Using cartoons to investigate geographical issues

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Geography teachers have, for some time, acknowledged the value of cartoons as a means of fostering an appreciation and understanding of geographical issues – and why not? For many students, cartoons, especially in their comic form, constitute a popular form of literary engagement, and are especially engaging for the visual learner. This article examines the development of cartoons as a form of political satire and social commentary, outlines the benefits derived from using cartoons as an instructional tool, and explores some of the cartoon-based teaching and learning strategies teachers employ to enhance the interpretative and communicative skills of students. When used appropriately, cartoons are able to meet a range of educational needs, and the skill of cartoon interpretation is something that can have application well beyond the years of formal schooling.

The power of the cartoon

The term 'cartoon' – originally used to describe a full-size preliminary drawing of a painting or tapestry – has, since the mid-nineteenth century, been used to denote a humorous or satirical illustration published in newspapers and magazines. For the most part, cartoons address topical public issues, personalities, events or social trends and seek to make direct comment on such matters.

The communicative power of cartoons lies in their ability to present often-complex issues, events and trends in a simplified and accessible form. They usually do this by employing the devices of caricature, analogy and ludicrous juxtaposition to sharpen the public's view of contemporary issues. While many of the artworks created by cartoonists are humorous they can also have quite a 'cutting' edge. They may, for example, deride public figures by exposing their idiosyncrasies, eccentricities and vanities. Significantly, cartoons seek to elicit a response from the observer and predispose him/her to a particular course of action or way of thinking. Like caricatures, which are only meaningful to those familiar with the person portrayed, cartoons only have meaning for people who are familiar with the cartoonist's subject matter. It also seems reasonable to conclude that a person's interpretation of a cartoon will be coloured by his or her own socio-political experience and cultural background.

As a form of visual media cartoons constitute a major, but sometimes underestimated, vehicle for mass communication. While cartoons in the world's developed nations constitute a popular form of political satire and social commentary, they often take on a much more serious function in developing countries where illiteracy rates remain stubbornly high. They are, for example, used as a means of mass education, especially in health related information campaigns (family planning and AIDS prevention being notable examples) and the promotion of political issues (the comic and cartoon are particularly effective as a means of political propaganda).

As an instructional tool the cartoon is, however, little understood, and teachers, if they are to use them effectively, need to develop teaching and learning strategies that assist students to 'scaffold' both their analysis/interpretation of cartoons and their communication of the understandings they derive from them.

Cartoons in the classroom

Used within an educational context, cartoons are seen as having several distinct, though often interrelated, advantages.

- Cartoons can be used as a means of promoting interest in a particular idea, issue, event or social trend. Used in this way cartoons represent a very effective motivational tool – the 'hook' by which the teacher can gain the attention and interest of the learner.
- Cartoons can assist in the students' appreciation and understanding of a particular idea, issue, event or trend. A well-crafted cartoon can distil quite complex issues into a form that is accessible to a wider (non-expert) audience.
- Frequently, more information and utility can be garnered from a cartoon than is immediately apparent. Cartoons can, for example, be used to initiate classroom discussion and debate, and promote critical thinking (used in this

context to describe the processes by which individuals use reflective, reasoned, rational thinking to gather, interpret and evaluate information in order to formulate an opinion or make a judgment).

- Cartoons can prove useful in 'tapping' students' emotions prior to a thoughtful and considered examination of a particular issue, topic or theme. For example, the plight of asylum seekers or exploited sweatshop workers.
- Cartoons can be used to encourage students to use their imagination. Teachers may, for example, ask students to speculate on the message being conveyed by a cartoon and even propose their own captions. Gifted and talented students can be extended academically by asking them to draw their own issues-based cartoons.
- Cartoons can prove particularly effective when used as stimulus material in examinations where an overall appreciation of a topic, rather than the restatement of specific facts, is the principal aim.
- The use of cartoons in Geography can demonstrate to students that no school subject is a disciplinary 'island' – they are, in fact, interdisciplinary in nature.

Thus cartoons provide teachers with a motivational and instructional tool that add relevance, variety and enjoyment to teaching and learning. But how may these benefits be realised within the classroom setting? How can the interpretive skills of students be develop and how can students structure their written responses so that they gain maximum recognition for the knowledge and understandings they have acquired through these interpretative processes?

Types of cartoons

While it is sometimes difficult to differentiate cartoons by genre, it is, by general consent, possible to identify four major categories. These are: the editorial (or political) cartoon; the gag (or pocket) cartoon; the caricature; and the comic strip. Editorial cartoons are normally found on a newspaper's editorial page and generally focus on the day's big story – a specific public issue, personality, event or trend. Gag cartoons and caricatures, on the other hand, are found throughout a newspaper or magazine and are used to illustrate prominent stories. Comic strips (many of which are syndicated across a number of newspapers and magazines) are generally located together in a dedicated section of a newspaper and appear on a regular (often daily) basis.

Political (or editorial) cartoons

As noted above, political cartoons serve as a running commentary on social change and in many instances seek to provoke a reassessment of existing social attitudes and values. For the most part, political cartoons highlight and comment on what the cartoonist (or their editors) believe to be the significant news of the day, with the aim of the cartoonist being to influence the reader to adopt a particular point of view and predispose him or her to a particular course of action.

Stylistically, political cartoons can be quite diverse but most employ symbolism/visual metaphors and caricatures to explain often-complex political and/or social issues in a humorous or satirical manner. While the majority of cartoonists continue to demonstrate a preference for the traditional black-ink artistic form, an increasing number now use colour and some incorporate other forms of media, including digitalised photographic images.

