

Political Cartoons in the Classroom



Fun and Games, by Fiona Katauskas (Political Cartoonist of the Year), Behind the Lines Exhibition, 20 September 2023

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Using This Resource

*This resource is designed to support you and your students to **explore big ideas** around **civics and citizenship** and **media literacy** through the wonderful world of **political cartoons**!*

Year Levels: 7-12

This comprehensive guide to political cartooning contains activities for investigating political cartoons and their function, as well as learning how to read and analyse these cartoons. You can use each page as a stand-alone task, or combine them to form a handy reference resource. The topics covered are related to the English and HASS learning areas, the General Capabilities, and the Cross-curriculum Priorities of the Australian Curriculum.

The cartoons selected as exemplars are from our historical collection and our annual Behind the Lines exhibitions. Each cartoon is hyperlinked, allowing students to access curatorial information and read more about the context of each piece. We encourage you and your students to also look for any 'hot off the press' cartoons, as the questions and discussion points provided are adaptable to other cartoons and pieces of media.

By examining political cartoons as examples of free speech, you are also helping your students examine how we can use media to have a say in our democracy, and how we can be critical consumers of the media we read. We hope that your students will be inspired to express themselves by creating political cartoons of their own.

Learn More...

Teachers can expand on the learning within this resource by combining with any of our range of [Political Cartoons Resources](#) or [Media Literacy Resources](#) and by booking their class in for the digital workshop '[Drawn Together](#)'.

Teachers can expand upon their own skills by booking into the TQI approved '[Media Literacy and Critical Thinking with Political Cartoons](#)' Professional Development workshop.

Keep exploring at moadph.gov.au/learn

What is a Political Cartoon?

Political cartoons are a form of **visual media** used to express an **opinion** or commentary on **political events, politicians and social issues** of the day.

"The bottom line about cartooning in general, is that it is story telling. So there is the old standard stuff, putting the prime minister in a silly hat and outfit, but there is also a real trend in a lot of the new kind of cartooning by younger people as well - when it's to do with politics, it more personal. Because politics isn't about the politicians, politics is about relationships of power on all levels..."

- Fiona Katauskas, Behind the Lines, 2021

Points for Discussion:

- What issues are important to young people?
- How could you use a cartoon to express your view on one of these issues?
- How might a personal issue be impacted by politics?
- What changes could you advocate for to make a difference on the issues you care about?

Freedom of Speech

In Australia's Democracy freedom of speech is important. This can take many forms, including the **freedom to draw**. Political cartoons are one way to **express an opinion** and contribute to discussions around political and social issues.

"One key indicator of democracy is the freedom of its citizens to criticise the powerful. If you want to gauge that freedom, look no further than at the cartoonist. In some countries you might find not many, as the cartoonists will have sensed which way the wind was blowing and disappeared...or been arrested, or imprisoned or erased somehow already"

- Cathy Wilcox,
opening of Behind the Lines, 2020.

Points for Discussion:

- What are some of the rights and freedoms that we enjoy in our Democracy?
- What are some of the ways we can exercise our freedom of speech and freedom of expression in Australia? What might change if we did not have these rights?
- What responsibilities come with our rights to freedom of opinion and expression? How do you uphold these responsibilities in your community?
- Where do you find cartoons in the media? How might cartoons enhance or contrast with journalism and other opinion pieces?

Context and Values

Political cartoons depict **values** that are being **challenged, debated or even celebrated** in society. Consider too, how a cartoonist's own values and biases may contribute to the way they portray people and recent events.

Points for Discussion:

- What are some social norms, values and behaviours in today's Australian society? Do these differ according to age, gender, time, culture? Any other considerations?
- How might the personal bias of a cartoonist be evident in their work? Does it matter if a political cartoonist is biased towards/against a particular group of people or way of thinking?

Questions:

- What values are shown within the cartoons? Are these values portrayed positively or negatively?
- What can these cartoons tell you about the social values that may have existed at the time of publication?
- Can you identify any other values or biases the cartoonist might have? Imagine: If they felt differently about one value how might the message of their cartoon be changed?



