
Don't Cancel Comedy

Segment Length: 6:11 minutes

Lesson Description:

Is comedy facing more censorship these days? Why? Has everyone lost their sense of humor? Are comedians today pushing boundaries? Can humor bridge political divides, and is the art of satire under threat? Explore free speech through the lens of comedy.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify examples characteristics of humor and satire used in political commentary.
- Analyze the impact of political satire on public discourse, recognizing how comedians express and convey their viewpoints through humor.
- Evaluate the need for and impact of free speech in society.

Concepts & Key Terms:

Cancel Culture: The practice of publicly boycotting or condemning individuals, often celebrities or public figures, for perceived offensive actions or statements, often leading to social or professional consequences.

Censorship: The suppression, restriction, or other control of information, ideas, or artistic expression by a government or other authority. It can involve the removal or prohibition of content considered offensive, controversial, or contrary to established norms or policies.

Fact-Checking: The process of verifying the accuracy and truthfulness of claims, statements, or information presented in various forms of media, such as news articles, speeches, or satirical content.

Satire: A form of humor or criticism that uses irony, sarcasm, or ridicule to expose and criticize flaws, vices, or absurdities of individuals, institutions, or society as a whole. Satire often employs exaggeration or parody to make a point.

Preview Activity and Questions:

Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

Viewing Guide:

We recommend that teachers show the video segment twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

Answers to Viewing Guide

1. commercials
2. satire
3. mean
4. terrible
5. Nazi

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Viewing Guide

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. At one point the late-night shows became vaccine _____.
2. This _____ about Bernie Sanders rounding up ISIS members to vote got fact-checked by Snopes.
3. The Assistant Secretary of Health is a transgender woman. Calling her the Man of the Year is a _____ joke. I wouldn't make it, but it doesn't need be censored.
4. I think it is all of our jobs to speak out about this. It's the lowest form of comedy. It is hack. It is played out. And those were _____ jokes.
5. It's just everyone who disagrees with me is a _____! So, it's imperative that I change their mind with force and violence!

Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:

Who should decide what is funny and what is offensive? _____

Why? _____

Should anything be off limits in comedy? _____ Why/Why not? _____

Is there a constitutional right to not be offended? _____ Please Explain. _____

Discussion and Analysis:

1. What is comedy? What is satire? What benefits do comedy and satire bring to our society
2. Can humor help address complex social and political issues? Why/Why not?
3. Does humor serve as a bridge between opposing viewpoints, or does it further polarization? If it furthers polarization, should it be censored?
4. How do comedians navigate the line between making people laugh and delivering thought-provoking messages?
5. Who should decide what is funny and what is offensive? Explain.
6. What is fact-checking? How does it impact views on social media?
7. Why would someone fact-check a joke?
8. How do fact-checking and censorship impact the creative freedom of comedians and satirists, and what are the implications for free speech?
9. Does silencing people for telling certain jokes, or saying offensive things, reflect a loss of freedom in our society? Explain.
10. How is cancel culture different from censorship? How are the results the same?
11. How might the fear of backlash cancel culture affect comedians' willingness to take risks and challenge the status quo?
12. Is there any significance to the market's demand for comedy that challenges political correctness and societal norms? Please explain. What does this tell us about cultural shifts?
13. Many comedians used to do their stand-up comedy acts on college campuses. Now, some of those comedians won't play at colleges because of the hostility of the audiences and college administrators to certain jokes. Does this reflect a good change or a bad change? How should colleges react to comedians and other speakers with viewpoints that may differ from the mainstream?
14. What happened to tolerance?

Discuss These Lines from the Video:

1. Alone? Well, you should know that my pronouns are they/them so we can drive in the carpool lane.
2. It's not like a lecture. It is a lecture. I mean, they really become a parody of themselves at that point.
3. The left used to be anti-establishment and anti-corporation. And now they've become the blob.

