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**Political cartoons: Pictures with a point**

A political cartoon is a cartoon that makes a point about a political issue or event. You can find them in any daily newspaper, but they won’t be in the comics section. Instead, look on the editorial pages – they’re right next to the editorial columns, and across from the opinion essays. You can also find them in newsmagazines and on political Web sites.

Political cartoons can be very funny, especially if you understand the issue that they’re commenting on. Their main purpose, though, is not to amuse you but to persuade you. A good political cartoon makes you think about current events, but it also tries to sway your opinion toward the cartoonist’s point of view. The best political cartoonist can change your mind on an issue without you even realizing how he or she did it.

The old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” proved true in the debate over the United States’ imperialist ambitions before, during, and in the aftermath of the Spanish–American War. People in 1898 had varying levels of literacy, and political cartoons in newspapers and magazines reached a wider audience than articles. Political cartoons represent both positive and negative views of European Imperialism in the late nineteenth century, and they give us great insight into the mindset of those who both supported and rejected the theory of Imperialism and Colonialism.

## Cartoonists’ persuasive techniques

Cartoonists use several methods, or techniques, to get their point across. Not every cartoon includes all of these techniques, but most political cartoons include at least a few. Some of the techniques cartoonists use the most are symbolism, exaggeration, labeling, analogy, inference, and irony.

Once you learn to spot these techniques, you’ll be able to see the cartoonist’s point more clearly. You should also be aware of any political slant, or bias, that he or she might have. When you know where the cartoonist is coming from, it’s easier to make up your own mind. You might also start watching out for the persuasive techniques used in other media, such as political ads and TV news programs.

**Vocabulary needed for analysis**:

**Symbolism**: Something that stands for something else. Cartoonists use simple objects, or symbols, to stand for larger concepts or ideas. After you identify the symbols in a cartoon, think about what the cartoonist intends each symbol to stand for. For example, a heart can be a symbol for love.

**Irony**: Words that mean that opposite of their usual meaning, for Example, a bald man named “Harry.” Irony is the difference between the ways things are and the way things should be, or the way things are expected to be. Cartoonists often use irony to express their opinion on an issue. When you look at a cartoon, see if you can find any irony in the situation the cartoon depicts. If you can, think about what point the irony might be intended to emphasize. Does the irony help the cartoonist express his or her opinion more effectively?

**Analogy**: An analogy is a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics. By comparing a complex issue or situation with a more familiar one, cartoonists can help their readers see it in a different light. After you’ve studied a cartoon for a while, try to decide what the cartoon’s main analogy is. What two situations does the cartoon compare? Once you understand the main analogy, decide if this comparison makes the cartoonist’s point more clear to you. For example, he is as loyal as a dog or she runs as fast as a cheetah.

**Exaggeration**: Making something seem more that it really is, for example, telling your parents that if you do not get the toy you want, it will be the ‘end of the world.’ Sometimes cartoonists overdo, or exaggerate, the physical characteristics of people or things in order to make a point. When you study a cartoon, look for any characteristics that seem overdone or overblown. (Facial characteristics and clothing are some of the most commonly exaggerated characteristics.) Then, try to decide what point the cartoonist was trying to make through exaggeration.

**Inference**: Conclusions reached based upon reasoning and evidence.  For example, if I draw a picture of a bug with a big red X over it, based on the evidence from the picture you could infer that I do not like bugs.

**Labeling**: Cartoonists often label objects or people to make it clear exactly what they stand for. Watch out for the different labels that appear in a cartoon, and ask yourself why the cartoonist chose to label that particular person or object. Does the label make the meaning of the object more clear?

**Common Symbolism Used in Political Cartoons**

•United States –Uncle Sam, Flag, Stars and Stripes, Shield, Lady Liberty, Eagle

•Germany-

•Russia-

•Great Britain-

•France-

•China-

•Peace –dove, olive branch, victory sign, scales of justice.

•Democrats –donkey.

•Republicans –elephant or G.O.P (Grand Old Party)

•Death –vulture, skeleton with shroud, skull and crossbones, grim reaper.

•Love –heart, Cupid

•Money –dollar bill or dollar sign, British pound sign or EU currency.

•Rats –dirty, filth

## Collaborative Analysis Gallery Walk

## Today we will be furthering our academic conversation regarding imperialism by examining political cartoons of the period. Each group member should take upon themselves ONE analyst role (smaller groups can combine the visual and language analyst roles):

•Symbologist: responsible for analyzing the symbols used in the cartoon

•Historian: places the cartoon in a specific historic moment

•Visual Analyst: describes and analyzes the visual elements of the cartoon

•Language Analyst: describes and analyzes the language elements of the cartoon

•Scribe: completes the analysis form and takes group notes

Once you’ve identified the persuasive techniques that the cartoonist used, your group can discuss:

* What is the cartoonist’s opinion on this issue?
* What other opinion can you imagine another person having on this issue?
* Did you find this cartoon persuasive? Why or why not?
* What other techniques could the cartoonist have used to make this cartoon more persuasive?

Each group should analyze 5 cartoons.