Nullians Ep 16, Kamsani Bin Salleh, self-published, 11 September 2022



Little Help, Brett Lethbridge, The Courier Mail, 15 April 2021

Historical Cartoons

Australia has a **strong tradition** of political cartooning. Historical cartoons show us **perspectives on past events**, and help us uncover how **societal views and values** have changed over time.



Liberals pledge to ban communists, by Samuel Garnet Wells, 1949

For further context for this cartoon head to: [Behind the Lines](#)

Explore more historical cartoons here:

- [Behind the Lines - the Freedom to Draw](#)
- [The Best of - John Frith](#)

Investigating Historical Cartoons:

- Consider what you know of the time period represented. What other world events were happening that may have affected Australia?
- Are there any clues in the cartoon that can tell you about the historical issue depicted? For example, are there any politicians represented in this cartoon? What do you know already about their actions and policies?
- Describe what is happening in the cartoon. Are any symbols used? What might this information be telling you about the cartoonist's views towards those represented?
- Does this issue have ongoing relevance? Do you believe a cartoon like this would be published in Australia in the 21st Century? Why/why not?

Being Informed Citizens

Political cartoons **examine the policies and actions** of those who are elected to represent us. They also depict **key figures who impact our democracy** including celebrities, business people and other leaders to contribute to discussions around **social movements and political change**.

Points for Discussion:

- Where do we get our information from? How might our perspectives change if we access a range of sources?
- Why might a political cartoon be an effective way to communicate a message?



The Band Marched On, Jon Kudelka, *The Saturday Paper*, 6 May 2023

Other cartoons to try:

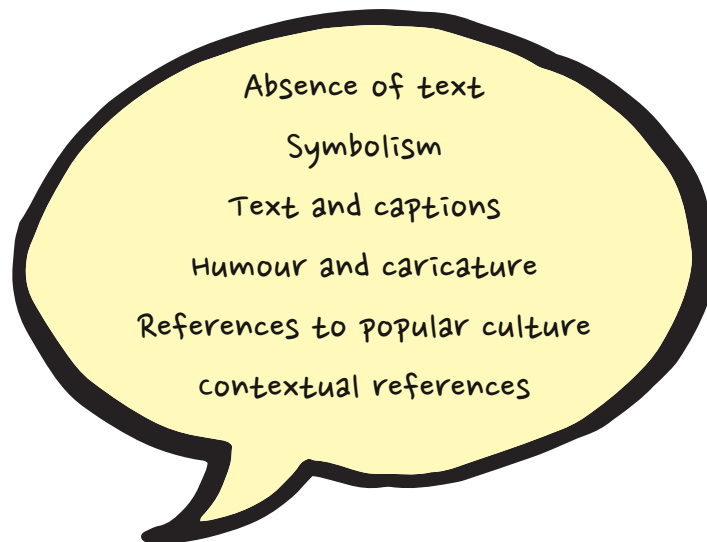
- [*National Housing Emergency*](#), David Pope, 2022
- [*The Great Australian Hero*](#), Fiona Katauskas, 2022

Questions:

- Who are the people being represented in this cartoon?
- Examine the captions - what issue could this cartoon be commenting on? Does the cartoonist agree or disagree with the action taken on this issue?
- What comment is the cartoonist making about Australia's democratic process? If the audience was persuaded to agree with this, what kind of democratic action could they take to express their views?

