UNIT 7
SERIOUSLY FUNNY

The BIG question
How does humour entertain and persuade within its historical, social and cultural context?

Key learning ideas
● Humorous texts come in many forms and have different purposes.
● Humour can entertain, influence and position an audience.
● Humour can reflect different times and contexts.

Knowledge, understanding and skills
Students will:
● understand how humour can entertain and persuade
● understand different types of humour such as puns, parody and satire
● learn to use devices and techniques that create humorous effects
● analyse and create a wide range of humorous texts.
‘Knock knock’.
‘Who’s there?’
‘Lettuce’.
‘Lettuce who?’
‘Lettuce in, it’s cold outside!’

A funny thing happened on the way to school . . .

The only pash-practice I’ve had so far is with Katie’s doll: the one that Dad calls Ms Vamp. It’s got large red lips, slightly open. I took Ms Vamp into the cellar where it was dark, cool and quiet. Maybe even a little . . . romantic. I was just puckering up and inching Ms Vamp closer to my mouth when a voice said, ‘What are you doing?’
— from First Kiss by Richard Yaxley

Did you hear the one about? . . .
The power of laughter

Everyone loves a laugh. As the well-known adage states, ‘laughter is the best medicine’. Today, sociologists and psychologists believe that laughter makes us happy. Laughing releases endorphins, which are special chemicals that ease pain, boost the immune system and hasten the healing process. Humour comes from many sources and we each have humour preferences: things that tickle our personal ‘funny bone’. But humour can have a purpose other than to entertain: it can be used to persuade through a variety of devices that make us think differently about something, such as an issue. The power of humour is well-recognised — not only can it bring people closer together, but it can also change people’s minds. You can’t get more powerful than that!

Tuning in

1 **Think and share:** What makes you laugh? Think of a line from a television show, movie, book or joke that has made you laugh. Share this with a partner. Do they agree that it is funny?

2 **Think and explain:** How does each of the images or text on the page opposite relate to humour?

3 **Discuss and perform:** Below are some examples of situations. In groups, discuss how a joke or other form of humour might be used to make the situation seem less troublesome. In your groups, select one example and perform a short roleplay or mime (1–2 minutes) for the class.
   - The sole of your shoe has started to come away at the toe just as you run on court for the final basketball game of the season.
   - You have just missed the school bus and it has started to rain.
   - You have been set grammar homework and accidentally take home another student’s notebook, and complete the activities before you realise it was not your book.
   - You are called onto stage during an assembly and trip up the stairs.
   - The girl/boy you have a crush on catches you staring at them during class.
   - Your mother is telling your new girlfriend or boyfriend about your acne problem.

3 **Think and discuss:** Are there some topics that shouldn’t be made fun of? With a partner, compile separate lists of your ‘no-go’ subjects. Compare your lists. Discuss the differences and similarities and try to account for these.

LITERACY link

**The context of humour**

Not only is humour personal (some of us like slapstick and some of us like ‘black’ humour), it also reflects the culture and time in which it exists. What we might find funny today may not have been funny last century and vice versa. For example, audiences roared with laughter at speeches in Shakespeare’s plays that poked fun at topical issues in Elizabethan England. Today we have no experience of those events and they leave us unmoved. Similarly, what we find funny in Australia may not be considered humorous in, for example, Italy, Norway or Iran. A ‘blonde’ joke, for example, may be laughed at in Australia (even though it is not ‘politically correct’) but be irrelevant in another culture. Humour depends on its context and our prior knowledge and experience within that context.

**Discuss with other members of your extended family, for example a grandparent, what they find funny. How different is it to what you find funny?**
How do humorous texts entertain?

We are exposed to humour every day: someone tells us a joke or funny anecdote; your friend mimes something funny about another friend’s annoying habits when she is not looking; we see and hear a stand-up comedian on a television show; our baby brother or sister says something cute; the cat falls asleep in a funny pose — the list goes on. Much of this humour is spoken or visual, often both. Humour can be kind or cruel; often it challenges and confronts us by tackling taboo subjects. However, in its simplest or purest form, its purpose may be just to amuse and entertain. Whatever its purpose, humour involves an interaction between the producer of the humour and the receiver of the humour. Through humorous devices, such as manipulating language, the reader or listener is positioned to accept the humour and laugh.

There are many conventions in humour. The convention of the comedy duo with a straight guy and a fall guy has been around for generations. The straight guy in a comedy duo feeds lines to the more clownish partner or the fall guy. This ‘fall guy’ is the gullible (easy to fool) victim, who is easy to take advantage of. Famous comedy duos from the past are Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello and The Two Ronnies. In contemporary comedy, the duo seems to have been overtaken in popularity by single stand-up comedians.

On the next page is the transcript of a routine or skit by a comedy duo, Leroy and Laura, who performed in the 1960s. In this routine, the meaning of the language is manipulated using wordplay and misunderstanding to create humour. When performed, the comedy worked on one level because of the sound of the words; however, the costuming, body language and voices of the duo would have added another level.

Before you read the extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.
Miss Ng can be heard as 'missing'. This sets up the comedy to follow because the other person misunderstands right away. (3)

Miss Tacon — a play on the word mistaken (9)

Sano Moore — another play on words (11)

Comedy is based on the many plays on words possible using the prefix mis (meaning 'not' or 'faulty') and the polite form of address for an unmarried woman Miss. (15)

The two characters are talking at cross-purposes and this adds to the humour of the situation.

Punch line — misappropriate means to wrongfully use someone else’s money, making her highly unsuitable to be an accountant. (27)
Activities ...

