

# What is a political cartoon?

Teachers Notes

What is a political cartoon?

## Freedom of speech



In Australia's democracy,  
freedom of speech is important.

This can take many forms...  
including the FREEDOM TO DRAW.

The media often includes cartoons  
to accompany other journalism and  
**the cartoonists are free to express  
their views.**

They help society discuss political  
and social issues.

Remember,  
in a democracy —  
**a voice  
has power.**

### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

#### Freedom of speech:

Booker Prize-winning author Ian McEwan argued in an address to a group of American college students, "freedom of expression sustains all the other freedoms we enjoy" and "without free speech, democracy is a sham".

<http://behindthelines.moadoph.gov.au/2015/foreword>

Do you agree with this statement? Can you think of any examples which would help support your claims.

#### Power of one's voice:

"As our most popular exhibition, *Behind the Lines 2015* exemplifies our vision in celebrating the spirit of Australian democracy. We want our visitors to stop and think about the role of political cartooning in this country, and reflect on the overwhelmingly important power of one's voice," Daryl Karp, Director of Museum of Australian Democracy, launch of *Behind the Lines 2015*,  
<http://moadoph.gov.au/exhibitions/behind-the-lines-2015-the-year-s-best-political-cartoons/>

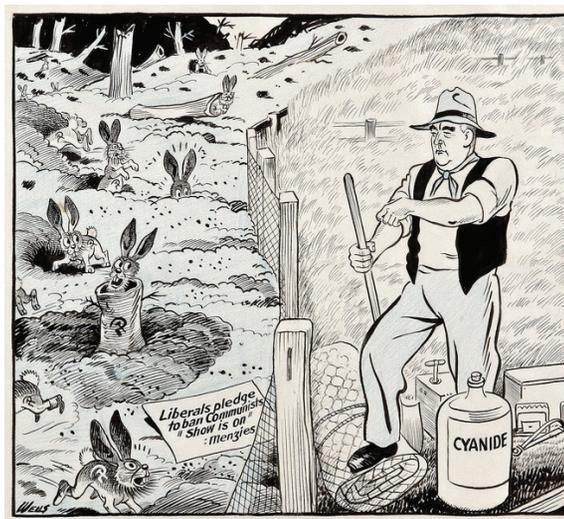
Consider other countries and the freedoms they do or not share with Australia in regards to freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Is the power of one's voice evident?

What is a political cartoon?

**Historic  
tradition**

Australia, like many other democracies in the world, has a **strong historic tradition of political cartooning.**

We value our cartoonists as artists, and for their commentary on political issues.



*Liberals pledge to ban communists, Samuel Garnet Wells, 1949*

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:**

Consider the cartoon in the slide:

- Describe what is happening
- Do you know who the figure is representing?
- Who are the rabbits designed to represent?
- Use the title and the actual cartoon to piece together the views of the artist on the topic.
- Complete some additional research on the historical context of this period. Research other cartoons from this period – what were other cartoonists views on this issue?

Example of another cartoon to use:

*Stop Press, Will Mahoney, 1940*

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## So, what is a political cartoon?



Political cartoonists draw cartoons of politicians and public figures to **make a point (and usually a funny joke) about a certain issue of the day.**

Controversial political cartoons are part of the debate **that makes Australia's democracy great.**

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:**

*"Australia's political cartoonists are well known for their sense of humour and, although they don't have all the answers to the political issues, they know how to use ridicule to probe for answers to legitimate questions,"*  
Behind the Lines 2015, Exhibition Curator, Tania Cleary.

How do you believe political cartoons are used to help 'probe for answers to legitimate questions'?

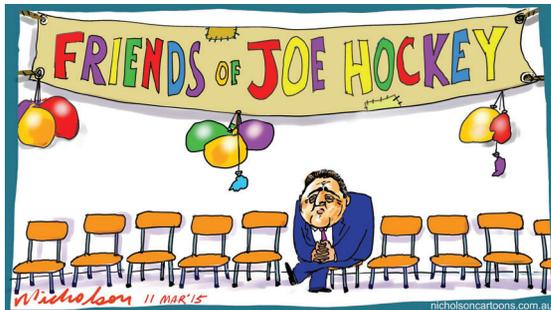
Can you think of a recent political cartoon that was used to help progress a particular issue/question?

Compile a list of some topics that could constitute a 'controversial political cartoon'.

