

CLASSROOM COMEDY

If we want to use comedy in the classroom, the first step is to learn how to think and communicate like a comedian. A comedian twists words and phrases in order to design surprising and unexpected narratives. Once learned, teachers and students can use this method of communication to enhance any lesson. The following example provides a glimpse into the mind of a comedian and demonstrates one way of leveraging comedy in the classroom.

START WITH THE CONTENT: CULTURAL RELATIVISM

The following narrative about cultural relativism is not funny, it's simply a summary of the content that we want to deliver and reinforce.

Cultural relativism is about understanding a culture on its own terms and not making judgements. The goal is to understand that there are cultural practices different than your own. The idea is that no culture's norms are superior to another's. For example, in some cultures, when people meet up, they kiss, while in another culture the custom is to shake hands. In some cultures, arriving early to a party is totally cool, while in other cultures it's rude to arrive early. In America we eat Fast food, while in places like Brazil they eat tarantulas. No judgements.

NEXT, PUNCH IT UP

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/4IP7XTSE4JW](https://youtu.be/4IP7XTSE4JW)

Now the challenge is to turn the narrative into a comedy routine. We can do this by analyzing each line of the above narrative in order to determine where comedic elements can be added. Below are several types of communication strategies that can be used to punch up a story.

<i>Literary Devices</i>	<i>Use homophones, sarcasm, metaphor, simile, and hyperbole</i>
<i>Self-Deprecation</i>	<i>Make fun of yourself or your ideas Undermine your perspectives</i>
<i>Incongruence</i>	<i>Use language or an attitude that does not fit with the narrative</i>
<i>Power of Three</i>	<i>Make the third example in a list an unexpected conclusion</i>
<i>Double Standards</i>	<i>Point out hypocrisy and inconsistent applications of ideas</i>
<i>Inappropriate</i>	<i>Be playfully offensive (but never hateful)</i>
<i>Callbacks</i>	<i>Bring back an earlier detail in a different context</i>
<i>Specificity</i>	<i>Explore the look, smell, taste, and feel Determine how a variety of people would react</i>

The resulting script for the stand-up routine is below and includes explanations of the comedic elements and thinking. **Listen to the routine**, follow along with the script, and then go back and read the explanations. This will help illustrate how a comedian communicates.

Cultural relativism is about understanding
A culture on its own terms and not making judgements
You know, like if you saw someone eat, I don't know
A big spider and the legs were like wiggling
Outside their mouth for a few seconds
Before they get pushed in all the way
And then you hear a crunch as they bite down
You would want to avoid blurting out
"Uh, eww, gross"

*I want to take the final example from the narrative and present a version of that example, up front. This will allow me to present an extreme example of what we will be talking about and also give me the ability to create an opportunity for a **callback**. At the end of the routine, I will be bringing this example back. Instead of talking specifically about eating tarantulas, I can just reference eating spiders (allowing for a specific type of spider to be brought up at the end). Eating spiders is not a cultural norm for us. So, let's imagine someone is eating one and add **specificity**. What might that look and sound like? The legs might be wiggling outside the mouth and then there might be a crunch when the person bites down. The specificity creates an absurd and extreme situation. Not only is eating spiders outside our cultural norm, but that level of detail makes it seem even further away from what we are used to. How can I drive home the idea of cultural relativism given this extreme example? I can figure out what an extreme reaction might be to this extreme example. Someone in a culture that does not eat spiders might react to watching someone eat one in this way by saying, "gross!" However, we want to make sure we avoid saying gross.*

No. The goal is to understand that there are cultural practices different than your own
You know, maybe spiders are in season
Maybe you're jealous because you've always secretly wanted to try it
Maybe that spider has a really juicy abdomen
You don't know, so don't judge

*If the goal is to understand other cultural practices, then what is an alternative perspective that we can try on when it comes to eating spiders? We can relate the idea of eating spiders to something that is somewhat familiar to us, like eating tomatoes. We eat tomatoes when they are in season, maybe we have always wanted to eat a certain type of tomato, and we enjoy tomatoes when they are juicy. So, we present the idea of eating spiders in the tomato context, using the **power of three**. We want to make a list of three ideas, each more absurd than the next. Maybe spiders are in season (absurd), maybe you are jealous because you have always wanted to try them (more absurd), maybe the spider is juicy (most absurd). Then we can add some specificity by suggesting that the spider's abdomen is juicy.*

