

# Language for ...

## jokes and humour

**Age:** Adult / Young adult

**Level:** Intermediate

**Length:** 45–60 minutes

**Language Focus:** Key vocabulary associated with humour

**Skills:** Speaking, reading, listening

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student, one copy of the audio (downloaded or played via onestopenglish)

**Aims:** To provide students with the language needed to discuss humour



- 4 Ask students to work individually to write full words in the warmer. Encourage them to check in a dictionary if necessary. Check the answers with the whole class.



**Teaching tip:** Ask students to spell words aloud when giving answers. Pronouncing the letters of the alphabet in English is tricky even at higher levels, and particularly those letters that might be pronounced differently in their language, e.g. a, e, l, r, y. If they mispronounce a letter (e.g. they say 'a' when they mean 'e'), write 'a' on the board, as in 'sansa' for 'sense', to highlight the error.

### What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

- 1 To introduce the topic, ask students to think of the following:
  - Their favourite comedian (in their own country or in another country) and why he or she is funny.
  - A funny film or TV programme they have seen and why it was funny.

Ask them to compare their ideas with a partner. Then ask each pair to share their ideas with the whole class.
- 2 Give a copy of the worksheet to each student.
- 3 In pairs, ask students to complete part a of the warmer. Check the answers with the whole class then have a brief discussion classifying the types of comedy that were mentioned in point 1 above, seeing which students prefer.
- 4 Ask students to work individually to complete Exercise 2b without looking at the audio transcript. Ask them to compare their answers in pairs and check their answers by looking in the text. Check their answers as a class to make sure they have all the correct answers.
- 5 Ask students to read through the six questions carefully first. Then ask them to listen to the conversation and find the answers. Note that you may need to play the recording more than once. Ask them to compare their answers in pairs. Then ask them to tell you the answers. Alternatively, make a copy of the audio transcript and let the students check the answers themselves.
- 6 Ask students to work individually to complete Exercise 2c. Check answers with the whole class.
- 7 Ask students to work in pairs to complete Exercise 2c. Check answers with the whole class.
- 8 Ask students to work individually to prepare their joke in Exercise 3. Inform students that their joke must not offend anyone in the class. Monitor and give help if necessary, especially if some students need help in translating something from their language.

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- 9** Ask students to work in pairs to complete Exercise 4. Remind them to use their ideas from Exercise 3. When they have finished, invite students to tell their jokes to the whole class.
- 10** Ask students to work individually to think about their reactions to the statements in Exercise 5. Encourage them to write notes, if necessary. Then ask them to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the three statements. Ask each pair or group to report back to the class. Make sure they give reasons and don't simply say 'We agree' or 'We disagree'.
- KEY:**
- 1a.** 1. b)  
2. d)  
3. a)  
4. e)  
5. c)
- 1b.** 1 funny  
2 sense of humour  
3 crack a joke  
4 laugh
- 2a.** 1 Because he won't expect it back.  
2 Interest.  
3 Words with exactly the same sounds but different spellings and meanings.  
4 Homophones or words which sound almost the same but not quite.  
5 Themselves.  
6 Partners (relationships).
- 2b.** 1 one-liner  
2 double  
3 punchline  
4 wordplay  
5 literal  
6 idiomatic  
7 hilarious  
8 butt
- 2c.** 1 d  
2 f  
3 e  
4 a  
5 c  
6 b
- 3.** students' own answers
- 4.** students' own answers

