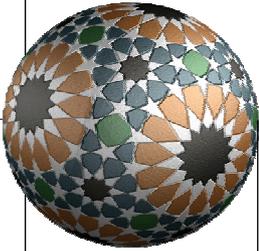


'Reading' political cartoons



Learning outcomes

- ◇ Students will sharpen their analytical abilities
- ◇ Students will develop an understanding of the impact of the use of imagery
- ◇ Students will explore the treatment of controversial issues through cartoons
- ◇ Students will identify the visual use of stereotyping
- ◇ Students will deepen their understanding of what is at stake in disagreements about Israel-Palestine

Lesson in brief

Students will look at the techniques used by political cartoonists. They will gain a better understanding of how political cartoons can be effective by considering cartoons in relation to Israel-Palestine.

National curriculum

Citizenship key stage 3 – unit 09 – The significance of the media in society
 Citizenship key stage 4 – unit 08 – Producing the news
 Citizenship key stage 4 – unit 03 – Challenging racism and discrimination

Most newspapers publish political cartoons. Opinions are expressed not through words, but through images. Political cartoons have a long history. They can support or challenge mainstream views.

Lesson Plan

Starter

- ◇ Start the discussion by considering what the students think about political cartoons. If they are funny, does this mean that they are less serious than other forms of political argument, such as written articles? Are they less effective?
- ◇ Discuss quotes of prominent political cartoonists on their work (see the following page)
- ◇ Go through the main techniques that cartoonists use – explaining each in turn so that the students understand them. (If you think it best, the following page can be photocopied and handed out so that the students have it as a reference point.)

Main activity

- ◇ Split the class into groups and get each group to go through the cartoons answering the questions in the 'Things to think about when you look at the cartoons...' box.

Plenary

- ◇ Which do you think would be a more effective way to make the point – a political cartoon or a newspaper editorial? Why?

Homework/follow-up

- ◇ Ask each student or group to do their own cartoon and to write or present to the class the techniques that they used.





What some political cartoonists say about their work...

Political cartoonists violate every rule of ethical journalism – they misquote, trifle with the truth, make science fiction out of politics and sometimes should be held for personal libel. But when the smoke clears, the political cartoonist has been getting closer to the truth than the guys who write political opinions

Jeff MacNelly

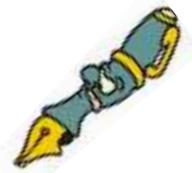
There is a serious point buried in there, somewhere. But the point is also to make people laugh and the best ones are when you do both – when you hit the spot and make people laugh

Martin Rowson

Political satire. It's also very primitive. You're out to damage somebody at a distance with a sharp object which is the pen

Steve Bell

How political cartoonists do what they do...



EXAGGERATION – A situation is over-emphasised and shown 'bigger than life.' It is intended to create a strong impression & not meant to be taken literally – for example, an overcrowded building might be drawn with people coming out of the windows.

CARICATURE – A person's distinctive features are exaggerated to humorous or grotesque effect – the person looks different and comical but is still recognisable – for example George Bush is often drawn with big ears or as a monkey.

SYMBOLS – A symbol is an easily recognisable image that is used to represent something – for example a dollar sign represents money or the influence of money; a dove or olive branch represents peace; a six-pointed star or star of David is used to represent the state of Israel (the star is the image on the Israeli flag)

STEREOTYPING – A member of a group (religion, nation, sexuality etc) is depicted through images and actions which are seen to be typical of that group (and so ignoring the variations within the group) – for example blond women as silly bimbos, computer programmers as geeks with thick glasses.

SATIRE – Something or someone is criticised through ridicule. Although satire is often very funny, the purpose of satire is not humour but criticism in a clever way – for example a person considered corrupt might be drawn with money spilling out from their pockets.

LABELS – A person or a thing is identified by written words – for example, a figure that is meant to represent a political party might have the name of that party written across their chest.

Things to think about when you look at the cartoons...

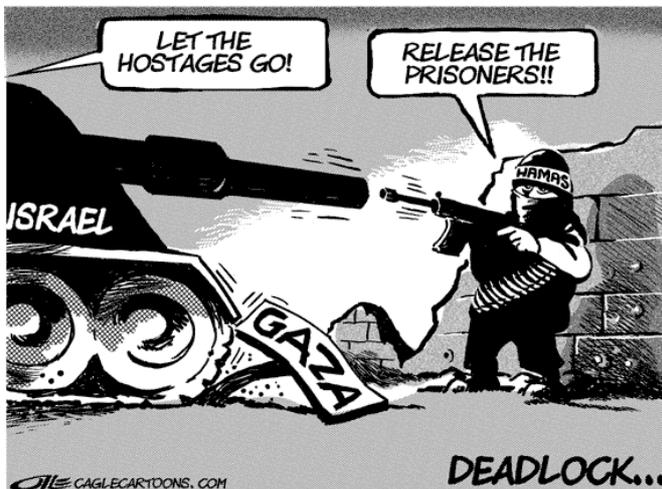
- ◆ What is the event or issue being portrayed?
- ◆ What is the cartoonist's opinion? How does the cartoonist get this opinion across – in other words, how does the cartoon 'work'? Consider the techniques discussed—is exaggeration/ caricature/ symbolism/ stereotyping/ satire/ labelling used effectively?
- ◆ What does the cartoonist want us to think about the different figures represented?
- ◆ How might different audiences 'read' this cartoon?
- ◆ Is the cartoon thought provoking?



