

Election 2008: Toon in to Election '08

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Participate in a class discussion about the role of political cartoons as a means of swaying public opinion.
2. Complete a political cartoon analysis activity.
3. Discuss various political cartoon captions and select an entry for an online political cartoon caption contest.
4. Discuss out loud and/or in writing the effects of political cartoons on the candidates, election results and on students as potential voters.

Related National Standards

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning), at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 7: Understands alternative forms of representation and how they serve the purposes of constitutional government.

Standard 17. Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government.

Standard 20: Understands the roles of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics.

Standard 29: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.

Language Arts

Reading

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Media

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 6: Applies decision-making techniques.

Working with Others

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Estimated Time to Complete Lesson

One 50-minute class periods

Materials Needed

- Internet access for viewing NOW's 'Toon In contest site at <http://www.pbs.org/now/php/cartoons.php>
- Handout: Toon in to Election '08 (PDF file)

Backgrounder for Teachers

As the presidential campaign continues to heat up, Americans are bombarded by news of every speech, stop and flub made by the candidates. While this provides interesting coverage and fodder for the late-night talk shows, it does not encourage viewers to delve more deeply into some of the tougher, less publicized issues that voters could benefit from exploring.

Using content and election coverage from the NOW website, this series of lessons offers students and teachers the opportunity to explore questions such as the fairness of the electoral college, the role of various groups in the outcome of the election, voting laws, the effect of money and campaign contributions on political policy, and political spin tactics and political advertising.

Giving students an opportunity to look at the election and focus on issues that are not often part of mainstream news will help broaden their understanding of the political process and foster a greater awareness of the role of democracy in shaping our everyday lives.

Assumed Student Prior Knowledge

Students should be familiar with the major presidential candidates. Knowledge of terms such as primary, caucus, political poll, Electoral College, delegates, superdelegates, and lobbyists would be helpful in students' ability to understand discussion information and when making decisions about which topics they might be interested in presenting to the class.

Teaching Strategy

1. Distribute the **Toon in to Election '08 Worksheet**. Facilitate a short discussion about political cartoons using questions such as:

- Why do you think political cartoons are such an effective means for communicating opinions and ideas?
 - How can a political cartoon be used to get voters to think more deeply about a specific candidate or election issue?
2. Review the worksheet directions, and provide students 5-7 minutes to develop a caption for each of the cartoons. Encourage them to think about what they have learned throughout the lesson when creating their captions.
 3. Select volunteers to share their captions for each cartoon with the class. After hearing several captions for each cartoon, discuss the effectiveness of each cartoon in conveying its message as well as how the cartoon might influence voters.
 4. Direct students to NOW's Election 2008 'Toon In caption contest at <http://www.pbs.org/now/php/cartoons.php>. As a class, review the captions already submitted for the contest. Provide students with 10 minutes to develop an appropriate caption of their own. Go around the classroom and have students share their captions aloud. When all have shared, either vote and select the best caption from the class and submit it to the contest or allow each student to submit his/her own caption as part of the contest.
 5. As a follow-up to the presentations and 'Toon In activities, facilitate a class discussion or have students respond in writing to questions such as:
 - It has often been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Keeping this in mind, how can political cartoons be both positive and negative for candidates?
 - How did studying and writing captions for the political cartoons presented on the worksheet help you learn more about election topics or shape your ideas about the election process or candidates?

Assessment Recommendations

Consider the following assessment ideas:

1. Give students completion grades for participating in class discussions and group work activities and the 'Toon In caption contest.
2. Assign completion or letter grades for the oral/written response activity at the end of the lesson.

Extension Ideas

1. Have students create their own political cartoons related to election issues and publish these on a classroom website or bulletin board in as content for the school newspaper or as submissions to local newspapers or other media outlets.

Related Resources

PBS Teachers: PBS Vote 2008

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/vote2008/tools.html>

A collection of resources including items such as Ask Your Lawmaker, Ballotvox, Campaign Audio, Get My Vote, Idea Generators, Interactive Map, Select a Candidate, Vote by the Issue Quiz and You Decide.

NOW's 2008 Election Coverage

<http://www.pbs.org/now/election-2008/index.html>

Provides a "Democracy Toolkit" and "Burning Questions" related to the 2008 election as well as links to current election news, political cartoons, tracking polls, viewer feedback, and other resources.

Online Newshour: Vote 2008

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2008/>

Access current news stories, a reporter's blog, delegate counts, candidate profiles and more.

American Experience: The Presidents

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/2008/>

This site connects the past to the present by asking voters to consider a number of questions related to the presidency by examining how past presidents have handled similar issues.

P.O.V.: Election Day (airs July 2008)

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/electionday/preview.html>

A documentary film that follows 11 different voters on election day 2004 and provides a glimpse into the election process and decisions made by voters.

About the Author

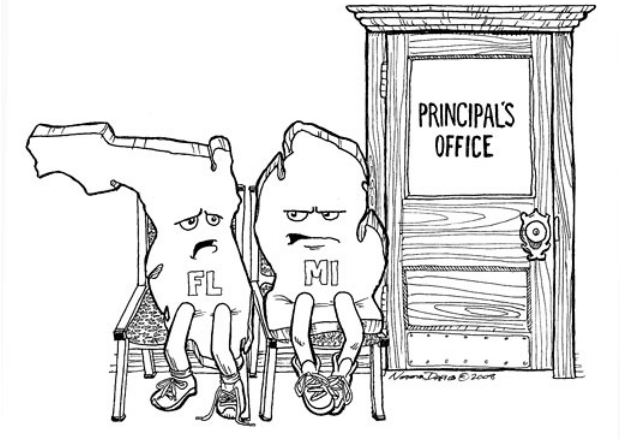
Lisa Prososki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school English, social studies, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prososki has worked extensively with PBS authoring and editing many lesson plans for various PBS programs and PBS TeacherSource. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national meetings, Prososki also works with many corporate clients creating training programs and materials, facilitating leadership and operations workshops, and providing instructional support for new program rollouts. Prososki has authored one book and also serves as an editor for other writers of instructional materials.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Toon in to Election '08

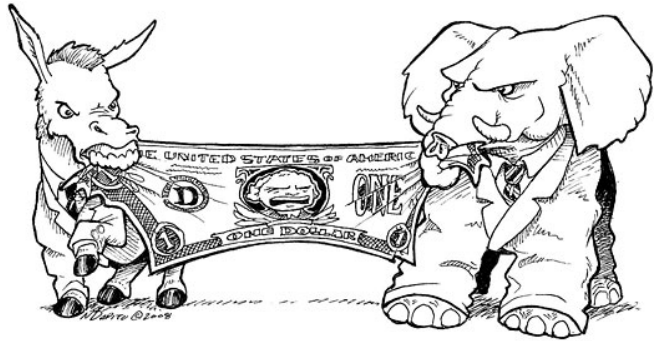
Directions: Briefly study each political cartoon below. Take time to think about what you have learned throughout the lesson, and create an appropriate caption for each cartoon below. Be prepared to share your captions with classmates and discuss the content and message of each cartoon.



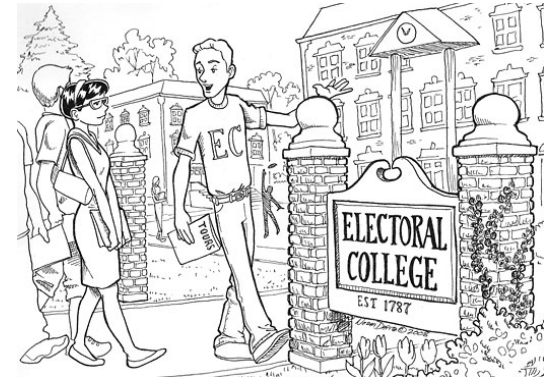
1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____