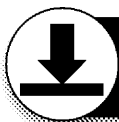


Teaching Pack for GCSE Eduqas Media Studies

Component 2A: Sitcoms:
Modern Family and Friends

Second Edition, September 2023



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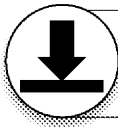
Teacher's Introduction

Sitcoms are a fun and easily digestible form of entertainment. As such, the aim of this resource is to create a series of lesson plans to teach sitcoms in a way that is truthful to the TV genre and meets the requirements of the GCSE Eduqas specification. The set texts (**for assessment from 2024**) outlined by the specification are relevant and contemporary; they were thoughtfully chosen as they exemplify sitcom conventions while simultaneously illustrating the evolution of the genre.

All 12 lessons come with a structured lesson plan. Each lesson plan has clear timings of the activities and full instructions to facilitate ease of implementation. Every lesson is tailor-made by way of six carefully thought-out activities: a starter; an introductory activity; Task 1; Task 2; a plenary; and a homework task or assignment.

The starter activity is typically 10 minutes, with the scope of introducing the lesson at hand. The introductory activity is also typically 10 minutes and delves into the lesson's topic in further detail. Tasks 1 and 2 are approximately 15 minutes each and aimed at either highlighting the most important aspects of that lesson or accentuating the aspects of that lesson which may need more dedicated time. The final 10 minutes of the lesson are allocated to a plenary task intended to consolidate the lesson. Finally, homeworks are provided, and often empower the students to carry out further research on concepts, or begin practising exam-style questions. Furthermore, every activity for each lesson has an accompanying answer sheet with full or indicative answers.

Every lesson (excluding Lesson 10) comes with a corresponding PowerPoint presentation. The aim of the presentation is to ensure that activities which require a degree of interactivity or the assessment of colour in design are more effective. Whenever possible the option to carry out the entire lesson on paper is provided. However, often the starters and plenaries are allocated to the PowerPoint, as presentations command student attention, and the opening and closing activities are structured in a way that opens up student dialogue and initiates class discussion.



Supporting PowerPoint presentations are provided on the ZigZag Education Support Files system, which can be accessed via zzed.uk/productsupport

Relevant context and theories are included throughout the resource. However, it is not certain whether students will have covered these theories at the point that this lesson will be delivered. Therefore, when necessary, further information is provided at the start of the activity. The way each activity is envisaged to be carried out is also suggested in the lesson plan. However, as their primary educator, you are within your remit to decide how best to carry out certain activities based on the needs of your class and individual students.

In light of the set texts, the examples that are routinely used take into consideration *Modern Family* (S08E02) and the pilot episode of *Friends* (S01E01). However, for students to truly grasp the similarities and differences between sitcoms, as well as distinguish between subgenres, further references are made throughout the resource.

The ultimate aim of this resource is for the student to walk away knowing how to answer the sitcom component of their GCSE Media Studies exam. The specification is used as a guide to structure and compile the resource.

September 2023

Second Edition, September 2023

This resource has been updated in line with specification changes to set products for exams from 2024.

Eduqas GCSE Media Studies – Component 2 Section A: Sitcoms

Lesson	Lesson Theme	Lesson Aim	Specification Reference
1	Introduction to Sitcoms (1)	Familiarisation with sitcoms as a TV genre	General intro to topic
2	Introduction to Sitcoms (2)	Better understanding of TV media Studies concepts	Theoretical frameworks
3	Media Industry	Understanding of how sitcoms appropriate the media industry	Organisational structure, individual identity, regulation, piracy, promotion
4	Media Audiences: Sitcoms	Understanding of types of audience and audience theories	Mass/niche audience, Stuart Hall, Uses and Gratification Theory
5	Media Language: Conventions	Understanding of conventions as a media tool, and conventions associated with sitcoms	Genre conventions, sitcom conventions, repetition of conventions
6	Media Language: Theory	Understand creation of meaning, and theories associated with media language	Semiotics, intertextuality
7	Media Language: Narrative	Understand the importance of narrative and the theories associated with it	Stock characters, narrative structure (Todorov), narration theory (Propp)
8	Representation: Reality and World	Understand different representation of reality and the world in sitcoms	Representation of reality and the world
9	Representation: Stereotypes	Understanding the difference between social groups and stereotypes and how they are represented in sitcoms	Representation of social groups and stereotypes
10	Representation: Theory	Understanding of representation theories and how they are used in sitcoms	Process of selection, mediation, construction
11	Media Contexts	Understanding of media contexts and how they apply to sitcoms	Media contexts: historical, sociocultural, political
12	Consolidation of Sitcoms	Bringing together the previous 11 lessons in revision lesson format	Main themes addressed in specification and previous lessons

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Lesson 1

Introduction to Sitcoms: Pa

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the differences between the various sitcom genres.
- ✓ Become familiar with the different sitcoms that fall into different sitcom and hybrid genres.
- ✓ Understand the key differences between the two main types of sitcoms.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 1
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 1.1, 1.2;
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family S08E
- Exercise books

? Starter

Word Search: Find the Sitcom Title

Students start their first lesson on sitcoms by identifying various US and UK sitcoms. The worksheet consists of a word search which has a number of sitcom titles embedded in it. The worksheet is designed so the activity is not too easy. However, you may write down the answers to the activity less challenging if needed. **PowerPoint Lesson1** includes a copy of the word search. **Answer Sheet 1.1** also has the answers for this activity.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Class Sitcom Discussion

Students are presented with four sitcoms to discuss. **PowerPoint Lesson1** directly follows this activity. The aim of this activity is to enable teachers to effectively gauge how well students understand sitcom genre. Indirect questions and suitable examples are provided in the information document.

P Learning Activities

Task 1: What's in a Genre? (20 mins)

Provide students with **Worksheet 1.2**. Individually or in small groups, students use the information provided about the historical context of sitcoms. Students then use the information to identify similar characteristics between the sitcom titles provided, and then identify which programmes fall under. The first two have been completed. Answers can be found in the information section below. Further information has been provided for students on the worksheet and additional information is provided for you in the information section below.

Task 2: Understanding Hybrids (15 mins)

Located on **PowerPoint Lesson 1**, this task consists of a matching activity where students identify which sitcom **not mentioned in Task 1**, and highlighting how it fits into the sitcom forms part of a sitcom. An example relating to *Scrubs* has been provided in the information section below.

Extension 1: Time permitting, you may ask students to explore further sub-genres of sitcoms. Students are aware that this area of genre is not exclusive to sitcoms.

Extension 2: You may ask students what the difference between dramedy and comedy-drama is. A drama with comedic moments, while a comedy-drama is a comedy with dramatic moments.

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Plenary

Single- vs Multi-camera

In this activity students will distinguish between the two main types of sitcom (single-camera sitcom vs multi-camera sitcom). **PowerPoint Lesson 1** concludes by highlighting the key differences (as well as the two key similarities) before moving on to the final slide which provides examples of each into these two types.



Homework

Watch *Modern Family* (US, 2010–present) and write a list of the main characters from the series. Think they are 'stock characters'. Create an analysis of stock characters. **Teacher's watch episode 1**



Information

Intro activity. Suggested answers: For the discussion presented on the slide, two questions will be answered based on students' viewing habits. However, to stimulate a discussion that distinguishes between sitcoms and other comedy genres, musical comedies and romantic comedies and other TV comedy subgenres and include: *Desperate Housewives* (US mystery dramedy, 2004–2012), *Ugly Betty* (US, 2006–2010), *Glee* (US musical teen-dramedy, 2009–2015), *Jane the Virgin* (US romantic comedy, 2009–present), *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (US musical romantic comedy, 2015–present), *Scrubs* (US, 2001–2010), *Stella* (UK comedy-drama, 2012–present), *iZombie* (US crime drama, 2015–present), worth including sketch shows like *Little Britain* (UK 2003–2006).

Tasks 1/2. Further information: The **documentary style** of all programmes is a **situation comedy**. However, *Modern Family* also makes frequent use of **documentary** style. The following examples can be used to illustrate the **documentary** style.

Worksheet 1 and **PowerPoint Lesson 1**: *Modern Family* (US, 2009–present) is a sitcom. It places a different situation or predicament from one episode to the next. It is a typical style of documentaries as a comedic tool, so this sitcom's subgenre would be **mockumentary**. *Scrubs* (US, 2001–2010) is also a sitcom, with frequent serious moments. It is the **comedy-drama** subgenre. However, since this programme is set in a hospital, it has medical tendencies. Therefore, although it is a sitcom, this TV programme is also a hybrid. It is appropriately referred to as a **medical comedy-drama sitcom**.

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Worksheet 1.1 – Starter: Find the Si

There are nine TV sitcom titles in the word search below. Can you find them?

A	B	S	O	L	U	T	E	L	Y	F	A	B	U
T	U	R	J	T	B	X	Q	V	M	T	C	X	X
J	H	R	E	A	Y	E	H	F	M	K	U	Q	P
W	S	T	E	S	H	V	N	W	J	A	V	Q	E
L	A	E	B	S	D	C	V	Y	Y	O	O	Y	U
D	D	T	W	I	S	A	E	T	B	C	N	F	N
Y	Q	Y	L	H	G	X	K	B	L	X	X	F	G
V	H	I	F	A	S	B	C	C	X	G	A	O	C
F	R	I	E	N	D	S	A	Q	A	M	Z	I	I
K	Q	K	K	C	Y	V	H	N	I	L	F	G	C
U	R	R	O	L	M	D	V	L	G	F	B	W	W
C	Y	T	V	W	I	R	Y	E	O	T	W	I	T
S	N	O	S	P	M	I	S	E	H	H	F	N	I
W	Z	I	R	I	E	G	H	S	Y	K	S	E	C
L	D	Q	D	S	E	C	E	M	B	J	D	O	C
K	X	D	J	C	P	E	U	O	H	C	D	J	E
D	I	G	A	B	M	M	Q	V	N	L	T	S	Q

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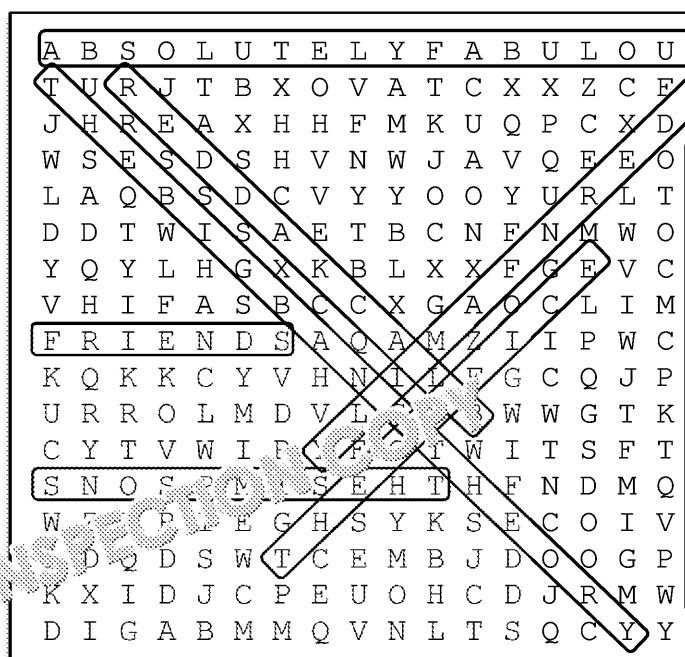
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Answer sheet 1.1 – Starter: Find the Sitcom

Here are the 10 TV sitcom titles in the word search below.

- *Absolutely Fabulous*
- *Blackadder*
- *Family Guy*
- *Friends*
- *Modern Family*
- *The Big Bang Theory*
- *The Inbetweeners*
- *The Office*
- *The Simpsons*
- *Man Like Mobeen*



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Worksheet 1.2 – Task 1: What's in

Information: The sitcom genre, in context

A **situation comedy (sitcom)** is a type, or *genre*, of comedy which centres on a group of characters who must resolve a different situation every week; hence, *sitcom* differs from most other scripted TV productions, as it is not serialised (having a continuous story) and they are always 30 minutes long (with the exception of special episodes).

Pinwright's Progress (BBC, 1955–1962) was the world's first TV sitcom, and it is one of the most recognised forms of TV entertainment. Understandably, it has had a significant impact on its 67-year history, making way for a number of sitcom subgenres to be recognised, more than others.

Task: Identifying the subgenres of sitcoms

Can you identify some of the common characteristics these share? Based on your answer, identify the hybrid/subgenre the sitcoms most represent. NOTE: Some sitcoms share characteristics with multiple subgenres.

Sitcom Titles	Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Friends</i> (US, 1994–2004) <i>The IT Crowd</i> (UK, 2006–2013) <i>Family Guy</i> (US, 1998–present) 	<i>A comedy with a fixed set of characters who face a different situation or predicament from one episode to the next</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Nurse Jackie</i> (US, 2009–2015) <i>Mom</i> (US, 2013–present) 	<i>Sitcom that derives humour from taboo subjects, or comedy that deals with serious issues that normally feature in dramas</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What We Do in the Shadows</i> (US, 2019–present) <i>The Office</i> (UK, 2001–2005) <i>Modern Family</i> (US, 2009–2020) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Flintstones*</i> (US, 1960–1966) <i>The Simpsons</i> (US, 1988–present) <i>Family Guy</i> (1998–present) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Blackadder</i> (UK, 1983–1989 not including specials) <i>Our Flag Means Death</i> (US, 2022–present) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Mr Bean</i> (UK, 1990–1995) <i>The Pee-wee Herman Show</i> (US, 1981) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Red Dwarf</i> (UK, 1988–1999) <i>3rd Rock from the Sun</i> (US, 1996–2001) <i>Futurama*</i> (US, 1999–2013) 	

* Could these titles fit onto any other category?

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Answer sheet 1.2 – Task 1: What's in a

Sitcom Titles	Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Friends</i> (US, 1994–2004) • <i>The IT Crowd</i> (UK, 2006–2013) • <i>Family Guy</i> (US, 1998–present) 	A comedy with a fixed set of characters who face a different situation or predicament from one episode to the next
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nurse Jackie</i> (US, 2009–2015) • <i>Mom</i> (US, 2013–present) 	Sitcom that derives humour from taboo subjects, or comedy that deals with serious issues that normally feature in dramas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What We Do in the Shadows</i> (US, 2019–present) • <i>The Office</i> (UK, 2001–2003) • <i>Modern Family</i> (US, 2009–2020) 	Situation comedies which use features of the documentary/reality genre to create comedic situations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Flintstones</i> (US, 1960–1966) • <i>The Simpsons</i> (US, 1988–present) • <i>Family Guy</i> (1998–present) 	Sitcom that is produced as an animation as opposed to live action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Blackadder</i> (UK, 1983–1989 not including specials) • <i>Our Flag Means Death</i> (US, 2022–present) 	Sitcoms that are set in recognisable historical periods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr Bean</i> (UK, 1990–1995) • <i>The Pee-wee Herman Show</i> (US, 1981–1985) 	Comedy in which there is one central character rather than several
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Red Dwarf</i> (UK, 1988–1998) • <i>3rd Rock from the Sun</i> (US, 1996–2001) • <i>Futurama</i> (US, 1999–2013) 	Comedy set in an imagined future with all the features of science fiction

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Lesson 2

Introduction to Sitcoms: Pa

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand why genres are important to TV content.
- ✓ Understand how genres work with the concepts of Media Studies: the 'language', representation, etc.
- ✓ Apply these concepts to specific examples of TV genres.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 2
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 2.1, 2.2,
- Computers/Internet
- Exercise books

? Starter

The Pros and Cons of Genres

Students participate in a class discussion on the pros and cons of genres. Students discuss about sitcoms to help guide their answers. The class is to be divided into two groups and the other discusses cons for five minutes. Then one person from each group presents to the class. **PowerPoint Lesson 2** includes suggested answers for both sides of the discussion.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

The Concepts of Media Studies

On **Worksheet 2.1** students are presented with the concepts of Media Studies. By this point in the course, individually, or in small groups, students need to know the definition of each concept. Time permitting, you may wish to probe understanding by asking related examples for each concept, before moving on to the next task.

P Learning Activities

Main Task: Applying Media Concepts to TV Sitcoms

Provide students with **Worksheet 2.2**. This task works better in small groups, as they can engage in discussion before committing to a particular answer. Alternatively you can do this as a class-based discussion. Having defined the required Media Studies concepts, students are now required to apply these concepts to the sitcom genre. Answer the questions on **Answer Sheet 2.2**. The answers provided also include sitcom examples to help students understand how these concepts work within TV sitcoms.

Extension Task: It may prove interesting to provide students with a sitcom and ask them to provide an example for each concept as it is used in that programme. For example, you could ask 'what is the most iconic feature of *Friends*?' Students could discuss how the sitcom is a good example of Media Language. They may mention the amount they earned by the final series (Institutions), or the stereotypical characters – Ross is a geek, Rachel is a princess, Chandler is sarcastic, etc.

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Plenary

Friends in Context

This lesson concludes by consolidating the previous activities about genre and style. Teachers may choose to carry this out on paper by utilising **Worksheet 2.3** and **PowerPoint Lesson 2**. Students are provided with *Friends* as an example of a sitcom which students will be familiar with. Students are given five statements which are all related to the sitcom. They must decide which Media Studies concept the statement relates to.



Homework

Having seen the final episode of *Modern Family*, recreate the final activity for today's lesson. Provide one example from the sitcom that clearly shows how the concepts discussed today to establish itself as part of the sitcom genre.

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Worksheet 2.1 – Introduction: The C Media Studies



Match the Media Studies concepts used in this unit to their definitions.

Concept	
Media Language	A collection of create media p around
Representation	A group of indiv to a
The Media Industry	How the media to convey mea the types of encounter, and
The Audience	The historical/po that media pro
The Media Context	How the media of people o

These concepts will be addressed individually in this unit, and you will be assessed on these concepts mean, and how they relate to Media Studies in your exam.

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Answer sheet 2.1 – Introduction: The C Media Studies

Below are the correct matches of the concepts with their definitions.

Concept	Definition
Media Language	How the media uses certain tools (conventions) to create the dialogue used, the type of encounter, and the theme to be explored
Representation	How the media portrays events, issues and people as real
Media Industry	A collection of organisations/institutions that create productions and circulate them
The Audience	A group of individuals who consume and interact with the product
The Media Context	The historical/political/social/cultural conditions in which products are produced in

These concepts will be addressed individually in this unit, and you will be assessed on how you understand these concepts mean, and how they relate to Media Studies in your exam.

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Worksheet 2.2 – Main Task: Applying Media Language to TV Sitcoms



The concepts of a TV sitcom


We have so far addressed what a TV sitcom is as well as the different types that exist. In this unit, we will explore the theories that will be used in this unit. In groups, discuss how you think the media language of TV sitcoms and answer the questions below.

