

McCarthyism Satire

NCSS thematic strand: time, continuity & change
Grade 11

Background

The post World War II era was characterized by rising tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The spread of communism throughout Europe and Asia led to fear of a communist plot in the United States. Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) became the standard bearer for the anti-communist witch-hunt of the 1950s. In 1950, Senator McCarthy gave a speech in West Virginia in which he claimed to have a list of employees of the US government, including member of the State Department, who were members of the Communist party or who were Communist spies. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, created in 1947, used the same methods and goals as Senator McCarthy. People, especially government employees and member of the entertainment industry, were called in front of the committee to testify regarding their alleged membership of the communist party. Trumped up charges, manufactured evidence, and chance encounters were used to convict people of being Communist sympathizers. McCarthy and his tactics occasionally ridiculed members of the press, including cartoonist Herb Block.

Objectives

Students will:

- ❖ Be able to identify and understand political cartoons and satire
- ❖ Understand the hysteria behind the Red Scare
- ❖ Understand McCarthyism, including its goals, tactics, and means of support

Procedures

Procedure 1

Show Colbert Report clip “The Word-American History X’d” (4:37)

Procedure 2

Define satire (the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly, etc). Ask students: what techniques does Colbert use in his satire?

Procedure 3

Model for the class by going through “Everyone is a Little Subversive” cartoon ad worksheet on smartboard.

- ❖ Define subversion.
- ❖ Walk class through different questions on worksheet.

Procedure 4

Divide class into groups of 3-4. Provide a cartoon to each group and hand out the Cultural satire worksheet. Have each group discuss the questions on the worksheet.

Procedure 5

Debrief activity. Have each group present and explain their cartoon to the rest of the class.

Assessment

Students will be observed during group work and presentation.

Students will be assessed based on responses to cultural satire worksheet.

Resources

<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/407490/january-31-2012/the-word---american-history-x-d>

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/fire.html>

“Everyone is a Little Subversive” Cartoon

Cultural Satire Worksheet

Satire: the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or denying vice, folly, etc.

1. What objects are present? What do they represent? Is there any writing?
2. What is happening in the picture?
3. Who is the target audience?
4. What is the literal message of the cartoon?
5. What is the cartoon really saying? Who or what is being satirized?
6. What technique is the author using? Does the author appeal to emotion, logic, etc?
7. What argument is the author making?