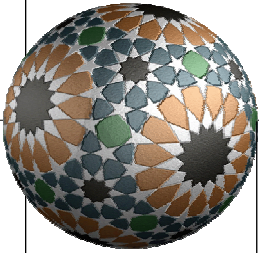


'Reading' political cartoons



Learning outcomes

- ◇ Students will sharpen their analytical abilities
- ◇ Students will develop an understanding of the impact of the use of imagery
- ◇ Students will explore the treatment of controversial issues through cartoons
- ◇ Students will identify the visual use of stereotyping
- ◇ Students will deepen their understanding of what is at stake in disagreements about Islamophobia and multiculturalism.

Lesson in brief

Students will look at the techniques used by political cartoonists. They will gain a better understanding of how political cartoons can be effective by considering cartoons dealing with Muslims and multiculturalism.

National curriculum

Citizenship key stage 3 – unit 09 – The significance of the media in society
 Citizenship key stage 4 – unit 08 – Producing the news
 Citizenship key stage 4 – unit 03 – Challenging racism and discrimination

Most newspapers publish political cartoons. Opinions are expressed not through words, but through images. Political cartoons have a long history. They can support or challenge mainstream views.

Lesson Plan

Starter

- ◇ Start the discussion by considering what the students think about political cartoons. If they are funny, does this mean that they are less serious than other forms of political argument, such as written articles? Are they less effective?
- ◇ Discuss quotes of prominent political cartoonists on their work (see the following page)
- ◇ Go through the main techniques that cartoonists use – explaining each in turn so that the students understand them. (If you think it best, the following page can be photocopied and handed out so that the students have it as a reference point.)

Main activity

- ◇ Split the class into groups and get each group to go through the cartoons answering the questions in the 'Things to think about when you look at the cartoons...' box.

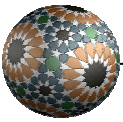
Plenary

- ◇ Which do you think would be a more effective way to make the point – a political cartoon or a newspaper editorial? Why?

Homework/follow-up

- ◇ Ask each student or group to do their own cartoon and to write or present to the class the techniques that they used.





What some political cartoonists say about their work...

Political cartoonists violate every rule of ethical journalism – they misquote, trifle with the truth, make science fiction out of politics and sometimes should be held for personal libel. But when the smoke clears, the political cartoonist has been getting closer to the truth than the guys who write political opinions

Jeff MacNelly

There is a serious point buried in there, somewhere. But the point is also to make people laugh and the best ones are when you do both – when you hit the spot and make people laugh

Martin Rowson

Political satire. It's also very primitive. You're out to damage somebody at a distance with a sharp object which is the pen

Steve Bell

How political cartoonists do what they do...



EXAGGERATION – A situation is over-emphasised and shown 'bigger than life.' It is intended to create a strong impression & not meant to be taken literally – for example, an overcrowded building might be drawn with people coming out of the windows.

CARICATURE – A person's distinctive features are exaggerated to humorous or grotesque effect – the person looks different and comical but is still recognisable – for example George Bush is often drawn with big ears or as a monkey.

SYMBOLS – A symbol is an easily recognisable image that is used to represent something – for example a dollar sign represents money or the influence of money; a dove or olive branch represents peace; a six-pointed star or star of David is used to represent the state of Israel (the star is the image on the Israeli flag)

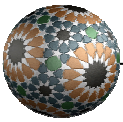
STEREOTYPING – A member of a group (religion, nation, sexuality etc) is depicted through images and actions which are seen to be typical of that group (and so ignoring the variations within the group) – for example blond women as silly bimbos, computer programmers as geeks with thick glasses.

SATIRE – Something or someone is criticised through ridicule. Although satire is often very funny, the purpose of satire is not humour but criticism in a clever way – for example a person considered corrupt might be drawn with money spilling out from their pockets.

LABELS – A person or a thing is identified by written words – for example, a figure that is meant to represent a political party might have the name of that party written across their chest.

Things to think about when you look at the cartoons...

- ◆ What is the event or issue being portrayed?
- ◆ What is the cartoonist's opinion? How does the cartoonist get this opinion across – in other words, how does the cartoon 'work'? Consider the techniques discussed—is exaggeration/ caricature/ symbolism/ stereotyping/ satire/ labelling used effectively?
- ◆ What does the cartoonist want us to think about the different figures represented?
- ◆ How might different audiences 'read' this cartoon?
- ◆ Is the cartoon thought provoking?

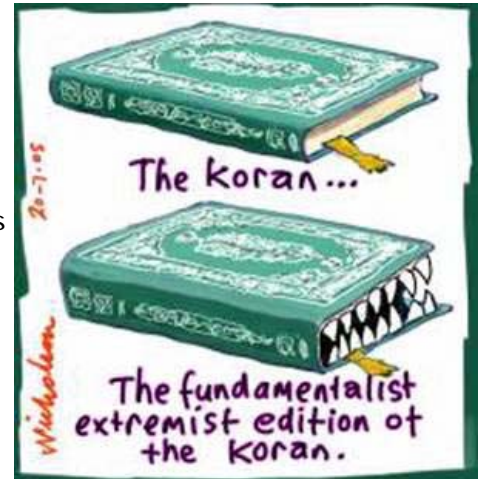


Cartoons in a debate: Islam and multiculturalism

Are there similarities in how the Muslim figures were represented? Do they seem like 'normal' ordinary people? Do you think it is a stereotypical image? Or do you think it is realistic?

Cartoon 1

Some people argue that there is something within Islam which tends towards fundamentalism. Others say that that this is not true and that fundamentalist Islam is a deviation from the true Islam. Where do you think the cartoonist stands on this issue? How is this communicated?



