

**Warmer – types of joke**

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

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

**Task 1 – Reading: making predictions**

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

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

**Task 2 – Reading a blog post.**

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

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

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

**Fools**

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

**Singing and dancing**

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

**Absurdity**

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

**Happy endings**

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

**Task 3 – Reading: topic sentences**

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

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

**Task 4 – Writing: topic sentences**

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

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

**Task 5 – Reading: checking your understanding**

Read the text again and answer the questions.

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

**Task 6 – Vocabulary**

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

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

**Task 7 – Vocabulary practice**

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

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

**Task 8 – Creating a Shakespearean comedy**

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

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

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