

Cartoons for the Classroom

Presented in cooperation with the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)



Courtesy James Casciari

Under the First Amendment there is no such thing as a false idea. However pernicious an opinion may seem, we depend for its correction not on the conscience of judges and juries but on the competition of other ideas.

– United States Supreme Court: Gertz vs. Robert Welch, 1974

The competition of ideas

No such thing as a false idea. That's a powerful concept. A free exchange of ideas and opinions is what gives us the information to form our own opinions and not allow the government to think for us. Persuasion, not coercion. Discussion, not censorship. The cartoons here call into question our government's involvement in Iraq. What if the only voice we were allowed to hear was the government's? In his book, "Drawn & Quartered: The History of American Political Cartoons," Stephen Hess wrote: "The political cartoon is the embodiment of the American form of government. Democracy is fed by encouraging a free forum for discussion."

Talking points

Political cartoons, by definition, attack the high and mighty. They ridicule our leaders and make fun of the government. Politicians occasionally turn to the courts to try and stop the attacks. Using the examples below, list your own arguments - both for and against - censoring cartoons that carry these messages?

1. A cartoon that criticizes the government when the country is at war
2. A cartoon that attacks a politician during an election campaign
3. A cartoon that calls for the violent overthrow of the U.S. government
4. A cartoon that a majority of a newspaper's readers find offensive.



Courtesy Nick Anderson / Courier Journal

Get out your newspaper

Gather a week's worth of political cartoons from your newspaper. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Worksheet (available online at the NIE Website) analyze each cartoon and explain its message. Which of the cartoons would be difficult to publish in a country that doesn't recognize the concept of Freedom of Speech?

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists
<http://editorialcartoonists.com/>

The Freedom Forum:
<http://freedomforum.org/>