

## Year 8/9 Unit: Sounds Funny

*Note: This section of the unit flows on from a physical comedy unit, in which the conventions of comedy have been unpacked and explored.*

### LEARNING GOALS

- Appreciate and be able to identify features of radio comedy sketches and plays
- Understand their structure and specific requirements
- Understand their history and contemporary relevance, and related careers
- Attempt and improve accent skills
- Experiment with vocal elements to create meaning and comic effects
- Understand and apply features of verbal comedy
- Know how to source, edit and play sound effects
- Create and demonstrate (rehearsed, live recording) a comic sketch

|    |   |
|----|---|
| Wk | This is somewhat flexible (some activities may begin in week earlier, go into next week; or swap order)<br>3x 50 min lessons a week |
| 1  | Introduction: appreciating examples, identifying features and dramatic languages  |
| 2  | Voice and accent; reading 1-2 page scripts  |
| 3  | ICTs; verbal comedy conventions; scriptwriting conventions  |
| 4  | Teacher and student creating; group creating and peer analysing. Own idea checked   |
| 5  | Try out idea with group, peer feedback, draft, teacher feedback, apply  |
| 6  | Demonstration rehearsal, sourcing sound effects   |
| 7  | Demonstration   |

### RADIO SKETCHES AND PLAYS CONTEXT

*Teacher notes: The information below is interspersed amongst following lessons, as students (through questioning, discussion and response) explore what has changed across time and how audio drama and comedy is still relevant today.*

#### HISTORY

- The community gathers for a story, a song, a laugh, around the fire, in music halls, around the radio, the tv, the cinema and now, around the smart phone.

#### NOW

- People still gather in comedy clubs, theatres; people still listen to the radio, to audio books and sketch shows (while travelling for instance)
- Rise of podcasts (listen any time), true crime serials
- Still may be (read) performed in front of a live audience

#### CAREERS

- Announcer, news reporter, interviewer, investigative journalism, writer, performer, producer of news, interest, drama and comedy

1-2 lessons appreciating and identifying features of Radio Sketches and Plays (some examples are used in later lessons):

## EXAMPLES OF SKETCHES:

### JOHN FINNEMORE'S SOUVENIR PROGRAMME (2013-2019)



*John Finnemore's Souvenir Programme* is a sketch comedy series broadcast on BBC Radio 4. John Finnemore is the sole writer and performs with Margaret Cabourn-Smith, Simon Kane, Lawry Lewin and Carrie Quinlan. The first series was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2011, and further series have followed annually.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scS-Z70e4Xo> Awesome

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wx0lgwUFMJk> Dog show

Jot down examples of features you notice that might be key to

- Audio drama (telling a story through sound and voices alone; without visuals)

*Teacher notes: clarity of speaking; sound effects that make meaning clear; accents or voices that suggest class or have timbre which creates contrast; establishing context (ie location), role and relationship at the start.*

- Audio comedy (making comedy work through sound and voice; without visuals)

*Teacher notes: puns or jokes around words; pauses to create comic effect; odd combinations to create visual images; delivery that emphasises certain words; the ridiculous or nonsensical (absurdity); intensity of delivery; pauses to allow listeners to put together ideas and thus get the joke.*

### I'M SORRY, I'LL READ THAT AGAIN (1960s)



*I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again* is a BBC radio comedy program that originated from the Cambridge University Footlights revue Cambridge Circus in the early 60s. It had a devoted youth following, with live recordings being more akin to a rock concert than a comedy show.

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbWHiFS\\_R7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbWHiFS_R7E) (skip 0.55-2.37min section)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pd-dH8WWmcc> (re-performed – beginning section)

Jot down examples of features you notice that might be key to

- Audio drama (telling a story through sound and voices alone; without visuals)

*Teacher notes: clarity of speaking; sound effects that make meaning clear; accents*

- Audio comedy (making comedy work through sound and voice; without visuals)

*Teacher notes: puns eg Miss Fortune, Herr Shirt; pauses to create comic effect; odd combinations to create visual images (Queen Mother racing against horses); the ridiculous or nonsensical (absurdity); pauses to allow people to think about the joke.*

### DANNY KAYE (c 1950s)



Danny Kaye was an American actor, singer, dancer, comedian, musician, and philanthropist. His performances featured physical comedy, idiosyncratic pantomimes, and rapid-fire novelty songs. 'I wasn't born a fool. It took work to get this way'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6ndLuQ3lkc> The Little Fiddle

What vocal, narrative and comic devices can you identify?