Whatever their style, political cartoons constitute a powerful instrument for shaping the parameters of public discourse and debate and ultimately influence public opinion. Often (but not always) political cartoons support the ideological positioning of the publication in which they appear and, in some instances, conform to the political and social views of the proprietor. However, in contexts where a diversity of views is encouraged and journalistic freedom valued, the cartoonist is normally free to adopt a

Useful cartoon websites

The following Internet websites provide access to a vast number of political cartoons:

- PoliticalCartoon.com *www.politicalcartoons.com*
- Cartoon Web *http://cartoonweb.com*
- Cartoon Stock *www.cartoonstock.com*
- Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists index *http://cagle.slate.msn.com*
- New Zealand Cartoon Galley *www.nzcartoons.com.nz*
- Nicholson's Cartoons *www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au*
- News Limited Cartoons *www.news.com.au/cartoons*
- The Age newspaper *www.theage.com.au/cartoons/*
- The Sydney Morning Herald *www.smh.com.au/cartoons*
- The Guardian newspaper *www.guardian.co.uk/cartoons*

The world's newspapers can be accessed via:

www.world-newspapers.com

A brief history of political cartooning

Political (or editorial) cartoons, as they appear in today's newspapers and magazines, emerged rather suddenly in the early 1840s. In 1843, the United Kingdom's *Punch* magazine (first published in 1841) quite cheekily assigned a new meaning to the word 'cartoon' when it used it to describe an exhibition of preliminary sketches of paintings and murals proposed for the Houses of Parliament, which were in the process of being rebuilt after the devastating fire of 1834. At the time, Punch featured a weekly, full-page satirical drawing known as *'Mr Punch's pencillings'*. In the July of 1943, the magazine replaced the pencilling with a copy of its own entry in the Parliamentary exhibition. In a series of drawings – to which it gave the title "cartoons" – the magazine contrasted the lavishness of the new Parliament building with the hardship experienced by the country's poor. The full-page wood engraving by John Leechcy's featured ragged paupers standing in puzzled bemusement in front of a gallery of opulently framed portraits. The word cartoon stuck and quickly became associated with pictorial satire and eventually with any humorous drawing. By the time *Punch* ceased publication in 2002, the magazine had published more than half a million cartoons, a selection of which can be accessed at www.punch.co.uk.

The actual appearance of the early Punch cartoons was largely determined by the technical requirements governing the magazine's production. Artists were required to draw their illustrations on wooden blocks which were then carved by an engraver. Not surprisingly, the quality of the reproduction depended on skill of the engraver and the cartoonist's understanding of the engraving technique. As a result, many of the most successful early cartoonists – including Leech himself – were those who had initially trained as engravers.

Drawing inspiration from the Punch initiative, newspapers and magazines began incorporating satirical drawings into their publications. As a result, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in political, satirical and humorous cartooning in the United Kingdom, its dominions (including Australia and New Zealand), and the United States of America – the nation now most closely identified with this particular art form.

The first American political 'cartoon' is generally acknowledged to be Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" illustration published in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1754. Featuring a severed snake – each segment of which represented one of the American colonies – the drawing is considered significant in the history of political cartooning because it established a connection in the public's imagination between a drawing and a specific idea – colonial unity. Although historically significant, Franklin's illustration did not constitute the founding of America's cartooning tradition. It would be another century before political cartoons became commonplace in its newspapers and magazines.

While the political and social polarisation fuelled by the administration of President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) proved a boon to the political satirist, it was the American Civil War (1861-1865) that, according to Katz (2004), represented the "golden age" in American political cartooning. In the North, publications such as Harper's *Illustrated Weekly* and Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper*, published thousands of cartoons over the course of the conflict. President Abraham Lincoln was to later acknowledge the importance of these cartoons in mobilising public support for the North's struggle against the Confederacy (Katz, 2004, p. 44–5).

Given the persuasive power of the political cartoon it was not long before it would feature more widely. Beginning in 1872, The *New York Daily Graphic published* a front-page, large-format cartoon and, in 1884, Joseph Pulitzer's *The New York World* became the first daily American newspaper to include a political cartoon. By 1900, political cartoons were commonplace in American newspapers and magazines.

The surge in American political cartooning was facilitated, at least in part, by the freedom of speech provisions of the American Constitution and its First Amendment, and the technological developments (especially the introduction of lithography) that enabled the reproduction of cartoons to be undertaken more quickly, cheaply and in greater numbers. The demand for political and social satire was fed by an increasingly literate, informed and enfranchised citizenry.

Few cartoons were published in Australia until the *Adelaide Monthly Almanac* began running anti-government cartoons in 1850. There were two important reasons for the lack of satirical comic art: cartoonists were subject to censorship and it was still not considered journalistically respectable to publish such material. However, the number of cartoons increased after the 1850s when *Melbourne Punch* became the first magazine to publish weekly political cartoons. This initiative was followed by the Punches in the other colonies, *The Lantern* in Adelaide and *The Bulletin* in Sydney. Finally, in the 1880s, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* abandoned its journalistic conservatism and introduced daily cartoons.

The history of political cartooning in New Zealand dates from the 1860s. Like Australia, it was the colony's Punch magazines that led the way with newspapers showing little enthusiasm for the graphic art. The colony's Punch magazines – modelled on the *Melbourne Punch* and strongly influenced by those published in London – flourished from the 1860s–1880s. Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago all had their own Punches. The Dunedin-based *New Zealand Punch* (first published in 1888) would be the last of this tradition. James Brown, an illustrator with the *Otago Punch*, is amongst the most notable of the early New Zealand cartoonists.

Today, political and gag (or pocket) cartoons, caricatures, and comic strips constitute a popular and respected art form and feature in most, if not all, newspapers and many news magazines.

stance on issues that may be at odds with that the newspaper's or magazine's editorial orientation.