UNDERSTANDING and ANALYSING humorous texts

Getting started
1. What are the characters’ names?
2. List all the words in the script that begin with the prefix *mis*–. Using a dictionary, write their meanings and then use each in a sentence.
3. What was the name of the previous accountant? Explain why her name could be regarded as humorous?
4. Which character did you have most sympathy for in the skit? Can you explain why?

Working through
5. Was there a serious aspect to this skit or was it wholly comic? Explain your view with examples from the skit.
6. What does the audience need to know in order to appreciate the humour in this dialogue?
7. What actions might Leroy and Laura include with their dialogue to add to the humour?
8. How could visual humour be maximised in this performance? Consider costuming and body language, including gesture.
9. Who plays the straight guy and who plays the fall guy in this scene? Is it easy to tell which is which? Explain.
10. Are Leroy and Laura stereotypical characters? How do you know? If so, in what ways?
11. What elements of the skit contributed most to its humorous tone? Use examples from the skit to support your opinion.

Going further
12. To what extent does this skit rely on the manipulation of language? How successful would it be without the wordplay?

RESPONDING to humorous texts

Getting started
13. Look at the illustration of Leroy and Laura on page 197. Which of them looks the most humorous? Draw your own picture of Leroy and Laura as you imagine they should appear in the skit.

Working through
14. In pairs, perform this skit, making sure you use *pause, pitch, pace* and volume for effect. Use visual effects as well as body language elements to best comic advantage. See how often you can make your audience laugh.

Going further
15. In pairs, transform this skit into an anecdote from the first-person point of view, a) as told by Laura and b) as told by Leroy, to a friend after the interview. Try to inject as much humour as you can. Compare your anecdotes. How similar or different are they?
16. Think of some other words that begin with the prefix ‘mis’. Continue the dialogue between Leroy and Laura using these words to humorous effect.
Wordsmith ...

USING PUNS TO CREATE HUMOUR

‘Newsflash! Fifty chickens stolen from farm. Police suspect foul play.’

Why is this joke funny? It’s because the word foul sounds just like fowl. Foul play is a term used by police to suggest a crime has occurred; and in this case, the crime involved the theft of chickens, which are a type of fowl. That’s a lengthy explanation of a joke based on a pun, or play on words.

Puns often rely on the use of homophones to provide humour and work best when spoken. This is because homophones are words that sound the same when spoken but are spelled differently and have different meanings.

You can have a lot of fun creating puns by deliberately misspelling words for humorous effect. But first you need to know the correct spelling and meaning of the words before you can play with them. In the case of homophones, being able to distinguish the correct spelling for the meaning you want is crucial, or you may create a joke you did not intend!

1 Explain how and why the following joke works.

A bear walks into a juice bar and says, ‘I’ll have aaaaaa ... pineapple juice, please.’

‘Sure,’ says the man behind the counter, ‘but why the big pause?’

The bear replies, ‘These? Dunno, I guess I was born with them.’

2 Draw a rough sketch to illustrate this joke.

Puns can also include the use of figurative and literal meanings of words. For example:

‘I wondered why the football was getting bigger. Then it hit me.’

The joke is funny because the phrase ‘Then it hit me’ has two meanings. The literal meaning is that something has made contact with the speaker. The figurative meaning of the phrase is that something finally makes sense. So literally, the ball is coming closer to the speaker and makes contact. The figurative meaning is that the speaker realises the football is getting bigger because it is coming closer to him.

Puns can also rely on made-up words that sound like another word; for example, the movie Gnomeo and Juliet has made up the name Gnomeo as a play on the name Romeo and the word gnome.

Because they are so common, some people believe puns are the lowest form of wit. However, Shakespeare relied very heavily on puns to create humour in his plays and his works are considered to be literary masterpieces!
The quotation below is from Shakespeare’s play Richard III. Can you find the pun?
‘Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York.’
Here’s another pun based on part of this quotation.
A camping shop advertised a sale with this sign:
‘Now is the winter of our discount tents.’

CAMPING SUPPLIES

SALE

‘NOW IS THE WINTER OF OUR DISCOUNT TENTS’

For all your camping needs

OVER TO YOU...

1 See if you can complete these jokes that rely on puns using homophones.
   a What did the grape say when someone stepped on it?
      Nothing. It just gave a little ____________
   b Two peanuts were walking through a park late at night and one was ____________.

2 Below is a list of popular movie titles based on puns. Working with a partner, identify
   and then explain the pun in a table format like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie title</th>
<th>Explanation of wordplay used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty and the Geek</td>
<td>A play on the name of the classic fairytale, Beauty and the Beast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvin and the Chipmunks 2: the Squeakquel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maid in Manhattan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnomeo and Juliet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An American Tale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Santa Clause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Search for Santa Paws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Create your own visual pun — that is, an illustration that is a play on a certain
phrase. For example, a ‘grandfather clock’ might have an image of an old man with a
clock as a face or a ‘hot dog’ might be a dog lying in the sun.
Humorous media texts that entertain

The passage below was written by a young stand-up comedian called Melinda Buttle. This extract is from her blog and was also published in The Courier Mail in a column called My view. Before you read the extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

Ready to Read…

● From the picture, what impression do you form of the writer? Does she look funny, serious, cool? Explain.
● What is a blog? Where would you find a blog? Have you ever read or posted on a blog?
● Look at the heading. What does this title lead you to predict about what will follow?
● Read through once without referring to the annotations. Then read it a second time using the annotations to help you understand the text.

mel buttle

THE WORST THING I EVER DID
November 4, 2011 | Comments closed

This is a confession note of a terrible person. I, Mel Buttle did something very bad when I was sixteen, but first some context. The year was 1998, I had a crush on Jock Murray, I was sleeping through Religious Education classes and winning two for one Icy Poles at the Tuckshop most days. I’d written a parody song of Whitney Houston’s ‘Dance with Somebody’ to entice Jock Murray to come to the formal with me. I’d taken the chorus and instead of

Use the Mel Buttle weblink in your eBookPLUS to read her blog online.

An anecdote or recount told in first person
Follows narrative structure — orientation (2–3)
Common experiences from school days establish connection with reader (3–6)

In hindsight, writing him a parody song was a bad idea; an even worse idea was singing it at him, on the train. You win some you lose some, I lost some that day, and by some, I mean dignity. However, singing Whitney Houston on a train is not the worst thing I’ve ever done. I had opted out of maths for senior; the school broke their long held rule about all students taking at least one stream of maths to year twelve, just for me. I have always struggled with maths and maths’ ugly stepsister, science. My biology teacher described me as having ‘not a clue’. It felt like I was a bump to the head away from being allowed to play with worms in the school garden. However, tarnishing a school’s reputation for academic excellence is not the worst thing I’ve done.

Mrs Henry was my religious education teacher, RE was compulsory, but it wasn’t assessed. Thus, I used to spend RE sleeping, writing substandard parody songs about boys I liked, and asking Mrs Henry tough questions about dinosaurs and the Bible. Mrs Henry and I were not on good terms, she had written a comment on my report card about my lack of attention in class. What am I to do when there’s a bird outside with its head stuck in a sausage roll wrapper? Ignore it and keep on working?

One morning tea, I was trying to wow the cool girls with my impression of Georgie Parker, while simultaneously eating a banana, when all of a sudden Mrs Windle screeches, ‘second bell girls, off to class now!’ Second bell? Bum! I didn’t say this aloud, I wanted to get prefect, and I’m not an idiot. I was in a pickle, I had a banana peel, there were no bins, and my class was only a few doors down. I made a snap decision, which would break Ian Kiernan’s heart; I dropped the banana peel next to the port racks, and walked away like nothing had happened. The same way Chuck Norris walks away from explosions.

Oh no! I see Mrs Henry coming around the corner, chatting away to some students, probably talking about how many three legged puppies she’d saved from burning houses. I watched the following unravel in slow motion, Mrs Henry slipped on the banana peel, Mrs Henry went up in the air, and Mrs Henry fell to the ground breaking her wrist.

I’ve never told anyone that I was the dropper of the banana peel. Ever since I’ve had to live with my terrible secret, this may be my last column as I don’t know if they’ll give me a pencil in the detention room, where, after this is published I imagine I’ll be for the next twenty years.
Activities ... 

UNDERSTANDING humorous media texts

Getting started
1 Who is the narrator of the anecdote?
2 Where does the anecdote take place?
3 Why did the narrator throw the banana peel on the ground?

Working through
4 Sum up in one or two sentences ‘the worst thing’ the writer has ever done. Do you agree with her that she is a terrible person? Explain.
5 List all the names (proper nouns) used in the blog. After each, explain who they are. Put a star next to those who actually appear in the anecdote.
6 Find two humorous devices in this blog and explain why they are funny.
7 What references in this blog might someone from another culture find hard to understand? Why would this be so?

Going further
8 How does the writer position you to feel empathy with, or sympathy for, her?
9 What is the comic significance of slipping on a banana peel? Hint: It’s been a staple of physical comedy for generations.

ANALYSING and EVALUATING humorous media texts

Getting started
10 Which text do you find more humorous: the skit on page 197 or the blog on pages 201–2? Explain your preference.
11 Draw a story graph to show how the events unfolded leading up to the ‘banana peel’ incident.

Working through
12 Draw up a table with four columns, like the one below, either using a ruler in your notebook or in Word using the ‘Insert table’ function. Then compare the two texts under the headings shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous devices in skit</th>
<th>How they contribute to the comic effect</th>
<th>Humorous devices in blog</th>
<th>How they contribute to the comic effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going further
13 How does the structure of this anecdote lead the reader through the stages of a narrative? How does the structure differ from that of the skit by Leroy and Laura?
14 This blog was also published as a print newspaper column. How different might the respective audiences have been? Explain.

NEED TO KNOW

metaphor a figure of speech (or technique) whereby something is said to be another thing, not just like another thing
allusion a subtle reference to another text, designed to draw on the feeling or plot of that other work
personification a device used in writing by which objects are treated as if they have human qualities; for example, The sun smiled.
rhetorical question a question that is designed to make the listener think about an issue, but not necessarily answer the question
hyperbole (pronounced hi-per-buh-lee): deliberately exaggerating an idea for effect
CREATING and RESPONDING to humorous texts

Getting started
15 Readers of blogs often post comments on the blog site. Write the comment you would have made on this blog post when the comments function was active.
16 Perform this blog post as a spoken monologue. Think about body language, gesture, pace, pitch, pause and volume of your delivery to make it as humorous in tone as you can.

Working through
17 Choose a section of the anecdote and rewrite it to change the tone from humorous to serious. How difficult is it to do this?
18 Create a comic strip or storyboard of the ‘banana peel’ incident.

Going further
19 a Write the accident report that Mrs Henry would have filed after the incident, or
b Mrs Henry’s own blog post retelling the same incident in a serious tone. How different are these from the original? How did you achieve this difference?

