

Analyzing Political Cartoons: An Arkansas Perspective

Arkansas Grades 7-12 Social Studies

October 2016

Length:

One 90 minute block or two 50 minute classes.

Materials:

Cartoons 1-5 and accompanying worksheets (attached)
Examples of political cartoons from the UALR web exhibit for introduction
Projector linked to computer with internet access (for displaying images)

Common Core Standards:

Grades 7-8:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Grades 9-10:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources

Grades 11-12:

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.

Essential Question:

What are political cartoons?

How do political cartoonists use drawings to express their opinions to the public?

Objective:

The students will be able to identify components used by political cartoonists to clarify their point of view such as irony, exaggeration, symbolism, labeling, and stereotyping. Additionally, the students will identify different interpretations of political cartoons.

Introduction:

Introduce the idea of political cartoons to the class. Start by checking for prior knowledge about political cartoons and discuss if there is the opportunity. Show examples of political cartoons from the UALR web exhibit and ask students to talk about what stands out in each example shown. What are the artists trying to accomplish? At this point introduce the five components of the cartoon analysis guide. Once the students have a grasp of what a political cartoon aims to do, break them into groups to begin work on the activity (Ideally, this activity works best with around 25 students broken into five groups with five students in each group).

Activity:

Once the class is in groups, give each group one cartoon and the corresponding question sheet from the attachments below. Each cartoon focuses on a different component of political cartoons that are necessary to understanding the meaning of the drawing. Once received, the group should take 5 minutes to analyze the cartoon using the attached cartoon analysis guide which consists of the five components that are highlighted on each cartoon. Once complete, the group should use 5 more minutes with their analysis to answer the questions on the worksheet attached to the cartoon. While the students are working, go to each group and give a number, 1 to 5, to each member.

Once the questions have been completed by each group, call the class to attention and instruct everyone that was given the number 1 to go to a designated area (repeat with numbers 2-5 and have predetermined areas in mind for the second groupings). Once the new groups are in their designated area, their assignment is to teach the other students in their group about their respective cartoon. They should go over each component of the cartoon analysis guide and the question sheet in order to explain the cartoon to their group. The other students in the group should take notes on the cartoons of the others and at the end of the activity will have ideas on each of the five cartoons. Give the groups 10 minutes to complete this task. As they are working, go around to each group to ensure understanding by answering any questions they may have about their cartoon or political cartoons in general.

Once both groupings are complete, ask for volunteers to address the class on their explanation of each cartoon. Have the image displayed for the class to see and look for competing explanations to foster classroom discussions on interpretation and historical context.

Assessment:

Individual teachers can choose different ways to assess learning through this activity. Examples include but are not limited to taking up notes and analysis for each student for a grade, giving a rubric to each group to assess participation in the activity, or evaluating participation in groups and discussions with a rubric.

References:

Bill Graham Cartoon Collection, 1945-1985. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

John Kennedy Cartoon Collection, 1935-1988, UALR.MS.0023. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/activities/political-cartoon/lm_cart_analysis_guide.pdf

teachinghistory.org

Cartoon #1

Exaggeration

The Cartoon: This cartoon on the issues in Arkansas public schools after desegregation began was drawn by Bill Graham for the Arkansas Gazette on November 1, 1956. The cartoon shows a man carrying a book labeled “Arkansas School Problems” going into the year 1957.



Bill Graham Cartoon Collection, 1945-1985. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

Background: By November 1956, tensions in Arkansas school districts, particularly Little Rock, were at an all-time high. Little Rock had planned to begin desegregation of its public schools in the fall of 1957, beginning with Central High School, in order to comply with the Supreme Court’s decision in the *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* case. Little Rock Central High School was desegregated in September 1957 at the orders of President Dwight Eisenhower.

Look For Exaggeration: 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 by exaggerating them.

