

Historical Context– Teaching Strategy

Quick Overview

Students examine the time period, key events, and social conditions surrounding a political cartoon or artwork to better understand its message. By connecting the image to its historical moment, students uncover deeper meaning and intent.

Skill Objective

Students will...

- analyze visual and textual clues
- conduct or review contextual research
- make evidence-based interpretations
- develop replicable habits for source analysis and inquiry

Content Objective

Students will...

- critically engage with the ideas in a primary source

Civics Skills Connection

Inquiry Skills:

- **Encourages student questioning:** Teaching historical context invites students to ask why events, decisions, or ideas emerged when they did.
- **Supports construction of knowledge:** Allows students to build their own interpretations rather than accept a single narrative. Students synthesize evidence to form conclusions.

Prep ahead

- Curate the political cartoons or art that will be used in the lesson
- Research the context behind the cartoon or art
- Plan additional inquiry driven viewing questions
- Anticipate student reactions and possible misreadings
- Print out, project, or add the selected political cartoon/art to the class LMS

Strategy Steps- Teaching Facing Question Set

Used phased analysis to help students examine the political cartoon or artwork. Using guiding questions in phases will help students understand how to uncover the historical context without being overwhelmed.

1. Introduce source analysis as a repeatable practice.
 2. Guide students through Phases 1-4.
 - a. Phase 1: Observation
- What people, symbols, or text stand out in this image?

- What details suggest this image relates to a specific issue or moment?
- b. Phase 2: Context Building
- What was happening historically around the time this image was created?
 - What event, law, conflict, or debate might this image respond to?
 - What problems or tensions existed during this period?
- c. Phase 3: Meaning and Perspective
- How do historical conditions help explain the message of the image?
 - What position or attitude toward the issue does the creator appear to take?
 - How might people at the time have interpreted this image?
- d. Phase 4: Historical Significance
- What does this image reveal about public opinion or political debate at the time?
 - Why are images like this useful for understanding history?

Customizations

- **Option 1: Gamify it**
 - Groups of students working with the same source compete to see which group can correctly identify and describe the historical context with materials provided by the teacher.
- **Option 2: Assess it**
 - Assign students to annotate or caption the image with notes explaining how specific visual elements connect to historical events, ideas, or conditions. Educator collects the annotations from individuals.