

Cartoons for the Classroom



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

Between the lines

The Doomsday Clock is a symbolic clock maintained since 1947 by the Board of Directors of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Midnight on the clock represents nuclear annihilation. Each time the threat of nuclear conflict increases, the clock is moved forward and when tensions ease, it's moved backward. On Feb. 27, 2002, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the clock was edged forward. As of early 2005 the clock stands at 10 minutes to midnight.

Putting a face on our fears

The threat of nuclear war is an abstract concept. In order to represent that concept visually, an artist needs a symbol. In 1949, Herbert Block, the legendary cartoonist for the Washington Post, created "Mr. Atom" as a personification of those post World War II fears. The figure loomed over the world in a number of Herblock cartoons over the years. Today, while the enemy may have changed, the threat of a nuclear holocaust still exists. Yesterday's "Mr. Atom" has evolved into something called weapons of mass destruction. And the Doomsday Clock keeps ticking.

Talking points

1. Herblock's "Mr. Atom" is an anthropomorphic symbol, an inanimate object or idea that's given human characteristics. SpongeBob and Garfield are other examples of anthropomorphic images. Can you think of any more?
2. What's the symbol that "Mr. Atom" is swinging in the toon?
3. What details help make "Mr. Atom" a menacing figure and not just a comic character? For example, did you notice his war helmet?

"TICK-TOCK TICK-TOCK"



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Get out your newspaper

Gather a collection of political cartoons from your newspaper over the next two weeks. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Worksheet (available online at the NIE Website) analyze each cartoon and explain the issues addressed and determine the point of view of the artist. Gather news stories about those issues and evaluate the cartoonists' opinions.

Additional resources

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

More on the Doomsday Clock
http://thebulletin.org/doomsday_clock/current_time.htm

Herblock's 20th Century
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/>