

Congress in the Public Eye: A Look at American Political Cartoons

Lesson 2: How Do People Express Views about Congress? — The Role of Political Cartoons and Public Voice

Activity 1: Understanding Persuasion Techniques

Introduction

The purpose of this activity is to facilitate students' understanding of the personal and political rights expressed in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Students will investigate the artistic and persuasive techniques used by political cartoonists, evaluate the meaning of cartoons, and begin to formulate their own ideas about our government and how Congress works.

Focusing on Library of Congress Collections:

- [Prints and Photographs Online Catalog: American Cartoon Prints](#)
- [Herblock's Gift: Selections from the Herb Block Foundation Collection](#)
- [Herblock's History: Political Cartoons from the Crash to the Millennium](#)

Recommended Grade Level

Grades 8–12

Course/Subject

Civics/Government

Media Studies

Standards

Generally, this lesson connects to standards on civic ideals and practices and historical and social studies analysis skills.

Time

This activity will take approximately 60 minutes.

Activity Objectives

<p>Understanding Objectives: WHAT students will understand</p> <p>Students will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• that citizens are guaranteed specific rights in the U.S. Constitution and Amendments;• how Congress and its role in major historical events has been portrayed in political cartoons, and how these cartoons influenced Congress and the public;	<p>Process Objectives: HOW students will learn</p> <p>Students will actively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• describe the personal and political rights expressed in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution;• identify artistic and persuasive techniques used in political cartoons; and• analyze issues addressed in political cartoons.
--	---

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ways for citizens to express views and why it is important; • long-standing criticisms of Congress and determine the validity of these criticisms; and • how to use resources available through the Library of Congress to study issues relating to public perceptions of Congress. 	
---	--

Activity Materials

NOTE: Teachers should preview all sites to ensure they are age-appropriate for their students. At the time of publication, all URLs were valid.

Digital Resources from the Library of Congress

<p><u>Prepare for projection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons • "That's The Free World Deciding How Free to Be" by Bill Mauldin • "A Burp Special. October 9, 1944" by Chick Young • Photograph of Chauncey Mitchell Depew • "Depew—New York's 'Independent and Unfettered' United States Senator" • "I'm Eight. I Was Born on the Date of the Supreme Court Decision" by Herblock
--

Resources from the Center on Congress at Indiana University

Prepare for Projection or Viewing in an Internet-Ready Computer Lab

- Understanding Persuasion Techniques

Other Resources

- The [U.S. Constitution](#), specifically the First Amendment

Equipment and Other Supplies

- Student access to Internet-ready, Macromedia FLASH[®]-enabled computers or computer lab
- Projection device with one Internet-ready computer

Vocabulary

analogy*	An analogy is a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics.
civil rights	Rights of personal liberty guaranteed in the Constitution.
critique	Citizens and cartoonists often analyze, review, study, assess, or criticize-- offering a critique of an issue or political action.
exaggerate*	Sometimes cartoonists overdo, or exaggerate, the physical characteristics of people or things in order to make a point.
irony*	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 opinions on issues.
label*	Cartoonists often label objects or people to make it clear exactly what they stand for.
political cartoon	A political cartoon is a drawing that makes a statement about a political event or issue.
public policy	A decision, law, or other action of government that addresses problems and issues. Some policies are passed into laws, and some policies are contained in rules and regulations.
rights	In this lesson, a right refers to the powers and privileges granted to citizens.
responsibilities	Duties or obligations.
symbol*	Cartoonists use simple objects, or symbols, to stand for larger concepts or ideas.
*Definition from the Cartoon Analysis Guide: http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/cag.html	

