Editorial Cartoons and Memes

To be an editorial cartoonist, you have to combine several talents. You have to learn to draw. You have to learn to write. You have to pay attention to the news so you can come up with good ideas.

--Fred Barbash (2003)

Editorial cartoons provoke the thought found on the opinion pages with the humor found in the comics section of a newspaper. The cartoon is usually drawn by one person and does not necessarily represent the editorial opinion of the newspaper it appears.

Part of the power of an editorial cartoon lies in its simplicity. Because they use few—if any words—to tell a story, they can be read and understood even by people who are illiterate. Satire and caricature often re-enforce the cartoonist's message.

By studying political cartoons, you can get a sense of the important issues in various historical periods. Links to various editorial cartoons and cartoon collections can be found in our list of Reference and Resources.

Charles Cave (2000) argues that "Cartooning is a fine example of the use of creative thinking. You can see a different perception of the world through the eyes of the cartoonist." Part of the role of the editorial cartoonist is to provide unique insights.

Editorial cartoons continue to appear in newspapers today. However, individuals such as Randall Munroe write editorial cartoons and release them on-line.

Memes

Memes are a 21st century version of the editorial cartoon. Like editorial cartoons, memes take a simplistic approach to communicating their messages. However, most memes include some type of text.

Although memes tend to be simple, some are very complex and require an understanding of current events. One such meme was released on 17 July 2013 shortly after Queen Elizabeth II officially endorsed the same-sex marriage law that had passed parliament.

In a series of photographs, the Queen is shown in various colored dresses. The images are arranged in the same order as the colors of the gay pride flag.

Avoiding Plagiarism

The date you access a web site is a requirement for proper documentation because web sites can change. Unlike with a book or article, what you see today might not be what you see tomorrow. When you find information on the Internet you want to cite in a paper, it is a good idea to print it out in case the web site is modified or eliminated. For example, Charles Cave's web site existed on 3 January 2005. But when I went to find it on 2 March 2005, it no longer existed.

If I were writing a research paper, I would not have used Cave's quotation because it is so old and cannot be verified. However, I keep the example to make the point that students should print out copies of any on-line references they are using.

References and Resources

Backer, Dan. "A Brief History of Political Cartoons." *Uniting Mugwumps and the Masses: Puck's Role in Gilded Age Politics.* 1 July 1996. American Studies at the University of Virginia. 22 July 2013.

Barbash, Fred. "The Power of the Pencil: Editorial Cartoons Often Make a Sharp Point." 2 March 2005. *The Washington Post*. 3 January 2005. 22 July 2013.

"Britain Legalizes Gay Marriage." *Time World*. 17 July 2013. Time. 22 July 2013.

Cave, Charles. "Cartooning and Creativity." *Creativity Web.* 26 February 2000. 3 January 2005.

"Dr. Seuss Went to War: A Catalog of Political Cartoons." Mandeville Special Collections Library. 2012. University of California Regents. 22 July 2013.

Munroe, Randall. *xkcd: A Webcomic of Romance, Sarcasm, Math, and Language*. 2013. 22 July 2013.

"Thomas Nast." nd. *Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum*. 2012. Ohio State University. 22 July 2013.