

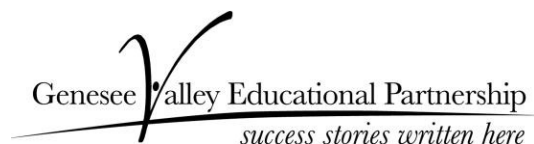


**Reading for Fun
and Understanding**

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National PASS Center

2013



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Humor

Words to know:

- ✓ humor
- ✓ irony
- ✓ comic strip
- ✓ satire
- ✓ political cartoon
- ✓ tall tale

What kinds of things do you like to do to make yourself laugh? Put a check next to the ones you do.

___ watch a funny movie

___ listen to a funny person

___ watch a funny TV show

___ tell jokes

___ read the comics

___ do word puzzles

___ read a comic book

___ do jigsaw puzzles

What kinds of things make you laugh?

Some literature is written to make people laugh. It is written to entertain and make the world a happier place through humor and games. Let's explore some types of humorous literature.



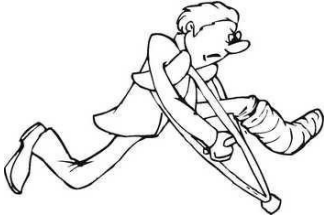
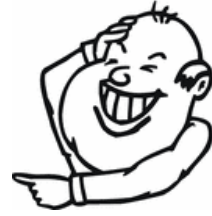
Humor in America

Telling jokes and funny stories is an old tradition in America. There are many different types of humor in literature. Here are some examples:

- Jokes about really smart people who seem to have trouble getting along in everyday life are called common sense jokes. Common sense is knowledge based on life experience rather than knowledge learned from books.
- Most people like to poke fun at relatives. Maybe they have an uncle whose nose is a little too big and has a funny sounding sneeze. Most people will laugh at a story about a funny relative.
- Tall tales often give ordinary people super-human powers, or make ordinary events seem much more amazing than they really are. Any superhero comic book is an example of this type of humorous literature.

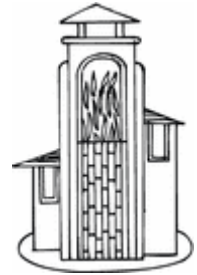


- Jokes, or tricks, played on others are used to make an audience laugh.



- Slapstick comedy includes an “Injury” such as a pie in the face or the exaggerated accident where the victim ends up with bandages and casts all over his body.

- Word jokes, or irony, in which a person might say one thing and mean another (“I can resist everything, except temptation.” Oscar Wilde). Irony can also be when something happens that is the opposite of what is expected (A fire station burning down).



- Culture is often a source of comedy. People, places, and events that occur only in America are used in jokes and are funny to Americans. If you are from another country the joke probably will not make sense to you.

The newspaper has a section just for fun and games. One type of humorous literature a newspaper has is called a comic strip. A comic strip is a series of pictures and words that create a humorous story. Here is an example of a comic strip. “Hi and Lois” is a cartoon about a family. There are a mother and father, a teenage son, a set of young boy and girl twins, and a baby. They get into the usual situations that might happen to any ordinary family. Here, Ditto, the twin boy, asks himself a question that many children ask: “I wonder if I have any special powers, like the characters in comic books?” His mother, of course, knows otherwise.

HI AND LOIS by Brian and Greg Walker



Answer some questions about the comic strip you just read.

1. What is the topic of this comic? _____

2. Can you relate to any part of this topic in your own life? How?

3. What is the humor in this cartoon? (Circle one answer.)
- a. The boy has superpowers.
 - b. The boy fell off the chair.
 - c. The boy knew what his mother was going to say, because of experience and the look on her face. He doesn't really have any superpowers, but he thinks he can read minds.
 - d. His mother tells him to do his homework.

