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American Humor as a Vehicle for Teaching Esl and Understanding American Culture

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AMERICAN HUMOR AS A VEHICLE FOR TEACHING
ESL AND UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT: "American Humor as a Vehicle for Teaching ESL and Understanding American Culture" focuses on the use of different kinds of humor as entry points into an understanding of American culture and as examples of real language for ESL activities. It is a collection of self-contained activities designed for the advanced ESL student which develops both oral/aural and reading/writing skills. The topics of the activities are Norman Rockwell illustrations, psychiatrist and mother-in-law jokes, comedy routines of Bill Cosby and Lily Tomlin, and newspaper articles by Erma Bombeck and Mike Royko. Included are a rationale, analysis, and discussion.

ERIC DESCRIPTORS: American English
Comedy
ESL
Humor
North American Culture

This project by Marguerite Kruse is accepted in its present form.

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AMERICAN HUMOR AS A THEME FOR MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

American humor in its many and varied forms serves as an excellent vehicle for the teaching of English as a Second Language and for understanding American culture. Because it reflects American culture, different examples of American humor can serve as entry points into an understanding of American culture. Because humor is expressed in idiomatic English, it provides examples of real language which can be used as a basis for ESL exercises.

Much that is meaningful about a culture may be gleaned from the things that native speakers find funny. For example, "A Nut in Every Car" by Bill Cosby, pokes fun at the rather bizarre goings-on in the New York subway system. The fact that many Americans would find, indeed have found, this piece funny indicates something about the American "world view." It indicates some kinds of things which are considered a fact of life in big cities in America. It also makes a statement about how Americans regard and deal with misfits, eccentrics, and some types of aberrant behavior. We laugh at them, for one. If a non-native speaker can see and even laugh at the things an American would, he or she is closer to understanding American culture than before.

Humor offers a wide variety of jumping-off places into the oral/aural and reading/writing skill areas of ESL. For example, amusing Norman Rockwell illustrations can be used as the topics for a variety of writing exercises including slogan and advertisement writing and descriptive writing. They also provide interesting topics for role-plays, as well as discussions around cross-cultural questions. Newspaper articles, such as "Exercise Can Be Unhealthy" by Mike Royko, a syndicated columnist, can be used as the basis for a variety of activities such as a fill-in-the-blanks exercise and a

synopsis writing exercise.

Humor can make the language seem less threatening and intimidating to the student. The student can concentrate on what is funny at the moment, not on what is difficult or trying about the language, providing, of course, that there is a reasonable match of the level of the student and the level of English of the humor. I have designed this project for advanced ESL students. Possibly some of the material might be accessible to an unusually high intermediate group.

Humor is also useful as a means to focus students' attention and engage them totally in what is going on at the moment. Used effectively it can pull everyone in. Then the focus can be shifted from the humor itself to the humor as an expression and reflection of the culture or as a jumping-off place to a particular grammar point or given skill area.

Humorous materials and/or activities can make the whole process of learning more enjoyable and memorable. They can help lighten the boredom and tediousness which is occasionally unavoidable in a classroom situation. Laughable things, be they events, pictures, dialogues, or written pieces, often are very memorable simply because they are funny. The funnier something is, the less apt to be forgotten. Why not try to use this principle as an aid to retention in teaching ESL?

THE MATTER OF CHOICE

My choice of humorous material is eclectic. It includes the monologues of contemporary comedians such as Lily Tomlin and Bill Cosby, American psychiatrist jokes, mother-in-law jokes, funny newspaper articles, and the illustrations of Norman Rockwell. Some of the types of humor I've chosen, or some of the pieces within each type of humor, may not be to everyone's taste. This surely is inevitable. However, regardless of the choice of a particular type or piece of humor, the exercises for a given piece may be easily adapted for another humorous piece deemed more suitable, useful, or funny by another teacher. For example, the album Lily Tomlin on Stage, which contains "Ernestine-A Phone Company Commercial" also has a wonderful piece titled "Glenna-A Child of the 60s." This is a one-sided telephone conversation between two teenagers of the sixties and is studded with idioms and slang. You might call it a period piece. All of the exercises designed around "Ernestine"--comprehension and cross-cultural questions for discussion, a role-play/dialogue writing exercise, exercises for terms and idioms, and a transcription/listening comprehension exercise--could easily be adapted to "Glenna."

I chose to include in this work only easily accessible source material. There are abundant, readily available sources of different kinds of American humor in libraries with their selections of joke books, newspapers, magazines, and humorous authors. All of the major and some of the minor newspapers have syndicated humor columnists such as Erma Bombeck and Mike Royko. Even certain Dear Abby letters are quite funny. Record stores usually have a comedy section with contemporary comedians such as Steve Martin, Bill Cosby, Lily Tomlin and others. Albums are available with some of the older comedians such as Lenny Bruce, and Elaine May and Mike Nichols, among others.

One volume of Norman Rockwell illustrations supplies a large number of amusing illustrations to work with.

The fact that there is such an abundance of material, much of which is free and for the asking, indicates to me what an excellent and useful source of material American humor can be for the ESL teacher.

FOCUS AND TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

There are basically four sources of American humor in this paper: jokes, monologues by comedians, newspaper articles, and Norman Rockwell illustrations. Given that humor is culturally bound, cross-cultural questions for discussion are a main focus for all the selections. Some of the questions examine how the subject matter and humor themselves reflect American culture. Other questions ask students to contrast American humor with their own, an exercise which can be quite illuminating. For example, psychiatrist jokes would seem to be specific to American culture although they might possibly exist in a few other cultures. "Ernestine-A Phone Company Commercial" by Lily Tomlin is a monologue poking fun at the telephone company in America. The subject matter itself generates material for discussions comparing how telephone calls are made in different countries, how the billing is handled, and contrasting the different quality of the phone service in different countries.

Listening comprehension is the emphasis in the exercises revolving around the monologues of comedians, particularly the comprehension of informal, conversational American speech. These monologues offer numerous examples of the reduced speech and contractions always found in everyday speech. For two of the monologues there is an exercise which calls upon the students to listen to and recognize contractions and reduced speech and then to correlate them with the expanded, written forms. These utterances are lifted out of the context of the monologue and spoken twice in a natural manner by the instructor. The students, using a multiple-choice worksheet, choose the correct answer. Other types of listening comprehension are demanded as well, such as listening for content or in order to transcribe the monologue.

A number of exercises allow students to develop their writing skills.

For example, students are asked to write slogans and advertisements, short stories, and subjective or objective descriptions using the Norman Rockwell illustrations as a starting point. They are also asked to write an imaginative profile of the artist himself. "Having Hot Flashes While Breaking Out in a Cold Sweat" by Mike Royko is the subject of a title-writing exercise and synopsis writing exercise. It is also used as a source of reduced and contracted speech which must be written out in full form by the students. An exercise based on an Erma Bombeck article calls for the students to paraphrase sentences.

Different role-plays based on the Norman Rockwell illustrations, monologues of comedians, and newspaper articles are included in the activities. There are fill-in-the-blank exercises for articles, prepositions, and present tense verbs. There are two types of vocabulary exercises based on the glossaries of terms and idioms of the monologues and jokes. One is within the context of the piece, another with a different context so that the student can learn to use them independently. "A Nut in Every Car" is the subject of a true-false exercise. The above mentioned Mike Royko article is used for reading dialogue aloud.

I have tried, in various ways, to give the students an opportunity to practice oral/aural and reading/writing skills in the exercises. I have also done my best to design activities that call upon the students to use their imagination and creativity. Both indirectly and directly I have attempted to give students many opportunities to express their feelings, reactions, thoughts, and observations about America, Americans, and American culture.

This project is not intended as a body of lessons built upon one another sequentially. Rather I intend that this be used either in part or as a whole in a flexible fashion. I myself would use it as a supplement

to other materials. It is a collection of possible models for the use of different types of American humor as a vehicle for ESL and to learn about American culture.

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Introduction

Norman Rockwell illustrations are well-known and well-loved by most Americans. I have chosen five as examples of amusing illustrations which could be used in the following activities. Of course, any number of Rockwell illustrations could be used. The teacher could photocopy an illustration for each student to work with or simply use the book with the class as a whole. "At the Breakfast Table," "Before the Shot," and "Doctor and Doll" are from 50 Norman Rockwell Favorites.¹ "The Big Game" and "Sports" are from The Norman Rockwell Storybook.²

¹ 50 Norman Rockwell Favorites (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977)

² Jan Wahl, The Norman Rockwell Storybook (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969)





Rockwell







THE
WINDMILL

Writing exercises

1. Working alone, in pairs, or in groups, as the teacher prefers, the students will choose a picture and decide upon a product which the picture might advertise. They will make up a slogan and advertisement for the picture, which will be presented to the class.
2. Students will write a short story titled "A Day in the Life of _____" as though one of the pictures were an illustration for the story. They will choose any character from one of the pictures.
3. Students will write a brief, one or two paragraph description of how they think one of the characters in the illustrations feels. They may choose between the following forms:

Subjective description

--first person singular: I feel _____ and _____

--third person singular: She feels _____

Objective description

--It seems that he feels _____

--She looks _____

--They appear _____

Papers will be collected, mixed up, and passed around making sure that no one receives their own paper. After reading and correcting them, each student will read the paper aloud and discuss it. The discussion can first focus on the suggested corrections, and then on the emotions expressed.

4. Based on their impressions of the artist from his pictures, the students will write a short profile of the artist. Students will include explanations about why they make the statements they do about the artist. For example: The artist came from a small town. His pictures illustrate

small town life.

Role-play

Working in small groups and using one of the illustrations as a topic, students will make up a skit and present it to the class. The skit could be a scene taking place 10 minutes before and/or after the moment depicted in the illustration. It could be a sequel to the scene in the illustration.

Homework

If material is available, one or several students will research biographical information about Norman Rockwell and present this to the class.

Cross-cultural questions

1. What kind of humor do you find in these illustrations? Is it apparent why Rockwell's illustrations are so well-loved by most Americans?
2. Do the illustrations give you a feeling for big city life? Small town life? For the flavor of both? What about the era? Could they be quite recent? Or are they old-fashioned?
3. Do they look distinctly American to you? If you didn't know they were American, where else would you guess they were from?
4. Are there things in the illustrations that remind you of your growing up years? What are they?
5. What sort of impression of the artist as an American and as a person do you get from the illustrations?
6. What themes does Rockwell seem to prefer?

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Handwritten mark or signature.

Introduction

The monologues of American comedians are enjoyable to listen to and work with. They are also a rich source of real language and insights into American culture. I have included three monologues. One is an excerpt from "The Difference Between Men and Women" from Bill Cosby is a Very Funny Fellow Right!³ "A Nut in Every Car" in its entirety is from the same album. "Ernestine-A Phone Company Commercial" also in its entirety, is from the album Lily Tomlin on Stage.⁴

³ Bill Cosby, Bill Cosby is a Very Funny Fellow Right!, Warner Bro., 1518, n.d.

⁴ Lily Tomlin, Lily Tomlin on Stage, Arista, AB 4142, 1977.

Procedure for each monologue

1. Play record/tape two or more times as seems necessary. After each playing, ask students what they have understood and build on that in subsequent playings.
2. Optional: with the third playing, pass out a transcript for students to read while listening.
3. Pass out glossaries. Ask and answer questions on vocabulary.
4. Work through and briefly discuss exercises for terms and idioms.
5. Discuss comprehension questions.
6. Discuss cross-cultural questions.
7. Do other exercises in the order given.

"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN" -- Bill Cosby

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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN -- Bill Cosby

"There and I'll tell ya something else about women, they always try to get the upper hand and they have one thing, see, 'You men don't suffer the way we suffer when we have labor pains.' Bull! I know a pain that only men suffer that's so far above labor pains you can't even find it on the pain chart. We don't even talk about it. There is no pain in the world greater than the pain a man gets when he goes out on a date, plants his date down in the seat, in the movie, puts his arm around the chair, in the movie, and leaves it there for two and a half hours. The blood from his fingertips drains to the center of his chest. 'What are ya doing?' I'm trying to save my wrist. Whadaya think?!"

Glossary of terms and idioms

get the upper hand - be in control

plants his date - has his date sit down

out on a date - a man escorting a woman someplace such as a movie or restaurant

drains - flows

labor pains - pains when giving birth

pain chart - chart for measuring pain

Vocabulary exercise (in context)

Fill in the blanks with a word or expression from below.

Women always try to _____.

When a man takes a woman to the movie, they are _____.

You men don't suffer the way we suffer when we have _____.

In the movie, the man _____ down in the seat.

The pain is so great that you can't even find it on the _____.

The blood from his fingertips _____ to the center of his chest.

labor pains

pain chart

out on a date

plants his date

get the upper hand

drains

Vocabulary exercise (out of context)

Complete the sentence with a word or expression from below.

Some people try to _____ because they enjoy being the boss.

When he goes _____ to a fancy restaurant, he _____
at the table.

When a woman has a baby, she usually has _____.

The hunger pains I had on my diet registered very high on the _____.

The water from the washing machine _____ into the sewer.

labor pains

drains

plants his date

pain chart

get the upper hand

out on a date

Comprehension questions

1. What does he mean when he says that women always try to get the upper hand?
2. What don't men talk about according to this monologue?
3. What is a pain chart? Does such a thing really exist? Is this part of the humor?
4. How long is a movie according to this monologue?
5. Why does the blood drain out of his arm?
6. How is this humorous? What is funny about it?

Cross-cultural questions

1. Would pregnancy generally be considered a taboo topic in your country? Why or why not? Explain.
2. Would a woman ever say this to a man in your country: "You men don't suffer the way we suffer when we have labor pains."? If not, why not?
3. Do men and women date in your country? If not, why not? If so, what would be a typical date? Where would you go? What would you do? What about a chaperone?

