



The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

TEACHER INSTITUTE

Political Cartoons Teacher's Guide

What is in this packet?

This packet is designed to give you, the teacher, the materials you need to utilize political cartoons in your classroom. Political cartoons are appropriate for any grade level, although they are especially useful as instructional aids in grades 7–12. The included PowerPoint and Notes are intended to be students' first formal introduction to political cartoons and should be presented to students before they begin to analyze political cartoons in earnest.

Materials

- Political Cartoons: A User's Guide
 - Introduction to political cartoons
 - How to use political cartoons in your classroom
 - Political Cartoons presentation teacher notes
 - Elements of Political Cartoons Summary Chart
 - Cartoon Analysis Exercise: Franklin Delano Roosevelt
 - Cartoon Analysis Form
 - Sources for Additional Cartoons
 - Image Citations
- Political Cartoons presentation (separate PDF)

Why teach political cartoons?

Political cartoons are a valuable classroom tool because they teach critical thinking skills as well as content. By studying political cartoons, students learn the techniques of visual analysis they can use with a variety of other images, from paintings to photographs to advertisements. They also become familiar with language arts concepts such as symbolism and exaggeration. Understanding the historical context of the cartoons requires the synthesis of information and an understanding of the issues of the past. Additionally, students must make inferences and assess issues from a variety of perspectives.

Political cartoons are often humorous, which means they are also fun! Students are often more engaged and interested in primary sources when they are visual. Not only are the images often appealing, but political cartoons engage both visual and verbal learners because they frequently have both imagery and text. And since political cartoons are still commonly used

today, students can relate to them. Cartoons of this type can even foster an interest in modern politics. Whether covering a modern or a historical issue, political cartoons are a great way to help students visualize and remember important events and controversies.

How can I integrate political cartoons in my classroom?

Students will need at least one class period of teacher-led instruction to become familiar with the process of cartoon analysis. Don't assume that students have been taught visual analysis skills in another class. Go through examples together so students can see the process correctly modeled. Once the basics have been established, students can be given additional cartoons to analyze independently.

Cartoons should be used throughout the school year along with other primary sources. Because political cartoons generally require some background knowledge of the topic, they are best used at the end of a lesson or unit. However, more advanced students can be given political cartoons at the beginning of a section as an anticipatory set. You can also:

- Hold a class discussion about a political cartoon at the end of a lesson to judge class comprehension of the subject matter.
- Have students analyze political cartoons in groups and share their findings.
- Ask students to write compare-contrast essays on two cartoons on the same topic (these cartoons can be either supporting or opposing each other).
- Encourage students to use political cartoons as evidence in historical essays.
- Use the Cartoon Analysis Form as a homework assignment, group project, or individual analysis tool.
- Invite students to draw their own political cartoons as a project or for extra credit.

Tips and Tricks:

- Do take the time to discuss the cartoons, either throughout student analysis or afterwards. Do not tell students to analyze a cartoon by themselves without guidance or conducting a summarizing discussion afterwards.
- Do make sure to explain the elements of cartoons thoroughly and do an example with the class. Some cartoons can be difficult to decipher, and students will need help initially making sense of this complex medium.
- Do judge content and difficulty of cartoons before giving them to your class.
- Do provide high-quality images to students and project the image as large as you can. There are many small details in political cartoons and students will be aided by clear copies.
- Do draw students' attention to specific details! Use your interactive whiteboard to zoom in on areas of the cartoon, or crop images and zoom in on a computer to show smaller elements. Alternately, hold a piece of paper midway between the projector and the screen to capture a small piece of the cartoon on the paper.

- Do encourage students to look at cartoons a section at a time. It may help students to cover the cartoon with a piece of paper and then reveal it an inch at a time.
- Do provide cartoons from both sides of the issue when possible, especially when dealing with current events.

Checklist for Cartoon Analysis:

- ☐ WHO: Who is the cartoon depicting?
- ☐ WHEN: Which time period does this cartoon depict? What else was happening during this time period?
- ☐ WHERE: Where are the events in the cartoon taking place? Where was the cartoon published?
- ☐ WHAT: What elements of cartoons are present?
- ☐ WHY: Why did the cartoonist draw this image? Who is he trying to convince? What is he trying to say about the topic?

These questions can be answered using the Cartoon Analysis Form.

Teacher Notes
Political Cartoon Presentation

Slide 2: Introducing the Concept

- Students are familiar with cartoons, but generally think of them as a form of comic art meant to entertain.
- Political cartoons (also called “editorial cartoons”) express opinions about very specific news events in the real world.
- An editorial cartoon focuses on a specific public issue, personality, event, or trend in the real world and makes a statement about that issue or event. The statement is usually intended to be controversial.
- Usually appearing in newspapers and magazines, political cartoons have been used for centuries and remain in use today.

