

You have now studied 38 cartoons in this article. You therefore have a large 'data bank' to call on in considering a final set of comments about the nature and impact of cartoons.

8.1 Here is a collection of comments. Decide in each case if you basically agree or disagree with each, and select one cartoon that best illustrates your opinion on each statement. So, if you agree with a statement, select the cartoon that best illustrates that view; if you disagree with a statement, select the cartoon that best negates that comment, and represents your opposite point of view.

STATEMENT ABOUT CARTOONS	AGREE	DISAGREE	BEST CARTOON
<p>[A cartoon] provokes people into thinking again about an issue ... I am ... interested in affecting the people in the middle, the swinging voter if you like.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Bruce Petty, <i>Good Weekend Magazine</i>, 13 July 2002, pp. 16, 19</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>[Cartoonists] skewer the pomposity, the glib rhetoric, and the deliberate lies of our political elites.</p> <p><small>Russ Radcliffe, <i>Best Australian Political Cartoons 2003</i>, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2003</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>[Cartoons] give such an unrelievedly bleak picture of politicians and the whole political process. I started to think about the impact of cartoons on the popular perception of Australian politics, and I was a little disturbed by what I was thinking. The problem is not with individual cartoons. No, the problem comes from a steady diet, week after week, and year after year, of images of politicians as liars, cheats, compromisers and fools. Whereas other mass media journalists are expected to report fairly objectively and without bias, there is no such expectation for cartoonists. When I speak of bias here I don't mean a preference for the Liberal Party or the Labor Party. Most cartoonists make no distinction here. No, what I mean by bias here is that virtually all the images of politicians and politics are negative. It is almost impossible to find a cartoon that says something positive about politics.</p> <p><small>Michael Hogan, www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/perspective/stories/s478618.htm</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>[My cartoons are] just a jumble of ideas and questions that I've got about a situation, put together in a way that sort of conveys the story. I'm trying not to illustrate the news, but ask some questions about what's going on.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist David Rowe in Libby Tudball, <i>Hired Assassins Study Guide</i>, ATOM, Melbourne, 2003</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>A cartoon is 'looking under and behind the surface of events, reading between the lines, unravelling the spin doctors' spinning'.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Cathy Wilcox, <i>Good Weekend Magazine</i>, 13 July 2002, p. 17</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Cartoonists confront people with little bits of truth ... [that are] sometimes funnier than the lies the politicians sell.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Bill Leak in Libby Tudball, <i>Hired Assassins Study Guide</i>, ATOM, Melbourne, 2003</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Cartoonists make democracy bearable.</p> <p><small>Introduction by Don Watson to Russ Radcliffe, <i>Best Australian Political Cartoons 2003</i>, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2003</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Drawing a cartoon is a way of expressing my anger and hopefully at the same time making other people angry about it.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Phil Somerville, <i>Good Weekend Magazine</i>, 13 July 2002, p. 17</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I don't think it really matters if you're a left-wing cartoonist or a right-wing cartoonist, as long as you make your point clearly and in a hard-hitting way, you've got the potential there to make people think.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Bill Leak, pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/11157/20010606/reportage.uts.edu.au/stories/aug00/23choice.html</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I suppose it is traditional that political cartoonists take on people with power in the community. There is now even more important, more anonymous, figures who run our global, corporate world. These non-elected people decide more than politicians what goes on and make decisions where all our wealth and the wealth of this country goes. We [cartoonists] keep drawing politicians but the real power is often with a different set of people.</p> <p><small>Cartoonist Bruce Petty, www.about.theage.com.au/view_profile.asp?intid=854</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

STATEMENT ABOUT CARTOONS

AGREE

DISAGREE

BEST CARTOON

The cartoonist's pen can be a devastating weapon that pricks pomposity in the powerful and evokes sympathy for the exploited and downtrodden.

Libby Tudball, *Hired Assassins Study Guide*, ATOM, Melbourne, 2003

The reason why Australian cartoonists do so well around the world is that they aren't afraid to take on the established order of things ... Our national characteristic of egalitarianism is tailor-made for political cartooning.

Federal Treasurer Peter Costello at the launch of *Cartoons 2002: Life, Love and Politics & Leunig Animated*, www.treasurer.gov.au/tsr/content/speeches/2002/007.asp

There are plenty out there who think a cartoonist does a funny gag which helps you get through the editorial and gives you a bit of light relief after the gloom and horror of all the news ... I'd say, when you get to the editorial page [and] you see the cartoon, have a good chortle, feel a bit better ... My view is that cartoons are political comment, only a cartoonist does it in pictures rather than words. But it's essentially just as politically informed, or should be, as [a column by an expert political commentator].

Cartoonist Geoff Pryor in Libby Tudball, *Hired Assassins Study Guide*, ATOM, Melbourne, 2003

You're the voice of the people, you're part of the thought processing of people, you can also be part of the healing process of the community, you're an advocate ... you're the person who's going back through the political script, and you're selling certain phrases or sentences that have relevance to the community or the reader.

Cartoonist Rod Emmerson in Libby Tudball, *Hired Assassins Study Guide*, ATOM, Melbourne, 2003

8.2 What do you now see as the strengths and weaknesses of cartoons?

8.3 How would you characterise or describe cartoons — are they thoughtful, politically incisive analyses and evaluations; or are they shallow slogans, a knee-jerk reaction to an issue — the newspaper equivalent of the political 'doorstop' interview?

8.4 Do you think that cartoons are a vital part of our democracy, or are they undermining it?

Activities

Here are some ways of following up many of the issues raised in this unit.

8.5 There is an assumption in the unit that cartoons really do influence people. But do they? Some issues to consider might include:

- Who 'reads' cartoons?
- Do cartoons influence people more than the articles in a newspaper (which are usually more balanced)?
- What if different cartoons present different ideas on the same day?

How could you test this?

8.6 In question 8.4 you considered whether cartoons help or harm a democracy and formulated a point of view or hypothesis. Below are two other exercises you can carry out to test this hypothesis further.

- Collect as many political cartoons as you can in a week. If possible, collect them from several different newspapers and magazines. Do they support the argument for 'healthy satire', or for 'destructive cynicism'?
- Devise a questionnaire that surveys people's response to cartoons, and the influence cartoons have on them.

Your survey needs to consider such elements as:

- How often people see political cartoons?
- Do the cartoons influence them?
- Are people more or less influenced by other political opinions, such as those of articles or commentators?

When you have agreed on the questions for the class survey, test as many people as you can. Then pool your results and analyse them. To help you analyse the results more fully, you may need to include discriminators in your survey such as:

- age
- gender
- types of newspapers read
- amount of political news or comments seen to help you analyse results more fully.

Resources

Cartoonist Michael Leunig reflects on the life of a cartoonist.
www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=/articles/2002

Nicholson cartoons.
www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

Hired Assassins, Political Cartooning in Australia. Film Australia, 2003,
www.filmaustralia.com.au

Libby Tudball, *Hired Assassins Study Guide*. Australian Teachers of Media, 2003
www.metromagazine.com.au/

Laughing with Knives: Exploring Political Cartoons. National Museum of Australia, 2003,
www.nma.gov.au/schools/school_resources/free_resources/civics_and_citizenship/laughing_with_knives/

Guy Hansen, *Behind the Lines*. National Museum of Australia, 2004,
www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/behind_the_lines

STOP PRESS
The cartoon voted Best Political Satire in the 2003 *Behind The Lines* exhibition was Cartoon 7A on page 10.