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ABSTRACT

The prevalent use of sophisticated advertising techniques in political campaigns presents the great danger that citizens can be manipulated to make political decisions out of emotion rather than rational thought. Citizens must be provided with the educational tools needed to detect the bias, distortion, and other tactics used to influence them. The social studies curriculum can provide students with the skills needed to detect bias that will allow them to make good decisions and thus become better citizens. This paper examines the use of bias in advertisements, graphs, and political cartoons, and suggests instructional strategies teachers can use to help students develop the skills necessary to detect such bias. A 6-item reference list is included. (DB)

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**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT, HAVE I GOT A DEAL FOR YOU:
SYSTEMS OF BIAS DETECTION**

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Systems of Bias Detection

Americans are bombarded daily with advertisements. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines and fliers deliver advertisements which extol the virtues of products that range from commercial items or services to political ideologies or candidates. According to Boorstin (cited in Kehl, 1983) the average American adult is exposed to over 500 advertising messages daily. Of those 500 advertising messages, the typical American consciously attends to approximately 75. Key (cited in Kehl, 1983) stated that most Americans experience about 100,000 words that have been carefully edited, slanted and carefully composed. These 100,000 words demand or plead for our attention, sympathy, loyalty, or money as they try to convince us to believe and/or buy.

A disproportional share of these advertisements are directed toward American youth. It has been estimated that even by the late 1950's, American children had been exposed to 350,000 television commercials by the time they reached their eighteenth birthday. This number has certainly increased during the past 30 years. During these formative years, children generally have not been provided systematic training to enable them to distinguish between advertisements which provide useful or needed information and those which are solely designed to fatten the coffers of the advertisers. Students are not taught systematically the tactics used by merchandisers to entice and hook them.

Many people appear to believe that this problem is not significant. They tend to believe that the worst thing that can result from the lack of skill in detecting bias in advertisements is that people might purchase products that are unneeded or inferior. This, however, is not true because media specialists have expanded the market for their skills. They have now entered the political arena.

The skills developed by Madison Avenue to sell toothpaste are now being used to sell political ideologies and candidates. These cleverly developed techniques do significantly influence our political views and our political decisions. This reality cannot be allowed to go unchallenged or uncountered in a democratic society. The United States should not allow groups with large advertising budgets to employ the most skilled advertising agencies to manipulate citizens into adopting their political ideologies and supporting and voting for their candidates without providing its citizens the educational tools needed to detect the bias, distortion, and other tactics used to influence them.

For a democratic society to survive, citizens must make political choices based upon rational decisions, not emotional ones. Our nation cannot afford the consequences of selecting leaders with deficient or minimal credentials but who have been carefully groomed by media specialists and packaged and sold to the public through commercials designed to impress rather than express, to manipulate rather than convince, and to baffle with trite clichés rather than persuade with logic.

The use of highly trained media specialists by political parties to manipulate the public is not new. Their effectiveness, however, has improved

significantly over the past four decades. Packard (1957) reported that while political manipulation has a long history, its effectiveness in a democratic society was negligible until symbolic manipulation became readily apparent in the 1956 campaigns. The New York World Telegram (as reported by Packard 1957, p. 184) had a headline, "The Hucksters Take Over GOP Campaign." The accompanying article stated, "The politicians are beginning to apply all the smart advertising techniques used by mass production America to merchandise autos, bath salts, and lawnmowers." The article explained how the Republican Congressional Committee employed custom designed campaigns that used "...cartoons, charts, dramatized radio spot announcements..., newsletters, street interview techniques, etc." (cited in Packard, 1957, p. 184).

Such campaign techniques have not diminished over the past 30 years. They have been improved since that time and are now used by all political parties and interest groups that are seeking to manipulate the American electorate. An examination of current elections attests to this fact. The 1988 presidential election could be characterized as being basically negative campaigns designed to provoke fear of the opposing candidate which means that people tended to vote against a candidate rather than for one. This pattern of campaigning is likely to continue in the future. As long as any vested interest group has winning at any cost as its objective or means and as long as the payoff for such a campaign is either power or money, the process will continue.

The United States desperately needs leaders who are statesmen rather than appealing images produced in the ad agencies of Madison Avenue. For

the perpetuation of this society, statesmen must be selected by thinking voters. To accomplish this, American voters must become critical consumers of the materials that may be produced in manipulative campaigns which are funded by special interest groups and produced by unscrupulous advertising agencies for campaign managers. This is necessary because these errant to scandalous practices are effective. Many Americans are being manipulated like puppets with campaign managers and advertising agencies pulling the strings.

Our national survival depends upon each succeeding generation of voters making enlightened political decisions. To assist the next generation of voters, schools must become more actively involved. Since one of the major purposes of education is to perpetuate and to improve the society in which it exists, there is little in the curriculum that is more germane than an effective program to detect bias and the various persuasive devices being used. This makes social studies very relevant and necessary.

Social studies is the part of school curriculum designed to assist the youth of the nation in becoming better citizens. Good citizens should not be manipulated by self-serving advertisers. They should be able to examine advertisements critically and to discern fact from fiction by rational means. They should not live by merely reacting emotionally to persuasion. A good social studies program can help them by providing the skills required in detecting bias. Indeed, these skills must be included and emphasized in the social studies curriculum to help preserve our democratic society.

Theorists in the 1980's have developed strategies to counter misinformation campaigns. Aider (cited in Kehl, 1983) proposed a set of questions designed to assist young people in detecting the relevancy and bias in advertisements. These questions, listed below, are designed to enable students to consider advertisements in a more discriminating manner.

1. What is the advertisement about as a whole?
2. What is being said in detail, and how?
3. Is the advertisement true in whole or part? and
4. What of it?

Kehl (1983) recommended more specific questions to help young people be less gullible when reading, seeing, or hearing advertisements. This set also helps to produce more discriminating behavior.

1. What voice is speaking in this advertisement? Is it an authentic, credible voice?
2. What audience is the advertisement directed toward and why?
3. What is the purpose of this advertisement--both the showy purpose and the real one? and
4. What is the central idea of their advertisement--both the showy and real one?

Devices Used in Propaganda and Advertisements

The objective of bias, as it is used in propaganda and advertising campaigns, is to increase people's urge to believe and buy. Campaign managers and advertising specialists have as their goal the selling of a product. The product can be a certain ideology, candidate, or an object or service. To

achieve their goal, these merchandisers use a variety of devices which range from providing partial information to outright misleading material. Social studies teachers are obligated to enhance students' understanding of the marketing processes used and increase their awareness of how they can be, and are being, manipulated through the use of strategies that are designed to elicit favorable responses from them.

Some of the most commonly used techniques for promoting bias are listed below. Although this list is neither totally inclusive nor totally mutually exclusive, it can provide the necessary knowledge and understanding to enable students to become more discriminating when confronted with propaganda tactics.

1. **Bandwagon** - This technique attempts to sell something based upon the notion that everyone is buying or believing it (e.g., everyone who is anyone is buying a Polo shirt). The message is that you should not be left out.
2. **Good Ole Days** - This technique attempts to sell a product or idea on the basis that the product or idea will help the buyer return to a simpler lifestyle characteristic of the good ole days (e.g., a return to the days when the family sat around the table and talked while sharing Country Time Lemonade).
3. **Plain Folks** - This technique attempts to sell a product by indicating that the product is good because it was designed to meet the needs of everyday people (e.g., a family pictured buying a four-door sedan that is solidly built and apparently designed just for such a typical, practical family).
4. **Testimonials** - This technique shows a well-known person endorsing a product with the implication that this person knows best in this instance (e.g., Michael Landon telling everyone that Kodak products are good).

5. **Heartstrings** - This technique uses human emotions to sell a product. Examples include a candidate depicted as being soft on crime which causes people to fear his election and an undertaker explaining to the family that the type of casket they buy depends upon how much they loved the departed one.
6. **Transfer** - This technique attempts to increase the lure of something by associating it with something else that is well accepted (e.g., a candidate seated at a desk with the flag prominently displayed).
7. **New and Improved** - This technique implies that a product is best because being new and being improved are desirable attributes to be seriously considered when making choices (e.g., Medusa computer as state of the art).
8. **Labeling** - This technique attempts to influence peoples' thinking about people, places, and things through carefully chosen terms that carry strong connotations of a pejorative or praiseworthy nature (e.g., a strong family man).
9. **Card Stacking** - This technique attempts to mislead people by providing only untrue or half-true facts or by not providing pertinent information (e.g., a candidate reporting only his or her voting record on those areas that will be readily accepted by his constituency).
10. **That's Incredible** - This technique attempts to sell a product by using catchy phrases and powerful modifiers (e.g., the ultimate driving machine). (Adapted from Devine, 1982)

Hoskison and Tompkins (1987) also presented an instructional strategy designed to help young students become more critical consumers of advertisements. Their strategy requires that students view commercials and examine the propaganda devices and persuasive language contained in them. This instructional model uses the following eight questions developed by Devine (1982) to assist students in developing skills in detecting propaganda:

1. What is the speaker's purpose?

2. What are the speaker's credentials?
3. Is there evidence of bias?
4. Does the speaker use persuasive language?
5. Does the speaker make sweeping generalizations or unsupported inferences?
6. Do opinions predominate in the talk?
7. Does the speaker use any propaganda devices?
8. Do I accept the message?

The Hoskison and Tompkins model (1987, pp. 81-82) contains six steps and uses large and small groups to accomplish the purposes of the strategy.

The strategy is as follows:

Step 1: Initiating. Begin by talking about commercials and asking students about familiar commercials. Videotape a set of commercials and view them with your students. Discuss the purpose of each commercial. Use the questions about commercials presented in Figure 3-7 to probe students' thinking about propaganda and persuasive language. (The eight questions are listed above.)

Step 2: Structuring. Introduce the propaganda devices and view the commercials again to look for examples of each device. Introduce loaded words and doublespeak and view the commercials for a third time to look for examples of persuasive language.

Step 3: Conceptualizing. Have students work in small groups to critique a commercial, listing the propaganda devices and persuasive language used. Students might also want to test the claims made in the commercial.

Step 4: Summarizing. Review the concepts about propaganda devices and persuasive language introduced in the first three steps.

Step 5: Generalizing. Present a new set of videotaped commercials for students to critique. Ask students to identify propaganda devices and persuasive language used in the commercials.

Step 6: Applying. Have students apply what they learned about propaganda devices and persuasive language by creating their own products and writing and producing their own commercials. As the commercials are presented, have classmates act as critical listeners to detect propaganda devices, loaded words, and doublespeak.

While their model was designed to assist students in analyzing radio and television commercials, it can also be readily used to help students become critical consumers of print advertisements taken from magazines and newspapers.

Propaganda Using Graphs

While some attention has been given to helping students avoid being manipulated by propaganda contained in advertisements, little attention has been given to helping them learn to detect bias used in graphing. Graphs are designed to present data in a form that promotes knowledge, comprehension, application and analysis. However, graphs, like advertisements, can be used to misinform the unwary.

The opportunity to manipulate the public using graphs has not gone unnoticed by Madison Avenue. Account executives of commercial or political campaigns have begun to recognize that graphs can assist them in their attempts to present bias in ways that are effective but are generally unchallenged.

Madison Avenue is aware that people usually comprehend data that have been graphed more easily than they do if the data are presented using other means. Advertising executives are also aware that people tend to believe data that have been graphed. Consequently, graphs are being used with increasing frequency in advertising campaigns.

Graphs used in advertising campaigns can use accurate data and still mislead the public. By manipulating the vertical and horizontal axis of a graph, the data can appear to have different meanings or implications. For example, a graphic display of the budget deficit during the Reagan administration can be made to appear more dramatic by increasing the vertical axis, which represents the actual number of deficit dollars spent by the federal government, while decreasing the horizontal axis which represents the years 1980-1988. This technique could have been employed by the Democratic Party to sway people into viewing the Republican Party as being big spenders and financially irresponsible.

By reversing the process, compacting the vertical axis and extending the horizontal axis, Republican campaigners can depict the deficit as real but minimal. While both the Democratic and Republican campaigners may graph the same data, the impressions left upon the voters may be very different, and it is the impression that is most important for them. By varying the graphing techniques employed, a political party may minimize a problem for which it is responsible and maximize the effect of its adversary's problem. In either case, however, the effect is the same. The public is being manipulated.

The public must hold political candidates and parties accountable for their actions. The public must become aware of the graphing techniques being used by political hucksters and commercial advertisers to misinform them. An awareness of these propaganda techniques can begin in the nation's elementary schools in social studies classes. It can be accomplished by using a strategy designed to teach students to read graphs critically.

Before a student can read the usual political or commercial graphs critically, that student must be able to read graphs at more elementary levels. The following strategy incorporates this understanding and starts at an appropriate level to enable students to read graphs critically. It requires students to examine the three parts of each graph: the title and columns, the data, and the source. It also requires them to answer questions designed to promote critical comprehension of each of the three parts. The strategy is summarized in the following steps:

Step 1. The Title and Columns.

Begin by asking what information is presented in this graph.
What quantities and/or time frames are given?

Step 2. The Data.

As students examine the data, ask specific questions which require interpretation. Specifically, the teacher should structure questions about specific entries of the graph regarding how much or many, how much or many more, or how much or many less. Basic comprehension of the data presented is needed to answer these questions.

Step 3. The Source.

Step three requires that students examine the source of the data and identify potential bias contained in the graph. Questions such as "Are the data complete?", "How accurate do you think they are?" or "Is there evidence of bias in the

data?" can be used to assist students in improving their ability to detect bias.

Step 4. The Two-Thirds Rule.

When the purpose of a graph is to present information in an accurate manner, the two-thirds rule is used. The two-thirds rule is a convention used by reputable statisticians which provides that the vertical axis will approximate two-thirds the linear measure of the horizontal axis. The use of this convention ensures that deliberate attempts to distort graphic presentations will not occur.

To assess students' understanding of the application of the two-thirds rule, teachers ask questions about whether the two-thirds rule was followed. If the rule was not followed, teachers might ask if the graph was designed to mislead the reader.

Political Cartoons

While some merchants of deceit use commercial and political advertisements and graphic displays to manipulate people into buying products or ideologies, others use political cartoons. Political cartoons can be powerful in swaying people to believe a political point of view.

When people are presented a point of view of some political issue in narrative form, the merits of the idea can be cognitively processed and either accepted or rejected. However, when a political issue is presented in a cartoon form, its messages may be quite subtle. A point of view in a cartoon format generally leaves the reader with an impression that is often couched in humor. As the reader laughs at the cartoon, the message is imprinted at the subconscious level and often will reemerge without a scrutiny of varying perspectives of the issue.

While political cartoons generally use humor, they are frequently used to make a biased comment on a social issue. They use symbolism, exaggerations, satire and caricatures to present a point of view without any attempt to show other competing ideas (Jarolimek, 1986). Political cartoons provide answers to people who have not fully grasped the full significance of the issue addressed.

People's attitudes and beliefs can be altered by a concerted effort to do so by using political cartoons. It, therefore, would be to the citizen's advantage to be taught to read political cartoons at a critical level. People should understand that a political cartoon is designed to present a political point of view that is generally in accord with a publisher's political beliefs. They also must be aware that publishers have vested interests that may not be magnanimous.