4. Sequence (tell the events in order) this cartoon. Tell what happens. Use the following sentence starters:

First, _____

Next, _____

Then, _____

Finally, _____

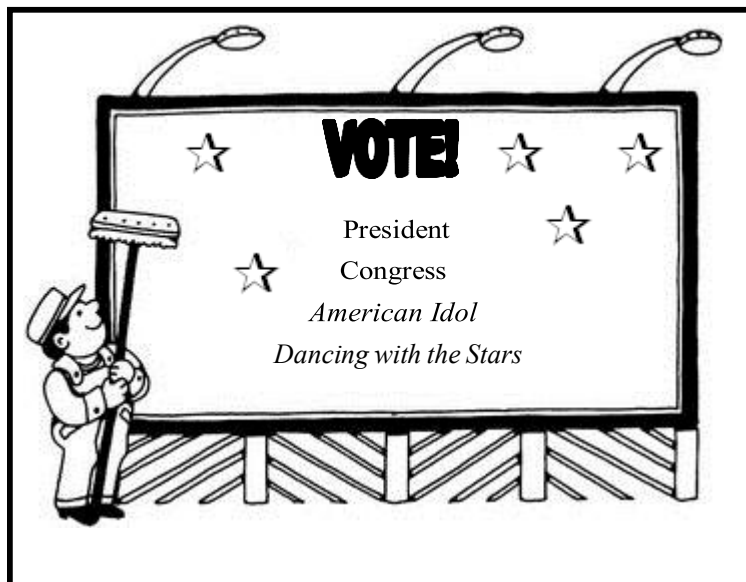
5. Would the cartoon be as funny if the order were changed? Why or why not?

Satire is a literary form that pokes fun at human behavior. Satire can be found in many forms. You might be familiar with some American television shows that include satire, such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *South Park*, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report*, etc. There are also many famous literary works that include satire. Some examples are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Brave New World*, etc.

Can you think of any television shows, movies you have watched, or books you have read that use satire? What are the titles?

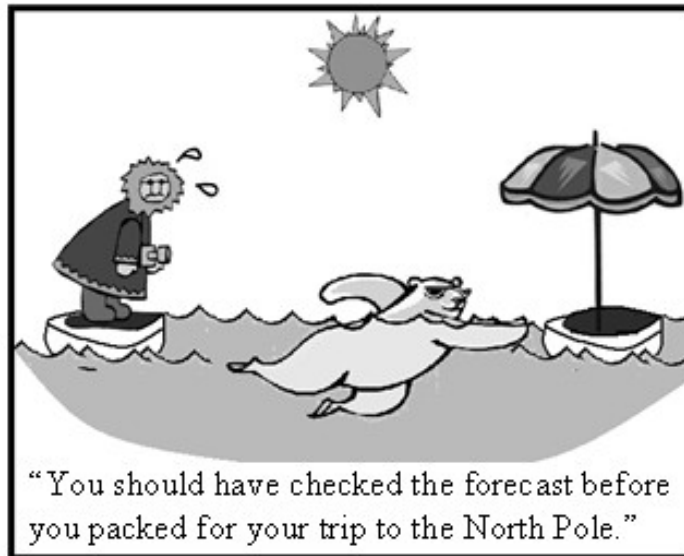
Political cartoons are also a form of satire. Political cartoons are a lot like comic strips but they make statements about politics, world issues, and society.

Example:



This political cartoon makes a statement about voters in America. It is saying that more people vote for reality television shows than vote in political elections.

Take a look at the political cartoon below and answer the questions that follow.

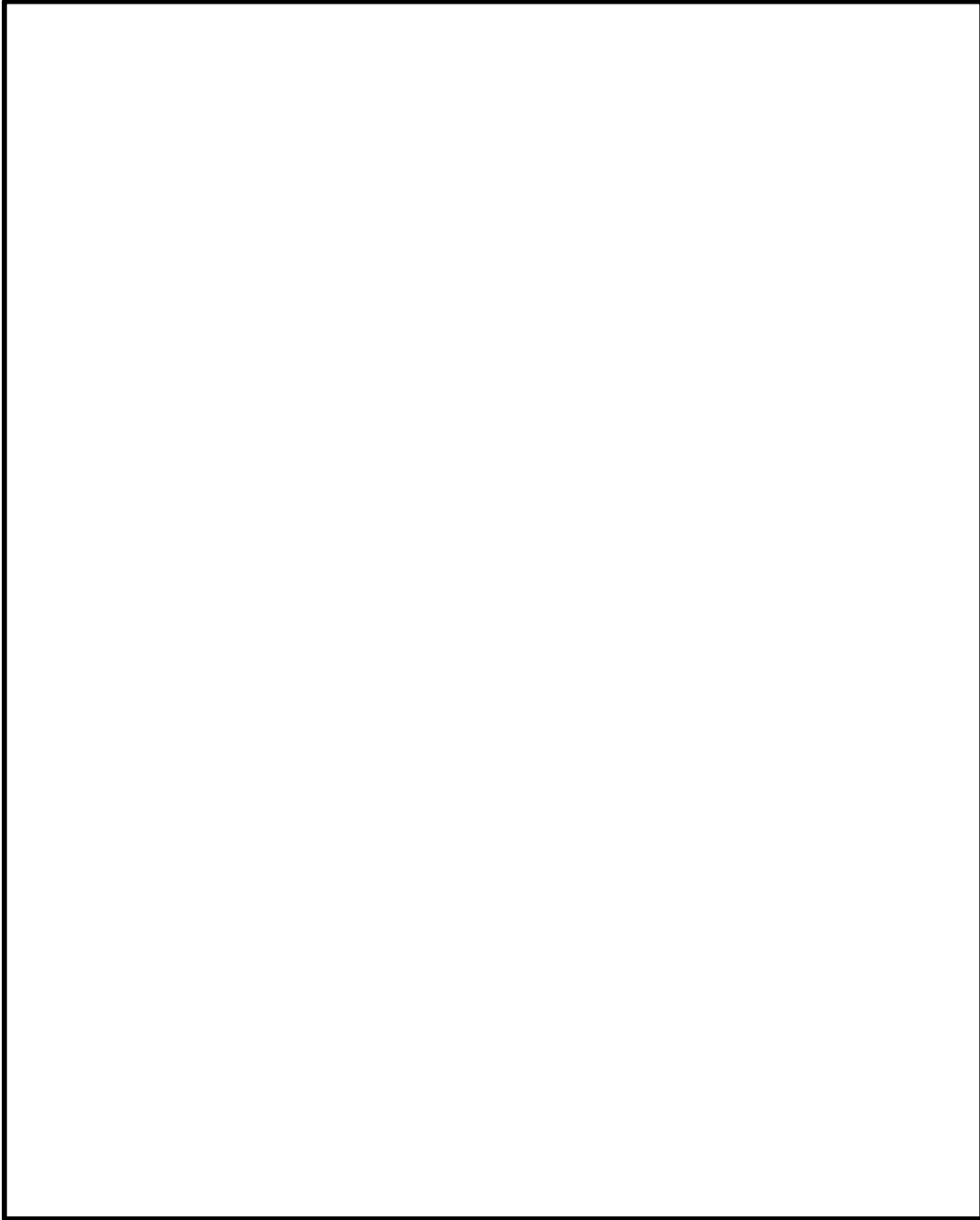


6. What topic is this cartoon addressing?

7. What message is it trying to send?

8. How is this an example of satire?

9. Think about a political or world issue that you feel passionate about. Some sample topics might be: immigration laws, gun control, health care reform, etc. Draw a political cartoon in the space provided.



Some other fun activities that can be found in the newspaper are puzzles. The newspaper usually has some different puzzles in it near the comics section. Some of these include Word Search puzzles, Sudoku, and other word or number puzzles. Review the words below to help solve the puzzle on the next page.

