

## NO JOKE: THE VALUE OF POLITICAL CARTOONS

**Location:** US

**Date:** 1800-Present

**Grades** 5-8

**Essential Question:** How are cartoons an effective way to convey an opinion?

### **Objectives:**

Students will begin to identify major components of political cartoons.

Students will note the ability of cartoons to affect the American political lexicon.

Students will explore the American Revolution, political redistricting, and extension of the franchise of blacks through political cartoons.

### **Curriculum Frameworks**

#### Common Core

Grade 5: English/Language Arts

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

RI.5.10.

By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4–5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Grades 6-8: English/Language Arts; History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

#### Massachusetts Curriculum Framework

Grade 5

Civics and Government

The Revolution and Formation of a Federal Government under the Constitution, 1775-1789

The Principles and Institutions of American Constitutional Government

The Growth of the Republic

US History I: The Revolution through Reconstruction, 1763-1877

Political and Intellectual Origins of the American Nation

The Formation and Framework of American Democracy

Political Democratization, 1790-1860

The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1877



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## Teacher Sheets

Cartoons are highly effective ways to convey an opinion. In some cases, they become part of our language. With an expanding electorate, often they were deployed to sway voters through emotional appeal. But one thing is certain—they were rarely something to joke about. In this lesson, show your students a variety of political cartoons to generate a conversation about the ways in which people have been influenced by these visual images. Each example has a complex historic background that you may explore as much as you like, but use these images as a means to introduce the topic and issues they raise. It can serve as a way to supplement your regular curriculum materials. You may also do the different parts of the lesson at separate times.

### Procedure

1. Explain the different ways people express opinions. Explore why a cartoon is an effective means, especially for those who might be swayed by emotion or did not read or write.
2. Begin with Part I of the Student Sheet. You may want to do this when you are covering the American Revolution or just to introduce political cartoons. Students may work independently, in small groups or as a class. Discuss their results.
3. Then show them the cartoon of Texas. Have them answer Part II of the Student Sheet. Discuss their results.
4. Political redistricting is a very complicated topic and the extent to which you want to cover it with your students will vary. You may simply want to say that we send people to Congress to represent our interests. Usually, districts are people who live close to each other, but sometimes, districts are created that have some odd shapes and people live pretty far apart. Ask them if it is good to have people with lots of different interests in the same district or not? There are no correct answers here and this discussion might generate some interesting points. Have them think about the student council at their school. Does each class or grade send a representative?
5. Another way to think about it might be to have them consider the lunchroom at your school. Consider how the tables are arranged. Suppose they had some friends at every table. How could they show that on a map? The point is that re-districting is sometimes like creating a district that includes your friends sitting spread out at lots of different tables. Have them complete Part III of the Student Sheet. Discuss their results.
6. The right to vote in general has been an important issue in American history. Look at the text of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the Voting Access Cartoon with your students and have them complete Part IV of the Student Sheet.
7. Bringing it all together: Ask students if they consider cartoons an effective way to make a point. Have them draw their own.



### Time Allocation

Part I: 10-15 minutes  
 Part II: 15-20 minutes  
 Part III: 15-20 minutes  
 Part IV-15 to 20 minutes

### Materials Needed

Join or Die Cartoon, included below and also located at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695523/>  
 Gerrymander Map and Cartoon, included on Student Sheet and also located at <http://maps.bpl.org/id/14867>  
 Texas Map and Cartoon, included below, also located at <http://tcgop.org/proposed-texas-congressional-map/>  
[http://www.laits.utexas.edu/txp\\_media/html/leg/features/0401\\_01/slide1.html](http://www.laits.utexas.edu/txp_media/html/leg/features/0401_01/slide1.html)  
 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, included below  
 Voting Access Cartoon, included below