*Teacher notes: intensity of delivery, gibberish*

## EXAMPLES OF FULL EPISODES/STORIES



WAR OF THE WORLDS (1920s) (historical relevance)

- "**The War of the Worlds**", directed and narrated by Orson Wells, as an adaption of H.G. Well's novel (1898), as part of a regular series of radio drama presented by *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, was performed and broadcast live as a Halloween episode at 8 p.m. on Sunday, October 30, 1938. The episode became famous for causing panic among its listening audience who tuned in later and didn't realise the description of Martian invasion was a play. (PICTURE: Orson Welles tells reporters that no one connected with the broadcast had any idea that it would cause panic.)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPE5k55g-o> The Panic Broadcast – PBS America



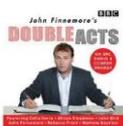
THE GOON SHOW (1960s) (historical relevance)

- A British Radio Comedy Program broadcast in the 1950s in front of a live audience. The show's chief creator and writer was Spike Milligan. Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe rounded out the main cast. The scripts mixed *ludicrous* plots with *surreal* humour, puns, catchphrases and an array of *bizarre* sound effects.
- *What might the italicized words mean?*
- Some of the later episodes feature electronic effects devised by the *fledgling* BBC Radiophonic Workshop, many of which were reused by other shows for decades.
- *What does this indicate about the availability of sound effects?*
- Many elements of the show *satirised* contemporary life in Britain, *parodying* many aspects of the culture.
- The programme exercised a considerable influence on the development of British, Australian American comedy and popular culture; including upon The Beatles and Monty Python.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuVFFNvyUT8> Rommel's Treasure
- *What evidence can you hear of ludicrous, surreal or bizarre content or sound effects?*
- *How are the actors using their voices to entertain?*
- *Why did they record live?*
- *What evidence of satire or parody can you hear ?*



CABIN PRESSURE (2008-2014) (*Teacher purchased resource*)

- *Cabin Pressure* is a radio sitcom written and created by John Finnemore and directed and produced by David Tyler. Performed in front of a live audience, it gradually gathered a cult following. The final episode received 22,854 requests for just 200 available tickets.
- The sitcom follows the exploits of the eccentric crew of the single aeroplane owned by "MJN Air" as they are chartered to take all manner of items, people or animals across the world. Each episode takes them to a place starting with the next letter of the alphabet.
- It has also won numerous comedy awards for Audio Drama, Radio Comedy and a Comedy of the Year award in 2014 (across TV and radio)



DOUBLE ACTS (*teacher purchased resource*)

- *John Finnemore's Double Acts* is a series of radio comedy programmes, written by John Finnemore. It is an anthology series of largely unconnected two-handers. 2015-

DR WHO (1960s>) An example of radio dramas that have been popular from the 60s til today  
*Dead Air* (*Teacher purchased resource*) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92qoJkrckPs> (*ad*)

AUDIO DRAMA FEATURES (*SHORT SUMMARY- these would be gathered through the exploration of examples*)

- Introduction music
- Announcer/Narrator/MC
- Ambient sound
- Sound effects
- Character voice/accents
- Vocal delivery: pace, pause, timing etc

*Along with audio samples above and others,  
several 1-2 PAGE SCRIPTS IN DIFFERENT GENRES are used to support learning in the next sections:*

*FEATURES and DRAMATIC LANGUAGES – identifying features and dramatic languages*

*VOICE/ACCENT – opportunity to try voices and accents*

*SCRIPTWRITING CONVENTIONS – example for identifying setting out*

FEATURES and DRAMATIC LANGUAGES unpacked in more detail, using examples (1 lesson)

#### STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE RADIO PLAYS

- Cliffhanger structure (*Climax resolution is starting point, unresolved climax ending*) OR
- Beginning (people, place, problem)
- Middle (obstacles and tactics as tension rises to a climax)
- End (resolution- often a feature introduced earlier satisfyingly involved)

#### REQUIREMENTS

- All information has to be said or heard so that meaning is implied or stated (eg who a character is: 'that's interesting, Pilot'. Ambient sound to suggest place)
- New time and place = new scene (often a sound effect is used to indicate this).