Before you begin let's explore the meaning of the words found in the puzzle.

Word	Definition
comedy	a play or other work of light and amusing character or triumph over misfortune
entertain	to hold the attention of pleasantly; to amuse
funny	causing amusement or laughter
humor	comical writing or talk
irony	the use of words to express a meaning that is the opposite of its actual meaning
joke	a short, amusing story or act causing amusement
laugh	the sound and act caused by something comical
satire	a literary form that pokes fun at human behavior

10. Solve the riddle by unscrambling each of the clue words. Copy the letters in the numbered boxes to the boxes below with the matching number to solve the riddle. The first one is done for you.

Question: *What letter font do animals in the jungle use to write?*

COEDYM

EANTNITRE 3

NYUFN 4

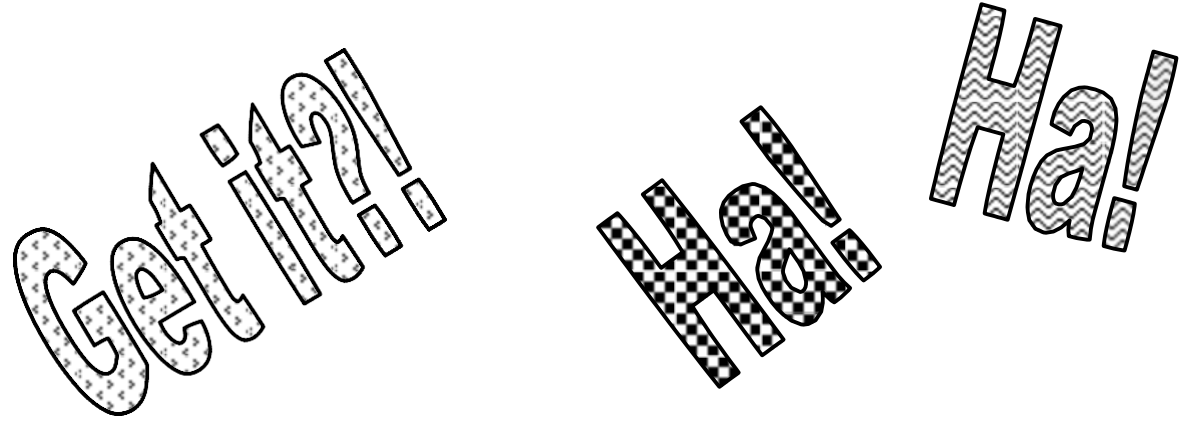
MORHU 5

IYNOR 6

JOEK J O K E¹
2
7

Answer: E

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



Another type of humorous literature is a **tall tale**. Tall tales are funny stories in which the storyteller exaggerates the people, places, and events. Some other features of a tall tale include:

- The hero may or may not be a real person.
- The hero finds funny and outrageous ways to solve a problem. This means that things happen in the story that can't possibly happen in real life.
- A lot of everyday, but interesting words are used.
- The hero must fight against some force of nature.
- There is often violence, but it is done in a humorous (funny) way.

Here is some background information on the time period of this tall tale:

During the 1800s, many people were moving to the western part of the United States. Life was very hard for them, and they had to find a way to survive the challenges of making a living in a difficult place. They had to clear forests to plant crops. They had to cross mountains, rivers, and deserts on foot or in small, dangerous wagons. They often had to fight off attacks from Native Americans, on whose land they were starting to build their homes and farms. People started to tell tall tales as a way of helping them get through the difficult days and overcome their problems.

The lands that the people went through were large and wild, and so are the heroes of tall tales. There were high mountains, dry deserts, dark forests, swift rivers, and endless plains. The stories started as “bragging contests” among the rough men out in the wild country. They wanted to see who could come up with the best, most amazing story. Some of the heroes of tall tales are real people. Johnny Appleseed did plant apple trees throughout the Midwest. Davy Crockett was a real frontiersman who fought and died in Texas. Each group of people who did a certain job had its own hero. Railroad workers, for example, told stories of John Henry a legendary engineer.