Concept	How It Applies to Sitcoms
 <p>Media Language is how the media uses certain tools (conventions) to convey meaning, such as the dialogue used, the types of situations that characters encounter, and the theme tune selected by the sitcom.</p>	<p>Consider the sitcom conventions below. Why are they used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laugh track Filmed in front of live studio audience (most sitcoms) Theme tune Shorter run time Non-serialised (self-contained/non-continuous story) Stock characters / stereotypes
<p>Representation is how the media portrays events, issues, groups of people or places as they are in reality.</p> 	<p>Choose a sitcom you are most familiar with, and describe how it represents the world – including what it might be trying to say about it.</p>
<p>The Media Industry is a collection of organisations/individuals that create media productions and circulate them around different platforms.</p>	<p>Can you give one example of the major type of traditional broadcaster in the USA?</p> <p>UK Traditional broadcaster:</p> <p>Streaming services:</p>
 <p>Audience is made up of individuals who consume and react to a media production.</p>	<p>Can you give one reason why someone would watch a TV drama?</p>

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Theoretical Framework...	How It Applies to Sitcoms
<p>The Media Context is the historical/political/social/cultural landscape that media products are produced in or are a reflection of.</p> 	<p>For each statement below, give an example from a sitcom you are familiar with. In a few words explain how it reflects the theory it was created in.</p> <p>The media can depict a reality and reinforce it.</p> <p>The media can make reality seem funny to make the audience like important issues.</p> <p>The media can mix both of these concepts together.</p>

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Answer sheet 2.2 – Main Task: Applying Media Language to TV Sitcoms

The concepts of a TV sitcom

Concept	How It Applies to Sitcoms
Media Language is how the media uses certain tools (conventions) to convey meaning, such as the dialogue used, the type of situations that characters encounter, and the theme tune selected by the sitcom.	<p>Laugh track to facilitate humour.</p> <p>Filmed in front of live studio audience (mostly) to provide additional feedback. Additionally, a live audience enables the cast and writer to understand if something is appropriate or not due to the live feedback.</p> <p>Theme tune is used to give a tone and personality to the sitcom (<i>Will & Grace</i>, <i>The Simpsons</i>). In many cases, the theme tune tells the viewer about the nature of the show, such as where it is set.</p> <p>Shorter run time compared to hour-long TV series, making it more accessible.</p> <p>Non-serialised (self-contained episodes / not continuous storylines). A smaller number of episodes but still pick up where you left off.</p> <p>Stock characters / stereotypes allow audiences to understand which role. Take <i>Friends</i> as an example: Rachel is the comic relief/joker; Monica is the sage/know-it-all; Joey and Phoebe is the goofy/carefree character.</p>
Representation is how the media portrays events, issues, or social concerns as reality.	<p>Choose a sitcom you are most familiar with, and describe how it represents the world.</p> <p><i>How I Met Your Mother</i>, <i>Friends</i>, and <i>The Big Bang Theory</i> represent friendship, especially when living in a big city or far away from home.</p> <p><i>The Fresh Prince of Bel Air</i> also highlights the importance of family. The case of Will. However, the sitcom is mostly concerned with the life of the Bel Air community, unlike <i>Will & Grace</i>.</p> <p><i>Will & Grace</i> represents homosexuality in the late 90s, shifting from a taboo subject to a more accepted topic. It also represents the lives of activists or activists in sitcoms such as <i>Ellen</i> and <i>Will & Grace</i>.</p>
The Media Industry is the collection of organisations that create media productions and circulate them around different platforms.	<p>There are some of the major broadcasters in the UK and the US.</p> <p>US traditional broadcaster: NBC (<i>Friends</i>), CBS (<i>How I Met Your Mother</i>), Freeform (<i>Baby Daddy</i>)</p> <p>UK traditional broadcaster: BBC (<i>My Family</i>), ITV (<i>Benidorm</i>)</p> <p>Streaming services: Netflix (<i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i>), Amazon Prime (<i>Transparent</i>)</p>
Audience is a group of individuals who consume and react to a media production.	<p>Can you give one reason why someone would choose to watch a sitcom?</p> <p>They are funny and light-hearted, sometimes we don't want to think too hard.</p> <p>They are shorter, and are not usually serialised, making them easy to watch.</p> <p>They often star veteran TV actors (Charlie Sheen, Tina Turner, and Dawn French), making these people familiar and giving them credibility.</p> <p>They often have a star of how good the show will be because that actor is in it.</p>
The Media Context is the historical/political/social/cultural landscape that media products are produced in. Media products are a reflection of the world.	<p>The media can depict a reality and reinforce it. <i>Friends</i> depicts a group of individuals who come together as a family in New York City. It shows that women can be just as capable and successful as her male counterparts.</p> <p>The media can make reality seem funny to make the audience like it. The Netflix comedy, <i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i>, takes the concept of a sitcom and makes it a reality. The show makes the concept of reality seem funny.</p> <p>The media can mix both of these concepts together. Characters are depicted as very stereotypical nerds, who are often very intelligent. However, they live in relatively realistic circumstances. The social groups is where the sitcom gets most of its comedy. The implied here is that opposites attract and this becomes a theme as the series progresses. Likewise, the day American family that gets itself into ridiculous situations is a reflection of a modern, extended family.</p>

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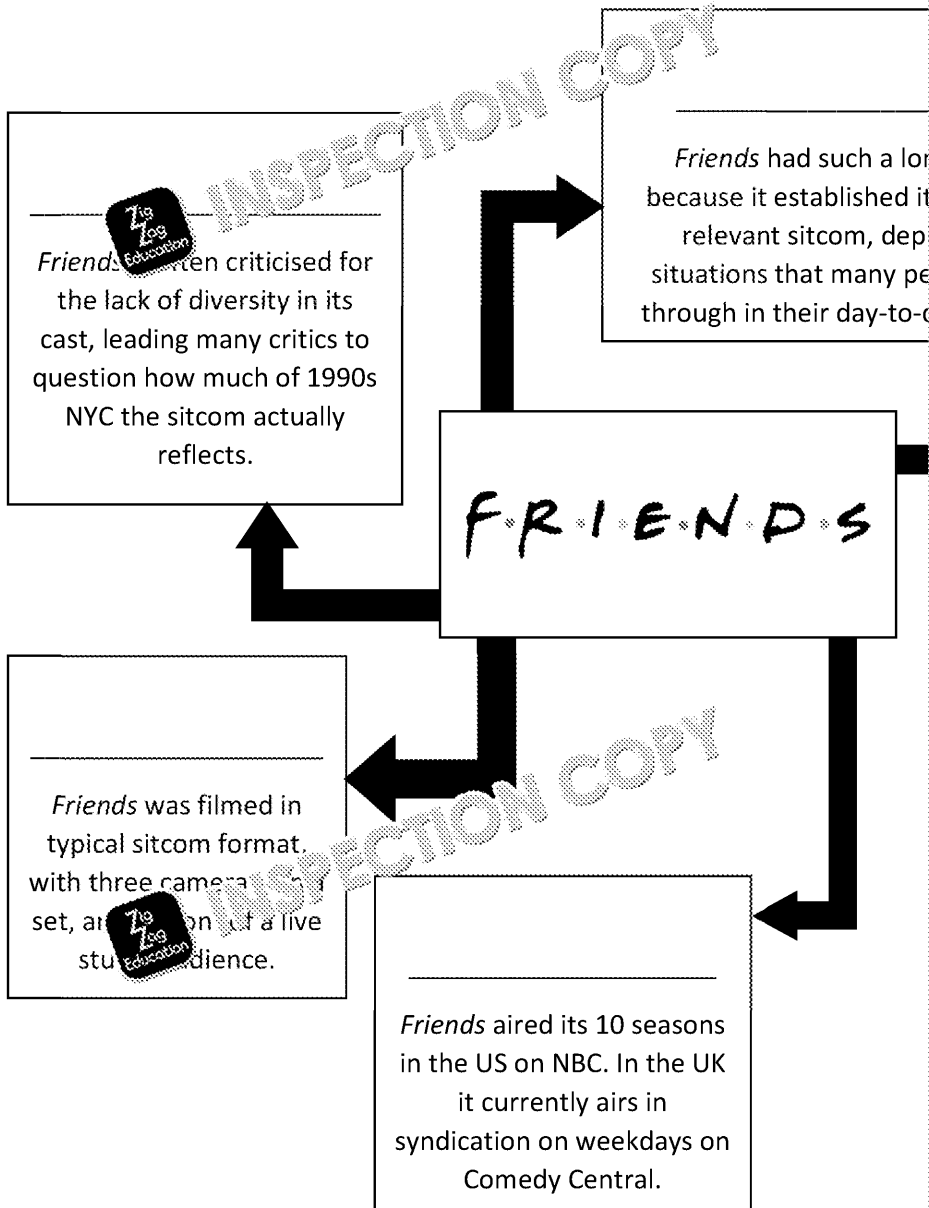


Worksheet 2.3 – Plenary: Friends

Which of the concepts discussed today best reflects the aspect of *Friends* provided?

Possible answers: Media Language, Representation, Media Industry, Audience, and

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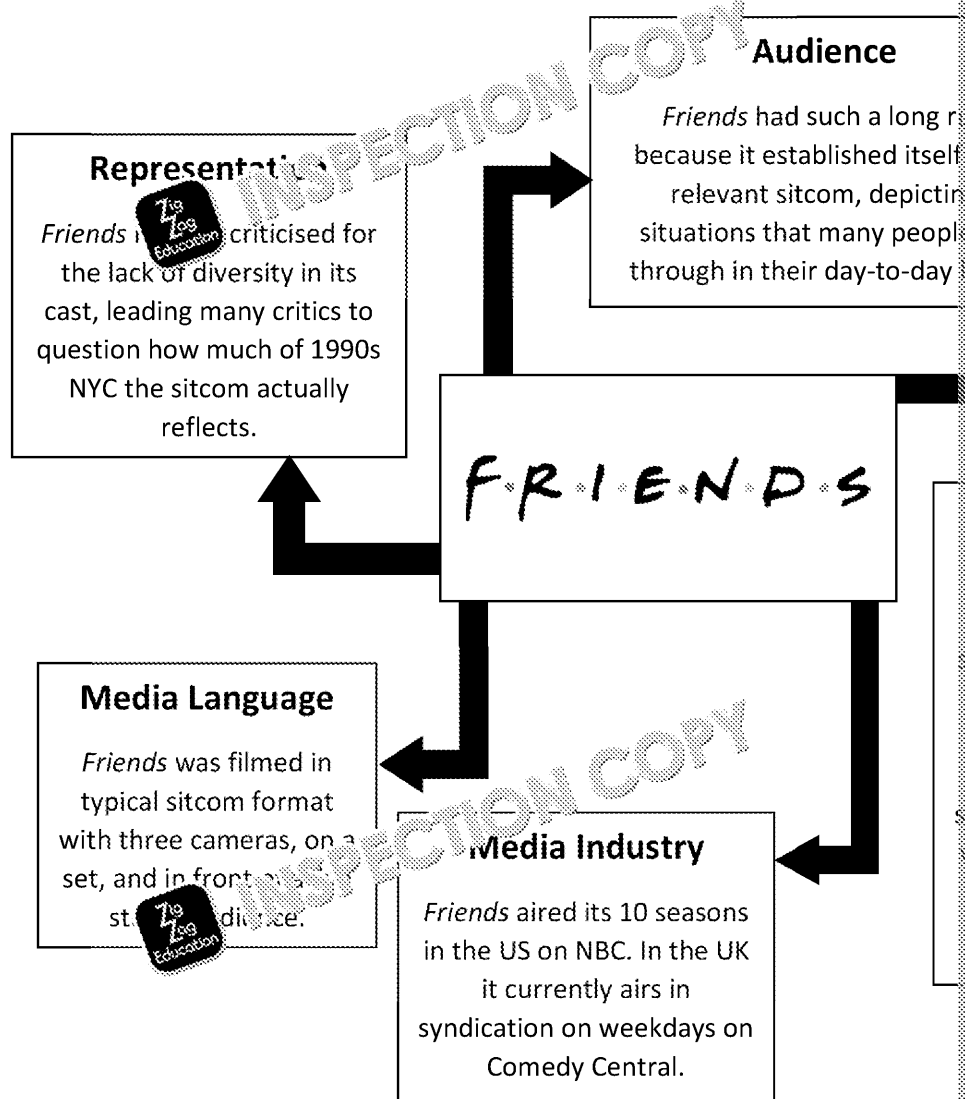
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Answer sheet 2.3 – Plenary: Friends in

Were you able to successfully label all the boxes? The answers to each have been



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Lesson 3

The Media Industry (and Sitcoms)

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the concepts of organisational structures and funding.
- ✓ Understand the influence of organisational and individual identity on a final product.
- ✓ Understand the importance of regulation, piracy and marketing of sitcoms.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 3
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 3.1, 3.2,
- Computers/Internet
- Exercise books

? Starter

The Conglomerate

Students participate in a class-based activity on **PowerPoint Lesson 3** delving into vertical and horizontal integration. The activity tackles US conglomerates NBCU

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Funding Projects; Organisations; and Individuals

Provide students with **Worksheet 3.1**, whereby students are presented with a text about the industry. The text explores commercial and public service broadcasters, funding and programming. The text is followed by four questions that are to be answered in class. To engage with the text provided, so it would be best for this activity to be carried out in discussion. **Answer Sheet 3.1** is provided to aid in substantiating answers further.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Platforms and Regulations (25 mins)

Worksheet 3.2 delves into the importance of TV regulation and the different platforms. This activity has a set text and allocated questions. The answers for this activity are in **Answer Sheet 3.2**. As this is meant to be a reflective task, it is recommended that the questions individually, with the answers discussed as a class. However, students should do further research wherever possible, so access to the Internet may prove beneficial to substantiate their answers.

Task 2: Marketing Sitcoms (10 mins)

Worksheet 3.3 presents students with several scenarios relating to marketing a sitcom. In class (time-dependent), students must decide whether the scenario in question is a sitcom on a global level, regional level or both. **Answer Sheet 3.3** provides the answers with a rationale for those choices.

💡 Plenary

Total Recall?

This lesson concludes by consolidating the activities about media industry. In general, quick-fire questions relating to the industry on **PowerPoint Lesson 3**. Answers are provided on **PowerPoint** immediately following each question.

📖 Homework

By conducting your own research, create a flow chart similar to today's starter showing the structure of the public service broadcaster BBC. The answer to this homework is on the final slide of **PowerPoint Lesson 3**.

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Worksheet 3.1 – Introduction: Funding Organisations; and Individuals

Information: Introducing the media industry!

- Sitcoms can be broadcast by commercial or public service broadcasters. Commercial broadcasters provide programming with the goal of making money (e.g. ITV, HBO, Netflix). Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) provide programming to audiences with the end goal solely to inform, educate and entertain. Channel 4 is a PSB in the UK that has the same obligations as the BBC. It is not state-owned but commercially financed; this is why it is not like the BBC, which is funded via TV licence payments.
- When a broadcaster has faith that a spec (the documented and formulated pitch) for a sitcom will do well, they will financially invest in the project to produce a preview (pilot presentation or full pilot). The broadcaster then decides if it feels that there is an interested audience, and the project fits the ideology of the network's brand. Without this buy-in the network will not commission the sitcom, and because of this a lot of sitcom scripts and briefs go unproduced.
- *Modern Family* is a fairly recent (2009–2020) and very successful US sitcom. Set in Los Angeles, it follows the lives of three related but very different families in a mockumentary format. Produced by ABC, it was picked up for syndication and is shown outside the USA on various networks, such as Sky Comedy in the UK. It is also available on Hulu, Disney+ and Peacock, and is available to purchase on Amazon. The fact that different audiences keeps these series relevant provides them with a lot of financial reward for the production companies. The latter is an especially important factor for British sitcom producers who, unlike their American counterparts, do not benefit from syndication as long after the series has ended.

Task: Consider the following questions, and answer them carefully. The text is provided to answer the questions. However, you may also conduct further online research to find answers.

- 1) Is *Modern Family* a commercial or PSB sitcom? Can you give an example of a commercial or PSB sitcom?
- 2) In your own words, explain the difference between a pilot presentation and a full pilot.
- 3) Why is the sale of a classic sitcom to a streaming service often an attractive option for production companies?

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Answer Sheet 3.1 – Introduction: Funding Organisations; and Individual

Task: Indicative answers

- 1) Is *Modern Family* a commercial or PSB sitcom? Can you give an example of

Modern Family, due to being developed and produced by ABC, is a commercial (American Broadcasting Company) is a commercial broadcasting network owned by The

- 2) In your own words, explain the difference between a pilot presentation and

In the television industry a pilot is an episode of a TV programme – normally used to test that programme; or rather, used to entice the broadcasters to purchase the full series. A pilot is produced for the broadcaster, and the entire episode is made. A broadcaster would not want to invest fully in the cost of producing the pilot presentation. Production of a pilot presentation typically consists of filming the footage together to give a general sense of what the episode (and subsequent episodes) will be like. These presentations are usually around 10 minutes long and will often encourage executives to want to see or know more, thus ordering a full pilot or possibly

- 3) Why is the sale of a classic sitcom to a streaming service often an attractive

Keeping the series going even after it has been cancelled is a way to maintain a saturated age of media content. Staying relevant is not easy, unless you're a classic such as *Friends* or *Only Fools and Horses*. One way to provide a second life to a series is to make it accessible for those who stood by it throughout its original run, and also open up new audiences. With Netflix purchasing *Man Like Mobeen*, and making it available globally, it

Maintaining **exposure** for a series will likely keep it in demand and give it more then chances increase for it to be renewed a continuation series (*Absolutely Fabulous*, BBC), reboots (as the case in 2017 when Netflix remade the *Time*), film adaptations (the series (also *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Sex and the City*), *Big Bang Theory*, *Young Sheldon*, or *Only Fools and Horses / Green, Green Grass*

Extensions of the main series are what turns a media text into a franchise, and to be **financially successful**. Regardless of whether or not the broadcaster is involved, production companies involved all want to make as much money as possible. Franchises are the best way to achieve this goal.

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Worksheet 3.2 – Task 1: Platforms and

Task: Read the following text carefully and answer the questions that follow.

The way that audiences watch a sitcom is largely dependent on the way that the broadcast is (broadcast) it.

Initially, the process was fairly simple. A production company would produce a sitcom and broadcast it. The production company might be independent, and be commissioned by a national network, or it could be in-house, which means the production company is part of the same conglomerate. The network would air the show and also sell it to other networks abroad, a process known as syndication. Audience figures would allow the network to know how popular the show was. Popular shows brought in more advertising revenue for commercial television, and for public service broadcasters. Public service broadcasters could also sell popular shows to commercial networks in order to increase their revenue. When home media formats were introduced, a particular show could purchase videos and then DVDs or Blu-rays to watch the show at home.

The number of channels available increased with the introduction of satellite and cable television. More channels were available to people, meaning more advertising revenue and more repeats and omnibus editions of popular shows became more common, as older time-slots (for example, midmorning or “daytime television”) didn’t attract as many targeted, original programming.

