Name:

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Satire, Irony, and Humor

Date:

Stand-Up Comedy Viewing Guide

**Instructions:** While viewing different clips from stand-up comedians over the next few days, analyze the effective techniques utilized by each artist. Use these insights to effectively create your own piece of stand-up comedy.

**Technique 1—Anecdotal Comedy**: Comedians often use anecdotes, or short stories, in order to entertain the audience. These stories are often parabolic and generally reflect a real-life experience to which the audience can easily relate.

Mike Birbiglia, “Thank God for Jokes”: (Netflix)

Identify each example of the satirical device, and then explain Mike Birbiglia’s purpose or effect in utilizing each device:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Device | Example | Purpose/Effect |
| Hyperbole |  |  |
| Irony |  |  |
| Burlesque |  |  |
| Incongruity Theory of Humor |  |  |
| (Device of your choosing) |  |  |

Answer each of the following questions while watching “Thank God for Jokes”:

1. Around what anecdote does Birbiglia frame his special (occurs at the beginning of the routine)
2. List at least 3 mini-anecdotes (situations) included in the special.

|  |
| --- |
| Situation 1: |
| Situation 2: |
| Situation 3: |

1. Why do you think Birbiglia chooses to include these particular situations or stories? **2 sentences minimum**
2. How would you characterize Birbiglia’s demeanor (his facial expressions and tone of speech), and what effect does this demeanor have on the audience, i.e. how does it make us *feel*?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aspect of Demeanor | Effect on the Audience |
| Facial Expressions: |  |
| Tone of Speech: |  |

1. How does Birbiglia’s involvement of the audience enhance the comedic experience? **2 sentences minimum**

Post-Viewing Questions

1. What was the funniest part of this stand-up, in your opinion? Why was this joke the funniest? **3 sentences minimum**
2. What “universal human truth” does Birbiglia assert by the end? **1 sentence minimum**
3. In your opinion, does he get his message across? Why/why not? Refer to examples from the stand-up to support your answer. **6 sentences minimum**

**Activity (depending on time):**

1. Write down a few of your actions from this past weekend (bullet list).
2. Reflect on the details on these average circumstances. What seems absurd or ridiculous?
3. Retell the story in a Birbiglia-esque manner (using the anecdotal technique of comedy).

Dane Cook—“Pickles”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv6lmtVDxzo>

Sometimes, anecdotal comedy fails. Analyze this clip from Dane Cook’s standup in order to understand how this technique can fail, based on both content and delivery.

1. What about the clip makes the audience laugh? **2 sentences**
2. What about the clip seems ridiculous or not that funny? **2 sentences**
3. What could Dane have done to ensure a more lasting stand-up effect? **2 sentences**

Hannibal Burress—“College Newspaper Interview”: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/h70je1/stand-up-hannibal-buress--college-newspaper-interview>

We have heard Hannibal Burress before (remember the TSA checking for cocaine?) He’s another great example of a comedian who effectively uses the anecdotal technique

1. How would you describe Hannibal Burress’s demeanor throughout the clip? **1 sentence**
2. How does this demeanor enhance his comedic value? **1 sentence**
3. Burress often interrupts himself while reading the letter out loud. How does this enhance comedic effect? **2 sentences**

Dane Cook—“Sneezing Atheist”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXtVzj9y-bo>

Oftentimes, comedians create bits that succeed and fail in different manners. Dane Cook’s humor often fails to stimulate a more educated crowd (i.e. US) because he fails to mine for universal truth and succumbs to amusing sound effects and swears in order to garner laughter. **In the boxes below, bullet point lists of funny/unamusing aspects of Dane’s performance**.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Hilarious | Seriously, Dane? Not Funny at ALL |
|  |  |

1. Why did some of Dane Cook’s jokes succeed in this clip? **1 sentence**
2. Why did some of Dane Cook’s jokes fail to incite laughter? **2 sentences**

**Now that we understand how anecdotal comedy might fail, workshop your stand-up routines in assigned groups.**

**Technique 2—One-Liners (Surrealist):** Some comedians feature a series of one-liners in their comedy. Although the follow-up to each one-liner varies, they generally follow the same formula: set-up a normal situation, then follow through with an incongruous statement.

**How to Write Jokes – One-Liners**

Modified from “10 Ways to Write One-Liners”(Marcus)

*The hardest part about my grandmother's death was - making it seem like an accident.*

The SET-UP, in that case - *The hardest part about my grandmother's death was* - sets your mind in one very clear direction. You are "set up" to hear all kinds of expected endings to that sentence - the usual platitudes regarding the difficulty of losing a beloved one. But instead, you get the PUNCHLINE, a surprising twist you weren't expecting, which changes the meaning of the entire sentence. In this case - *making it seem like an accident.*

It's crucial that the setup be as vivid as possible in order to help listeners picture the situation in their heads. Now that the necessary assumptions were made, the punch line adds an unexpected factor that changes the picture completely. The humor here is a result of the dissonance between the assumptions we made about the outcome of the situation- and the surprise generated by a completely different and usually absurd outcome.

*I want to die peacefully in my sleep like my grandfather... Not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car*

*Guns don't kill people, people kill people, and monkeys do too (if they have a gun)*

Often times, one-liners utilize puns (one word or phrase, multiple meanings). Our brain hears the first part of the sentence and assumes meaning A, but then the punch-line twists it, and it turns out to be meaning B.

*Throwing acid is wrong, in some people's eyes.*

*I once shot an elephant in my pajamas; how he got in my pajamas I'll never know*

Watch Steven Wright: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9ciHpT4WuM> (first 5 minutes)

Watch Mitch Hedberg: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAHiHJ2AhYE> (8:47—about 11-12 minutes, and 17:54-24:30)

Write down a few one-liners from the routines we hear:

Answer the following questions:

1. What about each comedian’s *delivery* enhance their one-liners? **2 sentences, one for each comedian**
2. Sometimes jokes “fly over our heads” until it “clicks” 30 seconds later. How does this phenomenon add to comedic effect? **1 sentence**
3. How does Mitch Hedberg’s comedy sometimes fail? **2 sentences**

**Now use the guide to create your own one-liners**

If time: Watch Aziz Ansari (his short routine is akin to what we’re aiming for with ours)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFR4PPxp2z8>

**Technique 3: Music in Stand-Up:** These days, a number of comedians fully integrate instruments into their stand-up routines. Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of the United States of America’s greatest poets, postulated that music is the “universal language of mankind”. Music *enhances experience*; think about it; that’s why background music in films constantly accompanies the subject matter, i.e. mournful dirges during funerals, and up-tempo horns during celebration. Examine how music can therefore influence comedy.

Watch Demetri Martin: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/eoerdf/stand-up-demetri-martin--stuff-on-piano>

Watch Bo Burnham: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUBjHPYH8Rs>

**Answer the following questions:**

1. How does each comedian make use of music in his stand-up? **1 sentence** (hint: they’re different)
   1. Demetri Martin:
   2. Bo Burnham:
2. What universal truth does each comedian address? **1 sentence each**
   1. Demetri Martin:
   2. Bo Burnham:

**You are not required to create music for your routine; however, it can be effective (and will be graded a little bit more easily)**

If time, check out Arlo Guthrie’s timeless classic, “Alice’s Restaurant”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m57gzA2JCcM