**Leading Idea: The experience of laughter**

We take laughter for granted – it is a part of everyday life. But some philosophers consider laughter to be one of the characteristics that distinguishes human beings from other animals. Are we the only species that laughs? Apes, like humans, seem to capable of laugh when they are being tickled – this kind of laughter is a physical response to pleasure. But it seems that humans are capable of other kinds of laughter as well. Might it be that humans are the only kind of animal that laughs in response to *ideas*? Emmanuel Kant thought that laughter was the result of recognizing the gap between what we expect and what actually takes place (like jokes, where the joke sets up one expectation, but the punchline provides a different ending) – this kind of laughter is a response to cognitive stimulus, rather than a physical stimulus. A child seeing a snail ceom out of its shell the first time might also reflect this kind oflaugher

**Several discussion plans and exercises explore the nature of laughter:**

(i) “The Act of Laughter” looks at *how* we laugh (where it happens in our body, the control we have over it, inward and outward laughter).

(ii) “Identifying Forms of Laugher” looks at *different types of laughter*, the *emotions* associated with different kinds of laughter, and how different kinds of laughter are caused (insecurity, joy, embarrassment, surprise, anticipation, etc).

(iii) “The Effects of Laughter” looks at questions of control - what effect does laughter have on us? How much control do we have over it? To what extent might laughter have power over us, and in when do we have power over it?

(iv) “Different Kinds of Laughter” – uses images to explore different ways we laugh. It can be used along with any of the discussion plans/exercises.

As you discuss laughter, you might like to think about and discuss some of the quotes on laughter from famous people. These quotes look t the social role laughter has in