The introduction of the Internet to this situation made distribution of TV programmes introduced opportunities for piracy and illegal downloading, increasing the need for people to own devices capable of accessing the Internet. This in turn led to the rise of online platforms and, importantly, streaming services such as Netflix. The growth of Internet usage and the introduction of peer-to-peer file sharing in the early 2000s, such as *The Big Bang Theory* and *Game of Thrones*, are some of the most illegally downloaded programmes online. The biggest factor contributing to this was people’s unwillingness to pay for a programme aired in the UK (sometimes US shows aired in the UK several weeks after their US broadcast). Many people cited the potential of the Internet and social media as a crucial story, and this is the primary reason why they were downloading illegally. To safeguard the authenticity of media texts and combat online piracy, popular streaming services joined the fight against piracy by down-ranking torrent sites such as ThePirateBay, reducing the accessibility of peer-to-peer files and illegal downloads. Broadband providers such as BT also worked together. This means that even if someone waded through all the Google-search results, the service provider would have blocked access to the website.

Online platforms have made TV viewing much more convenient and accessible to people. With the introduction of on-demand services, people are no longer held hostage by their television schedule. Certain programmes at the time at which they are shown on TV. Moreover, TV can now be watched with one another as much for live viewership. Audiences can now watch two programmes at the same time but on different channels by recording one of the programmes to watch later, or by going online and accessing it through that broadcaster’s on-demand service. This is placed on Live+7 ratings. This means that the importance of viewership is being placed on who tune in to watch a TV programme live, as well as on the number of people that watch on-demand services during the first seven days after the original broadcast. Streaming services do not need to release viewership figures in order to attract advertisers, as they use a different business model. They have always had the means to track their customers’ viewing habits. Netflix have introduced a cheaper subscription tier – the Netflix Basic with ads. Platforms are more transparent about their viewing figures, and they will probably use these and the data they have to personalise ads effectively and attract advertising revenue. Most of its original programming through popularity using a variety of measures:

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- The increase in subscriptions in a certain time frame from when a new programme is released
- The decrease in subscription cancellations in a certain time frame from when a new programme is released
- The amount of ratings given to a programme by Netflix subscribers
- Netflix's rating/recommendation system
- The social media presence the content commands online



When Netflix introduced its streaming service, it was originally a rental DVD service. People became willing to subscribe to the streaming service in order to watch the streaming service not only the range of original programming but also had the programming available to international viewers. For many people, the inclusion of a large catalogue of programming was enough to forgo illegal downloading and streaming. Netflix success story, however, is that other, existing companies realised that streaming was the way to go, and large companies like Disney, HBO, Apple and Amazon introduced their own streaming services. These streaming companies invest a lot of money into producing original programmes elsewhere: HBO has *Game of Thrones*, Netflix has *Stranger Things*, Amazon has *Leviathan* and a few very high budget shows. As customers are now faced with the prospect of subscribing to access these new programmes and films, there's a strong possibility of illegally downloading material.

Streaming has increased the globalisation of TV watching. Not only do streaming programmes a day after their US broadcast, but it also original content is released. Most interestingly, most streaming services make their original programmes available in weekly instalments, with the exception that programmes purchased from the US the day after their original US broadcast. This model allows for legitimate discussion about the content, while still allowing the viewer to watch sitcoms like *Mobeen*. While some may opt to watch these shows at a slower pace, binge-watching in maintaining audience interest. This means audiences do not have to wait nine months for the next season. On the other hand, when episodes for original programmes are released, there is often express dismay about the wait between one season and the next, while those who have criticised social media users and TV reviewers for spoiling the plot.

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Answer the following questions based on the text provided:

- 1) Name the two primary ways TV sitcoms can be pirated online. (1 mark)
- 2) How has the UK media industry attempted to combat online piracy of US im
- 3) What are the most common reasons given as to why people illegally view TV
- 4) In your own words, explain the **two benefits** and **two drawbacks** of Netflix's (5 marks)



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Answer Sheet 3.2 – Task 1: Platforms and

Task: Answer to text

- 1) Name the two primary ways TV sitcoms can be pirated online. (1 mark)
Peer-to-peer downloading and illegal streaming. (1/2 mark each)
- 2) How has the UK media industry attempted to combat the piracy of US im
 - a. By airing them relatively soon after they air in the US, sometimes the ne
 - b. Online streaming services now do so as part of their catalogue to be in the USA.
 - c. Google actively blocks links to torrent sites.
 - d. UK broadband providers block torrent sites altogether. (1/2 mark each)
- 3) What are the most common reasons given as to why people illegally view TV
Unwillingness to wait to watch legally, and fear of coming across spoilers on
- 4) In your own words, explain the **two benefits** and **one drawback** of Netflix's
(5 marks)
 - o Benefit: Binge-watching allows people to watch in their own time and at
 - o Benefit: A total release of episodes also keeps audience interest as they programme from beginning to end without any breaks in episode release programmes simultaneously.
 - o Benefit: Audiences can follow the series better by watching it over a short
 - o Drawback: Binge-watching opens the door for people who watch the show who prefer to take their time.
 - o Drawback: Release of all episodes at once means no longer wait for new episodes out weekly.
 - o Drawback: Binge-watching can prevent audiences from more important
▪ (1.5 marks for each correct benefit, and 2 marks for an acceptable

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Worksheet 3.3 – Task 2: Marketing

Task: Notice the list of common marketing techniques that have been used to promote *Modern Family*. Identify if they are an appropriate means of promotion on a global or national level.

Outdoor advertising – Billboards, taxis, bus stops, on buses and train stations, and advertising that TV series and film producers use to promote their products. The number of people that you can reach in a small amount of time. In this sense, it is similar to online advertising. However, people can choose to avoid a billboard like they can avoid an advertisement.

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Trailers and teasers – Unlike static adverts, trailers can help give viewers a taste of what's to come. With established programmes, fans are given a preview of what's to come. This type of promotion is used on television during other successful programming. However, trailers have moved into digital format and uploaded online for anyone to watch: anytime; anywhere. They can be produced in audiovisual format (to be seen and heard), or just audio format as a podcast.

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Pre-roll advertising – This is a form of online advertising that plays trailers and promotional videos. If a person is watching a comedy video on YouTube, they are more likely to watch a trailer for a sitcom than the trailer for the latest *NCIS* spin-off (depending on their other viewing habits). It's a good way to target the right audience, and most pre-roll service providers do not allow the video to be skipped within the first five seconds (thus making it more cost-effective than other forms of advertising).

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Social media marketing – Social media allows the sitcom to interact with its audience. The sitcom will converse with fans by retweeting or responding to Facebook posts. More content is used as a means of providing additional content and exclusive information to fans. This is often done by following the sitcom on its social media account (thus ensuring its online popularity).

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Panel shows and talk shows – Stars of TV shows are often seen on programmes like *Graham Norton Show*. This is a good way to generate publicity for the sitcom, not only in the UK but in different countries where the host can help gauge the right things to talk about and the local culture.

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Television conventions – TV conventions are very common in the US and are gaining popularity in the UK. San Diego Comic Con is the most attended fan convention in the world and is thought to have over 130,000 people in 2016. The aim of conventions like this is to provide fans with exclusive content, the opportunity to acquire rare collectables, and in many cases fun activities. Comic Con is rooted in comic books and audiovisual media. Based on them, a number of TV shows have been created. Examples include *2 Broke Girls*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *The Simpsons*, and *Arrow*.

Global: _____ Regional: _____

Publicity stunts – This means of marketing is a way of capitalising on the power of publicity. It's a stunt that captures people's attention, and starting people talking about the media. It's a competing alternative to other forms of marketing.

Global: _____ Regional: _____

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Answer Sheet 3.3 – Task 2: Marketing

Task: Answers for Task 2

Outdoor advertising: Regional; although a large amount of people are targeted via billboards (especially in large cities), those people are limited to the geographical location that the billboard is in.

Trailers and previews: Both; trailers and previews are often produced to be shown on TV. A common convention is to also place them online for international fans to watch, making them suitable for both global and regional advertising.

Pre-roll advertising: Global. Due to the nature of the Internet, any form of online advertising can target a global audience. Marketers may choose certain geographical locations to target or avoid entirely. However, online advertising is still often utilised on a global scale.

Social media marketing: Global; the reasoning here is similar to pre-roll advertising. Social media marketing has the added benefit of creating an interactive platform between fans and the brand.

Panel shows and talk shows: Regional; although publicity tours tend to occur on a national level, appearances of a sitcom star on different talk/panel shows are regional in nature. For example, a Russian talk show to promote the upcoming season of *The Big Bang Theory*, it is unlikely that people in Birmingham would know about that appearance and the discussion that took place. A similar appearance on *The Graham Norton Show* would very likely go unnoticed by many people outside of the UK.

TV conventions: Regional; comic cons are open to anyone who is willing and able to pay the entry fee, but they are regionally exclusive. One cannot go to San Diego Comic Con without being able to travel to San Diego. Entry fees are also very expensive. Luckily, most panel shows are recorded and uploaded online, making them accessible to a global audience.

Publicity stunts: Both; publicity stunts are meant to get people talking. Normally, they are limited to a geographically restricted location, but with the capabilities of the Internet that they can reach the globe, achieving the same desired outcome, just on a larger scale.

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Lesson 4

Media Audiences: Sitcom

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the relevant audience theories that are required for this unit.
- ✓ Identify the types of audiences that are described in the audience theories used
- ✓ Apply different audience theories to set sitcoms *Friends* and *Modern Family*.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 4
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family* S08E01
- Exercise books

? Starter

Theoretically Does It!

The starter activity begins by providing students with contextual information about **Worksheet 4.1**, which then leads to the task where students must apply the key section to the scenarios provided. An illustration of Stuart Hall's theory is also in **PowerPoint Lesson 4**. **Answer Sheet 4.1** provides the answers to this gap-fill activity.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

A Sitcom's Purpose

The lesson continues with contextual information about the uses and gratifications theory. The task on **Worksheet 4.2** then asks students to apply the theory to specific sitcoms. The theory is presented on **PowerPoint Lesson 4**. **Answer Sheet 4.2** provides the answers.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: The Big Broadcast (15 mins)

Worksheet 4.3 explores the sitcom audience by providing information about the theory. This worksheet then lists a table with a number of audience types and sitcom titles. Students then group the sitcoms mentioned would be of interest to. As this task is intended for mainstream audiences, all groups are selected for all the sitcoms. **Answer Sheet 4.3**.

Task 2: Let's Get Specific (15 mins)

Worksheet 4.4 builds on the previous activity by explaining how, although most sitcoms are aimed at mainstream audiences, some may be tailored to niche audiences. The information section is presented with a similar table as before. However, the sitcom titles are heavily edited. Students must now select which niche audience is most appropriate for each sitcom. A brief description of each sitcom has been provided. The answers are provided in **Answer Sheet 4.4**.

💡 Plenary

Bringing the Audience to a Close

Lesson 4 concludes by consolidating the previous theories about media audiences by applying them to *Modern Family* and *Friends* on **Worksheet 4.5**. Answers are provided in **Answer Sheet 4.5**. **PowerPoint Lesson 4** can be used as a quick revision if a quick revision is needed.

📖 Homework

Briefly explain the following questions:

- 1) Why has a series like *Friends* remained so relevant, so long after it ended?
- 2) What does streaming have to offer to *Friends* and *Modern Family* in terms of audience reach?

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Worksheet 4.1 – Starter: Theoretical

Information: Stuart Hall

There are many theoretical scholars who have studied the audiences of media. One of the most prominent media theorists is Stuart Hall, who distinguished between two types of audience and their responses to media texts.

Stuart Hall distinguished between the **active audience** and the **passive audience**. An **active audience** is one who engages with the media, interprets the product and challenges the message of the media text. An example of this is when a fan of an online TV show posts the latest episode of their favourite show on a fan forum and proposes a change. A **passive audience**, who is more accepting of what is being presented, is unlikely to make any challenging proposals. If a medical show were to show where a head transplant took place (which is not currently medically possible), an active audience might think this was a legitimate medical procedure, they would be a **passive audience**. Therefore, there is a higher chance that a passive audience will believe the media as opposed to an active audience, who challenges what they are watching.

Stuart Hall also proposes three distinct ways that the audience may respond to media:

- **preferred reading:** the audience's reaction is the same way that the media intended.
- **negotiated reading:** is when the audience simultaneously accepts some of the product but rejects others; for example, a lawyer who watches a legal drama may find the legal aspect of the programme not very truthful to reality, but enjoys the programme due to the characters and story. Therefore, this viewer partakes in a negotiated reading of that series.
- **oppositional reading:** is when the audience understands the intended message of the product but chooses to not accept it and disagree with it.

Task: Fill in the blanks with what has been covered in Stuart Hall's audience theory.



Words to be used are: *active audience, passive audience, preferred,*

Cameron Tucker is a character in *Modern Family*. He is the husband of Mitchell Pritchett. Lily. *Modern Family* is, as the name suggests, a family-oriented sitcom, and some viewers welcome the inclusion of a gay couple. Other viewers welcome that Cameron and Mitchell's portrayal brings to the screen and, as *Modern Family* has won several awards, this positive portrayal of a gay couple is clearly the _____ audience.

Some critics, however, hold the opinion that Cameron's character is generally sympathetic. On occasions when the character behaves in a way that reinforces negative stereotypes, this is a _____ reading of the character.

Modern Family was launched in 2014 on ABC, a major US broadcasting network. In its first slot, many viewers were introduced to it as part of their evening's viewing with a group of friends. This group could be considered as a _____ audience. The series has won several awards, including a People's Choice award in 2015. This award is decided by the audience who voted for *Modern Family* is an _____ audience.

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Answer sheet 4.1 – Starter: Theoretical

Task: Answers to starter activity in Lesson 4

Cameron Tucker is a character in *Modern Family*. He is the husband of Mitchell Pritchett and the father of Luke. *Modern Family* is, as the name suggests, a family-oriented sitcom, and some viewers welcomed the diversity and inclusivity that Cameron brings to the screen and, as *Modern Family* went on to win numerous awards, the couple is clearly the preferred reading.

Some critics, however, hold the opinion that Cameron's character is generally sympathetic on occasions when he behaves in a way that reinforces negative stereotypes. He is negotiated as a character.

Modern Family was launched in 2009 on ABC, a major US broadcasting network. In its first slot, many viewers would be introduced to it as part of their evening's viewing with a group that could be considered as a passive audience. The series was well received and won a People's Choice award in 2015. This award is decided by a public vote, so the *Family* is an active audience.

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Worksheet 4.2 – Introduction: A Sitcom

Information: Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory is a theoretical approach that highlights how media is used by the audience, in order to fulfil a specific need.

Take note of the table provided with the need classification and a formal definition in the uses and gratification theory.

Uses and Gratification Theory	
Need Classification	Definition
Entertainment and Diversion	The audience sometimes wants to escape from reality and chooses media texts for the sole purpose of allowing for a diversion from the real world.
Information and Education	Sometimes media texts are consumed for their educational value. Documentaries are a very clear example of this, as there are a significant number of sitcoms that provide educational content.
Social Interaction	Sometimes media texts are used to fulfil a need for social interaction . TV shows that may rely heavily on social media (hashtags and online promotions) are prime examples of this, as reality TV competitions that rely on public voting for progression.
Personal Identity	Some audiences use the subjects of media texts to relate to their own personal experiences . Many media texts capitalise on the audience's ability to empathise with a character or their situation.

Task: Take a look at the following examples and discuss among yourselves to see how each need the audience has in each scenario. The answer sheet will be provided as well as a list of those needs.

- 1) Sitcoms with ensemble casts, such as *Modern Family* and *That '70s Show*, have been popular with audiences because it is easy among such a large number of characters to find one that is appealing to the audience's sense of _____.
- 2) *2 Broke Girls* attempted to increase the viewership of its sixth season (2016) by offering out 'Facebook Live' streams before certain episodes. Netflix's *Full House* reimagined sitcom was also active on social media in 2016, with 6.63 million interactions. In this instance, the show appealed to their audience's need to partake in _____.
- 3) Shows like *Family Guy* and *Two and a Half Men* may be known to be political, but they have proven popular among US viewers. The reason for their popularity is that the need some people have to sit back and watch something funny. This appeals to audiences with _____ and a _____ from everyday life.
- 4) *Will & Grace* has been praised for normalising the wide spectrum of human sexuality. It has even expressed their thanks to the sitcom for helping them understand the LGBTQ+ community face. In this instance *Will & Grace* served to fulfil its audience's need for _____.

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Answer sheet 4.2 – Introduction: A Sitcom

Task: Answers for the introduction task are found below.

- 1) Sitcoms with ensemble casts, such as *Modern Family* and *That '70s Show*, have appealed to audiences because it is easy among such a large number of characters to find one appealing to the audience's sense of personal identity.
- 2) *2 Broke Girls* attempted to increase the view of its sixth season (2016) by releasing 'Facebook Live' streams before each episode. Netflix's *Full House* released its first season on social media on YouTube, with 6.63 million interactions. In this instance, it appealed to their audience's need to partake in social interaction.
- 3) Shows such as *Mr. Guy* and *Two and a Half Men* may be known to be political but they have proven popular among US viewers. The reason for their popularity is the need some people have to simply sit down and watch something funny. These shows appeal to audiences with entertainment and a diversion from everyday life.
- 4) *Will & Grace* has been praised for normalising the wide spectrum of human sexuality. It has even expressed their thanks to the sitcom for helping them understand the community face. In this instance *Will & Grace* served to fulfil its audience's need for education.

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Worksheet 4.3 – Task 1: The Broad in

Information: The sitcom audience

There are many demographics (particular sectors of the population) that a media producer may choose to aim their product at. In some cases they may choose for their product to appeal to a specific age group or gender (*Baby Daddy* is intended for the 15–25 age group). However, there are some instances where the media product may be intended to appeal to a mass audience (*Friends* depicted a group of 30-year-olds going through relational issues). In other instances the product may be intended for a specialised audience but written for a mass audience (the particular character of *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* has a unique personality that all people can relate to; however, everyone can relate to being in a difficult situation or circumstances).

Task: Complete the grid below.

Have a look at the grid below. The far left column has a list of main audience categories. The top row has a series of sitcom titles. Taking the sitcom into consideration, what audience category does the sitcom appeal to? The first one has been done for you.

Audience Category	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i>	<i>The Fresh Prince of Bel Air</i>	<i>The IT Crowd</i>	<i>That '70s Show</i>
Family	X				
Individuals	X				
Housewives	X				
Adults	X				
Teenagers / Young adults					
Children	X				
Men	X				
Women	X				

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Answer sheet 4.3 – Task 1: The Broad in B

Task: The following sitcoms are intended for mass audiences, and can in some way appeal to everybody in an attempt to maximise viewership.

This increases the chances of longevity for the series securing the coveted 100-episode rule, which allows the series to qualify for syndication (being sold after the sitcom ends to other broadcasters to air at a later date), as well as the original broadcaster, as well as the cast of the show being able to earn money for a much longer period.

Audience Category	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i>	<i>The Fresh Prince of Bel Air</i>	<i>The IT Crowd</i>	<i>That 70s Show</i>
Family	X	X	X	X	X
Individuals	X	X	X	X	X
Housewives	X	X	X	X	X
Adults	X	X	X	X	X
Teenagers / Young adults	X	X	X	X	X
Children	X	X	X	X	X
Men	X	X	X	X	X
Women	X	X	X	X	X

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Worksheet 4.4 – Task 2: Let's Get

Information: Niche audiences

Although most sitcom producers choose to broaden their target audiences, producers who choose to create sitcoms that appeal to a specific demographic the network it is being shown on (for example, Disney Channel sitcoms are for children rather than adults).

Task: Complete the grid below

With this in mind, take a look at the grid below. The sitcom titles have now been targeted at a niche audience. A brief description of each sitcom has been provided for you.

Audience Category	<i>Hannah Montana</i>	<i>Baby Daddy</i>	<i>Two and a Half Men</i>	<i>Hot in Cleveland</i>	<i>South Park</i>	
Family						
Individuals						
Housewives						
Adults						
Teenagers / Young adults						
Children	X					
Men						
Women						

***Hannah Montana* (2006–2011):** Disney sitcom about a teenager living a double life as an international pop star.

***Baby Daddy* (2012–2016):** A young bachelor becomes a single father, when the baby is left on his doorstep by the infant's mother.

***Two and a Half Men* (2003–2015):** A middle-aged hedonist's lifestyle comes under scrutiny from his neurotic younger brother and his innocently naïve pre-teen son.

***Hot in Cleveland* (2010–2015):** Three ageing actresses move from Los Angeles to Cleveland, Ohio, where they have to contend with the much colder and much sassier climate.

***South Park* (1997–present):** Animated sitcom about four young boys, and their adventures in the town of South Park, Colorado.

***Full House* (1987–1995):** A widower has to figure out how to raise three daughters with his brother-in-law and he needs help to do it.

***Girlfriends* (2000–2006):** Ensemble comedy about five black women in their late 20s/early 30s who triumphs over their personal and professional lives together.

***Man Like Mobeen* (20017–present):** BBC Three sitcom set in Small Heath, Birmingham, about a British Pakistani Muslim, his friends, family and community.

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Answer sheet 4.4 – Task 2: Let's Get

Task: Notice the arrangement of types of audiences based on the sitcoms provided. This is not to say that the sitcoms below cannot be enjoyed by any other demographic. However, the creator (with the broadcaster's instructions) would have produced the sitcom with a target audience in mind.

Audience Category	<i>Hannah Montana</i>	<i>Baby Doctor</i>	<i>Two and a Half Men</i>	<i>Hot in Cleveland</i>	<i>South Park</i>	<i>Modern Family</i>
Family						
Individual						
Housewives						
Adults					X	
Teenagers / Young adults		X				
Children	X					
Men			X			
Women				X		

Information: The main factors media producers use to target audiences:

- **Gender:** Although both genders may watch and enjoy a show such as *Two and a Half Men*, the show is targeted towards men. Both genders would undeniably find it appealing for different reasons.
- **Age:** Mothers may be more likely to watch Disney Channel's *Good Luck Charlie*. However, it is highly likely that the parents would find the sitcom parents more appealing than the show.
- **Ethnicity:** Some sitcoms such as *Girlfriends* or *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* resonate with black households due to the portrayal of the main characters being by black actors. *Like Mobeen* are all POC (people of colour) and the majority are Muslim. However, they have found success with people of all ethnicities and religions.
- **Cultural factors:** Factors such as social class, upbringing, education and so on can affect how two people respond to the same sitcom. *Modern Family* is a family-oriented sitcom about family living in California, while *The Middle* is a family-oriented sitcom about family living in the Midwest. Both shows premiered in the same year (2009), on the same night (Wednesday) and in succeeding time slots (*The Middle* 8:30pm, *Modern Family* 9pm). The shows are very similar. However, the two sitcoms would also appeal to different audiences for different reasons. *Man Like Mobeen* is set in a working-class area of the Midlands, representing a place which is unusual on British TV, which has been popular across class boundaries.

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Worksheet 4.5 – Plenary: Bringing the Audience to the Screen

Task: Audience appeal

Taking what you know now about the TV sitcom audience, can you use what you know about *Modern Family* and *Friends*? For the final row, the secondary need classification answer needs to detail why that would be considered as the secondary need fulfilled.

For your reference, a model answer has been provided for you pertaining to *Modern Family*.

	<i>Modern Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>
Mass/Niche Audience		
Passive/Active Audience		
Use/Gratification	It's fair to say that the primary use / gratification that audiences seek from sitcoms is Entertainment and Diversion.	

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	<i>Modern Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Man Like Mobeen</i>
Other (secondary) Audience Use/ Gratification			<p>Int Educa</p> <p><i>Man L</i> characte shown and sym audie identit due to class o</p> <p>Other audien with setting relatab</p>




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Answer sheet 4.5 – Plenary: Bringing the a Close

Task: Audience appeal

	<i>Modern Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>
Mass/Niche Audience 	Mass Audience: <i>Modern Family</i> depicts an extended family composed of three different types of families. Due to this, the variety of families in the US and worldwide are able to enjoy the content provided, and the thematic issues raised are also very relatable.	Mass Audience: The subject matter in the sitcom is very generalised, and the humour used is conservative, thus appealing to broad audiences.
Passive/Active Audience 	Passive: <i>Modern Family</i> has a typically passive audience that watches, reflects and identifies but does not challenge or protest. It reports many of the issues raised in the sitcom.	Passive Audience: The reasoning is very similar to <i>Modern Family</i> . <i>Friends</i> has now been re-aired and airs in repeats. Many people who watch it today have very likely already done so. It is also very likely people watching <i>Friends</i> would have it on while doing some other activity, so there is not the same level of engagement as there would have been when it was first viewed.
Use/Gratification		
Primary Audience Use/Gratification 	Informational and Educational: Although the sitcom is entertaining for audiences, some fans may choose to interact with cast members via their social media, or may personally identify with one character or another. The main objective of the show is to teach contemporary society that families can come in a variety of shapes and forms and still go through the same trials and tribulations that 'normal' families are considered to go through.	Personal Identification: With such a large ensemble cast, there is someone for everyone to relate to, and very likely, someone you know who reminds you of one of the characters. Most people can relate to having a group of friends and the sitcom is that these dynamics bring with them.

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Lesson 5

Media Language 1: Sitcom Conventions

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand what is meant by genre conventions and their importance.
- ✓ Understand the genre-specific conventions used by sitcoms.
- ✓ Understand how conventions can be repeated, reinforced the sitcom genre or reworked to reinvent it.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 5
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 5.1, 5.2,
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family S08E02
- Exercise books

? Starter

The Stock Character

Lesson 5 begins by introducing sitcom conventions by presenting students with **PowerPoint Lesson 5** about stock characters, specifically as it pertains to the character of the stock character. Discussion points are also provided in the PowerPoint presentation.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

What Makes a Genre?

The lesson continues by providing information about sitcom conventions and the **Worksheet 5.1**. The task on **Worksheet 5.1** then asks students to match up the definitions with their definitions. **Answer Sheet 5.1** provides the answers to this activity.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Conventions Key (15 mins)

Worksheet 5.1 then asks students to apply the terminology learnt in the previous lesson based on statements pertaining to these shows. The answers are provided in **Answer Sheet 5.1**.

Task 2: Eat. Sleep. Convention. Repeat. (15 mins)

PowerPoint Lesson 5 then briefly compares *Friends* with *How I Met Your Mother* with a slide with several similarities and a subsequent slide with several differences. Conventions may be the same but may also differ. **Worksheet 5.3** has also been provided for the first attempt to guess these answers themselves, or to document the answers provided.

💡 Plenary

Breaking the Cycle

Lesson 5 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 5** by asking students to select the sitcom *Modern Family*. Among the list are three conventions found in TV, but not specifically expected to identify these conventions. Answers are presented on the PowerPoint presentation.

📖 Homework

Explore how *Modern Family* uses or subverts sitcom conventions. [Extract: open *Modern Family* S08E02: 'A Stereotypical Day' (00:00–05:00, 5 minutes)] [12 marks]

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Worksheet 5.1 – Introduction: What Ma

Information: Sitcom conventions

Conventions are established tools used in a media text to help producers a it into a particular style (or genre). TV productions have many convention exception.

Take this brief of a show as an example:

The Good Place. A young woman (Janet) is rewarded in her afterlife by (a good place). However, she was an awful person when she was alive, and hell is better than this, instead. Therefore she has to hide the fact that she is not a people in the good place.

Based on this descriptor, a person cannot really decipher if this series is a drama or comedy. Because of the subject matter it is likely that a sitcom would be a list of possibilities. However, if the brief was prefaced by saying 'Single-camera Bell', one would not only understand the genre of the programme (single-camera Bell) but also be able to begin imagining its style too (**single-camera** sitcom). 'things' that come to mind are precisely what conventions are: the tools and become accustomed to when thinking of a genre.

Task: Sitcom

Take a look at the two lists below. See if you can match the various conventions definitions.

Convention
Narrative
Mise en scene
Setting
Diegetic sound
Non-diegetic sound
Visual codes

Definition
Sound that is heard, but its source is not visible, such as a plate smashing in the other room.
Helps define the sitcom's genre or style through different camera shots, angles, framing, lighting, like use of colour, facial expression, costumes, or props.
Is all the sound whose source is visible on screen, such as character dialogue.
Everything that is visible and includes the setting, the genre (or subgenre) of the programme, the production design, landscapes, and so on).
How a story is told in a sitcom through dialogue and actions.
Establishing the world that the story takes place in, giving a sitcom its identity and setting where the story is told.

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Answer sheet 5.1 – Introduction: What Ma

Task: Sitcom conventions

The convention has been matched to its correct definition.

Convention	Definition
Narrative	How a story is told in a sitcom through the use of dialogue and situation.
Mise en scène	Everything that is visible and included in a scene (subgenre) of the programme (props, clothing, etc. so on).
Setting	Establishing the world that the story takes place in, giving a sitcom its identity and the audience a sense of where it is taking place.
Diegetic sound	Is all the sound whose source is visible on the screen or in the dialogue.
Non-diegetic sound	Is sound that is heard, but its source is not visible on the screen or in the dialogue.
Visual codes	Help define the sitcom's genre or remind of the genre through camera shots, angles, framing, movement, and colour, facial expressions, body language, relationships, etc.

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Worksheet 5.2 – Task 1: Conventions

Task: Sitcom conventions

Have a look at the information provided about the several sitcoms below. A statement is made about a convention, and you must decide what sitcom convention it relates to. For your reference, a list of conventions is done for you:

1. *The Big Bang Theory* follows a group of highly intelligent scientists, but it is the complex equations around their apartment, and the occasional lunches at the office they work, that truly illustrate what the characters do for a living. The whiteboards and cafeteria are part of the sitcom's mise en scène.
2. Although *How I Met Your Mother* is not actually filmed in front of a live studio audience, the laugh track is used. The sitcom's use of the laugh track is an example of _____.
3. *Baby Daddy* tells the story of a single father (Ben) raising his infant daughter and family. Therefore, the baby (Emma) is regularly featured in scenes to reinforce the father. Emma serves as one of the sitcom's _____.
4. *Modern Family* makes use of the mockumentary subgenre as a means to present the story to the audience in a funny way. Although the mockumentary is considered as a visual code, in this instance it is used as a tool to help the _____.
5. *Friends* is set in Manhattan's West Village, so it is only natural for the group to hang out at a hipster coffee shop. Within the context of *Friends*, Central Perk is one of the sitcom's _____.
6. A running gag in *Will & Grace* is Karen Walker calling people 'Honey'. Megan Mullenbach's acting out a scene is a part of the sitcom's _____.
7. *2 Broke Girls* continuously reinforces the idea that Max and Caroline are poor because they have made from one episode to the next. They go so often their tally drops back where they started at the beginning of the series. This representation of the sitcom's _____.
8. *Scrubs* is one of the few series that falls into the medical sitcom subgenre. In most scenes the characters are wearing, well, scrubs. This is an example of the sitcom's _____.
9. *Man Like Mobeen* is a sitcom about a British Pakistani Muslim (Mobeen) living in London and bring up his younger sister. Mobeen doesn't have much money and has part-time jobs. Scenes take place in a supermarket, where Mobeen greets people, is almost always buying the things his sister requests. The supermarket is a _____ that is relatable for much of the audience.
10. Before she passed away, Howard's mother in *The Big Bang Theory* was often in another room. As much as she contributed to the sitcom's comedy, she was a part of Mrs Wolowitz's dialogue is part of the sitcom's _____.
11. *How I Met Your Mother* is a story about a father reminiscing with his children about his mother. The means of storytelling is a very original form of _____.
12. Although unusual for sitcoms, the final season of NBC's *Undatable* was entirely musical. Each episode featured a musician's band provide live music during the credits. Therefore, unlike most television programme credits, the credits for Season 3 of _____.



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Answer sheet 5.2 – Task 1: Conventions

Task: Sitcom conventions

Here are the answers to the questions:

1. *The Big Bang Theory* follows a group of highly intelligent scientists, but it is the complex equations around their apartment, and their occasional lunches at the cafe they work, that truly illustrate what these characters do for a living. The whiteboard and cafeteria are examples of the sitcom's mise en scène.
2. Although *How I Met Your Mother* is not actually filmed in front of a live studio audience, the sitcom's use of the laugh track is an example of non-diegetic sound.
3. *Baby Daddy* tells the story of a single father (Ben) raising his infant daughter and family. Therefore, the baby (Emma) is regularly featured in scenes to represent the father. Emma serves as one of the sitcom's visual codes.
4. *Modern Family* makes use of the mockumentary subgenre as a means to present the story to the audience in a funny way. Although the mockumentary is considered as a visual code, in this instance it is used as a tool to help the narrative.
5. *Friends* is set in Manhattan's West Village, so it is only natural for the group to meet at a hipster coffee shop. Within the context of *Friends*, Central Perk is one of the sitcom's visual codes.
6. A running gag in *Will & Grace* is Karen Walker calling people 'Honey'. Megan's acting out a scene is a part of the sitcom's diegetic sound.
7. *2 Broke Girls* continuously reinforces the idea that Max and Caroline are poor because they have made from one episode to the next. Every so often they tally drop back where they started at the beginning of the series. This representation of the sitcom's visual codes.
8. *Scrubs* is one of the few series that falls into the medical sitcom subgenre. It is easy to notice in most scenes the characters are wearing, well, scrubs. This is one of the sitcom's mise en scène.
9. *Man Like Mobeen* is a sitcom about a British Pakistani Muslim (Mobeen) living in London and bring up his younger sister. Mobeen doesn't have much money and has part-time jobs. Scenes take place in a supermarket, where Mobeen greets people, is almost always buying the things his sister requests. The supermarket is a setting which is familiar to the audience.
10. Before she passed away, Howard's mother in *The Big Bang Theory* was often in her own room. As much as she contributed to the sitcom's comedy, she was not always heard. Mrs Wolowitz's dialogue is part of the sitcom's non-diegetic sound.
11. *How I Met Your Mother* is a story about a father trying to reconnect with his children and his mother. The means of storytelling is the original form of narrative for the sitcom.
12. Although unusual for sitcoms, the final season of NBC's *Undatable* was entirely musical. Each episode featured a musical guest to provide live music during the credits. The credits, unlike most TV programme credits, the credits for Season 3 of *Undatable* are diegetic sound.

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Worksheet 5.3 – Task 2: Eat. Sleep. Conv

Task: Use this page to write down the answers to the PowerPoint task.

Similarities	
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod
	Mod

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Similarities	Differences
	<p><i>Friends:</i></p> <p><i>Modern Family</i></p>
	<p><i>Friends:</i></p> <p><i>Modern Family</i></p>
	<p><i>Friends:</i></p> <p><i>Modern Family</i></p>
	<p><i>Friends:</i></p> <p><i>Modern Family</i></p>
	<p><i>Friends:</i></p> <p><i>Modern Family</i></p>

Were the similarities  easier to find?

.....

.....

Why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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Homework

Use your answers to the plenary to explore how *Modern Family* uses or subverts stereotypes.
[Extract: opening sequence from *Modern Family* S08E02: 'A Stereotypical Day' (00:00–05:00)]
[12 marks]



Lesson 6

Media Language 2: Intertextuality

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand how meaning is created via organisation of symbols into signs
- ✓ Understand how semiotics and intertextuality can be applied to TV sitcoms.
- ✓ Be able to analyse and critique TV sitcoms as media texts by referencing semiotics and intertextuality.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 6
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 6.1 a, 6.1 b, 6.2, 6.3
- Computers/Internet
- Will & Grace theme tune
- Exercise books

? Starter

I See What You Mean

Lesson 6 begins on **PowerPoint Lesson 6** by presenting students with a set of visual symbols. Students are expected to guess what emotion each set of symbols represents. Students are expected to identify which character's emotion is representative of the emotions in question, in an attempt to refresh their knowledge of the sitcom and media language.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Less is More

The lesson continues on **Worksheet 6.1a** by providing students with a refreshed activity on this worksheet then asks students to consider the lyrics of the *Friends* theme tune. This song sums up the themes of the sitcom. **PowerPoint Lesson 6** can be used to present the lyrics and a video of the song. **Answer Sheet 6.1a** also provides the answers to the activity. Students are then asked to use the *Will & Grace* theme tune, which has no lyrics. All students are expected to list adjectives that they feel describe what they have seen in the sitcom, on **Worksheet 6.1b**. The theme tune has been embedded in the PowerPoint. Suggested answers for this part of the activity have also been provided in **PowerPoint Lesson 6**.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Pictures of a Thousand Words (15 mins)

Worksheet 6.2 provides students with information about connotation and denotation, and how they create meaning. The succeeding task then presents students with a famous picture of a thousand words, which students are required to label all the elements and address the meaning. Answers to this activity have been provided on **Answer Sheet 6.2**. However, teachers may use **PowerPoint Lesson 6** to carry out this activity if they wish, as the image and annotated answers are included there.

Task 2: Is Everything a Remix? (15 mins)

Worksheet 6.3 provides students with information about intertextuality, and the types of intertextuality and the role of intertextuality are also discussed. The task then asks students to review two sitcom images, one of *Modern Family*, and another of a *Will & Grace* image. Students are required to annotate the elements of intertextuality shared between the two images and how these images add meaning. Annotated answers to the task are provided on **Answer Sheet 6.3**. However, teachers may use **PowerPoint Lesson 6** to carry out the task, as the image and annotated answers have been included there.

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Plenary

The Meaning of It All

Lesson 6 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 6** by presenting students with seven. These emojis are constructed in such a way that they correspond to seven sitcom. What sitcom titles these emoji groups represent. Answers are provided at the end.



