

Political Cartoons

Summary

Political Cartoons play an important part in telling the history of a given period of time. Students will learn to analyze cartoons by identifying the symbols, characters and information and its significance in history

Time Frame

1 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication

Materials

- * Textbook cartoons
- * Current Political Cartoons - newspapers and magazines

Background for Teachers

In the late 1800's an increase in newspaper and magazine circulation provided a rich environment for the rise and use of political cartoons. During the Spanish American War, William R. Hearst encouraged the visual arts of Frederick Remington by saying, "you furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

Political cartoons communicate powerful ideas often in a humorous, enlightening manner, by incorporating the events of the period into an easily understandable format most people could relate to even with limited reading abilities. Symbols, caricature, drawings and exaggerations used by the cartoonist point out themes and problems of any given time period.

This lesson can be used throughout the year. However, I introduce political cartoons with the Gilded Age and Thomas Nast. Then I continue to use cartoons with the students for the rest of the year. Cagle.com also provides lesson plans on their website for grades 9-12.

Student Prior Knowledge

It is valuable to begin this lesson with a current event cartoon.

Background knowledge about the time period is important for student understanding of political cartoons. Students need to know universal symbols, such as Uncle Sam, doves representing peace, and so on. They also need to recognize characters of the time period.

So, during the Gilded Age, one would need to recognize visual presentations of men like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie and J.P. Morgan.

Instructional Procedures

One can use a variety of political cartoons from the textbook, newspaper and internet to do this lesson. Using an overhead or television show a cartoon and explain the steps for student to follow in analyzing the cartoon:

- Identify the characters, symbols and objects in the cartoon.
- Look for cues and details that will give further meaning

Identify the main idea of the cartoon by reading the captions and putting the message into their own words

Identify any bias the cartoonist might have.

After modeling several cartoons, put students into small groups. They will look at a series of cartoons and follow the steps above to interpret them.

Finally, give each student their own cartoon and ask them to individually interpret the meaning based on the time period.

Assessment Plan

- * Give students a political cartoon they have not previously seen and ask them to interpret the meaning of the cartoon in written form by following the steps given in class.

- * Have students create their own political cartoons for the given time period.

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