

CAN WAR BE FUNNY?

1. Uwagi ogólne

Materiał został przygotowany dla studentów zarządzania kulturą i mediami na II stopniu studiów, ale może zostać wykorzystany również na innych kierunkach humanistycznych, ponieważ dotyczy ogólnych kwestii językowych.

2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+, C1, C1+

3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: 90 minut

4. Cele dydaktyczne

Zasadniczym celem tych zajęć jest rozwijanie u studentów sprawności rozumienia ze słuchu oraz rozumienia autentycznego (jedyne skróconego) tekstu pisanego. Aby studenci mogli osiągnąć te cele, teksty oraz materiały wideo zostały wzbogacone o zadania wymagające dyskusji oraz wyciągania wniosków na podstawie przeczytanego/usłyszanego fragmentu mimo braku możliwości zrozumienia każdego słowa.

Dodatkowym celem jest zapoznanie studentów z klasycznymi brytyjskimi serialami komediowymi, co – w połączeniu z przedstawioną w TEDx talk teorią humoru – pozwoli im lepiej zrozumieć szerszy kontekst kulturowy, a co za tym idzie, pewniej się poruszać pośród różnych tekstów dostępnych na tak wysokim poziomie zaawansowania.

5. Uwagi i sugestie

Proponowany schemat lekcji

Lekcja koncentruje się na specyficznym brytyjskim poczuciu humoru, w którym prawie nie ma tematów tabu. Do tematu wprowadza krótki skecz Monty Pythona (link w kluczu dla nauczyciela) oraz ogólna dyskusja (ćwiczenie 1).

Druga część lekcji (ćwiczenia 2–6) skupia się na czytaniu dłuższego tekstu i wyciąganiu wniosków. Praca nad artykułem polega na dopasowaniu brakujących zdań, odpowiedzi na pytania oraz zdefiniowaniu podkreślonych w tekście słów. Całość zakończona jest krótką dyskusją na podstawie informacji zawartych w tekście.

Trzecia część lekcji (ćwiczenia 7–9) przedstawia teorię humoru, wyjaśniającą częściowo zagadkę humoru angielskiego. Najpierw studenci w parach/grupach próbują odpowiedzieć na pytania o źródło humoru, następnie zapoznają się z fragmentem TEDx talk, dzięki któremu mogą potwierdzić bądź skorygować swoje przypuszczenia, a na koniec oglądają fragment innej komedii (*Blackadder Goes Forth*) i próbują zastosować nowo poznaną teorię w praktyce.

Podsumowaniem całej lekcji jest dyskusja (ćwiczenie 10).

CAN WAR BE FUNNY?

I. Watch the video and answer the questions in pairs.

1. What's the situation?
2. Is it a typical one for a comedy show? Why (not)?
3. Do you know any other comedy shows showing violence and/or war?

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U90dnUbZMmM>.

II. Read the following article quickly, ignoring the gaps, and answer the question from its title.

Is it wrong to find humour in war?

By Nicholas Barber, 4 February 2016

Aside from Adam Sandler films, few things in life are less funny than war. Mass slaughter and widespread destruction are no laughing matter – and yet, it seems, we can't stop laughing at them. **1** – Graham McCann, the author of *Dad's Army: The Story of a Classic Television Show*, argues that the combination of warfare and humour can be uniquely comforting. "What *Dad's Army* says to viewers is that, for all the frightening and confusing and alienating aspects of war, there was also a sense of continuity and **familiarity**. It's a very reassuring idea that people still had their foibles, and still lead ordinary lives, even during WW2."

In spite of being set in a tranquil seaside town, and revolving around ineffectual members of the Home Guard, rather than active combatants, *Dad's Army* was still a risky proposition in 1968. When it was first **mooted**, BBC executives were concerned that the horrors of WW2 were still too fresh in viewers' memories for anyone to see the funny side. **2** – In doing so, they painted a picture of Britishness which was simultaneously mocking and flattering.

The British are in love with the myth of the amateur who doesn't try very hard to achieve something. So we love the idea that the ruthlessly efficient Germans were held at bay by a group of amateurs with tennis rackets and hockey

sticks. It's quite appealing, especially as we know the outcome of the war. It's that outcome, of course, which makes any comedy set during WW2 **palatable**. **3** – That's why WW2 is central to so many comedies, from Blake Edwards' *Operation Petticoat* to Mike Nichols' *Catch-22* to Steven Spielberg's *1941*.

The morality of certain other wars is less **cut and dried**, which makes them a more complicated subject for comedy. For instance, when the writers of *Blackadder*, Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, chose to set its fourth series in the trenches of World War One, the sitcom's producer, John Lloyd, took some persuading. "When you're dealing with Elizabethan England [as *Blackadder II* did]," says Lloyd, "you can have people being tortured with red hot pokers and nobody seems to mind. It's too far away and alien to affect anyone in terms of taste. But when Ben and Richard said they wanted to do the First World War, I thought, how the hell would that work?"

