

MACQUARIE PEN ANTHOLOGY *of* AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

TEACHING GUIDE

Unit 2: Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry:
Humour and emotion in Australian literature

for Lower to Middle Secondary English

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Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

FOCUS	Is there a distinctively Australian sense of humour recognisable in our literary heritage? Does the contemporary student see humour in the same things and respond in the same ways as previous generations? How well do Australian writers deal with emotional subjects?
LEVEL	Lower to Middle Secondary
LENGTH	<p>Approximately 14 – 18 lessons</p> <p>Teachers are encouraged to make choices of texts which they think will suit their groups and choose the most appropriate activities. The listed additional texts are examples of other innovative and exploratory texts that could be adapted to the format of these lessons. The length of time spent on this unit will change according to how many texts are selected for study and which of the activities are chosen.</p>
KEY TEXTS	<p>From the <i>Anthology</i>:</p> <p>Astley, Thea: <i>It's Raining in Mango</i> Humphries, Barry: 'Edna's Hymn' Lindsay, Norman: <i>The Magic Pudding</i> Marshall, Alan: 'The Grey Kangaroo'</p> <p>Supplementary text:</p> <p>Film (extension work): Armstrong, Gillian: <i>High Tide</i> (1987; Rated M)</p>
ADDITIONAL TEXTS	<p>Additional examples of texts from the <i>Anthology</i> that teachers could use for this unit include:</p> <p>Humour: Andrews, Barry: 'Lap, Phar' Campbell, David: 'The Australian Dream'</p>

	<p>Dennis, C.J.: ‘The Play’ Hartigan, P.J.: ‘Said Hanrahan’ Humphries, Barry: ‘Maroan’ Slessor, Kenneth: ‘Backless Betty From Bondi’</p> <p>Emotion: Barnard, Marjorie: ‘The Persimmon Tree’ Crabbe, Chris Wallace: ‘An Elegy’ Hope, A.D.: ‘The Death of the Bird’ Lawson, Henry: ‘The Drover’s Wife’ McAuley, James: ‘Father, Mother, Son’</p>
<p>LEARNING & TEACHING ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Introduction</p>	<p>In this unit students will look at a variety of poems, short stories and a film in terms of context, subject matter, features, structure and tone. They will consider questions such as whether the humour of the past is still accessible to a contemporary audience and what techniques writers have used to create an emotional response in readers/viewers over time.</p>
<p>1. Norman Lindsay’s <i>The Magic Pudding</i></p> <p>(3-4 lessons)</p>	<p>Explain to the students that Norman Lindsay’s comic fantasy children’s novel written in 1918, <i>The Magic Pudding</i>, was very popular when it was first published and that you are going to consider whether an extract from it has value for a contemporary audience.</p> <p>At the time of the book’s publication English culture and literature were still dominant in Australian life. Celebrating Australian animals and bush life was an unusual approach. Lindsay presented a distinctively Australian combination of animals, language and setting that invited the children of 1918, and later, to recognise their own culture and environment in an exciting way, creating a unique charm and appeal for them.</p> <p>As you work through the activities students will be moving towards an answer to the question: Does the contemporary student find humour in the same things and respond in the same way as previous generations? Why or why not? Why in some ways, and not others?</p> <p>Activity 1(a) Arrange for a reading of the extract making sure the spirit of this comic writing is represented with vigour and dramatic flair, and includes uninhibited presentation of the songs and poems.</p>

	<p>Activity 1(b) Show the students a copy of the book with its illustrations pointing out the central figure, the ‘walking, talking, inexhaustible pudding’ Albert, and the Society of Puddin’ Owners comprising Bill Barnacle, Bunyip Bluegum and Sam Sawnoff.</p> <p>Activity 1(c) Students in small groups to be given a number of different illustrations from the book and asked to deconstruct them, discussing the characters’ clothes, body language, the settings, colours and angles. One student from each group to report back to the whole class about what their group discovered on close study of the illustrations and how they feel the illustrations contributed to the book’s comic appeal and distinctively Australian flavour.</p> <p>Activity 1(d) Students in pairs to go through the story and underline all the words and names they consider distinctly old-fashioned and which place the story in a particular era or historical context. Similarly, using a different colour or highlighter they should mark the language which indicates the story is part of an Australian context in setting.</p> <p>Report back to the class to compare findings.</p> <p>Activity 1(e) Students to make up a play script from the extract and in groups plan a performance of one or both of the main incidents, assigning parts, gathering props, giving Albert a pudding head, setting out to entertain their audience and show their mastery and understanding of the comic mode with its demands of excellent timing and witty delivery of lines by characters. Students to give each other feedback on the effectiveness of their performances.</p> <p>Activity 1(f) Have a whole class discussion about the extract. See Teacher Resource 1(f) for suggested questions.</p>
<p>2. Barry Humphries’ poem ‘Edna’s Hymn’ (1-2 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 2(a) Begin by showing students an excerpt from one of Barry Humphries’ comic performances as Dame Edna Everage, or look at a photograph/still of Humphries dressed as Dame Edna. (Since ‘Edna’s Hymn’ was written Edna has become a Dame and superstar!) There are numerous examples available on the web. Discuss aspects of his performance/appearance such as:</p>