How to Read and Analyse Political Cartoons

Political cartoons are designed to **convey a message quickly** and evoke a thought, feeling or action from their audience – often without the use of a lot of text. Political cartoonists use a **range of techniques** to convey a message to their audience. These techniques include:

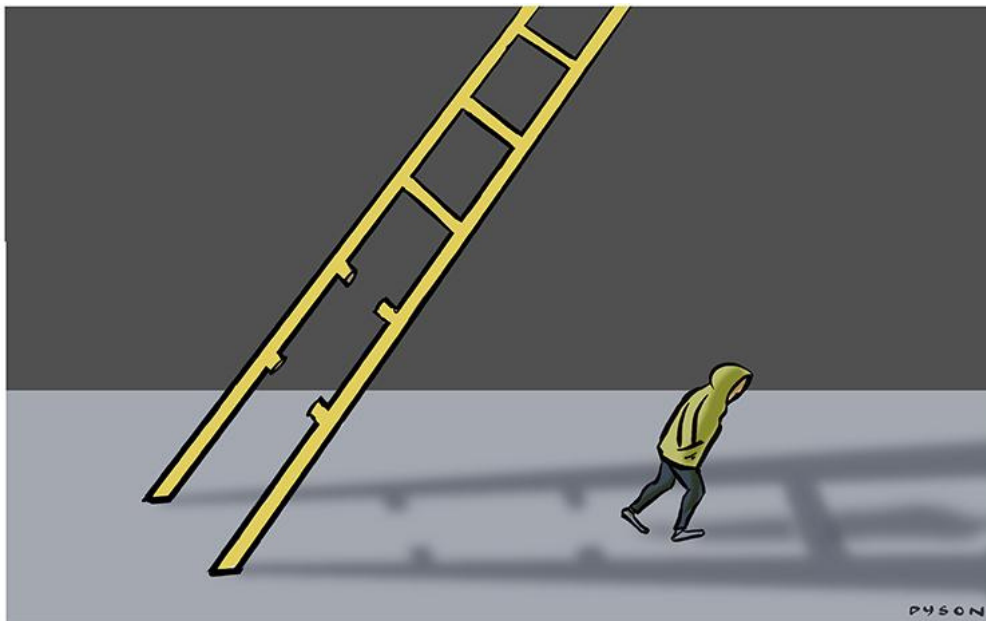


Points for Discussion:

- What do you know already about these techniques? Which ones do you need to learn more about? Are these techniques used in any other types of media?
- Which techniques listed above are likely to be the most effective ways to engage and entertain?
- How do political cartoonists use these techniques to form their own 'style'? Compare a range of artists from the 'Behind the Lines' exhibition.
- Can you think of any other techniques? Find an example and explain how the technique is used.

Let's Get Started!

Have a look at this political cartoon. What stands out to you?



Detour, Andrew Dyson, The Sydney Morning Herald, 3 May 2023

Other cartoons to try:

- *Pride of Place*, Chris Downs 2021
- *Yoga for Rising Interest Rates*, Meg Herbert, 2022

Questions:

- The overall feeling conveyed by a piece of media is known as “tone”. What feelings are shown in this picture?
- Identify the action occurring in the frame. What political event or social issue might this cartoon be about?
- What other techniques has the cartoonist used to make the message within their cartoon effective?
- What is this cartoon designed to make you think, feel or do?

Symbolism

Symbolism acts as a '**visual cue**' to help the audience grasp the message or feeling of a cartoon. A cartoonist's choice of colour, lines, facial expressions, animals and objects are all ways to symbolise **abstract concepts and hidden messages!**



Kids These Days, Fiona Katauskas, *The Echidna*, 17 May 2023

Other cartoons to try:

- *Teal Dawn*, Glen Le Lievre, 2022
- *The PM of No Responsibility*, Jim Pavlidis, 2021
- *Missing in Opposition*, Fiona Katauskas, 2021

A symbol is any object, colour or sign that is used to represent something else.

Questions:

- How many symbols can you find in this cartoon? What might these symbols represent?
- How does the cartoonist's use of symbolism help us understand their message?
- What other symbols are regularly used in art? What about comics? Does the use of symbols change depending on the type of media?
- Why might it be useful for cartoonists and other artists to depict abstract concepts using symbolism?

Text and Captioning

Political cartoonists **choose their words carefully**. Use of text can explain the action of the cartoon, who the characters are and can enhance the joke.

WINTER in AUSTRALIA'S GLORIFIED TENTS

(ie. terribly insulated homes)



The shock of icy toilet seats.



The 'COME ON HOT WATER' dance.



Swearing.



Cold rooms = out of bounds.



Your cat begins to tolerate you.



Dreaming of Summer...

@JessHarwoodArt

The Winter of Our DisconTENT, Jess Harwood, The Guardian, 24 May 2023

Other cartoons to try:

- *The Lockdown Passport*, Glen Le Lievre, 2021
- *Go the Hawkitohs!* Warren Brown, 2022
- *Sea Level Taylor Swift*, First Dog on the Moon, 2023

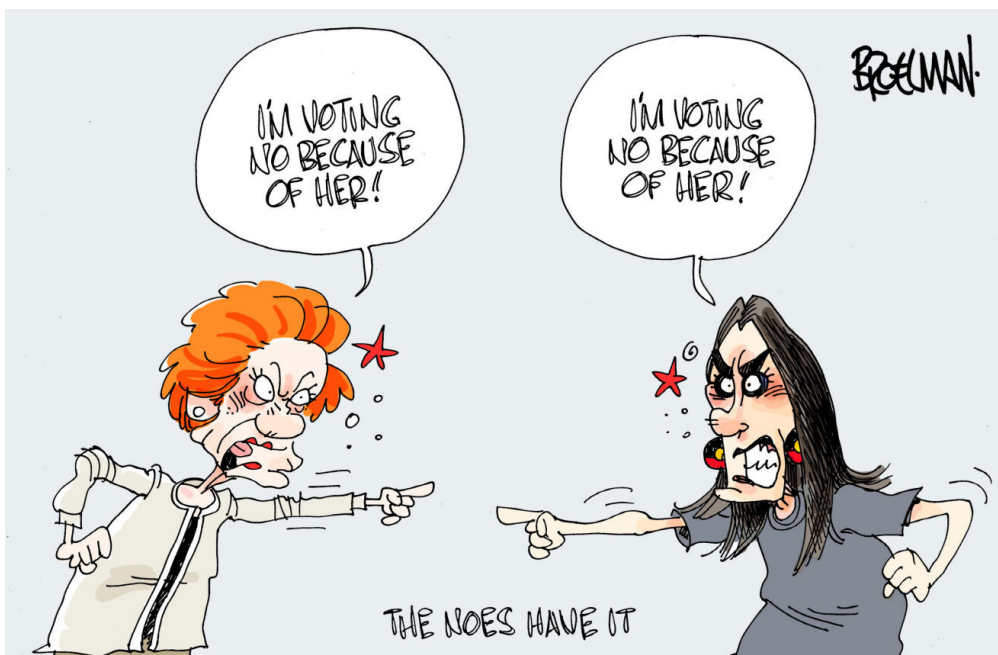
cartoonists use text in captions, labels, speech bubbles, and even the title to reinforce the ideas of their piece.

Questions:

- Choose a cartoon, such as the one above, and identify the type(s) of text being used. How does the text help communicate the cartoonist's message?
- Consider how the overall impact of the cartoon might change if the text was reworded, or removed altogether. What effect would your new wording have on the piece?

Caricature

In cartooning, **caricature** refers to the drawing of an individual that contains certain **personal features that are exaggerated**. This may have the effect of looking 'funny' or more easily recognisable.



The Noes Have It, Peter Broelman, *The Echidna*, 20 June 2023

Other cartoons to try:

- ***Election 2022 Race: Chariots of Fire***, Mark Knight, 2021
- ***Net Zero Expectations***, David Pope, 2023
- ***Dutton's New/Old Image***, Alan Moir, 2023

