



HUMOR: COMPARING THE JAPANESE AND AMERICAN

Seminar Leader: **Eaman Shire**

House Leader: **Karen Matsumoto**

Course Description

Why are things funny? What is the importance of humor at both a personal and societal level? In this class, we will explore these questions as we explore humor in Japanese and American culture. We will dissect examples in popular culture in order to figure out why certain things make us laugh, and we will discuss the significance of humor in Japan, America, and elsewhere. At the end of the class, students will come up with their own comedic material and then explain why they think it is funny using what they will have learned in the course.

Schedule

Day 1: *Introduction and Japanese Humor*

The first part of Day 1 will be spent introducing ourselves and getting to know the group. We will then introduce the topic of humor and dive into Japanese humor, focusing on the composition, history, and regional differences in humor. We will also discuss the importance of humor, before we introduce the final project at the end of class. Through these discussions, students will gain a deeper understanding of Japanese humor and learn how to analyze it.

Day 2: *American Humor*

On the second day, we will introduce American humor. We will discuss the composition and history of American humor, as well as play an improv game. Using knowledge from Days One and Two, students will compare and contrast American and Japanese humor. At the end of the class, we will discuss the final project in more detail. By the end of this second class, students will understand American humor and grasp differences in humor at both the regional and national level.

Day 3: *Importance of Humor*

Building upon our understanding of humor in many different geographical contexts from the previous two days, we will discuss the importance of humor in a variety of social contexts—personal, business, political, etc. We will then discuss the importance of the intended audience through concepts such as political correctness and satire. The class will gain an intuitive sense of what type of humor is appropriate in a given situation.

Day 4: *Final Project Presentations*

Most of Day Four will be spent presenting the final projects and giving feedback on these projects based on the tools that we will have learned in the course. After the project



presentations, we will wrap up the class by analyzing one last comedic piece together. From these experiences, students will be able to reflect on and apply what they have learned.

Pre-Seminar Assignments and Readings

Assigned Readings:

- *Secret of what makes something funny 'discovered'*
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/7938556/Secret-of-what-makes-something-funny-discovered.html>
- *4 Types of Japanese Comedy* <http://www.japan-talk.com/jt/new/japanese-comedy>
- *Japan's bitterest feud: Kansai vs. Kanto*
<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/28/travel/discover-japan-kansai-vs-kanto/>

Various sample videos exemplifying Japanese and American Humor

Message from the House Leader

Hi, I'm Karen and I'm currently studying Business Management and Asian studies at Stony Brook University in New York. I was born and raised in Kobe, and having my grandparents in Osaka, I grew up watching "Yoshimoto Shinkigeki" every Sunday on TV. I still like to watch it on Youtube when I miss the Osaka people's sense of humor while I'm in the U.S. I think comedy plays a big role in both U.S. and Japan and I hope to explore and learn about them together!

Message from the Seminar Leader

Hey guys, I'm Eaman from Minnesota. I'm a sophomore at Princeton University, and I'm majoring in Sociology and minoring in East Asian Studies. I love coffee and napping, although not at the same time. I joined an improv comedy group right when I started college, and ever since, comedy has been a significant part of my life. The skills I've learned through improv and through humor in general are actually very applicable to the real world, and I would love to impart those skills onto you so you can appreciate humor as much as I do.