

The Happy Classroom reflects the qualities of humor: playfulness, flexibility, spontaneity, unconventionality, humility, and shrewdness. Studies have shown that humor and laughter have positive cognitive, emotional, physical, and social benefits in the classroom and throughout life. Humor has power: power to energize the hum-drum and power to add levity to the everyday blah-blah-blah.

Humor and laughter increase student motivation, productivity, and self-confidence while creating a positive classroom environment. Shared laughter builds a sense of community. Humor encourages students to take part in class discussions by decreasing stress and anxiety. Humor can diffuse awkward situations, relieve boredom, and attract attention. Humor builds and supports happy classrooms.

Teachers should get serious about humor because of the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social benefits, and because it is FUN!

"...the most effective teachers tended to joke with students and smiled quite frequently." - Dr. Robert J. Marzano

➤ *Humor's Cognitive Benefits*

Humor attracts attention. A funny story, joke, riddle, or pun will get the brain's attention quickly. Brain research has shown that we can't get attention when students are not in the right emotional state. Humor lifts spirits, relieves boredom and helps students stay alert or tune in, thus keeping their attention.

Consider this riddle: **A man rode into town on Friday. He stayed for three nights and then left on Friday. How come?**

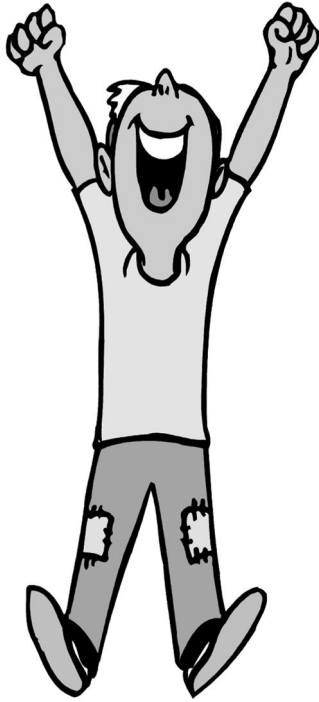
Even if you have heard the riddle before, I have your attention. Get ready to **groan, smile, or chuckle** out loud.

Answer: the Horse's name was Friday.

After reading the riddle you were thinking of all the possible answers and deciding which answers were the best explanations. This is exactly what we want our students to do: to use higher-level thinking skills to predict, to problem solve, and to make thoughtful decisions.

Starting a lesson with a humorous story or poem, cartoon, joke, or riddle can gain students' attention and put students in a better emotional and active state for learning. For example, below is a humorous way to start a lesson on why dictionaries remain necessary resources despite computer spell check programs.

Spell Checker Poem (Sauce unknown)



Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.
Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait a weigh.
As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite
Its rare lea ever wrong.
Eye have run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect awl the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.

This poem makes the teacher's point with humor and helps build a positive classroom environment and community – a happy classroom!

**Humor embodies many of the right hemisphere's most powerful attributes
- the ability to place situations in context, to glimpse the big picture, and
to combine differing perspectives into new alignments.
- Daniel Pink**

Humor studies have noted that people remember information associated with jokes because they have to pay more attention in order to "get the joke." One study showed that students in a class with teachers who use humor that is connected to content remembered the material 17% longer and approximately 37% more effectively. Try this one:

There are 50 states in America. Which is the smartest state?

Are you trying to name all the states? What is your criteria for the "smartest" state? Give up?

Answer: "Alabama. It has four A's and one B."

You learn something every day if you pay attention.
- Ray LeBlond

➤ **Humor is a form of intellectual play.**

All riddles and jokes contain background information and a basic play on words. Humor requires making unexpected connections, or unique associations, or a shift in perspective. It jumpstarts creativity, and creativity in turn promotes humor. The same qualities that are necessary for creative thinking are found in the expression of humor: imagination, risk taking, and divergent thinking. For example, read the Bill Gates joke below.

Bill Gates and the president of General Motors have met for lunch, and Bill is going on and on about computer technology.

"If automotive technology had kept pace with computer technology over the past few decades, you would now be driving a V-32 instead of a V-8, and it would have a top speed of 10,000 miles per hour," says Gates.

"Or, you could have an economy car that weighs 30 pounds and gets a thousand miles to a gallon of gas. In either case, the sticker price of a new car would be less than \$50. Why haven't you guys kept up?"

The president of GM smiles and says,

"Because the federal government won't let us build cars that crash four times a day."

In order to get the joke students must explore unexpected connections.

Our brains also look for patterns which allow us to be efficient and effective in everyday tasks. To demonstrate how strong these patterns are.... We are going to say the word JOKE five times. Then count to 3 before answering a question. Answer the question quickly with the first thing that comes to mind. Ready, set, JOKE.

JOKE

JOKE

JOKE

JOKE

JOKE

Count 3 – *One, two, three.*

Question: What do you call the white of an egg?

Did you answer yolk? Your brain searched for a familiar pattern and found rhyming words and parts of an egg quite efficiently. But, humor and creativity cause a shift in our point of view, resulting in thinking outside our well-developed and well-rehearsed patterns. (The correct answer is albumin.)

Learning is the act of making and strengthening connections between thousands of neurons that form neural networks. For the brain to build well-rehearsed patterns, it needs to make connections with previously learned information. Memory is the ability to reconstruct or reactivate the previously made connections. If you connect learning to something funny, students remember the funny.

Humor stimulates both sides of the brain to enhance learning. It alerts the limbic system, which is considered the attention center of the brain. Information is more likely to be remembered if it has meaning and contains an emotional hook. Humor eases tensions and psychological stresses, thus keeping the brain alert.

Summary of The Happy Classroom's Cognitive Benefits

- Humor increases attentiveness,
- Humor shifts the way we think, opening our minds to different perspectives,
- Humor requires higher-order thinking skills: critical and creative thinking skills, risk taking, decision making, and predicting, and
- Humor helps us retain information and increases memory retrieval.



➤ **Humor's Emotional Benefits**

Emotionally Blocked; Academically Locked

There is no better feeling than “getting it.” It is a self-celebration. If you have potty trained a child, you know how pleased she is when she succeeds at the task. We celebrate with TA DA! - arms in the air, smile, and clap!

Humor is a powerful emotion that improves mood and leads to optimism. It can diffuse difficult situations and change our behavior. Humor helps build coping skills to deal with stress. When we feel less stressed and more optimistic, we are more motivated and confident to cope with tough situations. Events do not seem so overwhelming when we look at them from a different perspective and, perhaps, learn to laugh at ourselves. Humor helps students reconnect with what's right about themselves and causes them to focus outward. This often results in an increased feeling of self-worth by reducing negative emotions.