Reduced speech and contractions exercise

The instructor will speak the following lines from the monologue twice in a natural manner. The student, working from the hand-out, will choose the written answer which best corresponds to the meaning of the given line.

1. "...an I'll tell ya..."
2. "...that's so far..."
3. "...you can't even..."
4. "Whadaya think?"
5. "We don't even..."

Reduced speech and contractions worksheet

The instructor will speak the lines in a natural manner using contractions and reduced speech. Choose the expanded form which best matches the spoken line.

1. a. ...and I shall tell you...
b. ...and I will tell you...
c. ...and I would tell you...
d. ...and I could tell you...
2. a. ...that was so far...
b. ...that should so far...
c. ...that is so far...
d. none of the above
3. a. ...you can to even...
b. ...you can not even...
c. ...you can no even...
d. ...you can to not even...
4. a. What you do think?
b. What do you think?
c. What think you?
d. What are you to think?
5. a. We do never even...
b. We never even do...
c. We do not even...
d. We not do even...

Synopsis writing exercise

After the discussion of the questions and working through of the exercises, play the monologue once or twice again. The students will write and give a title to a brief synopsis of the monologue without putting their names on the paper. Mix up the papers and pass them around. Each student will read a paper and correct and comment upon it in pencil. The papers will be read aloud and the corrections and comments discussed with the class. The discussion will also focus on the titles given.

"ERNESTINE-A PHONE COMPANY COMMERCIAL" -- Lily Tomlin

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ERNESTINE-A PHONE COMPANY COMMERCIAL -- Lily Tomlin

"A precious hello...

Here at the phone company we handle 84 billion calls a year, serving everyone from presidents and kings to the scum of the earth. So we realize that every so often you can't get a call through, perhaps your phone goes out of order for no apparent reason. Maybe you've been charged for a call you didn't make. We don't care. Watch this, just lost Peoria...

You see here in this computer room, we have a matrix of multi-billion-dollar space age technology that is so sophisticated that even we can't handle it, but that's your problem, isn't it? So the next time you complain about your phone service, why don't you try using two dixie cups with a string? We don't care. We don't have to. We're the Phone Company!"

Glossary of terms and idioms

scum of the earth - lowly people, criminals, bums, etc.

get a call through - reach the person you are calling

out of order - does not work, broken

for no apparent reason - for no obvious explanation

matrix of multi-billion-dollar space age technology - complicated and
expensive machinery

two dixie cups and a string - teacher will bring in and demonstrate prior
to playing the tape

charged - received a bill

every so often - occasionally

Vocabulary exercise (in context)

Choose from the bottom list the correct term or idiom and fill in.

The phone company serves everyone from presidents and kings to the _____
_____.

The phone company realizes that _____ you can't _____.

Sometimes the phone goes _____ for _____.

Sometimes you get _____ by the phone company for a call you didn't
make.

The phone company has a _____ that is sophisticated.

The phone company suggests that instead of complaining you try using
_____.

get a call through

out of order

two dixie cups and a string

every so often

scum of the earth

no apparent reason

charged

matrix of multi-billion-dollar space age technology

Vocabulary exercise (out of context)

Choose the correct term or idiom from the bottom list and fill in.

_____ I eat dessert but not usually.

The sign on the coke machine read " _____ ", so we couldn't buy
a coke.

Those people are so awful they are the _____.

I tried to _____, but all I got was a recording by the
operator.

He always gets angry _____.

The store _____ me for a dress I never bought.

The Defense department has a _____.

A make-believe telephone might be _____.

out of order

get a call through

scum of the earth

for no apparent reason

charged

every so often

matrix of multi-billion-dollar space age technology

two dixie cups and a string

Comprehension questions

1. This is a commercial for the phone company. What is its tone? Do you think it's serious?
2. Who does the phone company serve? Who are its customers?
3. What is said about the quality of the phone company's service?
4. What is said about billing for calls?
5. What is the phone company's attitude towards its customers?
6. What kind of technology does the phone company have? Describe it.
7. What is funny about this? Where does the humor lie?

Cross-cultural questions

1. What impression do you get about the phone company in America from your own experience?
2. How is the phone company in America different from that in your country? Explain.
3. Compare making a phone call in your country with making one in America.
4. How are you billed for calls in your country?
5. How are complaints handled by your phone company?
6. What is the quality of the phone service in your country?
7. Who owns the phone company in your country? Who runs it?
8. How efficient is it? Compare the efficiency with that of the American phone company.

Role-play/writing exercise

Students, in pairs or small groups, will write and present a skit of a commercial for some other big company in America or in their own country. It may be about the phone company if they wish. The dialogue and stage instructions will be written out to be handed in.

Listening comprehension/transcription exercise

The students working as a group with a tape recorder will transcribe the piece using the worksheet.

Transcription exercise worksheet

Fill in the blanks as you hear them on the tape.

A _____...

Here _____ we handle 84 billion calls a year,
_____ from presidents and kings to the _____.

So we realize that _____ you can't get a call through,
perhaps your phone goes _____ for _____. Maybe
you've been charged _____ you didn't make. We _____.

Watch this, just lost Peoria...

_____ here in this computer room, we have a matrix of multi-
billion dollar space age technology that is so sophisticated that _____
_____, but that's your problem, isn't it? So the next time you
_____. why don't you try using two dixie cups with a string?
We don't care. _____. We're the Phone Company!

"A NUT IN EVERY CAR" -- Bill Cosby

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Cross-cultural questions	p 43
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Role-play	p 45
Reduced speech and contractions	p 45

A NUT IN EVERY CAR -- Bill Cosby

"I am not from New York City. I was born in Philadelphia, raised in Philadelphia, educated in Philadelphia. And, huh, for those of you, that, if you plan to come into New York, and anytime soon, don't take--bring a lot of money with ya. It's the greatest city in the world. You can get all the entertainment you want for only 15 cents. Ride any of the subway trains that they have here. It's marvelous. Not only will they take you where you want to go and bring you back, but they go out of their way to entertain you. They put a nut in every car! You get on any subway car, some nut'll stand up, 'The Lord will kill you if you don't sit down here.' I saw a three-act show from West 4th Street up to 125th Street. First act was this woman that went around condemning everyone. She got off at 23rd Street. She was so great we gave her a standing ovation. She got back on, did an encore up to 34th Street. At 34th Street she was replaced by 200 high school kids, who went through the car, cut up the seats and the people. Well, while I was enjoying this I figured I'd go and look in the next car and see if they had a show going and they did. They had a group participation show going, wherein everybody in the group was trying to pull in this one guy who had his leg caught in the doorway. So I just dallied back into my car and I saw that a crowd had just, just a crowd grouped around and I saw these arms flailing and all this noise..... And what I thought was a karate demonstration turned out to be two old ladies taking a seat from a wino. So the old ladies and the kids all did a high kick-off at 81st Street and on came one wino and he talked to the other. And a guy nudged me and he said, 'These are the stars of the car. They come on everytime.' And they talked to each other and the whole thing was titled 'Incoherency.' The one wino looked at the other and said,

#1 'You huh you was on the motorcycle...'

