

THE ROSENBACH

Political Cartoons

Level: Grades 9-12

Political cartoons have been around for a long time. It seems strange that serious issues would be communicated with cartoons. Many people learn about political issues and world affairs by reading articles or books. Why might someone prefer to learn about politics by looking at a cartoon?

This is a cartoon by Rytis Daukantas about the Arab Spring, a revolution that started about 10 years ago. Look carefully at the setting and the characters. What is the illustrator trying to tell us about the revolution? Political cartoonists don't often use that many words. But the words they choose are very important to the message. Study the words in the cartoon and see if they help you understand what's going on.



Now we're going to step back in time. Here is a political cartoon from 1815 about the aftermath of the French Revolution. It was done by George Cruikshank, the most popular political cartoonist during that time and the same artist who did the Oliver Twist illustration we looked at a couple lessons ago. Because you may not have the background information to understand this one and you weren't alive in 1815, it might be tricky to interpret. But if you know some information about two of the main characters in this cartoon, you might be able to "read" it a little better. The first important character in this cartoon is King Louis the 18th. He struggled to regain power after the French Revolution. He is the one at the top of the pole trying to grab the crown. The second important character is Napoleon Bonaparte. He tussled for power with King Louis the 18th after the Revolution. Napoleon became the leader of France after the French Revolution. But eventually the King regained power of the country and exiled Napoleon to the island of Saint Helena. Study the cartoon carefully and see if you can answer the following questions:

- The crown at the top of the pole symbolizes power and King Louis 18th is reaching for it. But can you tell who the people are who are supporting him? How can you tell? Do they look happy about helping him reach the pole?
- Can you tell what the king is carrying?
- Why are there so many people watching the King try to climb the pole and get the crown? Some of them are talking to each other. What do you think they're saying?
- Can you locate Napoleon Bonaparte? How do you know it's him?
- What else can you learn about this time in history from looking at this political cartoon?

New French Caricature selling privately at Paris



Louis XVIII climbing the Mât de Cognac

The Mât de Cognac is a long pole well supported, on the top of which are hung upon public occasions various flags which he who climbs to the top gets. A poor Creation of total incapacity affords infinite joy to Maximilian & descends faster than he ascends. He who falls once and rises again affords the most sport. — Travels in France.

London pub'd by Wilson at Pall Mall Octob: 5th 1788

If you're interested in learning more about the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleon's exile, here's a great article for you:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Napoleon-I/Downfall-and-abdication>