

“The comedy in *The History Boys* centres around the opposition between the two teachers, Hector and Irwin.” What use does Bennett make of this opposition?

Bennett uses the two teachers', Hector and Irwin's, opposition in *The History Boys* as a catalyst for comedy. Their personality clash and contrasting teaching ideologies, are used to explore the impact teachers can have on their students.

The first time Hector is introduced by Bennett, he is shown being undressed out of his motorcycle leathers with “each boy removing an item”. Bennett uses physical comedy in this flamboyant entrance and already establishes Hector's control and power over the boys.

Furthermore, he is described as “a man of studied eccentricity” and seemingly embraces this due to his “bow tie”. However, Irwin is presented by Bennett as the polar opposite of Hector, a man of about “twenty-five or so”, compared to Hector “a schoolmaster of fifty or so”. This establishes a wide age gap for the audience, and from this alone, the audience could anticipate some sort of clash or confrontation between the two. This contrast is developed further through Irwin's abrupt and gruff replies to the headmaster; for example, his uncomplicated answer of “Oxford, Jesus”, showing how much the two differ. Bennett sets up the potential for comedic opposition for the audience.

When the two meet for the first time, a sense of conflict is created. Hector is displaying his enrichment philosophy of teaching, as well as his eccentricity, by agreeing to the boys' suggestions of acting out a brothel scene in French class (“A brothel.” “Très bien”), something that is usually seen as highly inappropriate in a school setting. When Irwin is introduced into the scene with the Head, Hector seems to show off his knowledge by continuing to speak French to them, and even “holds up an admonitory finger” to the Head to assert his power. Though the Head's linguistic prowess is somewhat lacking, “est sans ses...trousers?”, Irwin remarks “il est commotionné, peut-être?” which is met by an awkward reaction as no one understands, resulting in Irwin having to explain himself, thus