My view …
Did you find the texts in this section entertaining or amusing? For you personally, what are the three most important ingredients of humour? Are you more likely to read a text if you think it will amuse you?
7.2 HUMOUR ENTERTAINS AND PERSUADINGES

How do humorous texts persuade as well as entertain?

Using humour in a text creates a tone — that is, a particular mood, emphasis or attitude. There are many devices that the creator of a text can use to create a humorous tone. When the text is designed to persuade as well as entertain, a writer has to use additional structural and language devices to create this dual purpose. One device at a writer’s disposal is parody, whereby the creator pokes fun at something by mimicking its style.

Parody with a primary purpose to entertain is common in multimodal texts, such as films and television shows. Spoof comedy films are popular with modern audiences. These films parody or ‘send up’ other, more serious film genres using ridiculous characters and events, and often mocking or ‘sending up’ memorable scenes. By watching a lot of films, audiences develop an instinctive sense of film language and conventions. Spoofs achieve their humour by highlighting these common elements within genres and deliberately mimicking or manipulating them for comedic impact. Like any parody, a spoof movie is most enjoyable when the viewer is familiar with the films and understands the intertextual references.

LITERATURE link

Innuendo

Although a parody is easily recognisable, the reader has to work and think a little more about texts containing subtler messages. One device an author can use to do this is innuendo — where something you say has a second suggested meaning, which is often mean or rude. The listener can interpret the message in a favourable or unfavourable way. An example might be:

She’s done as well as can be expected.

Here the meaning could be that:

(a) She performed well, she was expected to do well, and she was expected to do well because she is so smart.

Or

(b) She performed to a standard (perhaps a very low standard) that was in keeping with expectations, and nobody expected a higher standard because she is not very smart.

The movie posters on the next page demonstrate very effectively how parody is used to advertise the movies in such a way that audiences will know what type of movie they can expect to see. Of course, the posters, like all advertising, have a persuasive purpose as well: to persuade a filmgoer to see the movies!

Before you view the movie posters, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.
**READY TO READ …**

- Where might these posters be found?
- Why am I reading/viewing the movie posters below?
- What elements can I see? What gets my attention first?
- Is there text on this poster that I can’t see to read? Does it matter?
- Have I seen these movies?

The poster’s tagline or slogan is comical, giving the viewer a clue that the film is not serious.

The characters are meant to represent real people (e.g. Eminem).

The ‘3’ in the movie title links to the tagline’s ‘threes’.

The most important details of the text are easy to read — the date the movie opens and title. Other required text (credits etc.) is in much smaller type.

Although the character’s expression is serious, the actor, Rowan Atkinson, is a well-known comedy figure — this is a clue to the viewer that this film is a comedy or a spoof of more serious spy movies.

The focal point of the image is the main character around which the parody revolves — the viewer can expect a character-driven movie.

The character’s pose, expression and dress are perhaps the stereotypical image of a spy action movie. The viewer and prospective moviegoer understands the parody and the intertextual reference to James Bond and similarly ‘serious’ spy movies.

The background showing an explosion parodies the ‘death and destruction’ common to spy movies.

Text is minimal as this is a promotional poster designed to persuade through a constructed image rather than words.
**Activities ...**

**UNDERSTANDING parody**

**Getting started**

1. Which poster makes the bigger impression on you? Why?
2. Which movie would you be more likely to be persuaded to go to see? Why?

**Working through**

3. Once an audience can identify what is being parodied, the next step is to make them laugh at it. One easy way to make something funny is through exaggeration or hyperbole. What examples of hyperbole can you identify in the posters?
4. Movie posters contain *taglines* or *slogans* to grab the attention of the audience and persuade them to go to see the movie. In the case of spoof movies, the poster must make it clear to the audience that the film is a parody. In each of the two movie slogans, what hints are you given to indicate the original material is being parodied and the fact it is a parody and not a serious movie?

**Going further**

5. James Bond has become the *archetype* of heroic spies. Looking over the poster, discuss with a partner what other characters have become so famous that everybody knows what type of characteristics they embody.

**ANALYSING and EVALUATING parody**

**Getting started**

6. Parodies rely on the audience recognising the source material. A parody’s creator must therefore select images or themes from the source material that are instantly recognisable. What are the images or features in the posters that allowed you to identify the original films that they reference?

**Working through**

7. Sometimes creators use one obvious layer of humour to amuse an audience. However, they can often use another layer of humour to make a point and position a reader to feel or think a certain way. Although the aim of spoof films such as those on page 206 would be to amuse, what serious point do you think the posters may be making?

**Going further**

8. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using parody to make a serious point about something?

**CREATING and RESPONDING to parody**

**Getting started**

9. Imagine you are creating a spoof of one or more popular movies. Write a one-paragraph synopsis of your spoof. What movie is it based on? What will be exaggerated? How will the characters represent archetypes or stereotypes?

**Working through**

10. Design a movie poster to advertise your spoof. What elements will you use to ensure a viewer knows it will be a parody and will be persuaded to see it?
11. Characters in parodies are generally *caricatures* or stereotypes rather than fully developed characters. Choose one of the characters from your spoof and write an imaginary biography of their life.

**Going further**

12. Create a trailer for your spoof movie including voiceover, music, images or video and text.
**Wordsmith ...**

**CREATING SPOOFS WITH NAMES**

Parodies are not generally subtle in their approach and this makes them relatively easy to create. Here’s a guide to creating spoofs that target the names of popular singers and bands. A tribute band is any band that performs covers of their idols’ songs. They often choose names that are easily recognised as being based on that of their idols.

Here are some techniques for creating a name for a tribute band or performer.

- Use a *spoonerism*; for example, Paty Kerry instead of Katy Perry.
- Add something to the name of the band and/or play on another word; for example, Abbalanche instead of Abba.
- Use a song the band made famous; for example, Smells Like Teen Spirit instead of Nirvana.
- Use a play on words of the performer’s name; for example, Olivia Neutron-Bomb instead of Olivia Newton-John.
- Use a nickname associated with the band; for example, Fab Four instead of The Beatles.

1. Match the tribute band name below in column 1 with the original name in column 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Rolling Clones</td>
<td>The Beatles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Maiden</td>
<td>Nirvana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bjorn Again</td>
<td>The Rolling Stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forever Fab</td>
<td>Black Sabbath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slack Babbath</td>
<td>U2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Spirit</td>
<td>Foo Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me As Well</td>
<td>Iron Maiden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woo Warriors</td>
<td>Abba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Decide which of the listed techniques was used for each of the names above.

**OVER TO YOU ...**


2. Choose your two favourite bands and use each of the listed techniques above to create humorous spoof names for them. Swap your list with a partner and see if you can guess each other’s favourite bands.

*Abba tribute band Bjorn Again*
Satire persuades
Apart from using humour to persuade in advertising, humour can be used to persuade an audience of a particular point of view. Some celebrities or retired sports stars make a lot of money on the ‘speaker circuit’, giving motivational speeches to young hopefuls and corporate groups, or at charity or fundraising events. Often they are paid large sums of money for these speeches and may use them to promote their own products. A writer who disapproves might ‘send-up’ or satirise this practice.

The speech below does just this, as writer Melanie Kirkwood takes on the persona of Barney Spritzenburger delivering a speech to the Annual Convention of Young Bodybuilders. The writer points out the speaker’s lack of modesty and humility, thereby lampooning the practice of sports stars using their fame as a springboard for further fame and fortune. The listener is positioned to laugh and agree.

Before you read the speech, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

**READY TO READ …**

- Look at the title. What do you think it means?
- Does the name Barney Spritzenburger sound like the name of someone famous? Who? What do you know about this famous person?
- The text is divided into paragraphs. How is the start of a new paragraph shown in the text?
- Look at the illustration and think about what you see there.

**Eat your greens . . .**

1. Good evening, it’s a great pleasure to be here at this convention in the Creatine Ballroom talking to you all. I hope listening to me will make a difference to each and every one of you in your quest to be bigger and better bodybuilders.
2. Many people ask me for advice these days — how to have a super body, how to be multi-talented, how to get into movies or politics, how to charge large sums of money for guest-speaking appearances . . .
But today, as I look out at your eager young faces, still wet with the sheen of perspiration from your workout sessions, I am feeling very humble. What I see in your faces takes me back to when I was just starting out in the sport of bodybuilding. I was a 60-kilogram weakling back then, who struggled to lift a bottle of vitamins. My biceps were bitsy, my deltoids were dinky, my pecs were puny and my six-pack was only a two-pack. I wasn’t training at all — the only thing that was running was my nose … from all the colds I used to get. When I went to the beach, I would kick sand in my own face. I looked in the mirror one day and said, ‘Barney, you are a 60-kilogram weakling. What you gonna do about it?’

It all has to start somewhere. And for me it started that day, looking in the mirror of my powder compact. I made a vow that within a year I would transform myself into a contender for the Mr Pluto contest. From there, Mr Universe would be only a light year away.

My diet began to change along with my workout program. Those sissy salads became a thing of the past; triple-strength protein shakes and a side of beef at a sitting became the order of the day. I think I can modestly say that the success of the beef industry in this country has more than a little to do with me. Indeed, when I was awarded Mr Beefcake 1997, it was sponsored by the Beef and Livestock Board. My poster ‘Abs in the abattoir’ was on the wall of every slaughterhouse in the land and McDougalls began serving the Spritzen Burger in all their restaurants. So remember, you are what you eat. Nobody who looks like a limp lettuce leaf ever won a bodybuilding contest and no-one — except perhaps rabbits — finds them interesting.

You will be tempted to take short cuts along the way — but don’t cheat, because you’ll only cheat on yourself. Vitamins and supplements are fine and I recommend them because everybody knows you can’t get enough from food alone. I particularly like the green ones because my mother always insisted I eat my greens; so I feel this way I am making her happy. Of course, I have developed my own range, and you can purchase these after this speech if you want to get the same results as I have. But don’t touch steroids and other supposed miracle drugs. They’ll give you a short-term boost but a long-term let down. When you’re posing up there on that dais and the Mr Universe tiara is being put on your head, you don’t want anyone to think you did it the easy way. It would be a dead give-away if you punched out the judge that gave you the lowest score. Keep yourself nice — remember you may want to go into politics someday and you’ll need a clean record as well as a clean handkerchief.

There is a lot of adverse publicity from outside the industry about bodybuilders: we take drugs, we don’t have any brains, we’re freaks, we’re a joke. Don’t let yourself be affected by this negativity. As you pose in front of the mirror in your tiny trunks, and with your muscles looking like Popeye in the after-spinach shot, be proud of what you are, what you have achieved. How many people outside of bodybuilding can say that their neck measurement is bigger than their IQ?

And now, how to get into politics …
Activities ...

UNDERSTANDING and INTERPRETING satirical texts

Getting started
1. Who do you think is the real-life person being satirised in this speech?
2. Find words in the speech that mean a) polish or lustre b) modest or meek c) to change, reconstruct or convert d) hostile or threatening. Write new sentences with each word to show you know the meaning.

