

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

WHAT ARE EDITORIAL CARTOONS?

Editorial cartoons are found in the editorial – or opinion – section of a newspaper. They are created by cartoonists as a way of visually commenting on and often criticizing the world around them – with humour. Editorial cartoonists express their ideas and opinions about issues (for example, what to do about Canada’s economy), events (such as the Olympic Games) or public figures (like the Prime Minister).

Because cartoons are drawn from the viewpoint of the cartoonist they do not tell the whole story about the event, issue or individual, but they reveal important messages. Their purpose is to grab people’s attention and cause them to re-examine their views on a subject. Editorial cartoons typically send a particular kind of message. The message is conveyed through images and wordplay. Their tone is generally ironic (portraying events in ways that are unexpected or contrary to how they seem), satiric (ridiculing the event, individual or issue), or humorous (inviting readers to laugh at themselves or at others).

In order to interpret the message of an editorial cartoon it is helpful to understand the *context* – the time, place and situation. It is also useful to understand some of the common *art techniques* used by cartoonists to emphasize their points. Considering these things will help you better decode and appreciate the message behind the cartoon.

WHAT COMMON ART TECHNIQUES ARE USED BY EDITORIAL CARTOONISTS?

Caption (a sentence or phrase that is the title or explanation of the cartoon);

Labels (words or numbers in the drawing to identify people, objects or dates);

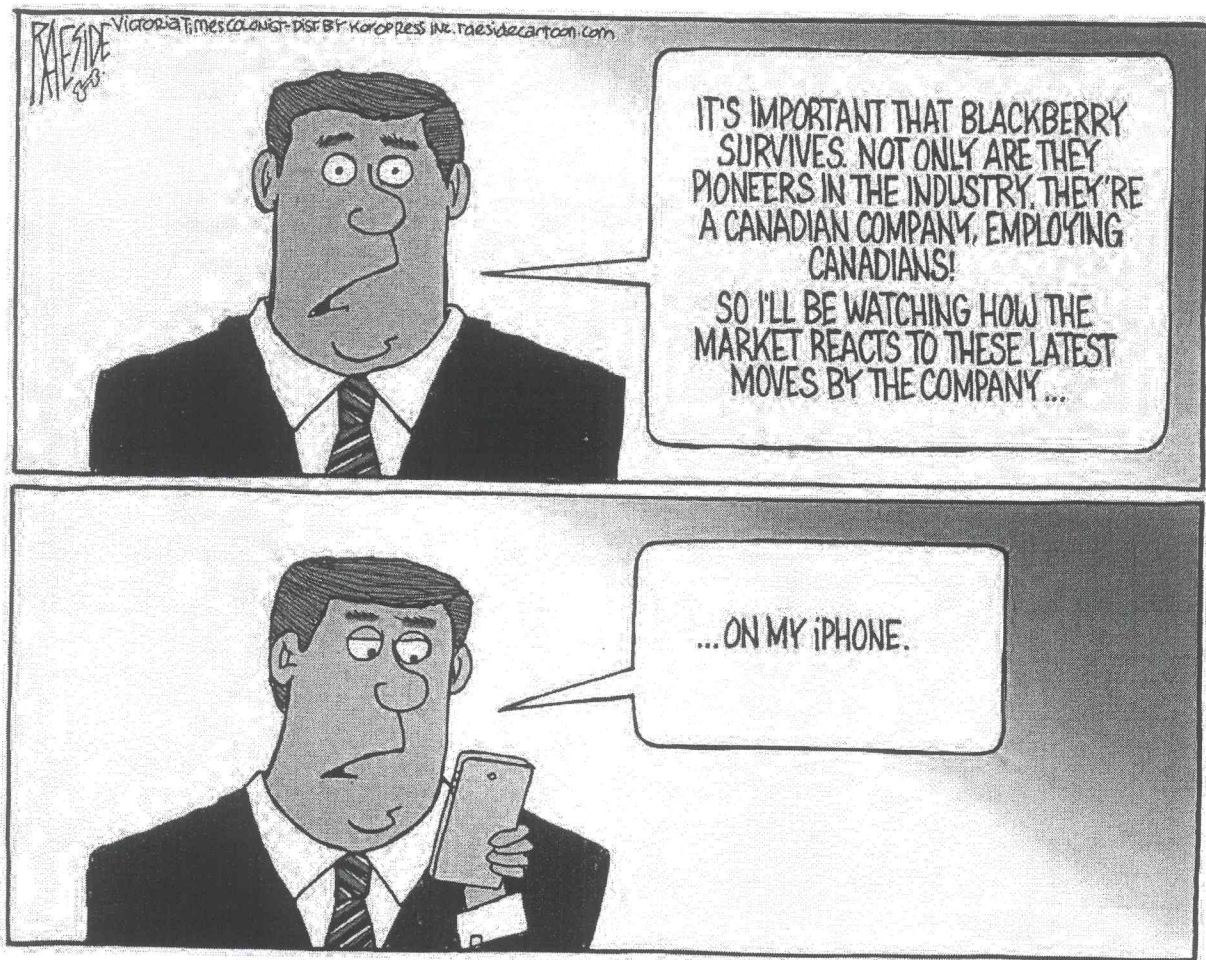
Relative size (some images are drawn much larger or much smaller than others);

Light and dark (use of dark shading and white space to create an effect);

Composition (the arrangement or location of figures or objects in the centre or background);

Symbols (a sign or image to represent something else);

Caricature (a distorted, simplified or exaggerated representation of a figure).



YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon above. Then, use the questions below to help you decode the cartoon’s message. Be specific and include as many details as possible in your answers.

INITIAL READING: What can an initial look reveal?

1. Glance quickly at the cartoon. What is your first impression – your “gut response”?
2. Read the *text*. What does it tell you about the topic of the cartoon?
3. Consider your background knowledge. What do you already know about the context of the cartoon – the time, place or situation? (List key facts.)

CLOSER LOOK: What’s happening in the cartoon?

4. Describe what you see in the cartoon. Who is featured in the cartoon? What is this person doing or saying? What else do you notice?

DRAW CONCLUSIONS: What overall impression can you draw?

5. Identify possible biases. Whose perspective or point of view is expressed in the cartoon?
6. Explain the overall message of the cartoon in a paragraph. (Remember, a good interpretation is *specific* and *detailed*.) ★