

ANALYZING POLITICAL CARTOONS

Editorial or political cartoons are not like other comics. They may be funny, but their main purpose is to offer an opinion or point of view about some issue or problem in the news. Some of the elements of political cartoons are:

SYMBOLISM

A *symbol* is any object or design that stands for some other thing, person, or idea.

EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION

Changes in size or shape often add to the cartoon's point. Distorting an object means changing it in some way to make it look funny, ugly, etc.

STEREOTYPES

A *stereotype* is a simplistic view of some group. It is often insulting, but it can also help the cartoon make its point quickly.

CARICATURE

Caricature is a portrayal of an individual's features in an exaggerated or distorted way.

HUMOR AND IRONY

Humor is important in many editorial cartoons. Irony is one kind of humor. In it, a viewpoint is expressed in such an odd way as to make that view actually seem ridiculous.

CAPTIONS

Words are used to reinforce the cartoon's nonverbal features. Words help the other parts of the cartoon make one overall point. Famous sayings, slogans, song lyrics, and well-known phrases can be used as captions.

Source: William Fetsko, "Using and Analyzing Political Cartoons"
(Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Productions, 2001).