Answer the questions based on the information you just read.

11. What was happening in the United States during the 1800s?

12. What do you think is the single most important feature of a tall tale?

13. Why did people enjoy telling these tales?

14. What do you think might make these stories funny?

Vocabulary: These words will help you understand the story.

Word/Term	Meaning
frontiersman	person who lived in the wild lands, away from cities and other people
howl	make a long cry (ah—oooo!), like a dog or a wolf
raise	to bring up children, young animals or plants, from childhood to adult
wail	make a long, high cry (waaahhh!) like a baby
flea	a tiny insect that lives on and bites animals and people
gallop	when a horse runs fast
tussle	a physical fight that often involves hitting and wrestling
ashamed	the feeling that you've done something wrong and are sorry for it
neigh	the sound a horse makes

You are about to read the tall tale of ***Pecos Bill***. *Pecos Bill* is a fun story that takes place in Texas around the time that people were moving west and building cattle ranches. He is the spirit of the American West: wild, uncivilized, more animal than man. Look for the many exaggerations in the story. Much of the English in the story is not correct, because it was meant to be told aloud, not read. The characters speak in the language of the time and place. Try reading this story out loud too.

Pecos Bill

‘Round about in the west of Texas, when the moon gets big and full, if you listen real hard, you’ll hear a long “Ah – hooooo!” Don’t be scared. It’s just the howling of the best cowboy that ever lived: Pecos Bill.

Now, “Why would a cowboy be howling?” you might ask. Well, I’m *tickled* (very happy) that you did. ‘Cause you’re about to hear about the wildest cowboy who ever lived. That is, after he found out that he was a cowboy and not a coyote.

This is how it all started. When Pecos Bill was a baby, he was tough as nails. He chewed on pine bark and had a real rattlesnake for a rattle. When the other kiddies played with teddy bears, Pecos Bill played with grizzly bears. He had fifteen brothers and sisters, and they were all as wild as the mustangs that roamed the prairies.

However, one day Bill’s father *got it into his head* (had an idea) that it was getting too crowded in east Texas. So he and Ma packed up the kids in a covered wagon and headed out west, where their closest neighbors would be 100 miles away. It was a long, bumpy trip through the hot desert, and Bill got pretty restless. He decided he’d climb up to the cloth top of the wagon and sit himself down up there so’s (in order to) he could see the way ahead. They were going through a prairie dog town, and Bill thought they were cute when they poked their heads up out of their holes. It was just into one of those holes that the wagon went, and it bumped and crashed and almost lost a wheel. In all the bumping and yelling that followed, Bill got thrown clear off the top of the wagon and onto the hot, burning sand of the desert.

When Bill’s little baby bottom touched the hot sand of the desert, he let out a cry: “Boo Hoo!!!!” because it hurt him. It just so happened that a mother coyote was passing by. When she heard the cry, she thought it sounded like “Ah—hooooo!!!” and went over to see if it was one of her babies. She thought the baby looked a little

strange for a coyote, all pale and everything, but she picked him up by the skin on the back of his neck and carried him to her den.

The mother coyote raised him just like she raised her other cubs. She taught him how to chase jackrabbits, scratch himself with a cactus, swallow a tasty lizard or two, and most of all, to howl at the moon. He got so good at howling that the farmers on the prairie shivered every time they heard his wailing howl. He had a good time running around the desert naked and dirty, *convinced* (sure) that he was a coyote.

But those days would soon be over for Bill. After about 17 years, his life changed forever. One day he was lapping up water from the stream, all bent over like a coyote, with his tongue in the water. All of a sudden, a cowboy came by on his big horse. Bill turned and growled at him, as any good coyote would. But the cowboy just said to him, “Hey! Who are you? And why are you running around the prairie *naked as a jaybird?*” (bare, like a baby bird without feathers)

Bill found it hard to talk at first, because he hadn’t talked in 17 years. But he croaked, “Coyote”.

