

Learning Targets

- Analyze the format, style, and conventions of editorial cartoons.
- Apply knowledge from this analysis to create an editorial cartoon.

Before Reading

1. Your teacher will provide examples of cartoons. Examine the cartoon assigned to you and determine whether the cartoon constitutes an editorial cartoon or a comic strip.
2. With a partner who has a different cartoon, construct a Venn diagram indicating the similarities and differences between these types of cartoons. Be sure to consider subject matter, style, how the cartoons in question demonstrate humor, etc.

During Reading

3. Read the following text, using your metacognitive markers to indicate anything that provokes a question (?), anything about which you wish to comment or make a connection (*), and anything you find surprising (!). Be prepared to discuss your responses.

Informational Text

An Inside Look at Editorial Cartoons

by Bill Brennan

- 1 A few weeks ago, Joy Utecht, the journalism teacher at Grand Island Senior High, asked if I could visit with some of her students about editorial cartoons.
- 2 The invitation was exciting because editorial cartoons are one of my favorite subjects. Very few items are as unique to a newspaper as editorial cartoons.
- 3 A very brief history lesson: Editorial cartoons first appeared in the United States on single-page broadsheets¹ during the colonial times. The first popular cartoon is a snake severed into 13 parts with the names of each colony by each piece. The caption is simple, “Divided we die.”
- 4 Such a theme helped the colonies, with their diverse locations and interests, unite under a common cause.
- 5 Flash forward to the years in New York City after the Civil War, when Tammany Hall² became such a powerful political machine that it nearly sucked the life out of its residents. In addition, William Tweed stole millions from the taxpayers.

¹ **broadsheets (n.):** early newspapers, also called broadsides, first used for issuing royal proclamations. They later evolved into the newspaper format with which we are familiar today.

² **Tammany Hall:** Tammany Hall was the name given to the Democratic political machine that dominated New York City politics.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Skimming/Scanning, Guided Reading, Graphic Organizer, Visualizing, Brainstorming, Sketching

My Notes

How to Read and Write an Editorial Cartoon

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why is caricature the starting point for political cartoon criticism?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Brennan alludes to an iconic political cartoon. How did this cartoon fit Brennan's five basic features?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Editorial cartoons may make you laugh, but they should always make you think. Can you recall editorial cartoons that have caused a stir?

6 Eventually, the *New York Times* and eventually law enforcement officials began investigations of the Tweed Ring, but it was the powerful cartoons of Nast that brought the politicians to their knees. At one point, Nast³, who worked for *Harper's Weekly*, turned down a bribe of \$500,000 to discontinue his cartoons.

7 Instead, Nast made Tweed the most recognizable face in America. When Tweed tried to flee conviction, he was arrested in Spain, because authorities recognized his face from Nast's cartoons.

8 By the way, Nast deserves partial credit for another icon, one that has stood the test of time. Along with an artist named Clement Moore, Nast drew the first Santa Claus.

9 Photography became a part of American newspapers and magazines as early as the Civil War, but the process was difficult and illustrations remained a part of American newspapers until early into the 20th Century.

10 But the sketches known as editorial cartoons are as popular today as they ever have been. People love the humor, simplicity and caricatures of politicians of the day. Caricatures, I told the students at Senior High, are exaggerations of one's physical features.

11 In recent years, there have been the JFK haircut, the LBJ ears, the Nixon eyebrows, the Carter teeth and the Clinton jaw. Of course, each cartoonist has his or her own style, but it is amazing how they reach out to the same features to identify a politician.

12 A good editorial cartoon must have five basic features.

- It must be simple. . .
- People must understand it. The cartoon must make sense to those who read the particular paper. A school newspaper might run a cartoon about cafeteria food that includes an inside joke and isn't readily understood by the general public. The cartoon would only make sense in the school newspaper.
- The cartoon must be timely. . .
- It must evoke emotion. A good cartoon should make people laugh or make them mad.
- Always, the cartoon must give a point of view. The cartoon may be looking at the truth, but it usually is coming from a specific viewpoint. When we look down at an object, the viewpoint is very different when we look up at the object. Editorial cartoons are the same way.

13 The *Independent* doesn't always agree with the viewpoint of each cartoon in the paper. Most certainly the readers don't always agree with them. But we all should agree that political cartoons are thought provoking. Just like a photograph, a well-illustrated editorial cartoon can be worth a thousand words.

14 There probably are about 100 newspapers, give or take a few, that employ full-time cartoonists. Unfortunately, it is a luxury that only metropolitan-sized newspapers can afford. Smaller newspapers subscribe to syndicated features for the right to reprint some of the better cartoons that have been published.

15 The next time you look at an editorial cartoon in the newspaper, try to look at it a new way. Instead of thinking about just whether you agree or disagree with the message, see if the cartoons have the five basic components to it [*sic*]. Then you can determine whether the message is getting through.

³ **Thomas Nast:** Nast used his cartoons to crusade against New York City's political boss William Tweed, and he devised the Tammany tiger for this crusade.

“Reading” Editorial Cartoons

4. Because there is so little space for an editorial cartoonist to make his or her point, the cartoonist often uses symbols and allusions as shorthand for the meaning of the cartoon. Examine each of the cartoons your teacher supplies and identify the symbols and allusions. Why might the cartoonist have chosen these symbols or allusions?
5. Most editorial cartoons present a specific political perspective. Do the cartoons you are examining have a specific point of view? How does the cartoonist demonstrate these perspectives?
6. Editorial cartoons are designed to evoke emotion—humor, anger, or outrage, for example. How do the cartoonists do this?
7. Based on these other questions, what does the message of your assigned cartoon seem to be, and what can you infer about its intended purpose?

My Notes

Literary Terms

Satire is a manner of writing that mixes a critical attitude with wit and humor in an effort to improve humankind and human institutions. Editorial cartoons are often rather satirical. You will learn more about satire in the second half of this unit.

How to Read and Write an Editorial Cartoon

My Notes

Creating Your Own Editorial Cartoons

8. Now that you have had some experience reading and analyzing political cartoons, try to create some of your own.

- Brainstorm topic ideas by thinking about current events in your school, your hometown, or the world. List a few ideas below.

- Choose one of your ideas and describe a point that you might want to make about that event. Perhaps you agree and want to show your support or perhaps you would like to ridicule those who might feel differently.

- What symbols, sayings, pop culture allusions, or other easily recognizable references might be appropriate for this topic?

- Sketch a very rough draft of what your cartoon might look like.

