

ENGL 282
Contemporary Southern Fiction
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Readings for Response Paper 1

Humor and the American South

Email and the internet has led to a widespread transmission of a lot of jokes—some funny, and others not so funny. But these jokes often provide an interesting lens into the culture that produced or inspired them. In ENGL 282, to begin our discussions about being Southern, I've put together a collection of jokes about the culture of the American South. While these documents aren't literature and aren't written by Flannery O'Connor or William Faulkner, they nevertheless are textual productions that provide insight into our assumptions about the South and being Southern.

While you're reading these jokes, think about the messages and stereotypes implicit in them—what conclusions would you draw about the South if these were your only source of information? Who would you think lived in the South? Which ones might have been written by Southerners themselves? And are all the rest by Yankees? Or *&%\$ Yankees? Why do we assume it would only be a Southerner or a Yankee? Would a Midwesterner write a joke about the South? Why? Keep in mind that you're likely to run across some potentially offensive material here, so be prepared.

Please print these out and be prepared to discuss them at our next class meeting.

A True Southerner
Astrology for Southerners
The Ten Commandments
Southern Slang, or "Hickphonics"

A Guide to Visiting or Moving to the South
You might be po'white trash if...
The Top FORTY Things You Will NEVER
Hear a Southern Boy Say

I have copied these directly from various websites or email; most of these jokes no longer can be identified by author, but are widely available online. If I have an original source, I have indicated it. These all appear as they are currently being transmitted on the internet.

A True Southerner

IF YOU ARE A TRUE SOUTHERNER YOU'LL LOVE THIS!!!

Only a Southerner knows the difference between a hissie fit and a conniption fit, and that you don't "HAVE" them but "PITCH" them.

Only a Southerner knows how many fish, collard greens, turnip greens, peas, beans, etc., make up "a mess."

Only a Southerner can show or point out to you the general direction of "yonder."

Only a Southerner knows exactly how long "directly" is as in: "Going to town, be back directly."

Even Southern babies know that "Gimme some sugar" is not a request for the white, granular sweet substance that sits in a pretty little bowl on the middle of the table.

All Southerners know exactly when "by and by" is. They might not use the term, but they know the concept well.

Only a Southerner knows instinctively that the best gesture of solace for a neighbor who's got trouble is a plate of hot fried chicken and a big bowl of cold potato salad. If the neighbor's trouble is a real crisis, they also know to add a large banana puddin!

Only Southerners grow up knowing the difference between "right near" and "a right far piece." They also know that "just down the road" can be 1 mile or 20.

Only a Southerner, both knows and understands, the difference between a redneck, a good ol' boy, and po' white trash.

A Southerner knows that "fixin" can be used as a noun, a verb, or an adverb.

Only Southerners make friends while standing in lines. We don't do "queues," we do "lines"; and when we're "in line," we talk to everybody!

Put 100 Southerners in a room and half of them will discover they're related, even if only by marriage.

Southerners never refer to one person as "ya'll."

Southerners know grits come from corn and how to eat them.

Every Southerner knows tomatoes with eggs, bacon, grits, and coffee are perfectly wonderful; that red eye gravy is also a breakfast food; and that fried green tomatoes are not a breakfast food.

When you hear someone say, "Well, I caught myself lookin'," you know you are in the presence of a genuine Southerner!

Only true Southerners say "sweet tea" and "sweet milk." Sweet tea indicates the need for sugar and lots of it—we do not like our tea unsweetened. "Sweet milk" means you don't want buttermilk.

And a true Southerner knows you don't scream obscenities at little old ladies who drive 30 MPH on the freeway. You just say, "Bless her heart" and go your own way.

Astrology for Southerners

Okra Dec 22 - Jan 20

Although you appear crude, you are actually very slick on the inside. Okra have tremendous influence. An older Okra can look back over his life and see the seeds of his influence everywhere. Stay away from Moon Pies.

Chitlin Jan 21 - Feb 19

Chitlins often come from humble backgrounds. Many times they're uncomfortable talking about just where they came from. A chitlin, however, can make something of himself if he's motivated and has plenty of seasoning. When it comes to dealing with Chitlins, be very careful. Chitlins can burn and then erupt like Vesuvius, and this can make for a really terrible mess. Chitlins are best with Catfish and Okra. Remember that when marriage time rolls around. No, not with a Moon Pie.

Boll Weevil Feb 20-Mar 20

You have an overwhelming curiosity. You're unsatisfied with the surface of things, and you feel the need to bore deep into the interior of everything. Needless to say, you are very intense and driven as if you had some inner hunger. Nobody in their right mind is going to marry you, not even a Moon Pie, so don't worry about it.

Moon Pie Mar 21-April 20

You're the type that spends a lot of time on the front porch. It's a cinch to recognize the physical appearance of Moon Pies. Big and round are the key words here. You should marry anybody who you can get remotely interested in the idea. It's not going to be easy. This might be the year to think about aerobics. Maybe not.

Possam Apr 21 - May 21

When confronted with life's difficulties, possums have a marked tendency to withdraw and develop a don't-bother-me-about-it-attitude. Sometimes you become so withdrawn, people actually think you're dead. This strategy is probably not psychologically healthy, but seems to work for you. One day, however, it won't work and you may find your problems actually running you over. No room in your life for Moon Pies.

Crawfish May 22 - June 21

Crawfish is a water sign. If you work in an office, you're always hanging around the water cooler. Crawfish prefer the beach to the mountains, the pool to the golf course, the bathtub to the living room. You tend to be not particularly attractive physically, but you have very very good heads. Keep a distance from Moon Pies.

Collards June 22-July 23

Collards have a genius for communication. They love to get in the "melting pot" of life and share their essence with the essence of those around them. Collards make good social workers, psychologists, and baseball managers. As far as your personal life goes, if you are Collards, stay away from Moon Pies. It just won't work. Save yourself a lot of heartache.

Catfish July 24 - Aug 23

Catfish are traditionalists in matters of the heart, although one: Whiskers, may cause problems for loved ones. You catfish are never easy people to understand. You prefer the muddy bottoms to the clear surface of life. Above all else, Catfish should stay away from Moon Pies.

Grits Aug 24 - Sept 23

Your highest aim is to be with others like yourself. You like to huddle together with a big crowd of other Grits. You love to travel, though so maybe you should think about joining a club. Where do you like to go? Anywhere they have cheese or gravy or bacon or butter or eggs. If you can go somewhere where they have all these things, that serves you well.

Boiled Peanuts Sept 24 - Oct 23

You have a passionate desire to help your fellow man. Unfortunately, those who know you best — your friends and loved ones—may find that your personality is much too salty, and their criticism will probably affect you deeply because you are really much softer than you appear. You should go right ahead and marry anybody you want to because in a certain way, yours is a charmed life. On the road of life, you can be sure that people will always pull over and stop for you. Except Moon Pies, they'll run you over.

Butter Bean October 24 - Nov 22

Always invite a Butter Bean because Butter Beans get along well with everybody. You, as a Butter Bean, should be proud. You've grown on the vine of life and you feel at home no matter what the setting. You can sit next to anybody. However, you too, shouldn't have anything to do with Moon Pies.

Armadillo Nov 23 - Dec 21

You have a tendency to develop a tough exterior, but you are actually quite gentle. A good evening for you? Old friends, a fire, some roots, fruit, worms and insects. You are a throwback. You're not concerned with today's fashions and trends. You're not concerned with anything about today. You're really almost prehistoric in your interests and behavior patterns. You probably want to marry another Armadillo, but Possum is another somewhat kinky, mating possibility. Stay away from Moon Pies.

The Ten Commandments Southern Style. Simple and to the point.

1. Just one God.
2. Honor yer Ma & Pa.
3. No telling tales or gossipin.'
4. Git yourself to Sunday meeting.
5. Put nothin' before God.
6. No foolin' around with another fellow's gal.
7. No killin'.
8. Watch yer mouth.
9. Don't take what ain't yers.
10. Don't be hankerin' for yer buddy's stuff.

Southern Slang, or “Hickphonics”

The Atlanta School Board is designating Southern slang, or “Hickphonics,” as a language to be taught in all Southern schools. Here are excerpts from the Hickphonics/English dictionary:

HEIDI - noun. Greeting.

HIRE YEW - Complete sentence. Remainder of greeting.

Usage: “Heidi. Hire yew.”

BARD - verb. Past tense of the infinitive “to borrow.”

Usage: “My brother bard my pickup truck.”