Slide 3: Symbolism

- Symbolism is the use of a sign or object in a work of art to stand for something other than itself.
- A symbol’s effectiveness depends on the presumption that its meaning can be understood by its audience.
- The use and treatment of such symbols in a cartoon suggests how the cartoonist, and perhaps the public as well, viewed the object being symbolized.
- Symbols call attention to several aspects of an issue, problem, event, or public figure.

Slide 4: Exaggeration and distortion

- Editorial cartoons do not try to present a literal picture of reality. They combine visual elements and words in many odd ways.
- Cartoonists frequently exaggerate or understate the relative sizes of the objects they draw, often to stress the power of weakness, the importance or the insignificance, the dangerousness or helplessness of some person, group, or social force.
- Distorting shapes of objects can also be a way to call attention to different aspects of the idea or issue being represented.

Slide 5: Caricatures

- Caricatures help us identify news figures quickly. A caricature is generally an exaggeration or distortion of one or more of a person’s prominent features.
- Since cartoons are designed to stir emotions and provoke debate, caricatures are often not very flattering. Consequently, the cartoonist will choose to emphasize those features which are the least flattering.
- The best caricatures distort features in a way that reveals something important about the individual being depicted. When utilized properly, they can raise important questions about public figures while providing insight into a particular subject or topic.

Slide 6: Stereotyping

- Stereotyping eliminates anything uniquely individual by exaggerating features associated with an entire group.
- Cartoonists often attempt to play on our own unconscious biases, but the results can be misleading or insulting. It's not always easy to tell whether a given stereotype is just a quick way to communicate or a demeaning slur.
- Care should be taken when using stereotypical symbols for they tend to elicit emotional responses. Stereotypes have the potential to reinforce harmful prejudices.

Slide 7: Humor

- Humor is a way of “taking the edge” off a serious subject and gives the reader an honorable way out.
- An editorial cartoon must respect its dissenters enough to avoid implying that they are fools for disagreeing.
- Each reader needs to be allowed to decide what the cartoon's implications are and what their own position is relative to the issue.

Slide 8: Irony

- Dramatic irony: The characters are unaware of something that the audience knows.
- Verbal irony: saying one thing and meaning another.
- Situational irony: The opposite happens of what you would expect.
- Not merely an unfortunate circumstance, like 1000 forks when you need a spoon.

Slide 9: Captions

- Words can be used in cartoons in many ways and work best when they reinforce the cartoon's non-verbal features.
- Words should only help the other parts of the cartoon to make one overall point. In that way, the reader usually must think about the cartoon and decide whether to agree with its main point.
- Famous sayings, slogans, song lyrics, and other well-known phrases can be used as captions.
- Keep in mind that captions should not detract from, or even make it unnecessary to look at, the visual elements in the cartoon.

Elements of Political Cartoons Summary Chart

Political / editorial cartoons are NOT just like other comics. They may be funny, but their main purpose is to offer an opinion or point of view about some issue or problem in the news.	
SYMBOLISM	A symbol is any object or design that stands for some other thing, person, or idea.
EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION	Changes in size or shape often add to the cartoon's point. Distorting an object means changing it in some way to make it look funny, ugly, etc.
STEREOTYPES	A stereotype is a simplistic view of some group. It is often insulting, but it can also help the cartoon make its point quickly.
CARICATURE	Caricature is a portrayal of an individual's features in an exaggerated or distorted way.
HUMOR AND IRONY	Humor is important in many editorial cartoons. Irony is one kind of humor. In an ironic statement, situation, or image, a viewpoint is expressed in such an odd way as to make that view seem ridiculous.
CAPTIONS	Words are used to reinforce the cartoon's nonverbal features. Words help the other parts of the cartoon make one overall point. Famous sayings, slogans, song lyrics, and well-known phrases can be used as captions.

Cartoon Analysis Exercise: Franklin Delano Roosevelt

This cartoon analysis exercise is meant to walk the class through the comparison of two basic political cartoons. Your class needs not have studied Franklin Delano Roosevelt or the 1930-40s to complete this exercise; the concepts used to analyze cartoons are the same regardless of content, and students can use the analysis skills practiced here on cartoons about any subject and from any era.

Directions:

Show each cartoon and provide the class with the necessary background (see the paragraphs below. You may need to adjust for grade level.) Then, analysis can be explored in a variety of ways:

- Divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss the analysis questions. Then have each group report their findings. Allow students to add to or question other groups' findings.
- Give students time to answer the analysis questions on their own and write down their responses. Then, lead a class discussion on the cartoon.
- Work through the questions with the class from beginning to end.

Cartoon 1: Looks as if the new leadership . . .