#2 'Well sport, ya can't...'

#1 '...I'm muh ask you a question...'

#2 '...Go ahead sport.'

#1 'Did you run over the motorcycle when...'

#2 'No.'

So huh I talked to'em after the show was over and I said, 'I think you guys are really great. Where do you go from here?' And he said, 'Well, one by one they take us over to the Greyhound Bus Station and they let us announce where the buses are going.' See what they do is they get the guys all juiced up and they say, 'Bus leaving on station number seven, four,... and north...'. "

Glossary of terms and idioms

go out of their way - exert themselves, make a great effort

nut - crazy person or a funny person

subway - underground train in a big city

condemn - announce someone is going to hell

ovation - audience claps loudly

encore - another performance

group participation show - the audience is involved in the show

flailing - arms swinging

dallied - walked slowly

high kick-off - play which starts a football game

nudged - poked with the elbow

star - important performer

incoherent - not understandable

juiced up - drunk

Vocabulary exercise (in context)

Fill in the blanks with an appropriate word or expression from the bottom list.

Not only will they take you where you want to go and bring you back, but they _____ to entertain you.

The New York _____ has a _____ in every car.

First act was this woman that went around _____ everyone.

Her act was so great she got a standing _____, and then she did an _____.

They had a _____ show going wherein everybody in the group was trying to pull in this one guy who had his leg caught in the doorway.

So I just _____ back into my car and I saw a crowd of people _____ their arms.

So the old ladies and the kids did a _____ at 81st Street and on came one wino and he talked to the other.

And a guy _____ me and he said, "These are the _____ of the show."

And they talked to each other and the whole thing was titled "_____."

They get the winos _____ and they let them announce at the bus station.

nut

subway

juiced up

go out of their way

condemning

ovation

encore

high kick-off

group participation

flailing

dallied

nudged

incoherent

stars

Vocabulary exercise (out of context)

Fill in the blanks with a word or expression from the list.

Americans _____ to be friendly.

Sinners are _____ to hell.

The boys were fighting and their arms were _____.

Elizabeth Taylor is a famous movie _____.

He is so funny. He is the biggest ___ in school.

The audience enjoyed the performance so much that they yelled for an _____.

They gave the show an _____.

After dinner we went for a walk and just _____ along.

When people have too many cocktails their speech is often _____.

Only big cities have a _____ for public transportation.

The mother _____ her little boy so he would pay attention in church.

A football game begins with a _____.

There was a _____ on television yesterday.

When I have too much to drink, I am all _____.

nudged

flailing

incoherent

star

juiced up

condemned

dallied

go out of their way

group participation show

ovation

subway

encore

nut

high kick-off

Comprehension questions

1. Where was Bill Cosby born and educated?
2. According to him, what is the greatest city in the world?
3. How can you get cheap entertainment there? Where does it take place?
4. Describe some of the acts in the show.
5. Explain about the stars of the show. What is their job with the bus company?

Cross-cultural questions

1. Did you find this funny? If so, what parts? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been on American subways as described by Cosby? If so, what was it like? Describe any nuts you saw.
3. Is there public transportation in your country? What is it like? How much does it cost? Is it common to see nutty people on it? If so, how do the other people react to them?
4. How is odd but harmless behavior regarded in your country? Do people ever laugh at it? Would a comedian ever use it as a subject for a routine like Cosby's?
5. How are nuts treated in your country?
6. How do Americans, from what you know, deal with such people?
7. Have you ever been to a Greyhound Bus Station in America? What was it like? Could you understand the announcer?

True-false questions

Circle each as to whether true or false.

1. Bill Cosby is from New York City.

True False

2. He advises bringing a lot of money with you when coming to New York.

True False

3. Free entertainment is provided on the New York subways.

True False

4. The wino won out in the struggle over the seat with the two old ladies.

True False

5. Greyhound Bus Station announcers speak very clearly.

True False

Role-play

Students working in small groups will write and present a scene of a funny incident involving public transportation, either in their own country or in America. They may use a scene from the tape if they wish.

Reduced speech and contractions exercise

The instructor will speak the following lines from the monologue twice in a natural manner. The student, working from the hard-out, will choose the written answer which best corresponds to the meaning of the given line.

1. "Some nut'll stand up."
2. "I figured I'd go."
3. "I talked to'em."
4. "I'munna ask you."
5. "It's marvelous."
6. "Don't take a lotta money."
7. "Ya can't go."

Reduced speech and contractions worksheet

The instructor will speak the lines in a natural manner using contractions and reduced speech. Choose the expanded form which best matches the spoken line.

1. a. Some nut should stand up.
b. Some nut will stand up.
c. Some nut stands up.
d. Some nut did stand up.
2. a. I figured I did go.
b. I figured I should go.
c. I figured I would go.
d. I figured to go.
3. a. I talked to some.
b. I talked to them.
c. I talked to him.
d. b and c
4. a. I am going to ask you.
b. I did ask you.
c. I would ask you.
d. I want to ask you.
5. a. It should be marvelous.
b. It is marvelous.
c. It was marvelous.
d. It ought to be marvelous.
6. a. Do not take lots of money.
b. Do not take a lot of money.
c. Do not take a lot a money.
d. Do no take a lot of money.
7. a. You could not go.
b. You can never go.
c. You can not go.
d. You could go.

JOKES

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Introduction

Collections of jokes are widely available in bookstores and libraries. I chose two kinds of jokes around which to design activities: psychiatrist jokes and mother-in-law jokes.⁵ They both seem to me to be representative of American humor and culture. "Knock, Knock" jokes and the routines of Will Rogers were good suggestions I have received. I pass them on as ideas for source material.

⁵Jokes Hours and Hours of Great Laughs (New York: Waldman Publishing Corp., 1980)

AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIST JOKES

1. Psychiatrist: "How long has your husband thought that he is Napoleon, Mrs. Stanners?"
Mrs. Stanners: "Ever since Waterloo."
2. Man: "I need help, Doc. My wife thinks she's a kitty cat."
Psychiatrist: "What do you want me to do?"
Man: "Get her to stop eating canaries."
3. My doctor told me to take tranquilizers once a month, right before I get his bill.
4. Patient: "Doctor, I'm terrified of robins. Everytime I see one, I break into a cold sweat."
Psychiatrist: "But why are you frightened of robins, Mr. Smith?"
Patient: "Aren't most worms?"
5. A man walked into a psychiatrist's office and told the doctor, "My wife thinks she's a duck."
The doctor put down his pencil and gasped, "Bring her in to see me immediately."
"I can't, Doctor," said the man. "She flew south for the winter."
6. Patient: "Doctor, I think everyone tries to take advantage of me."
Psychiatrist: "That's silly. It's a perfectly normal feeling."
Patient: "Is it really? Thanks for your help, Doctor. How much do I owe you?"
Psychiatrist: "How much do you have?"

