Introduction
You can listen to a recording of this article at:
http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/magazine-articles/funniest-jokes-world

This support pack contains the following materials:
- the article that you can listen to;
- a comprehension activity based on the article

Read the article

The Funniest Jokes in the World
by Chris Rose

Recently, a group of scientists and psychologists decided to try and find out what the funniest joke in the world was. This was obviously going to be a difficult task, as no two people ever really agree about what is funny and what is not – especially when they are from different countries.

In some ways, this is strange. Telling jokes, along with telling stories (which is a similar activity), is one of the most frequent and widespread activities around the world. All countries, all cultures, all languages have their jokes. Unlike telling stories, however, jokes are sometimes not funny or often completely incomprehensible to people who are not part of that culture.

Some things do remain the same – many jokes from around the world like to make fun of people who are stupid, or sometimes people in authority. A lot of jokes are about taboo subjects – jokes can be a way of talking about things that in normal “polite” society we are not allowed to mention. The problem is, of course, that people in authority or taboo subjects, for example, change from country to country and from culture to culture.

Anyhow, after a year-long serious academic survey, here is the joke which the experts decided was the funniest joke in the world:

Two hunters are out in the woods. One of them falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing, his eyes are closed. The other hunter takes out his mobile phone and calls emergency services. “My friend is dead!” he cries to the operator, “What can I do?” The operator, in a calm voice says: “Don’t worry. I can help. First, make sure he’s dead.” There is a silence, then a shot is heard. Bang! The hunter’s voice comes back on the line. He says: “OK, now what?”

Hmmmm. I don’t know about you, but I think this is perhaps mildly amusing rather than side-splitting. Culturally, it depends on us knowing that often hunters are not considered to be very intelligent people, and that often they are quite violent. But perhaps this is not so all over the world. It’s also quite a “black” joke – a joke about something which isn’t really a funny subject. The experts also found the second funniest joke in the world. Here it is:

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson go on a camping trip. After a good dinner and a bottle of wine, they retire for the night, and go to sleep.

Some hours later, Holmes wakes up and asks his faithful friend, “Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”

“Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”

“I see millions and millions of stars, Holmes” replies Watson.

“Don’t worry. I can help. First, make sure he’s dead.” There is a silence, then a
Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically, I can see that God is all powerful, and that we are a small and insignificant part of the universe. What does it tell you, Holmes?" Holmes is silent for a moment. "Watson, you idiot!" he says. "Someone has stolen our tent!"

I personally think this is better – perhaps still not exactly a side-splitter, but certainly a rib-tickler.

After reading
Decide which is the best answer to each of the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a. black joke</th>
<th>b. incomprehensible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>make fun of</td>
<td>d. mildly amusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>rib-tickler</td>
<td>f. side-splitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>survey</td>
<td>h. taboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>unexpected</td>
<td>j. widespread</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Telling jokes is something that people do all over the world. It is a very [...........] activity.
2. Some jokes are [...........], very difficult to understand for people outside of a specific culture.
3. Many jokes make people look stupid, they [...........] people from a certain group.
4. Some jokes are about subjects which we don’t often speak of, [...........] subjects.
5. The scientists asked many people from around the world about jokes and recorded their responses. These are the results of that [...........].
6. A joke that is quite funny is [...........].
7. A joke that is very funny indeed is [...........].
8. A joke about a subject which isn’t usually funny is called a [...........].
9. A joke which makes you laugh a bit is a [...........].
10. Many jokes have [...........] endings.

Answers:
1. j; 2. b; 3. c; 4. h; 5. g; 6. d; 7. f; 8. a; 9. e; 10. i