

LESSON 3: Exploring Political Cartoons: Social Forces that Impact the Rule of Law

Content Areas:

- History (Interest Groups, Role of News Media in a Republic)
- Fine Arts (Political Cartoons, Interpretation)

Grade Level:

- Middle and High School

Objectives:

The student will:

- Interpret political cartoons
- Identify potential forces in American society that may adversely affect the rule of law

Lesson:

This lesson involves students examining two different political cartoons, one from the 19th century and one that is contemporary, in order to explore how extra-legal forces affect the rule of law. These cartoons specifically focus on the influence interest groups have on Congress and how the media can affect the judicial process. Thus, students will explore how these extra-legal forces affect the creation of laws and the implementation of justice in the court system. Ultimately, the students will confront the dilemma revolving around First Amendment rights and the rule of law.

Pre-Lesson Prep:

1. Transfer the image of Joseph Keppler's 1889 political cartoon found in Appendix A onto a transparency or into a PowerPoint presentation so that the entire class will be able to view each image independently.
2. Secure access to computers and the Internet to view Chon Day's 1978 cartoon "We find the defendant guilty as charged by the media."
3. Make copies of the REED-LO matrix for each student.

The Lesson – Day 1:

1. As the students enter the classroom, have the following statement written on the board: "A monopoly is a capitalist's dream, but capitalism's nightmare." Ask the students to write down their responses to this statement. Allow five minutes for this reflective activity.

2. After the students have completed their writing, ask them to explain what the statement means. Lead a discussion in which you explore how, within a capitalist system, a capitalist strives to knock out competition and gain a monopoly; yet, by doing so, the capitalist undermines one of the important elements of a capitalist system: competition.
3. Have students list some of the negative effects monopolies could produce in both economics and politics and how monopolistic actions may undermine the rule of law.
4. At this point, divide the students into pairs and give each pair a copy of REED-LO. Explain that REED-LO is a scaffolding approach to interpreting works of art and that the students will use this guide as they examine the two political cartoons that will serve as the driving force behind this lesson. Be sure to note that this lesson is intended to be driven through dialog as the students share their thoughts about the works of art examined.
5. Project or display the image of the Joseph Keppler political cartoon “The Bosses of the Senate” so that all students can see the image. You may wish to provide each group with a copy of the cartoon as well.
6. Introduce this cartoon to the class by reading or paraphrasing the following information:

“*The Constitution* clearly outlines, with some interpretive leeway, what body is empowered to make law in the United States. Through a long history tied to English common law and general theories of jurisprudence, reinforced through *The Constitution* and ideals expressed in *The Declaration of Independence*, a court system exists within the United States that is intended to protect its citizens as they are prosecuted for allegedly violating the law or as they attempt to find justice. Within this system, however, certain extra-legal forces have emerged that directly impact both the process of making law and the judicial process. By extra-legal, I mean that these forces are perfectly legal and within the boundaries of the law but they are somewhat ill-defined both in *The Constitution* and common law. In this manner, these forces exert an influence over Constitutionally and culturally defined political and judicial areas in a manner not clearly articulated. The two political cartoons we will explore today and tomorrow examine how two different entities exert influence over the rule of law. While we do this, you need to think if this issue is a necessary product of the First Amendment or if certain restrictions can be put in place that will not damage the integrity of that Amendment.”

7. After relating this information to the students, have them begin to complete the REED-LO matrix. Students will begin by recording their answers to the questions in Step 1, React, and then sharing their thoughts with the class. After sufficient discussion, have the students advance to

Step 2 on REED-LO, Embrace. Again, after the students share their thoughts, proceed to Step 3, Explore. Continue this process of having students react to the guiding questions in each step and then sharing and discussing their responses until the students reach Step 5, Locate.

8. When the students reach Step 5, Locate, have them now reflect upon what this cartoon may be related to in relation to late 19th century American political culture. Have the students, if they have not done so, to read any words associated with the cartoon. At this point the students should also be asked to research through the Internet the following terms: 1) 19th Century American Trusts; 2) 19th Century American Interest Groups; 3) 19th Century American Monopolies; 4) 19th Century American Industrialization; 5) Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Have the students take notes on the material they research and relate this material to the political cartoon.

Homework:

1. For homework, students must examine the thoughts they recorded related to their research and how their research expanded upon their understanding of the political cartoon.
2. The students will then write a two paragraph opinion as to what the political cartoon is suggesting about late 19th century industrialization and politics. The students should also comment on how monopolies and trusts threaten the rule of law.

The Lesson – Day 2:

1. Have students turn in their homework assignments and sit with their partners from Day 1.
2. Access the image of Chon Day’s political cartoon “We find the defendant guilty as charged by the media” at http://www.condenaststore.com/-sp/We-find-the-defendant-guilty-as-charged-by-the-media-New-Yorker-Cartoon-Prints_i8641116_.htm. Note: because of copyright and licensing regulations, we have had to direct you to Conde Nast’s online store to access this cartoon. Reference to this link is not meant to be an endorsement of Conde Nast or a promotion for purchasing this cartoon; it is simply the only means available for us to share this cartoon with teachers.
3. Working with their partners, and referring to REED-LO, have the students discuss the possible meaning of the political cartoon. Give them time to formulate an opinion as to what the cartoonist is suggesting about the relationship between the judicial process and the media.
4. Discuss the students’ opinions about the political cartoon.
5. Now lead a discussion with the students about how interest groups and the media, both protected under the First Amendment, may adversely and negatively affect the rule of law – both making law and enforcing law.

6. Have students discuss campaign contribution limits and gag rules. In what ways do these actions possibly undermine the integrity of the First Amendment? In what ways do they realistically protect the rule of law?

Homework:

1. Have students create a political cartoon in which they either advocate or reject campaign contribution limits or the use of gag rules in the courtroom.

The Lesson – Day 3:

1. Place several blank sheets of newsprint or poster board on the walls before students arrive.
2. As students enter the class, ask them to tape their cartoons on the sheets/poster board.
3. Once all the cartoons are in place, invite the students to visit each sheet to examine and analyze the cartoons. Then lead a discussion around the use of symbolism, composition, and overall statement.
4. Conclude the lesson by summarizing points suggested by the cartoons examined over the three-day period and how interest groups and the media can affect the rule of law.
5. You may wish to alter or extend this lesson by bringing in posts on political blogs, editorials, or editorial letters and asking students to create cartoons based on these current issues. Have the class select the best cartoons and match them with the post, editorials, and/or editorial letters that inspired them and then assemble the results as a display for your classroom.

Appendix A

Joseph Keppler, "The Bosses of the Senate," 1889



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