Comedy

Satire

Duration: 1 week

Driving question

How can comedy be used as a vehicle to insight social change or highlight social inequity?

Overview

Students learn to devise performances that are of a satirical nature. They begin to understand that, if used correctly, comedy can go beyond a means of just entertainment and can be used to highlight social inequity. Students experiment with exaggeration, role-reversal and caricature both practically and experientially to understand how these techniques can be used in a performance to create comedy.

| Stage 4 outcomes | Stage 5 outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| A student: | A student: |
| 4.1.2 improvises and playbuilds through group-devised processes | 5.1.2 contributes, selects, develops and structures ideas in improvisation and playbuilding |
| 4.1.3 devises and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material | 5.1.3 devises, interprets and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material or text |
| 4.2.3 explores and uses aspects of dramatic forms, performance styles, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning | 5.2.3 employs a variety of dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning |
| 4.3.2 recognises the function of drama and theatre in reflecting social and cultural aspects of human experience | 5.3.2 analyses the contemporary and historical contexts of drama |

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/drama-7-10-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Content

Satire is traditionally a form of comedy, but can often be found in political theatre as a vehicle for social commentary on current social, historical or political events. Essentially it means to ‘send-up’. Satire will often mock an individual, group of people or, more broadly, an institution. Satire uses a range of techniques to create humour and dramatic meaning, including:

* Exaggeration – Representing something (action, voice, slogan) beyond normal boundaries so that it becomes larger allowing for faults to be seen (e.g. a caricature).
* Reversal – To swap the roles of a situation and present them out of the usual order (e.g. male versus female gender roles).
* Parody – to imitate the techniques, actions and language of a person, place, or thing.

Satirical comedy is made even more powerful when the topics are well known to the audience. Often the more relevant or famous the person, event or institution is, the funnier the satire will be for the audience as it feels more relevant to their lived experience. However, if done without care or thought, satire can be deemed as offensive or insulting, consequently care must be taken to ensure the dramatic meaning is clear and consistent.

While satire can often feel contemporary, it is important to note that its origins were in ancient Greek satyr plays and some of the works of Shakespeare. More recently, it was used by German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht who used theatre to highlight aspects of the government in 1930’s Germany. Presently, satire is all around us in contemporary culture with almost every facet of the media employing it, including: newspapers, magazines, theatre, arts, television, radio and film. It is a way of engaging audiences and an opportunity to provide a social commentary on social, political or cultural events in a comic or humorous means.

|  |
| --- |
| Cross-curriculum content and key competencies |
| Civics and citizenship |
| Difference and diversity |
| Gender |

Embedded elements of drama

* Role & Character
* Situation
* Language
* Movement
* Dramatic Meaning
* Audience Engagement

Assessment

All activities require students to demonstrate their learning and are all assessment for learning activities.

Teaching and learning activities

The following learning experiences are structured to provide students with a practical and theoretical understanding of how to structure a script.

Everyday events

Students will:

* create list of what they did yesterday after school. The list does not need be detailed, but more a short recount of events in dot-point form. For example, watched television, rode bicycle, went to the shops, are all good examples for this task.
* discuss the similarities and differences between the student activities.
* using the theme song to The Simpsons, ask students to identify the activities characters are doing during the opening titles. Examples include:
  + Bart writing on the blackboard
  + Bart on his skateboard
  + Homer leaving and driving home from work
  + Marge at the supermarket checkout
  + Lisa playing the saxophone
  + The family racing for the couch
* compare the sequence of events in the opening of The Simpsons to their own list of events.
* discuss why The Simpsons might start, as well as other TV series, with a recognizable series of events.
* read through the **more than laughs** handout and discuss how this relates to The Simpsons.
* review the opening sequence of events and discuss what underlying political, social or cultural messages are communicated. For example:

| Action from opening titles | Message |
| --- | --- |
| Bart writing on the blackboard during detention. | Discipline and engagement in USA education. |
| Maggie being scanned at the checkout. | Consumerism (please note Maggie costs $847.63). |
| Lisa playing saxophone and being forced out of concert band rehearsals. | Censorship of creativity and freedom of thought. |
| Family racing for the couch. | The breakdown of relationships/communications in families due to technology. |

* respond to the following in their logbooks:
  + What elements of satire are present in the opening sequence of The Simpsons? Provide an example.
  + What social commentary is being made through the opening sequence of The Simpsons? Why is this relevant?

Celebrity caricature

Students will:

* read the information provided and write a definition of ‘Caricature’
* access YouTube and as a class, watch [Donald Trump interviews himself in the mirror](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2DgwPG7mAA). Discuss and reflect on the performance in student logbooks. Suggested discussion topics are:
  + exaggerated movement and voice
  + celebrity status
  + use of slogans.
* select and watch another celebrity interview on YouTube for their choice. In their logbooks makes notes about:
  + their movement (gestures, idiosyncrasies, etc.)
  + their voice (pitch, tone, tempo, accent)
  + their language (what words do they use frequently).
* playbuild and perform a short satirical skit characterizing their chosen celebrity interview. Students will then evaluate how they caricatured their characters by discussing the skills/techniques used in their performance, in their logbooks.

Role reversal

Ask students to think about common stereotypes that exist regarding male and female gender roles.

Students will:

* identify roles that are commonly associated with males and roles that are commonly associated with females
* playbuild a group performance that uses role-reversal to create humour and make a social commentary on the issue of gender roles and stereotypes. Perform for the class.
* write a long response answer to a question about the topic in their logbooks. For example:
  + comedy is all about the context. Discuss this with reference to your study of satire.

Encourage students to use workshop and performance examples as evidence in written responses.

Differentiation

Extension

Students could:

* improvise an extended scene in character through a game such as [hot seat](https://www.dramanotebook.com/drama-games/hot-seat/).
* playbuild a performance based on a two page written stimulus provided by the teacher converting it into the form of a satire.

Life skills

| Life skills outcomes |
| --- |
| A student: |
| LS. 1.1 explores characters, roles, situations and actions through drama activities |
| LS. 1.3 participates in drama experiences in which role-taking is used to enhance their understanding of ideas and feelings |
| LS. 3.2 identifies and responds to the elements of drama or theatre in performances |
| LS 3.3 recognises that drama and theatre performances can communicate meaning and ideas. |

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/drama-7-10-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Students could:

* identify what makes them laugh about the situations presented to them in the clip of The Simpsons
* instead of referring to a celebrity, get students to think about how aparticular friend or family member behaves. Discuss the stances and voices of these characters and play them with exaggeration
* create tableaux (performed frozen images) of steretyped gender situations and then adjust the gender of key characters
* discuss verbally or in dot-point how other students created comedy in their performances.

Evaluate

Feedback is formative during the lessons.

Reference list and resources

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/drama-7-10-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Satire – **More than just Laughs Handout**

YouTube Clip: [Donald Trump Interviews Himself in the Mirror.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2DgwPG7mAA)

YouTube Clip: [The Simpsons (Opening Sequence)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U2n1zdi0W8)