

# Late Night Laughs

## *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno (NBC)*

### Props, Preparations, & Tips

- Share Leno's background and explain his "Headlines" comedy to the group.
- Pass out copies of the **headlines** that we have provided.
- Pass out newspapers and magazines, and ask participants if they can find a humorous headline, typo, advertisement, or story.

### A Little Bit About Leno

In 1992, **Jay Leno** (born April 28, 1950, in New Rochelle, New York) replaced Johnny Carson as the host of *The Tonight Show*. Before *The Tonight Show*, Leno was a stand-up comedian. Leno's penchant for fooling around and cracking jokes started when he was just a kid in school. Leno, who had been diagnosed with dyslexia, struggled in class, but used humor to his advantage. Once, his high school guidance counselor even advised him to quit school.

But Jay Leno is not a quitter. He persevered, got a college degree, started his own comedy club in college, and became a professional comedian. Soon, famous musical performers like Tom Jones, John Denver, and Johnny Mathis took notice and even asked Leno to tell jokes as an opening act for their concerts.

Taking over for Johnny Carson launched Leno into super-stardom. He brought his comedy act onto national television and told jokes with every interview. Leno enjoyed poking fun of celebrities and even added comedy skits to the show. In one of his most well known routines called "**Headlines**," Jay Leno finds double meanings in news clippings, including anything from classified ads to wedding announcements.

Take a moment to find the "funny" in the headlines and advertisements we have provided, then see if you can find some in your own local publications.

## ***Late Show with David Letterman (CBS)***

### **Props, Preparations, & Tips**

- Share Letterman's background and explain his "Top Ten" comedy to the group.
- Print copies of the unfinished **Top Ten lists** and pass them out.
- Provide pencils, pens, or other writing instruments for participants to finish the lists. (**Note:** *We have included potential answers on our "Printer Friendly" page to share.*)

### **A Little Bit About Letterman**

Growing up, **David Letterman** (born April 12, 1947, in Indianapolis, Indiana) admired his father's ability to tell jokes and entertain an audience. In college he broadcast his voice on the radio as a newscaster, but he was fired. Letterman's unpredictable on-air behavior followed him to television, where he worked in Indianapolis as a weatherman and news anchor. Viewers delighted at Letterman's antics, like when he predicted hail stones "the size of canned hams" and congratulated a tropical storm for being upgraded to a hurricane.

Letterman's big jump to stardom came when he received his own late night talk show, and he became renowned for his funny and sometimes sarcastic interviews with celebrities. Letterman also brought a whole host of funny segments to the show, including "**Stupid Pet Tricks**" and his famous "**Top Ten**" list.

Take a look at these Top Ten lists. Can you fill in the last three spaces on the handout?

### **Top Ten Least Impressive James Bond Gadgets**

10. Remote-control squirrel
11. Digital clock that is also a radio
12. Football-shaped phone
13. Shampoo and conditioner in one
14. A refreshing soda that combines both lemon and lime
15. Futuristic green liquid that fights bad breath
16. Delicious low-fat cheesecake
17. Electric-powered car that has limited range of fifty miles
18. Tuxedo with squirting lapel flower
19. 3-D glasses that allow you to see the world in 3-D

### **Top Ten Thoughts That Go Through Every Accountant's Mind on Tax Day**

10. If I see one more tax return I'm gonna jump off a building.
11. I think my calculator is talking to me.
12. If I mess up, they go to jail, not me.
13. Why didn't I become something exciting, like an insurance salesman?
14. Should I wear my navy blue suit or my navy blue suit?
15. Get through today and then I have a 364-day weekend!
16. Time to fake my death and move to the Caribbean islands.
17. How many zeroes are in a thousand?
18. Jeez, I forgot to do my own taxes!

19. With this client's salary, I should be charging a lot more.

### **Top Ten Signs You've Hired a Bad Lawyer**

10. Begins every sentence with "Well, as Perry Mason once said...."
11. He keeps citing the legal case of Godzilla vs. Mothra.
12. Just before your trial starts he whispers, "The judge is the one with the little hammer, right?"
13. He thinks he'll win your case, "because there's a first time for everything."
14. Whenever he says "Your Honor" he makes those little quotation marks in the air.
15. He giggles every time he hears the word "briefs."
16. Sign in front of law office reads "Practicing law since 2:45 PM."
17. All he carries inside his briefcase is a box of crackers and some breath mints.
18. He only takes cash.
19. He's being sued by his own mother.

## **Conan (TBS)**

### **Props, Preparations, & Tips**

- Share O'Brien's background and explain his "In the Year 3000" comedy to the group.
- Read the examples below, and pass around these blank "In the Year 3000" **forms** for people to fill out.
- Have newspapers or magazines on hand for participants who might need some inspiration.

## A Little Bit About O'Brien

**Conan O'Brien** (born April 18, 1963, in Brookline, Massachusetts) graduated as valedictorian of his high school class and then went on to Harvard University. He wasn't always serious as a student, however. At Harvard, he wrote for the *Harvard Lampoon* humor magazine. After he graduated, Conan moved to Los Angeles and became a writer for well-known television comedies like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons*.

A funny and charismatic man, he was given his own late night talk show, but since it was edgier than most other late night shows it was not very successful for the first three years. In its fourth year, though, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* took off and Conan became known as one of the funniest late night hosts in the business. Using his expertise as a comedy writer, Conan created a variety of skits, one of which is known as "**In the Year 3000**" (previously "In the Year 2000"). In this skit, Conan dresses in a robe like a soothsayer and makes funny predictions about the future.

Here are some of Conan's funny (and absurd) predictions for the year 3000. After sharing Conan's predictions, give it a try! Make your own funny predictions about what might happen in the coming year or two.

### **In the Year 3000...**

- YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook will merge to form one super time-wasting website called You Twitface.
- GM will make better, more efficient cars that break down within walking distance of a Toyota dealership.
- Jack Sprat will eat no fat and his wife will eat no lean. But the two will enjoy a synthetic combination of the two called "fleen."
- An employee at Starbucks will accidentally give someone a decaffeinated hazelnut mocha latte when they ordered a half-caf mocha café au lait. The other Starbucks employees will think this is hilarious.

- Caller ID will become so sophisticated that it won't just tell you the name and number but it will shout out, "Don't answer! It's just another telemarketer!"

### Discussion Starters

- Do you currently watch late night television? If so, which television host of the three mentioned do you enjoy the most? Why do you prefer this late night host?
- Do you know of any other current late night talk show hosts? How about **Jimmy Kimmel**, **Craig Ferguson**, or **Jimmy Fallon**? How do they compare?
- Did you watch **Johnny Carson** on *The Tonight Show*? Do you think late night comedy has changed since those days? What did you think when Jay Leno took over as host?
- Who do you think is the best talk show host of all time? How about Johnny Carson, **Steve Allen**, **Jack Paar**, or **Dick Cavett**?
- Have you heard of the **Conan/Leno/NBC conflict** in the news? If so, what's your opinion?
- Many late night television hosts are comedians. What other skills do you think are necessary in order for someone to be a good talk show host?
- All of these talk shows are on late at night. Why do you think they are on so late?

What kind of audience watches these types of talk shows? How is this audience different from a daytime audience? What daytime talk show hosts do you like?