Working through
3. There are two ‘audiences’ for this speech. Who are they?
4. If you were in the ‘audience’ for this speech (i.e. an amateur bodybuilder), how would you feel about continuing as a bodybuilder after hearing this speech? Why would you feel this way?
5. How does the writer position you to regard bodybuilders? How does she create this impression? How does this differ from the impression the speaker is trying to create?

ANALYSING and REFLECTING on satirical texts

Getting started
6. Is the writer of this speech gently poking fun at the speaker or is she being critical and scornful? Use some examples from the speech to explain.
7. Does the illustration support the satirical tone of the speech? Explain.

Working through
8. Is the speaker a good role model for his audience? Why or why not?
9. Who might be offended by this speech and why?
10. How would you sum up your overall reaction to the speech, its subject matter and the way it is presented? How successful has the writer been at satirising or lampooning her subject? Has she persuaded you to agree?

Going further
11. Do you think the view of bodybuilding and motivational speakers presented is a fair one? Are there other facts or viewpoints that would counter this view?

CREATING and RESPONDING to satirical texts

Getting started
12. Choose part of the speech (at least two paragraphs), decide on the body language and voice techniques you would use, and then deliver it to the class.

Working through
13. In pairs, construct five questions you would like to ask in an interview with a) Barney Spritzenburger after his speech and b) with the author Melanie Kirkwood about her intended audience and purpose. Then in pairs, conduct the interviews in the roles of interviewer and interviewee.

Going further
14. Write an introduction to a satirical speech on ‘celebrity in modern society’.

LITERACY link

Stated and implied meanings in spoken texts

A satirical speech uses language that operates or works on two levels: a literal meaning within the context of the text and an implied meaning that the listener recognises.

When Barney Spritzenburger says ‘And for me it started that day, looking in the mirror of my powder compact’, the listener can take that literally as the speaker looking into the mirror of his powder compact, or recognise the writer’s implication that if this supposedly macho man is looking into the mirror of a powder compact, he is vain and effeminate rather than macho.

What is the stated and implied meaning of an election slogan like ‘It’s time’ or ‘Going forward’?

NEED TO KNOW
tone the way a writer addresses the reader. A writer’s tone may be friendly, formal, angry, aggressive, playful, serious and so on.

My view ...

Are you more likely to be persuaded if you are entertained at the same time?
Do you think serious subject matter should be made fun of? Under what circumstances do you think this is a good idea?
7.3 HUMOUR IN CONTEXT

How is humour part of its social, cultural and historical context?

Different people find different things funny. We can find things funny only if we understand them. We bring to our understanding of all texts, including humorous ones, our unique personal and discursive background. This refers to the way we are influenced and shaped by our upbringing, our friends, our education, our gender, our interests and experiences, and so on. These exist within our particular society, culture and period in history. If an alien came to earth, he or she would have no context in which to understand our society or culture. Likewise, if we were suddenly beamed up to an alien world, neither would we. Even Americans often don’t ‘get’ Australian or British humour and vice versa.

It took a while for audiences outside Australia to ‘get’ the satirical humour of Dame Edna Everage; but the stereotypical, exaggerated character of Crocodile Dundee seemed to catch on more quickly.

Humour that makes us think often challenges our values, perceptions, ideas and viewpoints on issues. Political cartoons are a good example of how issues can be presented in a humorous or satirical way to make us think about an issue. Political cartoonists have been drawing these for centuries and they capture the spirit or preoccupations of their times. On the surface, political cartoons may be humorous, but they communicate a thought-provoking, often biting message. Symbols and messages are used by the cartoonist to convey a point of view through visuals and text.

**NEED TO KNOW**

symbolism using an object or person to stand for an idea; for example, a dove might symbolise peace

juxtaposition placing people or objects close together for effect

analogy a comparison between two or more things in order to explain something. For example, an analogy may be drawn between a heart and a pump or a child’s brain and a sponge.

irony the difference between the way things are and the way things should be or are expected to be

League of Nations The League was an international peace-keeping organisation (similar to today’s United Nations) that was established in 1920 immediately after WWI. It was an ineffective organisation largely because of disagreements among member nations. It had limited powers and was not able to prevent the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

Cold War After World War II, the world entered a new period of tension. The two superpowers, the USA and USSR, engaged in a ‘Cold War’ where they competed for authority and influence. In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis arose because the USSR had supplied Cuba with nuclear weapons within striking range of the USA. The two nations were locked in a tense stand-off, while John F. Kennedy (President of the USA) and Nikita Kruschev (leader of the USSR) defused the situation.

**POLITICAL CARTOONS**

- are found on the editorial page of print or online newspapers
- deal with events and issues currently in the news
- express a point of view in visuals
- use humorous persuasive techniques
- caricature
- captions, speech balloons and labels
- exaggeration
- symbols
- irony
- analogy
- juxtaposition

**SAMPLE EVALUATION ONLY**

212 English is ... Year 8
The following three cartoons are from different time periods in history, when political affairs were dominated by different issues. However, the cartoons have a common purpose: to bring to a viewer’s attention an issue of the times.

The League is presented as a caricature with a gloomy face.

Exaggerates the League’s failure as a peace-keeping organisation

Irony: the League is a peace-keeping organisation but is under attack.

Labels tell the story of the League’s opponents — US senators’ names.

The cartoonist’s signature

Many different ‘weapons’ symbolise the attitude of US senators to the League.

