

# Analysing Cartoons

When describing a cartoon it is wise to proceed in a certain order. **Before you start writing, get prepared by following the three steps below:**

1. Study the cartoon carefully and try to figure out what message the artist wants to convey with it. (Unless you know the intended message, you cannot describe the cartoon appropriately!!!)
2. Take a closer look at the details and decide whether they contribute to the message or not. Only those aspects that contribute to the message are relevant and therefore have to be described later on.
3. Make a list of all the relevant details.

**Once you have completed the first three steps, you can start describing what is going on in the cartoon.**

4. Describe where the situation is taking place, which characters are involved, what they are doing and what they are talking about. If possible, refer to the artist and the picture's title, date and source of publication.

Make sure you mention all the relevant details and leave out everything that does not contribute to the understanding of the message.

Keep in mind that for the reader the situation shown in the cartoon is happening right now. Therefore the correct tense for every action shown in the cartoon is the **PRESENT PROGRESSIVE (ING-FORM)**! The setting is described by using the **SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE**.

When referring to what is being said, thought, or written in the cartoon, try to use your own words as far as possible. Just copying the content of a speech bubble (*Sprechblase*), thought bubble (*Denkblase*), poster, banner, sign or caption (*Bildunterschrift*) is not a good idea! Make sure your descriptive part only describes what's going on in the picture and does not contain any sort of interpretation.

**Once you have described everything you consider relevant, start a new paragraph (new line!) and interpret the cartoon.**

5. Explain what the cartoonist wants to express with the cartoon.

In most cases cartoons contain a clear message. The cartoonist criticises people's behaviour, comments on trends in our society or just makes fun of certain people. Cartoons are often critical of real people, current events or trends, so it is important to recognize and identify them: point out the event or issue the cartoon refers to; if the cartoon is a caricature of a well-known person, it is important to say who it is. Keep in mind that the characters in the cartoon represent groups of people in most cases. In some cartoons a famous person (e.g. politician, sportsman, celebrity...) is illustrated.

Point out how far the details you described in the first part contribute to the message.

6. After writing your interpretation, read your full description carefully and make sure it really tells the reader what's going on in the cartoon. Keep in mind that after reading your description, a person who has never seen the cartoon before must be able to imagine the situation shown in the cartoon.

## **Conclusion:**

7. Say whether you think the picture or cartoon is effective or not and give reasons for your opinion (refer to the quality of the cartoon, the colours used, the depiction of people, symbols,...)
8. Read your full description once again and correct your mistakes (grammar, spelling, vocabulary).

## Cartoons – useful expressions

In my opinion the cartoon is supposed to ...  
The cartoonist may want to convey that...  
His message might be that...  
Perhaps his intention is to show that...  
The cartoon implies that...  
At first glance one might think that...  
but a closer analysis shows that...  
You could draw the conclusion that...  
to refer to.../ a reference to...  
to allude to an event/ an allusion to sth.  
a speech bubble/ thought bubble  
a funny caption  
on the (visual) surface  
on the figurative/ symbolic level  
X stands for/ symbolizes...  
to exaggerate character traits  
a slight/ gross exaggeration  
a satirical description (of)  
to satirize sth.  
to criticize the behaviour of politicians  
critical towards...  
sharp criticism of...  
an outspoken critic (of)  
to disapprove of sth.  
strong disapproval (of)  
to make fun of/ to poke fun at sb./sth.  
to ridicule sb.  
heavy sarcasm  
to make a sarcastic comment (on)

Meiner Meinung nach soll die Karikatur...  
Der Karikaturist will vielleicht vermitteln, dass...  
Seine Botschaft könnte sein, dass...  
Vielleicht ist es seine Absicht zu zeigen, dass...  
Die Karikatur deutet daraufhin/impliziert, dass...  
Auf den ersten Blick könnte man meinen, dass...  
aber eine genauere Analyse zeigt, dass...  
Man könnte den Schluss ziehen, dass...  
sich beziehen auf.../ ein Hinweis auf...  
auf ein Ereignis anspielen/ eine Anspielung auf etw.  
eine Sprechblase/ Gedankenblase  
eine komische Bildunterschrift  
auf der (visuellen) Oberfläche  
auf der übertragenen/ symbolischen Ebene  
X steht für/ symbolisiert...  
Charaktereigenschaften übertreiben  
eine leichte/ große Übertreibung  
eine satirische Beschreibung (von)  
etwas satirisch darstellen  
das Verhalten von Politikern kritisieren  
kritisch gegenüber...  
scharfe Kritik an...  
ein freimütiger Kritiker (von)  
etwas missbilligen  
starke Ablehnung (von)  
sich über jemand/etwas lustig machen  
jemanden lächerlich machen  
beißender Sarkasmus  
einen sarkastischen Kommentar machen

in the background

in the top-left corner

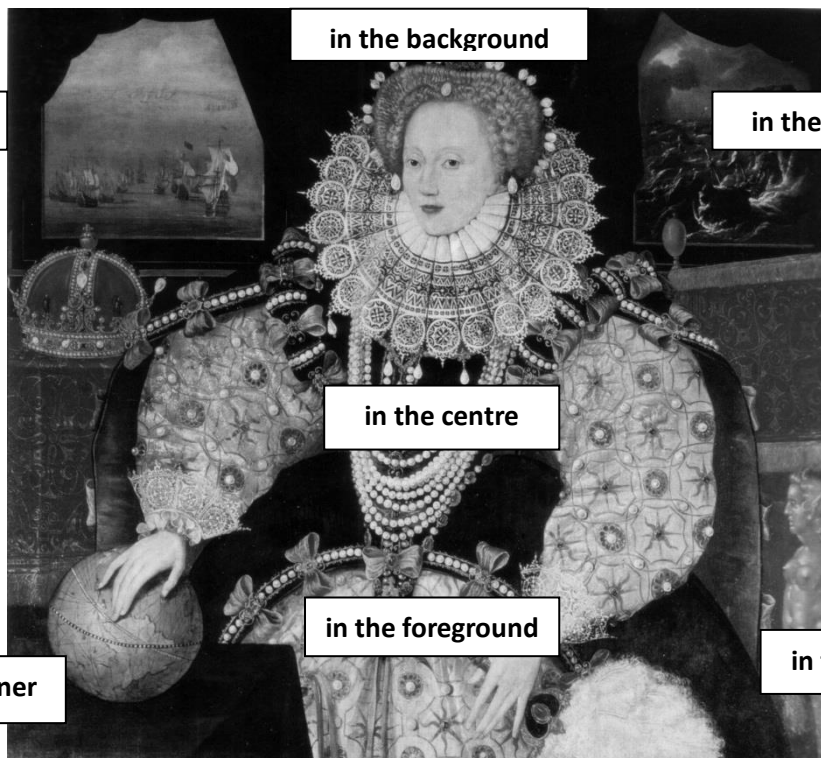
in the top-right corner

in the centre

in the bottom-left corner

in the foreground

in the bottom-right corner



**Step 1 - What is the general message?**

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**Steps 2 / 3 - Which details are relevant and which ones are irrelevant?**

relevant aspects	irrelevant aspects

**Step 4 - What is going on in the cartoon?**

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**Step 5 - What is the message of the cartoon?**

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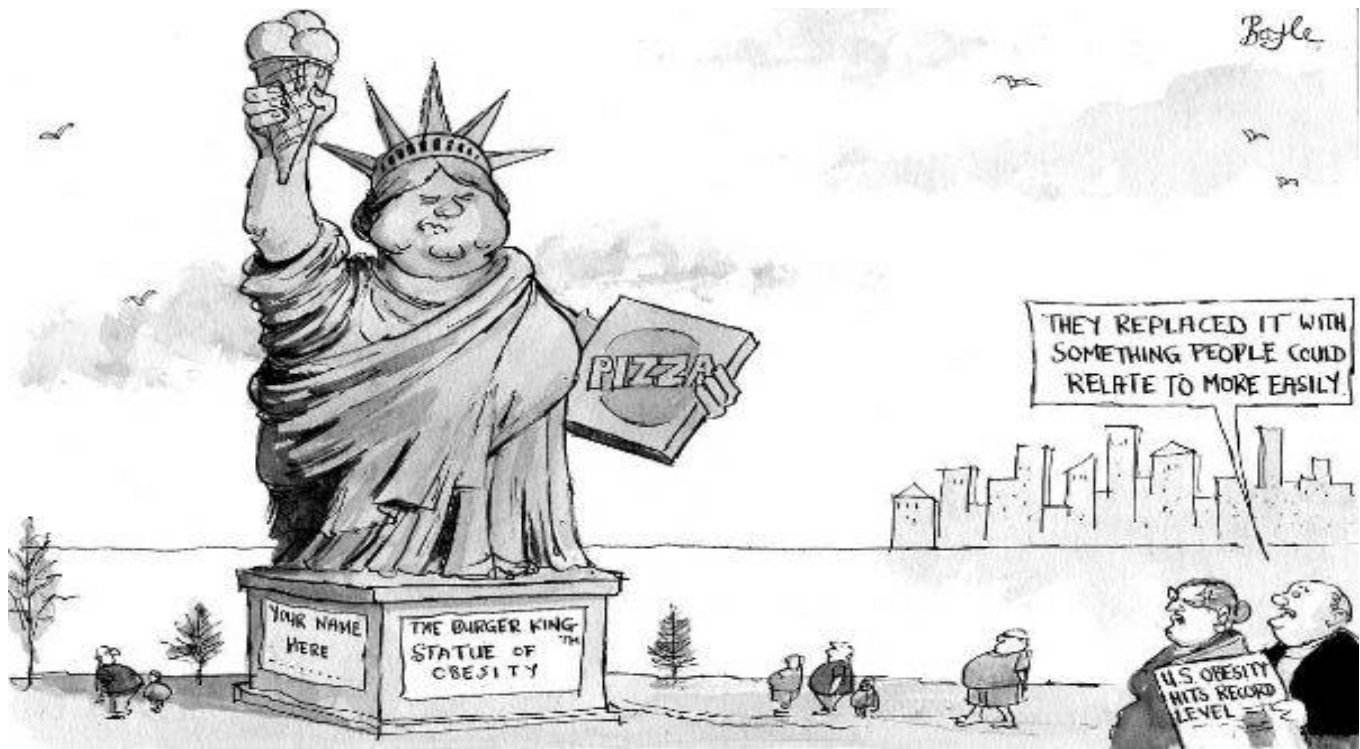
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**NOW WRITE YOUR ANALYSIS!**

Analyse the following cartoon "The Burger King Statue of Obesity":



Analyse the following cartoon "Billy Elliot":



**Annotations:**

- obesity – over-weight
- (to) relate to – (to) understand
- Record level – highest level
- Telly – television

"It all started after he saw that 'Billy Elliot' movie on the telly."