Notable political cartoonists in the Australian context include Alan Moir and Cathy Wilcox of *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Warren Brown, Lindsay Foyle and Eric Lobbecke of Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*; Bill Leak, Peter Nicholson (see Figure 1) and David Follett of *The Australian*; Andrew Dyson, Bruce Petty, John Spooner and Ron Tandberg of Melbourne's *The Age*; Geoff Pryor of the *Canberra Times*; Sean Leahy of Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*; Michael Atchison of the *Adelaide Advertiser*; Dean Alston of the *West Australian*; and Mark Knight of Melbourne's *Herald-Sun*. While all these cartoonists employ their own distinctive artistic styles, each acts as a social critic capable of effectively utilising the real communicative power of the cartoon.

Gag (or pocket) cartoons

Gag (or pocket) cartoons generally take the form of a relatively small drawing accompanying a specific article or report. Peter Arno of the *New Yorker* is generally considered the originator of this particular form of cartooning. Noted Australian gag cartoonists include Cathy Wilcox, Ron Tandburg and Peter Nicholson (see Figure 2).

Caricatures

Caricatures are artworks that exaggerate or distort the features and characteristics (or the basic essence) of a person or a group of persons to create a readily identifiable visual likeness. Most editorial cartoons, and many gag cartoons and comic strips, make extensive use of the caricatures of noted public figures. Some caricatures are drawn in a manner that lampoons the person being portrayed and in some instances seeks to provoke ridicule.

Standalone caricatures differ from editorial cartoons in at least one important respect. In editorial cartoons, the idea comes first and the artwork emerges from it. The caricature, on the other hand, is a portrayal of personality, often in a distorted or exaggerated form, without fixed rules.

Caricatures are exaggerative and must be personal and particular. Caricatures, therefore, represent a form of portraiture whereas cartoons will focus on communicating social or political opinion.

Notable Australian caricaturists include Brett Lethbridge of the *Courier-Mail*, John Shakespeare of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and David Rowe of *The Australian Financial Review*.

Comic strips

Cartoons that incorporate a series of separate pictures to illustrate a story are known as comic strips.

These may be for mere enjoyment or they may have a role similar to political and editorial cartoons. Popular comic strips include Brant Parker's and Johnny Hart's Wizard of Id, Chris Browne's Hagar the Horrible, Murray Ball's Footrot Flats (see Figure 3) and G.B. Trudeau's Doonsbury.

Cartoons as an instructional tool

Many Geography teachers use cartoons to engage their students in discussion about geographical issues. However, in order for cartoons to be used effectively students must understand how to interpret them. All too often they are

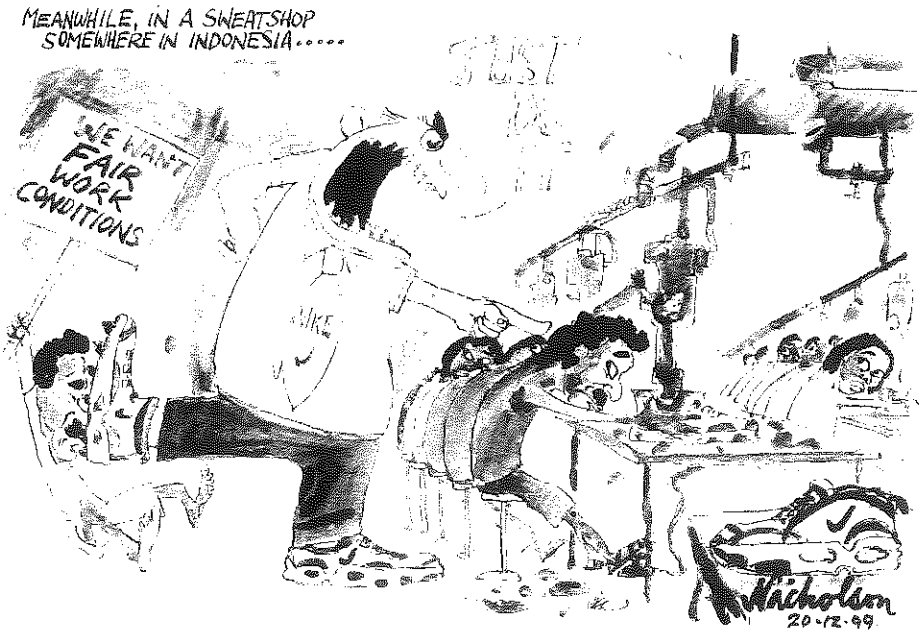


Figure 1: A political (editorial) cartoon by Peter Nicholson, cartoonist for The Australian.
Source: Nicholson of The Australian newspaper: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

Sample instructional strategies

1. Study the Nicholson cartoon. Identify the issue being addressed and write a brief explanation. Working in groups, see if other students agree with your interpretation. In your group, reach agreement on the meaning of the cartoon. Share your group's findings with the rest of the class.
2. Undertake research. Investigate the issue being addressed in the Nicholson cartoon and write a one-page report summarising your findings.

Source: Kleeman, G. et al. (2004). Global Explorations. Melbourne: Heinemann.

asked to study a cartoon and explain what is being depicted but they don't really understand how to proceed. Their ability to do so is significantly enhanced if they have an appreciation of the various elements cartoonist use to communicate an idea.

Elements of cartoons

The devices used to communicate the cartoonist's point of view are collectively referred to as the elements of a cartoon. These elements are shown in Figure 5 and explained in Table 1. Figure 6 demonstrates how Sean Leahy, cartoonist with Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, has combined these elements to comment on the plight of the world's poorest people.