Glossary of terms and idioms

psychiatrist - doctor for mental and emotional illness

kitty cat - housecat

canaries - small, yellow songbirds

robins - large, red birds

break into a cold sweat - start perspiring from fear

worm - small tube-like animal which lives in the dirt, also a lowly person

tranquilizer - pill for relaxing and calming

bill - statement of money owed

to take advantage of - to use someone unfairly

Vocabulary exercise (in context)

My wife thinks that she's a _____ and won't stop eating _____.

Everytime I see a _____ I _____ because I believe that I am
a _____.

My doctor wants me to take a _____ right before I get his _____.

I think that everyone tries _____ me.

kitty cat

robin

worm

psychiatrist

canaries

break into a cold sweat

to take advantage of

tranquilizer

bill

Vocabulary exercise (out of context)

Friends try _____ me by borrowing money and not paying it back.

My _____ from the telephone company was very high this month.

I often take a _____ to calm my nerves.

_____ prefer to eat _____.

Right before the car accident I _____ because I saw it coming.

_____ are birds which like to sing.

My _____ likes to catch mice.

My _____ helps me solve my problems.

to take advantage of

tranquilizer

broke into a cold sweat

kitty cat

psychiatrist

canaries

robins

worms

bill

Comprehension questions

Joke # 1

1. Who does the husband think he is?
2. How long has he thought this?
3. Who is talking to the psychiatrist? Who is the patient?
4. Describe the patient's problem.
5. Does the wife have a problem? If so, what is it?
6. Is this joke funny? Why or why not?

Joke # 2

1. Why does the man need help?
2. Does his wife need help? Who could help her? How could they help?
3. Why does she eat canaries? Is this normal for people to do?
4. What is funny about this joke?

Joke # 3

1. What did the doctor tell the patient?
2. Why would the doctor tell that to the patient?
3. Is this joke funny? Why or why not?

Joke # 4

1. What does the patient first tell the doctor?
2. How does the psychiatrist respond?
3. What exactly does the patient mean when he says "Aren't most worms?"
4. What is funny about this joke?

Joke # 5

1. What did the man tell the doctor?
2. Where were they talking?
3. How did the psychiatrist respond?
4. Why couldn't the man bring his wife in? Where did she go? How did she

get there? Is that possible?

5. What is funny about this joke? Explain.

Joke # 6

1. What did the patient tell the doctor? How does the patient feel?
2. What did the psychiatrist answer?
3. After the doctor answers, how does the patient feel? What does he say?
4. When the psychiatrist asks, "How much do you have?," what is he asking about? Why would he ask this? Is he trying to take advantage of the patient too? Why or why not?
5. How is this joke funny? Explain.

Cross-cultural questions

1. Are there psychiatrists in your country? If so, are there many? If not, who helps mentally ill people? How are they dealt with?
2. What does neurotic mean to you? Is there a comparable term in your language?
3. How are emotional/mental health problems regarded in your country? Are they ever a subject for jokes? If so, give examples. If not, why not?
4. If these jokes were to be translated into your native language, would they be considered funny? Why or why not? Explain.

Fill in the blanks with articles

Psychiatrist: "How long has your husband thought that he is _____
Napoleon, Mrs. Stanners?"

Mrs. Stanners: "Ever since _____ Waterloo."

Man: "I need help, Doc. My wife thinks she's _____ kitty cat."

Psychiatrist: "What do you want me to do?"

Man: "Get her to stop eating _____ canaries."

Patient: "Doctor, I'm terrified of robins. Everytime I see one, I break
into _____ cold sweat."

Psychiatrist: "But why are you frightened of _____ robins, Mr. Smith?"

Patient: "Aren't most worms?"

My doctor told me to take tranquilizers once _____ month, right before I
get his bill.

A man walked into a psychiatrist's office and told the doctor, "My
wife thinks she's _____ duck."

The doctor put down his pencil and gasped. "Bring her in to see me
immediately."

"I can't, Doctor," said the man. "She flew south for _____ winter."

Patient: "Doctor, I think everyone tries to take advantage of me."

Psychiatrist: "That's silly. It's _____ perfectly normal feeling."

Patient: "Is it really? Thanks for your help, Doctor. How much do I owe
you?"

Psychiatrist: "How much do you have?"

AMERICAN MOTHER-IN-LAW JOKES

1. Every married person in the world has a mother-in-law. Some are good and some are bad. Your mother-in-law is a real pain in the neck if:
 - Her pet names for you are words like "worm," "weasel," or "rat face."
 - You've been married for more than ten years and she still can't remember your name.
 - She cringes every time she looks at you.
 - Every time she visits, she brings her son some home-cooked food because she's afraid of the kind of meals he usually gets.
 - She continually tells you that after she's dead and gone, you'll regret the way you treated her.
2. My mother-in-law is a real treasure. I wish she was a buried treasure.
3. You can't win an argument with my mother-in-law. Once her mind is made up, she won't let you confuse her by stating the facts.
4. I wouldn't object to my mother-in-law having the last word. But wouldn't you think she'd get to it after fifteen years?
5. I'm not on speaking terms with my mother-in-law, and I wish she'd follow my example.

Glossary of terms and idioms

mother-in-law - the mother of the person you married

pain in the neck - nuisance

pet name - usually a special name

weasel - small, sly animal

rat face - face like a rat

cringe - back away with fear, a reaction of fear

dead and gone - died

treasure - riches

buried treasure - riches underground

argument - fight with words

mind is made up - will not change an opinion

having the last word - say the last thing in an argument

get to it - hurry up, get going

not on speaking terms - not talking to someone because you are angry with
them

follow my example - do the same thing as me

Vocabulary exercise (in context)

Choose the best word or expression from the list below.

Every married person in the world has a _____.

She can be a real _____.

Her _____ for you are "worm," " _____ ", or " _____ ."

Every time she looks at you she _____.

She says that after she's _____, you'll regret the way you treated her.

My mother-in-law is a real _____. I wish she was a _____.

You can't win an _____ with my mother-in-law.

Once her _____, she won't change it.

I don't object to her _____, but I wish that she would _____.

I'm not _____ with her and I wish that she'd _____.

follow my example

treasure

get to it

argument

mind is made up

having the last word

buried treasure

follow my example

dead and gone

on speaking terms

rat face

pet names

mother-in-law

pain in the neck

weasel

cringes

Vocabulary exercise (out of context)

Choose the best word or expression from the list below.

The woman who is the mother of my husband is my _____.

My husband's _____ for me is "sweetheart."

I call my enemy a _____ and a _____.

Once someone dies they are _____.

He always annoys me. He is a _____.

I _____ when I think of all my bills.

Pirates search for _____.

He claims that he has a _____ in his back yard.

My _____ about the whole thing. Don't try to change it.

In an _____ with another person, I never can _____.

because I can't think of anything to say.

Ever since our argument we have not been _____.

When are you going to _____ and finish this project?