- His costume and the humour that comes from his being a man dressed in a woman's clothes
- His falsetto voice as he creates his comic performance in heels, stockings, painted nails, elaborate hats and makeup;
- His accent and choice of words, calling the audience 'possums', laughing gleefully as he satirises many aspects of Australians' lives such as their tastes in food, entertainment and partners;
- His highly mocking attitude to anybody he interviews, teasing them with lavish endearments and thinly veiled putdowns.

Activity 2(b)

Have students experiment with ways of reading the poem including using Humphries' customary tone and pitch.

Activity 2(c)

Ask students to go through the poem putting circles around words or names of people they don't recognise or feel are outmoded.

Ask them to use a different colour to highlight terms and language they find recognisable and funny.

After discussing their findings as a class, talk with students about how and why colloquial terms change over time.

Activity 2(d)

Provide the students with **Student Handout 2(d)** and ask them to make brief notes as to how they would answer the questions listed there. Give them 20 minutes to prepare their answers before returning for a whole class discussion.

Activity 2(e)

Research tasks. Students, who have now read an extract from Norman Lindsay's 1918 comic work and Humphries' 1968 poem, research on the internet examples of contemporary Australian comic poems, novels and plays, or search their school's most recent anthologies for examples. Ask them to list:

- the names of popular comic actors or writers in Australia at present;
- some of the ways humour is created in texts;
- any similarities or differences they notice between contemporary and earlier approaches to humour.

(See **Teacher Resource 2(e)** for suggestions).

	<p>Activity 2(f) Organise a debating session either within the class or invite another class to participate.</p> <p>Topic 1: ‘Dame Edna should be Australia’s first female PM’. (Assure the students that humour is encouraged in the speeches for both the affirmative and opposition.)</p> <p>Topic 2: ‘That Australian humour has changed over time.’</p>
<p>3. Alan Marshall’s ‘The Grey Kangaroo’ (2-3 lessons)</p>	<p>Marshall’s assumption in his story is that when man interferes with animals he distorts the order of things. His story functions as a reminder to readers of the overwhelming importance of humans respecting life and seeks to gain empathy for all creatures, not just domesticated ones whose instincts can be distorted by unimaginative handling and training. He is asserting animal rights long before legislation was passed in Australia to do this formally and officially.</p> <p>Activity 3(a) Divide a print out of the Alan Marshall’s 1937 story, ‘The Grey Kangaroo’ into page lengths. Give them to small groups to read and put together into narrative order. This ensures engagement and ownership of the material, always a good start. Bring the groups back and as a class agree on the order of the pages.</p> <p>Activity 3(b) Ask students to go back into their small groups to discuss their emotional response to this story. Ask them to consider how this has been achieved through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • point of view • language • use of contrast • structure <p>See Teacher Resource 3(b) for some suggestions about how these techniques are used in this story.</p> <p>Activity 3(c) Ask students to find a written or visual text that they consider very moving. Tell them they will each have a few minutes to tell the class about their choice.</p>

<p>4. Thea Astley's <i>It's Raining in Mango</i></p> <p>(2 lessons)</p>	<p>[Note that the extract from <i>It's Raining in Mango</i> is also included in Unit 3: Aboriginal Perspectives.]</p> <p>Activity 4(a) Read aloud the extract in the Anthology from Thea Astley's 1987 novel, <i>It's Raining in Mango</i>.</p> <p>Activity 4(b) Discuss with the class whether they find Nelly's predicament moving and confronting. If so, what makes it so? If not, why not? Have students work with the text individually to find examples of how Astley creates an emotional response through her language choices and structure. See Teacher Resource 4(b) for suggestions.</p>
<p>5. Viewing Gillian Armstrong's <i>High Tide</i></p> <p>(Extension work)</p> <p>(4-5 lessons)</p>	<p>Students, having viewed Gillian Armstrong's 1987 film <i>High Tide</i>, will explore the way the director creates an emotional response in viewers.</p> <p>Activity 5(a) Students gather in small groups and decide how they could best describe the main events in the film, the characters (chiefly Bet, Lilli and Ally, three generations of women from a fragmented family), setting, plot and themes. Students then report back to the whole class with an initial appraisal from the group on the film's effectiveness and impact.</p> <p>Follow this with a whole class discussion of the techniques used in the film to create an emotional impact. See Teacher Resource 5(a) for suggestions.</p> <p>Activity 5(b) Find some stills of the film on the internet and assign one to each small group. Have them analyse their still in terms of camera angles, shots, lighting, framing, and what they say about the character, setting and themes of the film.</p> <p>Students to report back to the whole class group about their stills and what they reveal of the film's subtleties and images which evoke in us empathy for all three main characters and their attempts to make sense of their lives.</p> <p>Activity 5(c) Students write short diary entries from Lilli, Ally and Bet's point of view two years after the events of the film. They might find answers</p>

