



Learn Through Laughter

By Nile Stanley, Ph.D.



Dr. Stanley's "Learn Through Laughter" and the [Reading Calendar](#) are a monthly feature of the Department of Childhood Education, University of North Florida, 4567 Saint Johns Bluff Road, South, Jacksonville, FL 32224, nstanley@unf.edu, 904-620-1849.

Gents. I am very annoyed to find out that you have branded my child as an illiterate. It's a dirty lie as I marred his father a week before he was born.—signed, Concerned Mother. (from Dear Sir or Madam, 1948, by Juliet Lowell)

To understand the humor in the above letter you must know the difference in the meaning between *illiterate* and *illegitimate*. Also, being able to recognize the misspelled words causes you to chuckle at the writer's upbringing. You have to use critical thinking to comprehend jokes, puns, parody, and satire. Humor is our sixth sense, and as well having therapeutic value, laughter can enhance learning. The late Norman Cousins wrote in *Anatomy of An Illness* (1979) how he beat terminal cancer through humor. He literally laughed himself well by watching hilarious movies such as *Laurel and Hardy*. Cousins would also relieve his pain by having friends' ready funny stories over the phone. That laughter is the best medicine is well known. The use of humor in the classroom and in home study is often overlooked.

Learning doesn't have to be dull and boring. Children are more apt to learn if it's fun. Teaching through humor arouses attention, builds enthusiasm, and develops reading and writing skills. Jokes and riddles interest all ages and can be read aloud to develop fluency and expression. Just "getting a joke" requires the use of insight. Political satire as in the *Doonesbury* comic strip, for example, is only understood by those knowledgeable of current events. Children who write their own cartoons, jokes, riddles, puns, and limericks learn spelling, grammar, rhyme scheme, and comic techniques such as exaggeration and understatement. Also, both children and adult's learning English as a second language benefit in understanding and using humor as a powerful communication device. A fun way to learn about innuendos, idioms and sarcasm is have language learners play the game, *Make Me Laugh*. Challenge new speakers of English to try and make an audience laugh within one minute by telling jokes and relating comic stories they have read.

A bright little girl in Clinton, Wisconsin, returned an overdue book and said to the Librarian, "Here's the two cents fine. But will you tell me one thing? Can you actually make a living from this?" (From Dick Van Dyke's, 1975, *Those Funny Kids!*)

It has been said that "The most wasted day of all is one which we have not laughed." Those involved with helping children learn must always remember the First Commandment of Teaching, "Thou shalt be interesting." The Second Commandment is "If it's not fun, I don't want to do it." So show your laugh lines, do something funny every day, and pump up your knowledge.