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- A:** OK, so you think the British have a special sense of humour. Go on, then. Tell me a joke.
- B:** Why should you always borrow money from a pessimist?
- A:** I don't know.
- B:** Because he won't expect it back.
- A:** That's not funny, and anyway, you could crack the same joke in any language with the same meaning. What's so special about British humour?
- B:** I think it's connected with the language. We have lots of words with more than one meaning and that can be funny.
- A:** Can you think of an example?
- B:** Well, I wanted to be a banker but then I lost interest.
- A:** Hmm. I see. 'Interest' can also mean a percentage paid on money people invest.
- B:** That's right, so the joke is in the double meaning. We also make jokes based on literal meaning as opposed to idiomatic meaning. For example: a hole appeared in the middle of the road yesterday. Police are looking into it.
- A:** OK. I understand that one. Literally standing there and looking into the hole, or investigating it.
- B:** Yes. Then we have homophones. We make jokes using them too.
- A:** What are homophones?
- B:** Words with exactly the same sounds but different spellings and meanings. For example: I only know twenty-five letters of the alphabet. I don't know why.
- A:** OK, I get that one. The question word 'why' and the letter 'y'.
- B:** Then there are puns. These can be homophones but they can also use words which sound almost the same but not quite. There are thousands of jokes based on these. For instance, some people say that being a vegetarian is a huge missed steak.
- A:** Yes. It's not exactly hilarious though!
- B:** I'm trying to show you how the language influences our humour. We can even play with grammar to produce double meanings. One of my favourites is the newspaper headline 'Police found drunk in shop window'. If 'found' is past simple, it means they discovered a drunk person in the shop window. If it's a past participle, it means the police themselves were drunk. It wasn't an intentional joke though!
- A:** Right, but apart from wordplay, what are some other features of British humour?
- B:** Well, I think we like to laugh at ourselves and, in general, we don't take ourselves too seriously. I mean, I'm pretty pleased with myself. I bought a jigsaw puzzle that said 'three to five years' on the box. I finished it in three months!
- A:** Right. I understand that one. Are there any particular targets of British jokes?
- B:** I guess one of the favourite subjects is relationships, and partners are often the butt of jokes. For example, 'my partner's cooking is so bad we usually pray after our food', or 'My husband hasn't stopped looking through the window since it started snowing. If it gets any worse, I'll have to let him in.'
- A:** I don't know whether to laugh or cry. OK, come on. What's the secret of a good joke?
- B:** It should be short and easy to understand. One-liners are the best. If you have to explain the punchline, the joke hasn't worked. That's why it's sometimes impossible to translate jokes into other languages.

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### 1 Warmer

a. Below are the names of some types of comedy found on TV. Match up the names on the left, to their descriptions on the right.

1. sitcom	a) Humour that is based on physical actions such as people hitting each other or falling over, rather than on the clever use of language. Clowns, <i>Mr Bean</i> and <i>Laurel and Hardy</i> are examples of this.
2. satire	b) A series about a particular group of characters who deal with <b>situations</b> in a humorous way. An example is the US show, <i>Friends</i> .
3. slapstick comedy	c) A story that deals in a humorous way with unpleasant aspects of life such as illness and death.
4. Standup comedy	d) A show which uses humour to <b>criticize</b> someone or something and make them seem <b>silly</b> . An example is the British panel show <i>Have I Got News For You</i> which makes fun of the weeks' events in the news.
5. black comedy	e) A comedian that tells <b>jokes</b> on a stage in front of an audience.

b. Complete the spelling of these words connected with humour

1. fu\_\_ \_\_y
2. s\_\_ ns\_\_ of h\_\_ \_\_ o\_\_ r
3. c\_\_ \_\_ ck a j\_\_ \_\_ \_\_
4. l\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ h

### 2 Text

a. Listen to the conversation and answer the questions.

1. Why should you always borrow money from a pessimist?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the word for the percentage paid on money people invest?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What are homophones?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are puns?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Who do the British like to **laugh** at?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Which particular **target** of British humour is mentioned?

\_\_\_\_\_

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b. Complete the sentences with one of these words.

literal	hilarious	wordplay	one-liner
double	punchline	butt	idiomatic

- A \_\_\_\_\_ is a joke that consists of a single sentence.
- Many words in English have \_\_\_\_\_ meanings.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is the last line of a joke.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is using words in a clever or funny way.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ meaning of a word is its most basic meaning.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ meaning of an expression is different from the meaning of its individual words.
- If something is described as \_\_\_\_\_, it is extremely funny.
- If you are the \_\_\_\_\_ of jokes, people often make jokes about you.

c. Match the verbs taken from the text (1-6) with noun phrases (a-f).

- |             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| 1. get      | a) oneself seriously |
| 2. explain  | b) oneself           |
| 3. lose     | c) money             |
| 4. take     | d) a joke            |
| 5. borrow   | e) interest          |
| 6. laugh at | f) a punchline       |

### 3 Language in Use

You are going to tell another student about a joke you know in your own language. Think about these things:

- Who or what is the target of the joke?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does it involve any double meanings, homophones or puns?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is the joke short and easy to understand?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is the punchline clear and simple?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4 Communicate

Work with a partner. Tell your partner your joke. Use your ideas from Exercise 3.

Do you think each other's jokes are funny? Why/Why not?

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### 5 Discussion

Read these statements. Decide whether you agree or disagree with them. Think of reasons for your answers. Then discuss your answers with a partner or in a small group.

1. 'Some subjects are not appropriate for jokes. For example, death or religion.'
2. 'Verbal humour is much funnier than visual humour.'
3. 'A **sense** of humour is the most important quality for a person to have.'

#### Red Words

laugh***	target***	seriously***	feature***	
humour**	influence***	spelling*	sound***	
meaning***	double***	literal*	crack**	joke**
sense***	situation***	criticize**	silly**	comedy**