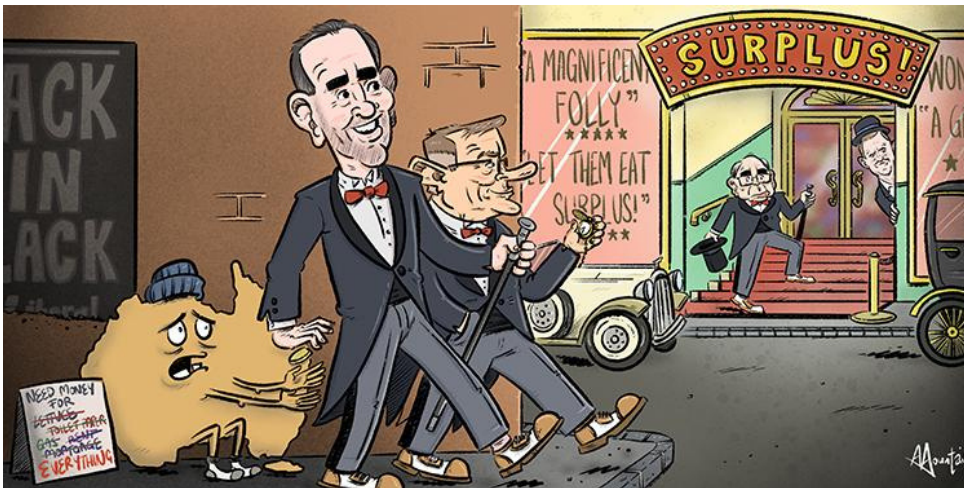
Questions:

- Who is depicted in the cartoon above? Describe what they are doing, and how they look. How does the caricature affect the tone or overall feeling of this piece?
- For each individual, find an official photograph and examine which personal features have been caricatured. What is the intended effect of drawing them in this way?

Want to create your own caricature? Learn to draw Australian PMs using these [Draw a Caricature guides](#) from artist Andrew Hore.

Stereotyping

Cartoonists sometimes use **stereotypes**, such as portraying politicians in costume or **behaving in a manner** that is typically associated with a **particular job** or **group of people**.



Let them eat surplus, Wes Mountain, The Conversation, 9 May 2023

Other cartoons to try:

- *Talking Back the Support*, Chris Downes, 2020
- *The Politics of Envy*, Alan Moir, 2021
- *Grown-Ups Club*, Johannes Leak, 2021

Questions:

- What do you notice about what each person is holding or wearing? What comment could the cartoonist be making about these individuals?
- Can you describe the stereotypes portrayed in this cartoon?
- Why might the cartoonist have chosen to use this stereotype to portray these figures? What effect might including a stereotype have on the reader?
- How do you feel when you see stereotypes used in media?

Humour

Humour is an important part of most political cartoons and is a very effective way for cartoonists to **communicate their message** to their audience.

Types of humour often found in political cartoons can include:

Irony:
the literal meaning of what is presented is the opposite of what is intended.

Sarcasm:
praise which is really an insult; sarcasm generally involves malice, the desire to put someone down.

Satire:
where an artist exposes faults, vices or poor behaviour in order to criticise.



Propertied, Fiona Katauskas, *The Echidna*, 3 August 2022

Other cartoons to try:

- **Untitled**, Warren Brown, 2023
- **Sparkling Submersibles**, Jon Kudelka, 2021
- **End Times**, John Shakespeare, 2020

Questions:

- Can you identify the type of humour used in this cartoon?
- Who, or what, is the joke about? Is this easy to distinguish?
- Consider a range of media types related to this issue. Is humour an effective way to deal with this content? Why/Why not?
- How could you use humour in a different way to convey your own opinion on this issue?

Pop Culture

Cartoonists often use references to popular culture to **make it easy for people to understand** their message. Through the use of pop stars, characters from movies or books, computer games and even internet sensations, cartoonists can include a story in their cartoon that **most people will know**.



