Analyzing Editorial Cartoons

Here is a riddle for you: When are cartoons not funny? Answer: When they are editorial cartoons that you don’t understand. On the comics page of your newspaper, the cartoons are meant only to entertain, and the humor is easy to recognize. However, editorial cartoons, sometimes called political cartoons, can be completely different.

What Is an Editorial Cartoon?

Editorial cartoons are illustrations. Located in the editorial section, sometimes called the Op-Ed section, of newspapers, they are designed to make you think about current issues and to sway you toward the cartoonist’s point of view. If you understand the techniques used to create them, you will have a better chance of getting the point and appreciating the humor. Here are some common elements of editorial cartoons:

- **Symbolism**: Using a picture to stand for a more abstract concept
- **Exaggeration/Caricature**: Overstating an aspect of a problem or exaggerating a person’s physical features
- **Analogy**: Comparing two things; for instance, directly or indirectly comparing a situation or event with a historical or fictional event
- **Irony**: Contrasting (often humorously) between appearance or expectation and reality

**Symbolism** Instead of using several words or sentences to convey an idea, editorial cartoonists often use symbolism. They use pictures as symbols for larger ideas, people, organizations, and so on.

**Exaggeration/Caricature** Exaggeration and caricature are tools that editorial cartoonists use to make their opinions clear. Without exaggeration and caricature, the cartoonist’s opinion might not be clear enough, or the problem might not be obvious. In the example that appears
to the right, Mr. Spock from the *Star Trek* series is made to have ears that extend above his head. The cartoonist does this to exaggerate the fact that Mr. Spock has large ears.

**Analogy** Like symbolism, an analogy can often express an idea that might otherwise take many words to describe or explain. It is sometimes easier to describe a situation or event by comparing it to a historical or fictional situation or event.

**Irony** Cartoonists often use irony to emphasize a point because it suggests the absurdity of a problem.

**Other Elements** Editorial cartoons may include **dialogue bubbles** (bubbles in which the characters’ speech appears), **captions**, and **labels** to make clear to the reader what people and objects are being represented. For instance, the camera-toting monkeys in the cartoon on page 287 would look confusing if the evil castle were not labeled “Tabloids.”

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**Airport Security**

"I’m sorry, I’ll have to confiscate this."

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Personal freedom and civil rights are two of the concepts often treated in editorial cartoons. In the cartoon above, the cartoonist **exaggerates** the security worker’s job by having him confiscate the man’s freedom. Here, the word **freedom** symbolizes the idea of personal freedom. The cartoonist is suggesting that airport security measures have gone too far and that travelers’ personal freedoms are being taken away.
The man in the cartoon above is seeking clean air in a world filled with smog. It is ironic that the only source for this clean air is at a gas station that fuels the cars that cause the pollution in the first place. It is also ironic that the air is intended to fill the tires of cars and not the lungs of people. The cartoonist exaggerates the problem of air pollution by filling the frame with smog and by suggesting that the man’s only source for clean air is from a gas station air machine.

This cartoon on academics and sports recruiting also uses exaggeration to illustrate its point that colleges recruiting athletes do not care enough about the education an athlete receives. Notice that the cartoonist
uses a label on the recruiter’s briefcase to tell readers who is being represented in the cartoon.

The cartoon above exaggerates the problem of privacy-invading photographers sent out by tabloid newspapers (the kind you find at supermarket checkouts) by making an analogy between them and the flying monkeys from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. In the movie, the monkeys are portrayed as evil and menacing, which is how many people view tabloid photographers.

### Analyzing an Editorial Cartoon

Find an example of an editorial cartoon in a newspaper, and briefly analyze it by answering the following questions on your own paper. Then, share and discuss your cartoon and analysis with a group of two or three classmates.

- **What is the issue addressed in the cartoon? What do you think is the cartoonist’s opinion about the issue?**
- **Which techniques (symbolism, exaggeration/caricature, analogy, or irony) are used in the cartoon?**
- **Is the cartoon humorous? What makes it humorous?**
- **What is another opinion a person could have about the issue treated in the cartoon? How could the cartoon be revised to communicate that opinion?**
IF YOU THINK THE PRESIDENT IS GROWING JOBS THEN VOTE FOR HIM

AWKWARD

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