

“What’s So Funny?": Exploring Comedy, Humor, and Laughter

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Rationale

Getting Serious about Comedy, Humor, and Laughter

In today's educational climate, teachers are under pressure to juggle many demands at once. From implementing the Common Core standards and preparing students for high-stakes assessments to priming students to enter the 21st century workforce, teachers are constantly catering to the stern imperatives of officials regarding student progress and performance. This endless juggling of high-stakes responsibilities has made the classroom an increasingly humorless place to be.¹ Like most commercial ventures in our time, learning has become "serious business."²

As a result, humor in school is at best an occasionally acceptable diversion. Any humorous detours that might significantly detract from solemn, quality instructional time are not permissible. While I am not advocating that we turn our schools into raucous carnivals, I do wonder who actually benefits from the gloomy weather brought on by so many sober mandates. These conditions beg the question: does education have to be such a grave matter? Can teachers strike a balance between being serious about learning and making learning seriously fun?

Education's amplified seriousness and noteworthy resistance to humor reflects a longstanding prejudice against humor grounded in some strains of the Western philosophical tradition.³ Today, these prejudices are alive and well in the attitudes of more than a modicum of teachers. As Colleen Ruggieri (1999), citing Richard Shade (1996), notes, some "educators have viewed using humor in the classroom as 'unprofessional, uncontrolled, and undignified.'"⁴

Mary Kay Morrison (2012) calls this “palpable fear of using class time for ‘fun’” *humorhobia* and enumerates its features. These include the fear of decreased classroom productivity, the fear of increased problems with classroom management, the fear of many teachers that they are decidedly not funny, and the fear of ensuring that students “laugh with,” as opposed to “laugh at,” each other.⁵ While *humorhobia* and its concomitant fears constitute an entirely legitimate stance towards the use (or non-use) of humor in the classroom, I believe that we do our students, our schools, and ourselves a disservice by categorically eliminating humor from education. Comedy, humor, and laughter, if deployed thoughtfully and within negotiated limits, can be rich topics for exploration within a unit of study, powerful classroom tools, and effective teaching and learning strategies.

Humor as a Topic, a Tool, and a Strategy

Comedy, humor, and laughter are valuable topics, tools, and strategies and worthy of exploration in large part because they are so familiar. Everyone has experienced humor. Most people laugh many times a day.⁶ Not only is a humor a universal part of human experience, but it is oftentimes a markedly *positive* part of our experiences. Humor’s ability to evoke positive emotional states makes it a powerful mode of promoting learning.

As Rod A. Martin (2007) notes in his synopsis of Alice Isen’s (2003) summary of research into positive emotions, “When people are experiencing positive emotions (including comedy-induced mirth)...they demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, enabling them to engage in more creative problem solving; more efficient

organization and integration of memory; more effective thinking, planning, and judgment; and higher levels of social responsibility and prosocial behaviors such as helpfulness and generosity.”⁷ When students are laughing and having fun, they are more open to new experiences, new ideas, and new literature.

Humor is a rich topic for exploration in large part because it is universally familiar. Humor sparks student interest because it is “an obvious emotion, and students are generally interested in finding out what causes them to laugh.”⁸ Exploring comedy, humor, and laughter is a practical way “to entice students” to move from the analysis of humor “into other kinds of literary analysis.”⁹ Because everyday life and pop culture are so saturated with a large variety of humor, it is “all the more important that we bring humor into our classrooms” in order to augment the symbiotic relevance of school to “real life,” and “real life” to school.¹⁰

This unit invites students to bring their knowledge of the humor codes of pop culture to bear on a variety of comedic forms high and low.¹¹ What’s more, this unit encourages students to pour over personal experiences with humor and ask what about those experiences was funny and why. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) writes, “The doors of laughter are open to one and all.”¹² Humor gives students a foothold as they launch personal and collaborative inquiries into increasingly complex ideas and comedic texts.

For keeping the door ajar, humor is an engaging topic for both teachers and students. Doing inquiry into humor can help teachers create a “supportive social climate” while serving “a variety of [other] purposes” too.¹³ These include putting students at ease by integrating “humor with content” in either planned or

spontaneous ways, reducing the frequency with which students “act out and cause disturbances,” and improving learning outcomes by making the teacher and the class “more appealing.”¹⁴

Although doing inquiry into humor packs the potential to create a positive learning environment, it also carries the capacity to create a negative one. That being said, I believe that the teacher plays the lead role in ensuring that classroom humor builds up, rather than tears down, learners. Rather than sheepishly avoid the oftentimes fine line between building up and tearing down, the teacher needs to guide the students in an ongoing dialogue about “what sorts of humor are productive, and what sorts of humor are counterproductive,” and “what makes the difference.”¹⁵ By acknowledging that some forms of humor can genuinely hurt others’ feelings, the teacher and students can discuss together how to go about “achieving a balance [between humor that builds up and tears down] so that he smiles are stronger than the frowns.”¹⁶

Negotiating limits together will help students learn how to reap the benefits of humor without hurting or offending others in the process. Striking this subtle balance may be challenging at times, but the positive benefits of using humor in the classroom far outweigh the risks. In this unit, there will be a strong emphasis on the relationship between humor and empathy. Open, shared dialogue can unlock the positive benefits of doing inquiry into humor together.

In addition to serving as a topic for doing inquiry, humor is a powerful problem-solving and communication tool. When we are presented with something funny, our brains first “appraise it as nonserious, playful, and humorous.”¹⁷ Then, we

laugh. This unit encourages students to recognize this stimulus-response pattern and to step beyond it by analyzing the “idea, image, text, or event that is in some sense incongruous, odd, unusual, unexpected, surprising, or out of the ordinary,” and to ask how, and why.¹⁸ Activities that push students to evaluate their cognitive responses to humor equip students to seek creative solutions to problems posed by language. By heeding the cognitive impact of humor in their personal experiences, students will learn how to unearth multiple meanings in language and literature as well as how to understand humor in relation to culture.

Through humor, teachers can enable students to understand and respond to the multiple meanings at play in life, language, and literature. Recognizing how “a single [linguistic] event can vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths” is a powerful communication skill.¹⁹ Michael Apter (1982) calls humor’s ability to operate on multiple wavelengths at once *synergy*. According to Apter, *synergy* makes it possible to hold “two contradictory images or conceptions of the same objects...in one’s mind at the same time.”²⁰ An awareness of and fluency in humor’s *synergy* prepares students to navigate real-world communication problems with grace and verve. To quote from David Lazear (1991), humor-tinged “language allows us to ‘get distance on ourselves,’ so to speak, so we can enjoy ourselves and others. It helps us to take a step back from the intensity of life and laugh. The possibilities that our language presents us are almost endless.”²¹ Students who are able to step back and see these possibilities will become better communicators and thinkers.

Just as language bears multiple layers of significance, so too do different cultures play host to multiple varieties of comedy and humor. One goal of this unit is

generate discussion around these cultural differences. As Richard A. Shade (1996) observes, how we appreciate humor is “related to culture, ethnicity, and group affiliation.”²² Ultimately, students will take away knowledge, skills, and tools (humor being one tool) to come at these differences with an open mind.

When students laugh at something, they are in essence “accepting it and approving it” in some way.²³ Therefore, understanding how humor is socially constructed puts students on the road to developing a greater sense of other cultures’ gestures, customs, and value systems. Furthermore, “humor is a wonderful tool for talking about cultural differences because when people are smiling they are more likely to be open to new ideas and to new ways of looking at problems.”²⁴ By experiencing what humor means in various cultural contexts, we as learners are forced to “switch paths, notice things we didn’t notice before, and countenance possibilities, and even absurdities, as easily as actualities.”²⁵

Humor can be a tool for entering into new-fangled way of seeing the world. To relate reading, writing, and thinking to our experiences of humor is to instantiate new models for the re-description of our worlds.²⁶ Humor alerts students to what is multiple—in this case, multiple cultural varieties of comedy. With an understanding of both our own sense of humor and that of others, we are “especially well-equipped to face new situations” because humor “affirms the incongruities in life’s predicaments.”²⁷ In short, humor prepares us to meet new situations with flexible attitudes and earnest empathy.

On top of being a tool for sharing difference and multiplicity with others, humor can serve as an effective teaching and learning strategy. I firmly believe that

the forces of openness and empathy—by virtue of sheer honesty and sincerity—eventually win out over forces of censorship. Even so, humor can pose real censorship dilemmas. In fact, brushing up against problems of censorship in relation to literature, to classroom management, and to social mores and taboos is to be expected. What counts is how teachers navigate these issues. In general, it is better to be open and forthright about sensitive subjects. Therefore, I fully intend to openly discuss these potential issues with students.

