**Intended Grade Level:** High School

**Lesson Purpose:**

In 2005, Mount Vernon invited several well-known political cartoonists from newspapers across the country to draw political cartoons focusing on major issues of George Washington’s presidency. These cartoons are displayed in the galleries of the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center at Mount Vernon. This lesson will use these political cartoons to engage students in a deeper understanding of George Washington’s presidency.

**Lesson Objectives:**

* Use political cartoons as a devise for understanding three of the major issues that affected Washington’s presidency: the president’s title, the Jay Treaty, and the existence of a national bank.

**Related Standards:**

* Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
* Reading Informational Texts
* Analysis of Primary Sources
* Foundations of the Political System
* Principles of Democracy
* Communication Strategies
* Evaluating Data

**Timeframe:** Approximately one class session

**Background Information:**

Cartoons and other satirical drawings have been part of the political discourse since before the American Revolution. Due to the expense of wood block engraving necessary to reproduce such drawings in the 18th century, political cartoons were not commonly found in newspapers of the time. However, engravings highlighting issues and events of the period were popularly sold. The rise of political and satirical cartoons in the United States took place in the late 19th century. Today, political cartoons and satire not only document issues and events, but also serve as important indicators of public opinion and editorial viewpoints.

**Procedure:**

* 1. Discuss with your students how political cartoons and other satirical drawings have been used throughout American history to make political statements and express points of view (see Background Information section above).
  2. Have students work in pairs or small groups. Give each pair or group a *blank, uncaptioned* version of one of the political cartoons provided in the ZIP download of this lesson plan (“Pomp and Circumstance, “The Jay Treaty,” or “The National Bank”). Each pair or group should also receive a copy of the label that accompanies that cartoon in the Mount Vernon exhibit gallery. Finally, each group should receive the background information document that provides details about the historical issue addressed in the assigned cartoon.
  3. After reading their labels and background information, students will complete the Captioning History Worksheet(included in the ZIP file download)and identify at least three significant issues gleaned from the background reading.
  4. After completing the worksheet and discussing the historical issue with their partner(s), students will collaborate to brainstorm an appropriate and creative caption for their cartoon based on their understanding of the historical issue. Remind students that political cartoons should ideally use humor or satire to express a viewpoint.
  5. Next, students should work together to write a brief exhibit label (75–100 words) providing context for their cartoon and caption.
  6. Have student groups present their cartoons, captions, and exhibit labels to the rest of the class. As a class, compare student cartoons: How do the captions differ? How are they similar?
  7. Finally, reveal to the students the *original captioned* cartoons completed for Mount Vernon by the nationally syndicated political cartoonists. As a class, discuss the similarities and differences between the students’ cartoons and the cartoons created by professional artists for the Mount Vernon Education Center.
  8. Conclude with a class discussion: In what ways do all the cartoons reflect individuality on the part of the cartoonists? How effective do students think political cartoons are in expressing viewpoints and conveying historical events and situations?
  9. Display the students’ cartoons and captions in the classroom.

**Optional Extension Activities:**

1. Students will be assigned the task of sharing a current political cartoon with the class. Over the course of a month, it will be the responsibility of each student to locate a current political cartoon in a newspaper or on a news website and bring the cartoon to class on his or her assigned day. Students should be prepared to explicate both the current event the cartoon addresses and the editorial viewpoint of the cartoon’s creator. After each presentation, have students analyze and discuss how well they think the cartoon illuminates the issue at hand. In what ways is the cartoon effective and ineffective, and why? Last, have the student presenter and other class volunteers talk about whether or not they share the artist’s opinion, and why.
2. Throughout the year, have students draw their own cartoons about historical or current events and issues that are being studied in class. The cartoons should be submitted with brief labels (approximately 75 words) explaining the subject. Consider forming a cross‐curricular panel of teachers (for example, Art, History, English) to judge the quality of the cartoons based on artistic skill and overall creativity; historical accuracy, relevance, comprehension, and critical analysis; and writing style, tone, and mechanics. The top cartoons can be displayed in the classroom, on a school bulletin board, or even published in a school newspaper or on a school website.