

Seminar II: From the Mouth of Babes: Inappropriate Humor in Literature for Young People

ENGL 02.394.04 – SPRING 2019

Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30-10:45

Location: James

Professor: M. Earl Smith, A.A.; A.M. (he/him/his)

Contact Information: smithmar@rowan.edu, 267-721-0007

✓ Office Hours: By appointment. Please text or email to schedule.

TEXTS:

Sendak, Maurice. *In the Night Kitchen*

Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad are Friends*

Burnham, Bo. *Egghead, or: You Can't Survive on Ideas Alone*

Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic*

Mansbach, Aaron. *Go the Fuck to Sleep*

Shusterman, Neal. *The Eyes of King Midas*

Pilkey, Dav. *The Adventures of Captain Underpants #1*

Carrol, Lewis. *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*

MAD About Trump: A Brilliant Look at Our Brainless President

Yoo, David. *The Detention Club*

Course Description: From the earliest moments of our existence, we are able to express happiness, and, thus, begin our understanding of humor. Humor, in fact, is often seen as a “safe” space for children to explore themes that may otherwise be outside of their emotional level of understanding. What, however, defines the type of humor that is safe for children? Who decides when such humor is appropriate, by developmental standards? How do ideas of what it is funny change based on race, sex, creed, age, and generational demographics? How far is too far?

In this seminar, we will explore how humor for children has changed across time, demographics, and location. We will look at what is considered funny by one time’s standards, and how our evolving understanding of issues such as sexuality has pulled certain issues out of the realm of humor and into the realm of social commentary. We will see how both Horatian and Juvenalian satire play a role in humor designed for children. We’ll discuss how modes of delivery for children are often perverted to give adults a few laughs. Finally, we’ll develop topics as it pertains to humor for children and culminate the course in a 15-20-page research paper relating to the readings and discovery in class.

Content/Trigger warnings: The material presented in this course will often deal with subjects including death, suicide, cannibalism, sexuality, and politics. There will be ample profanity, and class discussions will cover all of these materials. If you need to excuse yourself at any moment, please feel free to do so.

Course Objectives:

- Read and analyze varied examples of humor in literature for young people
- Understand the complexity of how inappropriate humor functions in literature
- Become conversant in theories of humor and how they apply to literary texts
- Construct insightful interpretations of literary texts using strong textual evidence
- Engage meaningfully with published scholarship
 - find, read, and analyze relevant scholarship
 - analyze works of fiction (i.e., primary sources) in light of scholarship (i.e., secondary sources)
 - question current scholarship and take sides in scholarly debates
- Strengthen our writing skills
- Express opinions and ask questions in a group setting
- Enjoy the process of reading, discussing, thinking, and writing (i.e., have fun!)

Course requirements and grading breakdown:

- Class participation (including general discussion, asking questions, presenting examples of humor, collaborative work, pop quizzes, etc.): 10%
- Six 1-2 page reading responses (5% each): 30%
- Student Group – lead discussion: 5%
- Student Group – research presentation: 5%
- One 18-20 page interpretive research paper: 50%
 - Meeting: 5%
 - Thesis: 5%
 - Outline: 5%
 - Draft: 5%
 - Final: 30%

Grading Scale:

A = 4.0	A- = 3.7
B+ = 3.3	B = 3.0 B- = 2.7
C+ = 2.3	C = 2.0 C- = 1.7
D+ = 1.3	D = 1.0 D- = 0.7
F = 0	

Academic Integrity Policy: Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated. The English Department adheres to the following policy for cases of plagiarism:

Plagiarism consists of “copying or imitating the language, ideas and thoughts of another author and passing off the same as one’s original work” (*American College Dictionary*). It is academic dishonesty and violates the integrity of the academic process. According to Rowan University policy, students committing any act of academic dishonesty may fail the assignment and/or fail the course, at the faculty member’s discretion. All violations of Academic Integrity MUST be reported to the Provost’s office using the RAIV process. Serious cases will be brought to a hearing. In order to avoid plagiarism, students should provide appropriate documentation whenever quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or otherwise using the language or ideas of others. Multiple submission (handing in a paper written for one class to another class) is also a form of academic dishonesty and will be treated accordingly. Visit <http://www.rowan.edu/english> for more in-depth information on this topic; for University policy and procedures, visit the following website: <http://www.rowan.edu/provost/policies/AcademicIntegrity.htm>

Do not cut-and-paste. Revising another writer’s prose – even revising it substantially – is plagiarism unless you properly cite your original source.

Students have rights as well as responsibilities; if you feel you have been unjustly accused of plagiarism, there is a mechanism for addressing that in a hearing. Again, see the Provost’s website for more information.

English Department Attendance Policy: After a student has accumulated more than two weeks of absences (i.e., four 75-minute classes, two evening classes of 2 1/2 hours each, or three 2-hour summer classes), a faculty member in the English Department will evaluate whether a student’s semester grade should be lowered and will have the right to advise the student to withdraw from the course or, alternatively, to fail the student for excessive absences.

Smith’s Attendance Policy:

- You are allowed two absences; you do not need to explain these to the professor;
- if you have a medical, personal, or family emergency that prevents you from attending class, **these will not count against your allowed absences, as long as there is documented reasoning behind said absences.**
- at the end of the semester, more than 2 absences will lower your final grade one grade-level [+/-]; each subsequent absence will lower your grade another level.

Due dates: Due dates for all assignments are firm. Your grade will be lowered one grade-level (+/-) for each day late.

Course schedule:

Week One

January 22nd: Course introductions, syllabus discussion, housekeeping.

January 24th: Discussion of children's humor in other mediums.

Week Two: Is it funny, or just a commentary on social values?

January 29th: Lobel, *Frog and Toad are Friends*

January 31st: Various articles on Lobel, available on Blackboard.

Week Three: Sensual vs Sexual

February 5th: Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen*

February 7th: Commentary on *In the Night Kitchen*, available on Blackboard

Week Four: This ain't for kids!

February 12th: Mansbach, *Go the Fuck to Sleep*

February 14th: There will be no class on this day. I will be in Chattanooga, Tennessee, for a book signing. Spend the day with the one you love!

Week Five: From *Playboy* to writing for children

February 19th: Silverstein, *A Light in the Attic*, part one

February 21st: Silverstein, *A Light in the Attic*, to end

Week Six: Humor in the era of Trump

February 26th: *MAD About Trump: A Brilliant Look at Our Brainless President*

February 28th: Various pro and anti-Trump examples

Week Seven: A scorned poet emulates his heroes

March 5th: Burnham, *Egghead*

March 7th: Video: Bo Burnham, *Make Happy*

Week Eight: Down the rabbit hole

March 12th: Begin film of *Alice in Wonderland*

March 14th: Conclude film of *Alice in Wonderland*

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 18-23

Week Nine: OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

March 26th: Carrol, *Alice in Wonderland*

March 28th: Scholarship on *Alice*, available on Blackboard

Week Ten: Humor in the graphic narrative

April 2nd: Pilkey, *The Adventures of Captain Underpants #1*, to p. 60

April 4th: Pilkey, *The Adventures of Captain Underpants #1*, to end.

Week Eleven: The 90's, or, how even humor became mass-market

April 9th: Shusterman. *The Eyes of Kid Midas*, to page 88

April 11th: Shusterman. *The Eyes of Kid Midas*, to page end

Week Twelve: Did Yoo miss the point?

April 16th: Yoo, *The Detention Club*

April 18th: Interviews from Yoo, available on Blackboard (there will be no class on this day, as I will be in Nebraska for a book signing)

Week Thirteen: Groupwork!

April 23rd: Group Presentations

April 25th: Group Presentations

Week Fourteen: Writing inappropriate humor and review

April 30th: Writing inappropriate humor and the publishing business

May 2nd: Final conferences about research papers

Finals Week:

THERE IS NO IN CLASS FINAL FOR THIS COURSE. YOUR FINAL RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE SUNDAY, MAY 12TH, AT 11:59 PM.

Academic Accommodations: Your academic success is important. If you have a documented disability that may have an impact upon your work in this class, please contact me. Students must provide documentation of their disability to the Academic Success Center in order to receive official University services and accommodations. The Academic Success Center can be reached at 856-256-4234. The Center is located on the 3rd floor of Savitz Hall. The staff is available to answer questions regarding accommodations or assist you in your pursuit of accommodations. We look forward to working with you to meet your learning goals.

Academic Integrity Policy: According to Rowan University policy, students committing any act of academic dishonesty may fail the assignment and/or fail the course, at the faculty member's discretion. All violations of Academic Integrity MUST be reported to the Provost's office using the RAIV process. Serious cases will be brought to a hearing. In order to avoid plagiarism, students should provide appropriate documentation whenever quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or otherwise using the language or ideas of others. Multiple submission (handing in a paper written for one class to another class) is also a form of academic dishonesty and will be treated accordingly. For University policy and procedures, visit the following website: <http://www.rowan.edu/provost/policies/AcademicIntegrity.htm>

Do not cut and paste. Revising another writer's prose – even revising it substantially – is plagiarism unless you properly cite your original source.

Most English classes use turnitin.com to upload and/or submit papers. Such programs give faculty members a useful archive of your papers, which helps them be specific when you ask them to write you letters of recommendation. No one else can access your work. Turnitin.com's primary purpose is to check for plagiarism. The website does not make that determination itself; it shows the faculty members the correlations and lets them make the decision.

