

B2.12 Great Sense of Humour - Handout

1 These questions introduce the topic of humour and comedy. It is of course a very important topic to cover, especially as it plays such a central role in British culture. Kate Fox in her book "Watching the English" (2004) wrote, "...most *English* conversations will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, mockery or just silliness." However, very often humour translates poorly from culture to culture. Nevertheless, it should provide a fruitful topic for discussion. Key vocabulary includes: *jokes*, 'stand-up' comedians, 'sitcom', 'romcom', *practical jokes* (a trick played on someone to make them look foolish), *satire*, *cartoon strips* and *clowns*.

2 As usual, these short texts can be read aloud for pronunciation purposes. Firstly, by the native speaker to provide a model, then by the learner. In fact, the way we tell anecdotes, or jokes - using particular stress, intonation and pausing, should make the reading aloud of these examples particularly useful in this regard. Make sure that your partner understands that *funny* means *amusing/comical*, or *strange/unusual*. There is a very frequently held misapprehension that it is the adjective of *fun*, and so means *enjoyable*.

3 This is a sensitive issue and it is not the intention of the author of these materials to offend. The vocabulary here is useful though, and recent controversies about Islamic cartoons demonstrate that it is an issue that people feel very strongly about. The two lower cartoons could perhaps be considered sexist, or insensitive by some (hopefully not many). It is unlikely that anyone could be offended by the two above.

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Key vocabulary includes: *offensive*, *racist*, *sexist*, *physical or mental handicaps*, 'sick' jokes, *black humour*, 'dirty' jokes and (in the cartoons) *scratch on the door/pee on the rug*, *the beep*, *chores*, *car fixation*, *tools*, *gadgets*, and *cosmetics*.

4 It is important to check the learner's understanding of these mistakes. Whilst it is often stated that a joke that needs to be explained loses its ability to amuse, it is better in this instance to provide an explanation as the feeling of frustration and being excluded from the joke is a worse alternative for somebody learning the language.

5 This is quite a difficult task and may require some thinking about. But any suggestions that you could make to offer inspiration to your partner will, as always, facilitate the writing task to follow.