**How to Analyse a Cartoon**

‘If it is funny and true, then it is a good cartoon.’ Nicholson

Cartoons are comments, so are necessarily biased. The cartoonist takes a view on a subject and presents his argument with no apology or justification, often in an exaggerated manner. The difference between cartoon comment and written comment is that cartoons offer no argument to persuade the reader to their point of view and usually poke fun at the person or institution they are commenting on. Cartoonists’ purpose is to capture and expose the absurdity of the human condition and make us laugh.

Traditionally, cartoons take the side of the little man against public hypocrisy, deceit or corruption. They are usually anti-establishment and aim to make a wry comment or irreverently debunk all kinds of puffery and authority. While they use humour, they are often very serious about the point they want to make.

To understand a cartoon you must know the facts related to the issue or certain terms or concepts that are referred to in the cartoon.

**Some Cartoon Techniques**

1. Exaggerating facial features of central figure
2. Representing members of a group as being similar – to emphasise powerless, loss of identity, mindlessness etc
3. Using animals to represent humans to critique behaviour
4. Using metaphorical references, comparing the issue to a well-known story or event.
5. Using sharp witty statements or dialogue to encapsulate the main point

**Analysis questions**

1. What issue is the cartoon commenting on?
2. What facts about the issue or general facts / concepts are referred to in the cartoon?
3. Who or what institution is being made fun of?
4. Whose side is the cartoonist on? What is the cartoonist trying to make us think about the person, institution or issue?
5. How does the cartoonist persuade us to his point of view? Comment on:
   1. People’s exaggerated features
   2. Words used (note plays on words or puns)
   3. Setting
   4. Framing (look at the foreground, placing of people or objects relative to eachother)

**Structure of your cartoon analysis**

1. Introduce the issue, showing background knowledge of events and people involved.
2. Describe the elements of the cartoon (type of cartoon, components, people, positioning, caption, caricature, facial expressions and body language, other words etc)
3. Interpret the meaning of the visual language and explain how the way people or objects are depicted, or what they are doing, represents the cartoonist’s argument about the issue.
4. Explain the probable effect on the reader