

The *Mindsparks* Editorial Cartoon Checklist

THE ISSUE: Editorial cartoons are NOT just like other comics. They may be funny, but their main purpose is to offer an opinion or point of view about some issue or problem in the news. First try to decide what the issue or problem is in the cartoon you are studying.

SYMBOLS: A symbol is any object or design that stands for some other thing, person, or idea. For example, a huge thug may stand for the problem of crime. Describe objects in the cartoon that are symbols.

EXAGGERATION & DISTORTION: Which features in the cartoon are exaggerated? That is, which appears much larger or smaller than they actually are? Changes in size or shape of this sort often add to the cartoon's point. Distorting an object means changing it in some way to make it look funny, ugly, etc. What symbols or other objects in the cartoon are distorted, and how does this add to the cartoon's point?

STEREOTYPES: A stereotype is a simplistic view of some group. It is often insulting, but it can also help the cartoon make its point quickly. What stereotypes are used in the cartoon? Are they used unfairly, or are they used just to help the cartoon make its point?

CARICATURE: Caricature is a portrayal of an individual's features in an exaggerated or distorted way. Is caricature used in the cartoon? If so, does it help to make an important point about the person portrayed?

HUMOR AND IRONY: Humor is important in many editorial cartoons. Irony is one kind of humor. In it, a viewpoint is expressed in such an odd way as to make the view actually seem ridiculous. Is the cartoon you are studying funny or ironic? If so, does the humor add to the cartoon's point? Does the humor present an unfair or highly exaggerated idea of the other side's point of view?

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE: A reader usually must know certain things about an issue in order to understand an editorial cartoon on that issue. What kinds of background knowledge do you need in order to make sense of the cartoon you are studying? Where might you get that knowledge if you do not already have it?

THE ARGUMENT: Slogans tell us what to do or think. "Smoking Kills," or "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute," are slogans. A good editorial cartoon is NOT just a slogan. It gives reasons for its opinion. In other words, it is an argument. What point of view does your cartoon present, and what argument does it offer? How do its symbols, distortions, stereotypes, caricature or other features help it to make a good argument for its point of view?