

What makes funny cartoons seriously persuasive?

Cartoonists' persuasive techniques do. All cartoonists have access to a collection of tools that help them get their point across. Some of these techniques work "behind the scenes." You might not even notice them unless you know what you are looking for.

Political Cartoons: Pictures with a Point

A political cartoon is a cartoon that makes a point about a political issue or event. You can find them in any daily newspaper, but they won't be in the comics section. Instead, look on the editorial pages – they're right next to the editorial columns, and across from the opinion essays. You can also find them in newsmagazines and on political Web sites.

Political cartoons can be very funny, especially if you understand the issue that they're commenting on. Their main purpose, though, is not to amuse you but to persuade you. A good political cartoon makes you think about current events, but it also tries to sway your opinion toward the cartoonist's point of view. The best political cartoonist can change your mind on an issue without you even realizing how he or she did it.

Cartoonists' Persuasive Techniques

Cartoonists use several methods, or techniques, to get their point across. Not every cartoon includes all of these techniques, but most political cartoons include at least a few. Some of the techniques cartoonists use the most are symbolism, exaggeration, labelling, analogy, and irony.

Once you learn to spot these techniques, you'll be able to see the cartoonist's point more clearly. You should also be aware of any political slant, or bias, that he or she might have. When you know where the cartoonist is coming from, it's easier to make up your own mind.

You might also start watching out for the persuasive techniques used in other media, such as political ads and TV news programs. There are a lot of people out there trying to change your mind – it's a good idea to be aware of how they're doing it.

- **Symbolism** - Cartoonists use simple objects, or **symbols**, to stand for larger concepts or ideas. After you identify the symbols in a cartoon, think about what the cartoonist intends each symbol to stand for.
- **Exaggeration** - Sometimes cartoonists **overdo**, or **exaggerate**, the physical characteristics of people or things in order to make a point. When you study a cartoon, look for any characteristics that seem overdone or overblown. (Facial characteristics and clothing are some of the most commonly exaggerated characteristics.) Then, try to decide what point the cartoonist was trying to make through exaggeration.
- **Labelling** - Cartoonists often **label** objects or people to make it clear exactly what they stand for. Watch out for the different labels that appear in a cartoon, and ask yourself why the cartoonist chose to label that particular person or object. Does the label make the meaning of the object clearer?
- **Analogy** - An **analogy** is a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics. By comparing a complex issue or situation with a more familiar one, cartoonists can help their readers see it in a different light. After you've studied a cartoon for a while, try to decide what the cartoon's main analogy is. What two situations does the cartoon compare? Once you understand the main analogy, decide if this comparison makes the cartoonist's point clearer to you.
- **Irony** is the difference between the ways things are and the way things should be, or the way things are expected to be. Cartoonists often use irony to express their opinion on an issue. When you look at a cartoon, see if you can find any irony in the situation the cartoon depicts. If you can, think about what point the irony might be intended to emphasize. Does the irony help the cartoonist express his or her opinion more effectively?

Once you've identified the persuasive techniques that the cartoonist used, ask yourself:

- What issue is this political cartoon about?
- What is the cartoonist's opinion on this issue?
- What other opinion can you imagine another person having on this issue?
- Did you find this cartoon persuasive? Why or why not?
- What other techniques could the cartoonist have used to make this cartoon more persuasive?

Cartoon Analysis Guide

In analysing a cartoon follow these 3 steps:	
Steps	Useful expressions
Step One - What is depicted?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the objects or people you see in the cartoon. 2. Describe the action depicted. 3. What is the setting, i.e. where and when does the action take place? 4. Which devices does the cartoonist use (i.e. exaggerated physical features, clothing, positioning and size of figures, facial expressions, body language, colour)? 5. Is there a caption? Are there any important words, numbers or phrases? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the foreground/background/centre there is/you can see ... • On the left/right there is ... • The scene depicts ... • Mr X is characterized/depicted as s.o. who ... • He looks as if ... • She appears to ... • It seems as if ... • Mr Y looks bigger as he is positioned in the foreground. •
Step Two - What is the message?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Which of the objects and characters are symbols? 7. What do you think each of the symbols means? 8. Which message/comment does the cartoonist want to convey? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He/She/It stands for/represents/symbolizes/shows • This indicates that ... • This assumption is supported by the fact that ... • The cartoonist emphasizes/criticizes/wants to express the idea that ... • The scene epitomizes ... (= verkörpert/ist der Inbegriff von ...) • The cartoon conveys the message that ... • It is obvious from the way Mr Y is depicted that ... • The cartoonist seems to criticize/ridicule/question ... • ...
Step Three - What is your personal opinion?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Do you agree or disagree with the message? Do you support the position? Do you find this cartoon persuasive? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is true that ... • In my opinion ... • I agree in principle, but ... • I entirely/partly agree with ... • I have my doubts as to ... • This statement/comment demands qualifying (= bedarf einer Erläuterung). • ...

HOW TO ANALYZE A CARTOON

Identifying the Main Idea of the Political Cartoon

Political cartoons are used to present a strong visual message or point of view on a topic of current interest.

1. Context||What political event or idea is the cartoon referring to?
2. What key people or groups are part of the cartoon's message?
3. How has the cartoonist depicted these people? Explain any symbols used by the cartoonist to portray people or countries.
4. Identify any captions, titles, labels, or speech bubbles in the cartoon. How do these contribute to the cartoon's message?
5. Interpretation||What is the message of this cartoon? How is the cartoonist trying to persuade the reader?

Analyzing the Method Used by the Cartoonist

Cartoonists use a number of methods to convey their message including humor, caricature (an exaggerated drawing in which features are distorted), satire, and symbolism. Use the questions below to help analyze the cartoonist's method.

6. Is the cartoon drawn realistically or are the characters distorted? Does the way the characters are drawn cast them in a positive or a negative light? Why do you think the cartoonist chose to use this style?
7. Is the cartoon funny or is it serious? Explain how the method chosen by the cartoonist effectively conveys a political message.
8. What drawings, captions, or labels does the cartoonist use to grab the reader's attention? What did you notice first about the cartoon?
9. Do you think cartoons are a good way to convey political messages? Explain why or why not.