### Assessment Criteria

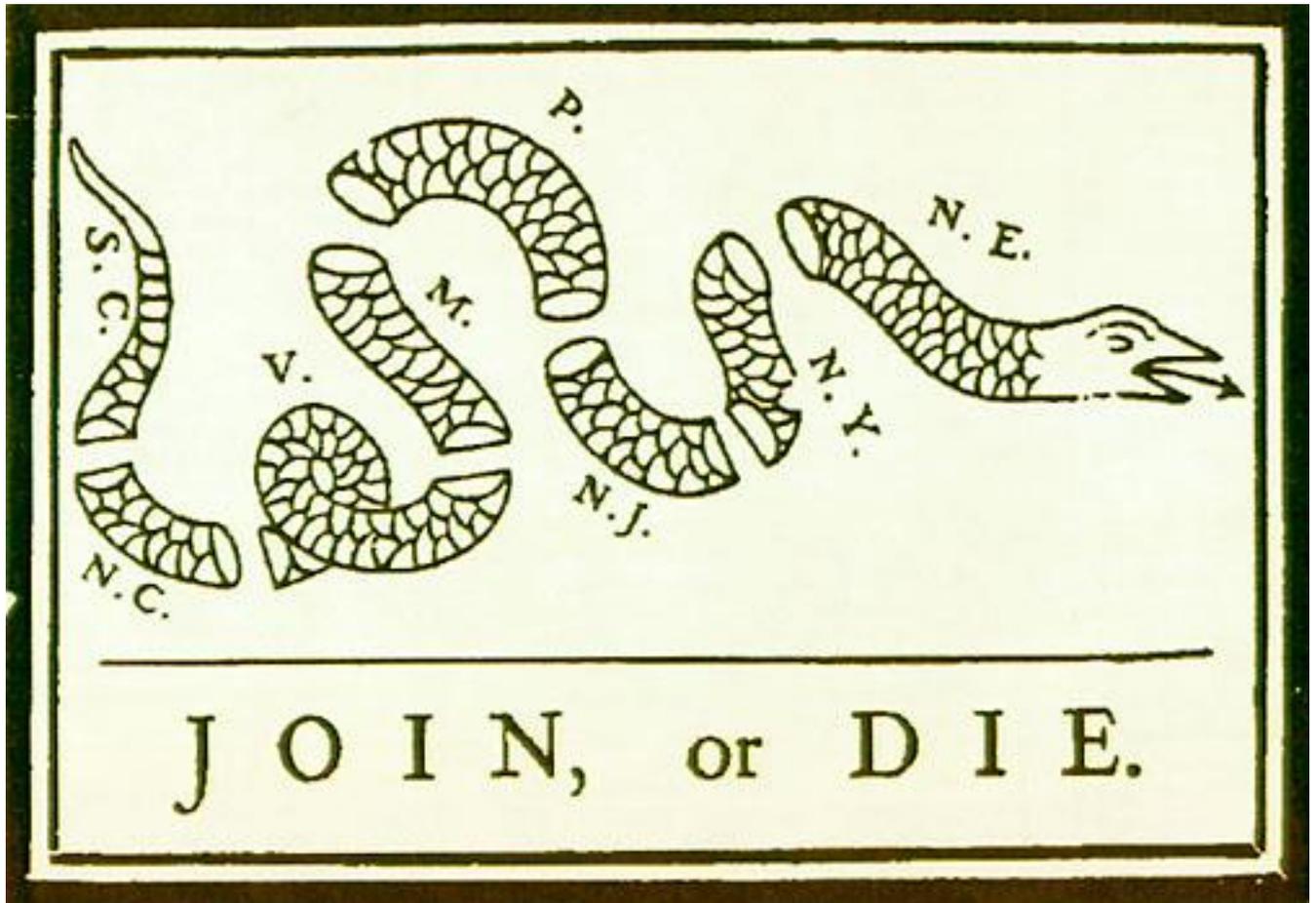
Did students begin to identify major components of political cartoons?  
 Did students note the ability of cartoons to affect American political language?  
 Did students explore the American Revolution, political redistricting and extension of the franchise of blacks through political cartoons?