Instructional approaches

Outlined below are just a few of the teaching and learning activities teachers can employ to enhance the cartoon interpretation skills of students. These strategies are consistent with a skill-based approach to teaching and learning – a process outlined in the box: *Skills-based instructional sequence*.

Brainstorming and cartoon analysis

Brainstorming – an instructional strategy used to generate, develop and refine ideas – can be undertaken independently by students, but is often more effective when employed in conjunction with group-based learning. Each member of the group can, for example, be asked to think creatively about a specific cartoon and then write down as many ideas as they can generate. Each member of the group then shares their ideas with their peers and the group then negotiates a consensus-based interpretative position. This process can be enhanced through one or both of the following activities:

1. Developing a cartoon interpretation mindmap highlighting the key points raised in the group's analysis of the cartoon (see Figure 6); and/or
2. Working together to complete a cartoon analysis scaffold (see Figure 7).

Each group then presents their key findings to the rest of the class.

When engaged in brainstorming students/groups are often encouraged to contribute ideas without the value or significance of the idea being discussed and this, in turn, increases the quantity of information available to the learner. The two basic principles of this approach are the deferral of judgement and the view that quality of any interpretation is enhanced by the quantity of interactions generated.

The key to successful brainstorming is to **not** interrupt the students' thought processes. As ideas come to mind, they stimulate the development of even better ideas.

Enlarging the cartoon in the centre of an A3-size sheet of paper can facilitate the process outlined above by encouraging students to summarise (in the form of a nnotations) the points raised in their group-based discussion.

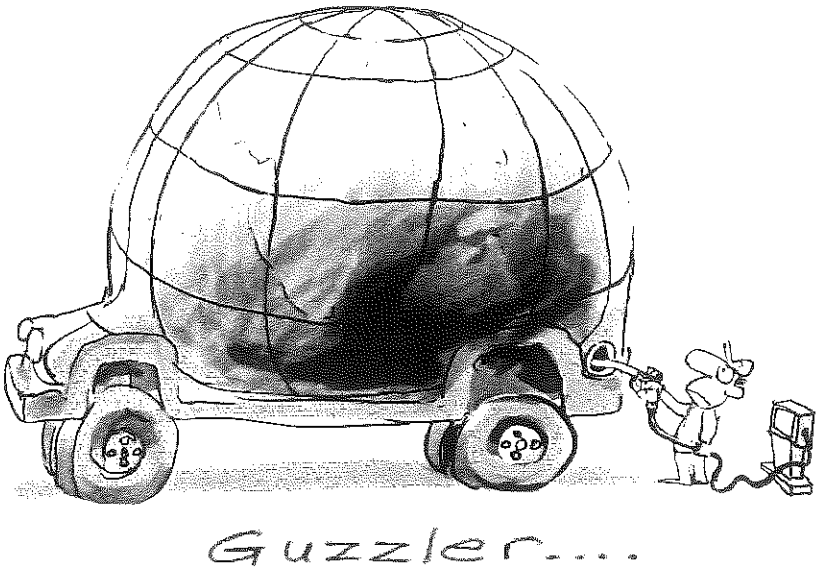


Figure 2: A gag cartoon by Peter Nicholson, cartoonist for The Australian.
Source: Nicholson of The Australian newspaper: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

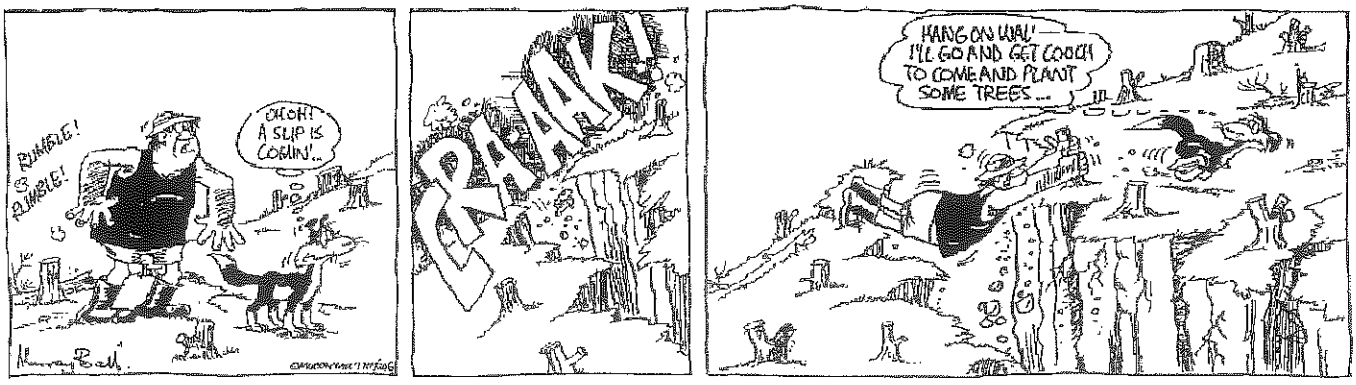


Figure 3: An example of a comic strip with an environmental theme by Murray Ball.
Source:

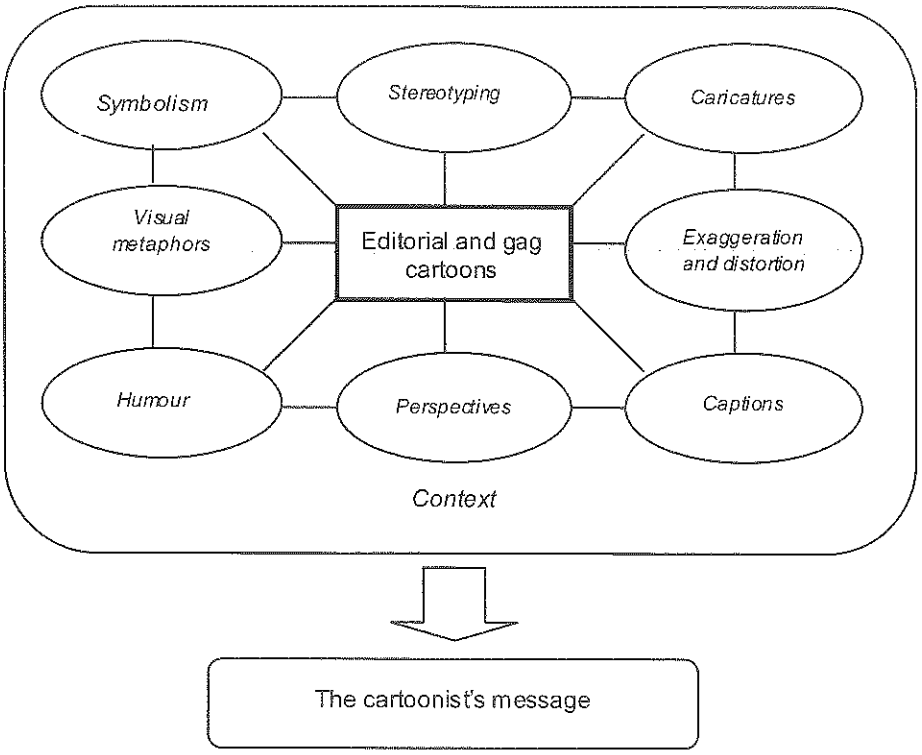


Figure 5: Elements of editorial and gag cartoons

This process can be taken a step further by asking the students to develop their own mindmaps incorporating the main ideas generated during class-based, report-back discussions (see Figure 6).

Internet scavenger hunt

Using the Internet, have students locate cartoons indicative of a selected geographical issue such as global inequalities, globalisation, population growth, pollution or land degradation.

Students can then analyse the cartoons using the processes outlined above, share their findings with the rest of the class and mount a wall display of the cartoons and the accompanying mindmap-based analysis.

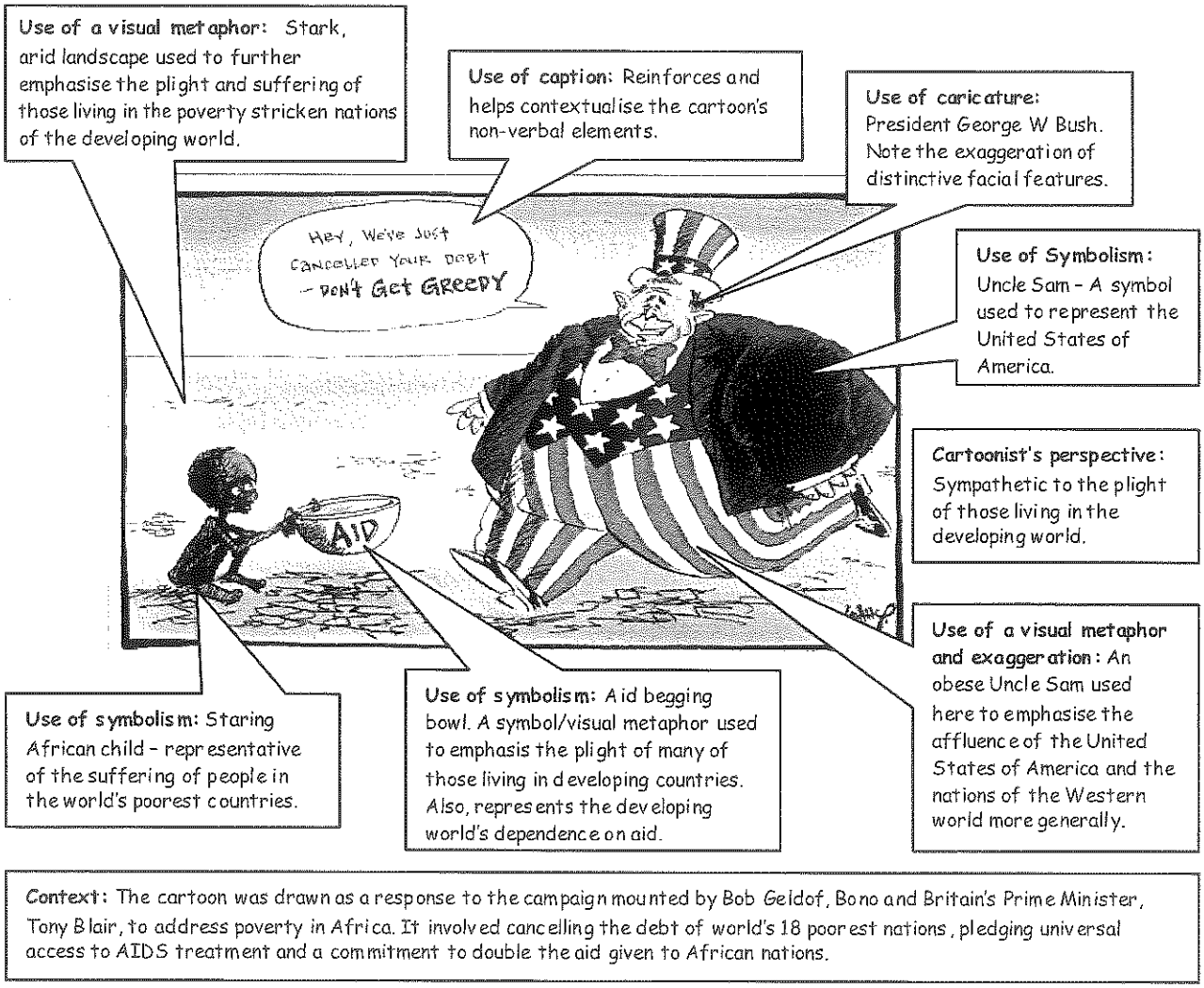


Figure 6: Symbols and visual metaphors are amongst the cartoonist's most powerful tool. Cartoon by Sean Leahy of Brisbane's Courier-Mail
Source: Leahy of the Courier-Mail newspaper: www.couriermail.news.com.au