#### ELEMENTS

- Tension: drives the action
- Language: almost everything is through this (plus sounds)
- Symbol: words and sound that can fill in a whole picture quickly
- Time and Place: where the characters are, should be clear when changes (eg through announcer, what characters say, sound effect)
- Role and Relationship: who the characters are and how they interact comes mainly through what they say and HOW they say it (accent, tone)
- Mood: possibly indicate genre, may change.
- Contrast: helps make ideas clear
- Focus: should be clear at each point, may change with entry of new character

#### CONVENTIONS

- Narration/announcer
- Meaningful sound effects/theme music/ambient noise
- Distinct character voices through delivery and language
- Rapid establishment of flexible time, place (context), characters and action
- Multiple distinct roles and scenes
- Rising climax or Cliffhanger structure (resolve previous cliffhanger, establish new problem, build to climax, end at critical moment)
- Imitation of existing genres

#### SKILLS

- Vocal acting skills
  - Character voice/accents
  - Delivery for comic effect (interpretation of script)
- Applying stagecraft (sound effects)
- Ensemble skills

VOCAL ELEMENTS (  $\frac{1}{2}$  lesson REVIEW- short practical activities)

- Pitch (high or low delivery of words)
- Pace (speed at which you speak)
- Pause (not speaking)
- Volume (loudness or quietness)
- Quality (harsh or sweet)
- Clarity (understandable and precise)
- Modulate (vary all of these aspects of voice)
- Project (loud or soft, the audience can always hear)

## ACCENTS (1 lesson)

*(Teacher Notes: context that we are dealing in stereotypes, often start from kids own cultures and celebrating what they can share with us. i.e. student from Ethiopia taught us their Mum's accent)*

### ACCENT STEREOTYPES: CONTEXT

- Safe place to not be good at accents
- Imitate pitch variations (upward inflection)
- Imitate pacing: drawn out vowels and diphthongs 'aaare yeeew frahm the souyth'; or clipped consonants 'Seth africk-ah'
- Usually a vowel shift involved ('fush un chups')
- Often consonants are removed ('nu yawk')
- Use stock phrases ('beached as bro' 'tuh be shore')

### ACCENT STEREOTYPES: HAVING A GO AT VARIOUS

*Teacher Notes: This is taught by teacher demonstration, utilising stock phrases, sounds and pitch variations, and mouth shapes. Students are encouraged to imitate and then experiment. Terrible outcomes are fine as long as they are having an attempt. Playful atmosphere.*

*There is also YouTube and an excellent ABC series on accent learning*

*Ending the lesson with some Theatresport games like accent rollercoaster can be a lot of fun.*

- American: Nu Yawk, Mafia (hoarse), Bohston, female Southern (y'all), male Texan, Western (ye'hah) African American woman (oh no you di'nt), valley girl (like, totally), surfer dude (woah)
- British: Queen, upperclass, old fashioned upper class (I say, wot), lower class (Jamie Oliver, Cockney, Bovver), Northern, Salisbury (Year but no but)
- Celtic: Scottish (Eng-lesh), Pirate, Irish (tuh be shure), Dublin/Belfast (shurre), Welsh (shloppier), Cornish (vill-uge)
- European: Swedish (I am Inga), Italian (Mumma mia), French (oh ho ho), Russian (Vladimier), German (Oh Volfgang)
- Down Under: Australian (Crikey), New Zealand (beached as, bro), South African (Seth Africaan), Greek/Lebanese Australian (Yeh brah), African (I am a turtle), Jamaican (mon), Asian (Confucius say), Indian (verrry gud)

### OTHER USEFUL VOICE TYPES

- Child voice (high)
- Aged voice (cracks and whistles)
- Well rounded voice

ACTIVITY: Try out voices, using scripts provided.