_____ and do this the way I would.

pet name

cringe

buried treasure

have the last word

follow my example

mother-in-law

weasel

dead and gone

argument

get to it

on speaking terms

pain in the neck

rat face

treasure

mind is made up

Comprehension questions

Joke # 1

1. What does every married person in the world have? Why?
2. How can a person be a pain in the neck? Explain.
3. What are examples of pet names in the joke? What kinds of names are these? Are they complimentary or insulting?
4. What can't the mother-in-law do after ten years of marriage? Why?
5. When the mother-in-law looks at the speaker what does she do? Demonstrate. What does it mean when someone does that?
6. What does she do everytime she comes to visit? Why does she do this?
7. What does she say that the speaker will do after she is dead and gone?
8. Why might she say this?
8. Where is the humor in this? How is it funny?

Joke # 2

1. What is the mother-in-law? What kind of person is she?
2. What does he wish she was? Why would he wish that?
3. How is this funny?

Joke # 3

1. What can't the speaker win with the mother-in-law? Why not?
2. What might confuse her?
3. How is this funny?

Joke # 4

1. What does the mother-in-law always have?
2. What does she need to get to? After how long?
3. What is the fifteen years referring to?
4. How is this funny?

Joke # 5

1. Who is the speaker not talking to? Why do you suppose?
2. What does the speaker wish the mother-in-law would do? Why?
3. What is funny about this?

Cross-cultural questions

1. Are mothers-in-law one of the most important relative in your country?
How are they regarded?
2. In America they are the subject of many jokes. Why do you think this might be? Are they ever the subject of jokes in your country?
3. Is there any relative in typical family life in your country that is joked about? What forms do the jokes take? Are they openly laughed at? If so, can you translate into English a common joke?
4. What do these jokes indicate to you about Americans? Does it seem okay to you that they laugh at such a thing? Explain.

Fill in the blanks with present tense verbs

- Every married person in the world (have) _____ a mother-in-law.
Some (be) _____ good and some (be) _____ bad. Your mother-in-law (be) _____
a real pain in the neck if:
--Her pet names for you (be) _____ words like "worm," "weasel," or "rat face."
--She (cringe) _____ everytime she (look) _____ at you.
--Everytime she (visit) _____, she (bring) _____ her son some
home-cooked food because she (be) _____ afraid of the kind of meals he
usually (get) _____.
--She continually (tell) _____ you that after she (be) _____ dead and
gone, you'll regret the way you treated her.

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Introduction

Newspaper articles, whether by syndicated communists or the occasional journalist, provide a supply of humorous material. I have used the work of Erma Bombeck and Mike Royko.⁶ As the articles are difficult and lengthy, they should probably be assigned as homework the night before class. Due to the length of the glossaries, I did not include vocabulary exercises. Many teachers would likely find the need for them depending upon their students.

⁶
Due to the fact that I clipped these articles out of a daily newspaper years ago while living in Hawaii, I can no longer recover the necessary information for documentation.

Erma Bombeck

When my son moved out of our house and into his own apartment, I tried very hard to hold back the tears. The nest was empty.

I bit my lip as I thought, goodbye Linda Ronstadt and Billy Joel.

Goodbye pure, organic, honey-herbal-scented shampoo that cost \$1.50 an ounce and lays on its side without a cap, running down the drain.

Goodbye empty milk cartons in the refrigerator and dried-out lunch meat. Goodbye labels that read, "Hand wash only."

Goodbye porch light that has been burning day and night for three years.

Goodbye mildewed towels and empty ice-cube trays. Goodbye one ski glove, parking tickets for bookmarks and boxes of newspaper tagged, "HANDS OFF!"

So long three-hour showers, shared razor blades, and unopened mail with Municipal Court, Division of Traffic in the upper left-hand corner.

I could stand it no longer. I rushed to the door, threw it open and yelled, "Mother's Day is Over!"

My husband was in the process of changing the locks when I said, "Don't take on so. After all, you haven't lost a son, you've gained a tire jack for your car."

Hello to olives that you could leave in plain sight in the refrigerator.

Hello hair dryer. Hello dinner whenever we wanted it.

Hello turned off garden hose. Hello to cheese that didn't have to be cut in half to get rid of the exposed part.

Hello family car that we used anytime we want. Hello grocery shopping once a week. Hello telephone calls that are for us.

Hello dinner parties without the fruit plate half gone. Hello soft music and conversation. Hello pencil by the phone and Hello leftovers.

This week, he moved back. We should have moved the nest while we had

the chance.

Glossary of terms and idioms

to hold back the tears - to try not to cry

the nest was empty - all the children have left home

I bit my lip - I tried not to cry

Linda Ronstadt, Billy Joel - singers popular with teenagers

organic - made from natural ingredients

honey-herbal-scented - made with honey and herbs

mildewed - rotting from dampness

bookmark - paper for keeping your place in a book

hands off - don't touch

Municipal Court - city courtroom

mother's day - yearly holiday and celebration for mothers

changing the locks - putting a new lock on a door or doors

don't take on so - don't become so upset

you haven't lost a son - from the expression "You haven't lost a son you've gained a daughter." This is often said to parents when their son marries.

tire jack - tool used to change a tire

in plain sight - in full view, easy to see

garden hose - used to water the garden

exposed - open to the air, visible

fruit plate - fancy plate of fruit for a party

leftovers - food not eaten at a meal

Comprehension questions

1. About how old is the son in the article? What is he doing?
2. Where does the family live? What observations can you make about their lifestyle?
3. What is the mother actually saying when she says: "I bit my lip as I thought, goodbye Linda Ronstadt and Billy Joel."? Is she serious? Why or why not? Explain.
4. What kinds of things is the mother saying goodbye to? Will she actually miss them? Why or why not?
5. "I could stand it no longer. I rushed to the door, threw it open and yelled, 'Mother's Day is Over!'" Why can't she stand it any longer? Why would she rush to the door and open it? What does "Mother's Day is Over!" mean? Is she happy or sad? Explain.
6. Why would the husband change the locks? Does he want his son to come back home? Explain.
7. Paraphrase and explain: "Don't take on so. After all, you haven't lost a son, you've gained a tire jack for your car."
8. What kinds of things is the mother saying hello to? Is she happy to say hello to them? Why or why not?
9. "This week, he moved back. We should have moved the nest while we had the chance." What does this mean? Are the parents happy? Why should they have "moved the nest" Explain.
10. Do you find any humor in this article? If so, what kind? Why or why not is it funny? Is the subject of the article itself funny? Or is it the way it's written about? Explain.
11. This article is about American suburbia. Explain what you know about it. What have you learned from the article?

Cross-cultural questions

1. How old are children in your country when they move away from home? If this doesn't happen, why not? Does the same custom prevail for daughters as for sons? Explain.
2. How do parents feel about their children leaving home? How do the children feel about it? Are the customs regarding this the same as they used to be or are they changing? Explain how they are changing. Why do you think this happens?
3. What kind of impression does this article give about the living habits of teenagers in America? Compare this impression with how teenagers in your country might behave in their own homes.
4. What is your reaction to this picture of American suburbia?

Writing exercise

Students will work individually, in small groups, or together as a class as the teacher wishes. They will paraphrase each goodbye and hello sentence to describe the son. For example:

"Goodbye empty milk cartons in the refrigerator and dried out lunch meat.":

The son leaves empty milk cartons in the refrigerator.