JAWJUH - noun. A state just north of Florida. Capital is Hot-lanta.

Usage: “My brother from Jawjuh bard my pickup truck.”

MUNTS - noun. A calendar division.

Usage: “My brother from Jawjuh bard my pickup truck, and I ain’t herd from him in munts.”

FAR - noun. A conflagration.

Usage: “If my brother from Jawjuh don’t change the all in my pickup truck, that things gonna catch far.”

BAHS - noun. A supervisor.

Usage: “If you don’t stop reading these Southern words and git back to work, your bahs is gonna far you!”

TIRE - noun. A tall monument.

Usage: “Lord willin’ and the creek don’t rise, I sure do hope to see that Eiffel Tire in Paris sometime.”

RETARD - Verb. To stop working.

Usage: “My grampaw retard at age 65.”

TARRED - adverb. Exhausted.

Usage: “I just flew in from Hot-lanta, and boy my arms are tarred.”

ARE - pronoun. Possessive case of we used as a predicate adjective.

RATS - noun. Entitled power or privilege.

Usage: “We Southerners are willin’ to fat for are rats.”

FARN - adjective. Not local.

Usage: “I cuddint unnerstand a wurd he sed ... must be from some farn country.”

DID - adjective. Not alive.

Usage: "He's did, Jim."

EAR - noun. A colorless, odorless gas (unless you are in LA).

Usage: "He cain't breathe ... give 'im some ear!"

BOB WAR - noun. A sharp, twisted cable.

Usage: "Boy, stay away from that bob war fence."

JEW HERE - Noun and verb contraction.

Usage: "Jew here that my brother from Jawjuh got a job with that bob war fence cump'ny?"

HAZE - a contraction.

Usage: "Is Bubba smart?" "Nah ... haze ignert."

SEED - verb, past tense.

GUMMIT - Noun. A bureaucratic institution.

Usage: "Them gummit boys shore are ignert."

Rules of the South

Don't order a steak at a Waffle House. They serve breakfast 24 hours a day. Let them cook something they know. And don't assume that Waffle House grits are any more typical of grits in the Righteous South than McDonald's represents your best California dinner.

Don't laugh at folk's names. Merleen, Bodie, Luther Ray, Bobby Sue, MaryBeth and Inez have been known to whip a man's ass for less than that.

Don't order a bottle of pop or a can of soda; this can lead to a beating. Down here it's called Coke, even if you want a Pepsi.

Southern women don't fancy to smart mouth Yankees. Just remember, they all have brothers and daddies. And when they call you a Yankee it's NOT a compliment.

Don't show allegiances to any other school in football other than an ACC or SEC team. All the others are a bunch of candy asses who play Wyoming every week.

Don't call us a bunch of hillbillies. Many of us are better educated than you and a whole lot nicer to boot. And more modest.

Yes, we know the humidity is high; just quit bitching, spend your money and go home.

No, the state symbol of North Carolina is not the orange and white highway barrel. This road construction is pissing us off too.

Don't go to the Cracker Barrel and order toast. If you do this everyone will know you're from Ohio. Just eat the biscuits like God meant for you to do.

Don't try to talk with a Southern accent if you don't have one. Nothing makes us madder than a Southern wannabe.

Don't be telling everybody how much better it was back home. If you don't like it here, get your sorry ass back home! {There's a popular bumper sticker in the Carolinas that reads 'We don't care how you did it up north.'}

We don't play lacrosse or none of them other sissy northern games, so don't be asking about no scores, cause we just don't care.

A Guide to Visiting or Moving to the South

If you are from the northern states and planning on visiting or moving to the South, there are a few things you should know that will help you adapt to the difference in lifestyles.

If you run your car into a ditch, don't panic. Four men in a four-wheel drive pickup truck with a tow chain will be along shortly. Don't try to help them, just stay out of their way. This is what they live for.

Don't be surprised to find movie rentals and bait in the same store. Don't buy food at this store.

Remember, "y'all" is singular, "all y'all" is plural, and "all y'all's" is plural possessive.

You may hear a Southerner say "Ought!" to a dog or child. This is short for "Ya'll ought not do that!" and is the equivalent of saying "No!"

Don't be worried at not understanding what people are saying. They can't understand you either.

The proper pronunciation you learned in school is no longer proper.

Be advised that "He needed kill'n" is a valid defense here.

