

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12 (can be adapted for middle school)

Analyzing Political Cartoons

This lesson will give students experience in analyzing political cartoons, allowing them to hone their skills in "reading" visual images. Its purpose is to promote interest in political issues, encourage student creativity and foster critical thinking skills.

Modern American political cartoons have been around since the nineteenth century. The increase in newspaper and magazine circulation in the 1800's provided a rich environment for the rise and use of

political cartoons. Thomas Nast, A.J. Volck and Joseph Keppler penned many popular cartoons advocating social reform. The reason behind their popularity is apparent. People with minimal reading abilities could understand and relate to a format that communicated powerful ideas in a humorous, enlightened manner. Through the use of analogy, irony, symbolism, and exaggeration the cartoonist expresses the themes and problems of their historical era.

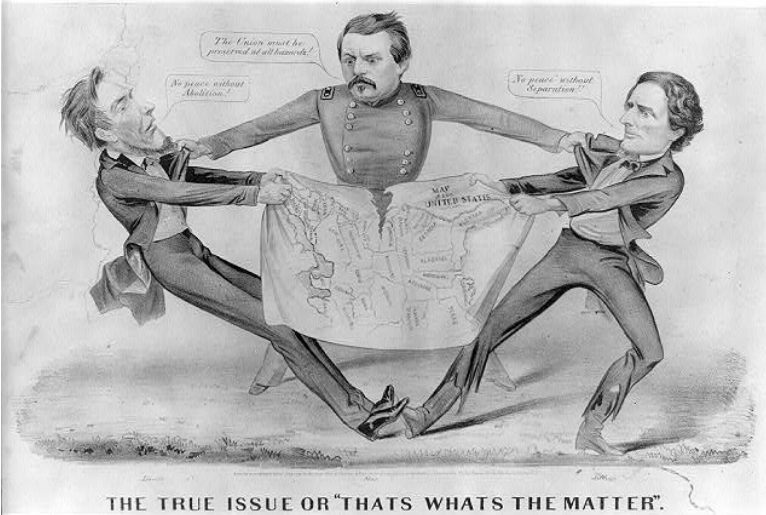
Political cartoons express opinions about public issues and public individuals. They appeal to all levels of readers. Often the full meaning of the cartoon is too subtle to grasp by the casual or uninformed reader. To fully understand a cartoon, the reader must have an understanding of the basic techniques used by the cartoonists as well as a knowledge of history and current events. Armed with this background, the reader must apply critical thinking skills to decipher and interpret the cartoonist's meaning and point of view.

Activities which utilize political cartoons in the classroom help to hone these critical thinking skills. Involving the student in the process of cartoon analysis can lead to further historical research in order to better understand the circumstances which led to the original drawing of each cartoon.

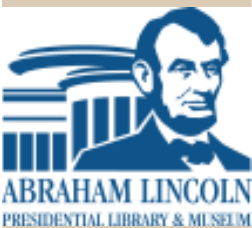
Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson students will:

- Identify five elements of a political cartoon (symbol, exaggeration, irony, labeling, and analogy).
- Identify the methods and techniques used by the cartoonist to convey a message.
- Draw on higher level thinking skills to interpret the elements of a political cartoon and to understand the cartoonist's point of view.
- Express their interpretation of the cartoon with their classmates and support their conclusions with evidence gleaned from the cartoon.
- Create their own political cartoon using the elements described above, as well as other artistic techniques that convey meaning.
- Reflect in writing on the power of images to convey meaning, ideas and points of view.



www.alplm.org



Department of Education
212 North Sixth Street
Springfield, IL 62701



The Whispering Gallery of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum showcases political cartoons featuring Lincoln.

Learning Standards

This lesson address the following Illinois State Learning Standards.

English Language Arts

Illinois State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

- A. Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.
- B. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.
- C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

Illinois State Goal 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.

- A. Understand how literary elements and techniques are used to convey meaning.

Illinois State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

- A. Listen effectively in formal and informal situations.
- B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

Illinois State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

- A. Locate, organize and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.
- B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.
- C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

Social Science

Illinois State Goal 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

- D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.
- E. Understand the development of United States political ideas and traditions.

Illinois State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

- A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.
- B. Understand the development of significant political events.
- D. Understand Illinois, United States and world social history.

Illinois State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

- A. Compare characteristics of culture as reflected in language, literature, the arts, traditions and institutions
- B. Understand the roles and interactions of individuals and groups in society.
- C. Understand how social systems form and develop over time.

Fine Arts

Illinois State Goal 25: Know the language of the arts.

- A. Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive qualities of the arts.
- B. Understand the similarities, distinctions and connections in and among the arts.

Illinois State Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

- A. Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in the arts.
- B. Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.

Illinois State Goal 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

- A. Analyze how the arts function in history, society and everyday life.
- B. Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.

Materials:

- Political Cartoons
(see resources listed below)
- Computers and Internet Access
- Cartoon Analysis Worksheet
(found in this lesson plan)
- Paper, Scrap Paper, Tracing Paper, etc.
- Markers, Pens, Pencils, Chalk, Charcoal, etc.
- Political Cartoon Drawing Activity Sheet
(found in this lesson plan)
- Journals

Procedure:

Part I: Explore the Elements of Political Cartoons

1. Ask students to draw symbols with which they are familiar and challenge their classmates to identify their meaning (McDonald's Golden Arches, Nike logo, Olympic rings are some examples).