Tom Romano (1995) advocates that we plainly address our own worries about censorship with students. Teachers can be honest and dialogue with students about how “there are social situations to consider when choosing language. We flout these considerations at our own risk”—at the risk of offending, alienating, or irritating others, and at the risk of discrediting our views or even ourselves in the minds of others.²⁸ Alleen and Don Nilsen (1999) also recommend that teachers be frank about the social dimension and ramifications of our words: “we need to help students ponder the relationship of censorship to such terms as good taste, appropriateness, tolerance, kindness, respect, sensitivity, and the ubiquitous political correctness.”²⁹

By thoughtfully raising censorship issues into the light, rather than burying them dismissively underground, teachers can facilitate productive discussion of how we moderate our choice of words depending on the context. Funny enough, humor is one strategy for skirting routinely censored, taboo subjects. Oftentimes, humor allows us to tactfully consider these touchy subjects by way of hints, undertones, and insinuations. Therefore, one manner of addressing the censorship

issues raised by humor is by way of humor itself.³⁰ Humor is a tool that allows us to say indirectly what we cannot say directly. Speaking indirectly lets us edge by discomfort and move light-footed past thorny encumbrances. To echo Polonius' words, humor is a way forward—"by indirections find directions out."³¹

Comedy, humor, and laughter, much like open class discussions, permit us to put our guard down and playfully consider those subjects that might otherwise go unexamined. Allow me to clarify something: this unit is by no means meant to plunge students headlong into discussions of taboo subjects. The point of my discourse on humor and censorship is to highlight that the topic of humor comes with its own pressure safety valve. When things get overhot, humor lets off steam. Now I want to turn to our central text for this unit, Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*.

Humor, the Texts, and Our Goals

The Arabian Nights is a theatrical adaption of a compilation of "Indian, Persian, and Arabic" tales first collected in Arabic in the thirteenth century.³² At surface level, Zimmerman's text is quite serious—the main protagonist, Scheherezade, is delaying her imminent death at the king Shahryar's hand through storytelling. However, just beneath this surface peril, a jocular tone and a playful levity glimmer. The humor in the play's numerous funny stories are balanced against some of its more serious themes: how we cope with life's low points, what role we play in the directions we choose for our lives, and how telling stories can be a life-giving act.

As Husain Haddawy (1990) notes, the tales in the *Arabian Nights* “divert, cure, redeem, and save lives.”³³ Throughout the play, these empathy-building stories help both the readers and the characters grow as communicators and collaborators. As Mary Zimmerman herself remarks in an interview, “it’s through storytelling that we cultivate empathy.”³⁴ Without condoning king Shahryar’s acts of murder, I hope that the teacher and the students can collectively participate in a process that parallels Shahryar’s in that we all grow in our capacities to laugh and empathize with others.

In addition to Zimmerman’s *The Arabian Nights*, students will be asked to muck with a variety of humorous texts. In light of the subjective nature of humor appreciation, these additional texts are by and large a reflection of the teacher’s personal sense of humor. My goal in choosing texts that I personally find funny is not to impose my sense of humor on students as somehow authoritative or correct. Nor is it my goal to convert students to my way of thinking about humor. There is no “correct,” “authoritative,” or “best” sense of humor—my sense of humor belongs to me just as yours belongs to you.

Accordingly, my goal is to help students do inquiry into their own personal, authentic sense of what is and isn’t funny. Because I am asking students to discuss and write about their senses of what comedy, humor, and laughter are in a sincere and authentic manner, I believe that I too am responsible for reciprocating in equal part by sharing my own sense of humor. By giving students ample time and space to share and sharing myself, we can together create an open and collaborative

environment where everyone's perspectives are at play, in dialogue, and equally valued.

In selecting a range of texts high and low, canonical and heterodoxical, the teacher is at once a purveyor and a critic of the value judgments that shore up the canon's enduring status. This unit encourages students to be critical consumers of cultural forms high and low, and in doing so to think about what influences our own preconceived notions and value judgments regarding comedy, humor, and laughter. Both the students and teacher will collaboratively move towards realizing these objectives through journal writing, a multi-genre project, and an extended definition assignment. These assessments are geared towards having students explore humorous "pop and high culture as parallel phenomena."³⁵

Sequenced to support students as they grow in their understanding and appreciation of humor's variety, this unit progresses from informal to increasingly formal forms of assessment. The journals serve as an informal way for students to flesh out their ideas in response to a prompt in a low-stakes, generative process. The multi-genre project gives students creative freedom to produce a conventional, nonconventional, or hybrid text that features a salient personal dimension. The extended definition assignment asks students to formulate a working concept of humor, draft a set of criteria that clarify that concept, defend that concept's validity with examples and counterexamples, and anticipate and respond to counterarguments. Through these opportunities for learning, students will become purveyors and critics of many varieties of humor in their own right.

Summary

While exploring comedy, humor, and laughter, students will have to delve into personal experiences, pop culture, and literature to wrestle with the implications of humor as a communication tool, a social phenomenon, an illustrator of cultural mores, a conduit for multiple meanings in language, and a counterweight to education's oftentimes stifling seriousness. Furthermore, students will do inquiry into the relationship between humor, empathy, and storytelling as they read Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*.

My hope is that these explorations challenge students to approach life in and out of school in a more collaborative, critical, and open-minded way. Moreover, I hope this unit empowers students to laugh more often. There's no shame in enjoying yourself as long as you don't harm yourself or others in the process. Who knows, laughter may be the highest art—it may truly affect the quality of your day.³⁶ Wittgenstein puts it this way, "the world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man."³⁷ Bakhtin, in chorus, weighs in, "Laughter and freedom. Laughter and equality. Laughter makes things close and familiar."³⁸ There is a time and a place for seriousness, and a time and a place for fun. Let's try and strike a balance between the two. The risk is worth the reward: "it is foolishness and not the calculations of reason that makes possible everything we treasure most in life. It is folly, especially, that allows us to live together and love one another."³⁹

Texts

Primary Text

Mary Zimmerman, *The Arabian Nights*

Supplementary Texts

Sugar and Spies (1966):

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcR6Uw2UL7c>)

Introduction to Robert A. Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, p. 1-10

Lucille Clifton, "Ode to My Hips"

<http://www.flatheadreservation.org/images/phs/poems/Ode%20to%20my%20hips-Lucille%20Clifton.pdf>

Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Chapters III-VIII

Richard Erdoes, *American Indian Trickster Tales*

"How Locust Tricked Coyote" p. 29-32

"He Sure Was a Good Shot" p. 151-152

"Don't Believe What People Tell You" p. 183

"A Lousy Fisherman" p. 258-259

Amy Peters, "The Tale of Scheherazade"

<http://www.netplaces.com/fairy-tales/princesses-and-princes/the-tale-of-scheherazade.htm>

The Arabian Nights at the Western Michigan University Theater:

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuOj43TpFPU&feature=related>)

Mary Zimmerman discussing *The Arabian Nights*:

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw_DdLtCm3Q)

Goals and Rubrics

Permission Slip

Some assignments we will complete during this unit ask you to reflect on your personal experiences. If you or your caregivers are uncomfortable with or opposed to this practice, I will be happy to meet with you and/or them to arrange alternative assignments. Please review the assignments and accompanying rubrics with your caregivers. If they sign this permission slip, you will be expected to complete all assignments as outlined below. If you become uncomfortable at a later point, let me know, and we can make adaptations then. Remember, you control what you write and don't write.

I, _____, caregiver of _____, acknowledge that my student will be asked to engage in reflective writing as part of Mr. Schulze's English 10 course. At this time, I do not foresee having any objection to the assignments and agree to contact Mr. Schulze directly if one arises.

Signature _____

(Adapted from: Galloway, Kelly. (2010). Am I a "Weapon of Massive Consumption"? : Learning to Fire the Canon. Retrieved from:
http://smago.coe.uga.edu/VirtualLibrary/Galloway_2010.pdf)

Assignment Weighting

The assignments for this unit carry the following weight in your total unit grade:

- Journal Entries _____ 30%
- Multi-Genre Project _____ 30%
- Extended Definition Assignment _____ 30%
- In-Class Discussion & Participation _____ 10%

Journal Entries

Approximately two times a week, I will give you journal assignments as a way to get you to reflect on our class discussions, readings, and/or your personal experiences with comedy, humor, and laughter. You will have 15 minutes at the beginning of class to write your entries. Keep in mind:

- One purpose of these journal assignments is to get you thinking about ideas you want to bring up in small group or whole-class discussions. Be sure to write about things you feel comfortable sharing with your peers.

- One goal of these journals is to give you time to flesh out and work through your ideas about comedy, humor, and laughter. I am much more interested in the quality and thoughtfulness of your ideas than I am with grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Be sure to include effective details.
- These journals are intended to help you generate ideas for other assignments in this unit including the Multi-Genre Project and the Extended Definition Assignment.
- Lengthwise, aim for one full handwritten page.
- I will collect and read the journals at the end of each week.

Journal Entries Assessment

At the end of each week, I will read your journals and grade them on the basis of completion. Your entries help me gauge where both individuals and the class as a whole are in regards to our inquiry into comedy, humor, and laughter. Reading them also gives me a chance to give you written feedback on your ideas.

