

Analysis

Bill Waterson is one of the first comedians we are introduced to as kids. We both have read the *Calvin & Hobbes* comic books, which are based on two main characters; Calvin, a little kid with a very imaginative mind, and Hobbes, his stuffed tiger and imaginary friend. For the Humor Project Study portion, we will focus on the comedy tools Waterson uses in his book *The Revenge of the Babysat*. One of the main tools Waterson uses to convey Calvin's perspective is **satirical remarks** toward other characters in his environment. An example of this is when Calvin opens his door and Hobbes tackles him to the ground. Calvin walks away wrecked, muttering, "man's best friend". The strongest comedy tool Waterson uses in his comics is **wit**, embedding **quick retorts and sarcastic remarks** that keep the reader on their toes. Some mild **blue humor** is incorporated in the comics in the form of spitting contests, snot, eating bugs, and avoiding cooties. However, this is not surprising as the main focus of the comic is boyhood and childhood innocence. One could argue that this tool is meant to remind the reader that despite having the humor of a curmudgeon, Calvin is still just a six-year-old kid.

Tim Keck and Christopher Johnson are the founders of *The Onion*, one of the world's best university humor publications. *The Onion* was established in 1988 at the University of Wisconsin and ultimately was meant to cover both real and fake current events in a way that is similar to the associated press, presenting even the most boring of news as groundbreaking in melodramatic headlines (also known as **hyperbole**). Considering that the publication is posing as a news source, the central comedy tools used in *The Onion* are wisecrack **parodies** and **situational humor**. Despite becoming wildly successful and inspiring countless other universities to start humor publications, there were times people have debated whether Tim Keck, Christopher Johnson, and their proteges took it too far. Part of what makes *The Onion* so particularly enthralling for college students and grown adults alike is that the writers often indulge in a lot of **blue humor**. While they generally have walked the fine line wisely, using blue humor while referencing celebrities has caused them legal trouble. On one occasion, Janet Jackson sued *The Onion* for referencing her in an extremely lewd headline regarding a make a wish kid.

The writing of Keck, Johnson, and Waterson share sharp and witty humor that requires the reader to think critically. Both Waterson and *The Onion* also incorporate real and fictional events that have taken place in the world (C&H discussion of war and violence as well as alien invasion). Whether their writing is considered kid-friendly by the public or not, Bill Waterson and the co-founders of *The Onion* have both made a lasting impact on others' life experiences. Bill Waterson's comics were able to bring humor to both adults and kids alike. On the other hand, *The Onion* is targeted as a satire for adults. Because they had different audiences, the same comedy tools are

expressed in different ways. **Blue humor** can be understood by kids and adults alike—the comedian just needs to read their audience.

Reflection

The most important takeaway we had was that it is crucial to read our audiences. Beyond what is appropriate for the ages one is targeting their humor towards, it is an excellent idea to write about what connects most with our viewers so that one's work is relatable and makes a lasting impression on them. One of the main reasons Waterson and the co-founders of *The Onion* were capable of becoming so successful is because they are particularly good at incorporating both the relatable and the ridiculous into their work. As described in the analysis, *The Onion* poses as a 'reliable' news source and *Calvin and Hobbes* is a cartoon about boyhood. But by incorporating ridiculous themes such as alien invasions or silly political headlines, the consumers of these works can enjoy a multifaceted comedy piece.

For us, humanity is what makes jokes funny. Self-deprecation and relatability will take people off their high horses and places them on an equal standing ground. We are all human, and we all have imperfections and make mistakes. As a result of that, being able to point out so-called failures and flaws can be both daring and incredibly entertaining.

However, it is also important to consider how incorporating the relatable and the ridiculous is a fine line. As mentioned in the analysis, when *The Onion* wrote a very inappropriate headline mentioning Janet Jackson, it ultimately caused enough trouble to put the publication in a legal battle. It is very important that we do not tarnish the reputations of others, or hurt them in any way, so continuing to avoid crossing boundaries is incredibly important.

This means that for our project we must figure out a way to both add the relatable and ridiculous aspects of our writing in a way that does not cross lines. This shouldn't be a hard thing to do if we are conscious of others and have discussions regarding what we write about.

One of our other main comedic goals with the project is to incorporate the fast-paced energy and wit that keeps the readers of *Calvin and Hobbes* and *The Onion* on their toes. Especially with our specific proposal in mind, we know that reading comedic work can have a different effect than performing it. We will have to work to get jokes across because it does not have the benefit of being heard out loud. Performed comedy seems easier to understand because we hear the jokes aloud, witness the person's facial expressions, and live vicariously through their unique experience. With writing, it can be harder to sound human or relatable, purely because it is printed words on paper.

We hope to use the wit and situational humor that we were so inspired by to create quality satire for our peers to enjoy. We also aim to take our multidimensional view of blue humor and do something positive with it. Humor without acknowledgment of human error and imperfection is lacking, so being able to address it positively is critical to the success of our project.

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Proposal

- 1.) Are you collaborating with others? Yes* or No

Yes, the group is Izzi and Chloe B

- 2.) Which form of humor are you planning to develop? (See [menu](#).)

We are planning to do comedic narrative and satire in the form of a student humor publication for Freestyle.

- 3.) What is the subject (or, in the case of satire, the target)? Why did you choose this subject?

The subject is the freestyle community and funny things that have happened over the course of the past two years here. We chose this subject because we thought this would be fun and connect the community together a little bit more. Also, I (Chloe) plan to apply for a position on The Chapman Kumquat next fall as a freshman at the university.

- 4.) Which comedic [tools/techniques](#) do you plan to use, and why? (List at least 3 main ones and explain briefly how you plan to use them):

We plan to use situational humor, parody, and hyperbole in this project. situational humor works well with the focus of the project being a humor publication posing as a newsletter. Parody is a great method of finding humor in situations without necessarily poking fun at people directly or true situations. Finally, using hyperboles to make killer headlines is another way to take seemingly uninteresting material and make it a funny read.

- 5.) Why do you think this is the right humor project for you? (If you have a group, can you assure me that everyone is invested in this idea and you won't have trouble getting everyone to contribute meaningfully?) What makes you excited about this idea? What are some potential pitfalls you wish to avoid?

As stated earlier, I plan to apply for a position on The Chapman Kumquat next fall as a freshman at the university. I've always been interested in this sort of thing, and I want to test the waters. Izzi loves drawing and wants to make some cartoons to go along with the writing that we come up with for this project. We want to generally avoid making anyone uncomfortable, as humor sometimes gets out of hand. Therefore, we'll have a lot of communication with the teachers and anyone else who wishes to be involved.

- 6.) If you get approval, what's your next step?

Our next step would be to come up with headlines and draft mini articles for the humor issue.