

STUDY GUIDE: Political Cartoons

Objective: "We are learning to analyze political cartoons using the POPITT strategy in order to understand a cartoonist's perspective, interpret visual symbols and metaphors, and identify the key global issues addressed."

Political cartoons are a form of visual satire (like South Park, The Simpsons, Southside, On My Block, The Boondocks, or that use humor, symbolism, and caricature to comment on current events, politics, and social issues. They distill complex ideas into simple, often exaggerated images to convey the artist's perspective and critique. These forms of satire critique, criticize, entertain, inform, and provoke thought while offering a sharp commentary on political figures, policies, or societal concerns. The power of political cartoons lies in their ability to communicate in a concise and visually engaging manner, making them a potent form of political and social commentary.

Satire: Using **irony** to ridicule/ expose the vices or limitations of **social/historical conditions**

Sarcasm: Using **irony** to ridicule/criticize **people**

POPITT : The **POPITT** strategy is a useful framework for introducing and analyzing a political cartoon.

P eople	Who are the people in the cartoon? What are they doing?
O bjects	What physical objects are included in the cartoon? What do these objects represent/ symbolize
P urpose	Who is the illustrator and what is his purpose ? What is the satirical or sarcastic message of the cartoon? (critique, criticize, inform, persuade, warn, instruct,?)
I ssues	What global issue(s) are depicted? What are the political/social/historical conditions/context?
T ime	What time period/year was this cartoon illustrated in? What was happening in culture/ history/ society at the time ?
T echniques	What techniques are used?

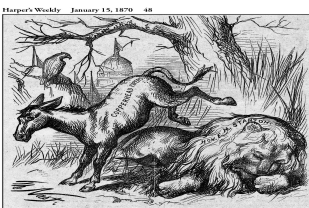
Stylistic Techniques cartoonists use to contextualize current/historical events

- **Symbolism** - using an object to stand for an idea *
- **Labeling/Captioning** - used for clarity and emphasis.
- **Analogy** - a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics.
- **Irony** - the difference between the way things are and the way things should be or the way things are expected to be.
- **Hyperbole** - overstating (hying up) or magnifying a problem
- **Punchline:** Oftentimes the final line of the cartoon, this sentence or phrase is the lasting joke or message that makes the reader smile/laugh. This line is often somewhat ironic and cements the meaning of the cartoon.
- **Speech Bubbles:** These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker's mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation. Types of speech balloons include those holding:
 - **Internal dialogue or thought bubble:** a thought enclosed by a balloon that has a series of dots or bubbles going up to it.
 - **External dialogue**, which is speech between characters.

Top 10 Symbols used in Political Cartoons:

- **Peace** - dove, olive branch, victory sign
- **Snakes:** divisiveness, violence, revenge, evil
- **Patriotism** Uncle Sam, flag, stars and stripes, shield, statue of liberty
- **Bears:** Strength/Sovereignty
- **Death** - vulture, skeleton with shroud, skull and crossbones, grim reaper
- **Love** - heart, Cupid, Venus
- **Money** - dollar bill or dollar sign
- **Heroes or good guys** - wear white
- **Villains** or bad guys - wear black
- **Statue of Liberty:** Justice, immigration, values

Origins of the Democratic symbol: the DONKEY



Origins of the REPUBLICAN symbol: the ELEPHANT



Visual Techniques cartoonists use to contextualize current/historical events

Negative Space The areas between and around objects. Areas that - if we notice them at all - we tend to think of as empty.

Graphic weight: A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways including:

- *The use of light and dark shades; dark-toned images or high-contrast images draw the eye more than light or low-contrast images.*
- *A pattern or repeated series of marks.*
- *Colors that are more brilliant or deeper than others on the page.*

Facial Expressions Faces can be portrayed in different ways. Some depict an actual person, like a portrait; others are iconic, which means they are representative of an idea or a group of people. Other points to observe about faces include: They can be dramatic when placed against a detailed backdrop; a bright white face stands out. They can be drawn without much expression or detail; this is called an “**open blank**” and it invites the audience to imagine what the character is feeling without telling them.

Hands/Feet: The positioning of hands and feet can be used to express what is happening in the story. For example, hands that are raised with palms out suggest surprise. The wringing of hands suggests obsequiousness (obedience/attentiveness) or discomfort; invisible hands suggest secrecy; clenched hands suggest power/ control; Hands over the mouth depict fear, shame, or shyness. Turned in feet may denote embarrassment, while feet with motion strokes can create the sense of panic, urgency, or speed.

Bleed An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

Words to describe political cartoons

1. Satirical – Uses irony and humor to criticize politics, culture, or society.
2. Provocative – Designed to spark thought, debate, or controversy.
3. Bold – Unafraid to challenge authority or taboo topics.
4. Culturally-rooted – Deeply connected to Chicano and Latinx identity and heritage.
5. Critical – Offers strong judgment or commentary on injustice and hypocrisy.
6. Humorous – Uses wit to soften or highlight difficult issues.
7. Unapologetic – Direct and unfiltered, not concerned with pleasing everyone.
8. Political – Focused on governmental, immigration, and civil rights topics.
9. Expressive – Conveys strong emotions through exaggerated facial expressions and body language.
10. Empowering – Uplifts marginalized voices, especially Latinx communities.
11. Sarcastic – Uses biting humor and mock praise to expose contradictions.
12. Activist – Encourages civic engagement and resistance.