

LESSON 5: ANALYZING POLITICAL CARTOONS

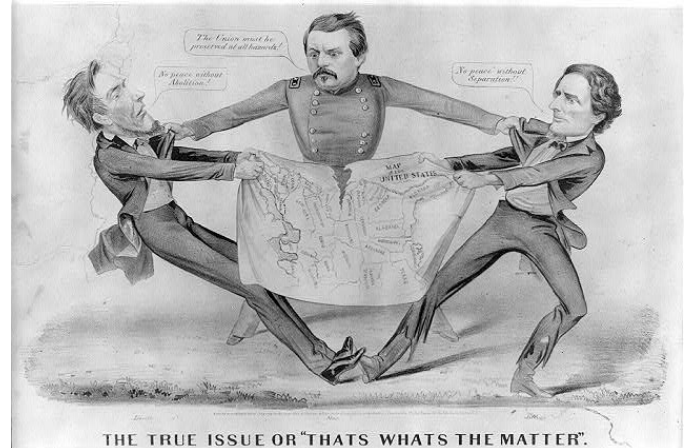
GRADE LEVEL 5-8

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Objectives

- 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.



INTRODUCTION

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 under-

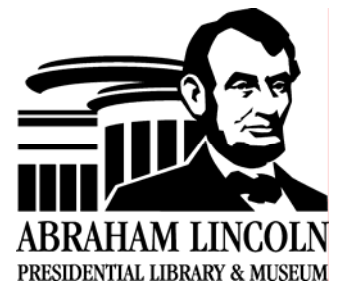
stand and relate to a format that communicated powerful ideas in a humorous, enlightened manner. Through the use of analogy, irony, symbolism, and exaggeration the cartoonist expresses the themes and problems of their historical era.

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.



Materials

- *Political Cartoons from Lincoln Biography Reading Kit (and on this CD or from additional resources listed below)*
 - #51 *A Phenomenon of Portraiture*
 - #52 *Passage Through Baltimore*
 - #53 *Flight of Abe*
 - #54 *President's Uncomfortable Seat*
 - #55 *President's Inaugural*
 - #56 *Great & Astonishing Trick of Old Abe*
 - #57 *Writing the Emancipation Proclamation*
 - #58 *Unbeeded Advice*
 - #59 *Abraham the Last*
 - #60 *The National Joker*
- *Computers and Internet Access (optional)*
- *"Cartoon Analysis Worksheet" (in this lesson plan)*
- *Paper, Scrap Paper, Tracing Paper, etc.*
- *Markers, Pens, Pencils, Chalk, Charcoal, etc.*
- *"Political Cartoon Drawing Activity Sheet" (in this lesson plan)*
- *Notebooks or Journals*

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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 (scales of justice, dove, 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:

www.memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/model.html

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.

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 above tips.
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.

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?

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

Online Resources

- *Association of American Editorial Cartoonists*
<http://editorialcartoonists.com/>
- *Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoon Index*
<http://cagle.msnbc.com/>
- *It's No Laughing Matter - Analyzing Political Cartoons*
http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/index.html
- *NARA: Digital Classroom - Teaching with Documents*
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/>

POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Name _____

Visuals

List the objects or people you see in the cartoon	Put a mark next to the objects that are symbols	List what you think each symbol means

Did the cartoonist exaggerate any of the objects or the physical features of a person or people in the cartoon? If yes, describe how.

What effect was the cartoonist trying to achieve by exaggerating these items?

Are the lines of the cartoon bold, fussy, light, hard or soft? Are shapes curvy (organic) or angular (geometric)? What feelings do the lines convey? What effect does this create?

Words

Identify the cartoon's caption and/or title.

Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.

List the words or phrases used by the cartoonist to label objects or people within the cartoon.

How do the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols?

Which words or phrases appear to be the most significant? Why?



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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?

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?

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

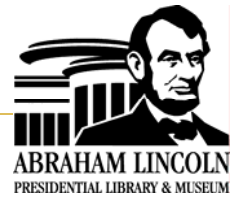
POLITICAL CARTOON DRAWING ACTIVITY SHEET

Name _____

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



Caption: _____



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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.

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?

Create a Political Cartoon: 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.