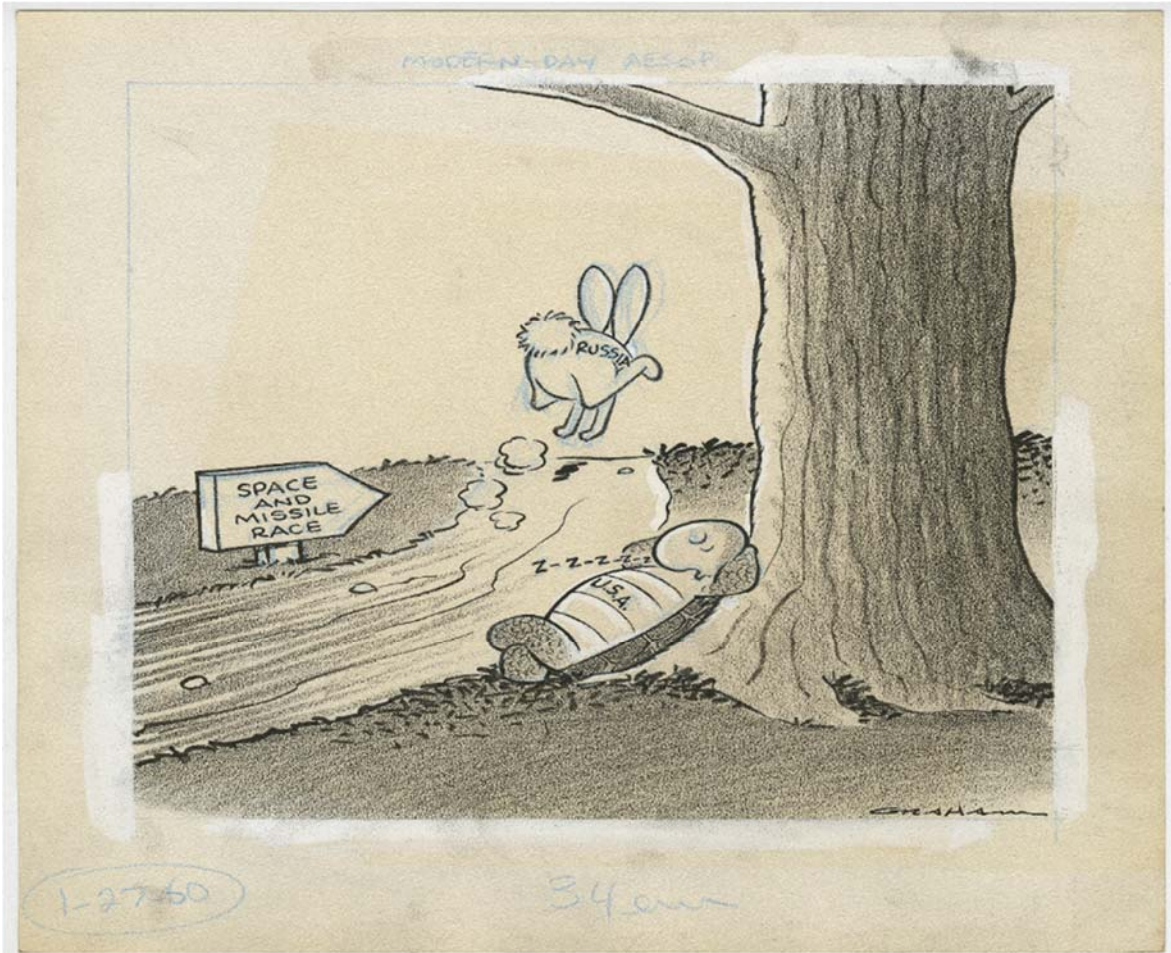
Cartoon Analysis Worksheet #1

1. What main problem does this cartoon address?
2. What are the key symbols in the cartoon and how are they exaggerated?
3. How do the exaggerations help the cartoon make its point?
4. Is there anything else about the book besides its size that helps the cartoon make its point?
5. How is the man in the cartoon reacting? How does this add to the visual effect of the book in the cartoon?
6. What else besides a book might the artist have used to create an effective cartoon on this topic?
7. How might an opponent of this cartoon's point of view have altered the symbols in it or changed the way these symbols are distorted?

Cartoon #2

Symbolism

The Cartoon: This cartoon on the race to explore space between the United States and Russia during the late 1950s and 1960s was drawn by Bill Graham for The Arkansas Gazette on January 27, 1960. The cartoon is referencing the fable of a race between a tortoise (United States) and a hare (Russia).



Bill Graham Cartoon Collection, 1945-1985. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

Background: In January of 1960, Russia had already beaten the United States by launching Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite to orbit the planet, in late 1957. The 1960s saw the introduction of a new race to put the first human being into space. In April of 1961, the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to orbit the globe, followed by United States astronaut Alan Shepard in May of 1961.

Look For Symbolism: 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 means each symbol to stand for.

Cartoon Analysis Worksheet #2

1. What is this cartoon about?
2. What elements in the cartoon can be called symbols?
3. How are these symbols drawn? Are they drawn in specific ways that add to the point the cartoon makes? Why or why not?
4. What other objects might have been used instead of a tortoise and a hare?
5. How might an opponent of this cartoon's point of view have altered the symbols in it?