League of Nations Covenant: the guiding principles of the ‘peace keeping’ organisation

The cartoon title is a rhetorical question about whether the League has a future.

The lock symbolises the need to control nuclear power.

The juxtaposition of leaders shows they are both responsible for solving the issue.

The cartoonist uses analogy: the Greek myth of Pandora, who opened a box that contained all the evils of the world.

Symbolises the dark and dangerous force of nuclear power

A 1962 cartoon from the American political cartoonist Herbert L. Block, known as Herblock

John F. Kennedy (USA) speaks to Nikita Kruschev (USSR) during the Cold War.
Nicholson cartoon from *The Australian*, 15 November 2011

**Language link**

**The troublesome apostrophe**

The apostrophe (‘) is one of the trickiest punctuation marks to use correctly in your writing. If you know what you are looking for, you will see examples of its misuse everywhere. You use the apostrophe:

- to show that something has been left out of a word; for example, *Don’t* (do not) be alarmed if *there’s* (there is) a small nuclear explosion. *Let’s* (let us) get a lock for this thing. These words are called contractions.
- to show ownership; for example, *Australia’s* uranium deposits (add ‘s); the leaders’ decisions (add ‘

**Note:** If the word is plural (more than one) — as in leaders, foxes, babies — and already ends in *s, es* or *ies*, the apostrophe goes after the *s*.

Never use an apostrophe with ordinary plural words; for example, *Our uranium deposits are large* should never be written *Our uranium deposits’ are large.*

Make up a set of rules for using the apostrophe with a fresh example for each rule.

**Literature link**

**Author and expert credibility**

When you are exposed to an opinion or ‘expert’ comments, it is extremely important to have some idea of the potential bias of the owner of the opinion. Knowing the qualifications and experience of someone who makes a claim or states a viewpoint helps you decide how much attention you might pay to what they have to say.

Next time you hear or read an opinion, think carefully about whose opinion it is, their potential bias and how much knowledge and experience they have on the topic or issue.
Activities ...

UNDERSTANDING political cartoons

Getting started
1. List the three cartoons in order of their publication dates. How many years are there between publication of the first and second cartoons, and the second and third cartoons?
2. What is the issue being presented in each cartoon? Try to summarise it in one sentence or draw up a table. See the Need to know entries on pages 212 and 214.
3. Which cartoon, if any, could you have understood without reading the Need to know background information?

Working through
4. Who do you think each cartoon is aimed at? (All cartoons were published in popular print media of their times.)
5. Which cartoon has a) the most text and b) the least text? Would more text help you to understand the cartoons with little text? Explain.

Going further
7. How do you think each of the following groups of people would react to the 2011 cartoon?
   a. The owner of an Australian uranium mine
   b. A peace activist
   c. An Indigenous Australian
   d. An Indian industrialist
   e. An Indian factory worker
   f. A homeless person in Australia

ANALYSING political cartoons

Getting started
8. Complete the following cloze activity by filling in the spaces with the best choice of words from the list below.

Political ____________ use many different ____________ to get their messages across. One of these is ____________. This is shown in the way the ____________ __________ of the characters are ____________. In the 2011 cartoon, Julia Gillard’s _____ and ______ are drawn much larger than they really are. ________ ________ chin and ________ are also exaggerated. The purpose of this technique is to create ____________.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>exaggerated</th>
<th>ears</th>
<th>techniques</th>
<th>physical features</th>
<th>cartoonists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>caricature</td>
<td>humour</td>
<td>nose</td>
<td>Barack Obama's</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why is it important that the figures in a cartoon can be instantly recognised?
Which cartoon makes you think the hardest about the issue? Explain.

Working through
In the 2011 cartoon, who is portrayed favourably and who is not? What techniques has the cartoonist used to do this?
Can you detect the bias of each of the cartoonists? How hard is it to do this without knowing something about their background?
Consider the 1962 and 2011 cartoons. Which most effectively persuades you that nuclear power is a bad thing? Explain.
How important is the use of symbols in any of these cartoons?
Which cartoons feature real people? What do these people have in common? Does this make them good subjects for a satirical political cartoon?

Going further
Two of the cartoons are in black and white and one is in colour. How has the cartoonist used colour in the 2011 cartoon to help convey his message? Would the cartoonists from the earlier time periods have had to use different techniques because they knew the cartoons would not be published in colour?

RESPONDING to political cartoons

Getting started
Rewrite the caption for any of the cartoons in your own words.
In the 2011 cartoon, what might be Barack Obama’s reply to Julia’s comment?
‘Political cartoons are great because you don’t have to be a good reader to understand them.’ Do you agree with this statement? Explain your view.

Working through
There are some common underlying themes in all three cartoons. In a paragraph, explain what these themes are and whether it is surprising given they are from different time periods.
Choose one of the cartoonists presented on pages 213–14. In pairs, work out a list of ten questions you would like to ask the cartoonist in an interview. Include questions about the subject matter, purpose, audience, message and techniques used. Then see if you can create appropriate answers. Roleplay the interview. You could also record it as a podcast.

Going further
In small groups, discuss whether political cartoons a) play an important role in recording history and b) play an important role in social comment or social reform. To support the viewpoints expressed, use the cartoons on pages 213–14 and others you might find in your History textbook or in the daily newspaper.

Political cartoons are a product of their times and cannot be fully appreciated out of their social, political and historical context. Write two paragraphs: one supporting and one opposing this view.

Choose an issue that you are aware of in Australia today; for example, refugee boat arrivals or the carbon tax. How could you represent this issue in a cartoon? Consider who might be caricatured, what symbols you would use and what text you would add.
Wordsmith . . .