“You ain’t no coyote!” said the cowboy.

“Am, too,” answered Bill. “I got fleas.”

“Lots of Texans have fleas. Coyotes have tails, and you don’t.”

“Sure I do!” Bill turned around and looked over his shoulder. He twisted and turned, but still couldn’t find a tail.

“*Dang!* If I’m not a coyote, then what am I?”

(Damn!)

“You’re a cowboy! So stop acting like a coyote!”

Bill was disappointed. He really liked doing all the things a coyote does, and he really didn't want to start wearing clothes. But, he said good-bye to his coyote family and joined the cowboy at the nearest ranch.

Things didn't go well there. The other cowboys made fun of Bill, and called him stupid. But Bill didn't care. He didn't know what the word meant, since coyotes never call each other stupid. One night, as they sat around the campfire eating beans, one of the cowboys said, "Hey, there's a bunch of wild, mean cowboys over there, across the river. They're so mean, they can break stones with their teeth."

Pecos Bill's ears perked up. "Hey, who are these guys?"

"They're the Hell's Gate Gang, and they'd sooner kill you than say 'Good morning!'" answered the cowboys.

Well, that just got Bill even more interested in meeting the gang. So he jumped up from his supper, and climbed onto his horse and started out to look for them. Soon though, *his luck started to run out* (bad things started to happen). As his horse was galloping across the prairie, it stepped into a hole and broke its leg.

"Dang!" said Bill. He was in a hurry, so he just picked up the horse and put him over his shoulders and walked another hundred miles. Soon he heard a loud rattling. A huge rattlesnake popped its head up right in front of him.

"Get out of my way!" yelled Bill. "I'm in a hurry!" The rattlesnake didn't care. He was just about to bite, when Bill punched him right between the eyes.

"Hey! You're not such a bad critter!" said Bill. "Come with me to meet the Hell's Gate Gang." So he wrapped the snake around his arm and off they went, Bill, his horse, and his new rattlesnake friend.

A little farther on, Bill was about to step over a small mountain, when he heard a growl. A huge mountain lion was looking him over, thinking that he'd be a tasty little snack, and he'd have the horse for dinner when suppertime came.

"Oh, no you don't!" Bill told him. "Let's just see who's stronger!"

So Bill and the mountain lion began to tussle, rolling over and over in the dirt. They flattened a few low mountains, and punched some holes in some rocks to make the Grand Canyon. At last, Bill got the lion by the head and squeezed him so tight his eyes were about to pop out.

The lion cried, "Ok! I give up! You win!" and it started to crawl off back into the mountains, really ashamed.

"Wait a minute," said Bill. "Don't be silly. Come on, I need something to get me to the Hell's Gate Gang pretty quick."

So he took the saddle off the horse and put it on the big cat. They raced through the prairie, with the mountain lion roaring, the horse neighing, the rattlesnake rattling, and Bill howling like a coyote. What a frightening sight! When they came near the gang's camp, all the men were so scared, they dropped their dinner plates into the fire and started shaking enough to cause an earthquake.

"*Howdy!**" called Bill. "Who's the leader of your gang?"
(Hello!)

"Well," drawled a big guy with ten pistols at his side and no teeth in his mouth. "I used to be, but...you're the leader now."

"Great! Finish up your supper, guys. Don't let me stop you."



Answer the questions based on the tall tale you just read.

15. Why did Bill think that he was a coyote?

16. How did the cowboy convince him that he wasn't one?

17. Why do you think Bill was so interested in meeting the Hell's Gate Gang?

18. What three things happened to Bill on his way to meeting the gang?

19. Why is this considered a humorous story?

End of Unit 3