Homework

Essay: Watch the clip of *Only Fools and Horses* (zzed.uk/12258-only-fools-and-horses) Christmas special. How does the contextuality add humour to this scene?

Context: *Only Fools and Horses* (1981–1991, with Christmas specials to 2003) is a British sitcom. Set in Peckham, London, it features the attempts of Del Boy and his younger brother, Rodney, to get rich and improve their lives.

Points to consider:

- The contrast between the fictional characters (Batman and Robin are intergalactic superheroes; Del Boy and Rodney are market traders who live in a council flat)
- Although they are dressed as superheroes, they are dressed in cheap costumes, reflecting their reputation for selling dodgy goods
- They are clearly dressed as the Adam West / Burt Ward dynamic duo, a very popular and quite comedic (zzed.uk/12258-batman)
- They accidentally save a woman from being mugged, so they accidentally become heroes – the scene has dramatic, exaggerated, mock-heroic overtones through the mist
- Their heroism is absurd as well as accidental – it's unlikely in the extreme that they would be dressed as Batman and Robin
- Their physical appearance is emphasised by their costumes for comic effect – thinner, taller, Rodney looks even taller and thinner
- They are actually going to be mugged, although they don't know it (a good example of dramatic irony) – they arrive, Bovington immediately shows them into the room before telling them they are being mugged



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Worksheet 6.1a – Introduction: Les

Information: Semiotics

- We constantly (often **unknowingly**) **infer meaning on to signs or objects** from the collection of symbols they use.
- The study of **how signs create meaning** is called semiotics.
- **Symbols** are the most obvious way that human beings **create meaning** constructed in a way that stands out a word; shapes brought together to form a picture; a set of traffic lights; a set of road signs; a set of symbols for drivers; or even a situation framed in a certain way to convey a type of feeling.

In Lesson 4 we discussed the importance of non-diegetic sound being one of the things we can use. A catchy theme tune is a very important form of non-diegetic sound that can distinguish one from another, and can go so far as to give a sitcom its own personality.

When audiences start to get acquainted with a sitcom they become exposed to its theme tune, which normally plays at the beginning of each episode (after what is called the 'cold open' of a sitcom). However, with time, the sitcom's creator hopes that the tune becomes a familiar feature of the sitcom's theme and content, like the actors who star in it.

Because sitcoms are a type of television programme, people automatically assume that the meaning of a series creates is through visual means. However, meaning can be created by sound as much as from what we can see!

Task: Answer the following questions about semiotics.

- 1) When you hear the phrase, 'I'll be there for you', what is the first thing that comes into your mind?

.....

- 2) Imagine hearing the lyrics of the theme tune for the first time. What does the title of the sitcom tell you about the characters?

'I'll be there for you
 (When the rain starts to pour)
 I'll be there for you
 (Like I've been there before)
 I'll be there for you
 ('Cause you're there for me too)'

.....

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Worksheet 6.1b – Introduction: Les

Task: Will & Grace theme tune

Now listen to the theme tune for *Will & Grace*. Which words, adjectives and feelings come to mind when you hear the theme tune? Take a few minutes to list them. Discuss your findings as a class.



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Did you miss any? Have you come up with any more?



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Answer Sheet 6.1a – Introduction: Les

Task: Answers to the questions about semiotics

When you hear the phrase, 'I'll be there for you...' what is the first thing that comes to mind?
Friends

Imagine hearing the lyrics of the theme tune for the first time. What does the chorus tell you about the sitcom?



I'll be there for you
(When the rain starts to pour)
I'll be there for you
(Like I've been there before)
I'll be there for you
(Cause you're there for me too)

'I'll be there for you' – They will be / are (literally) there for one another.

'(When the rain starts to pour)' – They shelter each other from the rain. Rain is a metaphor for adversity.

'(Like I've been there before)' – They have an established relationship (with the characters introduced in the first episode).

'('cause you're there for me too)' – It is a reciprocal friendship. They all rely on each other, highlighting the ensemble nature of the series.



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Worksheet 6.2 – Task 1: Pictures of a Thing (Denotation and Connotation)

Information: Denotation and connotation

Every sign has two types of meaning attached to it, **denotation** and **connotation**.

Denotation is the literal meaning that the sign is referring to. It is usually the thing that the sign is depicting.

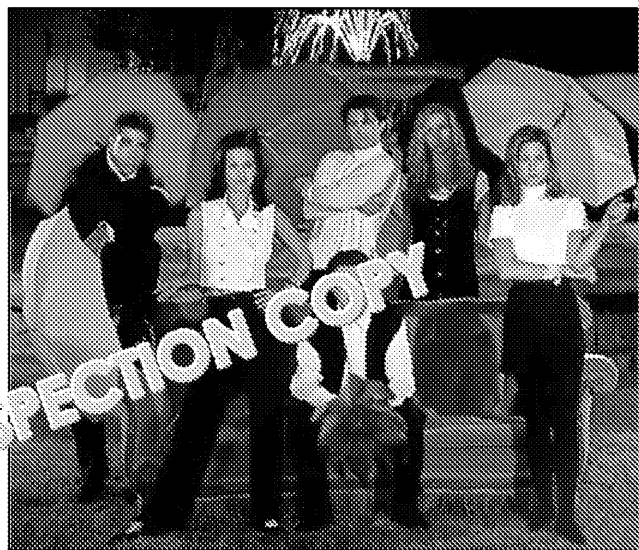
Connotation is the secondary meaning that the sign is referring to. It is usually meaning that is not understood if it is culturally agreed upon.

The table below gives an example of the **check mark** as a sign. Notice the difference between its denotative meaning and connotative meaning.

Example of Sign: ✓ (the check mark)	
Denotation	Connotation
A black streak, made of two inverted lines of different lengths meeting to create an obscure shape resembling the letter V. Denotation can rarely be argued against. It is the literal objective of <i>saying what you see</i> .	Good work (during school) Completed (when writing) This applied to me (when writing) Sports clothing (when writing)
Note how the connotation of the check mark depends on the context it is used in. Furthermore, in Korea and Japan they use the 'O mark' as a way to convey a check mark. This illustrates how connotations need to be culturally agreed upon meaning to be understood.	

Task: Denotation and Connotation

How many **check marks** can you spot in the promotional image for *Friends* provided? What connotative meaning about what viewers can expect in the series?



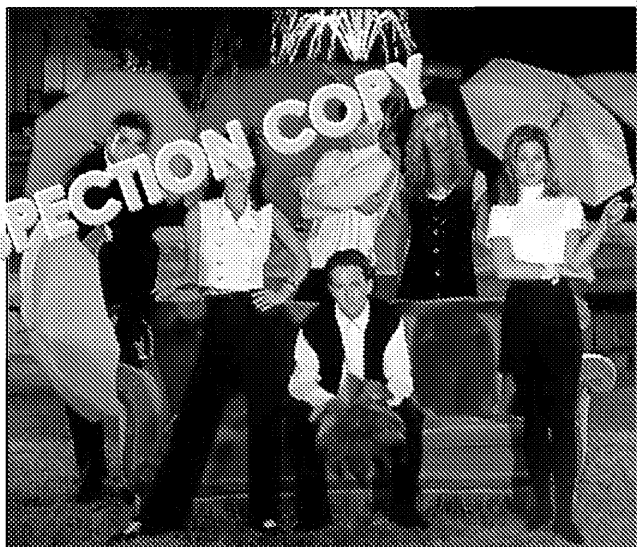
Credit: Title Sequence. Friends. NBC, USA, 1994–2004

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Answer Sheet 6.2 – Task 1: Pictures of a Thing (Denotation and Connotation)



Credit: Title Sequence. Friends. NBC, USA, 1994–2004

Task: Denotation and connotation

Umbrellas: Shelter from rain. Characters protect each other from hard times.

Sofa: Central Perk and/or Monica's apartment. Symbolises the many scenes where the characters interact.

Fountain: Represents youth. The show is about people navigating through young adulthood.

Clothing: Very typical of the 1990s. Looking back now you can easily tell when this show was made. The white ensemble is a reminder that these youngsters are neither good nor bad, just New York.

Lamp: May be a representation of wisdom; they are mature enough to live away from home. Alternatively, it could be that the lamp is a representation of their future.

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Worksheet 6.3 – Task 2: Is Everything (Intertextuality)

Information: Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the **relationship between texts**. Julia Kristeva introduced the idea that not only do objects and signs have the power to create meaning, but they also **create meaning by making reference to other texts**. In fact, by taking the concept into account, Kristeva claims that **language is the absorption and transformation of other texts**. Based on this, it can be argued that a genre and its conventions are simply reworked or recycled products.

A very clear example of intertextuality in TV is *The Simpsons*. The animated series makes media and cultural references in its episodes, sometimes even having characters being referenced as guest stars to lend their voice to the episode.

What are the benefits of employing intertextuality in sitcoms?

- Jokes based on familiarity are thought to enhance humour.
- Adds depth to the text, may enhance the narrative or as a device for plot.
- Adds realism when employing an established narrative.
- Intertextuality is an easy source of inspiration.
- Intertextuality helps reinforce the point you are making, especially if the original text has successfully done so.
- It can be a clever way for a creator to express their originality.
- Highly effective in conveying complex messages.

Risks of intertextuality:

- May **mislead** or **question** the creator's originality
- Could lead to copyright infringement, and plagiarism
- Reference may be overlooked if the audience does not understand or is not familiar with the reference.

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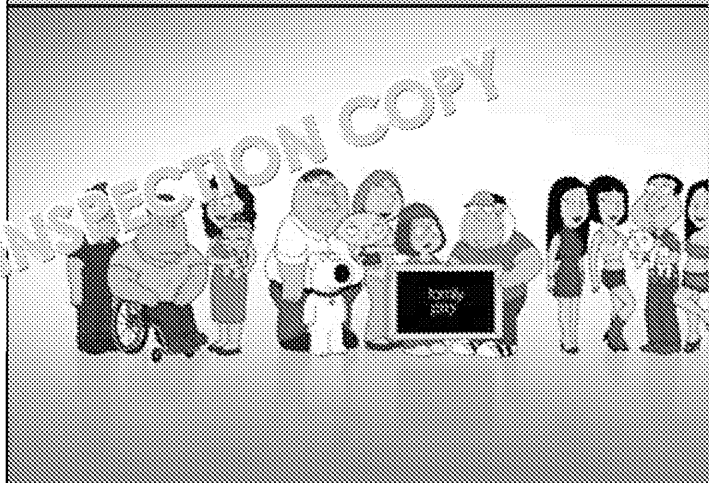


¹ Kristeva, J *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S Roudiez (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980)

Task: *Modern Family* vs *Family Guy*

Review the two series' intertitles (also known as a title card, typically used in the presented to you below. The one on the top is the intertitle for *Modern Family*'s bottom is the intertitle used during *Family Guy*'s 18th episode of its 11th season

Label the elements used by *Family Guy* which make reference to *Modern Family*

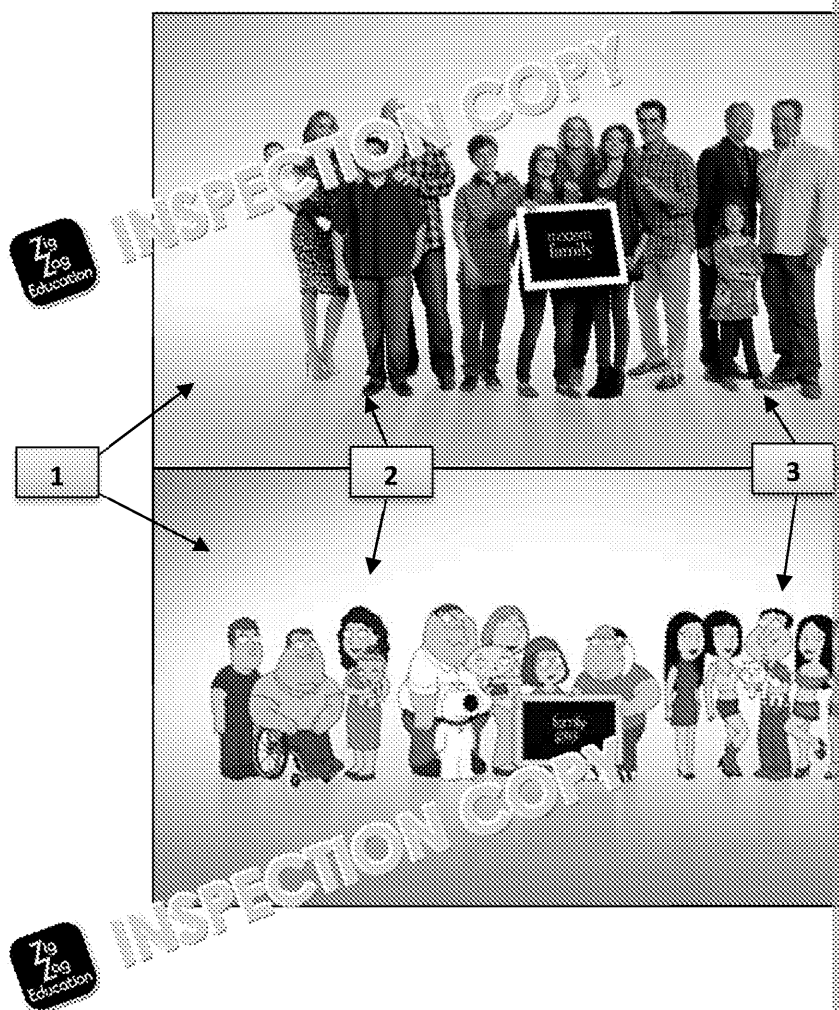


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This form of intertitle can be described as a _____



Answer Sheet 6.3 – Task 2: Is Everything (Intertextuality)



Task: *Modern Family* vs *Family Guy*

This form of intertextuality can be described as a **parody**.

Intertextual references found:

- 1) Same greyscale background, same font style, same chalk board, same group designs that are identifiable as being *Modern Family*'s are used to help the audience see the similarity between both shows. The grouping of families is a similar identifier.
- 2) Comparison of Swanson with Jay Pritchett: In *Modern Family*, Jay is the husband of the younger Latina wife. A running joke in *Modern Family* is whether Gloria may have a younger daughter. In *Family Guy*, Swanson has chosen to have a younger daughter, thus parodying Jay's character.
- 3) Quagmire's 'family' is parodying the Pritchett's: In *Modern Family*, Phil and Claire have an adopted Vietnamese daughter named Lilly. In *Family Guy*, Quagmire has an adopted cat. However, instead of being married to another man, he is seen in a relationship with four Vietnamese women; this is an on-the-nose parody aimed at whether or not marriage between people of the same gender is still a taboo.

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Lesson 7

Media Language 3: Narrat

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the conventions of a particular genre and how those conventions shape a narrative
- ✓ Understand how the narrative of sitcom is dependent on time and setting.
- ✓ Understand and apply the narrative theories of Todorov and Propp to sitcoms.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 7
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 7.1, 7.2a, 7.2, 7.3
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family S08E02
- Exercise books

? Starter

Narrative Conventions

Lesson 7 begins on **Worksheet 7.1**. Students identify the conventions of the sitcoms (and so on). The task which follows asks students to apply those concepts (S01E01) and to *Modern Family* (S08E02). **Answer Sheet 7.1** contains detailed narrative conventions apply to the two sitcoms. This activity is also provided on

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Narrative and Context

Lesson 7 continues on **PowerPoint Lesson 7**. Students are presented with a discussion (answers) relating to narrative similarities between *Modern Family* and *Friends*. and why this is so.



Extension: If there is time, students can explore the ways in which other sitcoms use these conventions.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Your Story's Structure (20 mins)

Worksheet 7.2a provides students with information about Todorov's stages of a story. They are expected to be familiar with these stages and how they operate within a sitcom. **Worksheet 7.2a** lists key moments from *Modern Family* S08E02, which are in the order they are expected to be used. **Worksheet 7.2b** to complete this task. They may either cut out the key moments and stick them on **Worksheet 7.2b** in the right order, or simply write them down in the correct order. **Worksheet 7.2** provides the correct order. This correct order, as well as activity instructions, are on **PowerPoint Lesson 7**.



Extension: Time permitting, can students identify which of the key moments from *Modern Family* S08E02 are observed by Todorov? These stages are highlighted in **Worksheet 7.2** and **PowerPoint Lesson 7**.

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Task 2: Fulfilling Your Purpose (10 mins)

Worksheet 7.3 continues building on narrative theory by providing students with Propp's theory of character functions. Students are expected to apply that information. Here students are expected to consider each of the characters of *Modern Family* and decide which role, or function, each character fulfil. **Answer Sheet 7.3** provides

Note to teachers: this episode consists of three separate story strands, and so characters for each function. If students identify one way in which characters are fulfilling a role, then that is acceptable as long as they can justify it! Also, as it is positive, it will be difficult to identify a villain.



Plan

Setting the Story

Lesson 7 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 7** by presenting students with a class of participants to consider what settings and locations are used in *Modern Family* for humour. Indicative answers are also provided.



Homework

Exam-style question: How much does the use of setting aid the narrative to inform the situation in the segment?

Modern Family S08E02: What information do you get about the different characters from any clues to the kind of story and characters in the series?

	<i>Modern Family</i>
• Jay and Gloria's house	
• Phil and Claire's house	
• Cameron and Mitchell's house (especially Lily's room)	
• Claire's workplace	
• The house Phil is trying to sell	

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Worksheet 7.1 – Starter: Narrative C

Information: Codes and conventions

All media texts follow certain rules. These rules usually develop, rather than are set in stone. For example, in a horror film, any character who goes off by themselves is usually killed; in a comedy, events are usually preceded by on-screen music; the villain often “returns” to be defeated.

Sitcoms also have a set of conventions (rules) which give information in a variety of ways. Remember that not all sitcoms will follow all the rules.

The following are examples of the ways that sitcom creators tell their story

Convention	
Audio codes	dialogue, sound effects
Visual codes	location, props
Characters	main, supporting
Structure/Plot	acts, scenes

Task: The codes and conventions of a sitcom

Think of sitcoms that you have seen. What do they have in common?

Place your answers in the box below.

Audio Codes	Visual Codes	Characters
The theme music	Characters' costumes give clues as to their personality / job / social situation	There are usually a small number of main characters (1-4)

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How far do *Friends* and *Modern Family*:

- a) Follow these conventions?
- b) Break from these conventions?

Modern Family	
Which conventions are followed?	
Which conventions are not followed?	

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Answer Sheet 7.1 – Starter: Conventions

Task: The codes and conventions of a sitcom (students may identify more than one for each convention. Examples can be from a variety of sitcom – for example, in *Only Fools and Horses* characters are definitely trapped in an unpleasant situation; in *Only Fools and Horses* trying to improve their financial and social situation; in *Cheers* the setting is a bar).

Audio Codes	Visual Codes	Characters
Theme tunes	Characters' costume give clues to their personality / job / social situation	There are usually a small number of main characters (1-4)
Background music which emphasises emotion	Settings are often, if not always, interior	There are often minor characters who appear in several episodes
Laugh track	There are only a few different settings	The characters are trapped in a situation they wish to leave
Studio audience	Mise-en-scene (set-dressing) also gives clues as to the character / story	The characters are often flawed in some way (stupid, selfish, spoiled)
Characters have catchphrases		Characters often conform to stereotypes
		is

How far do *Friends* and *Modern Family* conform to these conventions?

- a) Follow these conventions
b) Break these conventions?
(Students need to provide more examples)

Modern Family	
Which conventions are followed?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The settings are mainly interior and domestic (some exteriors, but these are mainly domestic) Characters conform to stereotypes (older husband, nerd, dramatic homosexual) The story focuses on personal relationships Theme tune and opening credits Minor recurring characters The characters' situations and personalities don't change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly interior settings Characters conform to stereotypes (nerd, etc.) Characters have catchphrases ("do it") The story focuses on personal relationships Laugh track / studio audience A very famous theme tune Minor recurring characters (Ross and Rachel have several seasons)
Which conventions are not followed?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large number of characters (divided into three main groups) Exploration of a few social themes (gay parenting, racism in America) although in a very light way No laugh track or studio audience The characters are not trapped in their situations, although they are all attempting to make those situations better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large number of main characters Characters are described as being ridiculous Characters are quite happy in their situation

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Worksheet 7.2a – Task 1: Your Story

Information: Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory

Tzvetan Todorov identified a chronology to the fairy tales he studied, with a beginning, a middle and an end. Todorov also claimed that for a character to fulfil the purpose of a story, they must be changed by the course of events that occur and become aware of this change.

According to Todorov, there are five stages of narrative progression are:

IMPORTANT:

- 1) **Equilibrium** is the sense of stability that is established for the main character. The **disruption** is where (following all the disruptions that occur in the story) the character achieves a new sense of normality leaving his/her circumstances changed, usually "lived happily ever after"), or returns to the initial situation.
- 2) **Steps 4 and 5 are often modified (or changed completely) in sitcoms.** In sitcoms, storylines that become part of the overall story of the series, such as two characters getting married or having a baby. This is known as a **"story arc"**. However, the structure of a sitcom is an episodic structure. This means that each episode resolves itself by the end of the episode, the series 'resets' itself for the following episode – in other words, the character returns to the initial situation. If you look at the production codes of sitcom episodes, you will see the **episode number** (the sequence in which the episode is broadcast) and the **production code** (the order in which the episode is produced) do not match, especially in early sitcoms. This is because it is easy for many sitcom episodes to be broadcast out of the order in which they were filmed or produced. This would not be possible with serialised programmes like *Broadchurch*.

Todorov's theory of narrative states that a story must follow a particular path, starting with a beginning, only moving forward until reaching the end in a **linear** way. However, narrative can be complex and can also be **non-linear**. Most sitcoms offer a linear narrative by following a single storyline (episode) usually takes place after the next and the narrative is linear. However, some sitcoms are known for their non-linear narrative. A prime example of this is the sitcom *Friends* is narrated at one point in Ted's life (late 20s/early 30s), while also making use of further flashbacks.

The narrative shared between *Friends* and *Modern Family* is very similar.

- Both sitcoms' narratives are predominantly linear. However, they make use of non-linear storytelling throughout the series.
- It is better to illustrate something visually, rather than have a character say it.
- S08E02 of *Modern Family* contains some flashbacks.
- S01E01 of *Friends* has no flashbacks, and its narrative is linear. Nevertheless, it does use flashbacks later in the series.

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Task: Below are the key scenes featured in S08E02 of *Modern Family*.

Cut out the scenes and rearrange them in the correct order as presented in the episode. When checking your answers, you may stick the labels in the correct order on the blank



Modern Family, 'A Stereotypical Day', Series 8

Mitchell and Cameron are very proud that Lily has a new friend, Tom, who is gay. They think that she's very open-minded – until they hear her

Gloria tells her that the dog has peed in the corner. Jay invites his black friend to meet his new neighbours that he isn't racist.

Cameron and Mitchell visit Jay and Gloria to talk about Lily's 'bigotry'. Jay talks about Lily being transgender, and contrasts it with how he felt when Mitchell goes to meet his new neighbours. This goes well until Jay makes an awkward comment about a neighbour's name.

Alex has mono and has come home from college; Haley has lost her job; Lily has bad schoolwork; Phil has been trapped in a house that he was trying to sell. (told in flashback)

Alex realises that everyone in her family – except Haley – wants her to go to college. She decides to go back to college.

Lily admits to Cameron and Mitchell that she painted Tom a weirdo because of the mural on her bedroom wall – and that she doesn't like the mural either. Cameron and Mitchell are angry because the mural is a painting of them, but they paint over it. Lily says

Jay's secret camera shows Joe peeing in the corner, Manny stealing candy from the store, Gloria breaking the TV remote

Claire realises that as the boss she has to be the 'bummer' – the person who is in the jokes – but is sad that she has to play that role at home as well. Tom decides to play that role.

Alex tries to leave but is too sick – she realises (and tells everyone) that she is glad she's stayed.

Manny is trying to be communist because he wants to kiss a girl who has a crush on him. He is horrified because he is having security cameras fitted and he thinks that (the girl is black) will think that he is racist; Gloria can't work the new TV remote

Phil thinks he has PTSD but can rely on Alex. Alex realises that while Alex is doing her homework. Haley wants Alex to go back to college because Alex is clever. Haley has lost her job.

Cameron and Mitchell try to confront Lily about her language towards Tom. Lily says she is bigoted

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Modern Family, 'A Stereotypical Day', Series



Answer Sheet 7.2 – Task 1: Your Story's

Task: See the correct arrangement of the key scenes found in *Modern Family*. (PowerPoint.) Please note (and discuss with students): S08E02 of *Modern Family* story strands which connect only a little.

Modern Family 'S08E02: Stereotypical Day', Series 8
Alex has mono and Luke is in a home from college; Haley has lost her job; school; Phil has been trapped in a house that he was trying to sell (flashback)
Manny is trying to be communist because he wants to kiss a girl who has horrified because he is having security cameras fitted and he thinks that (black) will think that he is racist; Gloria can't work the new TV remote
Mitchell and Cameron are very proud that Lily has a new friend, Tom, who is gay. They think that she's very open-minded – until they hear her
Claire realises that as the boss she has to be the 'bummer' – the person who is in the jokes – but is sad that she has to play that role at home as well. Tom has to play that role.
Cameron and Mitchell try to confront Lily about her language towards Tom, but she is homophobic
Gloria thinks the dog has peed in the corner. Jay invites his black friend to his new neighbours that he isn't racist.
Phil thinks Luke has ASD but can rely on Alex. Luke realises that while Alex is at home, Haley wants Alex to go back to college because Alex is clever. Haley has lost her job.
Cameron and Mitchell visit Jay and Gloria to talk about Lily's 'bigotry'. Jay talks about Lily being transgender, and contrasts it with how he felt when Mitchell goes to meet his new neighbours. This goes well until Jay makes an assumption about a neighbour's name.
Alex realises that everyone in her family – except Haley – wants her to go to college. She decides to go back to college
Lily admits to Cameron and Mitchell that she called Tom a weirdo because of her bedroom wall – and that she doesn't like the mural either. Cameron says because the mural is a painting of them, but they paint over it. Lily says
Alex tries to leave but is too sick. She realises (and tells everyone) that Haley is glad she's stayed.
Jay's security camera shows Joe peeing in the corner, Manny stealing a car, and Gloria breaking the TV remote

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Worksheet 7.3 – Task 2: Fulfilling Your

Information: Vladimir Propp's narration theory on the characters' purpose

Vladimir Propp's work is drawn from similar inspirations as those of Todorov. His studies focused on Russian folk tales with a particular focus on their characters. Propp identified eight types of character, not unlike fairy tale characters, which serve a purpose to the story's narrative.

IMPORTANT: According to Propp, each character can take two or more of the

 Villain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evil character who works against the hero
Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated by the lack/loss of something or a donor/dispatcher.
Donor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an object needed for hero's journey or them for the journey
Helper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aids the hero on their journey (sidekick)
Princess/Reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unattainable throughout the journey until the acquisition of this prize
Princess' Father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person who rewards the hero with the prize at the end of their journey
Dispatcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sends the hero on their journey and initiates the quest. Often this character is slain at the beginning.
 Antagonist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises complications, tries to take credit for the reward (this character can be the villain, or helper)

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Task: *Modern Family*'s character purpose

Below is Vladimir Propp's list of character functions. Based on *Modern Family* SO think performs which character function? **Remember:** some characters may serve some characters may share the same purpose between them. Some functions may attention to the functions as they may not all be fulfilled by a main character. **Be many characters, and because the episode consists of three different story strands character for some functions.**

Function	Character	What
Hero	Claire	Quest – to convince his
	Cameron and Mitchell	Quest – to convince her family take the
Villain		Quest – to be m
Dispatcher		
Donor		
Helper		
Princess/Reward		
Princess's Father		
False Hero		

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Answer Sheet 7.3 – Task 2: Fulfilling Your

Task: *Modern Family's* character purpose

Task: Here is the list of character functions based on S08E02 of *Modern family*. any more?

Notice some characters fulfil more than one function, and not all functions are fulfilled. In Propp analysed, most heroes achieve success, but in a sitcom, the hero often fails a quest because the hero needs to start again from the same point in the next episode.

Function	Character	Description
Hero	Jay	Quest – to connect with his family
	Claire	Quest – to connect with her family by making her own choices
	Cameron and Mitchell	Quest – to connect with their family
Villain	There is no real villain in this episode	
Dispatcher	Lily	She calls her family to blame them for the situation
Donor	N/A	
Helper	Miles	He comes over to help Jay
Princess/Reward	Lily	Lily proves not to be a princess (whenever she wants her dad's (whenever she wants her dad's)
Princess's Father	N/A, no rewards are given by other characters	
Failing Hero	Alex	Acts as if she is a hero, but conceals the fact
	Phil	Tries to overcome his fears
	Manny	Is trying to get over his fears

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Lesson 8

Representation 1: The World and Reality

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the importance of representation of the world and reality in sitcoms.
- ✓ Understand how single-camera sitcoms differ to multi-camera sitcoms in how they reference reality.
- ✓ Understand the importance of the world's portrayal in certain sitcoms as in some occasions the setting can play an integral role in the story.

Resources you will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 8
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family* S08E01
- Exercise books

? Starter

Setting up the World

Lesson 8 begins on **Worksheet 8.1** whereby students are asked to list typical settings. **Answer Sheet 8.1** is provided with suggested answers.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Single-cam vs Multi-cam Sitcoms

Lesson 8 continues on **Worksheet 8.2** whereby students tackle the differences between the two formats. They are then expected to use this knowledge to classify well-known sitcoms. In **Worksheet 8.3**, they are then asked which format *Modern Family* falls into. **Answer Sheet 8.3** is provided with suggested answers. This task is also presented on **PowerPoint Lesson 8**.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Representing the World (15 mins)

On **Worksheet 8.3** students are asked to consider the use of the city in sitcoms. They are then asked to represent the city in a drawing. Students use this information by briefly answering questions. In **Worksheet 8.4**, they are then asked to compare the representation of the city in *Friends* and *Modern Family* (suburban Los Angeles – the suburban part is important!), and **Answer Sheet 8.4** is provided with suggested answers.



Extension: Time permitting, students can compile both parts of this question. They are then asked to compare how the city is represented differently in the two sitcoms.

Task 2: Reflecting the Times (10 mins)

Worksheet 8.4 asks students to consider the historical context, and how it is portrayed in sitcoms. In **Worksheet 8.5**, they are then asked to compare the representation of the city in *Friends* and *Modern Family*. **Worksheet 8.5** is constructed in a table to facilitate comparative analysis. **Answer Sheet 8.5** is provided with suggested answers.

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Plenary

The First Impression

Lesson 8 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 8**. Students would first need to watch *Modern Family* respectively (timings provided in the PowerPoint and information) then engage in a class discussion centring on the questions presented on the slides. Answers are also included in the presentation.



Homework

Explain how city life is represented in S08E02 of *Modern Family*. Contrast this with a multi-camera sitcom as able to do this.



Information

Plenary activity. Plenary activities are typically shorter in length than main lessons. As students are required to see two five-minute extracts, additional time has been allocated.

The timings for extracts needed for this activity are as follows:

- *Friends* S01E01: Pilot Extract: 00:00 - 00:05
- *Modern Family* S08E02: A Stereotypical Day Extract: 00:00 - 00:05

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Worksheet 8.1 – Starter: Setting up

Through the years, sitcoms have managed to establish typical settings in order to story takes place.

Some popular setting categories include: home/family setting, work setting, youth setting.

Can you list different settings that feature in sitcoms you watch that fit into the categories below?

Home/Family	Work/Professional	Youth

Any place can be a setting, as long as it makes sense to the story and it serves a purpose.

Can you imagine if in *Friends* the characters all sat in Central Perk and didn't speak? Central Perk serves as a congregational area for the friends to meet and discuss whatever situation arises during that episode.

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Answer Sheet 8.1 – Starter: Setting up

Here are some of the typical settings that feature in each category...

Have you found any more?

Home/Family	Work/Professional	Youth
House	Office	High school
Living room	City office	School grounds
Kitchen	Office building lobby	Gym
Front garden	Laboratory	Locker
Back garden	Classroom	Hallway
Garage	Bar/Diner	Principal's office
Car interior		Nursery
		Cafeteria

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Worksheet 8.2 – Introduction: Single-Camera vs Multi-Camera Sitcoms

Information: Differentiating between single-cam and multi-cam sitcoms

The main distinction between a single-cam and multi-cam sitcom is implied by the name. A single-camera comedy uses only one camera for filming. Scenes are shot across multiple angles with one camera. These series typically shoot on location to create a natural feel, but as a result they are often costing more, and take longer to produce.

As the name suggests, multiple-camera sitcoms film with the use of multiple cameras and film several scenes simultaneously. The same scene is shot a few times but filmed at the same time. The way this is possible is because these series are filmed in the presence of a live studio audience. These shows have more of a theatrical feel and significantly less time to film and often cost less to produce, at least initially, but tends to demand a higher salary, increasing production costs.

Task: Differentiating between single-cam and multi-cam sitcoms

Based on your knowledge of single-cam vs multi-cam sitcoms, classify the following sitcom titles according to whether they are produced in single-camera or multi-camera format. Write 'Single' or 'Multi' in the appropriate column.

Everybody Loves Raymond, How I Met Your Mother, 30 Rock, The Mindy Project, The Mobb, Moebean, The Inbetweeners, My Family, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

Single-camera sitcoms	Multi-camera sitcoms

Think about the set episode of *Modern Family* (Season 2: 'A Stereotypical Day'). How would you classify the sitcom as a single-camera or multi-camera production?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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Answer Sheet 8.2 – Introduction: Single-camera and Multi-camera Sitcoms

Task: Differentiating between single-camera and multi-camera sitcoms

Single-camera sitcoms	Multi-camera sitcoms
<i>30 Rock</i>	<i>Everybody Loves Raymond</i>
<i>The Middle</i>	<i>How I Met Your Mother</i>
<i>Modern Family</i>	<i>The Big Bang Theory</i>
<i>The IT Crowd</i>	<i>The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air</i>
<i>Man Like Mobeen</i>	

Modern Family is a single-camera sitcom. Although the episode, and many other episodes, are set in different locations, the series also makes use of exterior settings (for example, when Phil and Claire go to the park with their new neighbour). The camera clearly follows characters during their day-to-day life on a studio set stage.

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Worksheet 8.3 – Task 1: Representin

Information: Representing the city in sitcoms

Where a sitcom is set is a very important function for a TV programme. The setting is often selected for a specific reason. In Lesson 6 we discussed the use of setting. However, for the setting to form part of the storytelling, it must be represented.

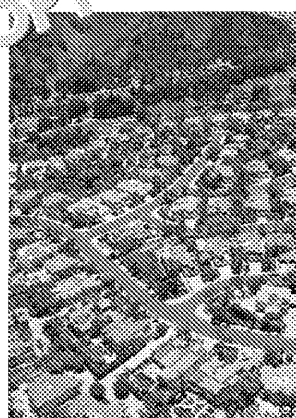
The representation of the setting in single-camera comedies and multi-camera comedies is different, due to the way that each sitcom is filmed.

Multi-camera comedies like *Friends* are filmed on a stage, whereas single-camera comedies like *Modern Family* are often filmed on location. Despite being set in New York City, *Friends* is set on the Warner Brothers' lot in Hollywood.

Task: Representing the city in sitcoms

For this task you are to split yourselves into four groups. Two groups should address *Friends*, and two groups should address *Modern Family*, with the groups which address the same sitcom making reference to the set episode of both sitcoms: *Friends* and *Modern Family*.

- How does *Friends* depict NYC, and how would this be appealing for audiences who might not be?
- How does *Modern Family* depict LA, and how would this be appealing for audiences who might not be?



Extension: Students can compile both parts of the question to compare how each sitcom represents the city.

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Answer Sheet 8.3 – Task 1: Representing

Task: Representing the city in sitcoms

Students may wish to use the points and ideas brought up as an essay plan to create work, thus turning the task into an **exam-style question**.

Through the representation of the world in the media, audiences get to understand a question is taking place in. This can either be a familiar experience for those acquainted with the city, or be informative (or in some cases aspirational) for those who aren't.

The city is represented in a set stage in *Friends*. In multi-cam sitcoms, utilising the location of the world as part of the narrative, which is also why the situational comedies, as the narrative tends to focus on the situation at hand. Multi-cam sitcom, can utilise more locations, both interior and exterior. It can also use multiple locations to follow individual characters – a multi-cam sitcom requires the actors to perform in multiple locations whereas single-cam filming allows for multiple takes and edits.

Friends' pilot episode makes an immediate reference to the characters living in New York City. The first thing we see when the episode starts is a shot of Central Perk from the outside. This shot only lasts four seconds, but it gives us all the context we require to start the episode. The name of the coffee shop is a play on words on Central Park (one of the most famous parks in the world and a tourist attraction found in New York City). The logo of the shop is illustrated as a sticker on the shop. The scene's audio cues add to the contextualisation, consisting of non-diegetic sound of car horns beeping (a very familiar New York City sound). While New York City would have got this contextualisation, but more references are made throughout the episode, giving some kind of context to the setting as soon as possible. New York City is arguably one of the most important settings of *Friends* (another being Monica's apartment). The setting establishes where this series is taking place, and for those who have never been to New York City, it provides a common middle-class pastime and behaviours associated with early 90s New York City.

