Analysing Political Cartoon Sources

Follow the steps below to complete your analysis of a political cartoon

1 What objects are in the source? What do these objects symbolise? What objects are exaggerated or emphasised and why?

2 What words are in the source? Which words are the most significant and why? What is the impact of including words? How do they clarify the symbols?

3 Are there people in the source? Who are they? What emotions are they expressing?

4 What actions/movement is happening in the source? What meaning does this create?

The above questions will help you to answer the key questions below:

5 What is the source commenting on, and what is the author's opinion on this?

6 Based on your historical knowledge of this time period, what groups does the author's opinion align with? Who might they disagree with?

People

People in cartoons often represent key individuals in history

Note the emotions these individuals are conveying, as well as other visual clues about their role in the scene, e.g. clothing

Movement

Movement in cartoons is key to expressing meaning - it shows how the people or objects in the source interact with each other

For example, if one person is running from another in a cartoon, you could infer that the pursuer is stronger or more threatening (in the opinion of the author)

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—JUNE 24, 1903.

FIDGETY JOE.

PAPA (DUKE OF DE-V-NSH-RE). LET ME SEE IF JOSEPH CAN BE A LITTLE GENTLEMAN;

MAMMA (ARTHUR B-LF-R). LET ME SEE IF HE IS ABLE TO SIT STILL, FOR ONCE AT TABLE.

Struwwelpeter adapted.

Objects

Objects in cartoons don't have to be realistic

Be attentive to how certain objects might be emphasised or exaggerated through size, colour, movement or positioning

This is symbolic - the author is using these objects to create meaning and make a political argument

Text

Text in cartoons is deliberately chosen by the author to convey meaning

Text gives us information about the context of the cartoon

Text is often combined with images to clarify the symbolism of objects

Look for: names, dates, places, key terms/legislation, adjectives

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