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William Shakespeare used comedy in different ways and for different purposes. Here are some examples:

Two Shakespearean comic characters

Shakespeare created comic characters such as:

- **Bottom** who appears in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A weaver and leader of a group of travelling players. He is put under a spell that gives him a donkey's head. Although he appears foolish, the audience becomes fond of him, perhaps because he is never evil or malicious.
- **Touchstone** who appears in *As You Like It*: A jester who, on first appearances might be looked down upon, however Shakespeare portrays him as anything but a fool; he knows a lot, has a quick answer to every situation and, although funny, is never nasty or unkind.



DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

Can you think of any characters in films, soaps or other television programmes that are the modern-day equivalents of Bottom or Touchstone?

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Comic relief

Shakespeare sometimes used a short comic scene to help break the tension in a serious play. This helped the audience to cope with darker scenes and events. This is the original meaning of 'comic relief'.

You might want to use this as an example:

- In Shakespeare's famous play *Macbeth* there is a comic scene often referred to as 'The Porter Scene'. This occurs in the middle of a series of dark and sinister events. (Act 2, Scene 3)

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

The term 'comic relief' is used to describe the way that Shakespeare helps the audience laugh during plays which depict terrible and tragic events. Are there any modern-day television programmes that use the same technique? What effect does it have on the audience?

The Comedy challenge

WRITTEN ACTIVITY:

Can you write and, if time, act out a short comedy sketch?

- It should have just **two** characters.
- Character No.1 opens the conversation with the words, 'I wish I could write just like Shakespeare.'
- Character No. 2 disagrees and explains why this would not be a good thing.

Consider these reasons as well as your own:

- How ridiculous it would be if people still wrote like Shakespeare today.
- How boring it would be if everybody wrote like everyone else.
- How no one would read any books because they would all be virtually the same.
- Don't forget to make it funny!