Multi-Genre Project

Throughout the course of this unit, you have been exploring what comedy, humor and laughter mean for you, for others, and for different communities and cultures. To show what you have learned through your engagement with our guiding questions (*What is comedy? What is humor? What is laughter?*) thus far, create an interpretive text in any form of your choice. Possibilities include but are not limited to the following: a collage, a painting, a poem or sequence of poems, a piece of music, a performance piece, or a sculpture. You also might consider: writing a review of your favorite comedic book, movie, or television show, producing a guidebook to your favorite comedic book, movie, or television show, a letter to an author, producer, actor, or comedian that explains your reactions to his/her work, creating a humorous children's book, drafting and drawing your own comic strip, writing and performing your own stand-up comedy routine. The possibilities are vast—be creative, use your imagination, and don't hesitate to take risks! Keep the following in mind as you produce your text:

- You may produce your text individually or in a group of any size up to 4.
- You will have 2 class periods in which to work on your text. Any additional work must be done outside of class.
- Although I want the main focus of your texts to be on what comedy, humor, and laughter mean to you, another goal of this assignment is to practice research skills. Therefore, in order to supplement your personal reflections,

this project requires that you consult and reference **at least 2 relevant sources**. We will discuss how you might incorporate your sources in our conference together.

- You must prepare a **3 to 5 minute presentation** to go along with your text. In your presentation, you will be expected to explain your text's significance and how it represents your evolving views on comedy, humor, and laughter. Accommodations will be made for any individuals or groups whose interpretive texts involve a performance of any sort. In that case, you will be given time to perform your piece first and afterwards to explain its significance and how it represents your evolving stance.
- After your presentation, I will ask you to fill out a **self-evaluation**. In the self-evaluation, you will be asked to describe the process you went through to create your interpretive text, to reflect on what you think you did well, to reflect on what you wish you had done differently, and to give me feedback about what you liked or did not like about this assignment.
- I will ask you to share your working idea for your interpretive text with me in a brief conference towards the beginning of this project. This conference is my way of ensuring that you are thinking seriously about your text early on the process. When we meet, I expect you to be able to explain your ideas, how you plan to translate those ideas in your interpretive text, and how your ideas reflect your evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. Be ready to share your two sources as well. Also, feel free to use our conference as an opportunity to bring up any lingering questions you might have about this project.

(Adapted and retrieved from: Smagorinsky, Peter. 2008. *Teaching English by Design*. 90-95.)

Multi-Genre Project Rubric

Interpretive texts will be assessed based on the following criteria: creativity, presentation (which includes two aspects: explanation of significance and how the text represents the student's evolving views), the self-evaluation, and sources. Students will be scored according on a scale of A-F, A being the best possible score.

Interpretive texts that meet the following criteria will receive an A:

1. *Creativity*: The text clearly shows that the student has put sufficient time, energy, and into producing it. Imagination and originality are evident throughout.
2. *Presentation*: The student has prepared a clear and appropriate presentation that allows his/her peers to truly experience and engage with his/her text.

- i. *Explanation of Significance*: The student clearly explains the significance of his/her text to class. The student addresses all elements of the piece in order to create a well-rounded and full sense of its significance for his/her peers.
 - ii. *How the text represents the student's evolving views*: The student clearly connects his/her text's significance to his/her evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. The student clearly analyzes and synthesizes the details and significance of his/her text in light of his/her evolving views.
3. *Self-evaluation*: The student demonstrates a clear effort to evaluate his/her efforts and the project as a whole. Answers are thoughtful and written in complete sentences.
4. *Sources*: Student references at least two sources. Student uses sources interestingly and effectively in relation to his/her text.

Interpretive texts that meet the following criteria will receive a B:

1. *Creativity*: The text clearly shows that the student has put sufficient time, energy, and into producing it. Imagination and originality are mostly evident throughout.
2. *Presentation*: The student has prepared a clear and appropriate presentation that allows his/her peers to truly experience and engage with his/her text.
 - i. *Explanation of Significance*: The student clearly explains the significance of his/her text to class. The student addresses most of the various elements of the piece in order to create a mostly well-rounded and full sense of its significance for his/her peers.
 - ii. *How the text represents the student's evolving views*: For the most part, the student connects his/her text's significance to his/her evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. For the most part, the student analyzes and synthesizes the details and significance of his/her text in light of his/her evolving views.
3. *Self-evaluation*: The student demonstrates a clear effort to evaluate his/her efforts and the project as a whole. Answers are thoughtful and written in complete sentences.
4. *Sources*: Student references at least two sources. Student uses sources interestingly and effectively in relation to his/her text.

Interpretive texts that meet the following criteria will receive a C:

1. *Creativity*: The text adequately shows that the student has put sufficient time, energy, and into producing it. Imagination and originality are adequately evident throughout.
2. *Presentation*: The student has prepared an adequate and appropriate presentation that allows his/her peers to truly experience and engage with his/her text.

- i. *Explanation of Significance:* The student partially explains the significance of his/her text to class. The student addresses some, but not all, the various elements of the piece in order to create a well-rounded and full sense of its significance for his/her peers.
 - ii. *How the text represents the student's evolving views:* The student partially connects his/her text's significance to his/her evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. The student partially analyzes and synthesizes the details and significance of his/her text in light of his/her evolving views.
3. *Self-evaluation:* The student demonstrates an adequate effort to evaluate his/her efforts and the project as a whole. Answers show some thought and are mostly written in complete sentences.
4. *Sources:* Student references at least two sources. It is not entirely clear how the sources are related to his/her text.

Interpretive texts that meet the following criteria will receive a D:

1. *Creativity:* The text partially shows that the student has put sufficient time, energy, and into producing it. Imagination and originality are minimally evident throughout.
2. *Presentation:* The student has prepared a presentation that allows his/her peers to truly experience and engage with his/her text.
 - i. *Explanation of Significance:* The student minimally explains the significance of his/her text to class. The student addresses a few of the various elements of the piece in order to create a well-rounded and full sense of its significance for his/her peers.
 - ii. *How the text represents the student's evolving views:* The student minimally connects his/her text's significance to his/her evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. The student minimally analyzes and synthesizes the details and significance of his/her text in light of his/her evolving views.
3. *Self-evaluation:* The student demonstrates a minimal effort to evaluate his/her efforts and the project as a whole. Answers show little thought and many are not written in complete sentences.
4. *Sources:* Student references at least one source. It is not entirely clear how the source is related to his/her text.

Interpretive texts that meet the following criteria will receive an F:

1. *Creativity:* The text does not show that the student has put sufficient time, energy, and into producing it. Imagination and originality are lacking throughout.
2. *Presentation:* The student did not prepare a presentation that allows his/her peers to truly experience and engage with his/her text.
 - i. *Explanation of Significance:* The student does not explain the significance of his/her text to class. The student does not address the

- various elements of the piece in order to create a well-rounded and full sense of its significance for his/her peers.
- ii. *How the text represents the student's evolving views*: The student does not connect his/her text's significance to his/her evolving views about comedy, humor, and laughter. The student does not analyze and synthesize the details and significance of his/her text in light of his/her evolving views.
 3. *Self-evaluation*: The student does not make an effort to evaluate his/her efforts and the project as a whole.
 4. *Sources*: Student does not reference any sources.

Extended Definition Assignment

Throughout the unit we have considered what makes something funny, what purposes comedy serves, and what makes us laugh. We have explored humor in a variety of situations, using examples from popular culture, from your personal experiences and observations, and from literature. In some cases, there has been disagreement about what counts as comedy and humor. What might be funny to one person might not be funny to another. Your task is to write an extended definition of comedy. To do so, include the following:

- A general introduction in which you provide an overview for your definition.
- A set of criteria or rules that clearly state what comedy is and what it is not.
- For each criterion, an example from literature, current events, popular culture, or your personal experiences that illustrates the rule at work; at least one of your examples must come from literature studied in class.
- For each criterion, a counterexample from literature, current events, popular culture, or your personal experiences that appears to meet the conditions of the rule yet that lacks some essential ingredient; at least one of your counterexamples must come from the literature studied in class.
- For each example and counterexample, a warrant that clearly explains why the rule is or is not being met.
- For your whole argument, a counterargument expressing the viewpoint of someone who might disagree with you.
- For the counterargument, a rebuttal in which you defend your position.
- Conventional grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage throughout your essay.

- Evidence of having written at least one rough draft that has been submitted for peer evaluation.

When choosing your examples, please consider the following requirements:

- **At least one of your examples has to draw on evidence from Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*.** In order to do this, you will want to consider how the play's events, themes, characters, structure, tone, point of view, setting and scene, stage directions, and dialogue contribute to what makes your example comedic or humorous. You will need to cite the play as one of your sources.
- For your other examples, you are free to draw on any evidence you deem appropriate and effective. Be sure and cite any examples or ideas that you obtain from other media sources. You don't need to cite your personal experiences and stories.

Extended Definition Assignment Rubric

Your extended definition will be assessed based on the following categories: introductory paragraph, criteria, examples, contrasting examples, warrants, conclusion, form, and mechanics, spelling, grammar, & usage. Students will be scored according on a scale of A-F, A being the best possible score.

