

## **So Gross! So Feral! So Sick! So Feisty! So Mawter!**

*Jeni Mawter is a well-known writer who keeps kids in laughter [and indeed, the adults]. With an MA in Children's Literature, Jeni is a master at humour, perhaps one of the hardest genres to write. In this article, she shares some sobering thoughts about both writing and appreciating humour.*

Humour in literature for young learners is often given the moniker of bum humour. Our culture tends to dismiss humorous literature as lightweight and unworthy, thus effectively taking a critical process and denigrating it.

Humorous texts are not easy to write but when a humorous text makes it, you can bet that critical and creative thinking are part of its success. We can agree that thinking involves inquiry, posing problems, acquiring and questioning information, thinking about possibilities, making decisions and forming judgments, justifying conclusions, reflecting on and refining ideas, seeing and valuing other perspectives, ethical reasoning, becoming aware of human existence, imagination and creativity, innovation and risk-taking. As well, being able to show and value enterprise and innovation and being able to engage and respond to the world is crucial for human existence.

These attributes form the matrix of a clever and successful humorous text – texts that are worthy of being included in the language arts curriculum. Humour requires us to be flexible in our thinking and it often requires us to think deeply in order to unpack the message and to engage in a perspective that is often alternative points of view. We must compare facts with other alternatives, observe and interpret, use logic and reason to imply, value and judge (or not judge). As well, we have to cope with contradictions, predict what may happen and develop options.

The critical thinking seen in humour means that minds have to be open to change (based on extra information, opinions, facts or reasoning) even when faced with conflicting information.

Humorous texts have various levels of complexity so that as students move through the curriculum they can explore texts of increasing complexity and variety (from picture books to novels, plays, film, television programs, comics, graphics through to conversation). Both Costa and Kallick (2000, 2001) recognize that an appreciation of humour is a vital component to finding solutions using the '*Habits of Mind*' approach.

A final word! Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) was perhaps the first to recognise that tragedy is not superior to comedy; that they are of equal importance:

*Humour is the only test of gravity and gravity of humour; for a subject, which will not bear raillery is suspicious, and a jest which will not bear serious*