### Enrichment Opportunities

1. Have students draw a cartoon about an issue that is important to them.
2. Have students research a topic from the past and present an overview of several cartoons on the topic. Some sources to consult:  
 Harpers Weekly, <http://loc.harpweek.com/>  
 Presidential Elections, <http://elections.harpweek.com/>  
 Thomas Nast, <http://www.thomasnast.com/>

## Student Sheets

Political cartoons are an important part of American history.  
Part I: Look at this drawing and answer the questions that follow.



Consider this image from the American Revolution.

1. Of what is it a picture?
2. How is each part labeled?
3. What is the message?
4. Although not funny, how has the artist used a picture to make his point?
5. Why do you think it worked so well?



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Part II: Look at the Political Map and Cartoon of Texas

1. What are the elephant and the donkey doing in this cartoon?
2. How would you describe the looks on their faces?
3. How is color being used in this cartoon? Would the cartoon be the same in black and white?
4. Does it seem to matter where the paint goes on the map of the state?
5. What is the artist's message in this cartoon?



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Part III: Look at the following map:



1. All of the towns to the left of the dotted line were put into the same Massachusetts voting district in 1812. How is that like the tables in the cafeteria?
2. Would it be better to have people in towns next to each other be part of the same district or not? Do you think people in towns next to each other are more likely to have common interests?

3. Many people thought the spread out districts were not a good idea. One artist drew a cartoon about it. Look at the picture. What features dominate the 'creature'?
4. As you look at it more closely, what words are also on this picture?
5. The artist combined two words—the name of the Massachusetts Governor—Elbridge Gerry and an animal—salamander and came up with the term GERRYMANDER. We still use this term today to describe voting districts that are drawn in odd shapes and combine people who do not live near one another and seem unfair.

