
INTERNATIONAL A-LEVEL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Unit 4 Language exploration

Insert 1

This insert is for use with **Question 1**.

The three texts that follow are:

Text 1: The Laugh Out Loud Joke Book

Text 2: The Science of Laughter

Text 3: Warming Up

**Please open the insert fully
to see all three texts**

Text 1

Q. How do you start a plant race?

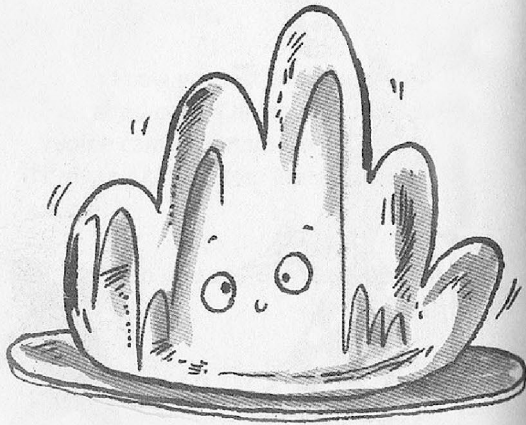
A. Ready, steady, grow!

Q. How do you start a firefly race?

A. Ready, steady, glow!

Q. How do you start a jelly race?

A. Get set.



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Q. What's the difference between a bottle of medicine and a doormat?

A. One's shaken up and taken and the other's taken up and shaken.



Q. Where do frogs leave their bags?

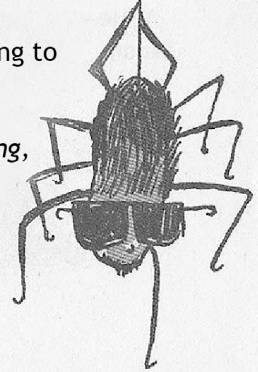
A. In the croakroom.

Q. What's the opposite of hieroglyphs?

A. Loweroglyphs.

A famous spider was talking to her fans:

'And if you want to know more about what I'm doing, go to my website.'



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The Science of Laughter

March 21, 2023



By Jonathan McIntosh

It's long been said that laughter is the best medicine. And whether it's the effects of a sharp one-liner, a knockout knock-knock joke, or the latest viral video dominating social media, a hearty dose of humour is good for the health.

But what exactly happens to our minds and bodies when we're tittering, giggling, or at the mercy of a full-blown belly laugh?

Here, we examine the science of laughter to better understand what's going on when our funny bones are suitably tickled.

Laughter as survival instinct

Laughter evolved as a form of social bonding and a way for animals to express playful behaviour. For example, mammals including rats, dolphins and apes laugh when they're tickled or when playing. Humans, however, don't need physical triggers to spark laughter – although tickling is likely to almost always leave the recipient tickled pink.

According to Janet Gibson, a professor of cognitive psychology at Iowa's Grinnell College, laughter developed in humans as a survival tool.

She argues that laughter has kept social groups together throughout the ages because it tells others that there's no need to be worried or anxious about what's going on around them. The human brain has maintained these connections over the centuries, which is why we associate laughter with feelings of amusement, safety, connection, and relaxation.

In fact, there's a whole host of activity happening in our brains when we find ourselves hapless to the har-de-hars.

Laughter makes us feel good

Much like the saying, laughter is indeed a strong medicine. When we're busy guffawing with glee, laughter swaps the stress-inducing cortisol in our bloodstream for a cocktail of feel-good neurotransmitters: dopamine, oxytocin and endorphins.

Dopamine helps improve learning, motivation, and attention span, while oxytocin – dubbed the “bonding” chemical – can foster feelings of connection when it flows into the bloodstream.

Endorphins also trigger feelings of pleasure and help lower adrenaline levels. Peculiarly enough, a 2011 study by Dunbar et al. found that people can withstand 15% more pain purely by laughing for a few minutes beforehand.

Laughing each day can help keep the doctor at bay

A natural mood booster, laughter increases oxygen intake, stimulates our lungs, muscles, and heart, and raises endorphin levels released in the brain. It also improves circulation and facilitates muscle relaxation – helping to lessen the impact of the physical symptoms of stress associated with the fight-or-flight response.

Negative thoughts can catalyse the release of neurotransmitters and hormones like cortisol, which can wreak havoc on the cardiovascular, metabolic, and immune systems over time. The positive thoughts connected to laughter catalyse the release of neuropeptides that can help battle stress by lowering heart rate and blood pressure.

A 2020 study by Zander-Schellenberg et al – which saw the psychologists measure the frequency and intensity of the laughter and stress of 41 people over a two-week period – found that the more participants laughed, the less stress they reported.

Having plenty of laughter in our lives can also act as a handy reappraisal technique that helps ground us in the moment. Laughter can also leave us feeling more content with our lives too.

Lurie and Monahan found in their 2014 study that the emotions produced by laughter – such as amusement, happiness, and joy – increased wellbeing and life satisfaction. Because of this, they argued laughter can make it easier to cope with difficult situations while facilitating a deeper appreciation of the meaning of life.

Text 3

WARMING UP

Thursday 7th September 2023

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Catie and me were performing together at the Queen Mother's Theatre in Hitchin. Catie's dipping her toe back into the stand-up scene and I am still working on putting together a show and we had a baby sitter, so we made it into a mini date too. We had dinner first and then hung out in the dressing room together. Which is still a good date by any standards. Then as part of the never changing dance of love we did some jokes for each other in front of nearly 200 people from Hitchin. It's a tale as old as time.

Catie has some great new jokes - I am glad she's back doing stand-up. I first fell for her watching her set back in the mid-2000s. Though she's doing less material about dating now and more about her husband snoring.

She also featured in my set, though I was bigging her up for how she looked after me when I was ill, so I think that makes me a better person. Also I don't snore. As she points out in the routine, she'll tell me I'm snoring and I will tell her I can't be because I am not even asleep yet. Is it really feasible that I think I'm awake, but am not and that I can't hear my own snoring?

Catie was great, but so was I. The show is very loose and relaxed and there's loads of ad-libbing* (at the start that I wasn't planning, hadn't thought about until I was on stage and still don't know where it came from). I have sometimes doubted myself as a stand-up - I am not one of those comics who insists they always blow the roof off, though I understand why they claim that - a lot of this is about confidence and if you convince yourself you're amazing and are going down brilliantly, even if you aren't, you will weirdly have a better chance of doing so.

I didn't blow the roof off - thank goodness, the manager would have been furious - but I was in command and even when I wasn't really sure what was coming next I ad-libbed jokes and ideas. It's not easy to make a story about illness laugh-out-loud funny for an hour, but aside from the couple of more serious bits (still with some decent jokes) it was wall to wall laughs. I think I might actually be good at comedy. Maybe I should give it a go.

It's great that Hitchin has a lovely comedy club and is pulling in an audience and I am still excited about building this show up to a 90 minute tour in 2024. It's been too long.

Tomorrow though I start a different tour.

[Buy Tickets Online](#)

*ad-libbing: to perform without preparing the words in advance

END OF TEXTS

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