He lets the lunch meat dry out.

"Hello turned off garden hose.":

The son forgets to turn off the garden hose.

He doesn't turn off the garden hose.

The class will discuss these as a group together.

EXERCISE CAN BE UNHEALTHY -- Mike Royko

The national craze for physical fitness has its dangers, as doctors are now warning us. Besides occasionally pitching over with heart attacks, joggers can suffer injuries to their heels, arches, toes and knees. There was, of course, the memorable case of the New York physician who jogged in zero weather and wound up with frostbite of his male appendage.

He was trying to warm the afflicted area, while reading instructions from a medical book, when his wife walked into his den. The poor woman almost went into shock, thinking her husband had become a weirdo.

Tennis players get painful elbows. Racquetball players bash each other's heads. Softball players disfigure their hands. Even disco dancers break bones by kicking other dancers.

It can make you wonder if being youthfully trim is worth the effort and potential pain.

Phil Farley, a wealthy Chicago real estate man, is now wondering.

Farley, 42, is overweight. Kind of fat, actually--about 225 sagging pounds on a 5-11 frame.

He has a friend who also is fat. And not long ago, while overeating at lunch, they both vowed that they would go into training and build themselves the kinds of bodies that would let them slither with pride across a disco floor.

To spur themselves on, they bet \$2,500 on who could lose the most weight in August.

Farley does not care for running. It makes his toes hurt. But his children have bicycles, so he began a daily routine of long, hard-pumping rides along the lakefront. The pounds began slipping away.

But as the end of the month approached, he began worrying. Would he

shed enough fat? Twenty-five hundred dollars is not small change.

A couple of nights ago, he went to dinner in a French restaurant and he weakened. A bit of pate. Some rich sauce. A gooey dessert.

By the time he got home, he was suffering from full-stomach guilt, another ailment of the fitness freak.

So he dragged out the bike and went for a ride, even though it was after midnight.

"I wanted to burn off those calories. I would have been awake worrying all night."

He pedaled from his Dearborn St. home into Lincoln Park which was almost deserted at that late hour.

As he wheeled through the park, he heard a sound behind him. Footsteps.

He looked back and saw four or five mean-looking young men. Although they were running, Farley suspected that they weren't joggers.

He became convinced they weren't joggers when one of them yelled: "Stop, you mother!"

"Help!" Farley screamed, and began pedaling as fast as he could, with the muggers only a few yards behind.

Farley had never gone that fast on a bike. His adrenaline was flowing and his legs were pumping. Those calories were really burning off.

He went so fast that he suddenly had the strange sensation that he was flying.

In fact, he was flying. In his frenzy, he had failed to make a turn. So he had soared right off the bank of the park lagoon.

Fortunately, the lagoon is not deep. Farley untangled himself from the bike and dragged himself out of the muddy water.

The muggers were gone, so Farley, covered with mud and his face bleeding from cuts where it hit the bike staggered toward a nearby street looking for

help. He asked a bus driver, who had a two-way radio, to call the Chicago police.

It isn't clear what happened when the police came. Farley says they seemed unsympathetic. They didn't go back to the lagoon and help him find his bike and they didn't look for the muggers.

The police arrested him. The charge? Being in the park after the 11 p.m. curfew.

The next morning, after being released on bond, having some stitches put in his face and retrieving his bike from the lagoon, Farley had trouble believing it had all happened.

"I get chased by muggers. I flew into the lagoon. I almost drowned. I get my face chopped up."

"I'm a respectable citizen of considerable wealth. But who gets arrested? The muggers? No, I get arrested. Have you ever heard of anything like that?"

No I haven't. How's your weight this morning?

"I lost a pound. Nerves, I guess."

Glossary of terms and idioms

craze - in fashion, something everybody is doing

physical fitness - body healthiness

pitching over - falling over

heart attack - failure of the heart

memorable - unforgettable

jog - run for exercise

frostbite - injury due to freezing

appendage - something that sticks out of the body such as an arm or leg

affliction - handicap

bash - hit

disfigure - mark up so that it looks ugly

potential - possible

sagging - hanging

vowed - promised

slither - slide

spur on - push

hard-pumping - difficult biking

slipping away - leaving

shed - lose

pate - liver paste

goeey - messy

suffering - hurting

ailment - sore or illness

fitness freak - someone obsessed with being healthy

burn off - use up

deserted - empty of people

wheeled - biked

suspected - thought

adrenaline - hormone present in distress situation

sensation - feeling

frenzy - crazy fit

untangled - took apart

dragged - pulled

muggers - robbers who rob people on the street

two-way radio - radio to send and receive messages with

unsympathetic - uncaring

arrested - taken by the police

curfew - time after which people must not be out

released on bond - money given for freedom from the police

stitches - sewn together cuts

retrieving - getting back

lagoon - lake

respectable - socially acceptable

considerable - much

nerves - emotional state

Comprehension questions

1. What are the dangers of the physical fitness fad?
2. What happened to the doctor who jogged in the cold weather? What about his wife?
3. Who was Phil Farley? Describe him. How did he get involved in the fad for physical fitness? What did he do?
4. Why did he start to worry?
5. What happened when he went to the French restaurant?
6. What did he do after he got home from the restaurant?
7. Where did he go and how did he get there?
8. Who did he see and what were they doing?
9. What did they yell at him? What does that mean?
10. What happened to Farley then?
11. How was he hurt? What about his bike?
12. What did the police do when they came? Who called the police?
13. What did Farley say about the incident?
14. Read aloud the parts you find funny. Why and how are they funny? Would they be funny if translated into your own language? Why or why not?

Cross-cultural questions

1. This article is based on a true-life incident. Did it surprise you that it could happen in America? How does it fit with your image of America? Could such a thing happen in your country?
2. Are you aware how popular fitness fads are in this country? If so, what kinds of physical activities does it involve? Are both men and

women involved in them? What age groups? What does this say about American life and culture? Is there any such thing in your country? If so, describe it. If not, why not? Explain.

3. What was your impression of the police? Could they have handled the situation differently or better? How? How would the police in your country have acted under the circumstances?
4. Farley made a bet of \$2500 about losing weight. What do you think of that? Would a rich person in your country do something like that? If so, what would they bet on?
5. Who could Farley complain to about the incident? In your country who could he have complained to? Would it get results to complain about the police in your country? Explain why or why not.

Synopsis writing exercise

Without looking at the article, students will write two short paragraphs summing up the article in their own words. Do not put names at the top of the paper. Mix up the papers, pass them around. Students will read the summaries aloud and discuss them focusing on the content. Instructor may type, bring back into class, and use the summaries as fill-in-the-blank exercises for prepositions (or other parts of speech).

Fill in the blanks with prepositions

It isn't clear what happened when the police came. Farley says they seemed unsympathetic. They didn't go back ___ the lagoon and help him find his bike and they didn't look _____ the muggers.