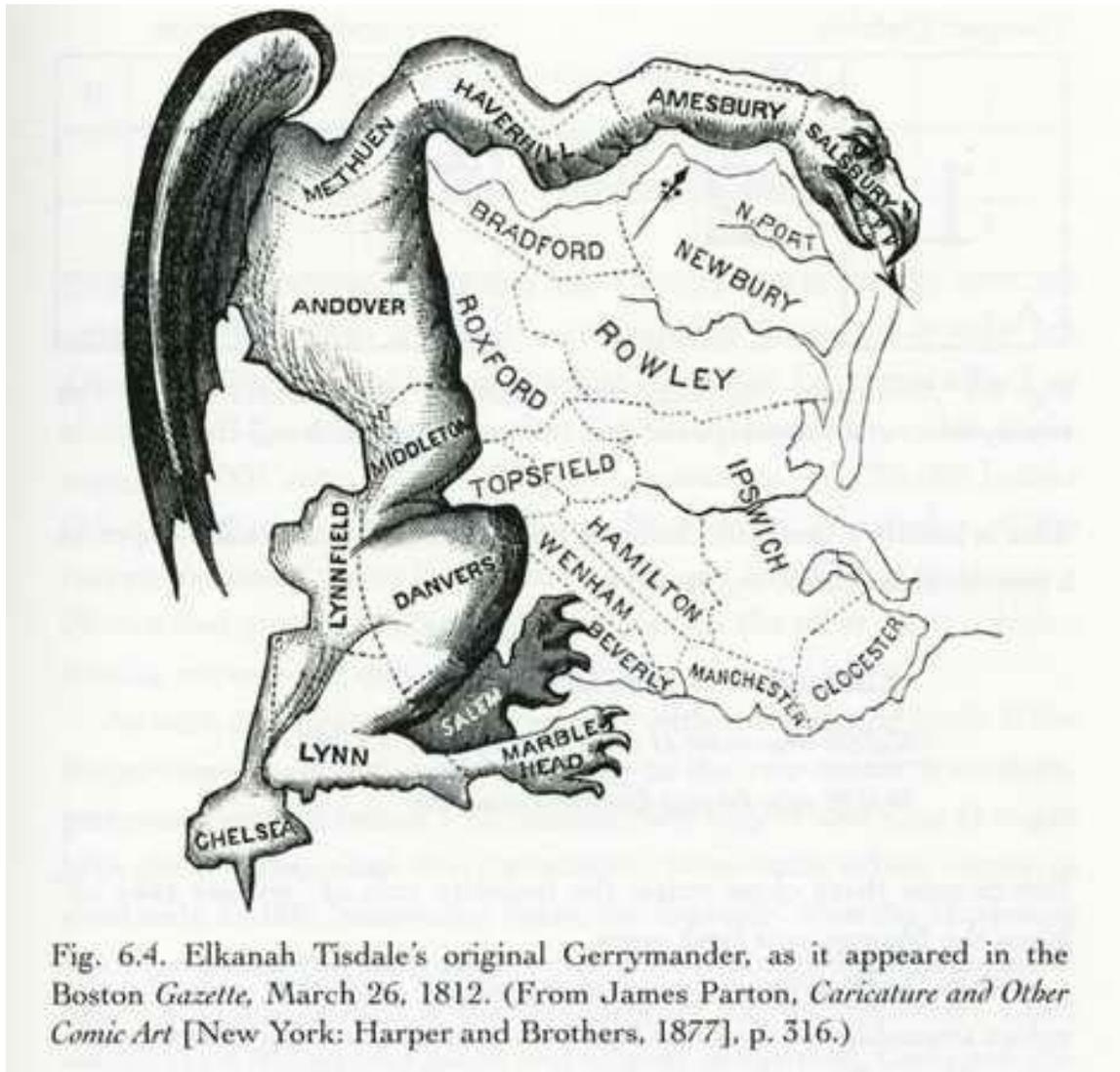


Fig. 6.4. Elkanah Tisdale's original Gerrymander, as it appeared in the *Boston Gazette*, March 26, 1812. (From James Parton, *Caricature and Other Comic Art* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877], p. 316.)



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## Part IV

1. Look at the language of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. What does it promise? What does it not guarantee?
2. Look at the cartoon. What path does each young man have to take to the voting booth? Why is it so much easier for the person on the left?
3. What obstacles have been put in the way for the person on the right?
4. What point is the cartoonist trying to make?



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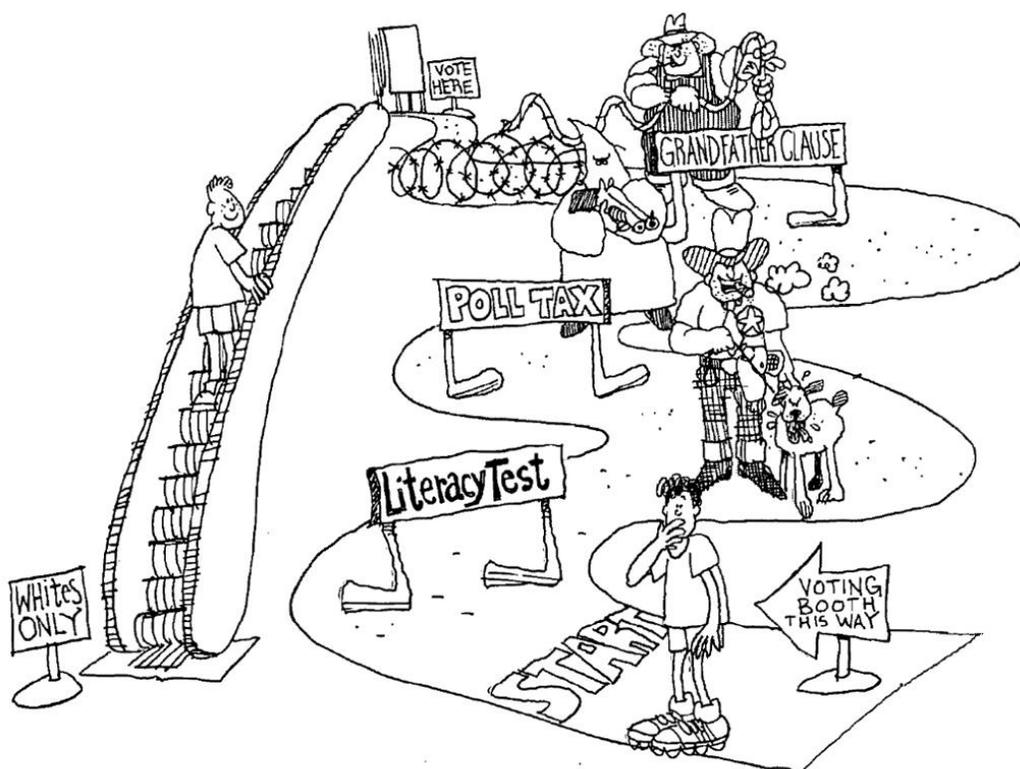
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### Supporting Materials