	<p>to such questions as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how they all feel about each other now; • whether Lilli’s experiment as a mother has been fulfilling, a failure, or a mixture of pleasure and pain; • whether Bet has enjoyed her new freedom without responsibility, and if she has kept in touch with Ally; and • whether Ally is thriving in her new role as a daughter.
<p>6 Drawing it all together</p> <p>(2 lessons + home time)</p>	<p>Two tasks are provided that encourage students to demonstrate the understanding they have gained from their study of humour and emotion in literature. You may wish them to choose between these activities or select the task most appropriate for them yourself.</p> <p>Activity 6(a) Students make large poster-sized collages responding to the two texts, ‘The Grey Kangaroo’ and <i>It’s Raining in Mango</i>, in which they use words and pictures, quotes and dialogue lines to indicate the gamut of emotions in each of them. [If the extension activity has been completed you may wish to include <i>High Tide</i> as an additional choice.]</p> <p>Display the posters in the classroom and encourage students to discuss in think-pair-share and then as a whole group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the texts cover so many aspects of the human emotional spectrum; and • the ways their creators have achieved this through textual language and filmic features. <p>Activity 6(b) This task requires students to produce two pieces of creative writing suitable for posting to a class Blog or Wiki. See Student Handout 6(b).</p>

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Teacher Resource 1(f)

- a. Children at the time of the book's publication were fascinated by the pudding's ever-renewing source of 'delicious puddings'. Are children today just as fascinated by fantasy and food as the children of early last century?
- b. What are the cultural implications of the readership of the time relating to homemade puddings as opposed to the very different foods we eat today, and how do these cultural implications indicate the book's context?
- c. Does the inclusion of the songs and poems in the narrative resemble techniques used in any contemporary stories students have read? Is it more like film musicals where ordinary spoken dialogue is interspersed with songs, in which characters sing about intense incidents that have just happened and heighten the emotion associated with them (or in the case of *The Magic Pudding*, sometimes lighten them)? Do the students find this an entertaining strategy in a written story?
- d. The cast of this extract is entirely male. Does this characteristic denote a bygone era when society was intensely patriarchal? Does this affect contemporary students' reception of the text? Why or why not?
- e. Are the two main incidents in the extract (Sam accidentally pushing Bill's head into the pudding; the wicked stealing of the pudding by a possum and a wombat) amusing to modern students? If so, what makes them funny?

Ideas about how humour is created in the extract include:

- the fact that the characters are animals in the bush settings (with funny names) acting like humans and interacting with human food
- the incongruity of a walking, talking source of food
- the slapstick nature of the incidents (a type of comedy full of rough play and pranks)
- the idea of a possum masquerading as a fireman
- the outrage of the puddin' owners over the theft of their precious, gratifying friend Albert
- the structuring of the story, where lively incident follows lively incident.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Student Handout 2(d)

- What is the significance of the poem's title, 'Edna's Hymn'? Are there any further references to the 'hymn'? What tone does it set?
- If more formal words were substituted for the informal words would the poem be funny at all? Try two examples.
- Humphries' portrait of Edna through the words of her hymn involves a caricature of the middle-aged Australian housewife. It also involves exaggeration. What are the effects of such strategies?
- What rhyme scheme is used? How does it contribute to the impact and humour of the poem?
- What aspects of Australian life is Humphries satirising in his 'hymn'? Is the satire gentle or vicious? Justify your opinion.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Teacher Resource 2(e)

Humour can be created through satire, impersonation, exaggeration, caricature, wit, puns, satirised names, deadpan wit, incongruity (a live puddin'!), absurdity and the ridiculous.