Students have rights as well as responsibilities; if you feel you have been unjustly accused of plagiarism, there is a mechanism for addressing that in a hearing. Again, see the Provost's website for more information.

Student Professionalism:

The English Department is committed to assuring that every class meeting contributes to equitable learning and scholarly inquiry for all. To that end, the Department asks all students to help create a positive classroom environment by adhering to the following guidelines of professional behavior:

- Arrive to class on time.
- Stay for the entire class; do not come and go.
- Be attentive, involved, and respectful to everyone.
- Focus on class material, rather than other coursework.
- Consider others' interpretations with an open mind.

- Contribute to discussions without interrupting others.
- Use language appropriate to a classroom setting
- Snack discreetly (if unavoidable), and do not leave trash behind.
- Avoid signaling when class time is over (i.e., packing bags, donning sunglasses).

Outside the classroom, students should:

- Use appropriate format, tone, and diction in emails.
- Keep appointments (or reschedule beforehand).
- Contact faculty before missing a class or exam.

Electronics Policy: Students are not allowed to have cell phones, tablets, or laptops out during class time, unless specifically permitted by the instructor.

Student Handbook: Students should review the University policy page:

<https://confluence.rowan.edu/display/POLICY/Home>

Student Learning Outcomes: This course fulfills the following English Department SLOs:

1. Think and write critically about literature, building arguments that are supported with textual evidence;
2. Work with the formal elements of literature (plot, setting, style, figurative language, symbols, etc.);
3. Read carefully, distinguishing between what a text states directly and what it implies;
4. Perform accurate and insightful close readings of literary texts;
5. Understand how issues of nation, culture, and social status help shape literary texts;
6. Find, evaluate, and incorporate critical sources to expand their understanding of a literary text;
7. Participate in class: speaking cogently as well as listening carefully and responding to others' ideas;
8. Demonstrate an understanding of correct spoken and written English;
9. Understand and demonstrate academic integrity.

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND DATES

See Registrar's website <http://www.rowan.edu/registrar>
for more complete information.

Withdrawals: If you decide not to take this course, you may drop it using Banner during the first few days of the term, in which case the course will not be recorded on your transcript.

After the Drop/Add period, follow the procedure and timeline – as well as locate the relevant form – for Withdrawal at <http://www.rowan.edu/provost/registrar/forms.html>. If you plan to withdraw, do so as soon as possible. If you stop attending class without officially withdrawing, you will fail the course. Also remember that you can take a course only twice. Withdrawal after the Drop/Add period constitutes one course attempt.

Withdrawal: Requires a signature from your professor; a W will be recorded on your transcript.
Late Withdrawal: Requires a signature from your professor and the Department Chairperson, Dr. Joe Coulombe. Your last date of attendance will be recorded, and you will receive either a WP (withdrawal passing) or a WF (withdrawal failing).

Hardship Withdrawal: Requires signatures from your professor, the Department Chairperson, Dr. Joe Coulombe, and the Assistant Dean of the College, Dr. Stephen Fleming. **Note**: the Dean will only approve a withdrawal for hardship circumstances beyond your control (academic failure will not warrant a withdrawal at this point).

REPEATING A COURSE

In the event that a student must or voluntarily chooses to repeat a course, the grade received for the repeated course will constitute the final grade for cumulative GPA purposes—whether the grade is higher or lower than the grade received in the original course. The original grade, although not counted in the cumulative GPA, remains on the student’s transcript. **By University policy, the same course may not be taken more than twice, including withdrawals.**

INCOMPLETES

Incompletes are given only in the event of a last-minute emergency that keeps a student from finishing a final paper or final examination. It is the student’s responsibility to arrange an incomplete with the faculty member before final grades are submitted. If you fail to turn in a final paper or final examination but haven’t talked with your professor, he or she will have the right to fail you; you will not automatically be given an incomplete. **The Incomplete will convert to an F if it is not extended or resolved.** It is the student’s responsibility to keep track of his or her Incompletes.

INCLEMENT WEATHER CLOSING

The University will remain open and classes will be held during inclement weather whenever possible. It is your decision, based on your assessment of the situation, whether or not to attend class. If you do not attend, please make arrangements with your professor as to how the missed work will be completed.

Rowan will notify the University community of a closing through the following ways:

- Rowan Mass Notification System (register)
- Rowan homepage (www.rowan.edu)
- Email
- Rowan Radio 89.7 WGLS-FM

- Dial 856-256-INFO (856.256.4636), press "1"
- Social Media

<http://www.rowan.edu/emergency/weather/weather.cfm>