

Step 4: Explain that there are many theories about humor; what it is and where it comes from. Today we'll look at three general types of humor:

Relief theory argues that laughter and humor are ways of blowing off psychological steam and stress. This kind of humor breaks the tension of a sad or tense situation.

Superiority theory was originally formulated by thinkers Plato and Aristotle. In this theory, humor is a means of declaring one's superiority over others. (If you're looking to cultivate a sense of humor to improve your leadership skills, this is not the kind you want to acquire!)

Incongruity theory argues that humor arises when two contrasting ideas are put together. Many joke punchlines are often the result of an unexpected ending. This kind of humor subverts a more conventional way of looking at the world.

In the following excerpt from a children's book, *Owl at Home*, author Arnold Lobel uses humor in a simple but effective way to surprise his audience. Lobel combines both relief and incongruity theory, describing familiar household objects to evoke sad feelings (relief). He then surprises the reader by gathering his tears to make tear water tea (tears are the body's way of relief and tea is a typical drink of comfort, but the combination of the two is also an example of incongruity theory).

If time permits, divide students into groups and have each group perform a skit of tear water tea. Students can re-write the text to suit their style or use objects in the classroom around them.

Step 5: Summarize. Review the ideas of creativity, humor, and failure. Ask if linking these ideas surprised the class, and if it gave them new confidence to explore new ideas as they learn and grow in excellence. Emphasize the need for persistence, as they pursue excellence.