

TOPIC OF A COMPETITION PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES

Topic: Humor as a Test of Shared Meaning: How Jokes Create and Reveal Common Ground

Goal: To investigate humor as a communicative process that both depends on and produces shared meaning, examining how jokes reveal implicit assumptions, cultural knowledge, and boundaries between those who “get it” and those who do not.

Short description (max. 2000 characters):

Humor is often treated as entertainment, but every successful joke presupposes a remarkable amount of shared understanding. A listener must recognize not only the literal meaning of words, but also context, expectations, cultural references, social norms, and the speaker’s intention. A joke therefore offers a particularly clear case for studying how communication depends on meanings that are rarely stated explicitly.

The research will explore humor as a form of communicative coordination. What has to be shared before two people can laugh at the same thing? What happens when one person understands a joke and another does not? Can humor create a temporary sense of community, and can the same mechanism also exclude outsiders?

The project may draw on Henri Bergson’s *Laughter*, Simon Critchley’s *On Humour*, and contemporary theories of humor and communication. Rather than attempting to explain all forms of humor, the student will select a limited corpus—for example, stand-up comedy, internet humor, intercultural jokes, or everyday conversational humor—and examine how shared meaning is established, disrupted, or negotiated.

The central question is not simply why something is funny, but what successful humor tells us about the conditions required for people to understand one another.

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