More recent wars are even trickier to turn into comedy, partly because – unlike WW1 and WW2 – they are being **waged** so far away from Western audiences. It's not impossible, though. The viewers of the sitcom *M*A*S*H* may have had their doubts about the Korean War (which the programme was officially about) or the Vietnam War (which it was really about), but its characters were doctors and nurses who saved lives on an hourly basis. We knew that they were the good guys.

4 – Isn't it walking through a minefield, so to speak, to try to get laughs from such a potentially upsetting topic? Wouldn't it be easier to put the same characters in an office or a shop? Perhaps. But a wartime setting brings depth and intensity to any comedy, even one as mild as *Dad's Army*. In some ways, a war comedy is the ultimate **distillation** of the archetypal British sitcom formula. **5** – And people in a war really are trapped. They can't just walk out if they're not getting on with each other.

As trapped as they may have been, however, many war veterans talk fondly of the blackly comic banter that helped them cope with their experiences. When one character gets his leg blown off, the team sends him a big bag of jelly babies, but they've bitten one leg off every one of them. You would never do that as a civilian – it would be too cruel. But that story was told to us by a soldier, and he thought it was hilarious.

Adapted from: <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20160204-is-it-wrong-to-find-humour-in-war>.

III. Read the article again and fill in the gaps with the missing sentences. There is one extra sentence that you don't need to use.

- A. But the programme's writers, David Croft and Jimmy Perry, were adamant that, as former soldiers themselves, they could joke about the war without trivialising it.
- B. Isn't there something tasteless about this phenomenon? Should we really be amused by large-scale bloodshed?
- C. Another reason why contemporary wars don't lend themselves to comedy is that they don't involve conscription.

- D.** However foolish the characters may be, we can laugh at their antics, safe in the knowledge that they are ultimately a triumphant force for good.
- E.** The comedy writer Frank Muir said that all sitcoms are about relationships between people who are trapped.
- F.** Still, the chance of alienating viewers with war comedies does raise another question: why make them at all?

IV. Match the words/phrases underlined in the text to their synonyms.

- a) essence, extract –
- b) acceptable, admissible –
- c) defined, settled –
- d) fellowship, closeness –
- e) aired, introduced –
- f) fought, going on –

V. Answer the questions in pairs.

1. Why is it a good idea to make a comedy show about WW2?
.....
2. Why is it OK to show the cruelty of Elizabethan times in an amusing way?
.....
3. Why is it hard to make a similar show about modern wars?
.....

VI. Discuss.

In general, why do people laugh at certain things/situations? What makes things funny?

VII. Watch the TEDx talk (0–7:20) on the theory of humour and complete the notes.

1. Dissecting a frog – according to, analysing humour is like dissecting a frog: people are interested and the frog
2. HURL (Humor Lab) – a fictitious organization created by to his theses.

3. Violation Theory – Peter McGraw’s theory of humour.
Humour occurs when we feel that something is wrong (i.e. is a violation) but it happens to or can be explained in

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysSgG5V-R3U>.

VIII. Watch a few scenes from *Blackadder Goes Forth* and answer the questions in pairs.

1. Is the situation funny?
2. How would you explain it using Peter McGraw’s theory?

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKukWdXaELA>.

IX. Discuss.

1. What’s your favourite comedy (a film or a TV show)?
2. How many times have you seen it? Do you still find it funny?
3. Can you think of any comedy that’s universal, i.e., can be understood and appreciated in different cultures?

KEY

I. Watch the video and answer the questions in pairs.

Proponuję wyświetlić film z ćw. 1 (Monty Python – *Self Defence Against Fresh Fruit*) PRZED rozdaniem handoutów.

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U90dnUbZMmM>.

Przykłady innych filmów i seriali komediowych z wojną i/lub przemocą w tle: *Allo, Allo* (na zdjęciu), *Blackadder*, *M*A*S*H*, *1941* (film S. Spielberga).

II. Read the following article quickly, ignoring the gaps, and answer the question from its title.

It's OK to find humour in war but only on certain conditions: it shows ordinary people or soldiers trying to lead an ordinary life in a difficult situation; the moral situation is clear; the audience can keep a distance from the situation (because it happened a long time ago, or because the war was won anyway).

III. Read the article again and fill in the gaps with the missing sentences. There is one extra sentence that you don't need to use.

Is it wrong to find humour in war?

By Nicholas Barber, 4 February 2016

Aside from Adam Sandler films, few things in life are less funny than war. Mass slaughter and widespread destruction are no laughing matter – and yet, it seems, we can't stop laughing at them. **1 – (B) Isn't there something tasteless about this phenomenon? Should we really be amused by large-scale bloodshed?** Graham McCann, the author of *Dad's Army: The Story of a Classic Television Show*, argues that the combination of warfare and humour can be uniquely comforting. "What *Dad's Army* says to viewers is that, for all the frightening and confusing and alienating aspects of war, there was also a sense of continuity and familiarity. It's a very reassuring idea that people still had their foibles, and still lead ordinary lives, even during WW2."

