

Name:

Date:

Yr 12 Media: Political Cartoons

ACTIVITY ONE: Look in a newspaper and find a cartoon about a current news item. The cartoon might be:

- a comment on an issue
- about a person in the news
- a reference to an event

or it might be a combination of the above.

Think of an issue, person or event in the news recently, and draw a cartoon about it. (Stick figures are fine!)

Next: Share your cartoon with the person next to you. Ask them if they can guess what you wanted to say. Discuss with them what you wanted to express. Was it difficult or easy to get across what you were trying to say? Does your partner have any suggestions on how to get it across more clearly or in a different way?

ACTIVITY TWO: How to read a Political Cartoon



A political cartoon can be defined as a satirical* comment, usually humorous, and often a caricature**, about a political person, event, institution or idea, and reflecting the cartoonist's own values or opinions on that issue.

As you may have discovered by trying to draw your own cartoon, there are many elements that go together to make a successful and effective cartoon. Here are four key elements that need to be considered when you are responding to and analysing a political cartoon. When analysing and

responding to a cartoon you need to examine its: context — the circumstances in which it was created content — the details of what it shows target — who or what it is directed at style — how it presents the content, through images, words and humour which taken together determine its message — the key point it is trying to make, or the idea it is putting forward.

In this unit, you will be asked to examine and analyse a number of political cartoons by applying the above elements to them. In this way, you will be considering how political cartoonists go about their work. As a result, you will then be in a position to decide how effective and influential political cartoons can be. Finally, you will be invited to create your own political cartoon for a special competition.

*Satire — where an artist exposes and denounces vice, folly, abuses etc. to scorn and ridicule.

**Caricature — a picture or description that ludicrously exaggerates the peculiarities or defects of persons or things.

STEPS IN READING A POLITICAL CARTOON:

1

Let your eyes "float" over the cartoon. Artists know what will capture the mind's attention first. Allow your mind and your eyes to naturally find the portion of the cartoon that most stands out. Most often, this will be a *caricature*, which is an exaggeration or distortion of a person or object with the goal of providing a comic effect.

2

Follow the cartoon's natural flow by discovering the interaction with the primary focus (found in step 1). If it's a person, to whom are they talking? Where are they standing? If it's an object, what is being done to the object? What is it doing there? Most often, you can look around the immediate vicinity of the primary focus to find what is being described. This is usually an *allusion*, or an indirect reference to a past or current event that isn't explicitly made clear within the cartoon.

3

Determine the audience. What section of the population is the publication geared towards, and in what country and locality? A political cartoon will be created with consideration to the experiences and assumptions of the intended audience. For example, a political cartoon in a publication distributed in a strictly conservative tone will convey its message in a different way than it would if the audience was a particularly liberal group.

4

Understand the context of the cartoon. More often than not, the political cartoon will be published in context, meaning that it is associated with the main news story of the day. If you are viewing a political cartoon outside of its original publishing source, you will want to be well-read about current and historical events.

5

Look for widely recognized symbols. Some metaphors are commonly used by political cartoonists. For example:

- Uncle Sam or an eagle for the United States
- John Bull, Britannia or a lion for the United Kingdom
- a beaver for Canada
- a bear for Russia
- a dragon for China
- a sun for Japan
- a kangaroo for Australia

6

Look at minor details in the cartoon that will contribute to the humor or the point of the cartoon. Often, words or pictorial symbols will be used to convey minor themes or ideas, but they are found in the background or on the sides of the cartoon.

ACTIVITY THREE: Collect as many political cartoons as you can in a week. If possible, collect them from several different newspapers and magazines. Do they support the argument for 'healthy satire', or for 'destructive cynicism'? Choose three of the cartoons and fill in the following:

Context			
Content			
Target			
Style			
Message			



Notes: