

Introduction to Political Cartoons



SYMBOLS & METAPHORS:

A visual symbol in a cartoon is any image that stands for some other thing, event, person, abstract idea or trend in the news. For example:

- Uncle Sam for the United States
- A lion for the United Kingdom
- A beaver for Canada
- A bear for Russia
- A dragon for China

UNDERSTANDING ANALOGY:

The cartoonist may compare two things that are not alike. This technique may be used if there is a complex topic or idea that is difficult to understand. By comparing it to something else, it can be easier for the reader to understand.



VISUAL DISTORTION:

Artists will often exaggerate or distort certain elements of the drawing to make a point. Changes or exaggerations in size, shape, emotions or gestures often add extra meaning to the symbols the cartoon includes.

POLITICAL CARTOONS use imagery and text to comment on a contemporary social issue. They may contain a caricature of a well-known person or an allusion to a contemporary event or trend. By examining the pictorial elements of the cartoon, along with the text elements, you can start to understand the message of the cartoon. This will lead you to understanding the cartoonist's goal in persuading the reader to think a certain way about a current issue.

AN ARGUMENT NOT A SLOGAN:

A cartoon offers visual and written features that together "make its case" - it presents reasons to support its view. So even though it is biased, the cartoon gives you grounds for responding and even arguing back.



IRONY IN WORDS & IMAGES:

An artist may use irony by using words or pictures to describe the opposite of what is, such as what should be. This is usually done with humorous effect.



IDENTIFYING STEREOTYPES:

Some of the visual elements may be stereotypes. This might help the reader identify the visual elements more clearly. These can also call attention to the stereotypes as offensive and outdated.

