

## LIGHTHOUSE CPA SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT

### HOW TO ANALYZE POLITICAL CARTOONS

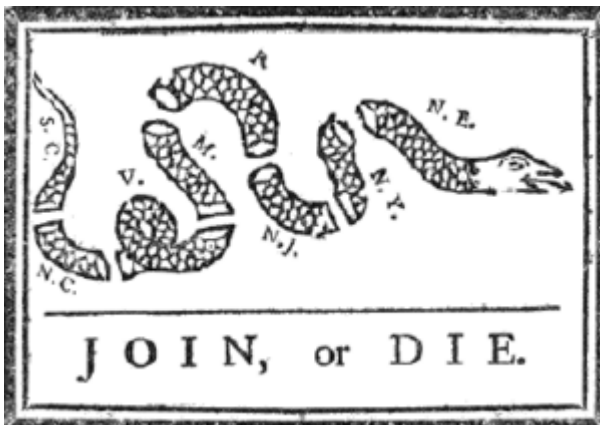


*In almost every newspaper around the world , a political cartoon is published that highlights a particular viewpoint or idea through the use of illustration . Often , the image is exaggerated and intended to be humorous as well as informative . They can also be satirical or even serious in tone , depending on the audience , the artist , and the idea illustrated . Use these steps to analyze a political cartoon so you can accurately find what the artist is trying to convey .*

#### STEPS IN ANALYZING POLITICAL CARTOONS :

- 1. Let your eyes "float" over the cartoon . Artists know what will capture the mind's attention first . Allow your mind , and your eyes , to naturally find the portion of the cartoon that most stands out . Most often , this will be a caricature , which is an exaggeration or distortion of a person or object with the goal of providing a comic effect .*

*In this example, "Join, or Die," the main focus is a snake:*



- 2. Follow the cartoon's natural flow by discovering the interaction with the primary focus (found in step 1) . If it's a person , whom are they talking to ? Where are they standing ? If it's an object , what is being done to the object ? What is it doing there ? Most often , you can look around the immediate vicinity of the primary focus to find what is being described . This is usually an allusion , or an indirect reference to a past or current event that isn't explicitly made clear within the cartoon .*
  - Following our example , the snake looks like it might be poised to attack . What would it be attacking ?*
  - The body is disjointed , and each of the eight sections has an abbreviation . Can you recognize any of them ?*

3. *Determine the audience . What section of the population is the publication geared towards , and in what country and locality ? A political cartoon will be created with consideration to the experiences and assumptions of the intended audience . For example , a political cartoon in a publication distributed in a strictly conservative town will convey its message in a different way than it would if the audience was a particularly liberal group .*

- *"Join, or Die" was first published in his Pennsylvania Gazette on May 9 , 1754 . The audience at the time would probably recognize the abbreviations as standing for a British American colony or region .*

4. *Understand the context of the cartoon . More often than not, the political cartoon will be published in context , meaning that it is associated with the main news story of the day . If you are viewing a political cartoon outside of its original publishing source , you will want to be well-read about current and historical events . For example, if Al Gore is talking to the Democratic National Convention about the Internet and how great it is , you need to understand that the press at one time misinterpreted what Al Gore said in an interview with CNN ' s Wolf Blitzer that he "invented" the Internet .*

- *"Join, or Die" was drawn by Benjamin Franklin and appeared in conjunction with an editorial by him that addressed the dissatisfaction of the colonies and encouraged colonial unity .*
- *The cartoon and editorial were published when the colonists were deciding whether to fight the French and their Indian allies for territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River .*
- *The phrase itself , "Join, or Die" implies that if the colonies don't join forces to "attack" or fight opposing forces, they will "die" or fail to work towards their own interest .*
- *At the time , there was also a superstition that a cut snake could come alive again if it was put back together before sunset .*

5. *Look for widely recognized symbols . Some metaphors are commonly used by political cartoonists . For example :*

- *Uncle Sam or an eagle for the United States*
- *John Bull , Britannia or a lion for the United Kingdom*
- *A beaver for Canada*
- *A bear for Russia*
- *A dragon for China*
- *A sun for Japan*

6. *Look at minor details in the cartoon that will contribute to the humor or the point of the cartoon . Often , words or pictorial symbols will be used to convey minor themes or ideas , but they are found in the background or on the sides of the cartoon .*

*SOME HELPFUL TIPS :*

- *As in most cases , two heads are better than one . Analyzing political cartoons is a frequent activity in history and social science classes from grade school through university levels . Try talking it out with a friend or classmate since you both probably see different aspects of the cartoon . When all else fails, ask a teacher .*
- *Many political cartoons appear on the opinion/editorial ( op / ed ) page of a newspaper . Look around the cartoon at editorials and opinion articles that might provide more context for the cartoon .*
- *You might also try looking on the front page of the newspaper ( or web site ) to find the most recent news articles for which the cartoon is made .*
- *Most political cartoons are drawn in black-and-white , so don't expect to see lots of color . Your analysis should be easy to make without it .*

*WARNING :*

*Political cartoons are many times meant to be funny and , more often than not , forget about political correctness . If you feel like you might be offended by a political cartoon , don't look at them .*