

Political Cartoon Analysis: Dr. Seuss Goes to War

Most of our students will know Dr. Seuss, the author of some of their very favorite children's books. We need to introduce him as a political cartoonist as well, commenting on the events of the 1930's and 1940's. His cartoon, "Waiting for a signal from home..." which appeared in the PM magazine in 1942, expresses many of the prevalent American suspicions of Japanese Americans in the wake of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Geisel's cartoon expresses the hysterical notion that the 110,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were potential saboteurs and spies, waiting for orders from Japan. His depiction of Japanese Americans, "slant eyed and buck toothed" without individual identities, drew upon deep seated racial animosity and stereotypes of Japanese Americans.

Lesson Steps:

1. Ask students what their favorite Dr. Seuss book was growing up.
2. Explain that Dr. Seuss was a pseudonym for Theodor Geisel, who also was a political cartoonist during the 1930's.
3. Show Geisel's political cartoon, ["Waiting for a Signal From Home"](#), and have students fill out the [Student Handout for Analyzing Political Cartoon](#).
4. After students have written down answers to questions have a class discussion. Be sure to explain to them the concept of 5th Column, a group that undermines a nation from within.
5. Have students write an analysis of the cartoon, based on the details they gathered and the class discussion.

Extension Activities:

There are, unfortunately, hundreds of images from posters and cartoons with similar depictions of the Japanese and of Japanese Americans during World War II. Most of our students will have learned about propaganda from World War 1 in their World Studies classes. You may want to show the similar way the US World War II propaganda portrayed the [Japanese "enemy as beast"](#) and also to illustrate how the fear, anger and hostility toward Japan was transferred onto Japanese Americans living on the West Coast, as shown in the photograph, ["Keep Moving."](#) There are also numerous examples of World War II war hysteria and racism in print as well. For example, the editorial, ["This is War! Stop Worrying About Hurting Jap Feelings"](#), appeared in the Seattle Times, January 30th, 1942. Any of these might be used as follow ups to the Dr. Seuss cartoon, to show prevailing attitudes during World War II.