4. We have to write things that are funnier than things they're actually doing. And that makes our job very difficult.
5. Today the Bee reaches more people than The Onion. The establishment doesn't like that, so they sic their so-called fact-checkers on the Bee.
6. Your racial identity is the most important thing! Everything should be looked at through the lens of race!
7. You see it in the reviews. Woke professional critics give Gervais terrible ratings, But audiences love what he does.
8. Clearly, The market is speaking. Lots of people want more comedy, and more free speech too!

Quotes for Discussion:

People have the right to be offended. They don't have the opposite right, to NOT be offended. *I'm offended* has become an argument for shut up.

– Svetlana Mintcheva

By laughing at something, we can acknowledge its reality while denying it power over our emotions.

– Tom Bivins

Political cartoons were born with democracy. And they are challenged when freedom is.

– Patrick Chappatte

From satire, you can learn how critical thinking works and how exciting it can be to be brave enough to question authority.

– Dwayne Booth

When you laugh, something in you says, 'oh, that's true.'

– Bill Maher

It's the comedian's job to find the line, cross it, and make the audience happy that you did that.

– Judy Gold

I stopped playing colleges, and the reason is because they're way too conservative. Not in their political views, But in their social views and their willingness not to offend anybody.

– Chris Rock

Comedy can, through its effects on audiences, help contribute to social change by drawing attention, disarming audiences, lowering resistance to persuasion, breaking down social barriers and stimulating sharing and discussion.

– Lauren Feldman

The line I won't cross now is making work that creates permanent damage to the communities that I see as already facing injustice. But I will make work that challenges oppressive systems.

– Kristina Wong

Activities:

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework. (Recall that the K and W sections are to be completed before watching the video and the L section after watching the video.)
2. Have students complete the Venn Diagram after viewing the video.
3. Have students complete the political cartoon activity prior to or after viewing the video.
4. Watch the two videos in Both Sides: Free Speech and Political Correctness. Answer five of the discussion questions in detail and present your answers to the class. Then, explain whether you think censorship and cancel culture limit or expand and support freedom.

<https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-free-speech-and-political-correctness/>
5. Research a current political issue and write a comedic monologue from the perspective of a fictional character, incorporating elements of satire and humor to comment on the topic. Students will perform their monologues for the class, focusing on delivery and comedic timing.
6. Divide the class into groups and provide each group with either a satirical news article or a serious article from a news source. Students will conduct research to fact-check the claims made in the article and identify any inaccuracies or exaggerations. They will present their findings to the class and discuss the implications of fact-checking in the context of satire and free speech.
7. Research historical examples of political satire, such as cartoons, literature, or performances from different periods in history. Then, analyze how satire was used to critique political leaders, institutions, or social norms of the time, and discuss the impact of satire on public perception and discourse.
8. Show students a segment from a satirical news program such as "The Daily Show" or "Last Week Tonight." Students will analyze the comedic techniques used in the segment, such as satire, parody, or absurdity, and discuss how these techniques contribute to the program's political commentary and audience engagement.
9. Assign students to find examples of political satire on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok. Students will compile a collection of satirical memes, videos, or posts related to current events and analyze the humor and messaging behind each example. They will share their findings with the class and discuss the role of social media in shaping comedic discourse.
10. Students will create their own political cartoons focusing on a current political issue or event. They will brainstorm ideas, sketch out their cartoons, and incorporate elements of satire and humor to convey their message. Students will share their cartoons with the class and discuss the effectiveness of visual satire in conveying political commentary.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Don't Cancel Comedy Venn Diagram

Directions: Complete the three different sections below in the Venn Diagram.

Cancel Culture

Similarities

Censorship

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Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Don't Cancel Comedy K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

K	W	L
What I know about comedy, free speech, and cancel culture...	What I want to know about comedy, free speech, and cancel culture...	What I learned about comedy, free speech, and cancel culture...
Who should decide what's funny and what's offensive? Why?	Is there a right to NOT be offended? Explain.	What benefits do comedy and satire provide?

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Don't Cancel Comedy

Political Cartoon Activity

Directions: Use the political cartoon to answer the questions below.



CartoonStock.com

Briefly describe what is happening in the political cartoon. _____

How does the image above relate to the video? _____

Does this political cartoon challenge or uphold the principles of free speech? _____

How so? _____
