



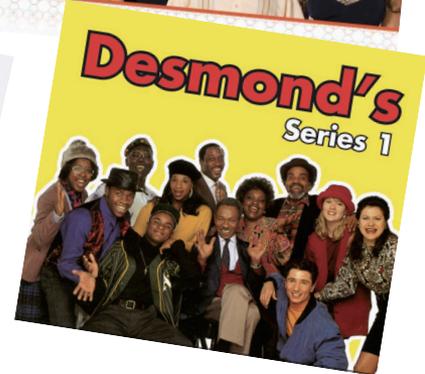
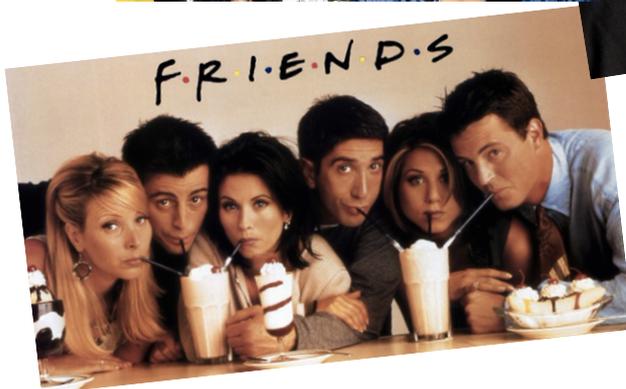
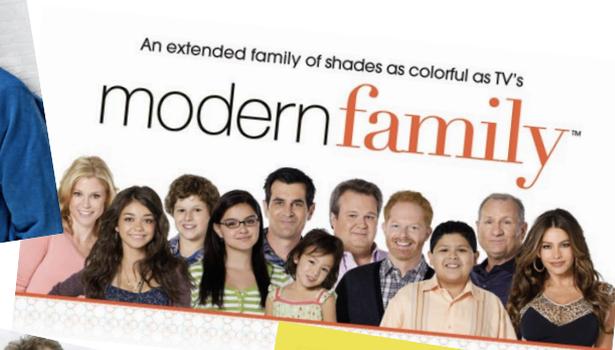
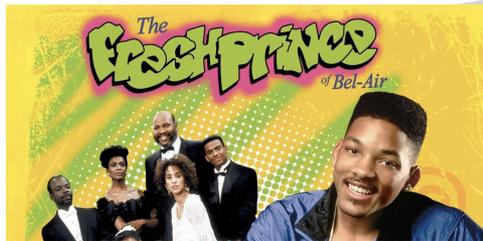
BLACK STAR EDUCATION

Black Representation on British Television: The 1990s

Comedy and the Changing Landscape

Make 'em laugh!

- What makes something funny?



Make 'em laugh!

In pairs, write a brief synopsis for 'the perfect TV sitcom'. Draw a quick sketch of some promotional material for this sitcom, making sure you use the codes and conventions for this type of material.

You can use the following pages from BFI Screenonline for background research:

- The British sense of humour:
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tours/humour/tourBritHumour1.html>
- Sitcom:
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/445368/>
- Race and the Sitcom:
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1108234/index.html>

Theory: Stuart Hall (on Sitcoms in the 1970s/80s)

“The same old categories of racially-defined characteristics and qualities... provide the pivots on which the jokes actually turn, the tension-points which move and motivate the situations in situation comedies. The comic register in which they are set, however, protects and defends viewers from acknowledging their incipient racism. It creates disavowal.”

- How far do you agree with this statement?

Use this statement to help inform your work in the next activity.

