Cartoons for the Classroom

Presented by NIEonline.com and the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)

Exploring the idiom

Fat Cats living high off the hog

Courtesy Kevin Kallaugher (KAL) / CartoonArts International

When hard times hit, a popular target for cartoonists is the corporate "Fat Cat" who profits at the working man's expense. The visual symbol stems from the slang term for a wealthy and privileged person who lives off the work of others. The term originally meant (and still means) "a rich contributor to a political campaign." The term "Fat Cat" is an example of an English idiom: An expression that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements. In other words, the phrase doesn't make much sense if you try to interpret it literally to get at its meaning. Some other examples: "gravy train," "cash cow," "dog eat dog." Can you think of any more that would make useful cartoon symbols?

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists
http://editorialcartoonists.com/

More by Kevin Kallaugher at CartoonArts International
http://www.nytimages.com/cartoons.html

Talking points

1. When you refer to a rich and powerful person as a Fat Cat, is it a positive or negative image? Does it necessarily mean you approve or disapprove of the way they use their money or power?

2. Are the rich and powerful always fat? Are poor never fat?

3. Are "Fat Cats" always white? Male? Anglo? Can a black women ever be depicted as a Fat Cat? Why not?

4. Is the "Fat Cat" a universal symbol? Would other cultures (Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern) easily understand the symbol?

Get out your newspaper

Gather a collection of political cartoons from your newspaper dealing with corporate scandals. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Worksheet (available online at the NIE Website) analyze each cartoon and determine the artist's point of view. Gather news stories about the process and evaluate the cartoonist's position based on the articles you read.

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