Constitutional Rights Foundation

Examining Political Cartoons

In this activity, students examine political cartoons and evaluate their persuasiveness.

Handouts for students:

- **Cartoons** — See Page 3 for links to cartoons, or use cartoons of your choice.
- **CARTOONS Checklist** — 1 per pair of students
- **Graphic Organizer for CARTOONS** — 1 per pair of students

If you can project each of the cartoons for all the class to see, it would be helpful to do so when students are reporting on and discussing individual cartoons.

Procedure

1. Focus Activity. Ask students: What is a cartoon? (A drawing or animation that is usually meant to entertain and be humorous.)
   What is a *political* cartoon? (A cartoon that is trying to make a statement about a current event or prominent person.)

   Explain to students that political cartoons have been around since the 16th Century, and are widely published today throughout the world. Since political cartoons usually are reacting to a current event of the time, they can be considered primary sources.

   Students should recognize that a primary source is a document or object created during the period being studied. Examples of primary sources would be newspapers, treaties, photographs, letters, diaries, etc., created at the time.

2. Tell students that the more one understands a political cartoon, the more its humor or message can be appreciated. Analyzing these sources requires skill. Distribute **CARTOONS Checklist** to each student. Review the checklist with students answering any questions they may have.

3. Divide the class into pairs. Distribute one or two cartoons to each pair to analyze. Distribute **Graphic Organizer for CARTOONS** to each pair. Tell students to analyze their assigned cartoon(s) using the **CARTOONS Checklist** and the **Graphic Organizer for CARTOONS** and be prepared to report back to the class on their cartoon. Give students time to complete the activity.

4. Ask all the students with Cartoon #1 to stand. If possible, project the cartoon for the whole class to see. Call on one pair to describe the cartoon and give its context. Call on another pair to report its most interesting discovery about the cartoon. And call on a final pair to answer: What point of view is the cartoon expressing? Is the cartoon persuasive? Hold a classroom discussion on the cartoon. Repeat this process for each of the cartoons.

Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Reading

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2
Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.6
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7
Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9
Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Cartoons about Current Events for Government Classes

You may already have a collection of great political cartoons you could use with the CARTOONS rubric. We selected a few based on issues we see CAP students talking about:

1. *American Way* by Bruce Plant. A man is thanking a veteran for his service. The veteran asks the man if he just voted, and the response is that it was too much trouble. The veteran expresses frustration. http://www.cagle.com/2014/11/american-way/

2. *NFL Pink* by Joe Heller. At a Halloween event, a girl is presenting a most ironic costume award to a man dressed up as a football player wearing pink in support of women's health. http://www.cagle.com/2014/10/nfl-pink/

3. Immigration Reaction by Joe Heller. "Who says Congress is afraid to 'act'?'' is the punchline. An interesting and fairly complex political cartoon for students to analyze. http://www.cagle.com/2014/11/immigration-reaction/

4. Immigration Executive Action by Jeff Darcy. A riff on Mount Rushmore. http://www.cagle.com/2014/11/immigration-executive-action/

Additional Resources

Historical Cartoons

American Political Prints, 1766-1876, Library of Congress.
http://loc.harpweek.com/default.asp

Current Events/Issues

The Cagle Post: Cartoons and Commentary
http://www.cagle.com

CARTOONS CHECKLIST

Political cartoons comment on issues of the day. Their purpose is to persuade the audience to accept a particular point of view on an issue. They use various techniques to persuade and make a point. To better understand any cartoon, use this checklist to examine it.

C ontext. Cartoons comment on events or issues of the day. To understand a cartoon, you need to know about the issue or event and maybe even a little about the cartoon. What is the cartoon commenting on? When and where was the cartoon created?

A udience. Cartoons are aimed at a particular audience. Who do you think is the intended audience? Why? What emotion or reaction is the cartoon trying to evoke from the audience? Explain.

R eality. Cartoons often portray real people, places, or things. Cartoonists even label them sometimes to make sure you don't miss them. What, if any, real people, places, or things are in this cartoon? List them.

T ongue in cheek. Although most political cartoons are not meant to be laugh-out-loud funny, they still make use of humor, particularly irony, sarcasm, mockery, or satire. Is the cartoon making fun of someone or something? Look for examples.

O verstatement. Cartoons often use overstatement, distortion, caricature, exaggeration, and even stereotypes. These overstatements are often the first things you notice. What examples can you find in this cartoon? What point is the cartoon making by using them?

O ne thing like another. Many cartoons make use of analogies, comparisons, or even metaphors. They say that one thing is like something else. What analogy, if any, does this cartoon make? What is the point of the comparison?

N uance. Some things in a cartoon you see right away. Other important things can be in the background. Look carefully at the cartoon. Are there small details that help make a point? What are they and what point are they making?

S ymbols. Cartoons usually employ commonly recognized symbols. For example, Uncle Sam appears in cartoons as a symbol of the U.S. What symbols does the cartoon use? What do they stand for?

After going through the checklist, answer three final questions:

1. What point of view is the cartoon expressing?
2. Is the cartoon persuasive? Why or why not? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.
3. Do you agree with the cartoon's point of view? Explain.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER FOR CARTOONS

Name _____ Date _____

Before answering the questions 1B3 below, use this graphic organizer to help you analyze the cartoon.

Title of Cartoon: _____

Context.	
Audience.	
Reality.	
Tongue in cheek.	
Overstatement.	
One thing like another.	
Nuance.	
Symbols.	
1. What point of view is the cartoon expressing?	
2. Is the cartoon persuasive? Why or why not? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.	
3. Do you agree with the cartoon's point of view? Explain.	