Extended definitions that meet the following criteria will receive an A:

1. *Introductory Paragraph*: The writer clearly identifies the topic of the paper and summarizes the criteria in the definition.
2. *Criteria*: Each criterion is worded so that the reader clearly understands what is and what is not included in the definition.
3. *Examples*: Each example is explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
4. *Contrasting Examples*: Each contrasting example is explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
5. *Warrants*: The writer clearly explains how each example and contrasting example illustrates the criteria to which is it related.
6. *Conclusion*: The conclusion summarizes the definition and extends it to provide a new insight based on the thinking that has gone into the definition.
7. *Form*: The writer's introduction, each criterion, and conclusion are separated into different paragraphs.
8. *Mechanics, Spelling, Grammar, Usage*: For the most part, the writing is clear and free of problems.

Extended definitions that meet the following criteria will receive a B:

1. *Introductory Paragraph*: The writer identifies the topic and summarizes the criteria, but one or the other lacks clarity.
2. *Criteria*: Most, but not all, the criteria are worded so that the reader clearly understands what is and what is not included in the definition.
3. *Examples*: Most, but not all, criteria are explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
4. *Contrasting Examples*: Most, but not all, contrasting examples are explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
5. *Warrants*: The writer explains how most examples and contrasting examples illustrate the criteria to which they are related.
6. *Conclusion*: The conclusion summarizes the definition and but does little to extend it to provide a new insight based on the thinking that has gone into the definition.
7. *Form*: The writer's introduction, each criterion, and conclusion are separated into different paragraphs.
8. *Mechanics, Spelling, Grammar, Usage*: For the most part, the writing is clear and free of problems.

Extended definitions that meet the following criteria will receive a C:

1. *Introductory Paragraph*: The writer identifies the topic and summarizes the criteria, but both explanations are sketchy and/or worded unclearly.
2. *Criteria*: Some, but not all, the criteria are worded so that the reader clearly understands what is and what is not included in the definition.
3. *Examples*: Some, but not all, criteria are explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
4. *Contrasting Examples*: Some, but not all, contrasting examples are explained in sufficient detail so that the reader clearly sees how it supports the criterion.
5. *Warrants*: The writer explains how some examples and contrasting examples illustrate the criteria to which they are related.
6. *Conclusion*: The conclusion summarizes the definition and but does not extend it to provide a new insight based on the thinking that has gone into the definition.
7. *Form*: The writer's introduction, each criterion, and conclusion are separated into different paragraphs.
8. *Mechanics, Spelling, Grammar, Usage*: The writing includes some problems that impede the reader's effort to understand what the writer is saying.

Extended definitions that meet the following criteria will receive a D:

1. *Introductory Paragraph*: The writer includes the opening paragraph but does not clearly explain the topic or the criteria.

2. *Criteria*: The writer makes an effort at writing criteria, but wording makes it difficult to understand what is included in the definition and what is not.
3. *Examples*: The writer provides examples, but it's not clear how they are related to the criteria.
4. *Contrasting Examples*: The writer provides contrasting examples, but it's not clear how they are related to the criteria.
5. *Warrants*: The writer makes an effort to relate the examples and contrasting examples to the criteria, but this relation is not clear to the reader.
6. *Conclusion*: The conclusion does not clearly summarize or extend the definition.
7. *Form*: The writing is all in one paragraph, or the divisions appear arbitrary.
8. *Mechanics, Spelling, Grammar, Usage*: The writing includes many problems that impede the reader's effort to understand what the writer is saying.

Extended definitions that meet the following criteria will receive an F:

1. *Introductory Paragraph*: There is no introduction.
2. *Criteria*: There are few or no criteria.
3. *Examples*: There are few or no examples.
4. *Contrasting Examples*: There are few or no examples.
5. *Warrants*: There are few or no warrants.
6. *Conclusion*: There is no conclusion.
7. *Form*: The writing is all in one paragraph, or the divisions appear arbitrary.
8. *Mechanics, Spelling, Grammar, Usage*: The writing includes many problems that impede the reader's effort to understand what the writer is saying.

(Retrieved from: Smagorinsky, Peter. 2008. *Teaching English by Design*. 207-208.)

In-Class Discussion & Participation

I hope that as you enter into discussions with your peers throughout the course of this unit you will develop your ability to articulate your own ideas and perspectives about comedy, humor, and laughter. I hope that as you speak and listen you make an effort to engage with others' perspectives that are different from your own. My hope is that through discussion you will not only become better speakers and listeners, but better thinkers, readers, and writers too. As you go about participating, please keep the following in mind:

- If you are worried about speaking in front of the entire class during whole class discussions, you will frequently have the chance to speak during small group activities. I want to encourage you to speak up whenever possible, but I understand if you choose not to speak on a daily basis. I do, however, always expect you to be engaged with and involved in the activity or discussion at hand.

- As you participate collaboratively in groups, I expect you to be respectful of others' ideas and perspectives at all times. Please refer to the "Guidelines for Discussion" which we negotiated together during the first weeks of the class.
- I encourage you to share your reflections on your personal experiences and your reactions to literature and/or popular culture. I really love to hear your perspectives so don't hesitate to contribute!

In-Class Discussion & Participation Rubric

Here is our usual discussion and participation as listed in the course syllabus, reprinted here for your convenience and review.

Grade	4	3	2	1	0
In-Class Discussion	Student is always actively engaged in class discussion both as a speaker and a listener.	Student is frequently engaged in class discussion both as a speaker and a listener.	Student is sometimes engaged in class discussion both as a speaker and a listener.	Student is infrequently engaged in class discussion both as a speaker and a listener.	Student shows no sign of engagement as a speaker or a listener.
In-Class Activities	Student contributes thoughtfully during in-class activities.	Student contributes fairly thoughtfully during in-class activities.	Student contributes thoughtfully on occasion during in-class activities.	Student rarely contributes thoughtfully during in-class activities.	Student does not contribute thoughtfully during in-class activities.

Reading Schedule

Students will begin reading Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights* on Wednesday (Day 18) and finish reading by Monday (Day 26). In order to finish by Monday (Day 26), students are encouraged to use the following reading schedule.

Read the following pages each night:

Wednesday (Day 18): p. 3-25

Thursday (Day 19): p. 25-38

Friday (Day 20) through Monday (Day 21): p. 39-74

Tuesday (Day 22): p. 75-92

Wednesday (Day 23): p. 93-109

Thursday (Day 24): p. 110-122

Friday (Day 25): p. 122-131

How much lies in Laughter: the cipher-key, wherewith we decipher the whole man!
--Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, p. 26

Daily Lesson Plans

Six Week Unit; General 10th grade; 50 minute classes.

Week 1

Day 1 (Monday):

What's So Funny? Getting Ourselves Thinking About Comedy, Humor, and Laughter

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

5 minutes: Free Association Activity: Teacher-Give students a blank sheet of copy paper and ask students to write the words *comedy*, *humor*, and *laughter* anywhere on it. Then, ask students to spend a few minutes writing as many definitions, connotations, allusions, metaphors, associations and the like to the words *comedy*, *humor*, and *laughter*.

10 minutes: Free Association Activity, cont'd: Have students get into pairs and share their free associations with one another. Have them think about the following questions as they share—provide them in a verbal as well as visual format.

Are there any similarities between your free associations? Any differences? Any patterns? Any surprises? Are any of your partner's associations new and/or unusual to you?

While sharing, have students write down at least one thing that her/his partner shared about her/his associations to comedy, humor, and laughter that both partners would feel comfortable sharing with the class as a whole.

10 minutes: Whole Class Discussion: Ask each student to share at least one of her/his partner's associations.

15 minutes: Show the 1966 Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoon *Sugar and Spies*: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcR6Uw2UL7c>). While viewing, tell students to write down at least one description of something they notice in the cartoon that pertains to comedy, humor, or laughter. Now, play the cartoon a second time. This time, have students think about the description they wrote down and try to write a definition of comedy, humor, or laughter that follows from the description. For example, around 50 seconds into the cartoon, Wile E. Coyote gets hit in the face by a suitcase flung out a moving car. So, the description would be: "Wile E. Coyote gets hit in the face by a suitcase flung out a moving car." One

definition that might follow from that description is that “It’s funny when something unexpected happens, like a suitcase hitting a character in the face out of nowhere.”

5 minutes: Whole Class Discussion: Have students react to *Sugar and Spies*. Ask: Did you find this funny? Did any of these associations you or others made come up in the cartoon in any way? Afterwards, introduce the unit’s driving questions—What is comedy? What is humor? What is laughter?

Day 2 (Tuesday):
Approaches to Understanding Humor

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

15 minutes: Teacher-Hand out the journal assignment.

Journal #1: Pick one of your favorite TV shows, movies, videos, or cartoons that you find especially funny. Why do you enjoy watching it? What about it makes you laugh? Be sure to provide specific details and examples.

15 minutes: Pass out the handout “Approaches to Understanding Humor” (see next pages) and have students read it. (Something to mention: This list of “Approaches” is by no means holistic or complete—encourage students to add new approaches, understandings, and/or revisions to the list throughout the unit.) Ask students to continue to think about their favorite cartoon, movie, video or TV show. Ask: Can you identify any of these approaches to humor in your favorites? Have students focus on a particular scene and write a brief paragraph about how one or more of these elements is/are at work in that scene.

Approaches to Understanding Humor

Incongruity: Have you ever laughed because something seems strange, out of place, unexpected, absurd, contradictory, understated, exaggerated, surprising, or completely unrealistic? If so, you've experienced incongruity in action.

Here's a good example:



(<http://drawthelinemidwest.org/ohio/transparency-report/>)

Word associations: incongruence, incongruent, incongruous

Superiority: Do you agree or disagree with the following? "Everything is funny as long as it's happening to someone else!" (Mark Twain) If you've ever laughed at someone you see suddenly trip and fall, then you've experienced superiority at work. Next time you find yourself laughing at someone else's expense, ask yourself: Would this be funny if it had happened in the same way to me?

Here's a good example:



(<http://aguiala.deviantart.com/art/Calvin-and-Hobbes-Crash-153713806>)

Word associations: superior

Relief: Have you ever laughed because you felt nervous, awkward, or uncomfortable? If so, you've experienced relief in action. Humor can relieve

pressure in tense social situations.

Here's an example: Uncomfortable?



(<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/237951.Laughter>)

Word associations: release; I'm so *relieved*

Play: Are you ticklish? If someone were to start tickling your feet right now, would you laugh? If so, you intimately understand how laughter can be a form of play. Laughing in play is non-serious in nature. Have you ever laughed at something someone said or did simply because you liked that person and not because what he or she said or did was truly funny? Once again, if you have, you have experienced humor as play firsthand. Laughing in play is a way to show approval.

Here's an example:



(<http://psychroaches.blogspot.com/2012/09/judge-lets-gorsky-off-hook-in-risperdal.html>)

Word Associations: playful

15 minutes: Small Group Activity: Have students bring their handouts and get into groups of two or three. In groups, have students choose one of the four approaches to understanding humor presented in the handout and ask them to produce some sort of text that demonstrates their understanding of the concept in action. Tell students they may want to draw a cartoon, write a story, or act out a scenario. They will have until the end of class today and ten minutes at the beginning of class tomorrow to produce their texts.

**Day 3 (Wednesday):
What Do You Find Funny?**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

10 minutes: Small Group Activity, cont'd: Have students put final touches on their texts from the previous day.

30 minutes: Ask students to share their texts with the class and then discuss their choices and procedures.

5 minutes: Whole class discussion: Teacher: Explain that the “Approaches to Understanding Humor” handout proposes only four approaches to understanding humor. After a couple days of thinking more deeply about comedy, humor, and laughter, are there more approaches? Are there varieties of humor not represented by the four on the handout?

**Day 4 (Thursday):
Can School Be Funny?**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Teacher-Hand out journal assignment.

Journal #2: Scenario. Your principal has spoken with me recently about showing you the Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoon *Sugar and Spies*. S/he believes that watching funny cartoons in school is poor way to spend class time. As a matter of fact, s/he has decided that from now on we can only watch serious videos in class. How do you feel about not being able to watch funny videos in school? Can something be both funny and serious? Can something be both funny and educational? Write a letter to the principal explaining why you either agree or disagree with her/his decision to eliminate funny videos from our school. Be sure to defend your position with specific details and examples of why humor is or is not appropriate in school.

25 minutes: Introduction to the Multi-Genre Project: Teacher-Hand out Multi-Genre Project directions and rubric (see Goals and Rubrics section). Explain the project, give students time to ask questions, and then offer clarifications. Encourage

students to focus on a specific person or text that informs their own views on what comedy, humor, and laughter are. Time permitting: Discuss how and where to find appropriate sources.

**Day 5 (Friday):
Genres of Comedy, Humor, and Laughter**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

15 minutes: Teacher-Hand out the journal prompt.

Journal #3: Yesterday, we discussed your upcoming Multi-Genre Project. What are you thinking about for your project? What topic do you want to focus on? How is that topic related to your evolving views of comedy, humor, and laughter? What text/product do you envision yourself creating? Your journal may include words, drawing, shapes, and symbols. Don't worry if about your journal being superbly organized and orderly. This is your chance to play with ideas and simply write what's on your mind.

10 minutes: Small Group Activity: Have students get into groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to bring their journals. Tell them: Your task is to share your working idea for your Mutli-Genre Project with the other members of your group. Ask this question to prompt discussion: How can you best represent your evolving views of comedy, humor, and laughter?

10 minutes: Whole Class Discussion: Teacher-Ask students to share their working ideas with the class as a whole. To prompt discussion, ask students: What makes a successful Multi-Genre Project?

10 minutes: Multi-Genre Project Groups: Facilitate the division of the class into groups of students with similar interests. These groups will be the groups within which students will produce their Multi-Genre Projects. Encourage groups to be of no more than 4 students each (if possible). Groups of 1 are perfectly acceptable.

End of class reminder (Write this somewhere prominent and visible!):

- Topic Proposals for Multi-Genre Project due Wednesday (Day 8, Week 2).
- Conferences Wednesday and Thursday (Days 8 & 9, Week 2)—Bring sources!
- Culminating product due Friday (Day 15, Week 3).

Week 2

**Day 6 (Monday):
Laughter: A Science?**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

25 minutes: 2x2x2 Activity: Teacher-Hand out copies of the chapter one of Robert Provine's *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. While reading, have students write down *two* quotes, *two* comments, and *two* questions in reaction to the chapter.

15 minutes: Small Group Discussion: In small groups of 3 or 4, have students share their quotes, comments, and questions. Ask: What connections can you make between your 2x2x2 and others' 2x2x2s?

5 minutes: Whole class wrap-up. Questions? Concerns? Patterns?

Day 7 (Tuesday):

OPTION 1: Comedy and Cartoons

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Magazine & Newspaper Search: Teacher- Provide students with stacks of newspapers and magazines, a blank sheet of poster board, and tape. In groups of 3 or 4, have students find examples of three of the four "Approaches to Understanding Humor" in comics they find as they search. Tell students to tear out the comics and tape them to the poster. Below each of the three comics, students will need to write an explanation of why the cartoon they chose embodies a certain approach to humor. In addition to these 3, students will find one comic that they find humorous but cannot be explained by one of the four approaches outlined in the handout.

15 minutes: Have each group share one of their comics with the class. Have students summarize the comic (as it might be too small for everyone in the class to see/read) and explain how their choice is an example of an approach to humor.

If there is any extra time, ask students about the comics they chose that could not be explained by one of the approaches to humor on the handout. Ask: Can any of your choices help us move toward articulating a new approach to humor? Are we ready to add any new approaches to our "Approaches to Understanding Humor" handout?

OPTION 2: Multi-Genre Project Workshop, Day #1½

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Have students work on their Multi-Genre Projects in groups. Circulate and help students find sources and make plans. Be sure to address lingering questions and concerns.

Remind students: This is intended to be a fun, exploratory project. These Multi-Genre texts can take any form you want them to as long as you can relate your

product to your evolving understanding of comedy, humor, and/or laughter in your presentation.

**Day 8 (Wednesday):
Multi-Genre Project Workshop, Day #1**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Students work on their Multi-Genre Projects. Teacher circulates and conferences with students about their projects.

Remind students: This is intended to be a fun, exploratory project. These Multi-Genre texts can take any form you want them to as long as you can relate your product to your evolving understanding of comedy, humor, and/or laughter in your presentation.

**Day 9 (Thursday):
Multi-Genre Project Workshop, Day #2**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Students work on their Multi-Genre Projects. Teacher circulates and conferences with students about their projects.

Remind students: This is intended to be a fun, exploratory project. These Multi-Genre texts can take any form you want them to as long as you can relate your product to your evolving understanding of comedy, humor, and/or laughter in your presentation.

**Day 10 (Friday):
Humor and Play**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Teacher-Hand out copies of the journal prompt and copies of Lucille Clifton's "Ode to My Hips."

Journal #4: Read Lucille Clifton's "Ode to My Hips." Now, choose a part of the body and write a poem about it. Rule of thumb: If you wouldn't want to discuss the body part you've chosen with someone else's grandmother, then don't pick it.

Ode to My Hips by Lucille Clifton

Look out boy
these hips are coming through!
These hips'll knock you off your feet
if you don't make room for them to move.
These hips sway
These hips sashay
These ain't no size 3 1/2 slim Kate Moss
teenage boy hypocritical hips-
These hips are woman hips!
These hips are wide
These hips hypnotize
These hips fill a skirt
the way the wind fills a sail.
These hips havechutzpah,
they think they can change the whole world!
When I take these hips out
for a walk on the street
and the sun is shining
and my bones are gleaming
I place my hands on these two hips
and let them speak the truth.

The poem can also be found here:

<http://www.flatheadreservation.org/images/phs/poems/Ode%20to%20my%20hips-Lucille%20Clifton.pdf>

20 minutes: Ask students share their poems with the class.

5 minutes: Whole class discussion: Ask students: How is the human body a source of comedy, humor, and laughter?

Week 3

Day 11 (Monday): Quixotic Humor

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

5 minutes: Teacher- Introduce Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: "Don Quixote is a 50 year old man who, due to excessive time spent reading (and living in the world of) romance novels, lost his mental faculties, dubbed himself a knight, and set out in search of adventure. . . ."

40 minutes: Don Quixote Skits: Hand out copies of 6 short episodes from *Don Quixote*. In small groups of 3 or 4, have students read and begin to discuss their episodes. Tell students: Tomorrow, each group will adapt their episode into a short skit. Afterwards, each group will summarize their episode and explain how they chose to incorporate comedy, humor, and/or laughter into their skits.

Group 1: Chapter III: Wherein is related the droll way in which Don Quixote had himself dubbed a knight

Group 2: Chapter IV: Of what happened to our knight when he left the inn

Group 3: Chapter V: In which the narrative of our knight's mishap is continued

Group 4: Chapter VI: Of the diverting and important scrutiny which the curate and the barber made in the library of our ingenious gentleman

Group 5: Chapter VII: Of the second sally of our worthy knight Don Quixote of La Mancha

Group 6: Chapter VIII: Of the good fortune which the valiant Don Quixote had in the terrible and undreamt-of adventure of the windmills, with other occurrences worthy to be fitly recorded

The full text of *Don Quixote* can be found here:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/996/pg996.html>

Day 12 (Tuesday): Humor and Incongruity

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

15 minutes: Have students reconvene their groups from yesterday and make final preparations for their skits.

30 minutes: Don Quixote Skits, cont'd: Have groups present. Ask groups to first present, then to summarize the episode they were given, and finally to explain how they chose to incorporate comedy, humor, and/or laughter.

Day 13 (Wednesday): Trickster Humor

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Defining a Trickster: With their "Approaches to Understanding Humor" handout close by, have students read one of the following American Indian trickster stories and have students create a definition of a trickster that can be supported with evidence from their story. Students will share the events of their story and their definitions tomorrow during class.

From Erdoes and Ortiz's *American Indian Trickster Tales*:

Groups 1 & 2: "How Locust Tricked Coyote" {Zuni} (p. 29-32)
Groups 3 & 4: "He Sure Was a Good Shot" {Cheyenne} (p. 151-152)
Groups 5 & 6: "Don't Believe What People Tell You" {San Ildefonso or San Juan} (p. 183)
Groups 7 & 8: "A Lousy Fisherman" {Haida} (p. 258-259)

**Day 14 (Thursday):
Humor and Superiority**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

10 minutes: Students meet briefly in their small groups and tie up any loose ends to their story recaps and definitions.

35 minutes: Students share their stories and definitions with the class.

*Activities in the days and weeks that follow pertaining to scaffolding the extended definition assignment are directly lifted from Peter Smagorinsky's *Teaching Students to Write Essays That Define* (2011).

**Day 15 (Friday):
Introducing Extended Definitions**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

5 minutes: Teacher- Review "Approaches to Understanding Humor" handout. Encourage students to propose new approaches, new understandings, and new adjustments to our working list.

25 minutes: Gateway Activity: Defining a Hero: Give students the criteria for the Carnegie Hero Award. Included in this handout is the story of Curtis Dawson, from Astoria, Oregon, who rescues a tugboat captain whose boat capsized while towing a barge. (Dawson won the award, but you should tell students only that he is a candidate for receiving it.)

Whole-class Discussion: Have students determine whether or not Dawson meets each of the criteria for the award, citing evidence from the information provided. Encourage students to go back to the information to find evidence and provide warrants.

The Carnegie Hero Award

Founded in 1904, the Carnegie Hero Award is awarded by the Carnegie Hero Fund

Commission to “a civilian who voluntarily risks his or her own life, knowingly, to an extraordinary degree while saving or attempting to save the life of another person.”

The criteria for the award are:

- The person being rescued must clearly be in danger of losing his or her life.
- The rescue must be one in which no measure of responsibility exists between the rescuer and the rescued.
- The recipient of the award must be a civilian acting voluntarily (not on active duty in the armed services or on a police or firefighting force).
- Those whose regular jobs require them to perform such acts are not eligible unless the rescues are clearly beyond the line of duty.
- A person is not eligible if he or she is saving the life of an immediate family member, except in cases of outstanding heroism where the rescuer loses his or her life or is severely injured.
- The rescuer must risk his or her own life to an extraordinary degree.
- The rescuer must comprehend the risks involved (not be too young or otherwise unable to understand the potential consequences).

Directions: Read the following case and decide whether you think Curtis Dawson fulfills the criteria for the Carnegie Hero Award. Provide specific evidence to support your viewpoint.

Curtis Dawson helped to rescue David M. Schmelzer from drowning, Astoria, Oregon, December 3, 2005. Schmelzer, 67, was the captain of a tugboat that was towing a barge on the Columbia River at night. The tugboat capsized in the swift ebb-tide current and floated upside down and partially submerged. Dawson, 47, assistant engineer, was working as a deckhand on the barge and witnessed the accident. Minutes later, he saw Schmelzer, unconscious, float toward the surface of the water alongside the barge. Although both the barge and the tugboat were then adrift, Dawson, fully attired, jumped five feet down into the river, despite the coldness of the water and limited visibility in the darkness. He swam to Schmelzer, grasped his jacket, and pulled his head above water. Realizing that they were being carried away from the barge, Dawson started to swim back to it, Schmelzer in tow. A deckhand threw a rope to Dawson and pulled the men to the side of the barge. With another man holding him, the deckhand leaned over the side of the barge, grasped Schmelzer, and with others worked with Dawson for several minutes to lift him to the barge deck. Cold and becoming numb, Dawson climbed and was aided from the water back to the deck. A bar pilot helicopter responded soon and lowered a sling that was used to lift Schmelzer from the water. He was taken ashore and then to the hospital, where he was admitted for treatment. Dawson also was taken to the hospital, where he was treated for cold-water immersion. Both men recovered.

During the discussion, have students apply specific defining criteria to an extended example and provide warrants to explain how specific evidence proves that certain

criteria are met. They begin to understand what defining criteria are and what applying criteria involves. Most students end up agreeing that Dawson deserves the Carnegie award.

Week 4

*Students are to begin reading Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights* the night of Wednesday (Day 18). See the reading guide provided in the Goals and Rubrics section.

Day 16 (Monday): Extended Definition: Borderline Cases

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Defining a Hero: A Borderline Case: Teacher- Hand out copies of "The Tale of Scheherazade." In small groups, have students read the story and discuss whether another potential candidate for the Carnegie Hero Award, Scheherazade, meets each criterion for the Carnegie Hero Award and why she is or is not as worthy as Curtis Dawson from Friday.

The Tale of Scheherazade

The Arabian Nights is commonly called a "frame tale" because it is a story with many more stories within it. It's a device that keeps the reader wanting more and, as you'll see in this case, the king wanting more too!

Once upon a time in a land far away, there was a king who had been so brutally betrayed by his wife that he made a promise to himself. Each night King Shahryar required his grand vizier to bring him a new bride, each night he was married, and each morning, he ordered the bride's head cut off.

This horror continued for many years until one day, the vizier's eldest daughter, Scheherazade, came to her father to ask for a rather unusual favor.

"Oh, Father," she cried, "how long will you allow this killing to go on? I think I can stop the killing. I have a favor to ask. Will you grant it to me?"

"Please, my Daughter," said her father. "I can't deny you anything that is fair. What is your favor, dear?"

Scheherazade was a very smart woman. She had read every book in the royal library. She knew the stories of kings and the works of the poets. Not only was she well-read, but also she was well-mannered, able to tell a good story, and kind-hearted.

"I would like you," Scheherazade paused, "to give me in marriage to King Shahryar. I have a plan to keep myself and the other women from being killed."

"No!" cried the vizier. "I have worked for years to keep you away from him."

"You must make me his wife," Scheherazade said. "It's the only way."

The vizier cried and begged his daughter to rethink her plan, but in the end it was of no use. At last he agreed to her wish.

The evening of the wedding, Scheherazade spoke in confidence to her sister, Dunyazad. "Pay attention to what I am going to tell you. After the wedding, I will ask the king to send for you so that we may spend my last few hours together. You must not be sleepy. Ask me to tell you a story. I will tell you a story that will save our kingdom."

Dunyazad bowed her head and agreed to this plan.

That evening King Shahryar was married to Scheherazade. When the ceremonies were complete and they were in the royal bedroom, Scheherazade dropped to her knees and began to weep.

"Oh, great and powerful King," Scheherazade said. "I have a younger sister, and I would like to say good-bye to her before I die."

The king agreed and sent for Dunyazad. The young girl sat at the foot of the bed.

"Oh, Sister," Dunyazad said, "tell me a delightful story to while away the last few hours of our waking life."

"That would please me," Scheherazade said. "If our wise king will permit me, then I will begin."

"Tell on," said the king, who for once was having trouble sleeping.

Scheherazade rejoiced, for this was part of her plan. And on this, the first night of the Thousand and One Nights, she began to tell her stories.

Source: <http://www.netplaces.com/fairy-tales/princesses-and-princes/the-tale-of-scheherazade.htm>

15 minutes: Writing Activity: After reading and discussing the case of Scheherazade in small groups, have students write a paragraph justifying whether or not Scheherazade should receive the Carnegie Hero Award.