Modern Family is set in suburban Los Angeles, although the spacious house and the lifestyle of the characters suggest any number of cities. Each of the three family groups lives in a pleasant home with Jay and Gloria's house especially boasting a swimming pool and a large garden that is always sunny. The lifestyles of the three families present an image of comfortable and affluent. The city is represented as a city with huge problems, or as the centre of the entertainment industry for rich kids. In *Modern Family*, the city of Los Angeles is rarely seen at all; the focus is on the characters. A viewer across the USA would feel familiar with this setting; some would recognise it as something they would find aspirational.

Los Angeles is on the West Coast of the USA and has a reputation for social progressiveness. The representations of the different groups in *Modern Family*, particularly Cameron's story, reflect this. In S08E02, Jay's story concerns the arrival of a new family into his neighbourhood, which will be perceived as racist. This is a positive approach to the racial divisions that exist in the affluent suburbs, which are still mainly white. Cameron and Mitchell's story revolves around a character who is bigoted towards a trans classmate. Both stories reflect an attitude of social liberalism that is often associated with the West Coast.

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Worksheet 8.4 – Task 2: Reflecting

On paper, *Friends* and *Modern Family* have several similarities. They are, however, the time in which they were made adds to those differences.

Can you think of a difference between both sitcoms' set episodes, and how they contexts below, based on when they were made?

	<i>Friends</i> (F1 Pilot September 1994)	<i>Modern Family</i>
Technology		
Clothing		
Humour		
Culture		

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Answer Sheet 8.4 – Task 2: Reflecting

	Friends S01E01: Pilot (September 1994)	Modern Family (S)
Technology	No/Limited use of technology.	All the characters are connected to technology. Rachel's homework is based on all her homework except for this one. Exception to this is to use
Clothing	Clothing used in the <i>Friends</i> pilot episode is very typical of the 90s. The oversized shirts Ross and Chandler wear, Monica's suspended trousers...	The clothing worn varied – Jay's clothing that he is retired golf, Haley's clothing Alex wears clothing image. Gloria's fashionable
Humour	The humour in <i>Friends</i> is seen to have a very conservative form which was the norm in the 90s. Stereotypical jokes are limited to the types of characters who are portrayed (Rachel is mocked for being spoilt, Ross is mocked for being a 'p'	The humour in <i>M</i> personal relationships situations that occur are based on stereotypes deliberately subverted. The tone over
Culture	<i>Friends</i> as a representation of the 1990s only features white people of a certain age. There is very little inclusion of other types of people.	<i>Modern Family</i> families – a gay couple more conventional is more diverse in sitcoms. The male however, with Gloria characters. The stereotypical represented women were stay-at-home been addressed success

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Lesson 9

Representation 2: Social Groups and Stereotype

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Understand the difference between social groups and stereotypes.
- ✓ Understand how stereotypes can be used as a comedic tool.
- ✓ Understand how stereotypes and social groups relate with audiences depending on their own personal identity and beliefs.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 9
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 9.1, 9.2,
- Computers/Internet
- Friends* S01E01; *Modern Family*
- Exercise books

? Starter

Sitcom Stereotypes

Lesson 9 begins on **PowerPoint Lesson 9** whereby students learn how stereotypes provide specific examples relating to Alex in *Modern Family*.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Stereotypes vs Social Groups

Lesson 9 continues on **Worksheet 9.1**. Students are provided with information and how they are distinct from social groups. This information is related to Race and they are then expected to answer two questions that elaborate further on this. It should be noted that the scene in question at this stage in the course, but the scene is deemed to be viewed on *Friends* S01E01 00:00–05:00. **Worksheet 9.1** is provided with support.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Function of Stereotypes (25 mins)

On **Worksheet 9.2** an exam-style question is provided. Students are given some information about stereotypes, then are asked to answer the question. The worksheet provides a plan in class, so as not to rush the essay in the time allocated. The idea is to have a class-written plan at home to develop their own essays. Alternatively teachers can assign (Task 2) in favour of writing the full essay in class. **Answer Sheet 9.2** is provided.

Task 2: The Representation of Social Groups (15 mins)

Worksheet 9.3 asks students to outline the social groups represented in *Friends* and *Modern Family* to be split into two groups, one to explore *Friends*, and the other to explore *Modern Family*. Students explore the social groups in their respective sitcoms, by looking at the character traits. **Answer Sheet 9.3** is provided with model answers that may be utilised as an example. This task is also supplied on **PowerPoint Lesson 9**.

💡 Plenary

Who's Your Bestie?

Lesson 9 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 9**. Students are asked to discuss as to why a character in *Friends* is a 'bestie'. Students should be challenged to think why the character is reliable, entertaining; education; humour, and so on.

📖 Homework

In today's plenary you have identified your favourite *Friends* character. Now choose a character from either *Friends* or *Modern Family*. Explore why this is so in paragraph form using the uses and gratification theory.

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Worksheet 9.1 – Introduction: Stereotypes

Information: Differentiation between social grouping and stereotyping

- A **social group** is a group with identifiable qualities that an individual may share
- A **stereotype** is a widely accepted image of a social group, based on the perception that the group share a set of characteristics
- Stereotypes are usually derived from the collective perception of social groups. The characteristics associated with a particular stereotype may be inaccurate
- Normally a social group does not regard itself as its own stereotype. However, a group may be **neutral** and have no connotations. It is the **stereotyping of that group** that may be associated with it (see connotative/denotative as discussed in Lesson 9.2)

Our first encounter with Rachel Green in *Friends*:

The social groups Rachel is associated with: female, adult, white, upper class. Some of the stereotypes associated with Rachel's introduction are:

- **emotional** (female stereotypes)
- **damsel in distress** (female stereotypes)
- **spoilt** (stereotype of the upper class)
- **materialistic** (also a stereotype of the upper class)

Task: With reference to the pilot episode of *Friends*, answer the following questions.

How do Rachel's actions convey her as the stereotypes mentioned above? Mention three examples. [9]

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How are the stereotypes mentioned above as portrayed by Rachel reflected in the pilot episode? Mention three examples. [9]

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Answer Sheet 9.1 – Introduction: Stereotypes and Social Groups

Task: Differentiation between social grouping and stereotyping

Rachel's actions:

- We first see her crying and wearing a wedding dress – emotional, damsel in distress
- Her shopping addiction; when she cheers herself up with a string of unsuccessful purchases (spoilt/materialistic).
- Her reluctance in cutting up her father's credit cards (upper class stereotype)
- Her inability to get a job (damsel in distress).

Rachel's dialogue

- Rachel: Well, it was about half an hour before the wedding and I was in the room with **the presents** and someone had bought us this beautiful **Limoges gravy boat** turned on by this gravy boat than by Barry. And that's when it hit me how much I love my head!

She finds comfort in a room filled with presents, and knows to refer to some of them by its designer name (materialistic).

- Rachel: So, like **you guys all have jobs?**
Monica: Yeah we all have jobs, that's how we buy stuff.

Rachel is so spoilt that she does not understand the concept of working for a living.

- Rachel: Guess what?
Ross: You got a job?
Rachel: Are you kidding? **I'm trained for not finding a job!** I was laughed at in 12 interviews.
Chandler: And yet you're surprising your dad?
Rachel: Well, **you would be too if you got new boots with 50% off!**

Rachel expects to be married and live off her husband so she never furthered her education. She was put down in the interviews but the act of buying herself new boots (materialistic).

- Rachel: I don't want to be a shoe anymore? Maybe I'm a purse, or a hat... I mean, I'm saying I am a hat! It's a metaphor, **daddy!**

Her father is so used to providing for his daughter that he does not understand her metaphor. She is so spoilt that she doesn't understand the concept of making involves clothing accessories (materialistic). She calls her father daddy.

- Rachel [on the phone with her dad]: Well, maybe it's my decision. Well, maybe. **Wait. I said maybe.**

Reluctance in giving up her father's money (dependent on her father; upper class).

- Monica [to Rachel]: **Welcome to the real world!** Welcome to the real world. You're gonna love it.

Rachel is oblivious to what it's like to be an adult as she's never had to work for money (upper class).

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Worksheet 9.2 – Task 1: The Function

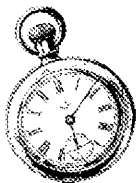
Information

Exaggerated stereotypes of an established group of people are often used to create humour. Sometimes these over-exaggerated stereotypes are seen as humorous, rather than offensive, by the social group being depicted, but they can also be seen as offensive and a reflection of ignorance.

Stereotypes can also be subjective. An audience expects a character to behave in a certain way, and if a character behaves very differently.



Task: (Example question)



Watch the selected scene from S08E02 of *Modern Family*. In small groups, discuss how the stereotyping of Cameron's character adds humour. Use your notes while you watch the scene to prepare for your discussion. Your group will then present their findings to the class, in no longer than 5 minutes. [Extract: Mitchell and Cameron discuss Lily's friend Tom (4:48 to 5:55)]



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Answer Sheet 9.2 – Task 1: The Function of

Task: The function of stereotypes in sitcoms

Indicative content: points for discussion

- The scene is domestic, reinforcing Mitch and Cameron's status as a family, but playing (an injury caused by playing 'charades') reinforces the idea that he is
- Both Cameron and Mitchell are dressed conventionally, although Cameron's for homosexuality.
- Cameron speaks in a dramatic, affected, way – 'We haven't been for sentimental about Lily – it's so sweet!' – and makes dramatic gestures and
- Cameron is relieved by the news that Lily is being kind to Tom, but wishes he used to be as Tina because he is proud of his 'gender identity' – a
- Cameron shows his pride in Lily by pretending to accept an award from 'Gwyneth Paltrow'.

This scene emphasises the positive side of Mitchell and Cameron's family – they are proud of her – but it also uses stereotypes of gay men for comic effect. Cameron is dramatic and also as wanting to take credit for other people's success on a public platform. Tom can also be seen as a stereotype of 'woke' West Coast attitudes (as personified by Gwyneth Paltrow) as Los Angeles is seen as more liberal than some other US states.

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Worksheet 9.3 – Task 2: The Representation of Social Groups

Task: The class is to be split into two groups. One of the two groups must identify characters who are represented in *Modern Family*, while the other group must do the same for *The Mindy Project*. Compare your findings as a class, and discuss what difference in terms of representation is evident in the set episode of these two shows.

You are to only discuss characters featured in the respective episode for both shows. You are not to discuss characters who are not prominently featured in the set episode of the two shows.

 Modern Family S08E02: 'A Stereotypical Day'	
Jay Pritchett	Richard
Gloria Pritchett	Mom
Mitchell Pritchett	Phil
Cameron Tucker	Joe
Phil Dunphy	Chris
Claire Dunphy	Rachel
Alex Dunphy	
Haley Dunphy	
Luke Dunphy	



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Answer Sheet 9.3 – Task 2: The Representation of Social Groups

Task: Indicative answers

The characters in *Friends* are all white, middle-class, heterosexual and very attractive. In media language terms this is called 'whitewashing'. On the surface, the sitcom is considering this is a show set in 1990s New York City, it does not seem very representative of the city, as there would have been a mix of different ethnic groups then living in the city.

Friends has had its fair share of criticism over the fact that none of the characters are from a religious minority. Ross, Monica and Rachel are Jewish (a religious minority in the USA with only 2% of the population being Jewish). Joey, on the other hand, while Catholic, is Italian-American. Although Italy is a large country, this ethnic group only makes up a little over 5% of the American population.

A counter criticism of whitewashing claims associated with *Friends* is that, in mid-1990s New York City, different ethnic groups willingly segregated socially and, therefore, it would have been untruthful and unrepresentative to feature an ethnically mixed cast of friends during these times.

The cast of *Modern Family* is larger and more diverse in terms of age, life situation and social class. The cast is still largely white and wealthy. Two of the main couples are heterosexual, reflecting changes in attitudes and laws in the USA since the 1990s. Phil and Claire Dunphy – married with three children – but Jay and Gloria's marriage has a considerable age gap, and both have children from previous relationships. Jay has an adopted daughter, who is Asian. None of the families are poor, but Jay is of the families here are upper middle class.

The cast is also more diverse in terms of appearance – at least for the men. Gloria and Claire is an attractive blonde, but the other male members of the cast do not conform to the ideal of male beauty.

Gloria and Jay are a Colombian, and Lily is Asian, but the rest of the main characters are white. This leads to criticism that *Modern Family* is not as diverse in matters of race or background, sexuality or appearance.

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Lesson 10

Representation 3: Representation Theory

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Become familiar with the theories of representation required for the exam.
- ✓ Understand how these theories are applied to sitcom.
- ✓ Understand how these theories help sitcoms establish their genre, and develop the narrative as well as the sitcom's characters.

You will need

- Worksheet 10.1, 10.2, 10.3
- Modern Family S08E02
- Computers/Internet
- Exercise books

? Starter

Process of Selection

Lesson 10 begins on **Worksheet 10.1** whereby students are introduced to selection representation. Selection is defined and explained, followed by an activity that of similar themes can vary the product's genres based on the selection process. watch the S01E01 of *Brooklyn 99*, a sitcom set in New York City police precinct. consider how the representation of homosexual men is depicted and differs between *Family*, based on the process of selection. **Answer Sheet 10.1** is provided with the episode of *Brooklyn 99* has been included in the information section below.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Under Construction

Lesson 10 continues on **Worksheet 10.2**. Students are provided with information made up of audio and visual elements, and how these are of specific importance. reminded that these elements have been covered in Lesson 5 (Sitcom Conventions). have a two-minute refresher of this lesson, or ask students to revise this lesson. activity of analysing theme tunes earlier in the resource, students must listen to *Family*, and list the elements used to construct this segment of the series and how sitcom. The extract is found at the start of each episode. **Answer Sheet 10.2** is provided with answers.

P Learning Activities

Main Task: Shots and Angles

On **Worksheet 10.3** an exam-style question is provided. Students are given some information about editing techniques in creating representation, particularly shot information, and previous information drawn from the course, students are to answer that follows. This question is based on an extract from *Modern Family* S08E02: [02:28]. The question asks students to analyse the shots and angles of the scene and this provides a test and humour. The worksheet provides enough room to create a rush the edit within the time allocated. The idea is to have students elaborate on and develop their own essays. Alternatively, teachers can carry out this task in an exam is provided with indicative answers.

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Plenary

Mediation

Lesson 10 continues on **Worksheet 10.4**. Students are provided with information on the importance of this. Students are then asked to reimagine a reboot of *Modern Family* as a cold open of the new series in no more than two pages. This activity can be an alternative activity instead. No **Answer Sheet** is provided due to the creative nature of this activity. Consider the implications of mediation when carrying out the activity.



Homework

Based on **Zig Zag Education** observations on the different ways women can be represented in media, write a character bio of the type of woman Claire's character represents as depicted in the show.



Information

Starter: The episode where Raymond Holt appears in *Brooklyn 99* (S01E01) can be found on YouTube: [zzed.uk/12258-brooklyn-99](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.uk/12258-brooklyn-99)

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In Media Studies, representation theory is concerned with how a media text associate itself with gender, age, ethnic backgrounds, social status and even media has the ability to influence audiences' perceptions about these important

There are a number of ways that media producers and media industries can represent, one of which is the process of selection.

The process of the text is what has been chosen to be included within the one scene or another, or the preference of the way something is said or seen between making a scene funny or not. Therefore, this process is as important as the media text.

Modern Family is a sitcom about three related family groups and their everyday lives. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is also a sitcom. It is set in an NYC police precinct and follows the adventures of a group of cops. Although both series are sitcoms, the way the creators have chosen to represent their characters and the kinds of stories they tell is very different.

Both *Modern Family* and *Brooklyn 99* feature gay men as main characters, but they do so differently in each show. Cameron Tucker and Raymond Holt are presented differently as sitcom characters.

You should identify the differences in representation and comment on the comic.

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Answer Sheet 10.1 – Starter: Process of

Task: Introducing representation!

- Cameron Tucker in *Modern Family* is in many ways a stereotypical gay man. He is in a committed relationship and with an adopted daughter. He speaks in a confident, relaxed way. He clearly enjoys attention – he pretends to accept an award in the set episode. He is easily hurt but always keen to make people happy. Much of the portrayal comes from the way he conforms to stereotypes, even when he is not.
- Captain Raymond Holt is very different. Firstly, unlike Cameron, he is shown in a professional role, not just a personal role (although in later episodes, we do see him in a personal role). He immediately takes control of a chaotic workplace. He has a commanding presence. He is uninterested in making a speech or being the centre of attention. He has a very different, almost robotic voice. His appearance is also very different. He is wearing an immaculate uniform. Ray is a very different representation of a gay man. The contrast between his often emotionless, deadpan delivery is frequently comic, and jokes at the character's expense are not his sexuality – he is driven, humourless, obsessive, competitive and highly intelligent.

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Worksheet 10.2 – Introduction: Under

Information: The audio and the visual

The construction of a media text such as a sitcom is also dependent on the audio and visual elements embedded in the text; a sitcom is an audio-visual medium after all! Audio and visual elements have already been mentioned in Lesson 5. However, now we will explore how these elements will be used to construct the text with representation.

Dialogue is an example of an audio element that can help with the representation of a situation. Imagine Joey from *Friends* saying 'So, how are you doing?' Do you think it would have the same effect on audiences?

If the *Jeopardy!* score played as Gloria came down the stairs, audiences would feel as if some funny situation is about to commence. Therefore the audio elements will only apply sitcom conventions such as bright lighting and upbeat music.

Task:

Listen to the theme tune for *Modern Family*. How is this segment constructed to represent the series?

Audio	

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Answer Sheet 10.2 – Introduction: Under

Task:

Audio	Visual
Instrumental, drum-heavy music	Each family group appears in a video photograph, held by the next family member, emphasising the family ties between them.
Up-beat/up-tempo: portraying the sitcom as having a happy, sunny nature	The characters appear as if dressed smart and happy – we know this family-friendly.



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Worksheet 10.3 – Main Task: Shots

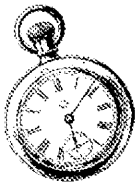
Information:

The construction of the media text is how the text is brought together, and the text's representation.

Camera shots are important in the construction of media texts. The angle they indicate the power of one character over the text, while an extreme close-up indicates the importance of detail framed in a shot.

Editing the media text, and is useful to help project the style that is being used by the audience. In comedies, long takes and minimal cuts within a scene can convey a character's frustration that something is taking too long to resolve itself, while a character's actions, conveying a sense of anxiety towards a situation in a film or audio-visual text such as a sitcom can determine how characters are perceived by audiences.

Task: (Exam-style question)



Next you will be shown a clip from S08E02 of *Modern Family* (01:10-01:20) which explains in flashback what has happened to him.

Explain how the use of **shots**, **angles** and **editing techniques** project humour to the scene. Use the time in the lesson to plan your essay and finish the essay at home.

Important: You may benefit by drawing from the information covered in the lesson (Le 5-10) to help you answer this question.



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Answer Sheet 10.3 – Main Task: Shots

Task: Students may wish to use the points and ideas brought up as an essay plan or a piece of work, thus turning the task into an exam-style question.

This scene begins with an interior mid shot of the family having breakfast, when Phil is shocked and distressed. The reaction shots of his children show their indifference, their lack of reaction to Phil's distress.