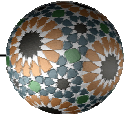
Cartoon 2

Some people openly describe Islam as a violent religion. Others say that it is only certain extreme forms of Islam that are violent. What does this cartoonist think about the relationship between Islam and violence? What does the cartoonist think about the argument made by some Muslims that Islam is a religion of peace? Who does the figure represent? How is he represented? Is the violence presented as justified and proportionate or extreme and unreasonable?

Cartoon 3

Pat Robertson, referred to in the newspaper clipping on the left, is a TV evangelist in the US who caused a storm when he said on his TV programme that "Islam is not a religion of peace", that "the goal of Islam is world domination", and that some were "satanic". How does the cartoonist feel about this perspective? Do you think the cartoonist thinks it is fair that so much attention is paid to the question of whether or not Islam is more violent than other religions? Are other religions also used to justify violence? What historical events does the cartoonist refer to? How are they related to Christianity? When Islam is seen as violent, ordinary Muslims are often called upon to distance themselves from the violence done in the name of their religion – is this true of Christians? How do you think the cartoonist feels about this?





In 2005, a Danish daily newspaper published twelve cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. Many Muslims were deeply offended by the cartoons. One of the cartoons which caused most offence was one showing the prophet Muhammad wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse. In this cartoon the founder of Islam is associated with terrorism suggesting that Islam is a violent religion. The cartoons were published in many countries. Those who supported the publishing of the cartoons argued that freedom of speech was such a cherished value for democracy. Those against the publishing of the cartoons said that the issue was not about freedom of speech, or even the offense caused to Muslims, but about discrimination which Muslims face across Europe. This debate also spilled over into the world of political cartoons.



Cartoon 4

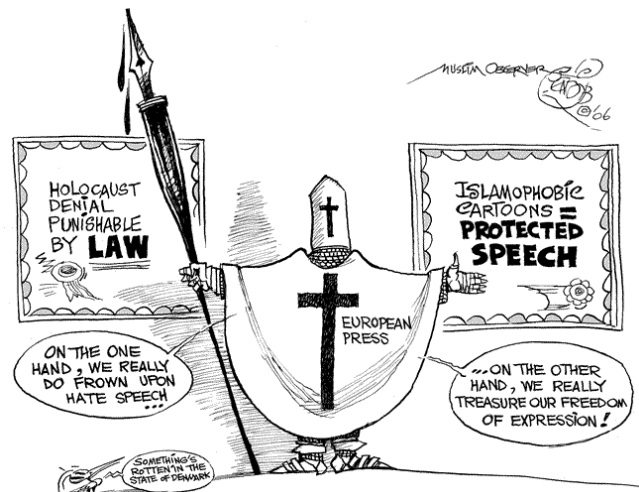
What is this cartoonist trying to say about the relationship between Islamism and freedom of speech? Is there any hope of persuading the figure in the cartoon of the merits of freedom of speech? How is the figure represented – look at what he is wearing. What is he carrying? Look at how freedom of speech is represented – why is this significant?

Cartoon 5

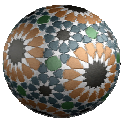
Democracy 101 is an introduction to the basics of democracy. Freedom of speech is seen to be a basic democratic right. There is a famous quote – frequently attributed to the French philosopher Voltaire – which is often said to summarise this belief in freedom of speech: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." How does what the student says in class relate to this quote? What does this suggest about his ability to understand the basics of democracy? How is this figure represented? Who might he be?



Cartoon 6

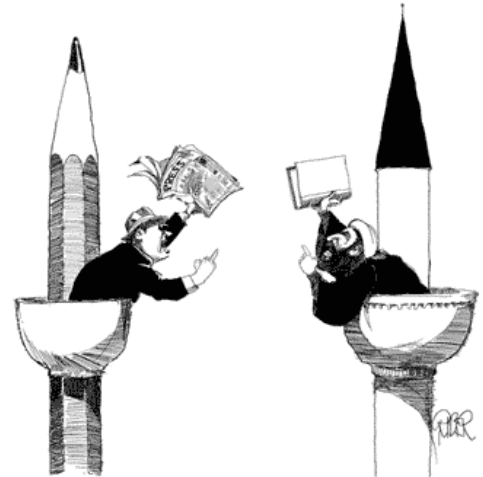


People who disagreed with the publishing of the cartoons were presented as being against freedom of speech. Many of them said that this was not true, that they were not against freedom of speech, but that this freedom was being used to justify hate speech against Islam. How does this cartoonist see the argument that freedom of speech justified publishing the cartoons? What double standards does he identify? Does the cartoonist's depiction of the European press suggest that it is neutral or not? How do you know?



Cartoon 7

Who do you think the two people in this picture represent? What are they doing? Where are they standing—what do the different buildings represent? What are they each holding? What might they represent? Do you think understanding and communication between these two people is possible? Why or hwy not?



Cartoon 8

What does the title of this cartoon suggest about multiculturalism? Do you think that the cartoonist thinks that multiculturalism is good for society. How is the cartoonist represent people who think it is important to respect people's differences? Does he present their views as naive or wise? Do you think this is a fair representation?

Cartoon 9

Some Muslim women have argued that some of them choose to wear burka or other Islamic covering and that you cannot simply assume it is oppressive. What they say is oppressive is denying women from making their own choices. Forcing women to cover up OR forcing them to remove their covering are just as oppressive as each other because in both cases the women is no longer free to make a choice. What would the cartoonist think about this view? How do you know? Would the cartoonist suggest listening to the views of Muslim women and valuing their voices? What do you think about this?

