

Sample Lesson – Handout 1 Symbol and Metaphor

The Cartoon: This cartoon on the drive for women’s suffrage appeared along with an article in the magazine *Judge*, March 3, 1917. The cartoon shows four women backing the drive for female suffrage riding on a steamroller crushing rocks labeled "opposition."



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-USZ62-128029

Background: By March of 1917, an energized women’s suffrage movement was in the last stages of its push to win the right to vote for all women in the United States. Women began winning voting rights in some western states in the late 1800s. The reform movement known as “Progressivism” further boosted the drive for female suffrage in the early 1900s. The effective roles women played during World War I may have finally pushed President Woodrow Wilson in 1917 to agree to back a Constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. The 19th amendment was passed in 1919 and sent to the states. The states ratified it in 1920.

Checklist Item – Symbol and Metaphor in Cartoons: A visual symbol in a cartoon is any image that stands for some other thing, event, person, abstract idea or trend in the news. For example, a dollar sign may stand for the entire economy. An octopus may stand for a powerful corporation with “tentacles” controlling many other institutions. Metaphors are like symbols in that they describe one thing as something else entirely. Shakespeare used a metaphor when he wrote “All the world’s a stage.” (A cartoon would simply show the world as a stage.)

- Begin any cartoon analysis by describing all the details in it that are symbols and metaphors.

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Handout 1: Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

(Take brief notes to use in a class discussion)

1. What is this cartoon about?

(a one sentence summary of its main point)

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 steamroller and the rubble it is crushing?

5. Notice how the three women are drawn. Are these figures also symbols? Why or why not?

6. Why is one woman wearing a banner labeled "West"?

7. How might an opponent of this cartoon's point of view have altered the symbols in it?

Sample Lesson – Handout 2

Visual Distortion

The Cartoon: The Library of Congress records no exact date or location for this cartoon on child labor by artist Herbert Johnson. It is a part of a collection attributed to photographer Lewis Hine. Based on photos near it, it is dated to approximately 1912.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-DIG-nclc-04783

Background: Child labor existed throughout American history. As the nation industrialized, much child labor moved from the farm to the factory. Children were seen as cheaper and easy to control. They were hired in large numbers to work in mines and factories, often in extremely unhealthful and dangerous conditions. In the early 1900s, labor unions and other national reform organizations began to seek legislation regulating or limiting child labor and promoting free, compulsory education as a substitute.

Checklist Item – Visual Distortion: Changes or exaggerations in size, shape, emotions or gestures often add extra meaning to the symbols the cartoon includes. For example, a dragon is often used as a symbol for China. But a huge, snorting dragon will make a different point about China from a tired, limping, meek dragon. Every detail in a cartoon, especially one that is distorted in some way, is likely to be a part of the cartoon's meaning.

- Identify the cartoon's symbols and notice how they are drawn.

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Handout 2: Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

(Take brief notes to use in a class discussion)

1. What big problem is this cartoon concerned with?

(a one sentence summary of its main point)

2. What are the key symbols in the cartoon and how are they distorted?

3. How do the distortions help the cartoon make its point?

4. Is there anything else about this huge hand besides its size that helps the cartoon make its point?

5. How are the children in the cartoon drawn? How does this add to the visual effect of the huge hand in the cartoon?

6. What else besides a hand 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?

Sample Lesson – Handout 3

Irony in Words and Images

The Cartoon: This cartoon on the evils of political patronage is by one of America’s most famous cartoonists, Thomas Nast. It appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, April 28, 1877.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-USZ62-89864

Background: This cartoon shows a statue of Andrew Jackson on pig. The statue is titled “To the Victors Belong the Spoils,” a phrase used to explain why election winners were entitled to hand out government jobs (patronage) to their loyal followers. Jackson was president from 1829-1837. However, Thomas Nast drew the cartoon in 1877, when he was battling machine politicians in New York City who in his view had proved how corrupt the patronage principle “to the victors belong the spoils” really was.

Checklist Item – Irony in Words and Images: Irony is a form of humor in which something is said in a way that undercuts or mocks its own apparent meaning. In other words, what is said seems to mean one thing, but it will be taken to mean the opposite. Irony is well suited to political cartoons, which often seek to mock something and show how false, unfair or dangerous it is. Irony always entails a contradiction. Often, an amusing image undercuts and reverses the meaning of the words in a caption. Sometimes, however, the image alone conveys the double meaning.

- Consider whether irony is used and if so, how?

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Handout 3: Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

(Take brief notes to use in a class discussion)

- 1. This cartoon makes fun of one aspect of politics in the 1800s. Can you explain?** (a one sentence summary of its main point)

- 2. In what ways does this image of a statue remind you of monuments dedicated to great or heroic figures?**

- 3. Using your background knowledge, explain the term "To the Victors Belong the Spoils" in your own words.**

- 4. What visual symbols in this cartoon undercut or go against the idea that this statue is meant to be heroic or admirable?**

- 5. The pig on this statue is rooting around in some garbage labeled "fraud," "bribery," "spoils" and "plunder." How does this add to the ironic message of the cartoon?**