

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

Evaluating Differing Opinions in Political Cartoons



Women's Sphere: Suffrage Cartoons

Illustration [1909?]

Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collection Division, NAWSA
Miller Scrapbook Collection.

Library of Congress Bibliographic record:

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbcmil.scrp5015401>

OVERVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this activity is to facilitate students' higher-order thinking skills through the analysis of issues presented in political cartoons. Students will identify sources of information about current issues. They will analyze three political cartoons related to the women's suffrage movement, discussing the techniques cartoonists use to advocate through this medium and determining the cartoonists' stands on the issue. Students will then examine contemporary political cartoons, formulate opinions about the issues addressed in the cartoons, and conduct research to get more information about the issues to confirm or modify their initial opinions.

Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Explain ways that people can become informed before developing views about issues and institutions;
- Identify artistic and persuasive techniques used in political cartoons;
- Analyze issues addressed in political cartoons;
- Use research evidence to formulate an opinion on an issue expressed in a political cartoon.

Time Required

Two class periods

Recommended Grade Range

Secondary Level: 8-12

Topic/s

Woman Suffrage ~ Scrapbooks ~ 1897-1911
Political Cartoons—various collections

Subject/ Sub-Subject

Social Studies: Civics

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

Language Arts: Writing, Viewing

The Library of Congress

Page 1

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Standards

McREL 4th Edition Standards & Benchmarks
<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Civics

Standard 29. Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1. Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument.

Standard 2. Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning.

Language Arts: Writing

Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Language Arts: Viewing

Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Credits

Center on Congress at Indiana University *Teaching with Primary Sources* Staff

PREPARATION

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity:

Projection device with one Internet-ready computer (or prepare and distribute copies) to share the following:

The Cartoon Analysis Guide

http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/cag.html

Election Day! <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a51845>

Women's Sphere: Suffrage Cartoons <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbcmil.scrp5015401>

Uncle Sam (as 'Public Opinion') Embracing Nurse...

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b23212>

Copies of newspapers from last several days or weeks (at least 2-3 different newspapers per student group)

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Resources

Background for the Activity:

These primary source documents from the Library of Congress provide background insight on the women's suffrage issues:

- Persuasion or responsibility, by Florence Kelley, Political Equality Series editorial, from the National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, 1848-1921; <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbnawsa.n835g>
- Debate on woman suffrage in the Senate of the United States, 2d session, 49th Congress, December 8, 1886, and January 25, 1887, by Senators H.W. Blair, J.E. Brown, J.N. Dolph, G.G. Vest, and Geo. F. Hoar. (In the Table of Contents, click on the "Woman Suffrage" link, then scroll down to pages 33-36. Begin reading at the last paragraph on page 33 at the line "Mr. VEST. Mr. President, any measure of legislation which affects popular government based on the will of the people as expressed through their suffrage is not only important but vitally so.") <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbnawsa.n4960>

Additional resources:

"Use Editorial Cartoons to Teach About Elections Past and Present" article by Walter McKenzie, Education World®, 2006 Education World

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr210.shtml

This article provides rationale for using political cartoons to teach about history and facilitate students' use of higher-order thinking skills. It also provides links to other resources about editorial cartoons.

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

PROCEDURE

Activating Prior Knowledge:

1. Explain to students that our representative democracy is based on the notion that ordinary people have the right and responsibility to be involved in their governance. If we want our representatives to do their job well, we must keep informed of current issues, analyze what is being presented by the media, and form and support our own opinions.
2. As a class, brainstorm ways citizens can become more informed about issues before committing to a viewpoint. Students may say that citizens can gather information from newspapers, the Internet, television, radio, or other people.

Activity:

1. Explain to students that one way to learn about current issues and the differing sides of an issue is to examine political cartoons. Political cartoons can show opposing viewpoints of the same issue.
2. Review the persuasive techniques that political cartoonists often use by going over **The Cartoon Analysis Guide** with students.
3. As a class analyze three political cartoons from the women's suffrage movement. Project or distribute copies of **Election Day!**, **Women's Sphere: Suffrage Cartoons**, and **Uncle Sam (as 'Public Opinion') Embracing Nurse**. . . (Refer to the Resources section above for two primary source documents that provide further insight into the issues surrounding the women's suffrage debate during this time period.)
Have students discuss the following questions for each of the three cartoons:
 - What is the cartoon saying?
 - What persuasive techniques did the cartoonist use?
 - What, if any, action is being advocated?
 - What evidence do you see in the cartoon to support your response regarding the action the cartoon is advocating?
 - How well did the cartoonist portray the main point of the cartoon?
 - Which cartoon did you find more persuasive? Why?
4. **(Optional)** Have students read the two documents suggested in the Resources section. Then ask students to compare the opinions expressed in the two documents and also compare the opinions in the documents with those expressed in the political cartoons.
5. Divide the class into small groups of four students and give each group a copy of two to four different newspapers. Have each group find the political cartoons located in the opinion or editorial section of the newspaper.
6. Ask each group to select one or two cartoons about on an issue of interest to them and summarize the cartoonists' opinions advocated in the cartoon. Then have students formulate their own opinions about the issue and raise questions that they might need to research in order to develop a more fully informed view.

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

7. Invite groups to share their analysis of the cartoons, discuss what their current views are on the topics, and share questions they need to research to become more fully-informed.
8. Have each student research the issues depicted in the group's political cartoon and write one paragraph explaining how background information caused them to confirm or modify their initial view, and why. Ask students to list the sources they used to help them become informed.
9. Ask students to share the results of their research and discuss various ways that people can become more informed about issues before committing to a viewpoint.

EVALUATION

Formative/ Informal Teacher Assessment

Observation providing evidence that students are:

- Actively participating in whole class and small group discussions;
- Demonstrating engagement with goals of the lesson;
- Using language that illustrates understanding of the persuasive techniques used by political cartoonists;
- Able to identify questions that will inform research on an issue;
- Showing the ability to form and support opinion on issues.

Summative Teacher Assessment

Assessment verifying that students are able to:

- Write a paragraph that explains how research on an issue caused them to confirm or modify their initial opinion.