According to the US Constitution,  
**Amendment 15 Ratified February 3, 1870.**

1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

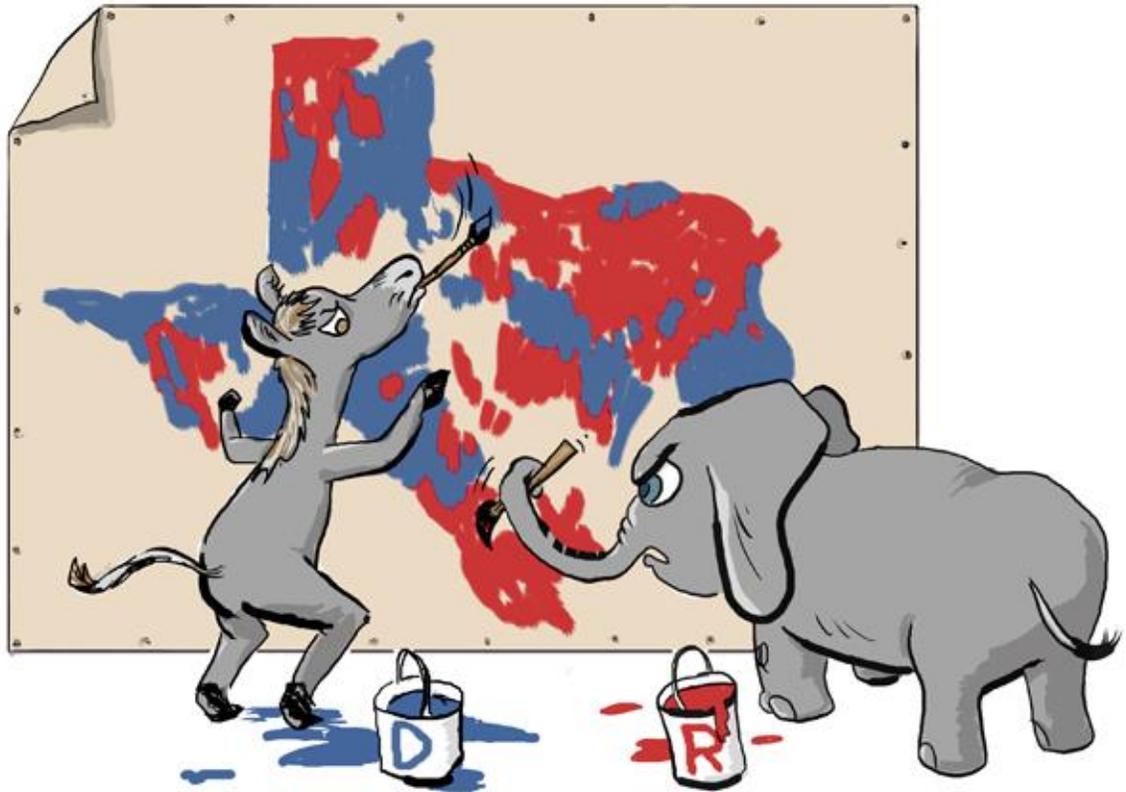
### VOTING ACCESS CARTOON



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