The police arrested him. The charge? Being ___ the park _____ the 11 p.m. curfew.

The next morning, ___ being released ___ bond, having some stitches put ___ his face and retrieving his bike _____ the lagoon, Farley had trouble believing it had all happened.

"I get chased ___ muggers. I flew _____ the lagoon. I almost drowned. I get my face chopped up."

"I'm a respectable citizen ___ considerable wealth. But who gets arrested? The muggers? No, I get arrested. Have you ever heard _____ anything like that?"

No, I haven't. How's your weight this morning?"

"I lost a pound. Nerves. I guess."

HAVING HOT FLASHES WHILE BREAKING OUT IN A COLD SWEAT -- Mike Royko

After President Carter unveiled his plans to conserve energy, I happened to talk to a modern young High-Rise Man, and he was nervous.

"I don't know if I can face that kind of future," he said.

You mean not having enough gas for your car?

"No, I can live with that. I have a tiny car. And my High-Rise job is not that far from my High-Rise home. And the high-rise that my High-Rise girl friend lives in is not that far from my high-rise. Besides, I may sell my car and switch to roller skates."

Then what is bothering you?

"Sweating. They are going to turn down the air conditioning in my office. In the restaurants I go to. In the discos. In the swingles bars. Where I get my hair styled. Everywhere I go, I will sweat."

Well, you've sweated before, haven't you?

"Occasionally, but only under certain conditions that are appropriate for sweating. When I play racquetball, I sweat. When I jog, I sweat. And when I roller-skate, I sweat."

So you're accustomed to sweating.

"But only when I'm supposed to sweat. As soon as I'm done, I stop sweating and I immediately shower and apply a deodorant that keeps me dry and gives me 24-hour protection against sweating. But it can't protect me if the air conditioning is going to be turned down. I will be sweating everywhere I go."

There's nothing wrong with that.

"You can't be serious. It is unnatural."

To sweat? But people have sweated throughout history. They have sweated since they began walking upright.

"Did they have energy shortages back then, too?"

I mean before there was air conditioning.

"You mean there once was no air conditioning?"

Why, of course, there wasn't. It didn't really become common until after World War II. Didn't you know that?

"Why no, I thought there had always been air conditioning. I've always had it. How could people live and work without it?"

We just sweated.

"You actually did without air conditioning?"

Sure. We all did.

"In your homes? Your jobs? Your discos? Your restaurants? You sweated in all these places? How awful for you."

Oh, it wasn't that bad.

"It sounds barbaric. When you discoed, you must have been dripping with sweat. Your clothes must have looked awful."

Well, we didn't disco, but we danced. And, sure, we sweated.

"You must have had to take showers every few hours."

No. Most homes didn't have showers. But we took a bath every Saturday.

"Once a week? Everybody must have..you know.."

Must have what?

"You know. Smelled."

Toward the end of the week, yes.

"But how could someone go up to a girl in a swingers bar if he was sweating and she was sweating. I mean, what a turn-off. You'd both be all wet. What kind of deodorant did you use--the stick or spray?"

I don't think we used any kind. I guess some ladies used them.

"You sweated and you did not use a deodorant? Didn't you...offend?"

Well, you sort of learned to keep your arms close to your sides. If you didn't flap your arms too much, you were all right.

"And when you slept on hot nights, didn't you sweat?"

Sure. But a person can sweat and sleep at the same time--even Spiro Agnew could do that.

"But what about people who were married or living together. You mean they would be in bed and both would be sweating?"

Why, yes.

"How uncool. Didn't your hair spray get gummy?"

We didn't use hair spray.

"How could you keep your hair in place?"

Brilliantine.

"But that's greasy. And you were sweaty. You were greasy and sweaty?"

I guess so. And sometimes gritty.

"Greasy and sweaty and gritty and grimy?"

Except on Saturdays when we took baths.

"It sounds like a nightmare. I'm starting to feel sick."

It won't be that bad. Stay calm. Why, you're starting to sweat.

"See, it's starting. Why did my parents bring me into this kind of world?"

Glossary of terms and idioms

hot flashes - the body suddenly feels very hot

cold sweat - perspiring due to fear

unveiled - showed

conserve - save

energy - power

high-rise - tall building

I can face - I can bear, I can stand

switch - change

roller-skates - shoes with tiny wheels

bothering - worrying

sweating - perspiring

swingles - single people who like to have fun

appropriate - suitable

racquetball - game using a ball and a racquet

jog - run for exercise

accustomed - get used to

deodorant - a type of cosmetic which helps to stop sweat from smelling bad

upright - standing

barbaric - uncivilized

flap - move like wings

gummy - sticky

brilliantine - old-fashioned hair oil

nightmare - bad dream

bring me into this kind of world - let be born into this life

greasy - oily

grimy, gritty - dirty

Comprehension questions

1. What did President Carter do? Why did he do it?
2. Why was the young man nervous? Explain "that kind of future."
3. What are his feelings about sweating? What does he say about it?
Where will it happen and why?
4. How does the other speaker respond to these feelings? What does he say?
5. When, according to the young man, are people supposed to sweat? What do they do about it? How does the older man respond?
6. When was air conditioning invented? What did people do before that about the heat? How does the young man feel about no air conditioning? What does he say?
7. How often did people use to shower? What about body odor? Deodorant? What is the young man's attitude? What does he say?
8. What does the young man say about the hair spray? What does the older man say about brilliantine?
9. How does the young man feel about using brilliantine? What does he say?
10. Paraphrase and explain the last question: Why did my parents bring me into this kind of world?" What kind of world does he mean?
11. Read aloud the parts you think are funny. Why are they funny to you?

Cross-cultural questions

1. Whose attitude can you identify with best? Why? What sort of age difference is there between the speakers?
2. How do you feel about the emphasis Americans place on being clean and smelling good? What is the attitude toward cleanliness in your country? How often and how do people bathe? Compare this with what you know or

have experienced about American bathing customs.

4. How prevalent is the use of deodorants and anti-perspirants in your culture? How widely available and advertised are they? Compare with America. How do you think and feel about the attitudes of Americans toward this? Compare this with the attitudes of people in your country.
5. Would people in your country speak openly about such things? Why or why not?
6. How do men and women groom their hair in your country? Compare with Americans.
7. In the article, the young man and the older man had very different attitudes. Would this be the case in your country? Explain.

Exercise for fun

Two student volunteers will each take a speaker's part and read aloud.

Writing exercises

1. Students working alone or in small groups will retitile the article in their own words, and briefly present it to the class.
2. Each student will write a brief synopsis of the article (one or two paragraphs). He or she will read this to the class and request or not request suggestions and corrections.
3. Each student will find five examples of reduced and/or contracted speech in the article. The student will write out the expanded correct form. These are to be presented to the class on the board and then corrected by peers.

Role-play

Students working in pairs will make up a skit about differences between generations. The topic may be the same or of a different nature if preferred. The dialogue should have examples of contracted, reduced speech. After each skit is presented, there will be a brief discussion focusing on the contracted, reduced speech as well as the skit itself.