Table 1: Elements of political and gag cartoons

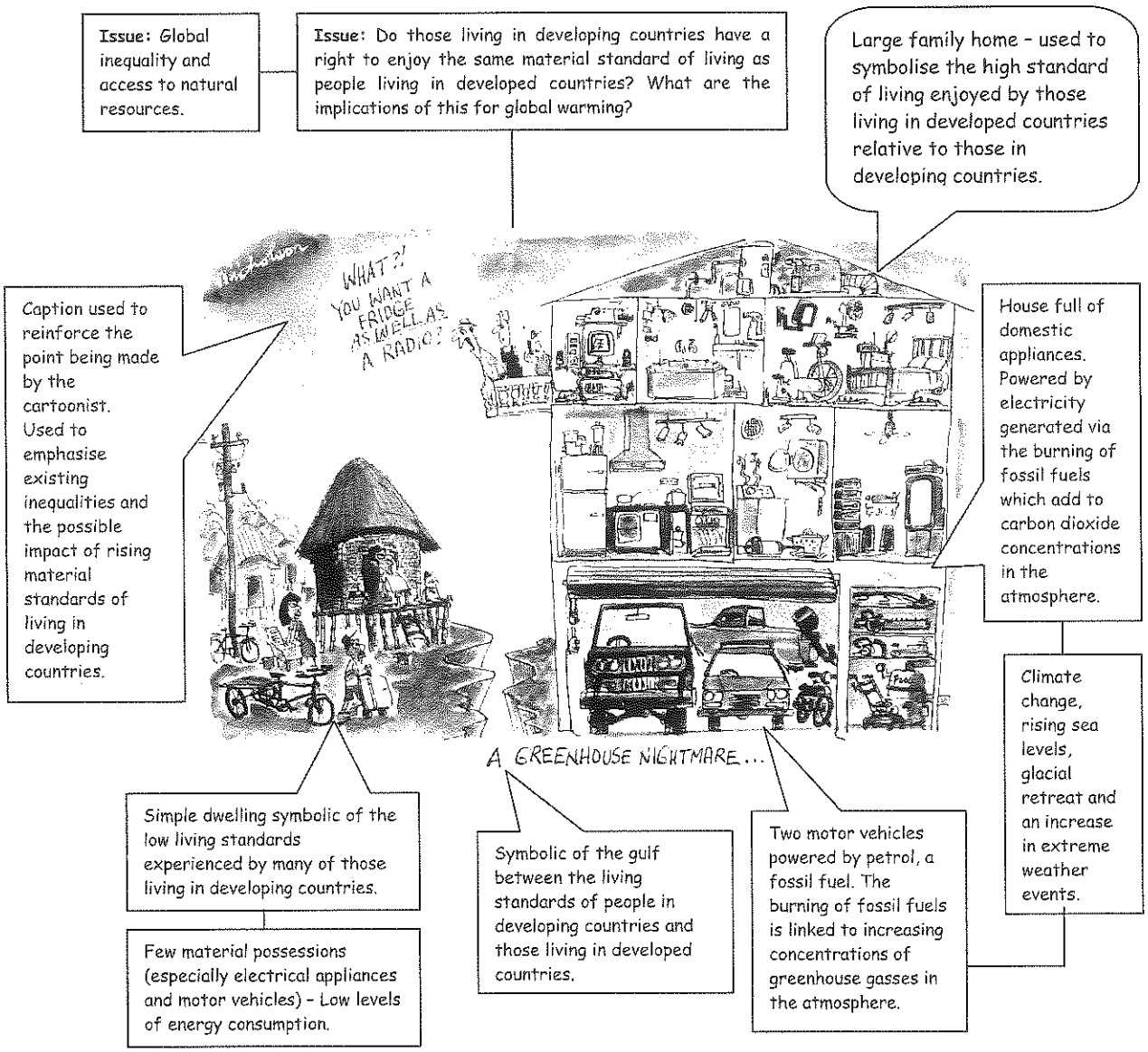
Element	*Description/explanation*
Context	The circumstances and conditions that 'surround' the issue, event or social trend addressed in a cartoon. The context might include the political, social, historical and institutional factors that shape the way we understand an issue, event, or a social or cultural trend.
Symbolism	Symbols have the ability to communicate often complex, emotionally rich ideas in a concise manner. The use of symbolism involves the inclusion of representational forms or images that have meaning beyond what is obvious and immediate. In other words, a sign or object used by the cartoonist to stand for something other than itself. The effectiveness of such references depend on the presumption that its meaning can be understood by the reader. Commonly used examples of symbolism include the dove or olive branch to symbolise peace, the Statue of Liberty – freedom and democracy; a heart, cupid or Venus – love, Uncle Sam, the Stars and Stripes, Columbia and an eagle – the United States of America; a bear – Russia; a dragon – China; and black clothing for villains or bad guys and white for heroes or good guys.
Visual metaphors	Visual metaphors are artistic devices used to help our minds come to grips with complex ideas by relating them to something more familiar and readily understood. In other words, they are those visual and text-based elements used by the cartoonist to trigger, in an observer, a metaphoric rather then literal thought. Metaphoric, as used in this context, refers to the meaning individuals ascribe to an image used to imply something else. Examples of visual metaphors used in cartoons include the use of bulls and bears to highlight the state of the share market; the sinking ship, wilderness setting or circled wagons to portray a government of political party experiencing a downturn in its electoral fortunes; a storm as a metaphor for chaos, confusion, fear, destruction and change; the grim reaper, vulture, shroud or skull and crossbones as a metaphor for evil, disease and death; and the globe as a metaphor for the world. Refaie (2003, pp. 76–77) argues that the meaning an observer attaches to a visual metaphor ultimately depends on the nature of his or her engagement with the socio-political context. The viewer is likely to bring his or her own life experiences to the interpretation process.
Caricatures	Caricatures – humorous illustrations that exaggerate or distort the prominent physical features and/or idiosyncrasies of a subject to create an easily identifiable visual likeness – help us to identify public figures quickly. When drawing a caricature the skilled cartoonist will often seek to emphasise those features that reveal something important about the individual being depicted. The best caricatures provide an insight into the character of the particular subject or issue. Examples of features subject to exaggeration in caricatures include George W Bush's ears, chin, mouth and small, closely set eyes, Tony Blair's ears, teeth, hair and raised eyebrows, John Howard's glasses and bushy eyebrows, Kim Beasley's bulky physical physique and nose, and Bob Carr's gaunt face, prominent ears and glasses.
Exaggeration and distortion	Cartoonists often exaggerate or understate the size of people and objects they draw. They do so to emphasise the relative power, importance and vulnerability of a individual, group or social force. It can also be used to draw attention to aspects of an issue being addressed.
Stereotyping	Creating an oversimplified image of a particular group of people while suppressing anything uniquely individual is known as stereotyping. Cartoonists often use stereotyping when seeking to highlight the dangers of society's tendency to generalise. In other instances they use it as a 'short-hand' way communicating generalisations. In this regard it constitutes a form of symbolism. Care needs to be taken when using stereotypical symbols to elicit an emotional response from an audience. They have the potential to reinforce and perhaps inflame harmful prejudices.
Humour	Irony (an expression in which the true meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning) and satire (the use of ridicule or scorn, often in a humorous or exaggerated way, to expose vices and follies) are often employed to give a cartoon a humorous edge. They can be used to poke fun at public figures or create a dynamic that draws the reader into a more active engagement with the issue addressed in the cartoon. Ultimately, each reader should be free to decide what the cartoon's implications are and what their position is relative to the issue. Humour can also be used to mollify any resentment those holding dissenting views may have as a result of the stance adopted by the cartoonist.
Captions	Text-based statements (or captions) are sometimes used to reinforce and contextualise a cartoon's non-verbal elements. In other words, they complement, rather than render obsolete, the other elements of a cartoon, which taken together communicate a social or political opinion. The reader is, however, still required to think about the cartoon to determine whether or not he or she agrees with the cartoonist's perspective. Captions often incorporate or mimic famous sayings, slogans (as in the Figure 1), song lyrics and other well-known phrases.
Perspective and tone	The position, stance or point of view adopted by the cartoonist. The cartoonist might take the opportunity to advance his or her own view on a particular issue or topic or he or she might seek to portray (often in a satirical way) the perspective associated with a key player. The cartoon's title and caption, and the facial expressions, body language and the relative size of characters portrayed may all provide insights into the stance or perspective of the cartoonist. The mood or tone created by cartoon provides important insights to the cartoonist's attitude towards the subject and his/her audience. The tone of the cartoon might, for example, be satirical, ironic and/or pessimistic; and it might be scathing or sympathetic.