In spite of being set in a tranquil seaside town, and revolving around ineffectual members of the Home Guard, rather than active combatants, *Dad's Army* was still a risky proposition in 1968. When it was first mooted, BBC executives were concerned that the horrors of WW2 were still too fresh in viewers' memories for anyone to see the funny side. **2 – (A) But the programme's writers, David Croft and Jimmy Perry, were adamant that, as former soldiers themselves, they could**

joke about the war without trivialising it. In doing so, they painted a picture of Britishness which was simultaneously mocking and flattering.

The British are in love with the myth of the amateur who doesn't try very hard to achieve something. So we love the idea that the ruthlessly efficient Germans were held at bay by a group of amateurs with tennis rackets and hockey sticks. It's quite appealing, especially as we know the outcome of the war. It's that outcome, of course, which makes any comedy set during WW2 palatable. **3 – (D) However foolish the characters may be, we can laugh at their antics, safe in the knowledge that they are ultimately a triumphant force for good.** That's why WW2 is central to so many comedies, from Blake Edwards' *Operation Petticoat* to Mike Nichols' *Catch-22* to Steven Spielberg's *1941*.

The morality of certain other wars is less cut and dried, which makes them a more complicated subject for comedy. For instance, when the writers of *Blackadder*, Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, chose to set its fourth series in the trenches of World War One, the sitcom's producer, John Lloyd, took some persuading. "When you're dealing with Elizabethan England [as *Blackadder II* did]," says Lloyd, "you can have people being tortured with red hot pokers and nobody seems to mind. It's too far away and alien to affect anyone in terms of taste. But when Ben and Richard said they wanted to do the First World War, I thought, how the hell would that work?"

More recent wars are even trickier to turn into comedy, partly because – unlike WW1 and WW2 – they are being waged so far away from Western audiences. It's not impossible, though. The viewers of the sitcom *M*A*S*H* may have had their doubts about the Korean War (which the programme was officially about) or the Vietnam War (which it was really about), but its characters were doctors and nurses who saved lives on an hourly basis. We knew that they were the good guys.

4 – (F) Still, the chance of alienating viewers with war comedies does raise another question: why make them at all? Isn't it walking through a minefield, so to speak, to try to get laughs from such a potentially upsetting topic? Wouldn't it be easier to put the same characters in an office or a shop? Perhaps. But a wartime setting brings depth and intensity to any comedy, even one as mild as *Dad's Army*. In some ways, a war comedy is the ultimate distillation of the archetypal British sitcom formula. **5 – (E) The comedy writer Frank Muir said that all sitcoms are about relationships between people who are trapped.** And people in a war really are trapped. They can't just walk out if they're not getting on with each other.

As trapped as they may have been, however, many war veterans talk fondly of the blackly comic banter that helped them cope with their experiences. When one character gets his leg blown off, the team sends him a big bag of jelly babies, but they've bitten one leg off every one of them. You would never do that as a civilian – it would be too cruel. But that story was told to us by a soldier, and he thought it was hilarious.

IV. Match the words/phrases underlined in the text to their synonyms.

- a) essence, extract – *distillation*
- b) acceptable, admissible – *palatable*
- c) defined, settled – *cut and dried*
- d) fellowship, closeness – *familiarity*
- e) aired, introduced – *mooted*
- f) fought, going on – *waged*

V. Answer the questions in pairs.

1. Why is it a good idea to make a comedy show about WW2?
In this conflict it was clear who's good and who's evil. So, however foolish the characters were, the viewers know they would win in the end.
2. Why is it OK to show the cruelty of the Elizabethan times in an amusing way?
Because of the distance from our times – the audience has the right perspective.
3. Why is it hard to make a similar show about the modern wars?
Because it's not so clear-cut who's good and who's evil, we don't know the outcome yet and, in most cases, we don't know anyone who's personally involved (so the audience care less).

VII. Watch the TEDx talk (0–7:20) on the theory of humour and complete the notes.

1. Dissecting a frog – according to **EB White**, analysing humour is like dissecting a frog: **few** people are interested and the frog **dies of it**.
2. HURL (Humor **R**esearch **L**ab) – a fictitious organization created by **Peter McGraw** to **support** his theses.
3. **Benign** Violation Theory – Peter McGraw's theory of humour. Humour occurs when we feel that something is wrong (i.e. is a violation) but it happens to **someone else** or can be explained in **more than one way**.

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysSg5V-R3U>.

VIII. Watch a few scenes from *Blackadder Goes Forth* and answer the questions in pairs.

Pod podanym linkiem znajduje się cały odcinek. Można wyświetlić 1–2 pełne sceny (w zależności od tego, ile czasu zostało), odpowiedzi na poniższe pytania powinny się nasunąć od razu.

1. Is the situation funny?

It's verbal humour (based on puns in many cases), as well as humour based on characters (the clever one vs the silly one). The characters are trapped but Blackadder finds a way around the orders.

2. How would you explain it using Peter McGraw's theory?

Benign violation of social norms (shooting the pigeon to avoid receiving the order and then eating the evidence), misunderstanding (Darling – the soldier's name; denying even seeing "that delicious plump-breasted pigeon"), bad things happening to other people, in different time and space.