Day 17 (Tuesday):

Extended Definition: Formulating Criteria

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

25 minutes: Learning Procedures for Formulating Criteria: Dishonesty: Teacher-hand out copies of a list of scenarios. In groups of three or four, have students discuss each scenario and develop a set of criteria for defining *dishonesty*.

Honest or Dishonest?

After discussing each of these scenarios, create a set of criteria for determining whether a person has acted *dishonestly*.

1. Alfonzo finds a twenty-dollar bill lying on the sidewalk in a residential area. No one is around at the time. Alfonzo keeps the money. Is he honest? Dishonest? Explain why.
2. Gerald finds a briefcase hidden under some bushes in a residential area. Inside the briefcase are many bundles of hundred-dollar bills. Gerald takes the briefcase home and plans to keep the money. Is he being honest? Dishonest? Explain why.
3. Adriana's neighbor gets a new hairstyle. Adriana doesn't particularly like the new look, but when her neighbor asks her opinion, she tells her, "You look very nice," because she doesn't want to hurt her feelings. Is she honest? Dishonest? Explain.
4. Sareena drove her parents' car by herself to the mall for the first time. She got a speeding ticket on the way home. When she returned home, her parents asked how everything had gone. She decided not to tell her parents about the ticket and said, "Okay; everything was fine." Is she honest? Dishonest? Explain.
5. Simon lost his copy of *The Arabian Nights* that he needed for class. His friend suggested that he go to the lost and found and look for a copy without any name in it. Simon did just that and found a book, which he then kept. Is he being honest? Dishonest? Explain.
6. Erika's friend told her that outside the cafeteria there were coolers with sodas that were free for students. Erika told several of her friends, who each went and got a soda. Erika's friend knew the sodas were not free but for a club fundraiser. Is Erika honest? Dishonest? Explain.
7. Tom's friend told him that in the school media center there were some boxes of DVDs of current movies in the back corner and that the librarian said it

was okay to take any of them he wanted. Tom went into the media center and found the boxes of new DVDs. No one was around, so he took three of them. Tom's friend made up the whole story, and the DVDs belonged to the school. Is Tom being honest? Dishonest? Explain.

8. Martina thinks the company's pens at the clothing store where she works are really cool. Without asking her boss if it's all right, she takes three of them home with her and gives two of them to her friends. Is she being honest? Dishonest? Explain.

20 minutes: Whole-class Discussion: Ask: What criteria for *dishonesty* have you arrived at through discussing each scenario?

Day 18 (Wednesday):
Extended Definition: Contrasting Examples

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

25 minutes: Creating a Contrasting Example: In pairs or individually, ask students to select a scenario from the "Honest or Dishonest?" handout and create a contrasting example for it.

20 minutes: Have each pair or individual share their contrasting example with the class, explain how it differs from the original scenario, and tell how it clarifies one of the criteria.

Day 19 (Thursday):
Extended Definition: Evaluating Criteria

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Transition Activity: Moving from Talking to Writing: Give students a few sample paragraphs for them to evaluate and eventually revise. Have students get into small groups and analyze the three paragraphs by answering the questions provided.

Paragraphs on Honesty

Directions: Read each of the three paragraphs. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What, if anything, is missing or confusing? Answer the following questions as you read each paragraph.

1. Does the paragraph present a clearly stated criterion for dishonesty? If so, what is it?

2. Does the paragraph include a specific example to illustrate or explain the criterion?
3. Does the writer explain how or why the example fulfills the criterion? Explain.
4. Does the writer include a contrasting example to set limits? Explain.
5. Choose the paragraph that is the weakest and revise it to make it more effective.

Paragraph A

Dishonesty involves twisting, distorting, or covering up the truth. For example, Sareena drove her parents' car to the mall by herself for the first time. She got a speeding ticket on the way home. When she returned home, her parents asked her how everything had gone. She decided not to tell her parents about the ticket and said, "Okay, everything was fine."

Paragraph B

What if someone tells her neighbor a "white lie" to protect her feelings? Is that being dishonest? Let's say the neighbor gets a new hairstyle that she is really excited about and the other neighbor tells her that it looks nice even though she doesn't particularly like it. It would be impolite and hurtful to say that you don't like the person's haircut. It isn't wrong to be polite.

Paragraph C

Imagine that a person finds a twenty-dollar bill lying on the sidewalk. No one is in sight. Would it be dishonest to keep the twenty-dollar bill? In this case, keeping the bill would not be dishonest. There is basically no way the person can find the owner. If he leaves the bill on the walk, it will most likely be blown away or picked up by someone else. Turning it in to the police would not accomplish anything either. The police couldn't find the owner. Dishonesty involves intentionally deceiving or cheating someone out of something, and in this case no one has been intentionally deceived or cheated. The person would have a clear conscience taking the money. If, on the other hand, the person found a bag full of thousands of dollars left in the bushes, it would be dishonest to try to keep it. It would be something a person would have to hide from others. If the police knew about it, they would require the person to turn it over to them so that they could try to find the rightful owner. If you have to hide your actions, it is a sign you're not being honest.

15 minutes: Whole-class Discussion: of students' answers to the questions, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each paragraph. Have several students volunteer to read their revised paragraphs to the class.

**Day 20 (Friday):
Multi-Genre Project Presentations**

Due: Multi-Genre Project Texts

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Have students present their Multi-Genre texts to the class.

Week 5

**Day 21 (Monday):
Extended Definition: Writing Warrants**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Learning Procedures for Providing Warrants: Teacher-Hand out the following handout that introduces warrants. As a whole class, review the procedure with three examples. Then, in small groups, have students discuss and create warrants for the ten criteria and their concomitant examples/counterexamples.

Introducing Warrants

A *warrant* is a statement that explains why a specific example provides evidence in support of a criterion or other sort of claim. Often, a warrant is introduced by words that are synonymous with *because*. These words and phrases include:

due to
for the reason that
in light of
in that
in view of the fact that
inasmuch as
owing to
since
through
whereas

Here are some ways in which you might illustrate a criterion with an

example/contrasting example and use one of these words to introduce a warrant that explains why it fulfills the criterion or does not meet the criterion. (The criteria are those required of the Carnegie Hero Award.)

Criterion: The rescuer must risk his or her own life to an extraordinary degree.

Example: Leila did not know how to swim when she jumped into the rapids to save Randy's life.

Warrant: Because Leila might have drowned by attempting to rescue Randy, and the rapids made swimming dangerous even for an experienced swimmer, Leila was heroic for jumping into the river.

Criterion: The recipient of the award must be a civilian acting voluntarily (not on active duty in the armed services or on a police or firefighting force.)

Example: Felicity, a firefighter, raced into the inferno caused by the explosion and rescued three babies and a toddler from certain death.

Warrant: Inasmuch as Felicity was an on-duty firefighter whose job required that she rescue victims, she is not eligible for the Carnegie Hero Award because she was not acting voluntarily, even if she was acting heroically.

Criterion: A person is not eligible if he or she is saving the life of an immediate family member, except in cases of outstanding heroism where the rescuer loses his or her life or is severely injured.

Example: Suzanne and her brother hated each other, but when a bus was about to run him over, Suzanne dove to knock him out of harm's way, breaking both her arms as she hit the ground.

Warrant: Since Suzanne hated her brother and should not be expected to save his life, and owing to the fact that she sustained painful although not life-threatening injuries through her action, Suzanne's saving of her brother's life does not qualify her for the Carnegie Hero Award.

Following are ten criteria, followed by an example/contrasting example. Decide whether the example fulfills the criterion or not, and then write a warrant that explains your decision.

1. *Criterion:* The person being rescued must clearly be in danger of losing his or her life.

Example/contrasting example: Fauselela's friend's infant son was kidnapped, and Fauselela drove at over 90 miles per hour to catch the kidnapper and force him to give up the child, not knowing at the time of the chase whether the kidnapper was armed.

Warrant:

2. *Criterion:* The rescue must be one in which no measure of responsibility

exists between the rescuer and the rescued.

Example/contrasting example: When Inez's boss was trapped beneath her massive oak desk following the earthquake, Inez lifted the desk and helped her out of the building, even with the threat of aftershock's present.

Warrant:

3. *Criterion:* The recipient must be a civilian acting voluntarily (not on active duty in the armed services or on a police or firefighting force).

Example/contrasting example: Preston, an off-duty volunteer firefighter, went into a burning vehicle following a car crash and rescued the injured victim from certain death.

Warrant:

4. *Criterion:* Those whose regular jobs require them to perform such acts are not eligible unless the rescues are clearly beyond the line of duty.

Example/contrasting example: Yao, a lifeguard, swam a quarter of a mile out into the ocean as a hurricane approached to rescue a boat-wreck survivor who was hanging onto a floating plank.

Warrant:

5. *Criterion:* A person is not eligible if he or she is saving the life of an immediate family member, except in cases of outstanding heroism where the rescuer loses his or her life or is severely injured.

Example/contrasting example: Juaniqua dove into the swirling waters to rescue Wags, her beloved family dog of thirteen years, drowning in the process but saving Wags' life.

