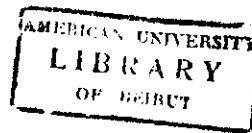


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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY PROGRAM

FINAL EXAMINATION

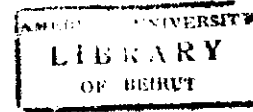
FALL 2002-2003

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READING + *Writing*

Why We Laugh

by
Janet Spencer



Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

1. Picture this cartoon: A man is watering his lawn just as an attractive blonds walks by. As he ogles her, he accidentally turns the hose on his dowdy wife, who is sitting on the porch.
2. Men usually think the cartoon is funny. Women do not. And there's a good reason for the difference in opinion.
3. We start finding things laughable—or not laughable—early in life. An infant first smiles at approximately eight days of age. Many psychologists feel this is an infant's first sign of simple pleasure—food, warmth and comfort. At six months or less, the infant laughs to express complex pleasures—such as the sight of Mother's smiling face.
4. In his book *Beyond Laughter*, psychiatrist Martin Grotjahn says that the earlier infants begin to smile and laugh, the more advanced is their development. Studies revealed that children who did not develop these responses (because they lacked an intimate, loving relationship) “developed a schizophrenic psychosis in later life, or simply gave up and died.”
5. Between the ages of six months and one year, babies learn to laugh for essentially the same reasons they will laugh throughout their lives, says Dr. Jacob Levine, associate professor of psychology at Yale University. Dr. Levine says that people laugh to express mastery over an anxiety. Picture what happens when parents toss children into the air. The children will probably laugh—but not the first time. In spite of their enjoyment of “flying,” they are too anxious to laugh. How do they know Mommy or Daddy will catch them? Once the children realize they will be caught, they are free to enjoy the game. But more importantly, says Dr. Levine, the children laugh because they have mastered an anxiety.
6. Adult laughter is more subtle, but we also laugh at what we used to fear. The feeling of achievement, or lack of it, remains a crucial factor. Giving a first dinner party is an anxious event for newlyweds. Will the food be good? Will the guests get along? Will they be good hosts? All goes well, the party is over. Now they laugh freely. Their pleasure from having proved their success is the foundation for their pleasure in recalling the evening's activities. They couldn't enjoy the second pleasure without the first, more important one—their mastery of anxiety.
7. Laughter is a social response triggered by cues. Scientists have not determined a brain center for laughter, and they are perplexed by patients with certain types of brain damage who go into laughing fits for no apparent reason. The rest of us require company, and a reason to laugh.

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8. When we find ourselves alone in a humorous situation, our usual response is to smile. Isn't it true that our highest compliment to a humorous book is to say that "it made me laugh out loud?" Of course, we do occasionally laugh alone; but when we do, we are, in a sense, socializing with ourselves. We laugh at a memory, or at a part of ourselves.
9. Another reason laughter is pleasurable is because of the physical sensations involved. Laughter is a series of minor facial and respiratory convulsions that stimulates our respiratory and circulatory systems. It activates the secretion of adrenalin and increases the blood flow to the head and brain. The total effect is one of euphoria.
10. Of course, we don't always need a joke to make us laugh. People who survive frightening situations, such as a fire or an emergency plane landing, frequently intersperse their story of the crisis with laughter. Part of the laughter expresses relief that everything is now all right. During a crisis, everyone mobilizes energy to deal with the potential problem. If the danger is averted, we need to release that energy. Some people cry; others laugh.
11. Part of the integral pleasure of a joke is getting the point. But if the sexual or aggressive element of the joke is too thinly disguised, as in "sick" humor, the joke will leave us feeling guilty instead of amused. We may laugh—but in embarrassment. According to Dr. Grotjahn, "The disguise must go far enough to avoid guilt," but "not so far that the thrill of aggression is lost."
12. Which brings us to why women may not have found the joke about the man watering his wife very funny—because they get the point only too well. Many psychiatrists agree that the reason women aren't amused by this kind of joke is that most jokes employ women as their target. Women sometimes make poor joke tellers for the same reason; consciously or subconsciously, they express their resentment by "forgetting" the story.
13. When we are made the butt of a joke, either on a personal or impersonal level, we are emotionally involved in it. Consequently, we won't be able to laugh (except as a pretense). While we are feeling, we cannot. The two do not mix. French essayist Henri Bergson called laughter a "momentary anesthesia of the heart." We call it comic relief.
14. Knowing that laughter blunts emotion, we can better understand why we sometimes laugh when nothing is funny. We laugh during moments of anxiety because we feel no mastery over the situation, claims Dr. Levine. He explains, "Very often compulsive laughter is a learned response. If we laugh, it expresses good feelings and the fact that we are able to cope. When we're in a situation in which we *can't* cope, we laugh to reassure ourselves that we *can*!"
15. How often have we laughed at a funeral or upon hearing bad news? We laugh to deny an unendurable reality until we are strong enough to accept it. Laughter also breaks our tension. However, we may also be laughing to express relief that the tragedy didn't happen to us. We laugh before giving a big party, before delivering a speech, or while getting a traffic ticket, to say, "This isn't bothering me. See? I'm laughing."

