuation errors?	5	4	3	2	1
7) brought the piece to a logical and satisfying conclusion?	5	4	3	2	1
8) given the piece an apt and clever title?	5	4	3	2	1
9) created an interesting and humorous story or essay for the reader to enjoy?	5	4	3	2	1

TOTAL = /50

COMMENTS:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARLENE F. MARKS

Arlene F. Marks has been writing and teaching since the age of 6, if we count playing school on the back porch with the neighbourhood children. In 1970 she made it official, earning her B.Ed. from what was then called the Ontario College of Education and getting herself hired by what was then called the Scarborough Board of Education. Since then, she has divided her time between full time teaching and full time writing, acquiring about twenty years of experience in the high school English classroom along with a raft of published writing credits in a variety of lengths and genres.

After formally retiring from the classroom in 2012, Arlene chained herself to her keyboard and began turning out fiction and educational materials. She is the author of a groundbreaking series of classroom-ready manuals for high school English teachers, titled *Literacy: Made for All* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). She is also co-author with Bette J. Walker of the *Let Them Write/Let Them Read* series for grades 4 through 8 (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). Arlene's second published novel, a science fantasy titled *The Accidental God* (Sun Dragon Press, 2014), was nominated for the 2015 Leacock Medal for Humour. She is currently hard at work on two speculative fiction series, one for adults and one for young adults.

Arlene F. Marks lives with her husband on the shore of Nottawasaga Bay, where she often slips her shackles to read, crochet, work logic puzzles, and visit with friends and family. To find out more about Arlene and her writing, you are invited to explore her web site:

www.thewritersnest.ca/