The websites listed in the box above are a good place for students to start their scavenger hunt.

Drawing cartoons

Asking students to draw their own cartoon on a selected geographical issue is an excellent way of assessing conceptual understanding. It can also challenge the gifted and talented student. As an instructional strategy, cartoon drawing enables the student to: apply their geographical knowledge and understanding in ways that demonstrate and enhance their critical thinking skills; be creative and original in their thinking; utilise symbols and visual metaphors to communicate sometimes abstract/complex concepts to an audience; draw on their general knowledge and apply it in geographical context; and explore and clarify their own value system.

Groupwork-based instructional strategies enable the gifted and talented student to relate to others, demonstrate their leadership skills, manage and influence others and appreciate and understand the views, attitudes and feelings of other students.



Sample cartoon-based instructional strategies

1. In groups, study the Nicholson cartoon and brainstorm the issue being addressed. Share your findings with the rest of the class. Use this information to write a short statement explaining the point Nicholson is tying to communicate in his cartoon.
2. Conduct a class debate. Topic: People in developed nations must accept a lower standard of living as part of their contribution to global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.
3. In groups, brainstorm what you and your family could do to reduce greenhouse emissions. Make a list of the suggestions and share them with the rest of the class

Source: Kleeman, G. et al. (2004). *Global Explorations*. Melbourne: Heinemann.

Figure 6: Sample group-based mindmap analysis of a Nicholson cartoon
Source: Nicholson of The Australian newspaper: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

Cartoons in the Classroom

Cartoon analysis worksheet **Page 1**

Newspaper, magazine or URL: .....

Cartoonist: ..... Date of publication or Internet access: .....

Visual elements

1. Identify any symbols or visual metaphors used by the cartoonist. What do these symbols and visual metaphors represent?

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Glue a copy of the cartoon here.

2. Has the cartoonist used caricature? If so, identify the person/persons featured in the cartoon. What physical features has the cartoonist deliberately exaggerated? What is the impact of this exaggeration? What does it suggest about the person/persons shown?

