

## **Title: How do political cartoons express opinions about a particular subject?**

### **Historical Background:**

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Thomas Nast didn’t say this, but he could have. Nast used the power of political cartoons to expose William M (Boss) Tweed and NY City’s Democratic political machine in the 1860’s. As stated in Glencoe’s textbook *The American Journey* (2006) McGraw-Hill, p. 625, “Political cartoons state opinions about particular subjects. To illustrate those opinions, cartoonists provide clues, using different techniques. They often exaggerate a person’s physical appearance, called “caricature.” Caricature can be positive or negative, depending on the artist’s point of view. Cartoonists also use symbols to represent something else. For example, the bald eagle is often shown in political cartoons as a symbol of the United States. Sometimes cartoonists help readers interpret their message by adding labels or captions.”

Learning to interpret political cartoons can help students understand issues of both the past and present. The use of visual imagery can be more memorable than just the written word. For example, after fleeing the United States, Boss Tweed was captured by police in Spain because they recognized him from Thomas Nast’s many political cartoons.

### **Correlation to NYS Grade 7/8 Social Studies Core Curriculum:**

Unit Seven: An Industrial Society

I. The Maturing of an Industrial Society in the Second Half of the 19th Century

**Suggested Timeframe:** This lesson should take approximately 30-40 minutes.

### **Materials/Resources:**

- Sample political cartoons (attached)
- Thomas Nast’s “The Brains” political cartoon (attached)
- Analyzing Political Cartoons worksheet (attached)

**Student Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Identify one characteristic of a political cartoon, such as states an opinion, uses caricature/exaggeration, uses symbols, is related to a current or historical event/topic
- Explain how political cartoons can be more memorable than a written editorial in a newspaper.

### **Teaching Strategies, Procedures, and Methodologies:**

1. As part of a unit on the Progressive era, the teacher will begin class by explaining to students that muckrakers used different ways to expose the corruption/abuses in society. One of the methods was using political cartoons. Explain to students that political cartoons state opinions about particular subjects. Cartoonists often exaggerate a person’s physical appearance, called “caricature” to develop their message. Cartoonists also use symbols to represent things. For example, the bald eagle is often shown in political cartoons as a symbol of the United States. Sometimes cartoonists help readers interpret their message by adding labels or captions. (5-10 min.)
2. The teacher will then project one of the sample cartoons on the overhead to analyze with students. (I have chosen two sample political cartoons to model the skill. The first is from the September 11 attacks, and the second is more current, and perhaps more relevant to students, on the danger of text messaging while driving).
3. Hand out the Analyzing Political Cartoons worksheet (attached). Answer the first four questions together with the students. (10 min-15 min)
4. The teacher will then project Thomas Nast’s “The Brains” political cartoon, and have students answer the second set of questions on their sheet. Students can answer independently or with a partner. (5 min)

5. When students finish, go over answers. (10 min.)
6. Close the lesson by asking students to turn over their worksheet, and explain why political cartoons can sometimes be more effective in presenting an opinion on a subject, rather than just the written word. Discuss their answers. (5 min)
7. Possible homework assignment or assessment would be to have students get a political cartoon from the newspaper or Internet, and analyze it using the questions from the worksheet.

**Evaluation/Assessment:**

Evaluation will be measured by grading the answers to the questions, and 1-2 test questions. Also, informal assessment will take place during classroom discussion.

**About the Author:**

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*Analyzing a Political Cartoon Worksheet*

**SAMPLE political cartoon:**

Directions: With the help of your teacher, answer the questions on the sample political cartoon.

- 1) Read the caption(s) or any other words in the cartoon.
  
- 2) Who or what is represented in this political cartoon?
  
- 3) What is being exaggerated in this cartoon?
  
- 4) What statement or opinion is this political cartoon making?

**“The Brains” political cartoon:**

Directions: Answer the questions on the “The Brains” political cartoon.

- 1) Read the caption(s) or any other words in the cartoon.
  
- 2) Who or what is represented in this political cartoon?
  
- 3) What is being exaggerated in this cartoon?
  
- 4) What statement or opinion is this political cartoon making?

