SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Marking the Text, Graphic Organizer

Introduction to Satire

S t a i r e

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

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L E T ’ S H E A R I T F O R T H E

C h e e r l e a d e r s

by David Bouchier

Strange things happen on college campuses in summer. I was nearly trampled to death the other day by a horde of very young women wearing very short red skirts and chanting something that sounded like “A fence! A fence!”

A fence might be a very good idea, perhaps with some razor wire and a warning sign saying “Danger: Cheerleaders Ahead.” Long Island is host to more than a dozen cheerleader camps. For the educationally gifted, Hofstra and Adelphi Universities even offer cheerleading scholarships (“Give me an A! Give me an A!”).

But I think there is some intellectual work to be done here. Cheerleading needs a history, a philosophy and, above all, a more sophisticated theory of communications.

The cheerleading phenomenon is almost unknown in the rest of the world. British soccer fans do their own cheerleading, with a medley of traditional songs, bricks and bottles. In less civilized parts of the world, fans express their enthusiasm by running onto the field and beating up the opposing team. Only in America do we have professional partisans to do the jumping and yelling for us.

Strange as it may seem to foreigners, the cheerleading industry has many ardent supporters. It is said to build self-confidence, positive attitudes and a mysterious quality called spirit, which seems to involve smiling a lot.
Cheerleading also teaches the value of teamwork, something that women have often despised in the past as a male excuse for mindless violence and idiotic loyalties. “Be 100 percent behind your team 100 percent of the time” is a slogan that would be heartily endorsed by Slobodan Milosevic, the Orange Order and the Irish Republican Army.

Young cheerleaders also acquire valuable practical skills: impossible balancing tricks, back flips and the brass lungs they will need for child raising or being heard at the departmental meeting. Above all, they learn to compete, in hundreds of local and national events. Cheerleaders are clearly the corporate leaders and the political stars of the future.

Cheerleader culture is much broader and shallower than I had imagined. There are glossy magazines and webzines featuring the essential equipment: deodorants, contact lenses, Cheer Gear, makeup, party dresses and miracle diets. Novices can learn how to create a successful cheer routine with hot music, unique moves, fab formations, and multiple levels. They can also learn the make their own pom poms (called just “Poms”). There are international stars out there you’ve never heard of, and even a few anonymous muscular cheerleading males, whose job it is to support the base of the feminine pyramid.

Despite cheerleaders’ obsession with pyramids, my research suggests that cheerleading began in ancient Greece, rather than in Egypt. The first cheerleaders were called Maenads, female attendants of the god Bacchus. Their task was to encourage the crowds to have a good time, with frenzied rites and extravagant gestures. The opposing squad, the Furies, were merciless goddesses of vengeance who would swing into violent action if their team was losing. The ancient Greeks must get the credit for being the first to give young women these important career opportunities.

So many teams were decimated by the Furies or led astray by the Maenads that cheerleading fell into disrepute for 2,000 years, until it was revived in a kinder, gentler form in the United States. But it’s still a dangerous activity. In an average year, high school footballers lose 5.6 playing days to injuries, according to the January 1998 Harper’s Index, a compilation of statistics. Cheerleaders lose 28.8 days. These accidents are blamed on excessive acrobatics and the passion for building taller and taller pyramids.

But all enthusiasm is dangerous, especially when it takes a physical form. If cheerleading is part of education, let’s use it to educate by focusing on the message. Surely we can do better than waving our poms, doing somersaults and chanting:

*Champs take it away*
*Now Play by Play*
*Move that ball*
*Win win win.*
Let's face it, this is not exactly a stellar example of the sophisticated use of the English language. To reduce the risk of injury and make the sport more educational and less distracting for the fans, I propose to substitute verbal skills for physical high jinks. Routines should become more static, and chants should become more grammatical, more literary and more conducive to the kinder, gentler society we all hope for in the next century.

Why don't you fellows
Pick up that ball
And move it carefully
To the other end of the field?
If we really want to teach good social values, let's chant this famous verse from Grantland Rice:

For when the one great Scorer comes
To write against your name
He writes not that you won or lost
But how you played the game.
Now there's a catchy message for the millennium!

And why not bring that youthful spirit and those brilliant visuals out of the stadium and into the workplace? Cheerleaders should be in every office, with a chant for every corporate game. In a lawyer's office, for example, a spirited cry of “Rule of Law! Rule of Law! Sue! Sue! Sue!” accompanied by some eyepopping dance steps, would give courage and purpose to desk-bound drones. On Wall Street, a simple chant of “Go Greenspan! Low Interest! Never mind the Asians!” would create a positive environment for investment. And cheerleaders would share their boundless enthusiasm with the rest of us who, in the game of life, so often find ourselves on the losing team.
As you read Bouchier’s essay, highlight anything you find humorous. Once you’ve finished, fill out the chart below, quoting passages you found funny, explaining why you thought each was funny and interpreting what each had to say about the subject referenced in the quote. An example has been provided to get you started.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Passage</th>
<th>Why it is funny?</th>
<th>What is the implied message?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…perhaps with some razor wire and a warning sign saying ‘Danger: Cheerleaders Ahead.’”</td>
<td>The writer uses hyperbole and vivid imagery to create a ridiculous picture of cheerleaders as a threat that needs to be contained.</td>
<td>The image seems to suggest that cheerleaders are dangerous.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now read the “Introduction to Satire” text on the next page, focusing on terms that seem to fit the examples of humor you have identified in the passages from “Let’s Hear It for the Cheerleaders.” In the space provided, write a paragraph responding to the following prompt.

**Writing Prompt:** How does Dave Bouchier’s article fit the definition of satire? Support your answer with specific examples from the text.
Introduction to Satire

Satire is a literary genre that uses irony, wit, and sometimes sarcasm to expose humanity’s vices and foibles, giving impetus to change or reform through ridicule. Types of direct satire include Horatian satire, which pokes fun at human foibles with a witty even indulgent tone, and Juvenalian satire, which denounces, sometimes with invective, human vice and error in dignified and solemn tones.

As you read satire look for these characteristic techniques of satiric writing:

**Irony**—A mode of expression, through words (verbal irony) or events (irony of situation), conveying a reality different from and usually opposite to appearance or expectation. The surprise recognition by the audience often produces a comic effect, making irony often funny. When a text intended to be ironic is not seen as such, the effect can be disastrous. To be an effective piece of sustained irony, there must be some sort of audience tip-off, through style, tone, use of clear exaggeration, or other device.

**Hyperbole**—deliberate exaggeration to achieve an effect; overstatement

**Litotes**—a form of understatement that involves making an affirmative point by denying its opposite.

**Caricature**—an exaggeration or other distortion of an individual’s prominent features or characteristics to the point of making that individual appear ridiculous. The term is applied more often to graphic representations than to literary ones.

**Wit**—most commonly understood as clever expression—whether aggressive or harmless, that is, with or without derogatory intent toward someone or something in particular. We also tend to think of wit as being characterized by a mocking or paradoxical quality, evoking laughter through apt phrasing.

**Sarcasm**—Intentional derision, generally directed at another person and intended to hurt. The term comes from a Greek word meaning “to tear flesh like dogs” and signifies a cutting remark. Sarcasm usually involves obvious, verbal irony, achieving its effect by jeeringly stating the opposite of what is meant so as to heighten the insult.

**Ridicule**—Words intended to belittle a person or idea and arouse contemptuous laughter. The goal is to condemn or criticize by making the thing, idea, or person seem laughable and ridiculous.
Parody — The parodist exploits the peculiarities of an author’s expression—the propensity to use too many parentheses, certain favorite words, or other elements of the author’s style.

Invective — Speech or writing that abuses, denounces, or attacks. It can be directed against a person, cause, idea, or system. It employs a heavy use of negative emotive language. Example: “I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.” (Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*)