If you hear a Southerner exclaim, "Hey, ya'll, watch this," stay out of the way. These are likely to be the last words he'll ever say.

If there is the prediction of the slightest chance of even the smallest accumulation of snow, your presence is required at the local grocery store. It doesn't matter whether you need anything or not. You just have to go there.

When you come upon a person driving 15 mph down the middle of the road, remember that most folks learn to drive on a John Deere, and that is the proper speed and position for that vehicle.

In the South, we have found that the best way to grow a lush green lawn is to pour gravel on it and call it a driveway.

If you do settle in the South and bear children, don't think we will accept them as Southerners. After all, if the cat had kittens in the oven, we wouldn't call 'em biscuits.

You might be po'white trash if . . .

You think "loading the dishwasher" means getting your wife drunk.
The Salvation Army declines your mattress.
You were shooting pool when any of your children were born.
Your school fight song was "Dueling Banjos."
Your wife has ever said, "Come move this transmission so I can take a bath."
You've ever given rat traps as gifts.
You clean your fingernails with a stick.
You've ever hit a deer with your car, deliberately.
Your mother has "ammo" on her Christmas list.
You keep a can of RAID on your kitchen table.
You've totaled every car you've ever owned.
There has ever been crime-scene tape on your bathroom door.
You ever got too drunk to fish.
You consider the fifth grade your senior year.
Directions to your house include, "Turn off the paved road."
The dog can't watch you eat without gagging.
Your lifetime goal is to own a fireworks stand.
You think the French Riviera is a foreign car.
You prefer car keys to Q-Tips.
You've ever financed a tattoo.
The gas pedal in your car is shaped like a bare foot.
You've ever bought a used hat.
You've ever been involved in a custody fight over a hunting dog.
You're considered an expert on worm beds.
You think a subdivision is part of a math problem.
Your stove is on the porch and your lawn chairs are in the kitchen.
"Bambi" made you hungry for rabbit.
You learned to drive in a monster truck.
You spit chewing tobacco in the plants.
Your wedding reception included a beer brunch.
You believe books are bad luck.
You believe all-star wrestling should be an Olympic competition.
You believe all-star wrestling.
You recycle motor oil by moving it from the car to the truck.
You think a "thesaurus" was a dinosaur.
You like to brag you learned to fire a shotgun before you could walk.
Rather than drinking the sacramental wine at church you "bring your own."

The Top FORTY Things You Will NEVER Hear a Southern Boy Say

40. Oh I just couldn't, she's only sixteen.
39. I'll take Shakespeare for 1000, Alex.
38. Duct tape won't fix that.
37. Honey, I think we should sell the pickup and buy a family sedan.
36. Come to think of it, I'll have a Heineken.
35. We don't keep firearms n this house.
34. Has anybody seen the sideburns trimmer?
33. You can't feed that to the dog.
32. I thought Graceland was tacky.
31. No kids in the back of the pickup, it's just not safe.
30. Wrestling's fake.
29. Honey, did you mail that donation to Greenpeace?
28. We're vegetarians.
27. Do you think my gut is too big?
26. I'll have grapefruit and grapes instead of biscuits and gravy.
25. Honey, we don't need another dog.
24. Who gives a damn who won the Civil War?
23. Give me the small bag of pork rinds.
22. Too many deer heads detract from the decor.
21. Spittin is such a nasty habit.
20. I just couldn't find a thing at Walmart today.
19. Trim the fat off that steak.
18. Cappuccino tastes better than espresso.
17. The tires on that truck are too big.
16. I'll have the arugula and radicchio salad.
15. I've got it all on the C: drive.
14. Unsweetened tea tastes better.
13. Would you like your fish poached or broiled?
12. My fiance, Bobbie Jo, is registered at Tiffany's.
11. I've got two cases of Zima for the Super Bowl.
10. Little Debbie snack cakes have too many fat grams.
9. Checkmate.
8. She's too young to be wearing a bikini.
7. Does the salad bar have bean sprouts?
6. Hey, here's an episode of "Hee Haw" that we haven't seen.
5. I don't have a favorite college team.
4. Be sure to bring my salad dressing on the side.
3. You All.
2. Those shorts ought to be a little longer, Darlin'.

And, Number ONE is:

1. Nope, no more for me. I'm drivin tonight