The idea is that no culture's norms are superior to another's

In some cultures, when people meet up, they kiss

While in another culture the custom is to shake hands

Both are equal and valid greetings

If you are trying to spread COVID

That's not a judgement, just an observation

In my culture we bump elbows and wink...it's safer

*We know that kissing and handshakes are common greetings. However, can we look at these greetings through a current events lens? Absolutely. Kissing and handshakes are frowned upon during a pandemic. Pointing this out allows the audience to recognize this incongruence. Now we can use **hyperbole** to present an extreme version of a new custom: bump elbows and wink.*

In some cultures, arriving early to a party is totally cool

Might make you seem a little lonely, but it's totally cool

*Is there a playful way to make a disparaging or **inappropriate** comment about people who arrive early to parties? Yes. People who arrive early have more free time. Possibly those who have more free time spend more time alone. Thus, those who are alone more might be lonely, which is why they come to a party early. However, we want to reinforce that this is a playful jab by saying, again, that it's totally cool to do it.*

While in other cultures it's rude to arrive early

You know, I actually arrive at the very end of the party

I walk in and announce loudly

Sorry I'm late I had 3 other parties to attend

I'm not sure if you know this but I'm an Instagram influencer

I have over 80,000 followers

In actuality, I only have 117 followers

And I don't get invited to a lot of parties

You can arrive early to a party. You can arrive on time. Let's finish the logical path here and think about arriving late. This allows us to put ourselves in the bit. Let's use hyperbole (think of an extreme example), specificity (to paint a word picture about the extreme example) and self-deprecation (point out some truth about ourselves that is not impressive). We can pretend to be a person that arrives extremely late to a party, at the end. We can come in loudly expressing an absurd statement to justify the lateness: I have a lot of parties to attend because I am popular. Then I can immediately undermine that hyperbole by expressing a truth in the extreme other direction: I am not very popular and don't go to many parties.

Finally, food

In America we eat fast food

Delicious burgers and fries that are thrown at us in greasy paper bags

It's so fast that we don't even have to order food by name

We don't have time for that

We just order it by number

The cashier asks, hey what can I get you?

And we're like a NUMBER 3!

Specificity: What does fast food look, feel, and smell like? Burgers and fries in greasy paper bags. What does the word fast mean? That we get the food fast. Is there another way that fast food is fast? Yes. We have even found ways of ordering it fast. We only have to shout a number at someone to order fast food.

While in places like Brazil they actually eat tarantulas

Now again, don't be like eww gross!

Remember cultural relativism. No judgement.

Callback to the eww about spiders from the beginning of the bit. NOTE: There might be an opportunity to go further with this concept. What if tarantulas were available in Brazil as fast food? What about the idea a number 3 tarantula meal?

Because In fact, eating spiders is a thing we all do

Did you know the average person eats 8 spiders in their sleep each year?

So, people in Brazil are just leaning into it

They're like, we're eating them anyway

So we might as well drench them in medium heat Mendez Hot Sauce

It's a sauce Unlike anything you've tasted

The flavor is a perfect balance of heat which lingers only for a moment leaving you ready for more

Specificity: Is eating spiders really that crazy? Is there a hidden truth about eating spiders? Yes. There is a myth that everyone eats 8 spiders while they are sleeping each year. This bridges the incongruence. Eating spiders is actually not that surprising and it's part of everyone's culture norms. In fact, people in Brazil are simply making a meal out of them instead of just eating them in their sleep. Since we all eat spiders, what is a way to make them more palatable? Put hot sauce on them. What type of hot sauce? I did some research to figure out the most popular Brazilian hot sauce. It's called Mendez. On the Mendez website, it has a tagline that describes their hot sauce: The flavor is a perfect balance of heat which lingers only for a moment leaving you ready for more. This type of specificity can leave the audience on the edge of their seat, wondering "where is the comedian going with this..."

Yeah, then wash that cephalothorax down with a glass of cajuína

A Brazilian beverage made of blended cashew apples

You might be thinking what I am thinking,

Mmm what in the world are cashew apples?

That's not a judgement...It's just a question

Is there a way to continue with the specificity? Yes. If we are thinking about eating tarantulas (and even specific parts of them, like the cephalothorax) with Brazilian hot sauce, we will need something to drink. What is a popular (and potentially humorous) Brazilian drink? Cajuína. It's made of blended cashew apples, which I have never heard of before. I can allude to the idea that eating spiders with this drink is yummy by saying, "you might be thinking what I am thinking. Mmm..." And then I can break that expectation by saying, "What in the world are cashew apples?" This provides the final surprising punchline.