16. But if we sometimes laugh in sorrow, more often we laugh with joy. Laughter creates and strengthens our social bonds. And the ability to share a laugh has guided many marriages through hard periods of adjustment.
17. According to Dr. Levine, we can measure our adjustment to the world by our capacity to laugh. When we are secure about our abilities, we can poke fun at our foibles. If we can laugh through our anxieties, we will not be overpowered by them.
18. The ability to laugh starts early, but it takes a lifetime to perfect. Says Dr. Grotjahn, "When social relationships are mastered, when individuals have mastered... a peaceful relationship with themselves, then they have... the sense of humor." And then they can throw back their heads and laugh.

(Taken from Baudoin et als Reader's Choice)

I. Indicate whether the statement is true (T) or false (F) by putting a T or an F in the blank below.

1. Most babies laugh immediately at birth. _____
2. People laugh to strengthen social bonds. _____
3. We mostly laugh to express mastery over anxiety. _____
4. Men and women have different opinions regarding humor. _____
5. Children who do not laugh do not have an intimate loving relationship with their parents. _____
6. If a person is targeted in a joke, (s)he cannot enjoy it. _____
7. According to Dr. Levine, all adult laughter results from primary and secondary pleasures. _____
8. A sense of humor involves throwing your head back and laughing. _____

II. Find a word in the text that has the same meaning as the following:

1. hardly noticeable (paragraph 6) _____
2. serious mental illness (paragraph 4) _____
3. puzzled, uncertain (paragraph 7) _____
4. hidden, concealed (paragraph 11) _____
5. place something at intervals in or among (paragraph 10)

6. deal with (paragraph 14) _____
7. weakness in character or behavior (paragraph 17) _____
8. removed, prevented (paragraph 10) _____

III. Circle the word that does not belong in the following groups.

1. cue butt target
2. inhibit suppress trigger
3. resent release discharge
4. crucial conscious integral
5. aggression repression suppression

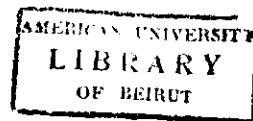
IV. Answer the questions in complete sentences. Use your own words.

1. Write a thesis statement summarizing the main idea of the article.

2. What is the main idea of paragraph 15 and what does the it (line 2) refer to?

3. According to the article, we laugh for different reasons. List the reasons given by the author. Do you agree with her? Explain.

4. What, in your opinion, is the tone of the passage?



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FALL 2002-2003 (1)

WRITING



Directions: Write a 4 paragraph essay on **ONE** of the following topics. Make sure you have a clearly-stated thesis statement and enough specific details and examples to support it. Remember to include a title.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
People behave differently when they wear different clothes.
Do you agree that different clothes influence the way people behave? Use specific examples to support your answer.
2. If you were asked to send one thing representing your country to an international exhibition, what would you choose? Why? Use specific reasons and details to explain your choice.

(Adapted from TOEFL Sample Writing Topics)

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