2. Discuss how pictures can convey messages and meanings. Can images be more powerful than words? Are words always necessary? Can lines express emotion or movement?

3. Introduce students to the elements of political cartoons. Show examples of each element to the class. The cartoons you use can be current or tied to a specific topic you are covering in class.

4. Invite students to complete the on-line exercise at http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/model.html

Cartoonists use five main elements to convey their point of view.

- **symbolism** - using an object to stand for an idea
- **captioning and labels** - used for clarity and emphasis
- **analogy** - a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics
- **irony** - the difference between the way things are and the way things should be or the way things are expected to be
- **exaggeration** - overstating or magnifying a problem or a physical feature or habit: big nose, bushy eyebrows, large ears, baldness

Examples of Symbols used in Political Cartoons

- **peace** - dove, olive branch, victory sign
- **United States** - Uncle Sam, flag, stars and stripes, shield, Columbia
- **Democrats** – donkey
- **Republicans** – elephant
- **death** - vulture, skeleton with shroud, skull and crossbones, grim reaper
- **love** - heart, Cupid, Venus
- **money** - dollar bill or dollar sign
- **heroes or good guys** - wear white
- **villains or bad guys** - wear black

Part II: Analysis of a Political Cartoon

1. Working in small groups, have students utilize the **Cartoon Analysis Worksheet** to analyze a political cartoon. Give a different cartoon to each group.
2. Have a student from each group present their analysis to the class. They should be able to support their position with evidence taken directly from the cartoon. The rest of the class should take notes on these presentations and be prepared to reflect upon the class discussion in their journals.

Tips for Students

- Experiment with your figures. Exaggerate, enlarge or stretch an image or part of the image to draw attention to it.
- Let your lines do the talking. Straight, severe lines can express anger while squiggly lines can be playful and curves are soft.
- Use tracing paper to make changes without drawing the whole picture again.
- Flip your drawing around to see if it works better from another angle.
- Crop your drawing for emphasis.
- Add shading to make an image funnier, more interesting, more foreboding or easier to see.
- Add details. Draw background to suggest context and a sense of place.
- Try different textured paper or colored pencils.
- Add a caption or dialogue to help convey your message. Decide if a bubble or square box suits your characters best for their dialogue.
- For your final cartoon, use a felt tip pen or pen and ink. Add color if you like.

Use these tips in creating your own cartoon.

Part III: Creating a Political Cartoon

1. Assign a specific topic or ask students to write down their feelings or what they want to make a statement about.
2. Have students sketch out a rough idea of their cartoon on sketch or scrap paper using the abovetips.
3. Using the **Political Cartoon Drawing Activity Sheet** have students create their own political cartoon incorporating some of the five key elements studied above.
4. Have students explain their drawing by answering the questions on the back of the Activity Sheet.
5. Have students present their cartoons for the class. Let the class analyze the cartoons using the **Cartoon Analysis Worksheet**.
6. Hang the cartoons around the classroom for the class to examine and enjoy.

Action

Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.

What facial expressions are portrayed in the cartoon? How does the cartoonist use lines to suggest that expression?

Do the lines of the cartoon suggest action or movement? How so?

Meaning

What political event or idea is the cartoon referring to?

What conclusions can you draw about the cartoonist's opinion?

Note how the visuals, action and words come together to make meaning in a political cartoon.

What specific details in the cartoon led you to this conclusion?

What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?

Whose opinion or point of view is not represented in this cartoon?

Do you like the cartoon? How is the cartoon effective in your opinion?

Political Cartoon Drawing Activity Sheet

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____



Caption: _____

Create your own cartoon, incorporating some of the five key elements: irony, exaggeration, analogy symbolism and labeling.

Symbols

Identify three symbols used in your cartoon and their meaning.

1.

2.

3.

Exaggeration

Identify and explain the areas where you used exaggeration to make a point.

*Have a classmate
analyze your cartoon
using the Cartoon
Analysis Worksheet.*

Irony

Is your cartoon ironic? How so?

Analogy

Explain how you used analogy in your cartoon?

Captions/Labeling

Did you use labels or captioning in your cartoon? Why or why not?

Part IV: Reflection

Use the questions below to prompt students to reflect in writing in their classroom journals.

1. Which cartoon examined in class do you think was most effective or persuasive and why?
2. Is humor an effective tool when addressing sensitive, divisive or volatile subjects?
3. Describe the steps you took in creating your own political cartoon. What process did you use to translate your intangible idea into a concrete drawing?
4. Why do you think political cartoons are so successful in reaching people on so many levels?
5. Did this exercise give you a greater appreciation for political cartoons? Why or why not?

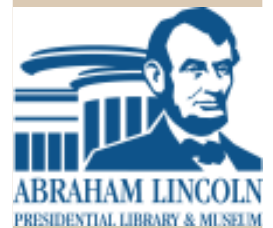
Resources:

[Association of American Editorial Cartoonists](#)

[Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoon Index](#)

[It's No Laughing Matter - Analyzing Political Cartoons](#)

[NARA: Digital Classroom - Teaching with Documents](#)



Department of Education
212 North Sixth Street
Springfield, IL 62701