## SOUND EFFECT SOURCES AND ICTS (1-2 lessons)

- Film and Drama collections at school
- YouTube: cut and paste into converter for MP3 or WAV format
- Save free ones
- Purchase
- iTunes sound effect collections
- Live (ie make the sound on the spot)

## ICTs

- Follow onscreen demonstration and handouts to:
  - source a sound from YouTube and convert a sound to MP3
  - Download Audacity and LAME
  - Import and edit a sound using Audacity
  - Downloading and using Qlab on a Mac OR
  - Downloading and using Multiplay on Windows to play effects
- ADVANCED
  - Downloading Reaper sound recording software
  - Using Reaper Software and Xenyx hardware to record

VERBAL COMEDY CONVENTIONS (1-2 lessons, in conjunction with a sheet listing dramatic languages -as per earlier page-, and various examples, listening for conventions to identify and unpack how they were used and how they interact with the dramatic languages. Note that students are already familiar with these conventions from an earlier physical comedy unit)

- **recognising** what we know already (expected) but in a different way
  - **Imitation** of genres/people/situations
  - Statement of the very obvious/understatement (sarcasm)/overstatement
  - **Taboo**: things not normally allowed to be said OR recognition of ridiculous things in reality
  - Rule of three (**repetition**), **running/extended gag**,
- being surprised (by the **unexpected**)
  - establish then break the routine
  - Funny **words** (including juxt, puns) and funny **images** (unexpected juxtaposition, insults)
  - **Juxtaposition**: putting things together that:
    - don't usually go together
    - don't fit/belong
    - **Consequences**: cause an unintended or ironic impact as a result > **ridiculous/absurd** situations
- farce: increasing **speed, intensity, complexity**

## REVIEW OF SCRIPTWRITING CONVENTIONS

*(students are already familiar with these from an earlier unit)*

*1-2 page scripts available: students identify features: collate a summary something like this.*

### **Names listed left, Dialogue indented**

GINA           Vot a vonderful sound the volves make, Victor!  
VICTOR       Crikey, Sheila, those dingoes are howling, and it don't  
                  sound wonderful.  
GINA           Who is zis 'Sheila'? Are you see-ink somevun else?!

### **Stage directions (sound effects and delivery notes) bracketed and italicized with names in capitals**

VICTOR       *(howling stops)* At blinking last! *(to GINA)* And, no, luv,  
                  there's no one else for this Aussie bloke, but you.

### **TASK HAND OUT**

- *1-2 page scripts from earlier activity are used*
- *A student exemplar or two from previous years is also played*

### **MODELLING**

- *With class, teacher shapes a planning a radio episode or sketch; writing part of it; and demonstrates setting out on PowerPoint.*
- *In groups students together shape a short sketch which another group/or class listens to and gives feedback on according to some of the criteria and dramatic languages (teacher guided) using the dramatic languages sheet given out earlier and their task sheet.*

### **BEGINNING TASK**

- *Students are put into groups of 3-5 who will become their demonstrators and operators. The task is done individually.*
- *Students individually plan their own episode or sketch – teacher check*
- *Students begin to write their episode or sketch – try it out on their group (providing necessary copies) and see what is working and what needs changes. Peer feedback*

### **DRAFT**

- *Prior to submitting draft student checks their success criteria checklist*
- *Student draft is demonstrated to teacher as well as submitted in script form – teacher feedback is given verbally and some notes on script*

### **DEMONSTRATION REHEARSAL**

- *Student applies feedback and rehearses demonstration with group (and is a demonstrator for their group) providing necessary script copies, they also source sound effects, and place into QLab, Multiplay or just number in order to be played, and organize an operator, providing a notated script.*

### **DEMONSTRATION**

- *Xenyx is set up and either teacher or students record 'live' in front of class audience, playing effects on cue as well.*
- *Selected recordings are played back to other class/younger grades, and to the class itself.*

## TASK SHEET KEY FEATURES

### Summary of Task: Write a comic sketch for radio

- set out using the conventions studied in class and demonstrating your grasp of the style by:
- stating requirements for character voice delivery, sound effects and ambient sound,
- rapidly and naturally establishing roles and relationships, tension, changes to time and place, and mood, through language,
- in either a simple rising climax structure, with a resolution, or cliffhanger structure.
- Using verbal comedy conventions
- consider imitating an established genre.
- 1-2 A4 pages, size 10 font
- DOCUMENTATION (named): this task sheet and criteria grid, draft.

