

How to analyse a political cartoon

Teachers Notes

How to analyse a political cartoon

How to read and analyse political cartoons



What do you see, think and feel when you 'read' a political cartoon?

Cartoonists use lots of techniques to deliver a message to readers.

This message includes their own ideas, attitudes and prejudices about political issues, otherwise **known as 'bias'.**

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Consider the meaning of the word bias. Come up with various topics that you have very strong opinions about. Do these opinions differ to other people's opinions? Are they each equally valid? In what circumstances could these opinions change? – age, gender, context, experience etc?

Does it matter that a cartoon contains the cartoonist's personal bias on a political issue?

What effect (if any) could a cartoon with bias have on those that view it?

What is the purpose/value to society of presenting cartoons with differing views/opinions of a political issue?

How to analyse a political cartoon

Are we getting the message?



Political cartoons can be filled with all sorts of techniques used by the cartoonist to get their message across to their audience.

These include:

- **Symbols**
- **Captions**
- **Stereotypes**
- **References to popular culture**
- **Humour and caricatures**
- **References to historic events**

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Why do you think it's important for cartoonists to use many different techniques to 'get the message across' to readers?

Define the following words: symbol, captions, stereotypes, popular culture, humour and caricature.

Choose a recent political cartoon to examine — based on your research of the definitions, are you able to identify any of these techniques in your chosen cartoon?

Can you think of any other techniques?

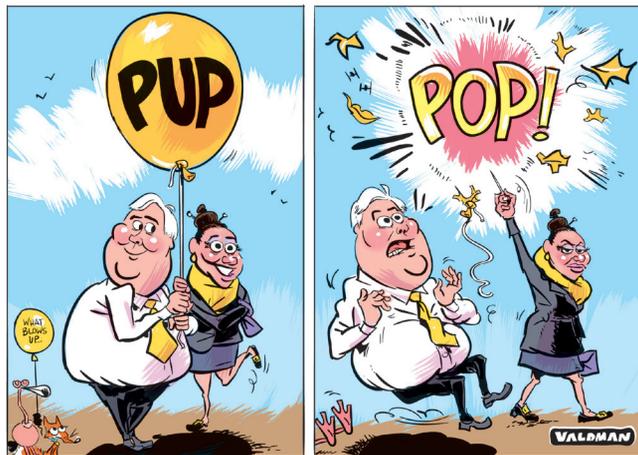
How to analyse a political cartoon

**Are we getting
the message?**

Some political cartoons may be full of techniques to convey a complex message, while others may be simple.

‘Simple cartoons like this one often work best: straight to the point’

Jos Valdman, 2015



Party Popper, Jos Valdman, 2015

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Do you understand the overall feelings that are shown in the cartoon?

Identify the individuals and the action occurring in the two frames. Research what political event the action is referring to.

Although it is quite a simple cartoon, what strategies has the cartoonist employed to make it effective? Ensure you look at all the images in the cartoon.

How to analyse a political cartoon

Symbols



Why do political cartoonists use symbols?

Often their message about politics is complicated and symbols are visual triggers for their audience to understand their message.

A symbol can be a
metaphor
or an analogy
for something
else.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Ensure you are familiar with the terms metaphor and analogy, define if required. Come up with a list of metaphors and analogies on a range of topics.

Using a selection of political cartoons from the MoAD website and the on-line Behind the Lines Exhibitions, explore the varied symbols that can be found — decipher what these symbols may be representing. Conduct further research on a specific cartoon. <http://moadoph.gov.au/learning/resources/>

Symbols can have benefits in political cartoons, including being a visual trigger to aid understanding of the overall message. However, there are also challenges with relying too heavily on the use of symbols — consider what these may be? Discuss, for example, readers familiarity with the content and the context of the cartoon.

How to analyse a political cartoon

Symbols

Look at this cartoon, what are three symbols you notice? Can you describe what these symbols represent?



The Incredible
Carbon Tax Machine.
John Tiedermann, 2011

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Consider drawing attention to Julia Gillard's lab coat, the piggy bank, the 'CO2' symbol, the dollar symbol, the Grecian pillar supporting the machine, her elongated nose...

Other cartoons to use include:

Frozen Asset, Andrew Dyson, 2013;

Le doigt d'honneur, John Kudelka, 2015;

The Australian, Matt Davidson, 2011.

How to analyse a political cartoon

Captions



Most political cartoons include captions with text to explain the scene. Captions can include speech bubbles, headings, and catchphrases used by politicians.

Captions help explain what is occurring in the cartoon, who the characters are and can enhance the joke.



Carbon Cate and the Magnates, Cathy Wilcox, 2011

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

When looking at political cartoons, consider what the purpose is of the caption. Is it a label, an explanation, a speech bubble, a catchphrase? Does the caption help communicate the 'message' of the cartoon? Does it help make a joke or a point about something?

- Other cartoons to use include:
Hebdo, First Dog on the Moon, 2015;
Hunt's Remit, Cathy Wilcox, 2014;
Shorten to the Point, Fiona Katanska, 2015;
#returnbull, *#renewal*, Christopher Downers, 2015;
Opposing Gravity, Matt Golding, 2011;
Matter of Taste, Cathy Wilcox, 2015

How to analyse a political cartoon

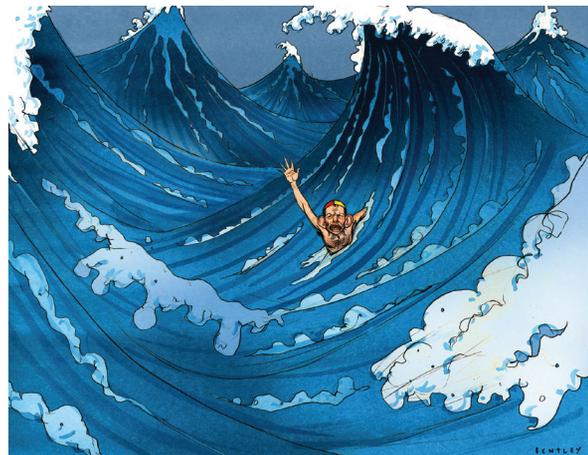
Stereotypes

Cartoonists use stereotypes to convey their message and also to be funny. They might portray politicians in costume or behaving in a manner that is easily recognised.

Can you describe the stereotype portrayed in this cartoon?

What characteristics help you to identify the stereotype?

Why is the cartoonist using this stereotype in their cartoon?



Not Waving, Drowning, Jonathon Bentley, 2015

How to analyse a political cartoon

References to popular culture



Cartoonists can use references to popular culture to make it easy for people to understand their message.

By portraying politicians as characters from a movie or book, cartoonists can easily tell a story in their cartoon –
and make a joke.

How to analyse a political cartoon

Popular Culture

What popular cultural reference can you see in this cartoon?

What does it say about each of the characters/politicians?



The Great Gonski, Mark Knight, 2013

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Examine some of the other cartoons listed below — what references do they have to popular culture? What is the reference saying about the personality of the politicians and their response to the political issue which is the focus of the cartoon?

Other cartoons to use:

Carbon Cate and the Magnates, Cathy Wilcox, 2011;

Leadership Spill, David Pope, 2015;

Tony Potter, Matt Adam, 2011;

Bob to the Rescue, David Follette, 2012



MUSEUM
OF AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRACY

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE