



BEHIND THE LINES

MOAD
Museum of Australian Democracy
at Old Parliament House

How to Analyse a Political Cartoon

Teachers' Notes



Behind the Lines 2022 Hero Image, by David Pope,
Political Cartoonist of the Year 2022



How to Read and Analyse Political Cartoons

A political cartoon contains a '**message**', what the cartoonist wants their audience to **think, feel, or do**.

Points for discussion:

- Compile a list of topics that you have very strong opinions about. Compare these with other people's opinions. What information has led you and others to form these opinions? Under what circumstances could these opinions change?
- How do political cartoons differ from other forms of media?
- Where can you access political cartoons? How can you broaden this access to include a range of differing views on a political issue? How might this be useful?
- What do you see, think and feel when you 'read' a political cartoon? What might you need to learn to be able to 'read' political cartoons even more effectively?

What the cartoonist wants us to know, understand or believe is their message.

This is usually made clear in their piece.

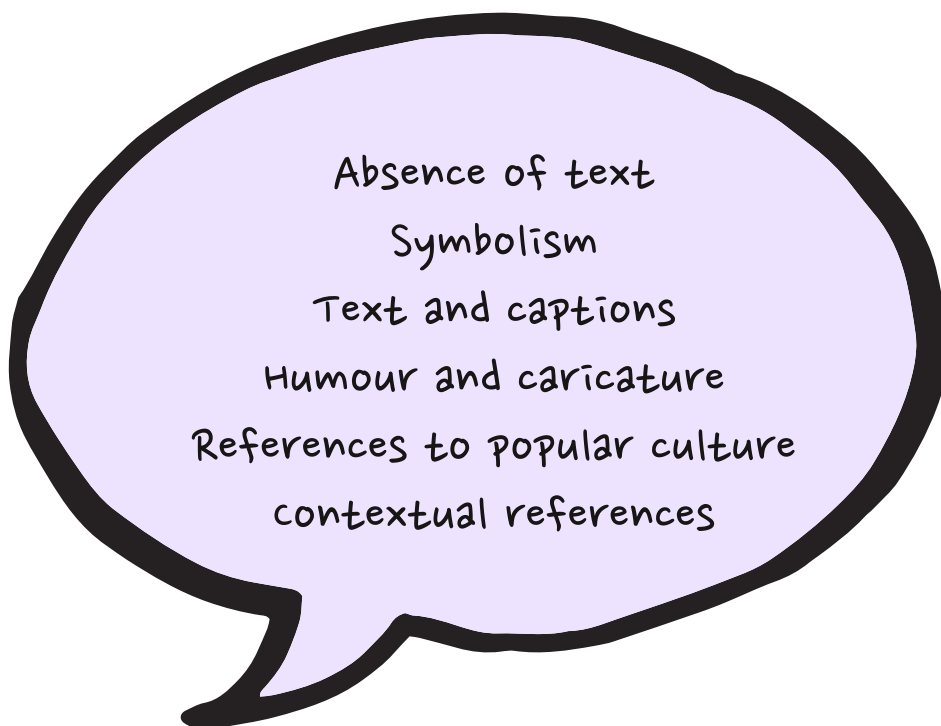
The cartoonist's personal attitudes, prejudices or political leanings are known as bias.

You may need to 'read between the lines' to uncover bias.



Are we getting the message?

Political cartoonists use a **range of techniques** to convey a **message** to their audience.



Points for discussion:

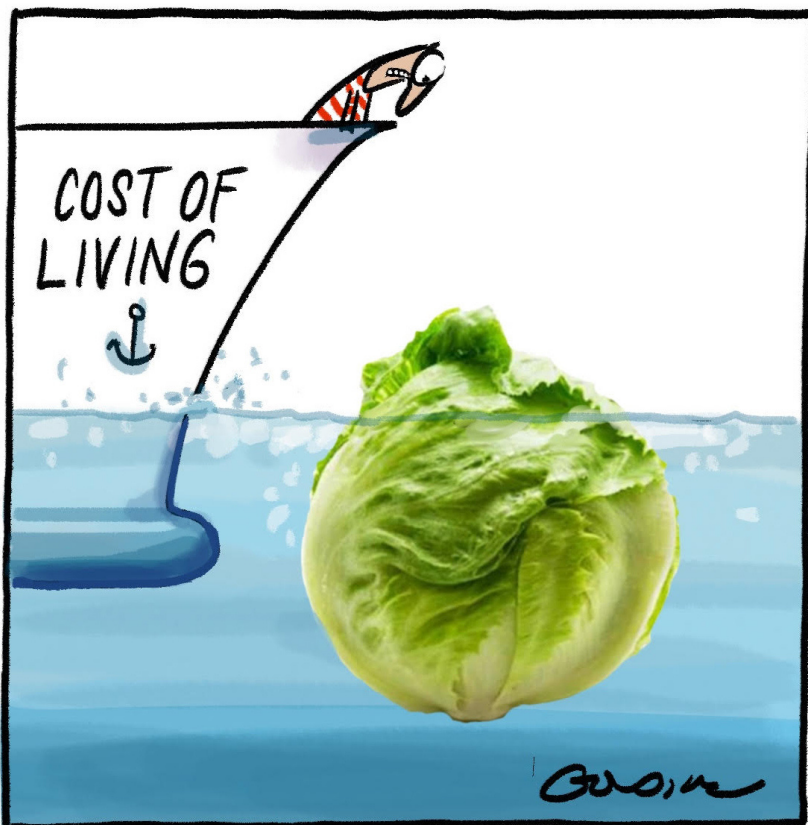
- What do you know already about these techniques? Which ones do you need to learn more about? Are these techniques used in any other types of media?
- Which techniques listed above are likely to be the most effective ways to engage and entertain?
- How do political cartoonists use these techniques to form their own 'style'? Compare a range of artists from the 'Behind the Lines' exhibition.
- Can you think of any other techniques? Find an example and explain how the technique is used.



Are we getting the message?

Political cartoons are designed to **convey a message quickly**, often without a lot of text. Considering the cartoon as a complete piece, created using a range of features, will help you understand the cartoonist's message.

We can investigate the image to find **body language, facial expressions, tone and symbolism** within the action, then see how the image and the text work together.



The Cost of Living Iceberg, Matt Golding, 2022

Points for discussion:

- The overall feeling being conveyed by a piece is known as 'tone'. What feelings are shown in this cartoon? How does it make you feel?
- Identify the individuals and the action occurring in the frames. Research what political event the action is referring to.
- What is this cartoon designed to make you think, feel or do?
- What strategies has the cartoonist used to make the message within their cartoon effective?



Symbolism

Commentary on political issues can be complicated. Using **symbolism** acts as a **visual cue** for the audience to **help understand** the cartoon. The symbol 'stands for' an abstract concept, like a feeling or idea.

Ideas to get started:

Your students may already be familiar with the idea of **colour** being symbolic.

- Use question prompts such as: *Who knows what colour to wear at a funeral? Which colour means good luck? What do bright colours mean to you?* Then examine the attitudes towards colour presented in your class. Are there any cultural differences? Investigate the origins of what certain colours represent.
- Brainstorm objects (including animals) that are often used in art and literature in a symbolic way. If stuck, begin with a white dove, a recognisable logo, or a dollar sign. Extend by investigating the origins of these symbolic associations.
- *How is the meaning changed if a character is compared to a lion, rather than a mouse?* Come up with a list of metaphors and analogies on a range of topics. Define these terms first if needed.

Points for discussion:

- Too much of a good thing? Symbols can be a real ink saver! But, what challenges can there be if a cartoonist relies too heavily on the use of symbolism?
- Discuss, for example, the audience and their familiarity with the content and the context of the cartoon.

A symbol is any object, colour or sign that is used to represent something else.



Symbolism

Consider how symbolism is used in this cartoon.

- How many symbols can you find? What might these symbols represent?
- How does the cartoonist's use of symbolism help us understand the message?



Missing in Opposition, Fiona Katauskas, 2021

Other cartoons to use include:

- *Teal Dawn*, Glen Le Lievre, 2022
- *Pride of Place*, Christopher Downs, 2021
- *The PM of No Responsibility*, Jim Pavlidis, 2021

Points for discussion:

- Consider drawing attention not only to the 'issues' that are being symbolically 'juggled' by Prime Minister Morrison here, but also the cartoonist's use of lines to indicate movement, colour and body language.
- What other symbols are regularly used in art? What about comics? Does the use of symbols change depending on the type of media?
- Why might it be useful for cartoonists and other artists to depict abstract concepts using symbolism?



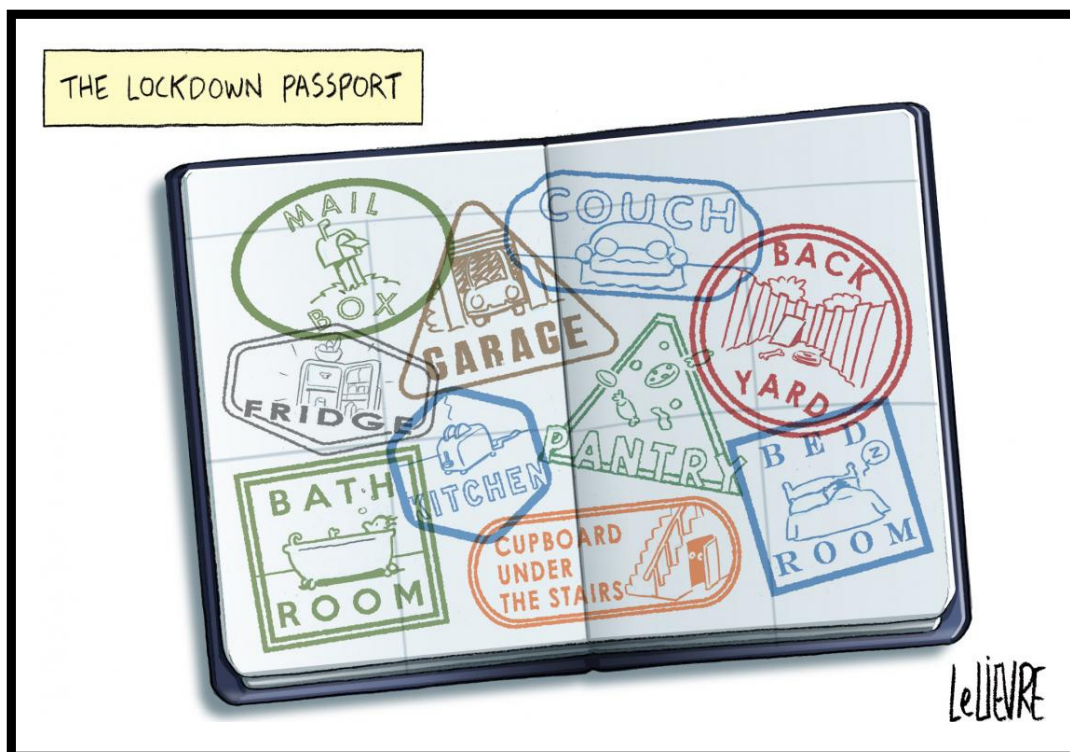
Use of Text

Political cartoonists **choose their words carefully**. Use of text can help explain what is occurring in the cartoon, who the characters are and can enhance the joke.

Points for discussion:

- Choose a cartoon, such as the one above, and consider how the overall impact is effected by the caption. Would the message be clear without the caption? Can you think of a different caption? What effect would your new wording have on the piece?
- Consider the type of text being used, and its purpose. Is it a label, an explanation, a speech bubble, a catchphrase? How does it help communicate the cartoonist's message?

captions
Titles
Speech bubbles
Thought bubbles



The Lockdown Passport, Glen Le Lievre, 2021



Stereotypes

Cartoonists sometimes use stereotypes, such as portraying politicians in costume or **behaving in a manner** that is typically associated with a **particular job** or **group of people**.



Grown-ups Club, Johannes Leck, 2021

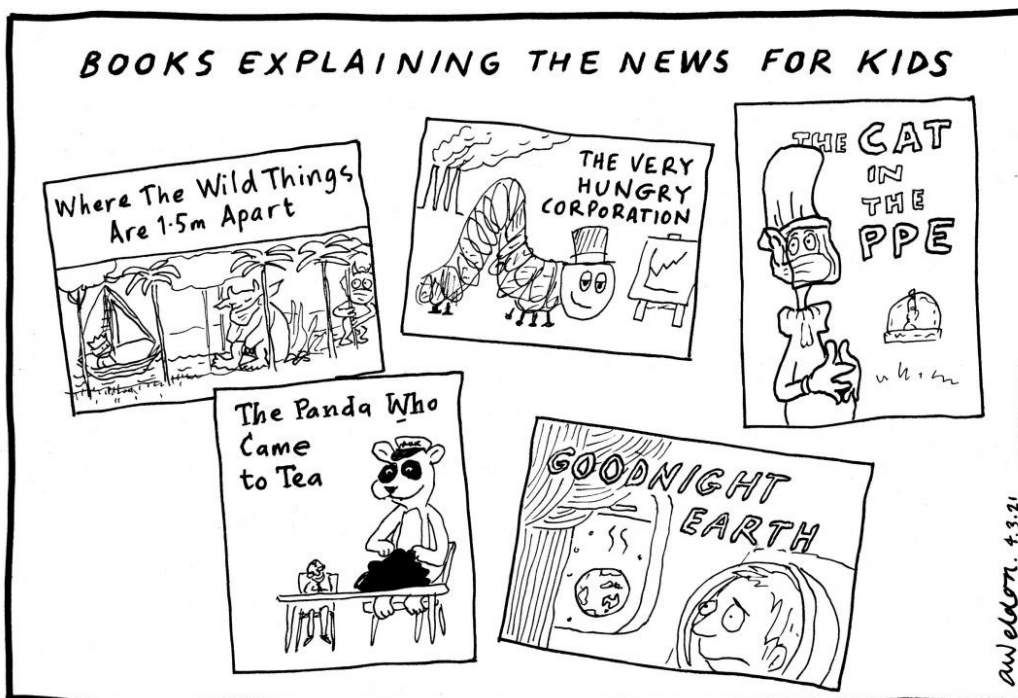
Points for discussion:

- Can you describe the stereotypes portrayed in this cartoon?
- Why might the cartoonist have chosen to use this stereotype to portray the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern? What is the intended effect?
- Consider the role of stereotyping - What effect might including a stereotype have on the reader?
- How do you feel when you see stereotypes used in media?



References to Popular Culture

What **popular cultural reference** can you see in this cartoon?
What does it say about each of the events or people involved?



Other cartoons to use include:

- *Tony Potter*, Matt Adams, 2011
- *Brown Leather Jacket*, Matt Golding, 2018
- *You're a Prime Minister, Harry!*, David Pope 2022

Books Explaining the News for Kids, Andrew Weldon, 2021

Points for discussion:

- How might using popular culture references in political cartoons help the audience to engage with and understand the cartoon?
- Make a list of some of your favourite film, TV, book and movie characters. What kind of personality traits or major plot points do you think these characters represent? How might the message of a cartoon be changed if you depicted a politician as one of these characters? Try it and see!

By portraying politicians as characters from a movie or book, cartoonists can more easily tell a story in their cartoon – and make a joke!