

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Learning to Analyze Political Cartoons with Lincoln as a Case Study
From David Chassanoff

Grade – 8th

Length of class period – 60 minute class, with a long term assignment included.

Inquiry – Students will learn to identify the key elements of a political cartoon and replicate the process themselves by creating a Civil War political cartoon.

Objectives - students will recognize symbolism, exaggeration, irony, analogy and captioning in political cartoons from the Civil War Era, determine the effectiveness of the artist & create their own cartoon using some of these elements.

Materials -Explanation of the key elements, a class example to discuss, a **power point presentation looking in detail at Lincoln as a case study**, a political cartoon analysis worksheet, a cartoon drawing activity and a rubric to use.

Activities The elements of a political cartoon will be thoroughly explained and defined. There will be an in depth question and answer session on how these elements have been used historically with the power point slide show using primary source material from the 1860's. The political cartoon analysis worksheet will be used with the cartoon: "The Good Uncle and the Naughty Boy" for homework. Finally, the students will create their own cartoon illustrating any aspect of the Civil War (see assignment).

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

The cartoon the students are creating will be graded as a quiz and will be assessed using the rubric included.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

Standard 2 Competence in literacy, inquiry and research skills is necessary to analyze, evaluate and present history and social studies information.

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including electronic media (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, images, artifacts, recordings and text).

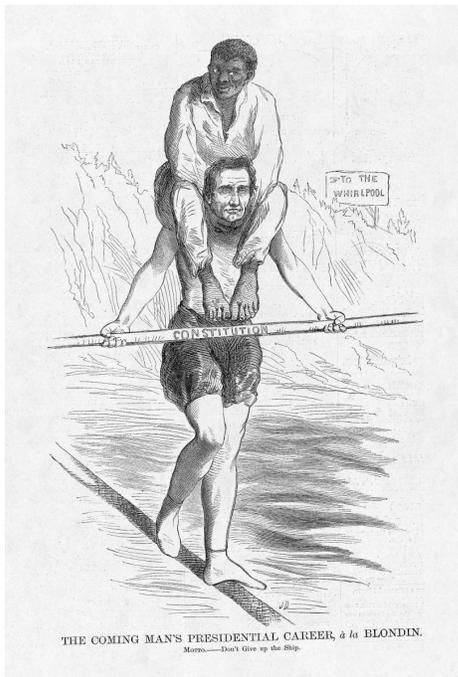
High School 5 Interpret social/political messages of cartoons.

Cartoonists use 5 main elements to convey their point of view.

- symbolism – using an object to stand for an idea.
- captioning & labels – used for clarity and emphasis.
- analogy – a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics.
- irony – the difference between the way things are & the way things are expected to be.
- exaggeration – overstating or magnifying a problem or a physical feature or habit: big nose, bushy eyebrows, large ears, baldness, etc.

Examples of Symbols Used in Political Cartoons

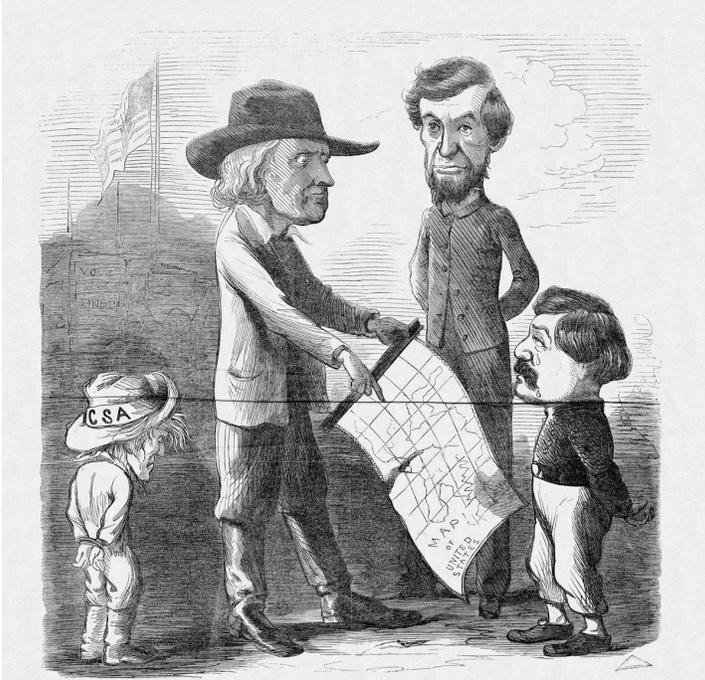
- peace – dove, olive branch, victory sign, scales of justice.
- United States – Uncle Sam, flag, stars and stripes, shield, lady liberty.
- Democrats – donkey.
- Republicans – elephant.
- death – vulture, skeleton w/ shroud, skull and crossbones, grim reaper.
- love – heart, Cupid, Venus
- money – dollar bill or dollar sign.



