Editorial Cartoon

What are editorial cartoons?

Editorial cartoons are found in the editorial – or opinion – section of a newspaper. They are created by cartoonists as a way of visually commenting on and often criticizing the world around them – with humour. Editorial cartoonists express their ideas and opinions about issues (e.g., what to do about Canada's economy), events (e.g., the Olympic Games) or public figures (e.g., the Prime Minister).

Because cartoons are drawn from the viewpoint of the cartoonist they do not tell the whole story about the event, issue or individual, but they reveal important messages. Their purpose is to grab people's attention and cause them to re-examine their views on a subject. Editorial cartoons typically send a particular kind of message. The message is conveyed through images and wordplay. Their tone is generally **ironic** (portrays events in ways that are unexpected or contrary to how they seem), **satiric** (ridiculing the event, individual or issue), or **humorous** (inviting readers to laugh at themselves or at others). The message is conveyed through images and wordplay.

In order to interpret the message of an editorial cartoon it is helpful to understand the context – the time, place and situation. It is also useful to understand some of the common art techniques used by cartoonists to emphasize their points. Considering these things will help you better decode and appreciate the message behind the cartoon.

What common art techniques are used by editorial cartoonists?

1. **Caption** (a sentence or phrase that is the title or explanation of the cartoon);

2. **Labels** (words or numbers in the drawing to identify people, objects or dates);

3. **Relative size** (some images are drawn much larger or much smaller than others);

4. **Light and dark** (use of dark shading and white space to create an effect);

5. **Composition** (the arrangement or location of figures or objects in the centre or background);

6. **Symbols** (a sign or image to represent something else);

7. **Caricature** (a distorted, simplified or exaggerated representation of a figure).

(To learn more about interpreting political cartoons, read the *Toolkit: Decoding Political Cartoons* by Charles Hou on the Library and Archives Canada's web site at **http://www.collectionscanada.ca/education/008-3050-e.html**)

Initial reading: What can an initial look reveal?

1. Glance quickly at the cartoon. What is your first impression – your "gut response"?

2. Consider your background knowledge. What do you already know about the context of the cartoon – the time, place or situation? (List key facts)

Closer look: How do the cartooning techniques help to present the message?

3. Find labels. How do the words in the drawing express ideas or identify people or objects?

4. Examine the relative size of figures or objects in the cartoon. What can you infer about the figures or objects from their size? How does the relative size add to the message of the cartoon?

5. Notice the caricature. How do the exaggerated, oversimplified or distorted features of the figures or objects add to the effect of the cartoon? What message does this send to the reader?

6. Look at the composition. Where are figures or objects located or arranged in the cartoon? What message does this send about their importance?

7. Identify the symbols. What do these signs or images represent? How do they add to the message of the cartoon?

Draw conclusions: What overall impression can you draw?

8. Identify possible biases. Whose perspective or point of view is expressed in the cartoon?

9. Explain the overall message of the cartoon in a detailed and specific paragraph.