

Cartoons for the Classroom

Presented in cooperation with the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)



B.D. brings the war home



B.D. has lost a leg and shed his helmet. The character has been a part of "Doonesbury" since Garry Trudeau launched the strip in 1970. B.D. was gravely wounded in Iraq - but not killed, Trudeau says, because the plot allows him to explore the struggles wounded soldiers face as they return home. Everything has changed as B.D. faces an uncertain future. To signal the change, B.D. appears without his helmet for the first time in three decades.

Can a comic strip character drive home the horrors of war to a nation becoming desensitized to mounting daily casualty reports? It helps to attach a face to the pain. Even if that face is simply a comic character we've known for 30 years.

The strip has a long history of addressing difficult topics. For that reason many papers have moved Doonesbury from the comics pages to the opinion page.

In 1975, Garry Trudeau became the first comic strip artist ever to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.



Garry Trudeau / Universal Press Syndicate. Reprinted with permission

Talking points: Some editors refused to run the middle sequence in their newspapers because of the strong language. Was that the right decision? What's the function of a comic strip? Who is the intended audience for the comics? Do you think a theme like this belongs in the funny pages? Comics are traditionally associated with children and "childish" themes. Most are gag strips, but satire does enjoy a place on comics pages and you may be surprised by the depth of some strips. Some, like the legendary Pogo from the 1940s, are really four-panel political cartoons. Is "Doonesbury" a comic strip or a political commentary?

Get out your newspaper

Examine the comic strips in your newspaper for a week. Which ones resemble political cartoons with a message rather than gags?

Dissect the toons explaining the message and why you feel some are editorial commentary.

Additional resources

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

Doonesbury at Slate.com
<http://www.doonesbury.com/strip/>