Role Model, Brett Lethbridge, the Courier-Mail, 22 July 2023

Other cartoons to try:

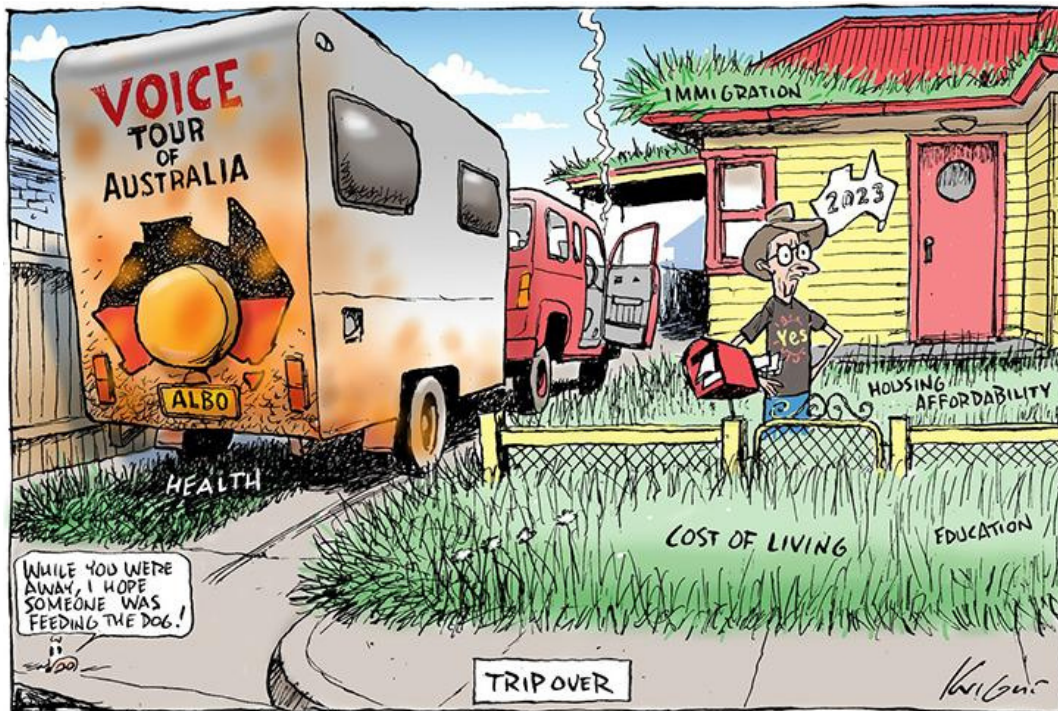
- ***Space Invaders***, Glen Le Lievre, 2022
- ***Hot Potato***, Paul Zanetti, 2019
- ***You're a Prime Minister, Harry!***, David Pope, 2022

Questions:

- What well-known characters or people can you identify in this cartoon? Make a list of the characteristics they have - from either your knowledge or from looking closely at their depiction here. Why do you think the cartoonist has chosen this reference to popular culture to portray this real-life event or issue?
- How might using popular culture references in political cartoons help the audience to engage with and understand the message of the cartoon?
- Make a list of some of your favourite film, TV, book and movie characters. What kind of personality traits or major plot points do you think these characters represent? How might the message of a cartoon be changed if you depicted a politician as one of these characters? Try it and see!

Tying It Together

Cartoonists use **multiple techniques** to convey their message. Build up your analytic skills by examining how they **combine and work together**.



Voice Tour Over, Mark Knight, Herald Sun, 17th October 2023

Techniques:

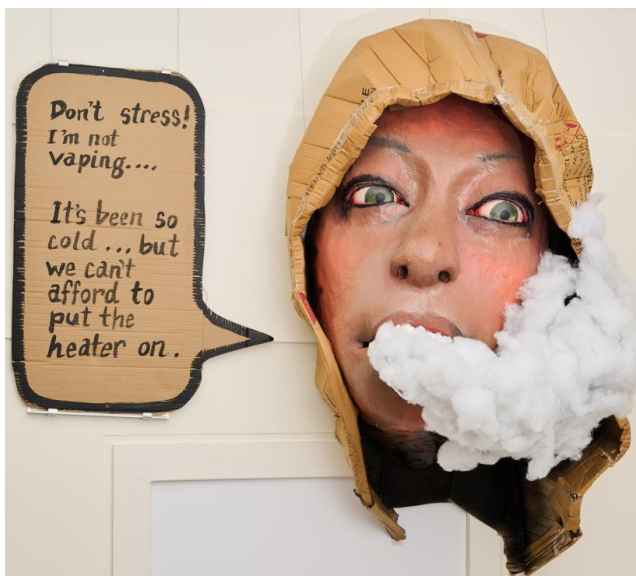
- Context - When was this cartoon created? What issues do you recognise in this image?
- Text - Are there any signs, captions, speech bubbles, puns, topics of discussion?
- Symbolism - What symbols can you see? Do they add any context or message?
- Caricature - Can you identify any personal features? Who is this image representing?
- Stereotypes - Are there any stereotypes present?
- Humour - What forms of humour used in this media? What effect might this have?
- Pop Culture - Are there any references to popular culture in this image?

Questions:

- Describe what you can see happening. What overall message is being conveyed?
- What more would you like to know about this topic? What other forms of media could you access?

Changing Media

Displayed on gallery walls, in street art or published on social media, these **non-traditional political cartoons** reach new audiences who might not regularly encounter cartoons in newspapers and magazines.



Don't Stress, I'm Not Vaping.., Van Nishing
Self Published, 19th June 2023

"[Comics and cartoons] felt like a good place to start talking about and also working through a lot of things that **were quite important to me**. With the rise of social media, there's a huge platform available to anyone so people are more willing to accept cartoons as something that can kind of punch you in the face."

- Meg O'Shea, Behind the Lines, 2021

Staying Informed:

- Compile a list of topics that you have very strong opinions about. Compare these with other people's opinions. What information has led you and others to form these opinions? Under what circumstances could these opinions change?

Access:

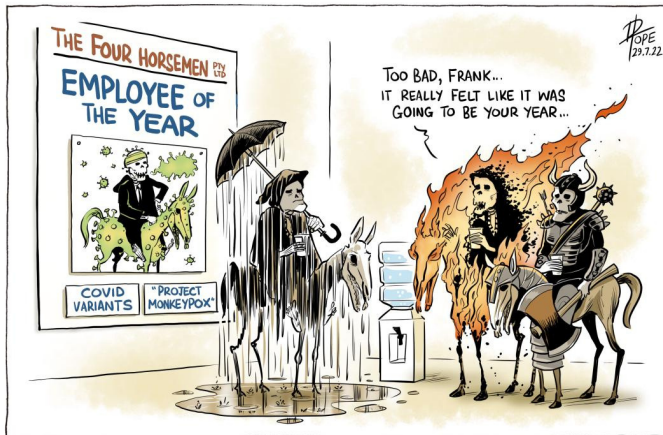
- Where can you find political cartoons? How can you broaden your access to include a range of differing views on a political issue? Why might this be useful?
- What do you see, think and feel when you 'read' a political cartoon? What might you need to learn to be able to 'read' a range of political cartoons even more effectively?

Take Action:

- Create your own cartoon on an issue you care about, using the techniques you have learned. How could you share your piece with others?

Compare and Contrast

Cartoons from different years, artists and perspectives can give insight into how **social, political and cultural values change** over time.



Employee of the Year, David Pope, The Canberra Times, 29 July 2022



Horses for Courses, Fiona Katauskas, The Guardian, 3 June 2023

comparing:
involves identifying similarities and/or differences

contrasting:
involves comparing two or more things to look for their differences

Juxtaposition:
is the act of placing two or more things side by side often to compare or contrast

Questions:

- What do you notice? What are your first impressions of these cartoons?
- Look for similarities such as artist, time period, themes, composition, and cartooning techniques. Where are the key differences in these pieces?
- What could we learn about changes in key issues, or in the cartoonists' perspectives from these two images?

Head to our Curated Collections to compare cartoons grouped together by theme.