



LESSON PLAN

# Clowning Around



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**Laugh Clown Laugh**

BY EMMANUEL VAUGHAN-LEE



## Clowning Around

### Key Idea

The clown is an entertainer, an integral social figure across cultures for centuries. Clowns can characterize society and provide a comedic way of viewing the world.

### Background

Clowns have been traced back as far as 4,500 years ago to ancient Egypt. Clowns have played essential roles in social and sacred ceremonies, including Native American communities. William Shakespeare used the clown, or the “fool,” numerous in his plays as a speaker of profound truth. Feste from *Twelfth Night* represents a fool central to Shakespeare’s plays. Mr. Bean or Homer Simpson exemplify modern fools who can jest about anything. Other clown symbols include Bozo the Clown, Carlton from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, Charlie Chaplin, Lucille Ball, Mr. Noodle of *Sesame Street*, and The Three Stooges.

This film is a portrait of a Berlin-based clown, Reinhard “Filou” Horstkotte. Reinhard describes some of his inspirations on becoming a clown in the film; some of them are joy, laughter, and the symbol of the “Pierrot,” the melancholic side of the clown whose origins are in the late 17th century. The Pierrot’s defining characteristic is his naiveté. Reinhard is the artistic director of Red Nose Germany, a branch of Red Noses Clowndoctors International, an organization with a strong team of professionals who share their expertise in the development of high quality hospital clown care programs for thousands of patients. Reinhard, in *Laugh Clown Laugh*, seeks to explore the whole human being, including all of its contradictions.

### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.



**Film:** 8 minutes

**Class:** 60 minutes

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- Art
- Drama
- English Language Arts
- Philosophy

#### COLLEGE

- Art
- Film
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Theater Studies

### THEMES

- Vulnerability
- Freedom of not knowing
- Spontaneity and laughter

### MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

### PREPARATION

- None



## Clowning Around

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 [or 11-12] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.4.9-12. Analyze relationships and interactions within and between human and physical systems to explain reciprocal influences that occur among them.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Explain that students will be watching a film about Reinhard “Filou” Horstkotte, a Berlin-based clown. One definition of the word clown from the 1600s is to “behave inappropriately,” which is reflected in the well-used phrase, “stop clowning around.” Introduce the film by asking students what comes to mind when they think of a clown. Ask students to describe their first memory of a clown. Was the memory from a live event, such as the circus, or from a film or written story? What does a clown represent to them? Can a clown change someone? Can a clown be a hero?

#### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Invite students to look for the ways the clown expresses himself as they watch the film. How does the clown function and influence others? According to Reinhard, there is more to being a clown than laughter. He describes that the role of the clown is not just to entertain, but also to explore the whole human being including all of the contradictions. Ask students to think about how human beings are a mixture of contradictions. For example, a contradiction is when we say one thing and mean another, or when we express ourselves one way, but feel another, etc. Ask students: What are your own contradictions?



### Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- What were some of the clown’s actions in the film that could be viewed as “inappropriate behavior”?
- “For me, the clown is the whole human being – a sense of humility, of freedom, of dignity, and playfulness,” says Reinhard. Which of these qualities in the film does Reinhard portray the most?
- “The clown is the master of failure,” says Reinhard. What do you think he means by this? What happens when a person embraces failure and doesn’t strive for perfection?
- Have you ever been asked to stop “clowning around”? What were you doing to prompt this demand?
- If you were asked to rename this film, what title would you give it?

### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Being a clown for Reinhard isn’t just a joke. Reinhard says that the clown contained the freedom to overcome the seriousness of his surroundings. What do you think he means by this statement? How can freedom transcend difficulties? How does laughter help us deal with pain? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
2. People have been terrified of clowns for centuries. Why do you think this is true? What could be some, misconceptions, fears, or phobias about clowns? Did the film offer any clues about these fears or misconceptions? (C3.D2.Geo.4.9-12)



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3. Can humor create just enough distance from “reality” to help tell a deeper truth? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
4. What comment from today’s discussion had the most meaning to you? Why? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1)

### Resources

Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, “[The History and Psychology of Clowns Being Scary.](#)” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 1, 2013.

Denise Winterman, “[Shakespearean Fools: Their modern equivalents.](#)” *BBC News Magazine*, March 31, 2012.