Procedures and Learning Experiences

<p>I. Introduction to Political Cartoons</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read the First Amendment aloud to students. Ask students to summarize what rights are granted in the First Amendment and explain how these rights apply to their own lives.2. Explain to students that “freedom of speech” includes not only the written and spoken word, but also other forms of expression such as art, photographs, films, and advertisements. Americans have been expressing their views in political cartoons for over 200 years.3. Duplicate and distribute the following resources:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “That’s The Free World Deciding How Free to Be” by Bill Mauldin• “A Burp Special. October 9, 1944” by Chick Young4. Have students work in groups to quickly create a chart comparing and contrasting the two cartoons. Allow students to share their charts with the class.5. Explain to students that “That’s the Free World Deciding How Free to Be” is an example of a political cartoon. A political cartoon is a drawing that makes a statement about a political event or issue. “A Burp Special. October 9, 1944” is an example of a comic strip. It was created for entertainment.	<p>Ongoing Assessment: <u>Informal Teacher Assessment</u></p> <p>Listen to student responses and evaluate their understanding of the First Amendment.</p> <p>Assess students’ understanding of the difference between political cartoons and comic strips.</p>
<p>II. Artistic Techniques Used in Political Cartoons</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain to students that in order to understand the meaning of a political cartoon, it is important to examine the artistic and persuasive techniques the artist used. Artists often use the basic art elements (color, value, line, shape, form, texture, and space) to convey ideas and evoke specific emotions.2. Print copies of the resources listed below:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Photograph of Chauncey Mitchell Depew• “Depew—New York’s ‘Independent and Unfettered’ United States Senator”3. Divide the class into groups of three or four and give each group one copy of the photograph “Chauncey Mitchell Depew.”	<p>Ongoing Assessment: <u>Informal Teacher Assessment</u></p> <p>Examine the comparison chart students created. Listen to student responses during the whole class discussion to assess the ability of students to identify artistic features and evaluate the persuasiveness of a cartoon.</p>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Have groups write five adjectives that describe the photograph 5. Give each group a copy of “Depew—New York’s ‘Independent and Unfettered’ United States Senator.” Ask groups to write five adjectives that describe the cartoon. Students should use the art elements (color, value, line, shape, form, texture, and space) to help you select adjectives. 6. Have students create a chart that compares and contrasts the two views of Chauncey Mitchell Depew. Invite groups to share their charts. 7. Discuss student reactions to the pictures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the cartoon make you view Chauncey Depew differently than the portrait? Why? • Does the cartoon make you view Chauncey Depew favorably or unfavorably? Which artistic features influenced your opinion? 8. Ask groups to use the title and clues from the political cartoon to make a possible interpretation of the meaning of the cartoon. 9. Have groups do brief research to confirm or revise their initial interpretation. Ask students to keep a list of the ways that they use to become informed about this cartoon (sources). Make a list and discuss the variety of ways used by the students and what knowing the background adds to the ability to interpret the cartoon. 	<p><u>Teacher Formal Assessment</u> Assess each student’s ability to formulate a reasonable initial interpretation of the cartoon, the means by which the student gained background information, and how the original interpretation of the cartoon was changed by gaining more background knowledge.</p>
<p>III. Persuasive Techniques Used in Political Cartoons</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use a projection device to show students: <p><u>“I’m Eight. I Was Born on the Date of the Supreme Court Decision” by Herblock.</u></p> 2. Divide students into small groups of three or four. Have the groups develop a list of questions they can ask to help them understand the meaning of the cartoon. 3. Invite groups to share their list of questions. Note whether any of the questions are the same across groups. 4. Explain to students that political cartoons differ in artistic style; however, most cartoonists apply the same persuasive techniques. Identifying these techniques in a cartoon can help you understand the message being conveyed. 	<p>Ongoing Assessment: <u>Informal Teacher Assessment</u> Check while students are completing It’s No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons to evaluate the extent to which students are able to identify the persuasive techniques.</p>

5. [ONLINE] Use a projection device with a single Internet-connected computer (or take the class to a computer lab) to show students, “It’s No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons.”

Read the definition for each persuasive technique aloud.

Before you proceed to the “Test Yourself” section, ask students to look at the questions they previously developed. (See step 2.) Discuss how identifying some of the persuasive techniques can help them answer these questions. Ask students to write the answers to some of their questions.

As a class, complete the “Test Yourself” section and identify the persuasive techniques used in each cartoon.

6. Give students additional practice identifying persuasive techniques used in political cartoons. Ask students to complete the online, interactive activity: Understanding Persuasion Techniques. **Note:** If you do not have access to the computer lab, duplicate and distribute the printable version of this activity.
7. Before students begin, describe the steps involved in completing the activity:
 - Select a cartoon. Read the text and look for details in the picture.
 - Click on one of the techniques listed on the notebook paper.
 - Type several sentences that describe how the artist used this technique in this cartoon.
 - Save and close the activity.

Formal Culminating

Assessment—Teacher—

Determine from the written responses the extent to which students are able to apply categories from It’s No Laughing Matter in analyzing political cartoons.