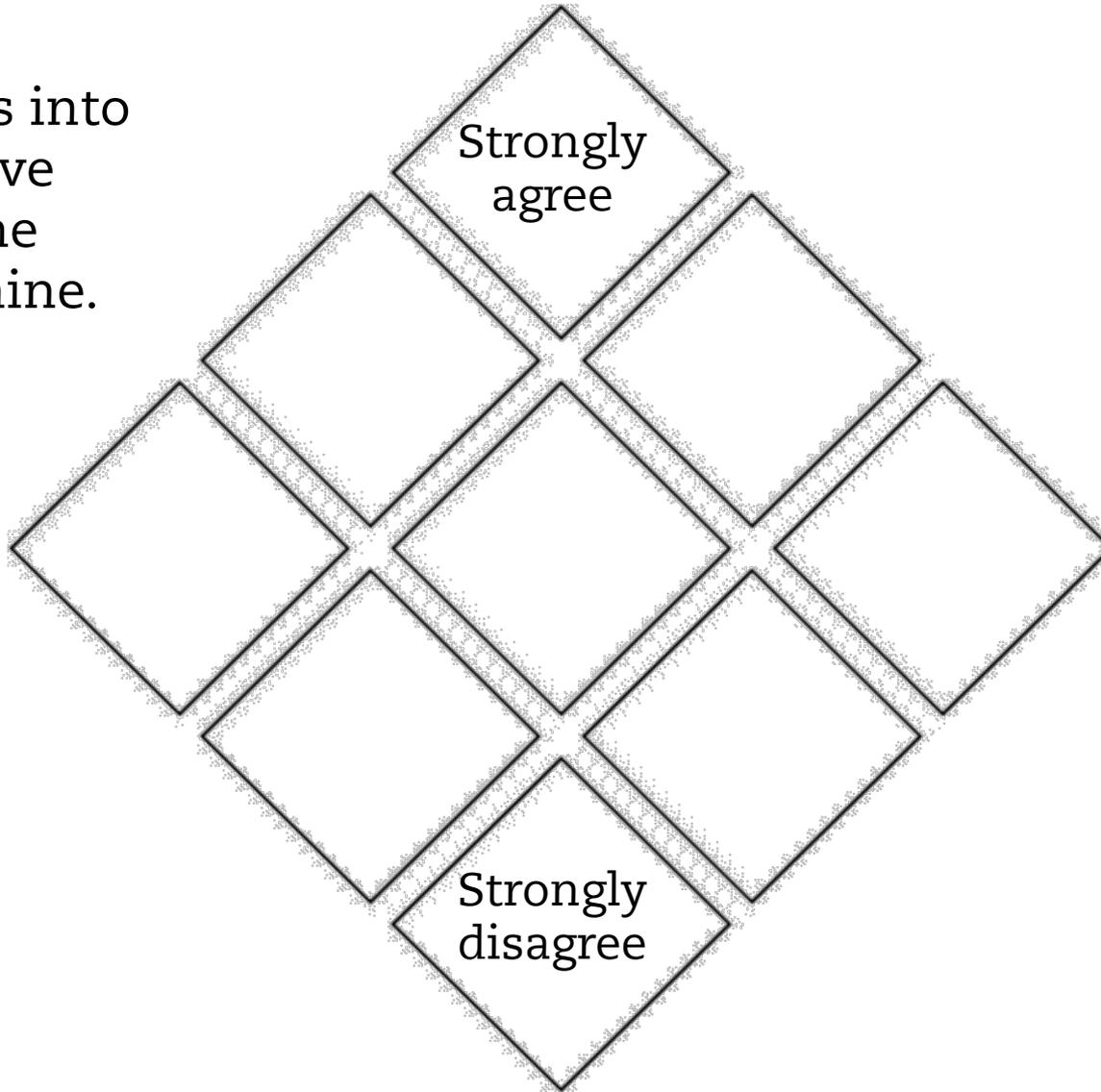
Diamond Nine

Put the following statements into a 'diamond nine' (see next slide)

1. Comedy enables 'covert racism'.
2. Racial comedy can be a form of community resistance.
3. Race is central to our understanding and appreciation of humour.
4. Sitcoms can be subversive.
5. Racial comedy can only be used successfully by members of the racial group which it is aimed at.
6. Stereotypes can be used positively.
7. Representation of minority groups on television are never a true depiction of reality.
8. Television comedies no longer rely on 'the same old categories' of racial representation.
9. Comedy can be a powerful force for change.

Diamond Nine

Place the statements into their relative boxes in the diamond nine.



Global Humour...?

- Imagine the room has a giant atlas on the floor.
- Stand on the spot where you were born. On a post-it write down a joke or silly comment you've heard about people who come from here. Stick this post-it to your shirt.
- Now move to the spot where one or other of your parents were born. Repeat the exercise with this post-it.
- Now move to where your grandparents were born. Repeat the exercise once more.
- Look at the jokes you have stuck to yourself. How many of them rely on stereotypes? How many of them actually apply to you and/or your family?

Global humour...?

- Look at where everyone else is standing.
- Choose one person and write a joke about the country they are standing on and add this to their own collection of post-its.
- Now look at any new post-its you have been given. How many of these rely on stereotypes? How many of these might be considered degrading? Are they more or less offensive because they are jokes? Are they more or less offensive because someone else wrote them?

Return to Theory: ‘It’s okay when we say it about ourselves’.

Stuart Hall:

“[It is said] that the best tellers of anti-Jewish jokes are Jews themselves, just as blacks tell the best ‘white’ jokes against themselves...They are unlikely to function by ‘putting down’ the race, because both teller and audience belong on equal terms to the same group. Telling jokes across the racial line... reinforces the difference and reproduces the unequal relations.”

- Do you agree with this statement?
- Why or why not?

Case Study: *Desmond's* (C4, 1987-94)

In 1987, Channel 4 started broadcasting the sitcom *Desmond's*.

While other sitcoms had focused on black communities, featuring predominately black casts, this show was innovative in that it focused on the workplace rather than the home and tried to move away from racial stereotypes.

Case Study: *Desmond's* (C4, 1987-94)

Use the following link to watch an episode of *Desmond's*:

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/desmonds>

Case Study: *Desmond's* (C4, 1987-94)

Using the episode you watched, and the following pages make detailed notes on this TV show:

- Desmond's:
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/490845/index.html>
- Race and the Sitcom:
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1108234/index.html>

Final Thoughts

“Comedy can never be inoffensive. Attack and hostility are built into its very structure and the skill in producing good, successful political comedy lies in finding the right targets”

(Medhurst in Daniels and Gerson, 1989: 21)

- How far do you agree with this statement?