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# I

## LEARNING THE ART OF CLOWNING

### *To the Teacher*

Some children seem to be natural clowns. They revel in the attention of their peers and are forever impressed with their own ability to elicit laughs from others. Perhaps some of the energy of these "class clowns" may be constructively channeled into the study of the professional art of clowning. As the child actually progresses up the ladder toward becoming a clown, he or she will gain greater insight and appreciation into this complex art which, as the child soon learns, demands a great deal of practice and discipline.

One of the first steps in learning the art of clowning is to develop a clown character. The child needs to discover a particular character that is funny, comfortable, and suited to him or her. The following activities are suggested for children who are interested in learning more about the art of clowning.

### *To the Student*

#### **How to become a Clown**

Begin by looking at pictures of clowns, visiting circuses, viewing circus films, watching old silent movies, and so on. Try to note the total effect of a clown's costume and makeup. Traditionally, there are three major types of clowns: the Whiteface Clown, the Auguste Clown, and the Character Clown. Investigate these character types in order to get a feeling for different clown characters. Try not to copy another clown exactly. Each clown character has its own personality and style. Eventually you should try to create your own unique clown character. As a beginning step, it may be a good idea to

write a brief description of each of these types, noting how they differ from one another.

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You may develop a greater understanding of clown character by focusing on a specific model such as Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp. Much of this character is based on contradictions. Focus on The Little Tramp's dress, mannerisms, and personality traits by obtaining VCR tapes of old silent movies from the library.

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Find out about a famous clown from the past. Share with the class some background information about the clown and the kinds of routines for which the clown was famous. Some suitable subjects are Joseph Grimaldi, Dan Rice, Otto Griebling, Emmet Kelly, Lou Jacobs, the Fratellini Brothers, and Felix Adler. Certain silent movie and early screen actors were also great clowns whose characters and biographies might be explored. Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, the Marx Brothers, and W.C. Fields are good starters.

This investigation may then be extended by finding out more about a modern clown associated with television or the movies. Clown characters created by Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, Jerry Lewis, Pee Wee Herman and others are possible choices. You will probably be able to come up with your own favorite.

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Trace the history of clowning from the days of the clown as court jester during the medieval times to the present. In researching the history, try to include the rise of the Italian street theater in the

## II

### LEARNING THE ART OF CARTOONING

#### *To the Teacher*

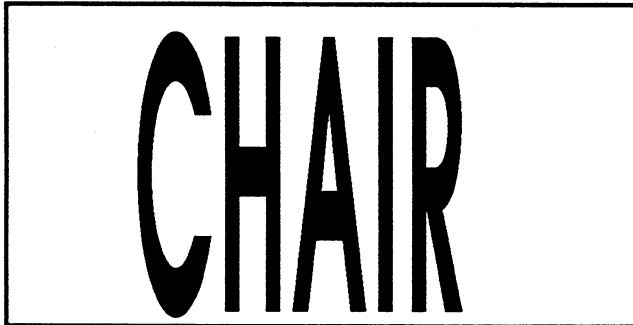
Gary Trudeau has written of the indispensable role of the cartoonist in our society. "When he's doing his job, he provides us with the means to look back into ourselves; he's the benign conduit between our self-serious facades and those pockets of vulnerability found deep within" (1975, preface). Most children enjoy drawing and many try their hand at cartooning. But some children demonstrate a natural flair for this avenue of expression. It is

hoped that a few of these children will become the next generation's Charles Schulz, Al Capp, Gary Trudeau, Jules Feiffer, Roz Chast, or Lynda Barry.

#### Warm-up Activities

Many teacher resource books offer simple warm-up exercises that encourage children to think divergently and use visual pictures to develop this ability. The child humorist may enjoy trying some of the following:

*WORDLES*—familiar words, phrases, or sayings whose meaning is expressed by the shape and placement of letters. For example:

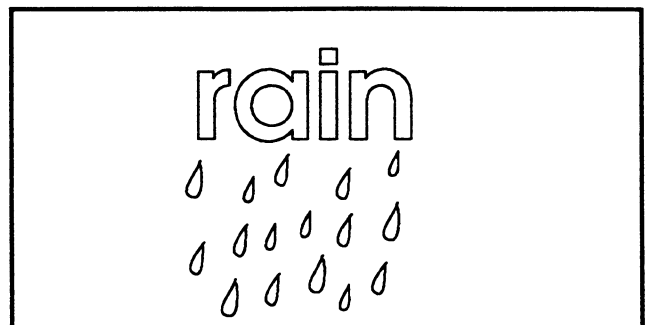


(High Chair)



(Misunderstanding)

*PIXWORDS*—exercises that instruct the child to draw a picture of the meaning of the word within the word itself or to illustrate colorful words in a form that represents their meaning. For example: (Crosby & Marten, 1984, p.43)



### III

## INCORPORATING HUMOR IN PROSE AND POETRY

### *To the Teacher*

Humor can help children to become more critical readers when it is used to discern an author's mood, purpose and style of writing, to teach inferring skills through play on words, and to evaluate content (Whitmer, 1986). Middle-grade elementary school children who have a history of indifference to reading may become motivated after listening to passages from popular children's humor books. But for children who have a flair for writing humorous prose or light verse, it is essential that they be exposed to the works of popular humorists and have numerous models from which they can learn.

Children love the ambiguity that is everywhere in language. Jokes, riddles, puns and figures of speech are especially entertaining to middle school youngsters, partly because they are a vehicle for peer interaction (Jalongo, 1985). Some warm-up activities that enable children to increase linguistic awareness are found in "wordles," hinky-pinkies," palindromes, spoonerisms, conundrums, "Tom Swifties," and comic similes. Many teacher resource books have examples of each. Try to expose your students to some of these word play activities.

### *To the Student*

The following are some word play exercises that are fun to do and will also help to increase your language awareness:

**WORDLES** contain a familiar word, phrase, or saying which the reader figures out by analyzing the shape, size, and position of the words or letter. Two examples are "chtongueeek" and Falling  
Your Face  
(Tongue in cheek, Falling on your face)

**HINKY PINKIES** (a.k.a. Stinky Pinkies) are pairs of words that go together and rhyme with each other. For example, a robber in charge is a "chief thief," a stupid finger is a "dumb thumb," and a comical rabbit is a "funny bunny."

**PALINDROMES** are words, phrases, and sentences that read the same backwards and forwards. For example, "Madam, I'm Adam," and "Rise to vote, sir!"

**SPOONERISMS** are named after Dr. William Spooner, a preacher and a teacher who lived in England over one hundred years ago. He had a funny way of switching around parts of words. According to legend, as Queen Victoria rode by one day, Dr. Spooner wanted to shout, "Three cheers for the dear old queen!" It came out, "Three cheers for the queer old dean!" (Tremain, 1976, p.16).

**CONUNDRUMS** are riddles framed in the form of questions with some type of word play in the answer. For example, "What is the longest word in the English language?" Answer: "Smiles: between its first and last letter, there is a mile."

**TOM SWIFTIES** use double meanings of words for full effect. For example, "I'll dig you later," Tom said gravely. Or, "These hot dogs are good," Tom said frankly (Crosby & Marten, 1984, p.32).

**COMIC SIMILES** invite you to see a funny and surprising common feature in two very different things. For example, you might be asked to complete sentences such as "He was as frightened as... a goldfish at a shark convention," or "He was a happy as... a flea family on a dirty dog" (Bleedorn & McKelvey, 1986, p. 16).

Try to collect these and other humorous language forms (jokes, tall tales, limericks, idioms,