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) gained the presidency in 1933, the nation was in the clutches of the Great Depression. In his first inaugural address, delivered days before this cartoon was published, Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." In the first hundred days of his administration, FDR launched the New Deal with a series of aggressive measures and unprecedented legislation designed to turn the Great Depression economy around. Some of the first programs of the New Deal included public works projects and reforms of the financial industry.

Cartoon 2: Step by Step

By the end of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term, the nation was slipping into a new recession and FDR's policies and actions were being carefully scrutinized and criticized. In 1937, Roosevelt presented controversial plans to reorganize the executive and the judiciary branches of government. Congress raised strong objections that the executive reorganization, presented as a way of making government more efficient, would upset the balance of power between the branches. Critics assailed the plan to reorganize the judiciary as "court-packing" because it proposed the addition of several justices to the Supreme Court. The court had ruled several pieces of New Deal legislation unconstitutional, so the proposal was widely perceived as an attempt to ensure favorable rulings.

CARTOON ANALYSIS FORM

1. Who drew the cartoon? _____
2. Where was it published? Title and date of the source. _____

3. List the key objects in the cartoon and describe what each represents:

Object	Symbolizes
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. What techniques or devices does the cartoonist use? (Ridicule, caricature, satire, puns, etc.) _____

5. What issue or event does the cartoon deal with? _____

6. Describe the action-taking place. _____

7. What is the cartoon's message? _____

8. Who is the intended audience? _____

9. What is the cartoonist's point-of-view? _____

10. Does the cartoon clearly convey the desired message? Why or why not? _____

11. What groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why? _____

Sources for Additional Historical Political Cartoons

The Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division: American Cartoon Prints

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/app/search/?q=political%20cartoons&co=app>

This collection from the LOC contains political cartoons, both domestic and international, from throughout American history. Many can be downloaded rights-free in high resolution.

NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.

National Archives and Records Administration: Clifford K. Berryman Political Cartoon Collection

<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/research/special-collections/berryman>

A collection of 2,400 original pen-and-ink drawings by Clifford K. Berryman that comment on Washington politics, congressional issues, presidential elections, and both World Wars. The collection also includes approximately 230 cartoons by Jim Berryman, Clifford's son.

NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

<https://emuseum.history.org/groups/prints/results>

The print collection at Colonial Williamsburg provides a window into the 18th-century world. Household inventories, political and decorative prints, newspaper advertisements, and other items representing a wide range of printed material enjoyed by colonial Americans.

NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.

The Library Company of Philadelphia

<https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3APOLCA>

The Library Company of Philadelphia political cartoons collection offers items dating from 1764 to 1905. *NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.*

British Cartoon Archive

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/library-it/special-collections/british-cartoon-archive>

The British Cartoon Archive (BCA) is dedicated to the history of British cartooning over the last two hundred years. *NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.*

Harper's Weekly Political Cartoons

<http://www.harpweek.com/>

Harper's Weekly was a popular news magazine published from 1857 to 1916. The political cartoons it contained, mostly by the artist Thomas Nast, affected elections and held sway over public opinion in the era. *NOTE: Period items may contain insensitive and inappropriate caricatures/stereotypes or negative/racially offensive depictions.*

Image Citations for Images Used in the Political Cartoons Presentation (Separate PDF)

Franklin, Benjamin. "Join or Die," 9 May 1754. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-9701 1754. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695523/>

"John Bull, the leviathan of the ocean; or, the French fleet sailing into the mouth of the Nile!" London: W. Holland, 12 December 1798. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC2-1857. <https://www.loc.gov/item/89712637/>

Baldwin, Marcus Wickliffe, Artist. "American Eagle," 1898. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-22588. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004661408/>

P.F.L.B. fecit. "John Bull fighting the French single handed," 1800–1815. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-10749. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006678160/>

"Lincoln & Douglas in a presidential footrace, No. 1, 1860." Buffalo, NY: J. Sage & Sons, 1860. LC-DIG-ppmsca-15777. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a17091/>

Graetz, Friedrich. "The anti-Chinese wall—The American wall goes up as the Chinese original goes down." Puck, v. 11, no. 264 (29 March 1882). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-4138. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3g04138/>

Gillray, James. "Political Ravishment, or the Old Lady of Threadneedle-Street in Danger!" 22 May 1797. New York Public Library Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-62a1-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

"The Political Cartoon, for the Year 1775," 1775, England. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. <https://emuseum.history.org/objects/16041/the-political-cartoon-for-the-year-1775>

"Out of fashion. In fashion," 1 Feb. 1772. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-85715. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002714563/>

Ray, S.J. "Looks as if the New Leadership was Really Going to Lead," *Kansas City Star*, 7 March 1933.

Warren, Billy. "Step by Step," *Buffalo News*, 11 February 1937.