

How to describe and analyse an editorial cartoon

Political cartoons usually use humor (visual and written) to make the readers of a media aware of a negative political or social situation. The cartoonist wants his readers to react to it (he uses humor for a serious purpose). A cartoon is an efficient way to make a complex situation easier to understand and remember than a long article.

For the **description**, you need to say -if you can know it- :

1. Who is the cartoonist and what are his/her political convictions? (most often, you need to research these information)
2. What is the tabloid newspaper, magazine or web site that published the cartoon? Is it politically on the left, center, or right?
3. When does the cartoon published (and how soon after the event it comments)?
4. What are the various elements of the cartoon (say where each element is in the cartoon: central figure, background, foreground, middle distance, on the bottom left, in front of, above, etc.) and what is the situation (what has happened/is happening/will happen)?
5. What are the techniques used ? Color, style, atmosphere, humor (caricature, irony, satire, zoomorphism, etc.), symbols, characters' expressions, onomatopoeia, speech/thought bubbles, captions, etc.;

For the **analysis** (comment on/explanation of) the cartoon, you need to -if you can know it- :

1. Describe the **historical context** or **political context** (what was the wider context of the situation/event the cartoon is commenting/criticizing?)
2. Describe the significance of each element of the cartoon (note that details, such as the color of a tie or the size of a person, can be significant) and identify the references used (political, history, art, pop culture, etc...)
3. Say what the cartoon is "about" (its "message"), say why the journalist/artist has drawn this cartoon (is his purpose to criticize, mock, question, denounce, inform, etc.?),
4. To conclude, say for whom the cartoon is intended (is the target readership well-educated, on the right or left politically, can the cartoon be understood by people other than the target audience?);

Useful vocabulary:

- Humor
- Topical humor
- Irony
- Satire
- Hyperbole
- Sarcasm
- Parody
- Black humor
- To mock, to make fun of
- Current/topical events/issues
- Exaggeration, distortion
- Stereotypes
- Symbols
- Allusions
- Analogy
- Visual elements (how they interact with each other)
- Labeling (bubbles, captions)
- Text (how the words enhance/comment the visual elements)
- Trends, events, themes
- Social/political commentary
- Main focus, main point(s)
- Details (minor or signification)