Syllabus

WRITING SHORT COMEDY (K30.1510)
Monday 3:30-6:10 Spring 2014 INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles
Office Hours: Wednesday 12-3 dbg3@nyu.edu
Thursday: 10-12 & 3:30-4:30

Satire is a lesson, parody is a game.
Vladimir Nabokov

Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticisms.
Aldous Huxley

This objective of this course is three-fold:

(1) To introduce students to writing for the world of short comedy which is very difficult to master. In the assignments herein, students will be exposed to thirteen ways of doing it.

(2) To help students understand the difference between humor, satire and parody. All three are quite different. Humor is the quality of being amusing or comic. Satire is the use of humor, irony or exaggeration to expose people’s stupidity, particularly in politics or topical issues. Parody is the imitation of a particular writer or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.

(3) To instruct students on how to find material and structure the joke. The best comedy writers understand that ideas are everywhere. Students will be introduced to the best ways to find material.

Work will involve a wide range of writing from NY Times Op-Ed pieces to writing a parody of a person or event, to writing stand up comedy to writing a 10-minute play poking fun at a politically correct law or rule, to writing a short comedic screenplay. Recommended reading: You’re Funny! Turn Your Sense of Humor Into A Lucrative New Career and And Here’s The Kicker.

WORK BREAKDOWN

All assignments should be written in 12 Pt. Courier

WEEK 1
Overview of the course and an exploration into the world of short comedy writing. Lecture will focus on finding material and then deciding what to do with it.
WEEK 2
Write a satiric opinion piece on something that bothers you. Examples will be discussed in class. 750 words. Lecture will focus on satire versus parody.

WEEK 3
Write a 10-minute play that pokes fun of a politically correct law or rule. No more or less than 10 pages. Format will be provided. Lecture will focus on the difficulty and challenge of writing a powerful 10-minute play with a beginning, middle and ending.

WEEK 4
Write a satirical short story (Fiction) for The New Yorker. Examples will be provided. Lecture will get into the difference between fiction and non-fiction essays.

WEEK 5
Write 5 pieces of humor for The Borowitz Report. Examples will be provided. Lecture will get into the approach to comedy that Andy Borowitz provides.

WEEK 6
Choose some outrageous event in the news and write a parody screenplay 7-10 pages long. Lecture will focus on the difficulty of writing short screenplays.

WEEK 7
Write a 2-minute (or longer) stand up comedy act. Lecture will deal with the value of finding a persona.

SPRING RECESS

WEEK 8
Write a Weird Al Yankovic music parody of a contemporary singer. Make it visual and rewrite the lyrics of the song you use, i.e., Like A Surgeon (parody of Like A Virgin), Eat It (parody of Beat It).

WEEK 9
Bring in 3 ideas for a feature film comedy. A few sentences describing each. Lecture will focus on writing full-length comedies. Lecture will be on Pixar’s 22 Rules of Storytelling.

WEEK 10
Write a humorous op-ed piece for The New York Times. Examples will be provided. Writing comedy for The Times Op-Ed Page is a challenge. Lecture will examine those who do it well.

WEEK 11
Create and write a humorous blog about something personal. Lecture will be on blogging and how creativity makes a blog stand out.
WEEK 12
Choose a public figure or topic worthy of a parody book and write a 5-page book proposal. Examples of parody books and book proposals will be provided. Lecture will be about the historical aspects of parody.

WEEK 13
Write your own obituary. HOWEVER, you have to live to be 90 years old and you must have an amazing life.

WEEK 14
Bring in 3 ideas of either 30-minute comedies or 60-minute hour-long dramas and be prepared to elaborate on them. Lecture will be on the difficulty of coming up with great ideas.

ATTENDANCE

Do not miss classes. If there is a class that you know in advance you must miss, let me know early on.

Lateness will not be tolerated. If you show up late a half a grade point will be deducted.

Short comedy pieces: 70%
Class participation: 30%

On the rare occasion where you know you will be late e-mail me and inform me of this. Each absence will reduce your final grade by one step. So, if you would have received an A and I find upon reviewing my attendance records that you've been absent twice and late twice, your grade will be lowered to a B.

Remember this: When you miss classes you lose out on the interplay that happens.