Cartoons in a battleground: Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israel-Palestinian conflict is often described as a cycle of violence – this implies a tit-for-tat exchange of violence by two equally powerful forces. Look at the following three cartoons. Which of the cartoons supports this view? Which challenge it? How are the messages of these cartoons similar to each other? In what way are they different? The Israeli army is one of the strongest in the world and has the second largest fleet of F-16s. Which cartoons allow for this fact and which do not?

Cartoon 1



Cartoon 2

Cartoon 3





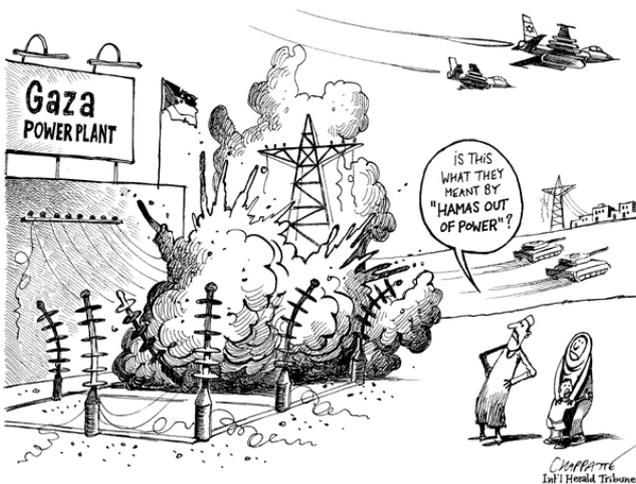
Cartoon 4

Israel has said that it would only deal with Hamas and a Hamas led government if Hamas met certain conditions. One of these conditions was Hamas recognition of Israel. The Hamas charter stipulates the destruction of Israel as one of its goals. This is taken as proof that Hamas is hell bent on destroying Israel. According to the group's leader, however, Hamas accepts the existence of the state of Israel but will not officially recognise until a Palestinian state is established. What does this cartoon suggest about this demand to recognise Israel? If Hamas does not recognise Israel can it pretend that Israel does not exist?



Cartoon 5

Israel was very unhappy with the election results in 2006 which brought Hamas to power. They have repeated that they are unhappy with the situation and refuse to deal with Hamas. In the summer of 2006, as part of an offensive against Gaza – part of the occupied Palestinian territories – Israel bombed all six transformers of the only domestic power plant in Gaza, leaving half the Palestinian population of Gaza without electricity for several months. The plant was repaired with funding from the governments of Egypt and Sweden.



Cartoon 6

Hamas and Hezbollah are both Islamic movements which fight against Israeli occupation. Hezbollah is based in Lebanon and Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In the summer of 2006, Israel was fighting with both of them. Israel came under criticism for a disproportionate use of force. What does the cartoonist think about such criticisms? How is this conveyed? In the cartoon, both Israel and its adversaries are forceful – whose force is seen as legitimate and fair, and whose is not?





Cartoon 7



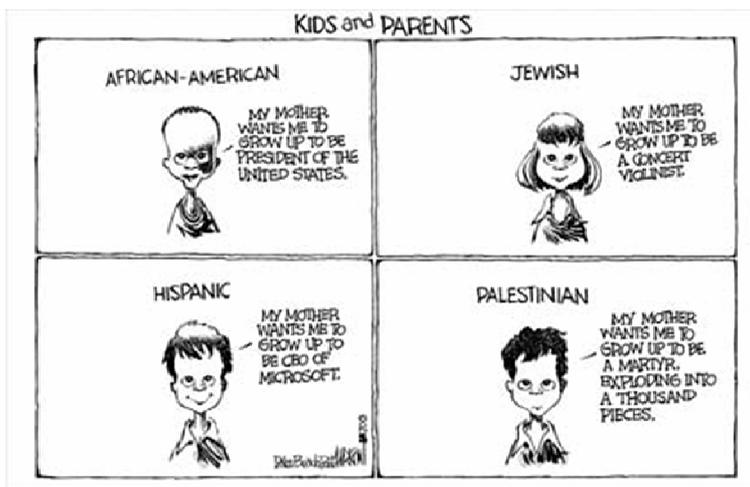
The US provides Israel not only with vast economic and military support, but also political support – it rarely criticises Israeli actions. How does the cartoonist portray US support for Israel? Whilst international human rights organisations and others have accused Israel (as well as Palestinians) of war crimes, the US has never accused Israel of war crimes but regularly accuses the Palestinians of committing war crimes. Given this fact, how does the use of the term 'war crime' in the cartoon strike you?

Cartoon 8

In 2004, Israel started building a wall that it refers to as a 'security fence' around the West Bank. The International Court of Justice has ruled that it is illegal. Israel has stated that it is necessary for its security – it is, according to Israel, meant to keep out suicide bombers. Some of the arguments against the wall include: it has violated Palestinians' basic rights; it has led to the demolition of people's homes and agricultural land; it has disrupted the livelihoods of thousands of people; it creates a mass open air prison for the Palestinians. How does the cartoonist present the views against the wall? Who is presented as being on the other side of the fence? In some places, the wall consists of concrete which is 8 metres high – does this come across in the cartoon?



Cartoon 9



Whose mother's aspirations strike you as odd in this cartoon? How are they different from the others? Are all the characters being equally stereotyped? Palestinians have resisted the Israeli occupation in peaceful and violent ways – including suicide bombing. Palestinians describe someone who has blown themselves as a 'martyr.' A martyr is someone who dies for a belief of principle. For Palestinians, this principle is Palestinian freedom against Israeli aggression. The view that Palestinian mothers send their sons to die is one that has been articulated by many who are opposed to the Palestinian cause. What might the cartoonist say to someone who suggested that people blow themselves up out of desperation not because their mothers sent them to die? What view might the cartoonist have of Palestinian mothers? What do you think of this view?