

# HUMOR IS A FUNNY THING

*By Fred Hobbs*

Question. Have you ever attended a play or watched a movie in which this scenario unfolded? Throughout most of the performance apparently only two or three people (who perhaps came to the event together) roared with laughter while the rest of the audience sat in mildly amused or totally bemused silence?

The guffawers obviously had what might be suspected as a low HQ. No, we're not referring to headquarters. We are exploring here a new concept that no psychologist apparently has studied...the humor quotient. No known scale exists to measure HQs. Observers are left to determine for themselves whether a low HQ means a person would laugh at anything or that he or she alone possesses the sophistication to determine what truly is funny.

Humor is a funny thing, literally and figuratively. Culture, gender, nationality, religion, language, maybe even political persuasion and certainly age can be major factors determining why a person finds a situation humorous. That's why there are jokes, anecdotes, parodies, poems, physical stunts and all manner of written, spoken and visual material. One of these will seem funny to someone.

To narrow down this short essay on humor, let's explore the role of language.

Many bits of humor fall flat when they are translated to another tongue, but what if two countries share the same language such as the Brits and the Yanks? In a bit of humor, the U.S. and Great Britain are often characterized as "two nations divided by a common language."

As far as a Humor Quotient is concerned, some say the most common differences between American and British sense of humor is that Americans don't understand irony. A writer named Simon Pegg explored that topic in depth and determined in an article titled: "What Are You Laughing At?" that the claim is not valid; they just use irony in contrasting ways. Brits appear to use irony in humor consistently and when Americans employ the device they tend to say that they were "only kidding". In movies and on TV, American humor is generally more "slap-sticky"; British offerings may be as rowdy, but somehow there is a touch of subtlety, which many say adds to a higher and more amusing HQ.

So, what is your HQ? Do you prefer the Three Stooges over classic Alec Guinness comedies such as "The Lavender Hill Mob" and "The Captain's Paradise"? Do you laugh when comedians tell "shaggy dog" stories which require you to wait patiently for the punch line? How about the stand up comedians of a few decades ago such as Henny Youngman? Remember his famous line, "Take My Wife...Please?"

Do you prefer the intellectual approach offered by punsters? Puns could be on the highest point on an HQ scale if such an index did exist or they can be dreadful and corny. Such as this one in recognition of Labor Day coming up: "He worked so hard that he worked his fingers to the bonus" or this at the expense of the media: "permanent press is a cycle of news laundering."

With today's headlines full of stories of senseless violence, corruption, political chicanery and hubris, what a pleasure to know that all kinds of humor is out there as an antidote for the negative. Enjoy your HQ, whatever it is!