Warrant:

6. *Criterion:* The rescuer must risk his or her own life to an extraordinary degree.

Example/contrasting example: When D'Andre saw a stranger climb over the fence of the lions' enclosure at the zoo, he leaped the fence, grabbed her, and dragged her back to safety before the lions noticed that she had entered the habitat.

Warrant:

7. *Criterion:* The rescuer must comprehend the risks involved (not be too young or otherwise unable to understand the potential consequences).

Example/contrasting example: When Hisako's friend Fredo said to the menacing intruder who claimed to have a gun in his pocket, "Your mama is so dumb she spent a half hour looking at orange juice box because it said 'concentrate,'" Hisako stepped between them and ordered the intruder to leave.

Warrant:

8. *Criterion:* A person is not eligible if he or she is saving the life of an immediate family member, except in cases of outstanding heroism where the rescuer loses his or her life or is severely injured.

Example/contrasting example: Pierre dove off a 100-foot cliff into the sea to rescue his drowning stepsister Porchia, hitting his head on the coral reef below and requiring reconstructive facial surgery after saving her life.

Warrant:

9. *Criterion:* The rescuer must risk his or her own life to an extraordinary degree.

Example/contrasting example: When the trapped and heavily armed bank robbers told Henrique that they would let their hostage go if he agreed to take her place, he agreed.

Warrant:

10. *Criterion:* Those whose regular jobs require them to perform such acts are not eligible unless the rescues are clearly beyond the line of duty.

Example/contrasting example: Detective Randolph, while driving to her karate class on her way home from her shift, saw a gang beating up a young man and single-handedly disarmed, disabled, and handcuffed all five of the alleged perpetrators.

Warrant:

Day 22 (Tuesday):

Extended Definition: Collaborative Writing, Round 1

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

45 minutes: Applying Knowledge of Procedures in Collaborative Writing: Ask students to get into small groups and write an extended definition of *dishonesty* using the scenarios from the “Honest or Dishonest?” handout from last Tuesday, Day 17. Give students the following format to help them structure their thinking:

- *First paragraph: introduction.* Introduce the concept/problem, explaining why it’s important to define the concept or why it is difficult in some cases to define the concept.
- *Second paragraph: first criterion.*
 - Explain the criterion as clearly as possible.
 - Give an example that fulfills the criterion.
 - Provide a warrant explaining how the example fulfills the criterion.
 - Give a contrasting example.
 - Provide a warrant explaining how the contrasting example clarifies or limits the criterion.
- *Each subsequent body paragraph.* Explain, illustrate, and warrant each additional criterion.
- *Final paragraph: conclusion.*

Day 23 (Wednesday):

Extended Definition: Comedy, Humor, and Laughter

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Teacher- Hand out the journal prompt.

Journal #5: Select a concept—*Comedy, Humor, or Laughter*—and then to begin to write scenarios that relate to the concept. This is intended to help you generate ideas for your Extended Definitions.

Teacher-Circulate, monitor progress, talk with students, and offer help.

25 minutes: Project copies of yesterday’s compositions at the front of the class. Together, students and the teacher review the criteria for an effective composition discussed last Thursday, Day 19. Then, have students determine the strengths of each composition and make suggestions for improvement.

Day 24 (Thursday):

Extended Definition: Collaborative Writing, Round 2

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Have students continue to work on their scenarios with particular emphasis on beginning to draft a set of defining criteria that stems from their scenarios. Teacher-circulate.

15 minutes: Have students get into small groups with other students working on an extended definition of the same concept. Students share their progress with each other, trade ideas, and help one another develop their sets of criteria.

Day 25 (Friday):

Humor and Relief: Introducing Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Teacher-hand out the journal prompt.

Journal #6: Scenario: Imagine that someone is holding you hostage and you cannot escape. This person gives you an ultimatum: "Tell me a story or meet your demise right here and now." What would you say? What story would tell in this life-or-death situation? Would you choose a funny or a serious story? Tell me the story you would tell to save your life. Be sure to heed this one rule: Don't bore the person threatening to off you.

10 minutes: Introduce Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*, paying special attention to its history, its largely impromptu conception (its staging and writing were an interactive, ongoing, dialogical process), and its production history.

15 minutes: Class will view two videos:

- (1) The Arabian Nights at the Western Michigan University Theater:
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuOj43TpFPU&feature=related>)
- (2) Mary Zimmerman discussing *The Arabian Nights*:
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw_DdLtCm3Q)

Whole-class Discussion: Ask: How do these videos expand your understanding of the play so far? Is this a funny play? Why or why not?

Week 6

Day 26 (Monday): Body Biographies

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Body Biography Activity: Teacher-hand out large sheets of butcher paper. Have students work in groups of 3 or 4 to create a body biography of either Scheherazade or Sharyar.

For your chosen character, your group will be creating a *body biography*—a visual and written portrait illustrating several aspects of the character’s life within the play. The body biography should:

- Review significant events, choices, and changes involving the character
- Communicate the full essence of the character by emphasizing the traits that make her/him who s/he is
- Promote discussion of the characters

The body biography should include:

- A review of significant happenings in the play
- Visual symbols
- An original text
- The character’s three most important lines from the play

15 minutes: Have students share their body biographies with class.

Adapted from Peter Smagorinsky’s *Teaching English by Design* (2008), p. 36

**Day 27 (Tuesday):
Jigsaw, Day 1**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

15 minutes: Jigsaw Activity, Part 1: Teacher-Divide the class into six groups, giving each one of the following topics to become experts on. Have groups discuss their topics in their home groups for 15 minutes with *only* the aid of the text of *The Arabian Nights*.

Journal #7: Each student will need to take notes! Tomorrow, you will leave your home group and form a new group. In that new group, you will be the expert on your particular topic, so be prepared to share your findings with your peers! You will submit these notes to me as your seventh journal entry.

Group 1: The frame tale

Group 2: The element of time

Group 3: Sympathy the Learned

Group 4: “Embodied” stories: “A Note on the Staging,” p. xvi—“These stories are embodied, ‘seen’ as well as ‘heard.’”

Group 5: The six simultaneously told stories (p. 109-122)

Group 6: Music—songs, the chorus, and musical instruments

30 minutes: Jigsaw Activity, Part 1, cont’d: Have students stay in their home groups and continue to discuss their topics. Starting now, allow students to use Internet sources to see what more they can find out about their topics. Teacher-Circulate, offer assistance, and promote on-task behavior.

**Day 28 (Wednesday):
Jigsaw, Day 2**

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

30 minutes: Jigsaw Activity, Part 2: Have students get into new groups consisting of one representative from each of yesterday’s groups. In groups, have students share their knowledge and expertise on their topics from yesterday.

10 minutes: Jigsaw Feedback Activity: Hand out the following questionnaire and ask students to spend 10 minutes responding to the questions in complete sentences.

Your Thoughts on the Jigsaw Activity

1. What, if anything, did you like about this activity?
2. If we were to do this activity again, what changes would you like to see implemented in order to make this activity more fruitful and enjoyable?
3. Did this activity help you think about comedy, humor, or laughter in a new way? If so, how? If not, what did it make you think about?
4. *Optional:* Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

5 minutes: Teacher asks how students are progressing on their Extended Definitions. Are there any questions, comments, or concerns?

Day 27 & Day 28 are adapted from Peter Smagorinsky’s *Teaching English by Design* (2008), p. 42-43

**Day 29 (Thursday):
Four Square Activity: Synthesizing *The Arabian Nights***

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Four Square Activity: Ask students to take out a piece of paper and fold it in half twice to create four rectangular squares. In the upper left-hand corner, students draw a picture that represents their understanding or depiction of *The Arabian Nights*. In the upper right-hand corner, students write an explanation of their drawing, using language they might use when talking to a friend. In the lower left-hand corner, students analyze their illustration, using language they might use when talking to a teacher. In the lower right-hand corner, students write a found poem derived from the original language of the literature. Have students produce their four squares individually.

20 minutes: In small groups of 3 or 4 students, have students share and discuss their four squares.

5 minutes: Once more, teacher asks if there are any last minute questions or concerns about the Extended Definition Assignment.

Adapted from Peter Smagorinsky's *Teaching English by Design* (2008), p. 39-40

Day 30 (Friday)

Funny (Stage) Business: One Last Look at Comedy, Humor, and Laughter

Due: Extended Definition Assignment

5 minutes: Attendance, housekeeping.

20 minutes: Teacher-hand out the journal prompt.

Journal #8: If you were to look up the word "absurd" in the dictionary, you might find something along these lines:

1. ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous<an *absurd* argument>
2. having no rational or orderly relationship to human life : meaningless <an *absurd* universe>; also : lacking order or value <an *absurd* existence>

Now, turn to pages 110-112 of *The Arabian Nights*. Re-read "Story 1: The Prince and the Tortoise." Working from the definition of "absurd" given above, write a persuasive piece arguing that this short episode either is or is not absurd. Defend your position with evidence from the text.

25 minutes: Reading Circle Activity: Have students sit in a circle. Ask students to share either a sentence or a paragraph from their Extended Definitions that they are particularly proud of or pleased with in some way. Sending off: Great job everyone.

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