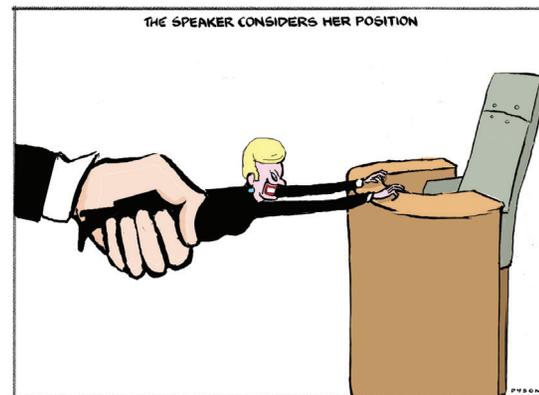
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## So, what is a political cartoon?

What point is being made in these cartoons?



*Friends of Joe Hockey*, Peter Nicholson, 2015



*Gripping Conclusion*, Andrew Dyson, 2015

What is a political cartoon?

“In the hands  
of a great cartoonist,  
a **simple line drawing**  
**has extraordinary power**  
**to slice through political**  
**spin and rhetoric**; to clearly  
illuminate an otherwise  
hidden truth...”

Peter Greste, Australian journalist,  
Behind the Lines 2015 Catalogue

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Consider the meaning of 'political spin and rhetoric'.

Why is it important that cartoonists can help an audience see the 'hidden truth' of a political issue.

What role does this play in our democracy?

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## Cartoons and democracy



Political cartoons reflect the context in which they were created:

- **The historical period in which they were made**
- **The political issues of the time**
- **The social norms, values and behaviours of society**

AND the opinions and biases of the cartoonist.

Many cartoons may be made about the same issue,  
**but each cartoonist will feel differently about it.**

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:**

Discuss and/or research the definitions of norms, values and bias.

What are some social norms, values and behaviors in today's Australian society? Do these differ according to age, gender, time, culture? Any other considerations?

Choose a variety of political cartoons from the Behind the Lines on-line collection from the last 5 years, <http://moadoph.gov.au/learning/resources/political-cartooning/>

Analyse the cartoons to consider the context in which they were created and how the context may be different for each cartoon.

Are there any cartoons that show possible bias on behalf of the cartoonist? If there is bias, does it matter? What may be the impact?

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## Cartoons and democracy



### Consider the context of this cartoon.

Can you identify the political issue, the historical period, the possible social norms and values of the time?



*His Master's Voice*, Will Mahony, 1938

### CONTEXT OF THE CARTOON:

Drawing on the trademark image of record company His Master's Voice, Will Mahony reacts to government censorship and immigration policies in the 1930s. In a deafening tirade he catalogues the cases of Mabel Freer, Egon Kitsch, Alfred Foster and Gerald Griffin. Kitsch and Griffin had been denied entry to Australia due to their political views. Freer, a white woman born in India, was excluded by the notorious dictation test and the political speeches of judge Alfred Foster had been censored by the government. Mahony argues that the right to free speech is being curtailed and drowned out by the loudest voices; the government and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. <http://behindthelines.moadoph.gov.au/2015>

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## Cartoons and democracy



### What do political cartoons do for democracy?

Political cartoons are an important example of our democratic freedoms in terms of free speech and freedom of expression.

They contribute to our democracy by:

- **Commenting on strengths and weaknesses of Australia's democracy at the time**
- **Critiquing key figures who impact democracy including politicians, celebrities, business people and other leaders**
- **Communicating social movements and political change.**

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:**

**About political cartoonists:**

*"By distilling political arguments and criticisms into clear, easily digestible (and at times grossly caricatured) statements, they have oiled our political debate and helped shape public opinion."*

Peter Greste,

<http://behindthelines.moadoph.gov.au/2015/foreword>

Consider some recent political cartoons — how effective do you believe they have been at helping to shape public opinion?

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**‘Everyone has  
the right to freedom  
of opinion and expression;**  
this right includes freedom  
to hold opinions without  
interference and to seek,  
receive and impart information  
and ideas through any media  
and regardless of frontiers.’

United Nations’ Universal Declaration  
of Human Rights of 1948 to which  
Australia is a signatory

**QUOTE REFERENCE:**

<http://moadoph.gov.au/blog/freedom-of-speech-life-itself/>

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:**

After reading the blog by historian Barry York, referenced above, consider how different Australia would be without the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

What areas that you take for granted would change?



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