

Political Cartoons: What's the Message?

Overview

Description

This assignment asks students to analyze political cartoons to discern their meaning and to evaluate their use of artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques.

Final Product: Students will study a set of political cartoons and compose a written analysis that examines each cartoon's message and evaluates the techniques the creator used to convey meaning.

Note: With small adjustments, this assignment could feature cartoons published during earlier historical periods and thus enhance students' understanding of the social and political contexts in which a literary work was written and published.

Subject

English III, IV

Task Level

Grade 11-12

Objectives

Students will:

- Explore the different meanings of certain stock images found in political cartoons.
- Discuss similarities and differences between political cartoons and other cartoons.
- Describe major differences between cartoons and other forms of political and social commentary.
- Identify and analyze artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques commonly used in political cartoons.
- Analyze the use of sarcasm, satire, and irony in political cartoons.
- Make critical judgments about the likely effectiveness of a cartoon for particular audiences.
- Recognize the value of cartoons in helping people sharpen and clarify their views about important social and political issues.
- Understand the importance of discerning a text's effect on its intended audience.
- Understand the importance of distinguishing between their own reactions to a text and the reactions of the intended audience.

- Describe, interpret, compare, and contrast the messages of three political cartoons, carefully discussing the techniques each author uses to convey the intended message.
- Write a 2–3 page analysis of a set of political cartoons linked by a common theme.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages and *Political Cartoon Matrix* handout.
- Study the meanings associated with common political cartoon imagery (e.g., Uncle Sam, the Democratic donkey, the Republican elephant).
- Locate several “sets” of political cartoons online or in newspapers. (One approach might be to collect cartoons about the same event or person but drawn and captioned using different perspectives or techniques.)
- The following websites can be useful in locating political cartoons:
 - <http://www.cagle.com/politicalcartoons/>
 - <http://www.politicalcartoons.com/>
 - <http://townhall.com/political-cartoons/>
 - <http://editorialcartoonists.com/>

Prior Knowledge

- Students should have some knowledge of the stock images commonly used in political cartoons (e.g., the Democratic Donkey and Republican elephant, the Statue of Liberty, and Uncle Sam). Because cartoonists count on their audience associating these images with particular meanings in order to decipher the intended message, a class review of stock images may be necessary.
- Students should understand how exploring the components of the rhetorical situation will help them understand the cartoon's intended message.
- Students should have a firm understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading, and be comfortable using word processing software.

Key Concepts and Terms

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| • Caption | • Irony |
| • Caricature | • Position |
| • Exaggeration | • Sarcasm |
| • Humor | • Satire |
| • Imagery | • Text |

Time Frame

This assignment will take up to a week to complete. In class, students will review symbols and analyze a set of political cartoons with their assigned group. Students will then work outside of class to write an analysis of another set of cartoons provided by the instructor.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Review imagery and explore the meanings of certain stock images found in political cartoons.
- Discuss similarities and differences between political cartoons and other cartoons.
- Describe major differences between cartoons and other forms of political and social commentary.
- Identify and analyze artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques commonly used in political cartoons.
- Analyze the use of sarcasm, satire, and irony in political cartoons.
- Understand the importance of discerning a text's effect on its intended audience.
- Understand the importance of distinguishing between their own reactions to a text and the reactions of the intended audience.

Procedure

1. Begin by examining cartoons on subjects with which students are likely to be familiar so that students can draw on their prior knowledge to make sense of the texts. Ask students to focus on the cartoonist's use of artistic, literary, and rhetorical devices. An overhead projector can be useful here.
2. Review the meaning of stock images in political cartoons (e.g., Uncle Sam, the Democratic donkey, the Republican elephant, the Statue of Liberty).
3. Discuss the differences between political cartoons and other cartoons by showing one of each. Also ask students why they believe cartoonists use the form to convey social and political commentary.
4. Remind students that call-in talk shows like the one hosted by Rush Limbaugh and panel-discussion shows like the one hosted by Bill Maher are also platforms for social and political commentary. Play clips of these shows and discuss differences between how such shows communicate a message and how political cartoons communicate a message.
5. Introduce students to some of the artistic techniques used by cartoonists to get their messages across (e.g., caricatures using exaggerated body features).

