

Lesson Plan: What's So Funny?

Overview

Humor has many forms: irony, paradox, and parody are just a few. Sometimes humor can be found in art. This activity invites participants to identify humor, in its full array, during a visit to *Life on Mars*, and to consider how it affects their understanding and interpretation of contemporary art.

Objectives

- Define ways humor occurs in art.
- Identify various types of humor in art in the 2008 *Carnegie International*.
- Describe what makes a humorous element in art funny.
- Interpret what effect humor has on audience as it occurs in various artworks.
- Reflect on and discuss possible interpretations of artworks based on your exploration of how humor is employed as a communicative strategy.

PA Standards

- 1.6 Speaking and Listening
- 1.7 Characteristics and Function of the English Language
- 9.1 Production, Performance and Exhibition of Arts
- 9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts
- 9.3 Critical Response
- 9.4 Aesthetic Response

Pre-Visit Activities

1. Review

Humor is a quality related to amusement and laughter. It is a general recognition of what is incongruous, comical, or absurd. A variety of things can make something funny. Review the Student Handout on ways humor can strike a comedic chord.

2. Ask

What makes you laugh? Do you have to laugh for something to be considered humorous? Can you think of an example for each of the categories of humor listed on the Student Handout? Which are more common?

3. Connect

Have you ever found art that was humorous? Or humor that was artful? Indeed, some art is intended to get a laugh, or at least surprise us in a way that is comical. Can you think of ways art might be funny? Maybe you know of art that has made you laugh, made you think, or delighted you in some way. How did it achieve this? Discuss.

Visiting the Exhibition

4. Look for the Jokes

Invite participants to keep an eye open for humor in the exhibition *Life on Mars*. Sometimes it's a matter of how one views the art. Sometimes the artist has given his or her work a witty title to tip us off. Sometimes a joke is tucked into a detail, while other times the work, overall, is witty or whimsical.

5. Make Notes

As participants tour the exhibition, have them jot down which works they find to have a sense of humor and identify what kinds of humor are evident. They may use the table on the Student Handout to organize their findings. Can students identify any cultural and contextual references to which the artists allude?

Post-Visit Activities

6. Share

Participants share their ideas about humor they found in artworks and how it affects their understanding or appreciation. Be sure to have students point out what they observed that led to the humorous effect. Discuss with the group these ideas by comparing their notes and descriptive paragraphs.

7. Interpret

Discuss the ways works tend to strike our funny bone. Do the "jokes" add to the significance of the works' meanings? How so or

not? Considering what participants found to be humorous, can they find patterns or themes in *Life on Mars*?

What about the exhibition title, *Life on Mars*? Is it whimsical? What might it mean?

How does the museum context and the long history and tradition of the *Carnegie International* add to or detract from our experience of humor in the galleries?

8. Assess

Evaluate student explications of humor, whether written or oral, by criteria of ability to identify and articulate specific qualities of artworks that convey a sense of humor. Check for understanding in students' ability to identify and recognize types of humor, keeping in mind that sometimes more than one type might be at play or be difficult to determine due to subtle differences between types. Have students defend their answers by noting details of the artwork that suggest a particular type of humor to be sure their understanding is correct.

Alternatives and Extensions

9. Blog Posts

Have participants post their ideas and findings about humor on the *Life on Mars* web site. You can set up a classroom blog just for your group. In this way, participants can readily share ideas, comment on peers' posts, and practice writing for digital media. By so doing, participants will practice their descriptive and analytical writing skills with an authentic audience.

10. Audio Podcasts

Create podcast accounts on a free podcasting site (e.g. Gcast.com). Participants bring mobile phones and record their notes and descriptions (Steps 5 and 6) and post them to the *Life on Mars* web site. You can set up public or private class blog just for your group, too.

11. Use Humor in Art

Create an artwork that incorporates one or more humorous elements to make a point, express an emotion, or get a laugh. Be prepared to explain your intention and why you chose the kind of humor you did so that students understand the decision-making inherent in the creative process—and so others might best "get the joke."