

# How to Read a Political Cartoon

A **political cartoon** is a cartoon that conveys an opinion about a political topic. It can be challenging to interpret the meaning of political cartoons because they often rely on symbolism and context to convey their message. To help you analyze a political cartoon, you can use a few key strategies:

## First, look for any words.

- What is the cartoon's caption?
- What labels do you see in the illustration?
- What dialogue is there? Who is speaking to whom?
- How do the words in the caption, labels, and dialogue relate to each other?



## Next, look at the illustration itself.

- What characters are there? Are any of them public figures?
- What are the characters doing?
- How are the characters drawn? What are they wearing or holding?
- Are there symbolic messages conveyed by how they look?
- What objects are there? Are any of the objects symbols of something?
- What action is taking place? Is there anything different from what the reader might expect?
- What emotions are portrayed? How can you tell?

## Lastly, think about any outside context.

- When was this cartoon published? What was happening at the time?
- Who drew the cartoon? What do you know about the cartoonist's political opinions?

You can use these observations to identify the underlying message of the cartoon. Keep a few considerations in mind:

- A political cartoon might be supporting the opposite of what the words in the cartoon suggest. To tell when this is happening, consider how positively or negatively the characters and actions are portrayed.
- A political cartoon might use a simple setting that readers can easily understand to suggest a comparison with a more complex event or issue. To tell when this is happening, consider if the situation in the cartoon also exists in a larger political or social context.

Try  
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Take a look at the political cartoon above. It was published in 1928 and depicts millionaire Henry Ford addressing calls to run for president. Use the strategies on this page to determine the message of this cartoon. Discuss your thoughts with a friend or classmate.