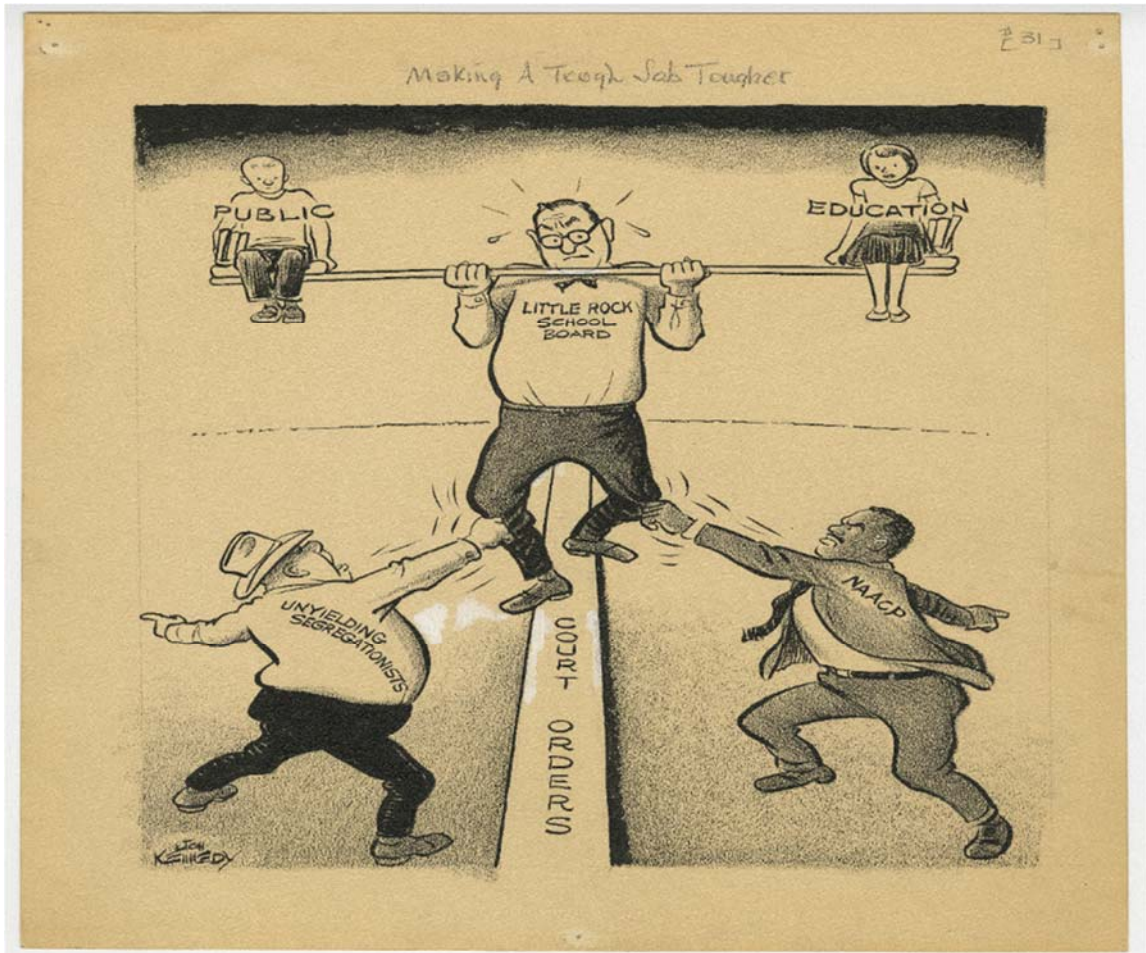
Cartoon Analysis Worksheet #3

1. This cartoon shows irony in one aspect of the Cold War. Explain.
2. Using your background knowledge, explain the term “The fear that keeps the peace” in your own words.
3. What visual symbols in this cartoon undercut or go against the idea that the world is peaceful?
4. The cartoon shows many different groups of people together. How does this add to the irony of the cartoon?

Cartoon #4

Labeling

The Cartoon: This cartoon on the public school crisis in Little Rock in the 1950s was drawn by Jon Kennedy for the Arkansas Democrat. It shows a man walking on a line while being tugged at from both sides, all the while balancing two children on a pole. The cartoon is titled “Making a Tough Job Tougher”.



John Kennedy Cartoon Collection, 1935-1988, UALR.MS.0023. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

Background: After 1954, the Supreme Court ruled segregation in public schools unconstitutional and cities across the southern United States began to transition to integrated schools. Segregationists and representatives from the NAACP, with the Little Rock School Board in the middle, fought over a timeline to implement the policy.

Look For 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?

