
The Simpsons

WORKSHEET A

First shown on television in 1989, the animated sitcom *The Simpsons* quickly became a huge success. The first series attracted an average of more than 13 million viewers per episode in the United States, and it wasn't long before it started gaining fans in many other countries. In its 18 year history it has won countless prizes, as well as being named best ever television series by *Time* magazine.

So what do people find so funny about the dysfunctional Simpson family and the other cartoon characters who inhabit the imaginary American town of Springfield? One possible answer is that the show doesn't just poke fun at American society and culture, but also at universal aspects of the human condition. It also balances 'low' and 'high' humour, for example by combining amusing visual jokes with clever references to social and political issues, music, science, television and history.

The show's principal characters are, of course, the members of the Simpson family. The father, Homer, is widely seen as one of the greatest comic characters in cartoon history. Although lazy, clumsy, inconsiderate and basically quite stupid, he still manages to be likeable, partly because in his own unusual way he is devoted to his wife and children. He works, rather inappropriately, as a safety inspector at the Springfield nuclear power station. His catchphrase, 'D'oh!', used on the many occasions when he makes a mistake, became so popular that in 2002 it entered the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is fortunate that his long-suffering wife, Marge, possesses a tolerant personality in addition to her eye-catching blue hair.

The eldest of Homer and Marge's three children is Bart, a mischievous ten year old boy who doesn't make much effort with his schoolwork. In the 1990s, around the time he appeared on a popular T-shirt with the declaration, 'Underachiever and proud of it!', Bart attracted controversy in the United States because some politicians saw him as a bad example to the nation's children.

The second child is Lisa, a Buddhist and vegetarian who knows more about world affairs than the rest of the family even though she is only eight years old, and the youngest child is Maggie, a dummy-sucking toddler.

The supporting characters include the sinister Mr Burns, who is Homer's boss at the power station, and the family's lovable but untrained dog, Santa's Little Helper. In 2007 *The Simpsons* celebrated its 400th episode and the release of a successful film. With the flow of fresh ideas maintained by a team of 16 writers, there's no sign of the show disappearing in the near future. Its original creator, the 53 year old writer and cartoonist Matt Groening, said in late 2006 that 'right now, the show is ... as good or better than it's ever been ... the stories do things that we haven't done before, so creatively there's no reason to quit.'

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WORKSHEET B

Part A

Here are some simple definitions for words or expressions that appear in the text on Worksheet A. Can you find the words or expressions they refer to?

1. _____ - _____ (adjective) particularly noticeable
2. _____ (noun) someone who doesn't achieve as much as he/she could
3. _____ (noun) someone who creates cartoons
4. _____ (adjective) very many; too many to be counted
5. _____ (noun) a rubber or plastic object given to a baby or young child to suck in order to comfort it and make it stop crying
6. _____ (adjective) able to put up with unpleasant or annoying situations
7. _____ (verb) to live in (a place)
8. _____ (adjective) describes someone who often has accidents because he/she does not behave in a careful, controlled way
9. _____ (adjective) clearly new and different
10. _____ (verb) to stop, give up
11. _____ _____ (noun) a kind of factory that produces electricity
12. _____ (noun) a young child, especially one who is learning or has recently learnt to walk
13. _____ (adjective) main, most important
14. _____ (adjective) threatening to do harm or to do something evil
15. _____ (adjective) not real; just part of someone's imagination

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WORKSHEET C

Part B

Decide whether or not the following statements have been written in correct English. Then bet a minimum of 10 points up to a maximum of 50 on your choice.

		Yes/No	Points bet	Points lost	Points won
1	The Simpsons are a dysfunctional family.				
2	Maggie Simpson is still a toddler.				
3	The 400 th episode of <i>The Simpsons</i> was in May 2007.				
4	Homer Simpson is a very funny cartoon character.				
5	<i>The Simpsons</i> contains amusing visual jokes.				
6	'D'oh!' has become a famous catch-word.				
7	The show's writers maintain the flow of fresh ideas.				
8	The original creator of <i>The Simpsons</i> is the writer and cartoon Matt Groening.				
9	'I think <i>The Simpsons</i> is the funniest show in cartoon history.'				
10	'Since last year I saw countless episodes of <i>The Simpsons</i> .'				
11	In the United States <i>The Simpsons</i> is still attracting an average of more than nine million views per episode.				
12	The show pokes the fun to a lot of different subjects.				
13	Bart Simpson doesn't do very much effort at school.				
14	Homer's long-suffering wife is called Marge.				
15	<i>The Simpsons</i> contains clever referrals to social and political issues.				
				Total points lost and won	
				Final total (subtract total points lost from total points won)	

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WORKSHEET D

Part C

THE WORDS OF HOMER SIMPSON

Below are eight quotes from perhaps the most famous character in *The Simpsons*. Can you work out what the missing words are?

1. (When meeting space aliens)

'Please don't eat me! I have a wife and kids! E _ _ _ h _ m!'

2. 'Just because I don't ca _ _ doesn't mean I don't un _ _ _ _ _ _ _ d.'

3. 'Bart, with \$10,000 we'd be mill _ _ _ _ _ res! We could buy all kinds of us _ f _ l things, like ... l _ _ e!'

4. 'Well, it's 1 a.m. I'd better go _ _ m _ and spend some quality time with the k _ _ _.'

5. "'To Start Press Any Key". W _ e _ _ _ _ _ e ANY key?'

6. 'If something's h _ _ _ to do, then it's not w _ _ _ h doing.'

7. 'How is education supposed to make me feel smarter? Every time I learn something new, it pushes some _ _ d st _ _ f out of my brain.'

8. 'E _ _ _ _ _ h? Who n _ _ _ _ that? I'm never going to England!'

9. 'Kids, you tried your b _ _ _ and you f _ _ _ _ _ miserably. The lesson is, never try.'

10. 'I'm not im _ _ _ _ _ d easily. Wow! A blue car!'