

Supercomics—Study Guide

- 1) Most stories begin with a precipitating incident—that is, something that sets the action in motion. What is the precipitating incident in *Supercomics*? How early in the play does it happen? What is the purpose of the dialogue and action that happens before the precipitating incident?
- 2) *Supercomics* takes its humor from many different types of classic comedy. Can you find examples of the following in the script: childhood riddles, physical comedy, vaudeville, stand-up comedy, joke telling, knock-knock jokes. Can you think of any type of classic comedy that does not appear in the play? What other types of classic comedy do you recognize in *Supercomics*? Are there jokes in the play that you have told before? How does presenting familiar jokes in a new way make them funny again (or does it)?
- 3) Much comedy, from simple jokes to complex situational humor, depends on having a “straight man,” that is, someone who is not immediately in on the joke. In a way, the straight man is the representative of the audience. Who is the straight man in *Supercomics*? How can you tell? What does he/she do to help the audience understand what is going on?
- 4) The antics of Curly and Mo are based on the physical comedy of a group called The Three Stooges. Watch a video of one of the classic routines of The Three Stooges. Do you think they are funny? Why or why not? Would you describe their humor as sophisticated or unsophisticated? Why?
- 5) Vaudeville bemoans the downfall of vaudeville. What was vaudeville? Why do you think it was so successful in its day? Why did it become less popular? Can you think of anything on television today that contains elements of vaudeville? How do you think you would react to an old-time vaudeville show?
- 6) A malapropism is when someone uses the wrong word, but often a word that sounds like the right word. Often foolish characters use malapropism to humorous effect. Can you find a character in *Supercomics* who is guilty of frequent malapropism? Do you find his/her malapropism funny? Can you find examples of malapropism in other plays? How long do you think this comic device has been around? Have you or someone you know ever been guilty of a malapropism?
- 7) Groaner is famous for writing headlines that include bad puns. Can you find such a headline in a real newspaper? Try rewriting the headlines of today’s paper in the style of Groaner.
- 8) After the comics lose their senses of humor on p. 16, they perform jokes that, on the surface, are not funny. Do you think the audience of *Supercomics* will laugh at these jokes? Why or why not? How might your favorite joke go if you told it in the same style of “anti-humor”?

9) Why do you think the playwright has Vlad sell trenchcoats and existential philosophy books? How would the play (especially scenes like the one between Bernie and Bobbie on pp. 18–19) differ if Vlad sold sunglasses and comic books?

10) How does Drew's role in the play change after the residents of Comedyville lose their senses of humor?

11) According to Drew's definition on p. 21.10, almost everyone could be a superhero, since everyone is capable of doing something unusual. Based on what you are able to do, what would your "superpower" be in Comedyville? What would your superhero name be? Where would your secret lair be?

12) *Supercomics* combines elements of classic comedy with elements of superhero comic books. How does the playwright combine these two elements? Why is it appropriate to combine them? What "rules" of superhero comics are adopted in *Supercomics*? How are those rules changed or adapted to fit the world of this play? Does anyone in *Supercomics* actually have superpowers?

13) Comedyville is a town whose whole economy depends on comedy. Many towns are centered on a single industry such as farming or manufacturing. Can you write a paragraph, story, or skit about a single industry town in which the industry is philosophy? Music? Math? Sports? Dancing?

14) Vaudeville is searching for a missing slapstick during much of the play. What is a slapstick? What is the style of comedy called slapstick comedy? Do you think there are examples of slapstick comedy in *Supercomics*? Where? Can you find examples of slapstick comedy in current movies or television?

15) Who do you think deserves the credit for saving Comedyville? Why? What punishment do you think would be appropriate for Vlad the Exhaler? For Solemn? For Gobsnacker?

16) A running gag is a joke that is used over and over again and becomes funny because of this repetition. The audience comes to anticipate a running gag with pleasure. Can you find examples of running gags in *Supercomics*?

17) What lesson can be learned from the way the problems of Comedyville are eventually solved? Do you think *Supercomics* is mostly a play about learning lessons or is it just a fun comic romp? Or is it some of each? Why? How does the final line of the play sum up the message of *Supercomics*?