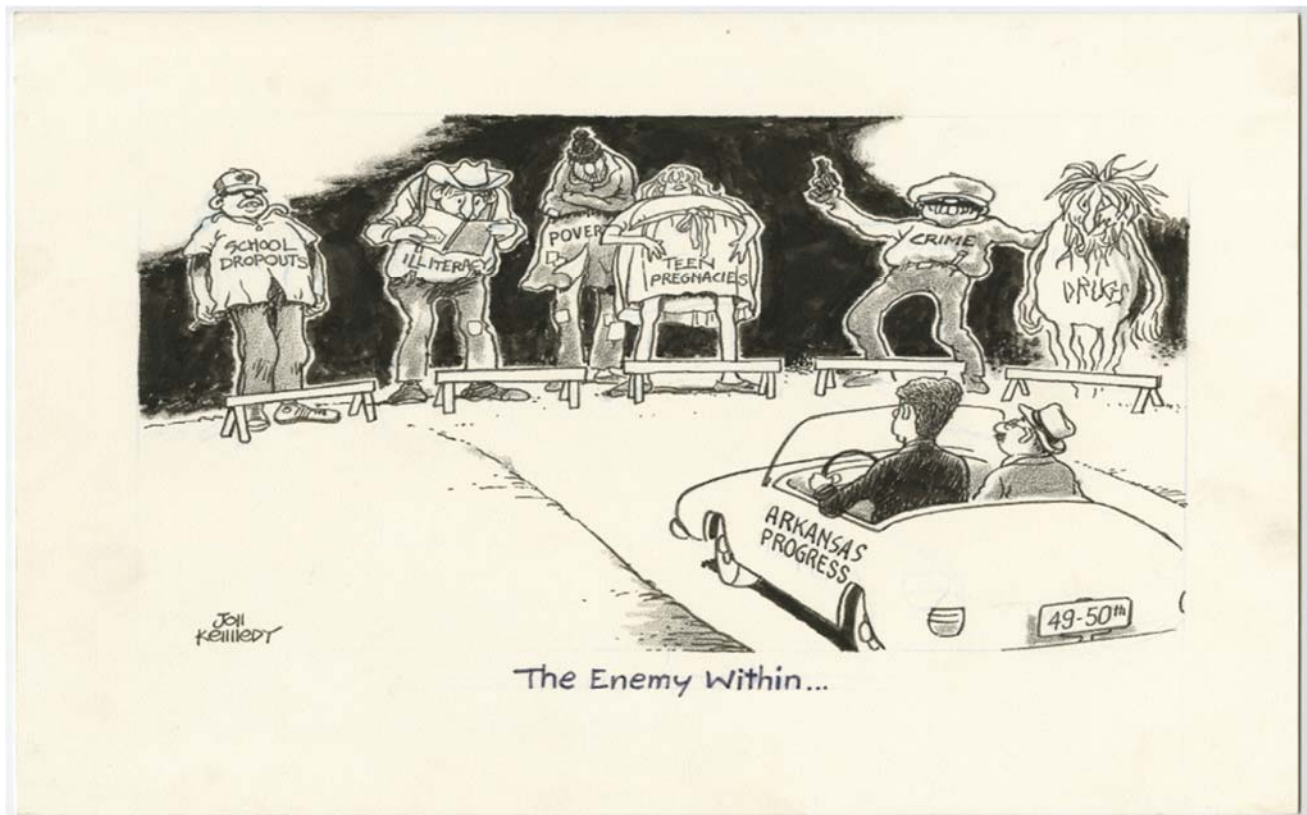
Cartoon Analysis Worksheet #4

1. What main point is the cartoon trying to make?
2. How do the labels in the cartoon help clarify its meaning and purpose?
3. Is there anything that should or shouldn't be labeled in the cartoon? How would the change help clarify its meaning?
4. How are the objects that are labeled drawn?
5. Do the drawings have any meaning without the labels? Explain.

Cartoon #5

Stereotyping

The Cartoon: This cartoon on problems facing Arkansas in the late 1980s was drawn by Jon Kennedy for The Arkansas Democrat on March 2, 1988. It shows a car labeled “Arkansas Progress” being stopped by a roadblock manned with characters labeled “School Dropouts”, “Illiteracy”, “Poverty”, “Teen Pregnancies”, “Crime”, and “Drugs”.



John Kennedy Cartoon Collection, 1935-1988, UALR.MS.0023. UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock.

Background: In the 1980s, Arkansas faced many challenges that left it near or at the bottom of lists among states in areas such as teen pregnancy and education. The same problems that had plagued Arkansas for some time, causing many stereotypes about Arkansans, were still quite evident and important for residents of the state.

Look For Stereotyping: A stereotype is a vastly oversimplified view of some group. Stereotypes are often insulting. Yet they may give cartoons a shorthand way to make a complex point quickly. They also reveal broad cultural attitudes.

Cartoon Analysis Worksheet #5

1. What is the main point this cartoon is trying to make?
2. The cartoon is titled "The Enemy Within". How do the visual features of the cartoon clarify the title?
3. How are the characters stereotypes of Arkansans or southerners?
4. What might someone moving to Arkansas have to say about these stereotypes?