The next shot is of Phil seated at the table doing a 'to camera' speech, as *Modern Family* speaks directly to the audience, explaining how traumatic his experience has been.

We then see Phil's experience in flashback. He is seen packing up after an open door, accidentally locking himself in the closet. Except for one close-up of Phil's eye peering through the door handle should be, staring at his mobile phone on the table, this sequence shows him looking increasingly dishevelled and distressed. A series of jump cuts follow him as he tries to escape, eats Tic Tacs, tries to escape, tries to meditate, lays out a meal on the table and is finally rescued by a rather surprised family.

Although Phil's distress is clearly real, his situation is ridiculous, and the humour of his predicament is treated with the utmost seriousness. As he leaves, he grabs a bucket, with a verbal reference to the fact that he's been using it as a toilet.

The contrast between Phil's 'trauma' and his family's indifference adds to the comedy, which reinforces Phil's character as being overly dramatic and a bit incompetent.

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Worksheet 10.4 – Plenary: Media

Information: From start to finish – mediating the media text

Mediation deals with the production process that a media text goes through to reach an audience.

As far as a sitcom is concerned, this could refer to revisions to the script before it is placed; how the director chooses to storyboard and edit the episode to plan out his shot production design may change during filming to make better use of props in the set.

Task: Mediation

Channel 4 is planning a reboot of the sitcom *Modern Family*, and you have been tasked with rewriting the cold open for the new version of this classic sitcom for your area of the UK.

In no more than two pages, write the cold open for the new version of this classic sitcom for your area of the UK.

Each page of a script is typically one minute in duration. A cold open in a sitcom is the beginning of an episode that takes place before the opening sequence of the show. It can be an episode or simply be a very funny scene that encourages audiences to not change the channel while they are playing. Your task is to make sure the new version of this show is reflective of the current situation in which you live.

1. Your teacher may ask you to read out your scene and explain your creative choices. You should describe what you have changed to make this reboot relevant to this generation.
2. You are not expected to get the template of the cold open perfect at this stage. If you use a screenplay template, some suggestions for templates can be provided by your teacher.

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Lesson 11

Sitcoms: In Context

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Identify the key contexts that sitcoms are concerned with.
- ✓ Understand the key contexts as they apply to specific situations and texts.
- ✓ Understand the importance of sitcom scheduling within the contexts of the media.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 11
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4
- Computers/Internet
- Exercise books

? Starter

Sitcoms: In Context

Lesson 11 begins on **PowerPoint Lesson 11** whereby students are required to identify whether a sitcom is not a sitcom, and answer why. Answers are provided on the slides.

Q Understanding and Learning (Intro)

Contextualising the Sitcom

Lesson 11 continues on **Worksheet 11.1**. Students are provided with information on the contexts, as they pertain to the specification. Students are then given three statements applicable to a particular context. Students need to guess which context most likely applies, and are provided with correct answers.

✍ Learning Activities

Task 1: Appropriateness of Context (10 mins)

On **Worksheet 11.2** students are given an overview of three sitcoms, as obtained from the specification. Students should assess the information provided and, based on that information, provide their reasoning behind it. They are only to make assumptions based on the information provided. **Answer Sheet 11.2** is provided with a sample answer.

Task 2: Today's Contemporary is Tomorrow's History (25 mins)

Worksheet 11.3 is a detailed question that asks students to compare the historical context of *Modern Family* with the context of *Modern Family*. **Answer Sheet 11.3** is provided with model answers that may be used as a guide.

💡 Plenary

Similar Structures within Varying Contexts

Lesson 11 concludes on **Worksheet 11.4**. Students are provided with loglines for two sitcoms (both the most watched sitcoms of their time). Based on that information, students are asked to identify two similarities between the two sitcoms. **Answer Sheet 11.4** is provided with a sample answer.

📖 Homework

Source a sitcom episode from the 1960s or 1970s of your choice on YouTube. Identify the time and defy its historical context to remain relevant in today's world?

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Worksheet 11.1 – Introduction: Contextual

Information:

The context in which a media product is made can fall into three main categories, also be described as the 'situation' that the media product was created in, or Media products are human creations. Therefore, in a way of being thought of are understood to be closely linked to the contexts that they reflect. The three using are the sociocultural context, the political context and the historical context.

Sociocultural context: refers to the social and cultural landscape that the sitcom uses to engage in dialogue, the importance given to representation of cultural phenomena such as a character drinking in Starbucks or Chipotle for dinner.

Political context: refers to the political climate that affects the sitcom directly which use satire as a form of humour regularly resort to politics as a source of having *Modern Family* depict a gay family is also, in and of itself, a reflection of which it was created.

Historical context: the historical context, on the other hand, is a representation of the century in which the sitcom was made. Although shows such as *The Golden Girls* for the time in which they were made, when we watch them now we automatically we are watching something 'old'.

IMPORTANT: Sociocultural and political references that may today be outdated reflection of the historical context of the sitcom.

Task: Fill in the blanks with the relevant context based on the fictitious sitcoms.

- 1) A very popular 1980s sitcom that airs repeats, on Tuesday afternoons at 17:00 today of the main characters' dress sense and the lack of technology. This sitcom is a reflection of the _____ context in which it was made.
- 2) A sitcom is in its third season. A writers' strike takes place, resulting in prolonged season. Although the sitcom is highly popular, it ends up getting cancelled and they move on to other projects. This sitcom's cancellation occurred due to the _____ context of the writers' strike.
- 3) The main character in a sitcom is a social media editor for a fashion website. In one episode, the character creates a hashtag (#CardiganCatastrophe) that goes viral among fans of the sitcom. Eventually the phrase starts being used in everyday life as an official word in the Oxford Dictionary. This sitcom has had a direct influence on the _____ context.

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Answer sheet 11.1 – Introduction: Context of the Sitcom

Introduction: Did you identify the right context for the scenario provided?

- 1) A very popular 1980s sitcom still airs repeats, Tuesday afternoons at 17:00 on today often make fun of the characters' dress sense and the lack of technology. This sitcom is a reflection of the historical context in which it was produced.

- 2) A sitcom is in its third season. A writers' strike takes place, resulting in prolonged season. Although the sitcom is highly popular, it ends up getting cancelled and the characters move on to other projects.

This sitcom's cancellation occurred due to the political context that brought it to an end.

- 3) The main character in a sitcom is a social media editor for a fashion website. In one episode, the character creates a hashtag (#CardiganCatastrophe) that goes viral among fans of the sitcom. Eventually the phrase starts being used in everyday life as an official word in the Oxford Dictionary.

This sitcom has had a direct influence on the sociocultural context of the time.

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Worksheet 11.2 – Task 1: The Appropriateness of Context

Information: Context (in context)

Media products (including sitcoms) are typically analysed by using all of the contexts discussed at the same time. Rarely does one context apply exclusively to any one product, often these media products resonate within one context more than the rest.

Task: Look at ALL the information provided for the three sitcoms below, and decide which context best represents it today. Explain the reasoning behind your answer.

Title: ***I Love Lucy***

Country of Origin: **USA**

Original Network: **CBS**

Original Release: **1951–1957**

UK Distribution: **Hallmark Channel**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **A whacky woman constantly strives to become a star, but her husband and gets herself in the strangest situations.**

Context:

Reasoning:

Title: ***Parks and Recreation***

Country of Origin: **USA**

Original Network: **NBC**

Original Release: **2009–2015**

UK Distribution: **Currently does not air on UK TV. Aired on Dave (until late 2016)**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **This show follows the absurd antics of an Indiana town as it pursues sundry projects to make their city a better place.**

Context:

Reasoning:

Title: ***Modern Family***

Country of Origin: **USA**

Original Network: **ABC**

Original Release: **2009–2020**

International Distribution: **Hulu, Netflix, Disney+**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **Three different but related families face trials and tribulations as they navigate life in the modern world.**

Context:

Reasoning:

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Answer Sheet 11.2 –Task 1: The Approach of Context

Task: Did you identify the right context for each sitcom? What was the reason?

Title: ***I Love Lucy***

Country of Origin: **USA**

Original Network: **CBS**

Original Release: **1951–1956**

UK Distribution: **Channel 4, Allmark Channel**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **A whacky woman constantly strives to become a star and her husband gets herself in the strangest situations.**

Context: **Historical**

Reasoning: This programme's style and tone is that of a typical sitcom. However, the black-and-white format that it was broadcast in, as well as the reputation it has as a classic.

Title: ***Parks and Recreation***

Country of Origin: **USA**

Original Network: **NBC**

Original Release: **2009–2015**

UK Distribution: **Currently on UK TV. Aired on Dave (until late 2016)**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **This show follows the absurd antics of an Indiana town's public officials as they pursue sundry projects to make their city a better place.**

Context: **Political**

Reasoning: As this sitcom chronicles the life of public servants, the subject matter of this, also its jokes) would be very political in nature.

Title: ***Modern Family***

Country of Origin: **UK**

Original Network: **ABC**

Original Release: **2009–2020**

International Distribution: **Hulu, Peacock, Disney**

Logline courtesy of IMDB: **Three different but related families face trials and tribulations in comedic ways.**

Context: **Social**

Reasoning: The Series follows three wealthy middle-class families in suburban US family groups – a 'conventional' couple, a gay couple and a second marriage with current US society.

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Worksheet 11.3 – Task 2: Today's Comedies Tomorrow's History



Task: Read the following, and complete the task.

Friends first aired on NBC in 1994, whereas *Modern Family* launched on ABC in 2014. Although both are sitcoms which occasionally explore similar themes, they are very different. Making comparisons between the two, illustrating their sitcoms' historical context and how they reflect the society and times they were created in. Use the space below to



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Answer sheet 11.3 – Task 2: Today's Context Tomorrow's History

Task: Read the following, and complete the task.

Gender: In *Friends* there is an equal split in gender. The 1990s was seen as a time of prominence as a symbol of independence, especially in the context of moving to New York. In *Modern Family*, there is a range of ages and a mix of both gender and sexuality. The portrayal of women as stay-at-home mothers in *Friends* S08E02 Claire is shown as having a husband. *Friends*, however, shows the men as already having established careers, with the exception of Joey's. The women are still trying to find their place in the professional world, represented by a female leader in the workplace, something which became a thing in the 1990s, in comparison with the way things were in the early 1990s.

Ethnicity: Although NYC has always been a melting pot, and legally enforced public segregation after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in America, there is much debate over the fact that diversity (and the occurring segregation) is still very dominant in contemporary society. The cast of *Friends* is very representative, as during this time it would be unlikely for a group of friends to have such a mix of races and ethnicities. Similar criticisms have been levelled at *Modern Family*: mostly white, middle-class American, and the characters who are not (Gloria and Manny, who are Colombian) have been portrayed at times as being very stereotypical. This does, however, represent the reality of affluent American suburbs, which are still less ethnically diverse than urban areas.

Sexuality: The cast of *Friends* is exclusively heterosexual, whereas *Modern Family* includes a gay couple. During the course of the series, get married and adopt a child. This reflects changing attitudes in the USA; in the 1990s it was rare to see gay characters so prominently portrayed in a mainstream sitcom.

Also, consider the following:

- Fashion: The clothes worn by the characters are reflective of the time each show was made, especially the dated style of Rachel Green in *Friends*.
- Tech: *Friends* has no cell phones, their landlines are large and look old today. In *Modern Family*, the characters all have mobile phones; in fact, the narrative in S08E02 uses Phil's security camera and Gloria's remote control as plot devices.
- Central Perk: a British series would typically feature a pub as the public place where the characters would typically meet, as in the case of *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*. The culture of frequenting coffee shops is reflected in *Friends* through Central Perk, showing that the frequent use of coffee shops in American series is what led to the success of chains like Starbucks in Europe (and the UK) over the past 20 years. There is no such equivalent in *Modern Family*, as the three different family groups visit each other's houses, which fits the theme of the show.

Specific to Friends:

- A typical representation of 1990s New York City with a very liberal outlook. *Friends* shows the transition between adolescence and adulthood. However, the representation of the characters' lives is often unrealistic, as they manage to navigate their lives through the city without the help of adults.
- *Friends* represents a 'pre-September 11th' society where people were a lot more susceptible to the horrors the world is capable of, an attitude that characterises the 9/11 attacks.

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Worksheet 11.4 – Plenary: Similar within Varying Contexts

Task: Read the logline (a brief summary of a television programme) for *Friends* also taking into consideration the Fun Fact provided. Please answer the following

Loglines:

Friends 'follows the lives of six friends living in Manhattan, New York as they try to overcome the tribulations of their twenties, while relying on each other for help through the ups and downs of love and life'.

The Big Bang Theory 'follows the lives of seven friends; four nerdy scientists who must balance their professional lives which they are leaders in, and the social world they live about. All while trying to maintain romantic relationships with their female counterparts'.

Fun Fact: *Friends* is the most watched programme in the 2001–02 US TV season, while *The Big Bang Theory* is the most watched programme of the 2015–16 US TV season. Both shows aired Thursday nights at 20:00, on NBC (*Friends*) and CBS (*The Big Bang Theory*).

Question:

Considering the media contexts covered in this lesson, mention **two similarities** between the two sitcoms presented to you. Answer the question individually and discuss your answers in pairs.

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Answer sheet 11.4 – Plenary: Similar Sitcoms within Varying Contexts

Task: Indicative answers to plenary question

Here are a list of similarities between *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*. You may use this list in order to elaborate on the ones that you may have missed, or some of this list.

- 1) Both sitcoms chronicle the lives of a group of friends in their twenties, living and working in New York City, shifting from the pre-90s to the 2000s. Both shows reflect that most young adults are heavily reliant on their parents and are not married.
- 2) Both are American sitcoms with similar styles: filmed on a set, in front of a live studio audience, making them highly identifiable as sitcoms, thus much more recognisable for viewers.
- 3) The characters in both sitcoms face similar issues. The issues in both sitcoms are timeless (dealing with love, marriage, professional success, parenthood, social status, etc.).
- 4) Historically, both shows are selective about the ways they represent the time period they are set in.
- 5) The female characters in both sitcoms are strong, independent and very capable of taking care of themselves; they are not depicted as damsels in distress who need a man to save them. Giving these shows a more gender-balanced portrayal of the sexes.
- 6) Both shows share a similar-sized audience, and both shows aired on the same network (CBS) on different networks and during different years). Socially, this shows the similarities in the audiences between the two shows.

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Lesson 12

Sitcoms: Revision Lesson

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Consolidate the chapters covered by this topic.
- ✓ Discuss the important aspects of a sitcom.
- ✓ Revise the concepts of a sitcom and its representation to sitcoms and its representation with better means of communication and a critical analysis of the genre.

You will need

- PowerPoint Lesson 12
- Presentation software
- Worksheet 12.1; Answers
- Computers/Internet
- Modern Family S08E01
- Exercise books

? Starter

Representation

Lesson 12 begins on **PowerPoint Lesson 12** whereby students are required to present how *Modern Family* represents family relationships. Students should orient themselves to the main groups of characters, and their representation.

✍ Learning Activities

Main Task: Industry and Audiences Revision

On **Worksheet 12.1** students are given information about scheduling of content for two schedules for Thursday night US programming for 2014 and 2015. Students practice by comparing the two schedules and answering the questions provided with the answers.

💡 Plenary

Which Sitcom am I?

Lesson 12 concludes on **PowerPoint Lesson 12**. Students are given specifically describing either *Friends* or *Modern Family*. Students must guess which sitcom. Answers are provided in the slide show.

📖 Homework

Create a revision mind map for each of the set texts. It is up to students how they do it, although a good suggestion would be to organise key ideas into four areas – Audience, Representation and Media Forms (which covers conventions, narrative, visuals).

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Worksheet 12.1 – Main Task: Industry & Revision

Information: Scheduling

The context of the media is not only concerned with the impact of sitcoms on society, but is also concerned with the logistical and financial side of the industry. A specific example of this is the times and times in which sitcoms are scheduled. Compare the two Thursday night television (winter, 2001 and 2015–16). Can you notice any differences or trends in the scheduling of sitcoms, the amount of sitcoms broadcast consecutively, and how sitcoms are marketed?

Task: Use the schedules to answer the questions below. For your reference, sitcoms are highlighted in grey.

2001–02 TV Schedule	September–December 2001			
Thursday	08:00	08:30	09:00	09:30
ABC	<i>Whose Line is it Anyway?</i>	<i>Whose Line is it Anyway?</i>	<i>Who Wants to Be a Millionaire</i>	
CBS	<i>Survivor: Africa</i>		<i>CSI: Crime Scene Investigation</i>	
FOX	<i>Family Guy</i>	<i>The Tick</i>	<i>Temptation Island</i>	
NBC	<i>Friends</i> * ¹	<i>Inside Schwartz</i>	<i>Will & Grace</i>	<i>Just Shoot Me</i>
UPN	<i>WWE SmackDown!</i>			
The WB	Popstars	Elimidate Deluxe	Charmed	
2015–16 TV Schedule	September–December 2015			
Thursday	08:00	08:30	09:00	09:30
ABC	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>		<i>Scandal</i>	
CBS	<i>The Big Bang Theory</i> * ²	<i>Life in Pieces</i>	<i>Mom</i>	<i>Angel from Hell</i>
The CW	<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>		<i>The Originals</i>	
FOX	<i>Bones</i>		<i>Sleepy hollow</i>	
NBC	<i>Heroes Reborn</i>		<i>The Blacklist</i>	
NB: During the 2006–2007 US TV season, The CW was founded as a result of a merger between The WB and UPN.				
* ¹ Denotes the most watched US scripted programme of 2001.				
* ² Denotes the most watched US scripted programme of 2015.				

1) What trends can you notice about specific networks' Thursday night programming?

.....

2) How has the Thursday night 8pm time slot changed for NBC and CBS?

.....

3) What trends can you notice regarding the structure of comedy scheduling in the 2015–16 season?

.....

4) How do comedy blocks typically operate during prime time in terms of their structure?

.....

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Answer sheet 12.1 – Main Task: Industry & Revision

Task: the answers to Task 1 are provided below.

- 1) What trends can you notice about specific networks' Thursday night programming?
Both schedules (15 years apart) have a network which broadcasts a full night of sitcoms. In 2001, the sitcoms were the most watched scripted programme for that year.
- 2) How has the Thursday night open time slot changed for NBC and CBS?
NBC had the most watched scripted programme in 2001 (*Friends*), but by 2016, the block was dominated by serial TV dramas. CBS had established a comedy block by 2001, with the most watched scripted programme (*The Big Bang Theory*).
- 3) What trends can you notice regarding the structure of comedy scheduling in 2001 and 2016?
Networks typically air half-hour comedies in one-hour blocks, sometimes two or four comedies per night.
- 4) How do comedy blocks typically operate during prime time in terms of their placement and ratings?
Comedy blocks are traditionally broadcast in the front end of the prime-time slot. They tend to have high ratings, and serve as lead-in content for well-known or long-running programmes.

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