

Cartoons for the Classroom

Presented by NIEonline.com and the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)



Courtesy Nick Anderson / Louisville Courier-Journal

Loaded with symbols

To interpret the message in this Nick Anderson political cartoon, you have to recognize a series of symbols and put the toon into the context of its time. On the surface this cartoon shows a cowboy with a saddle approaching a frightened donkey that's tied to a tree. But wait. Why are there Ws on the boots? So who's the cowboy? What do the cross-shaped spurs signify? The donkey doesn't seem very happy about what's about to happen. Who does the donkey represent?

Get out your newspaper

Gather a collection of political cartoons from your newspaper over the next two weeks. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Worksheet (available online at the NIE Website) analyze each cartoon and explain the issues addressed and determine the point of view of the artist. Gather news stories about those issues and evaluate the cartoonists' opinions.

Talking points

1. Make a list of the symbols employed in this cartoon. For example, we know the main figure is a cowboy because of "cowboy symbols" such as . . .
2. When this cartoon was originally published, President Bush had just won reelection thanks, in part, to strong support from the "Christian Right." What does this toon say about that support?
3. President Bush is often depicted as a cowboy in political cartoons. Why? Is that a positive or negative characterization. Explain.
4. Why do cartoonists turn to symbols as visual shorthand to get their message across?

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)
<http://editorialcartoonists.com/>

Nick Anderson's Pulitzer Prize (2005) portfolio
<http://pulitzer.org/year/2005/editorial-cartooning/works>