



## A Confederacy of Dunces (B2 Upper Intermediate)

### A – Before you start

Answer the questions with a partner.

1. Do you like novels or films that make you laugh? Why (not)?
2. Can you name any that have made you laugh recently?
3. Some novels and films are described as “cult classics”. What do you think this means?
4. Which works in your own language would you describe as “cult classics”?

### B – Listen and answer

Read these incomplete statements. Then listen (without reading) and fill in the blanks.

1. John Kennedy Toole was born in the state of \_\_\_\_\_, USA.
2. He wrote his novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* in the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. It was finally published in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The title comes from a quote of \_\_\_\_\_ century Irish writer, Jonathan Swift.
5. The novel is about Ignatius J. Reilly, an \_\_\_\_\_ medieval scholar and misfit.
6. Ignatius lives with \_\_\_\_\_.
7. He spends his time \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and writing letters to his girlfriend.
8. He gets a job at a \_\_\_\_\_ and loses it
9. His second job is \_\_\_\_\_ and he loses that, too.
10. His mother thinks he should go into a \_\_\_\_\_.

### C – Read and answer

Read the article and answer the questions.

1. What is the tragic story behind John Kennedy Toole’s novel?
2. Who managed to get the novel published? How?
3. What happened in 1981?
4. How does the article describe Ignatius J. Reilly’s appearance?
5. What does Ignatius do to help his mother with the housework?
6. Why does his mother decide he needs to get a job?
7. Why does Ignatius think no employers would give him a job?
8. How does he justify losing his first job?
9. Why does he lose his second job?
10. What qualities have made *A Confederacy of Dunces* become an international cult classic?

### D – Learn it! Use it!

Complete these sentences with words from the glossary. (You may have to adapt the expression in some way; e.g. change the verb tense, or change from plural to singular.)

1. You'd better wear a jacket and trousers to the interview. Jeans and a sweater are \_\_\_\_\_.
2. J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, was a \_\_\_\_\_ of English Literature.
3. I can't stand Mara's new boyfriend. He's really \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Last night's storm was quite severe but luckily it didn't do much \_\_\_\_\_ in this area.
5. Our neighbours' children are thoroughly \_\_\_\_\_. Their parents let them do whatever they like.
6. Yesterday Joe \_\_\_\_\_ our maths teacher so much that she gave us all extra homework!

### E – Ready for the B2 FIRST Certificate in English? (Reading and Use of English, Part 1)

Read the text and decide which word in brackets best fits each gap.

1. Peter and his brother Ivan are undergoing grief because they have lost The plot of *A Confederacy of Dunces* focuses <sup>1</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (at/on/to/with) Ignatius J. Reilly's adventures all over the city of New Orleans, and the eccentric and <sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (shining/bright/coloured/colourful) characters he comes into contact with. One could say that the city, <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (as/like/so/what) it was in the early 1960s, is also one of the story's main protagonists. Many local writers and critics consider the novel to be the best <sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (depiction/picture/drawing/aspect) of New Orleans to <sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (find/found/be found/have found) in a work of fiction. Its authenticity is enhanced by the accurate use of New Orleans dialects in the dialogues. Many of the characters, including Ignatius J. Reilly himself, are based on real people that the author had come <sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (over/from/to/across), and the events of the story are set against <sup>7</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (unreal/realistic/actual/effective) locations, like the Prytania Theater and the D. H. Holmes store. <sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (From/Since/Of/In) 1996, a statue of Ignatius has stood in Canal Street, at the former site of the D. H. Holmes store where, in the opening scene of the story, Ignatius was waiting under the clock for his mother.

### F – Write about it

Write about a cult classic written in your own language. Mention:

- who wrote it;
- when it was written;
- where/when it's set;
- what it's about;
- how it was received when it first came out;
- whether it has won any prizes;
- why it's considered a cult classic.

## Answers: A Confederacy of Dunces (B2)

### B – Listen and answer

1. Louisiana
2. early 1960s
3. 1980
4. 18th
5. eccentric
6. his mother
7. eating, drinking, thinking
8. clothing factory
9. selling hotdogs
10. psychiatric hospital

### C – Read and answer

1. When Toole was unable to find a publisher for his novel, his mental health declined and he took his own life.
2. His mother managed to get the novel published by continuing to approach writers and publishers with the manuscript.
3. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.
4. It says he's overweight and oddly-dressed.
5. He dusts a bit and makes an occasional cheese dip.
6. Because after crashing her car she faces a claim for damages.
7. Because he thinks they would sense in him a denial of their values, so they would fear him.
8. He says his excellence confused his employers.
9. Because he eats vast numbers of the hotdogs he's employed to sell.
10. It's clever and amusing and was way ahead of its time, so it still resonates with readers today.

### D – Learn it! Use it!

1. unsuitable
2. scholar
3. obnoxious
4. damage
5. spoilt
6. riled

### E – Ready for the B2 FIRST Certificate in English?

1. on
2. colourful
3. as
4. depiction
5. be found
6. across
7. actual
8. Since