Charles Blondin (Jean François Gravelet, 1824-1897) was a French-born acrobat who became famous in the late 1850s for his daring tightrope walks over Niagara Falls. He repeated the feat several times while performing various stunts, such as drinking a bottle of wine, eating a meal, standing on his head, standing on one foot, walking blindfolded, hanging by his feet, pushing a wheelbarrow, laying down, and walking on stilts (the latter accomplished before an audience that included Edward, Prince of Wales).

Blondin earned a considerable amount of money for his acrobatic exploits: \$1500 for one Niagara Falls crossing and an estimated \$5-8,000 for one season. He was able to purchase a house in the town of Niagara Falls for \$4,000 cash. The daredevil made other challenging tightrope walks, including crossing the Montmorenci Fall in Quebec, which is wider and deeper than Niagara Falls, and the Genesee River at Rochester, New York. In 1861 the British Home Office prohibited him from pushing prizefighter Tom Sayers in a wheelbarrow across a tight rope suspended from the Crystal Palace.

The stunt that Lincoln—in the guise of Blondin—performs in this *Harper's Weekly* cartoon refers to the time when Blondin carried his 136-lb. agent, Henry Colcord, on his back while crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope. The cartoon may also allude to a crossing in which Blondin appeared as an enchained Liberian slave. In the artist's view, the Republican party's stance on slavery is a burden on Lincoln's shoulders as he tries to win the presidential election. The U.S. Constitution, however, is Lincoln's balancing rod that keeps him steady and allows him to reach his goal.



THE GOOD UNCLE AND THE NAUGHTY BOY.

UNCLE SAM--I HEAR THAT SOMEBODY HAS BEEN OFFERING TO SELL THIS TO THAT DOT THERE, AND I'M BOUND TO FIND OUT WHO DID IT. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, WERE YOU THERE DURING THE ELECTION?
ABRAHAM--I WAS AT THE TOP OF THE POLL, SIR.
UNCLE SAM--GEORGE MCCLELLAN, WERE YOU SEE?
GEORGE MCCLELLAN--IF YOU PLEASE, SIR, I WASN'T ANYWHERE.
UNCLE SAM--HUM! WEREN'T ANYWHERE! THAT LOOKS SUSPICIOUS--VERY SUSPICIOUS!

Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

Name:

Visuals

List the objects or people you see in the cartoon	Put a mark next to the objects that are symbols	List what you think each symbol means

Did the cartoonist exaggerate any of the objects or the physical features of a person or people in the cartoon? If yes, describe how.

What effect was the cartoonist trying to achieve by exaggerating these items?

Are the lines of the cartoon bold, fuzzy, light, hard or soft? Are shapes curvy or angular (geometric)? What feelings do the lines convey? What effect does this create?

Words

Identify the cartoon's caption and/or title.

Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.

List the words or phrases used by the cartoonist to label objects or people within the cartoon.

How do the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols?

Which words or phrases appear to be the most significant? Why?

Action

Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.

What facial expressions are portrayed in the cartoon? How does the cartoonist use lines to suggest expression?

Meaning

What political event or idea is the cartoon referring to?

What conclusions can you draw about the cartoonist's opinion?

What specific details in the cartoon led you to this conclusion?

What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?

Whose opinion or point of view is not represented in this cartoon?

How is the cartoon effective in your opinion?