

Humor is more than being funny

Healthy Panther Post seventh-grade reporters didn't know what to expect when Philadelphia comedian Mary Carpenter brought them on stage.



Some giggled nervously when she asked them to form a large circle. But one by one, they followed her instructions, smiling and laughing. Then she had them imitate her when she said her own name in a funny voice.

Now everybody was amused, and that was her goal. She said humor can calm us down. Relax us and enable us to take ourselves less seriously. "It helps normalize everyone and make everyone comfortable with sharing their own opinions," said Mrs. Carpenter, executive director of ComedySportz in Philadelphia.

She also spent time as a middle school teacher. She said she used her experience as an actor and comedian to help her students relax, to memorize certain things, and to study.

Mrs. Carpenter uses her time on stage at ComedySportz, the city's longest-running comedy show, to build connections with people through shared funny experiences. "I like lifting other people up," she said. People are "naturally ridiculous" and sharing a laugh "helps normalize everyone."

Humor is also healthy in other ways. Dr. Edward Creagan of the Mayo Clinic, a hospital and research institution, said humor benefits people mentally and physically. Writing on the clinic's website, he said humor can decrease stress and increase the body's natural "feel-good" chemicals.

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Get your hands dirty: Become a gardener

Mr. Trichon, a sixth-grade social studies teacher, can't seem to get enough gardening.

He has a garden at home and at MaST, and he runs his own landscaping company. He grows vegetables like tomatoes and lettuce.

He said gardening is good exercise and helps you get stretched and breathe calmly.

There are many benefits to gardening. It can improve a person's physical health and mood and reduce stress. It also can build social connections, according to Los Robles Health System in California.

One example of community building is the North Philly Peace Park. It uses gardening as a healthy way to unite communities and help people relate to each other, said Tommy Joshua Caison in the *Healthy NewsWorks* article "Sowing Togetherness."

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Illustration by Ian Pan

Find out what Ms. Gouldey says about technology on Page 3.

Art can strengthen relationships

The art educator at MaST Community Charter School said she speaks to her students through art to teach them human lessons that help them understand everyone's perspective on life and how it should be treated.

"It is scientifically proven that engaging in art can lower cortisol, the stress hormone," said Miss Smiley in an interview with *Healthy Panther Post* reporters. "So, I use art as resistance for my students

and as a safe space for them to learn from me and carry on the lessons I teach."

Art can build social connections. An article from the American Psychological Association, "Connecting Through the Arts," says art strengthens community bonds in a safe and creative environment inside and outside of school. It can foster empathy, collaboration, and conversation.

Miss Smiley describes being an art teacher as contained chaos with lots of bubbles of joy.

Speaking about art's effect on people, Miss Smiley said she believes with everything going



on in the world currently, being the observer of art can also help create an understanding. Her advice for a beginner artist is to try everything, even if it's bad because nobody cares about a little mistake.

She said the only way for someone to change the constant thought that they aren't good at art is by simply making art and blocking out the worry until they improve.

—Story by *Healthy Panther Post* reporters
Easel illustration by Adrianna Lewis

Gardening connects you to nature

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It champions food, education, and community to promote people caring for each other, according to the park's website. The program builds community by uniting people by doing things they like. In addition to gardening, people can enjoy creating art, playing, and listening to music.



Mr. Trichon said gardening can have a positive impact on people. He said his advice for others starting a garden is to pick certain colors that you like.

He said a good garden has different stages depending on the month or season. The thing that makes a good garden is if you truly like it and if you can connect to it, he said.

Finally, Mr. Trichon said everyone should be connected to nature.

"I truly feel there are issues with kids these days. Everyone is on screen and should go outside," he said.

—Story by *Healthy Panther Post* reporters
Illustration by Mia Wackens

MaST Community Charter School Healthy Panther Post
The *Healthy Panther Post* is a publication of MaST Community Charter School in Philadelphia. Contributing seventh-grade reporters include Aimana Abdykadyrova, Caitlin Agnoni, Lydia Jean Cartagena, Jayden Edward, Reman Elsehy, Logan Giammarco, Paetyn Haldeman, Declan Hamilton, Simon Jaison, Adrianna Lewis, Olivia Anne Maxwell, Aubrey McCloskey, Sadie McCloskey, Peyton McShane-Marco, Olivia Mora, Jack Oakes, Maggie O'Brien, Ian Pan, Dylan Parker, Julian Pierre, Douglass Reidy, Julian Rodriguez, Kylie Rudolph, Francis Shiju, Lasha Tskhvareashvili, and Mia Wackens. The *Healthy Panther Post's* faculty advisor is Mr. Costanzo. The middle school leader is Thomas Giampolo.

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Humor can help you build bonds

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“Nothing is as effective [at relieving stress] as running a marathon, holding your cat or your dog, or having an explosion of laughter,” said Dr. Creagan. In addition, he said, “a hearty laugh may decrease blood pressure, help regulate heart rhythm and just provide an element of joy, that elusive factor in well-being.”



Mary Carpenter

provide an element of joy, that elusive factor in well-being.”

Healthy Panther Post reporters interviewed Mrs. Carpenter as part of their research into the benefits of humor. “I liked how Mrs. Carpenter gave us an experience of improv. It released tension and gave us an opportunity to connect with others using humor,” said Reman Elsehy.