# Sample Cartoon #1



Source: <http://www.cagle.com/news/Firefighters/1.asp>

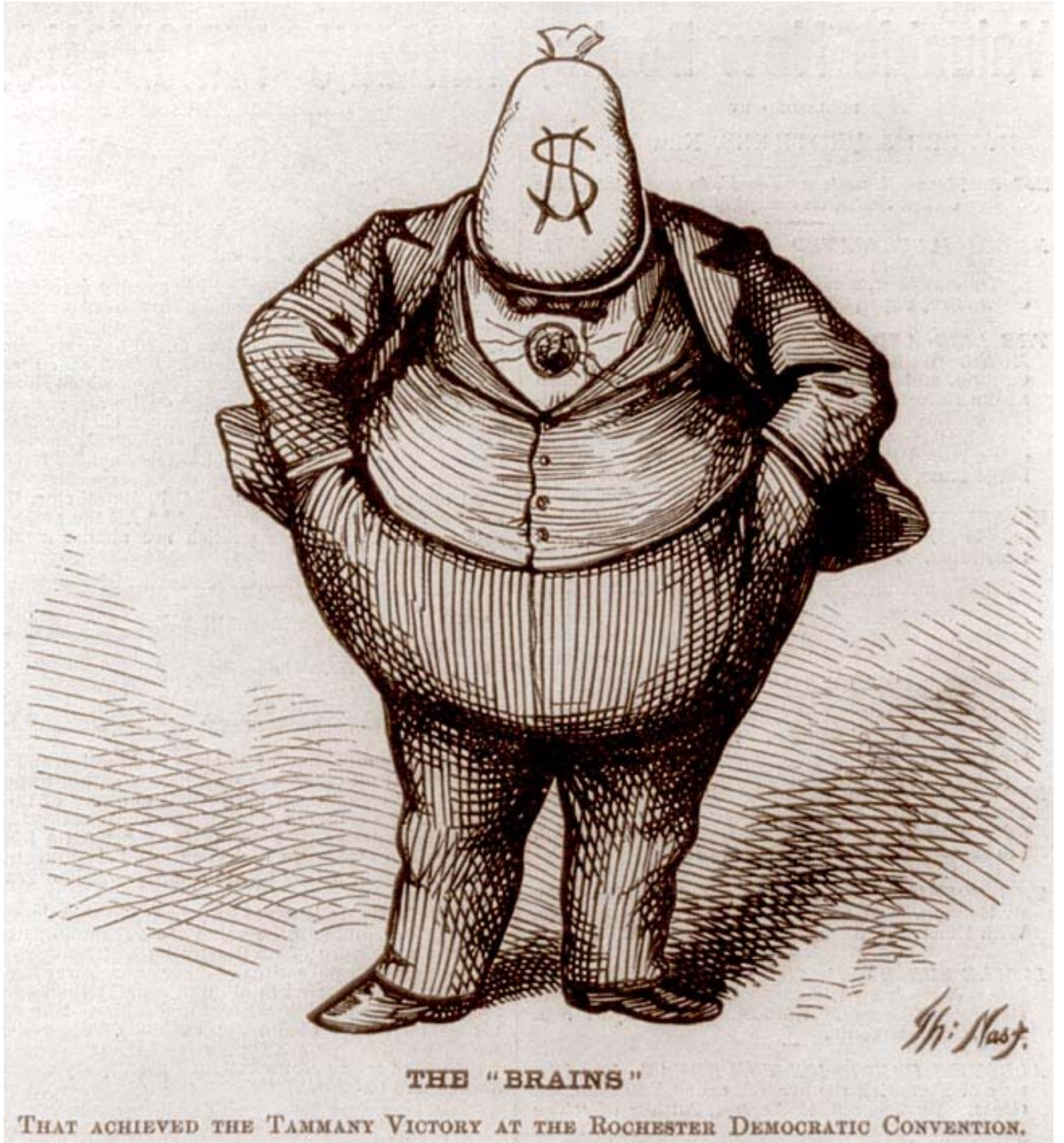
## Sample Cartoon #2



**DEROSIER**™  
TIMES UNION 2009

Source: <http://blog.timesunion.com/derosier/date/2009/07/>

# “The Brains”



Source: [http://cartoons.osu.edu/nast/images/the\\_brains100.jpg](http://cartoons.osu.edu/nast/images/the_brains100.jpg)