## DRAMATIC LANGUAGES

| Elements              | Skills                          | Conventions of Style   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Tension               | Scriptwriting                   | <b>Podcast</b>   |
| Mood                  | Applying                        | Narration/announcer  |
| Language              | Stagecraft                      | Meaningful sound effects/theme music/ambient noise   |
| Symbol                | (eg sound effects requirements) | Distinct character voices through delivery and language  |
| Time                  |                                 | Rapid establishment of flexible time, place (context), characters and action (multiple distinct roles/scenes)  |
| Place                 |                                 | Rising climax or Cliffhanger structure (resolve previous cliffhanger, establish new problem, build to climax, end at critical moment)                        |
| Role and Relationship |                                 | <b>Verbal Comedy</b>   |
| Contrast              |                                 | Recognition, Imitation, Taboo, Repetition, Unexpected, Break the Routine, Funny words and Images, Juxtaposition, Consequences, Speed, Intensity, Complexity. |
| Focus                 |                                 | <b>Scriptwriting</b>   |
|                       |                                 | Names listed left, Dialogue indented   |
|                       |                                 | Stage directions (sound effects and delivery notes) bracketed and italicized with names in capitals  |

| A  | B  | C   | D  | E   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Excellent management of elements: tension, mood (genre), language, symbol, time, place, role, relationship, contrast, focus to create dramatic action              | Strong management of elements: tension, mood (genre), language, symbol, time, place, role, relationship, contrast, focus to create dramatic action | Competent management of elements: tension, mood (genre), language, symbol, time, place, role, relationship, contrast, focus to create dramatic action | Partial management of aspects of elements: tension, mood (genre), language, symbol, time, place, role, relationship, contrast, focus to make dramatic action | Partial use of aspects of elements: tension, mood (genre), language, symbol, time, place, role, relationship, contrast, focus to make dramatic action |
| Perceptive and insightful use of a range of skills: (scriptwriting; applying stagecraft) & conventions: podcast and script (setting out) to shape dramatic action. | Skilful use of a range of skills: (scriptwriting; applying stagecraft) & conventions: podcast and script (setting out) to shape dramatic action.   | Competent use of a range of skills: (scriptwriting; applying stagecraft) & conventions: podcast and script (setting out) to shape dramatic action.    | Partial use of skills: (scriptwriting; applying stagecraft) & conventions: podcast and script (setting out) to make dramatic action.                         | Partial use of aspects of skills: (scriptwriting; applying stagecraft) & conventions: podcast and script (setting out) to make dramatic action.       |
| Insightful and skilful synthesis (complex structure and shaping) of the dramatic languages, purposes and contexts to create dramatic action and meaning (content)  | Skilful synthesis (structure and shaping) of the dramatic languages, purposes and contexts to create dramatic action and meaning (content)         | Synthesis (structure and shaping) of the dramatic languages, purposes and contexts to create dramatic action and meaning (content)                    | Partial use of structure and shaping, purposes and contexts to make dramatic action and superficial meaning (content)  | Partial use of aspects of structure and shaping, purposes and contexts to make dramatic action (content)  |
| On schedule, worked independently, full documentation  | Mostly on schedule, usually worked independently, most documentation   | Generally on schedule, worked fairly independently, key documentation   | A bit behind schedule, off task at times, lacking most documentation   | Behind schedule, off task, no documentation   |

#### Things I did well

#### Things I can improve

##### Elements

- Managing tension so it built and was defined
- Established mood of chosen genre
- Used language effectively and concisely
- Used symbolic sounds meaningfully
- Clear character and relationships
- Time and place clear

##### Scriptwriting skills and conventions

- Names listed left, dialogue indented, stage directions bracketed and italicized

##### Conventions of Radio Play/Podcast/Verbal Comedy

- Announcer/Narrator used to establish contexts if necessary
- Meaningful sound effects/theme music/ambient noise
- Distinct character voices through delivery and language
- Recognition, Imitation, Taboo, Repetition, Unexpected, Break the Routine, Funny words and Images, Juxtaposition, Consequences, Speed, Intensity, Complexity.

##### Meaning

- Meaning (character, action, context) quickly, clearly and accurately communicated
- Structure creatively shaped to entertain audience

##### Polish

- Proofread

##### Effort

- Used class time wisely (independent, prepared, focused)
- Full draft to schedule
- Brought script documentation

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