



## THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS Lesson Plan

### *Political Cartoons and Dr. Seuss*

[pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss](http://pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss)

**Grade levels:** 9 to 12

**Estimated time:** Three class periods (but the assessment activity may be assigned for homework)

#### **Introduction:**

Political cartoons have played a role in United States politics and public affairs since the 1700s. Dr. Seuss drew political cartoons for *PM* newspaper during World War II, expressing his liberal views in an uncensored medium. Students will analyze some of these cartoons on THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS video and Web site and discuss how these cartoons convey Dr. Seuss's messages. They will conclude by creating their own political cartoons concerning a current event.

#### **Lesson objectives:**

Students will:

- Analyze a recent political cartoon
- Read and discuss an article about political cartooning
- View and take notes on a segment of THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS
- View and take notes on political cartoons on THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS Web site
- Discuss their observations of Dr. Seuss's political cartoons
- Create their own political cartoons about a current event

#### **Materials Needed:**

- Computers with Internet access
- TV and VCR
- THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS video
- Drawing materials (blank white paper, colored pencils, magazines suitable for cutting, scissors, glue—or students may be asked to gather these materials on their own)

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#### Standards:

(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>)

#### Language Arts:

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

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media

#### United States history:

Standard 25: Understands the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of America's roles in world affairs

#### Civics:

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

#### Teaching strategy:

1. Show students a political cartoon from a recent newspaper. Discuss their interpretation of the cartoon. Why did the artist draw it? What message is he or she trying to get across? How effective do students think this cartoon is in making its point?
2. Have students read the text on the Political Cartooning page at THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss/political.html>).
3. Discuss these questions as a class, asking students to consider what they've read on the site:
  - What are some advantages of political cartoons over plain text articles? (possible answers: less literate people can often understand them, they're eye-catching and succinct)
  - What are some of the purposes and outcomes of political cartoons? (possible answers: they express political thought, champion activism and help bring about social change)

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4. Write the following words and phrases on the board: fascism, anti-Semitism, America First movement, Japanese internment, left wing. Ask students if they can define any of these terms, and discuss their meanings. Provide definitions for the terms students are not familiar with, as follows:

**Fascism:** a political philosophy that glorifies the state and confers supreme power to a dictatorial leader while forcibly suppressing opposition and individual expression. Nazi Germany was an example of a fascist state.

**Anti-Semitism:** prejudice against Jews.

**America First Movement:** a movement during World War II that advocated isolationism and nonintervention in Europe. Pilot Charles Lindbergh was involved in this movement.

**Japanese American Internment:** the forced removal of Japanese Americans from their homes to internment camps during World War II.

**Left-wing:** during World War II, members of the political left were against racism and anti-Semitism, opposed to Hitler, against isolationism and the America First movement, and pro-labor, but many distrusted the Japanese and condoned the internment of Japanese Americans.

Explain that these terms will be mentioned in the video segment students are about to see.

5. Show the time segment 01:20:11 – 01:26:55 of THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS. As students watch, ask them to take notes to answer these questions:
  - How did Dr. Seuss respond to Hitler and Mussolini, the Holocaust, and the Japanese American internment?
  - Why did Dr. Seuss choose to write for PM?
6. Discuss the above questions as a class, using examples from the video.
7. Ask students to make charts with three columns. They should label the first column "cartoon title," the second "topic" and the third "Dr. Seuss's view."
8. Have students return to THE POLITICAL DR. SEUSS Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss/>). Ask them to select "The Gallery" from the left side of the screen and then select "Enter Gallery" at the lower right. Have them look at each of the black and white political cartoons and read the captions for each one.

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9. As students view each cartoon, ask them to fill in their charts with the following information:
  - first column: write the name of the cartoon
  - second column: write the historical event or situation the cartoon addresses (e.g. "the America First movement during World War II")
  - third column: write the viewpoint Dr. Seuss takes in this cartoon. What is he trying to say in his drawing?
10. As an option to save time in the previous two steps, divide the class into small groups and assign each group to a few of the cartoons. Have groups share the information they've entered into their charts with the class.
11. Discuss these questions as a class, asking students to use their notes from the video and the Web site:
  - How did Dr. Seuss's cartoons reflect his own political views?
  - How did Dr. Seuss respond to the Japanese internment? How did this response differ from his reaction to other acts of racial and ethnic discrimination?
  - How effective do you think Dr. Seuss's political cartoons are in communicating his viewpoints?
  - How important do you think the work of political cartoonists is in general? Do you think they still play an important role in shaping public opinion? Why or why not?

#### **Assessment:**

Have each student choose a current event in national or world politics. They might select an international conflict, a domestic issue under debate, or the actions of a particular political leader.

You might want to list potential current event topics on the board and discuss them as a class to make sure students understand the issues involved. Unless students have time for in-depth research of new issues, encourage them to choose current events they've already heard about and may have already developed opinions on.

Ask students to create political cartoons that illustrate their reaction to the event they've selected. Students who are not comfortable drawing may cut out pictures from newspapers or magazines (but not political cartoons!) and make a collage rather than

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an original drawing, but they must write their own text to show the point they're trying to illustrate.

Have all students, whether they've drawn pictures or made collages, write captions explaining what the cartoon shows and why they've chosen to create their cartoon on this issue. They should write captions on separate pieces of paper so people looking at the cartoon must initially try to determine its meaning without the help of the caption.

#### **Extension ideas:**

Have students choose a modern political cartoon from Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index (<http://cagle.slate.msn.com>). They should select a topic from the list on the left side of the screen.

Have them write paragraphs comparing and contrasting the cartoon they've selected with one of the Dr. Seuss political cartoons they've examined in this lesson. They should address the similarities and differences between the artists' drawing styles, the messages the cartoons are conveying and any other factors they think are significant.

Have students go to Political Cartoons of the Lilly Library: <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/cartoon/cartoons.html> to find political cartoons from before the twentieth century. Ask them to choose two or three cartoons from this Web site and write paragraphs describing the issues or events they relate to, the viewpoints they show and how they differ from today's political cartoons.

#### **Online resources:**

The Political Dr. Seuss:  
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss/>

Political Cartoons and Cartoonists:  
[http://www.boondocksnet.com/gallery/pc\\_intro.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/gallery/pc_intro.html)

Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index:  
<http://cagle.slate.msn.com>

Political Cartoons of the Lilly Library: <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/cartoon/cartoons.html>

Analyze a Thomas Nast Cartoon:  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/cartoon.htm>



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Herblock's History: Political Cartoons from the Crash to the Millennium: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/cartoon.html>

About the Newspaper *PM*: <http://www.ksu.edu/english/nelp/purple/miscellaneous/pm.html>

BBC - History – World War Two:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo>

### **About the author**

Betsy Hedberg is a teacher and freelance curriculum writer who has published lesson plans on a variety of subjects. She received her secondary teaching credential in social studies from Loyola Marymount University and her master of arts in geography from UCLA. In addition to curriculum writing, she presents seminars and training sessions to help teachers incorporate the Internet into their classrooms.