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify and analyze artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques commonly used in political cartoons.
- Focus on the use of sarcasm, satire, and irony in political cartoons.
- Understand the importance of discerning a text's effect on its intended audience.
- Understand the importance of distinguishing between their own reactions to a text and the reactions of the intended audience.

Procedure

1. Distribute a set of political cartoons on regional, national, or international issues. (Note: Make sure that the cartoons you use represent a range of political positions.)
2. Divide students into groups.
3. Familiarize students with taking notes using the *Political Cartoon Matrix*.
4. Ask students to work in their group to identify and discuss the artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques used in the political cartoons and to record their observations on the *Political Cartoon Matrix*.
5. Ask students to work in their group to examine the use of sarcasm, satire, and irony in the political cartoons and to record their observations on the *Political Cartoon Matrix*.
6. Have each group present its findings to the class.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Describe, interpret, compare, and contrast the messages of three political cartoons, carefully discussing the techniques each author uses to convey the intended message.
- Write a 2–3 page analysis of a set of political cartoons linked by a common theme.

Procedure

1. Facilitate a final class discussion on the value of political cartoons and their effectiveness in clarifying views about important social and political issues.
2. Distribute the written assignment.

3. Encourage students to use the notes they and their group recorded on the *Political Cartoon Matrix* handout as the basis for their written analysis.
4. Answer student questions about the written portion of the assignment.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Providing students with a list of political images and their meanings.
- Providing students with pointed questions specific to their cartoons.
- Allowing students to work with a partner to locate political cartoons of their choice to analyze.
- Providing students with sample analyses of other cartoons.
- Monitoring and guiding students' analyses.

The following factors may be considered when assessing students' performance in writing their 2–3 page analysis. These assessment factors should be made clear to all students at the beginning of the lesson. Consider, for example, how well the following questions are addressed:

- Does the student describe the cartoon's subject matter, drawing on research when necessary to explain events, people, and ideas the cartoonist references?
- Does the student explain the point the cartoonist is making?
- Does the student's analysis use strong, precise descriptive language?
- Does the analysis reference concrete details in the cartoon?
- Does the analysis demonstrate a keen understanding of how the artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques discussed in class apply?

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
A.1. Engage in scholarly inquiry and dialogue.	✓	✓	✓
B.1. Consider arguments and conclusions of self and others.		✓	✓
B.2. Construct well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions.		✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.3. Identify the intended purpose and audience of the text.		✓	✓
A.5. Analyze textual information critically.	✓	✓	✓
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.			✓

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.			✓
A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.			✓
A.4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine key ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.			✓

A.5. Edit writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate.			✓
II. Reading			
A.3. Identify explicit and implicit textual information including main ideas and author's purpose.		✓	✓
A.7. Evaluate the use of both literal and figurative language to inform and shape the perception of readers.		✓	✓
A.9. Identify and analyze the audience, purpose, and message of an informational or persuasive text.		✓	✓
A.10. Identify and analyze how an author's use of language appeals to the senses, creates imagery, and suggests mood.		✓	✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

<i>Political Cartoons: What's the Message? - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
110.34.b.1. Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.1.A. Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, the arts) derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes. 110.34.b.1.B. Analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings. 110.34.b.1.E. Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauri, histories of language, books of quotations, and other related references (printed or electronic) as needed.
110.34.b.6. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Literary Nonfiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the effect of ambiguity, contradiction, subtlety, paradox, irony, sarcasm, and overstatement in literary essays, speeches, and other forms of literary nonfiction.
110.34.b.7. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze how the author's patterns of imagery, literary allusions, and conceits reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.
110.34.b.8. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose.
110.34.b.9. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their

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understanding. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.9.A. Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion.

110.34.b.9.C. Make and defend subtle inferences and complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns.

110.34.b.10 Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about persuasive text and provide evidence from text to support their analysis. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.10.A. Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships (e.g., implication, necessity, sufficiency) among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text.

110.34.b.10.B. Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.

110.34.b.11. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Procedural Texts. Students understand how to glean and use information in procedural texts and documents. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.11.A. Draw conclusions about how the patterns of organization and hierarchic structures support the understandability of text.

110.34.b.11.B. Evaluate the structures of text (e.g., format, headers) for their clarity and organizational coherence and for the effectiveness of their graphic representations.

110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea.

110.34.b.7.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning.

110.34.b.7.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases.

110.34.b.7.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

110.34.b.7.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

<i>Political Cartoons: What's the Message? - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
<p>110.34.b.15. Writing/Literary Texts. Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Students are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.13.A. Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.13.A.i. Effective introductory and concluding paragraphs and a variety of sentence structures. 110.34.b.13.A.ii. Rhetorical devices, and transitions between paragraphs. 110.34.b.13.A.iii. A clear thesis statement or controlling idea. 110.34.b.13.A.iv. A clear organizational schema for conveying ideas. 110.34.b.13.A.v. Relevant and substantial evidence and well-chosen details. 110.34.b.13.A.vi. Information on all relevant perspectives and consideration of the validity, reliability, and relevance of primary and secondary sources. 110.34.b.13.A.vii. An analysis of views and information that contradict the thesis statement and the evidence presented for it.
<p>110.34.b.17. Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.17.A. Use and understand the function of different types of clauses and phrases (e.g., adjectival, noun, adverbial clauses and phrases). 110.34.b.17.B. Use a variety of correctly structured sentences (e.g., compound, complex, compound-complex).
<p>110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.</p>
<p>110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.</p>
<p>110.34.b.24. Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.24.A. Listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content and by identifying the positions taken and the evidence in support of those positions. 110.34.b.24.B. Assess the persuasiveness of a presentation based on content, diction, rhetorical strategies, and delivery.
<p>110.34.b.25. Listening and Speaking/Speaking. Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to formulate sound arguments by using elements of classical speeches (e.g., introduction, first and second transitions, body, and conclusion), the art of persuasion, rhetorical devices, eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.</p>
<p>110.34.b.26. Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.</p>

Political Cartoons: What's the Message?

Introduction

Political cartoons are different from most of the cartoons that appear in the Sunday comics section. Political cartoonists use their medium to convey messages about current social and political issues and prominent figures. Their use of persuasive techniques may be obvious or subtle. You should be able to understand not only what message the cartoon's combination of words and illustration conveys, but also the specific techniques the cartoon uses to convey its message. Do not simply agree or disagree with a cartoon's judgment; rather, figure out whom the cartoonist is trying to persuade, how he or she conveys the message, and how well he or she uses the medium to do so.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Review some of the stock images used in political cartoons. Discuss what they represent and the different meanings they may have.
2. View the cartoons provided by the instructor and discuss differences and similarities between traditional cartoons and political cartoons.
3. Participate in a discussion of the major differences between cartoons and other forms of political and social commentary, such as call-in talk shows, panel discussion news shows, and editorial pieces in the newspaper.

Investigating

1. Work collaboratively with the rest of your class to analyze an assigned set of political cartoons by looking at the artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques used. Pay particular attention to use of satire, sarcasm, and irony.
2. Discuss the set of cartoons with your assigned small group and contribute to the discussion of your classmates' cartoons.
3. Take notes on your set of cartoons using the *Political Cartoon Matrix* handout provided.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Participate in the final discussion of the value of political cartoons and their potential effect on readers' views about pressing social and political issues.

2. Review the *Political Cartoon Matrix* handout to identify key points to include in your analysis.
3. Obtain a new set of cartoons from your instructor.
4. Write a 2–3 page analysis of the new set of cartoons. Compare and contrast the approaches taken by the cartoonists, note the choice of artistic, literary, and rhetorical techniques, and make a judgment about the effectiveness of each cartoon.

Political Cartoon Matrix

Category	Cartoon 1	Cartoon 2	Cartoon 3
Author's message			
Subject matter			
Use of irony, satire, and sarcasm			
Use of other literary and rhetorical techniques (at least 2)			
Use of artistic techniques (at least 2)			