

Types of Comedy for Drama Class



Studying comedy can be one of the most enjoyable units of work in any high school drama program. One of the advantages of comedy is there are so many sub genres of this form that can be isolated for investigation and performance at different levels of schooling. I find the more visual and physical forms of comedy are enjoyed by junior students, while understandably senior students often find literary and sophisticated forms of comedy rich and rewarding in their drama studies.

One of the main challenges of studying comedy is that the end product should not just be entertaining, but humorous for the audience. Considering the audience is usually students' peers in their own classroom, they often discover it is a fine line between being funny or embarrassed when the humour falls flat. So, creating a culture of acceptance in your drama classroom where students will not ridicule those who take a risk with their comedy performances, is essential.

Below I have compiled a 30 different comedy forms with my own descriptions, suggested year levels at which to study them in drama, plus links to relevant published articles on The Drama Teacher.

Low Comedy requires little skill in the scripting (if there is a script at all). Often a visual or highly physical work. Appropriate for all year levels.

Slapstick is knockabout, physical humour. Media examples include *The Three Stooges*, *The Marx Bros*, *Laurel and Hardy* and *Mr Bean*. Appropriate for all year levels.

Farce involves ridiculous, improbable situations. Media examples include *Fawlty Towers* and *Monty Python*. Appropriate for middle and senior year levels.

Satire is comedy that sends up people and events, ridiculing and mocking weaknesses to create the humour. Most suitable for the middle and senior years.

Parody is similar to satire as it is a work that deliberately imitates another work for comic effect, sometimes delivering a message. See YouTube for many examples of

parodies of contemporary people and world events. Suitable for middle and senior year levels.

Stand-up is a type of comedy normally involving one person performing a comic routine before a live audience. Suitable for the middle and senior years.

Revue / Variety Show / [Vaudeville](#) typically involve a collection of songs, sketches, dances etc. into a single show. Sometimes related subject matter, though often not. Suitable for all year levels.

Black Comedy / Black Humour is humour that makes fun of serious subject matter such as death and religion. Offensive to some, hilarious to others. Requires intelligent scripting. Suitable for senior year levels.

[Commedia dell'arte](#) is historical, improvised physical comedy, originating in Italy around the year 1550. Arlecchino the harlequin servant made it famous! Most suitable for middle and senior year levels.

Burlesque requires discretion when studying this form with students. Focus on the origins of burlesque in England as satirical comedies. Suitable for senior years when studying the history of theatrical entertainment.

Travesty is a work that misrepresents serious subject matter via parody. Suitable for senior year levels.

Tragicomedy as the name suggests is a work comprising a mixture of both comedy and tragedy. Samuel Beckett's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* is a classic example. Suitable for all year levels.

CHECK THIS OUT: Top Class Drama Success

High Comedy is intellectual (normally literary) comedy works displaying a sophisticated wit, such as Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Suitable for senior year levels.

[Comedy of Manners](#) are literary, artistic works comprising sophisticated society satires. From 1660 to about 1700, these plays were also known as Restoration comedies (William Wycherley, etc.). The form was later revived in the 1770s (Richard Sheridan, Oliver Goldsmith) and then again in the 1890s (Oscar Wilde). Suitable for senior year levels.

[Theatre of the Absurd](#) The insertion and detection of various forms of comedy (vaudeville, physical comedy, etc.) in absurdist plays requires a solid understanding of the form. Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is a fine example. Suitable for senior year levels.

Romantic Comedy is comedy involving love and romance. Many of Shakespeare's comedies are romantic comedies. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Musical Comedy Musical theatre is mostly (not always) comic in some way, hence lighthearted and appealing to the masses. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Sentimental Comedy Not really a comedy at all, but plays that involve the main character overcoming a series of moral challenges. Suitable for senior year levels.

Comedy of Intrigue / Comedy of Situation Comedy where the main characters are all involved in the same predicament and/or environment. Comedy of intrigue often involves complex plots and subplots, such as Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Comedy of Humours is a historical comedy linked to Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson. Based on the premise that the human body consists of four liquids, all representing a different type of humour, in turn affecting the types of characters represented in the drama. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Comedy of Character is a play that focuses on the absurdities and eccentricities of the characters rather than plot development. Richard Sheridan wrote a number of comedy of character works. Suitable for senior year levels.

Comedy of Ideas is a sophisticated form of comedy where characters are archetypes representing particular ideas or world views. Suitable for senior year levels.

Comedy of Morals A comedy that condemns unacceptable behaviour in society via the use of satire. Moliere's *Tartuffe* is considered a fine example of the form. Suitable for senior year levels.

Court Comedy Comedy written to be performed at the court of kings and queens. Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* is one such example. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Old Comedy Around 5th century BC, Old Comedy was the first phase of Athenian comedy popularised by Aristophanes whose works satirised public people and events. Suitable for middle and senior years.

Comedy Greek comedies from around 400 BC to 320 BC representing the transition period between Old Comedy and New Comedy in Athens. Suitable for senior year levels.

New Comedy Around 320 BC to the middle of the 3rd century, New Comedy works now included the typical Athenian citizen. Menander introduced New Comedy to Greece. Suitable for senior year levels.