AVOIDING VERBOSITY

One of the most effective ways of persuading a reader or listener is to avoid unnecessary wordiness or verbosity. If the message is not direct and hard-hitting, the audience will simply tune out. To be persuasive, a message should be communicated quickly and economically. Political cartoonists know this very well, as shown in the cartoons on pages 213–14. In other persuasive texts, there is a role for emphasis and repetition but it should never be overdone.

1 Look at the cartoon at right.

Which of the following would make the least verbose but clearest substitute?

a Beware!

b Caution: falling rocks!

c Rocks may fall so take care.

d Rocks!

2 Replace each of these expressions with a single word.

● at this point in time

● hold a discussion with

● as a consequence of

● in close proximity to

● due to the fact that

● in the event that

● at the end of the day

3 Use the example at right as a guide when crossing out all the unnecessary words in the statements that follow.

a Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My speech, or what I want to talk to you about this afternoon, is about the environment and about the damage we are doing to the environment.

b The dress, which was orange in colour, had a sale ticket on it and was marked down to sell for $40.

c Good morning customers, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. This morning these grapes in the crate in front of me have been reduced and are selling for a greatly reduced price of $4 per kilo.

Letter to the Editor

I am writing to advise you that the article entitled Buyer beware published in last week’s newspaper on 22 March was absolutely and completely inaccurate.

My view . . .

Can humour make you think? Is a message better understood if it is delivered with humour? How important is someone’s background and prior knowledge in determining what they find funny?
COMPOSE AND CREATE

Productive focus: writing and speaking

1

Humorous routine or recount

Either

In pairs, develop a short (three-minute) routine for a comedy duo. Give your duo a name and decide who will be the straight guy and who will be the fall guy. Choose a subject for your routine from the following, or come up with a topic of your own.

- Going to the dentist for a tooth extraction
- Going to the doctor for an injection
- Taking a Great Dane for a walk
- Washing an elephant or giraffe

The routine may use mime if you wish.

Tips for performing mime

- Stretch to warm up the body.
- Practise with simple exercises such as putting on gloves, taking off gloves, sucking a lemon, opening a present, walking against the wind, climbing a ladder, pushing through a crowd.
- Make sure the audience can always see your face.
- Do not mouth any words. You must express the idea with your body only.
- Be as noiseless as you can. Sighs, banging feet and loud falls detract from the magic spell of the mime.
- Focus on character and on how the character would think, feel and act.

Or

Write a blog or diary entry that recounts an imagined or real humorous anecdote in which you are the main character. Alternatively, it could be delivered as a monologue.

Some key points to remember

- Your purpose is to entertain.
- Plan each character in detail, including costume.
- Use simple props.
- Use pause and pace effectively — timing in comedy is everything!
- Make effective use of body language, gestures and voice (volume, pitch etc.).
- Make sure your routine, monologue or anecdote has an effective opening and builds to a punch-line or resolution at the end.
- Your anecdote should be written in the first person.
- Use figurative language and humour devices in your anecdote.
Satire and parody

Either

Design a film poster for a recent film you have seen—except design it as if it is for a spoof version. Prepare by writing an outline of the basic storyline of your parody movie. Remember to think about the elements of the original movie, such as the genre and characters, so that you can parody these elements.

Or

Choose a nursery rhyme, a folk or traditional song, or something from your own musical collection and create a parody version of it to be marketed as a ring-tone. Remember, you will need to keep the style and format consistent to the original. For example, the syllables and rhyming pairs should be consistent, and the title and chorus in a parody will usually sound similar to the original, often including puns on the original lyrics.

Design a marketing sleeve for your song. Remember, the song is a parody, so think carefully about what type of images you wish to use.

Or

Write a satirical speech on one of the following topics.
- Being a contestant on a celebrity reality show
- Teaching teenagers to drive
- Being a wedding planner
- Being a dog walker

Some key points to remember

- Your purpose is to entertain and persuade the viewer to:
  a) see the parody version of the original film
  b) download the parody version of the song as a ring-tone or
  c) agree with your point of view on the topic of your speech.
- Decide whether your poster or marketing sleeve will be detailed or simple. Think about what should appear in the foreground, middle ground and background.
- Consider the amount and style of text that will appear on the poster or marketing sleeve.
- You may wish to include a serious message or statement in your parody or satire.
- Use techniques such as figurative language, exaggeration and ridicule in your speech.

Use the assessment criteria rubric to guide you through your chosen task.
Create a persuasive cartoon

Create your own cartoon based on one of the following topics, or come up with one of your own.
- Celebrities earn too much money for very little work.
- There should/should not be a carbon tax in Australia.
- Dangerous dogs are a menace to society.
- There are too many books, films and television shows about vampires.
- People are too obsessed with their iPhones, iPads and iPods.
- There is no privacy on social networking sites such as Facebook.

Some key points to remember
- Your purpose is to entertain and persuade the reader/viewer to 'get' your message.
- Decide on the audience your cartoon is aimed at and the message you want to convey.
- Think about using some or all of the main persuasive tools available in cartoons — symbolism, analogy, exaggeration, caricature, juxtaposition and irony — to help get your point across.
- Consider the role labels, speech balloons and captions will play.

Self-evaluation . . .
1. What would you like to learn more about after completing this unit?
2. What did you learn that was totally new to you? What did you already know about?
3. What thinking strategies did you use throughout this unit; for example, summarising, comparing, explaining, interpreting, analysing, evaluating?
4. Have you learned any speaking or performance strategies during this unit?