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3. Is there evidence of stereotyping in the cartoon? If so, describe it.

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Text-based elements

4. Does the cartoon have a caption and/or title?

5. List any words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon?

Key definitions:

Caption: A statements used to reinforce the cartoon's visual elements.

Caricature: The portrayal of an individual's physical features in an exaggerated or distorted way.

Visual metaphor: An image, object or setting that is representative of something else.

Perspective: The point of view adopted by the cartoonist.

Symbol: An element of a cartoon (for example, an object or sign) used to represent something else.

6. Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most important? Justify your selection.

General

7. Identify the issue addressed in the cartoon.

8. Explain, in your own words, the opinion or point of view being advanced by the cartoonist.

9. What interest groups would agree/disagree with the point of view advanced by the cartoonist?

Independent analysis and interpretation of cartoons

Having developed their skills of cartoon analysis via the group-based processes outlined above, students reach a stage where they are able to interpret cartoons independently. Students can further consolidate this skill by adopting a systematic approach to the interpretation of cartoons and the communication of the geographical knowledge and understandings derived from the process. This 'scaffolding' assists students to stage the cartoon interpretation process and structure their written responses.

When interpreting cartoons with a geographical theme, students should be encouraged to ask themselves the following three questions:

1. What information does the cartoon convey? This includes the issue being addressed and the perspective, stance or point of view adopted by the cartoonist.
2. What geographical concepts/generalisations are related to the issue addressed in the cartoon?
3. What are the geographical implications of the issue addressed by the cartoonist?

From a consideration of these three questions emerges a three-stage organisational framework or scaffold for the writing of a stimulus-based response.

Stage 1 – Description.

This stage involves the identification of the issue being addressed int the cartoon. In addition to naming the issue this statement should include a brief outline of its geographical significance and identify the perspective, stance or point of view of the cartoonist. It might also include an explanation of how the various elements of the cartoon contribute to the message the cartoonist is

Skill-based instructional sequence

When developing the cartoon analysis skills of their students, teachers commonly employ a skills-based instructional sequence. This sequence typically involves five distinct stages. These are:

1. Planning.

This preliminary stage involves:

- targeting specific syllabus outcomes (or objectives);
- identifying a topic area and then selecting an appropriate cartoon;
- determining the level of expertise students to are expected to demonstrate; and
- deciding how this expertise is to be assessed and evaluated.

2. Providing the context for learning.

This stage involves ascertaining the extent of prior learning, developing the students' contextual knowledge and understanding, and making sure the students know the outcomes they are working towards.

3. Modelling the cartoon interpretation skill.

During this stage of learning the teacher typically models the skills and processes involved in cartoon interpretation. This might, for example, involve breaking the cartoon down into its contributing elements and ensuring that students are able to successfully link each of these identify the message or point of view the cartoonist is trying to communicate.

4. Guided practice.

With the teacher's assistance, students attempt to analyse a selected cartoon. The teacher, in this instance, adopts an interventionist stance, guiding students to the successful completion of the task.

5. Attempting to demonstrate the skill of cartoon analysis independently.

During this stage of the instructional sequence students are encouraged to analyse a cartoon independently. The level of teacher intervention will vary according to the ability and confidence of individual students.

6. Opportunities for ongoing practice and testing.

Without regular practice the level of expertise displayed by students will diminish. It is, therefore, essential that students have an opportunity to revise and practice their cartoon analysis skills.

7. Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning sequence.

At strategic stages during the instructional sequence the teacher assesses whether students have successfully mastered the skill of cartoon analysis and reflects on the effectiveness of their teaching. In some instances this evaluative process will result in the teacher returning to specific stages in the sequence outlined above to ensure that all students are able to competently demonstrate their mastery of the cartoon analysis.

Cartoons in the Classroom

Cartoon interpretation scaffold

Description: A statement outlining the nature of the cartoon's subject matter. This might, for example, include a statement identifying the geographic issue being addressed and the perspective adopted by the cartoonist.

Analysis: In interpreting the cartoon you should identify the range of geographic concepts or generalisation relevant to the issue being addressed and use these to demonstrate your understanding of the issue. You might also evaluate the point of view or perspective adopted by the cartoonist and include reference to alternative perspectives relevant to the issue.

Implications: This part of your response requires you to apply your geographic knowledge and understanding to outline the geographical implications of the issue addressed in the cartoon.

seeking to convey.

Stage 2 – Analysis

In analysing the cartoon, students should first identify the geographic concepts/generalisations relevant to the issue being addressed. Students should then demonstrate their understanding of these concepts by using the appropriate terminology in context to discuss/explain the geographic processes/phenomenon central to the issue. Alternative perspectives can also be mentioned in this section of the response.

Stage 3 – Implications

This stage involves the students applying their knowledge and understanding of the cartoon's subject matter to discuss the geographical implications of the issue addressed. In some instances students may be able to use the information obtained to draw inferences and construct generalisations. Where appropriate these implications, inferences and generalisations should be illustrated by reference to specific examples.

A scaffold for communicating the knowledge and understandings derived from the analysis of a cartoon is shown in Figure 8.

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on the benefits derived from using cartoons as a way of enhancing students' appreciation and understanding of geographical issues. In doing so, it explores some of the cartoon-based teaching and learning strategies teachers can employ to develop the interpretative and communicative skills of students. Specifically, it seeks to enhance students' ability to:

- interpret/analyse cartoons to determine their meaning;
- explain (or account for) the geographical issues addressed in cartoons;
- examine (or reflect on) the geographical implications of an issue portrayed in a cartoon; and
- communicate (in writing) the knowledge and understandings derived from the analysis of a cartoon.

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