

Why Aren't You Laughing? - Context & Culture

Level: Pre-Intermediate & Up

Objective: To discuss the importance of context and culture in language learning

Plan: Bring in some comics from the students' language. Hand out one comic to each group or pair. Ask them to explain the comic to the class. The students should ask additional questions if they don't understand the group's explanation.

Pre-teach the auxiliary vocabulary your students may not know. You'll probably need a yard, to crack (to open), to grease (to ease), a proceeding, a battle, a microbrew, a brigand

Now ask them to read the comic. Ask them if they understand it? Make sure everyone does and then ask them if they find it humorous. Why or why not?

Tell them that it is supposed to be funny. Ask them to give suggestions about what might be humorous about the situation.

Here you have two options. You could do a question and answer session with the students where they ask you about the references in the comic and things they don't understand.

The other option is to tell them that you want them to read background information on the topic.

Hand out the background information cards. Tell them to read them. Have them discuss their information in groups.

After reading, have them come back to the comic and make another guess at why it might be funny.

The point of the activity is to show students how context and, in this case, cultural context is usually more important than simply understanding the grammar and the vocabulary.

After discussing the students ideas, add your own input. Then do a class discussion on the importance of understanding context & culture, if the students need to know everything about English speaking cultures, what's valuable and what's not, how to go about studying cultural elements, etc

Follow-up: Have them bring in a comic they like and explain it to the class (this can be in their own language).

Have students design their own comic from any number of online comic creators.

<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2008/06/04/the-best-ways-to-make-comic-strips-online/>

American Football - A game with 11 people on a side. The quarterback throws a ball to one of many running backs that have to catch it. The running back then has to run up the field and gain yards. The team continues to make plays by throwing the ball and running yards until someone takes the ball over the 100th yard, which is called a touchdown. A touchdown is worth 7 points.

Fantasy Football - A game players usually play on the Internet. Players choose NFL football players for their online teams. The teams are then awarded points depending on how well each player does in the actual games that take place every week.

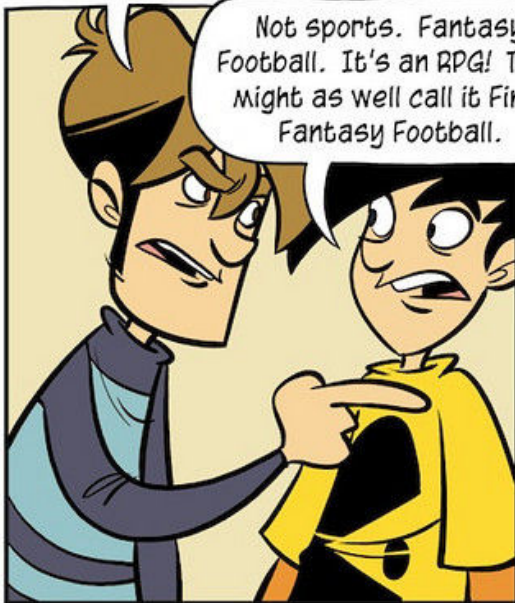
Nerd and Geek Culture - Nerds and geeks are stereotypically the skinny white kids at school who love math and science. They are into computers, science fiction & fantasy, and video games. They do not like sports both because they aren't physically fit to play and because they view sports players as largely unintelligent and overly macho.

Final Fantasy - Final Fantasy is the most well-known RPG or role-playing game in the world. The first Final Fantasy came out for the Nintendo back in 1987. The game has a huge following of gamers from around the world. Final Fantasy XIII is due to come out in 2010 for the Playstation 3 and XBOX 360.

Beer culture in the US - There are two major brewing companies in the US, Budweiser and Miller. Drinking beer is a common activity during most sporting events. People drink before the game, during, and after, especially at football games. Microbrews are beers brewed by small companies or individuals. They are generally only produced locally and are considered to be much better than the mass-marketed national brands like Budweiser and Miller.

Marcel Proust - Marcel Proust wrote "In Search of Lost Time", which is often considered to be one of the most influential novels of the 20th century by many critics. The novel comprises seven volumes at over 3,200 pages and has over 2,000 characters. Proust is little known in pop-culture and those who read him generally consider him to be only for the sophisticated and highly educated.

I'm just saying.
When you talk about "running
backs" and "yards," it sounds
suspiciously like *sports*.



I choose characters
based on stats...

Your characters are
Football players!

And then, each
Sunday, they do
battle...



Don't tell me you've
actually... *watched* it.

Ah. Your silence
is my answer.



What? You
drink beers!

I drink seasonal
microbrews, brigand!

And I argue about
PROUST!



<http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic/2009/9/25/>