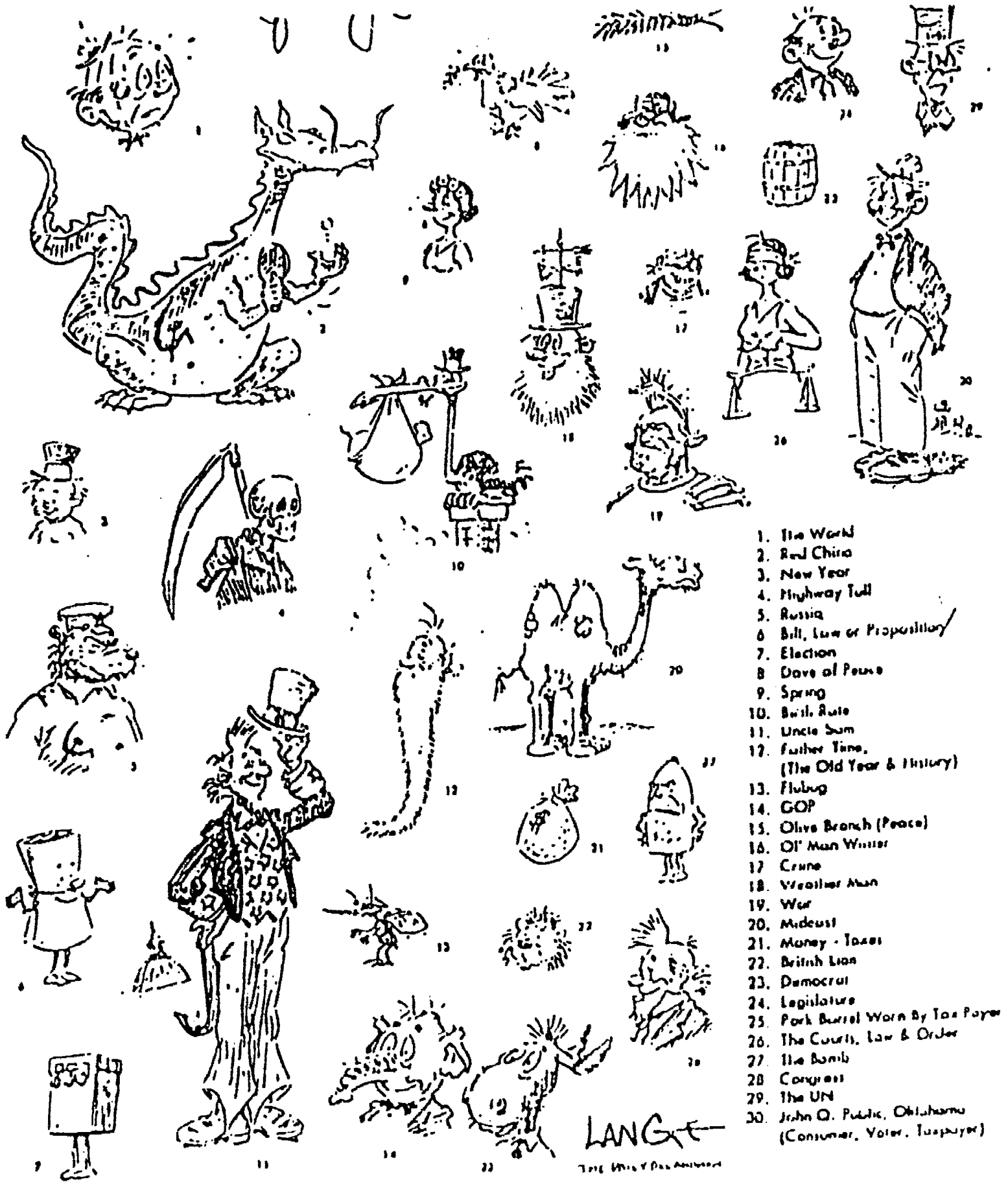
Social studies teachers can assist students in learning how to evaluate the true message of political cartoons and in identifying alternative points of view. They can do this by employing a strategy for assisting students to analytically read political cartoons. Students can learn to read political cartoons and evaluate their messages, but they must have both a knowledge of current events and a comprehension of symbols frequently used by cartoonists. The first precondition can be met by devoting class time or assigning as homework the task of reading newspapers or watching national news broadcasts. Only when students become familiar with current events and the people associated with those events can they effectively read political cartoons.

The second precondition can be developed by presenting a handout of the symbols used by major newspapers or news magazines and teaching the students to recognize them in cartoons. The following page contains an example of such a handout.

After the two preconditions are met, students can read political cartoons, and a strategy developed by Lohmann (1975) appears to extend and enhance this ability even more. It calls for presenting current or historical political cartoons and asking the following questions which will lead students from a literal and shallow meaning to an analytical understanding of each cartoon presented.

1. What do you see in the cartoon?
2. What does each thing represent?
3. What action is occurring?
4. What is the cartoonist's message?
5. What other point of view might the cartoonist have taken?

With practice students can learn to read cartoons effectively to receive the cartoonist's message and to see that other points of view are not presented. The effect of the bias presented can be examined in this way rationally rather than emotionally.



1. The World
2. Red China
3. New Year
4. Highway Toll
5. Russia
6. Bill, Law or Proposition
7. Election
8. Day of Peace
9. Spring
10. Bail Rate
11. Uncle Sam
12. Father Time, (The Old Year & History)
13. Flubup
14. GOP
15. Olive Branch (Peace)
16. Ol' Man Winter
17. Crane
18. Weather Man
19. War
20. Mid-east
21. Money - Taxes
22. British Lion
23. Democrat
24. Legislature
25. Park Barrel Worn By Tax Payer
26. The Courts, Law & Order
27. The Bomb
28. Congress
29. The UN
30. John O. Public, Oklahoma (Consumer, Voter, Taxpayer)

(Lohmann, 1975, p. 37. Used by permission)

In conclusion, a primary goal of social studies instruction is to prepare the nation's young to assume their citizenship rights and responsibilities, and this requires the development of enlightened citizens who make economic and political decisions based upon thought processes rather than by simply reacting emotionally to the huckster's manipulation attempts. If this conclusion is accepted, the obvious implication is that systematic methods of propaganda and bias detection should be included in the social studies curriculum. If this is done, the democratic institutions of the nation may be perpetuated and improved.

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