For example:

- In both *The Magic Pudding* and 'Edna's Hymn' there is the use of impersonation (the possum dressed as the fireman, Humphries as Edna). Chris Lilley (*Summer Heights High*) also uses impersonation extensively to satirise his characters.
- Lindsay includes humour about accents, as does Barry Humphries. Kath and Kim, Kenny and Chris Lilley all use humour lampooning accents.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Teacher Resource 3(b)

- Point of view

The story is seen initially through the eyes of the old prospector who has gained the trust of the kangaroo mob and of the grey mother kangaroo. There is an innocent and mutually curious relationship between human and kangaroo, the old prospector has probably been saved from great loneliness in the bush over the years by the companionship of the animals whose feeding territory overlaps his own workplace area. When the dogs scent the animals and are whistled by their human owners into the chase of the mob, and the small, distinctively coloured mother kangaroo, the chase is experienced from her point of view. She gathers up her startled joey and begins to leap away, soon at frantic speed, and hampered to an extent by the heavy joey in her pouch. The kangaroo dog closes in on her, dragging her down, losing his grip momentarily, and then pursuing her with ferocious determination and tearing at her body when he has her with 'demonic savagery'.

The story's unity is established at the end, after her death, when the point of view returns to that of the old prospector who has been running towards them, horrified but unable to prevent the carnage. His feelings and thoughts are described with great clarity.

- Language

Marshall's choice of gentle, musical language to describe the kangaroo mob ('nostrils twitching' as they acknowledge the old man's unthreatening presence in the morning, the simile of 'their movements ... like music – rhythmical – an undulating rise and fall of symmetrical bodies against a background of slender trees') makes them at one with the peace of the bush, 'their flanks, wet with the dew from sweet-smelling leaves, glistened in the morning sun'.

The words 'symmetrical', 'slender' and 'sweet-smelling' are not only alliterative to give a unified collective image but metonymically function to associate the animals with the bush's most harmonious and peaceful aspects. This language use has the capacity to evoke an emotional response of wonder and appreciation of the animals' gentle, vegetarian presence.

The horror of the chase is increased by having established the innocence and vulnerability of the joey whose mother gathers him up before fleeing from the danger. He is described as feeling safe with her, 'his little heart, swift-beating at the excited barking of the pack, became even and content. He turned and his head popped forth

with childish curiosity'. The anthropomorphic association of the joey with having a childlike curiosity underlines his vulnerability and the innocence of this gesture.

- Contrast

Contrast is immediately established with the language used to create a sense of the disharmony and savagery of the pack dogs belonging to the boys nearby cutting timber. These dogs do not hunt for food, they hunt to enhance the sport of the boys. The blue kangaroo dog, Springer, is evoked in menacing images which make us apprehensive and fearful: 'his powerful, rib-lined chest rose and fell'; 'his lips, pushed up and back, revealed red gums and the smooth, ivory daggers of his teeth'. The connotative words 'powerful', 'red' and 'daggers' create fear of violence and ruthlessness. The full title given to him by his proud owners is 'Springer the killer'. The assonance and connotations of the word 'killer' make this title frightening and it foreshadows what is to come as the dogs realise the mob is near and begin to give chase.

- Structure

Marshall sustains the rising action of the story and the parallel rising horror with the mother kangaroo's flight, the actions of the pursuing dogs, the death of the baby, and then the story's appalling climax as Springer's teeth 'locked deep in her shoulder'. The story's falling action is just as skilfully established, including an image that achieves unforgettable pathos: 'Her front paws, like little hands, quivered in unconscious supplication. She relaxed, sinking closer to the earth as to a mother'. This last comparison draws on our understanding of nature and nature's merciful side. The little kangaroo will not suffer indefinitely.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Teacher Resource 4(b)

Nelly believes her baby will be taken away and has a terrible choice of saving him by living with the kind white Laffey couple, Mag and George, who are willing to offer her refuge and help protect her baby from the authorities. This can only be achieved by leaving her extended family and having to admit for once and for all that the tribal stories and dreams of the past are gone forever.

The language features which make her choice so moving and confronting include:

- The impact in the first part of the story of the compound word 'heart-jump'; of the words 'boongs' and 'buggers' as used by the police who were sent to take the children from their parents; the metaphor 'the world of the policeman's eye'; the strong verb 'slammed' and the alliterative phrase 'slammed into speechlessness'; the impact of the Aboriginal name Bidgi Mumbler; the image of 'a fearful tug-o'-war: the mother clinging to the little girl, the little girl clutching her mother's dress, and the welfare officer with the police, all pulling, the kid howling, the other mothers egg-eyed, gripping their own kids, petrified, no men around, the men tricked out of camp'.
- The impact of the paragraph beginning 'She bin chase that buggy two miles....she bin run run run and he gallop after her an hit her one two, cracka cracka, with his big whip....' What has Astley achieved by using Ruth's own dialect to express how she felt when her daughter was dragged away? This writing strategy relates to focalisation and point of view in that Ruth's terror and grief are increased when we witness the scene through her eyes and language. We feel outrage and our emotions are stirred to shame and protest at such an ordeal for the victim of ruthless ethnocentric thinking.
- Astley represents in George and Mag Laffey that small but documented non-Aboriginal minority who knew at the time of the taking away of the children that it was an inhuman and unwarranted policy. Students to discuss how Astley makes Mag and George's keeping of the police at bay heroic but nerve shattering for the reader as we watch Mag defy the law and take on the outrageously contemptuous, patriarchal and ethnocentric attitude of the policeman with steady courage and determination.
- Astley does not allow the success in this instance of keeping the police at bay to neatly end the story. Nelly's repeated two word phrase at the end, 'Not same....not same' leaves a tragic echo and highlights the sense of loss, inexpressible in the enormity of its dimensions, of a culture that had survived for 80 000 years, the oldest known culture on earth, the 'centuries of tribal dream' shattered and disrespected.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Teacher Resource 5(a)

Some techniques used in the film to create an emotional impact include:

- The establishing shot of the film reveals a road and Lilli, a woman in her thirties, an economical way of suggesting a metaphorical journey.
- The gradual way in which Lilli's personality and values are revealed. She is likeable but irresponsible and unsettled. She is fascinated by Ally once she discovers she is the daughter she left with her husband's mother so long ago, after he died and she couldn't cope with a new baby. A closeup of her face when she realises who Ally is reveals someone who is haunted by her memories of the past.
- The climax of the film, when Ally confronts Lilli on the beach and asks her if she is her mother, begins with an extreme long shot as Ally runs down to Lilli on the beach. The non-diegetic music (music heard by the viewer rather than by the characters within the frame) also swells into a climactic pitch and volume to accompany this and to mirror the immensity of the question. Ally is running to ask her. Lilli denies that she is Ally's mother and Ally is devastated.
- The water/sea imagery of the film reflects both Lilli's and Ally's hovering on the edge of great change in their lives. While Lilli and Ally are often shot walking near or interacting with the sea, Bet, who is a settled and consistent character is, on the contrary shown with a rubber hose, in a raincoat, hosing the fish refinery floor, a highly practical activity associating her with duty and hard work.
- When Lilli decides to take up the challenge of assuming her formally abandoned role as Ally's mother, she almost changes her mind again, secretly imagining herself leaving Ally in the roadside café where they have stopped on their journey north to a new life together. A point of view shot, containing great tension, shows the camera closing in on Ally who is sitting patiently, waiting confidently for Lilli to return. It transpires that the point of view is that of Lilli who has not left, and has decided she is committed to her new role of earning Ally's trust.

Make 'em Laugh, Make 'em Cry: Humour and emotion in Australian literature

Student Handout 6(b)

You are asked to write two sustained messages (750 to 1,000 words in each) suitable for posting on a class Blog or Wiki. The messages are to fill in an older brother or sister travelling overseas and unable to get back to the family Christmas day celebrations, on how the day unfolded.

1. In the first message you are to create an amusing and light-hearted comic tone. You will have to choose images, similes, metaphors, sound devices, connotative words etc which satirise a family gathering. You can exaggerate, create caricatures of family members and use all the comic devices available to produce a comic text. Often feast days can produce some frayed-at-the-edges behaviour in families. This can be very funny. Your sibling is overseas and might be hankering for a reminder of an Australian Christmas day so be sure to give your piece the distinctly Australian physical and cultural setting that the texts you explored in this unit give so effectively. (If you are from an ethnic group which celebrates Christmas quite differently or not at all, you are free to choose a special day from your own context to focus on for this task, while still maintaining a physical setting in Australia and a comic tone.)

2. In the second message you are to describe a Christmas day also, for the sibling, but create quite a different scenario with a serious tone and strong emotions. You may wish to include a moving experience/s that occurs and creates this kind of atmosphere. Again your intention and purpose will determine your word choice, structure of the account of the day, the poetic devices, all of which will create a specific tone. Think back to your texts and the explicit way the composers of pieces containing moving experiences look at the darker sides of life, but also the bitter-sweetness of them.

You must give both pieces texture and depth. You should aim to evoke the setting economically but powerfully, and choose images that are fresh and striking. Don't forget stylistic strategies such as varying sentence and paragraph lengths. You will be demonstrating in each piece the understanding, knowledge and skills you have gained from reading and viewing the texts in this unit.