Improv—short for *improvisation*—is one of the features of ComedySportz. It means comedy that’s created on the spot by the actors working with each other on stage in front of an audience. Mrs. Carpenter said improv takes teamwork and collaboration skills. You can’t be funny on stage without listening to the other people, she explains: “Listening to others is key to building a moment of laughter together.”

Mrs. Carpenter studied acting at Northwestern University and graduated with a degree in theater. She also attended the London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art.

Mrs. Carpenter previously lived in Los Angeles and Chicago, working for places like Second City, a

comedy club in Chicago. She has been with ComedySportz for 33 years

“The easiest part of my job is that when I am on stage, I am not alone,” said Mrs. Carpenter. On the other hand, she said, the hardest part of her job is getting out of her own head and resisting the need to be the center of attention.

Humor can also build relationships. “Humor gave me my husband,” said Mrs. Carpenter, who met him working at ComedySportz. Her younger son is also a member of ComedySportz.

Mrs. Carpenter says it’s a mistake to use humor in a negative way. Humor should never be at the expense of one person or a group of people, she said. And “humor should never be hurtful,” she added. When you’re “the butt of the joke,” it isn’t very funny.

For a comedian, it’s also important to learn that people aren’t going to laugh at every joke you make. You just need to accept it and move on, she said. “Don’t be afraid to mess up,” she said. “We will mess up and that’s OK.”

By trusting your instincts, you’ll increase your confidence over time. “This allows you to intentionally create flexibility in your thinking and allows you to pivot. Then you panic less,” she said. Mrs. Carpenter added, “The greatest way to build humor through connection is listening to each other and building off each other. That’s when you have those genuine moments that happen where you literally make each other laugh.” —Story by *Healthy Panther Post* staff; funny face illustration on Page 1 by Olivia Mora

Pros and cons of using technology

Whether you’re sending messages via text or email, chatting through video, or sharing data in real-time, tools like smartphones and smartwatches act as personal hubs of instant connection, according to an article on the Walden University website.

Technology gives you a chance to communicate with anyone anywhere. It connects you socially with friends and family.

Start of quote? If you use digital technology at all, chances are you’re staying connected with people who you might otherwise have lost touch with and regained friendships,” according to the article, “How Is Digital Technology Changing Our Interactions with Each Other?” on the Walden University website.

Healthy Panther Post reporters interviewed Ms. Gouldey, seventh-grade technology teacher, who has

observed how kids use technology to socialize. “A lot of kids use Instagram and TikTok in ways that are negative such as bullying, singling people out, reposting negative things, and sharing them,” Ms. Gouldey said. These actions have negative impacts on kids, can lead to depression or getting a Student Assessment Performance (SAP) referral, she said.

But the technology teacher said the negative effects of technology can be prevented by “having parents more involved and more hands-on.” They need to know what their kids are doing online.” Parental involvement can help these kids connect with others in a healthy way without any risks, she said.

—Story by *Healthy Panther Post* reporters

What reporters learned about humor

Editor's note: Seventh-grade reporters reflected on their experience of interviewing Mary Carpenter, executive director at ComedySportz in Philadelphia, and participating in two improvisation activities.

My favorite thing about what we did with Mary is how we got to work together with our friends, have fun and enjoy ourselves while also learning and doing what we were supposed to do. A mistake that I learned from Mary is how making fun of someone for something they can't change isn't humor and it is taking it too far. Humor should be something we laugh at and not what we get ashamed for.

—Lasha Tskhvariashvili

I thought that the interview went really well. Something that stuck out to me was how she is still at ComedySportz. She has been there for about 33 years. I really liked how she explained her responses well. She said she isn't the funniest

person and she wouldn't make jokes about something someone can't change about themselves. This is what I really liked about her.

—Aimana Abdykadyrova

Something that stood out to me was when Mary said [she tries] to make the other performer on stage look good. You can't just make yourself look good. You are not the only one on stage that is important.

—Kylie Rudolph

Something I really enjoyed about when we interviewed Ms. Mary was how she could just come up with something on the spot. She was able to answer our questions and make fun [improv] games on the spot which I thought was very impressive. Another thing I like about our interview with Ms. Mary was how calm she was during the whole thing.

—Ian Pan

Books offer more than a good story

To be a reader, you can practice reading, vocabulary, and context clues. You make sure to read for as much time as you can during your free time, said MaST Community Charter School seventh-grade math teacher Ms. Cain.

Being a reader helps kids succeed in school by growing their vocabulary and communication skills—learning that carries on later in life, according to the program “Reach out and Read.” The program works with doctors and other healthcare workers across the country to help kids from infancy to 5 years old love reading. During a child’s check-up, doctors ask their patients about language, words, reading, pictures, and stories, the program says.

Reading can help you connect with others by giving you a chance to bond with the people you love and feel safe with and have positive experiences and warm memories, according to the article published by Common Sense Media called, “10 reasons you should read aloud to big kids, too.”

In an interview with *Healthy Panther Post* reporters, Ms. Cain said being a reader is practicing your reading skills because practice makes perfect. She said to try to read for about 30 minutes a day during your free time.

Ms. Cain said she prefers reading physical books over audio books, but she is glad audiobooks



are available for people who don't get a chance to read printed books. She said having a lot of books available helps build a foundation for reading.

Her advice to students today is that “reading opens people’s minds and shares other people's perspectives.”

—Story *Healthy Panther Post* reporters
Illustration by Lydia Cartagena