

College Guild  
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# JOURNALISM CLUB

## Unit 4 of 6

### Opinion Pieces and Political Cartoons

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In Unit 3, we talked about facts and reporting the truth. Though some situations call for unbiased reporting, newspapers have whole sections devoted to opinion. In this Unit, we'll talk about how to successfully express opinions through both writing and drawing.

#### Three Modes of Persuasion

The goal of opinion writing is to persuade. This is easier said than done, as readers will often come in with their own opinions on a subject. Aristotle, the Ancient Greek philosopher, wrote a famous treatise called "Rhetoric" in which he laid out three modes of persuasion. These were methods that, when used together in a speech, would have the best chance at getting audience support. The three modes are still applicable in journalism today. They are as follows:

**Ethos:** This strategy assumes that readers will be more likely to pay attention to an article's message if they believe that the writer is trustworthy. A writer can show empathy with readers, demonstrate good character and show that he has experiences that qualify him to write on the subject.

**Pathos:** This strategy appeals to a reader's emotions and elicits an emotional reaction to the article. A writer may try to instill fear, sadness, excitement, guilt, anger or joy in her readers. She may also try to make a reader laugh.

**Logos:** This strategy is all about logic. A master of logos uses facts to show that his opinion is right. He appeals to readers' common sense with numbers and historical examples.

One place the modes of persuasion are commonly used is in advertising. For example, a toothpaste commercial could use ethos, pathos and logos to persuade viewers to buy a certain brand of toothpaste. Having a dentist endorse the product would be ethos because using an expert appeals to the credibility of the presenter. Showing a cute scene of a father helping his young son brush his teeth would be pathos because a happy family appeals to emotion. Adding facts like "90% of users of this toothpaste reported whiter teeth after only a week" would be logos because statistics appeal to logic.

#### 1. For each of the following images, explain which mode(s) of persuasion is/are used.



2. Now it's your turn. You are on the advertising team for a car company and making a new commercial. How will you appeal to:
  - a. Ethos?
  - b. Pathos?
  - c. Logos?

The following opinion piece about the Juvenile Justice System in Maine uses all three modes of persuasion.

**Portland Press Herald: "Our View: It's beyond question – justice system fails kids"**

By The Editorial Board | June 17, 2018

*In just a few words last week, Chief Justice Leigh Saufley summed up the state of the youth criminal justice system in Maine. Speaking about the case of a Skowhegan teen sent to the Long Creek Youth Development Center for violating probation, Saufley questioned why the system often ends up hurting the kids it's supposed to help.*

*"This is a juvenile who is 16 during most of this period of time," Saufley said as the Maine Supreme Judicial Court heard the teen's appeal. "He is acting inappropriately, which is not unusual for a juvenile. He is not showing up where he should be, which is not unusual for a juvenile. And the only thing the state could figure out to get this young man back on the ordinary track is incarceration.*

*"And I want to be clear, Long Creek is not a treatment facility. These kids are in lockdown. It changes who they are, it changes who they think they are. Have we not failed our kids?"*

*NOWHERE ELSE TO GO: The teen, known only as J.R. in court documents, was put on probation for a series of property crimes he committed when he was 15. After failing to abide by the terms of his release, and facing an increasingly frustrated prosecutor and judge, he was sent to the state's youth prison for up to 18 months, a far longer sentence than if he had committed the same crimes as an adult.*

*Prison is not the right place for kids like J.R., but there is nowhere else to send them. There is no secure facility short of Long Creek, and the community-based programs experts prefer to institutionalization have withered after years of underfunding, if they ever existed at all.*

*So kids with mental health challenges and behavioral problems whose parents can't afford private treatment are left to languish until they earn the attention of the criminal justice system. From there, it's only a short jump to a locked room at Long Creek, which has proved to be unequipped to handle its inmates, just as youth prisons in general have been shown to only further marginalize troubled kids.*

*Kids, experts say, respond better to community-based programs, where they can get treatment near home, close to friends and family, and in the same place they'll have to live once they get better.*

*Besides being more effective, such programs are also less costly. It costs the state \$250,000 a year to house a child at Long Creek; home- and community-based care costs tens of thousands of dollars less.*

*PROGRAMS WITHERED: Maine at one time built up a system of community-based programs as it moved away from a model that favored institutionalization. But in the years since, the state has failed to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates that support the system, and it has withered. According to the Bangor Daily News, 42 Maine children are receiving care out of state because of lack of options here, and others are stuck in psychiatric hospitals and emergency departments. There is a waiting list for services hundreds of names long.*

*In this environment, the LePage administration has suggested cutting rates further, which would only make it more difficult for agencies to provide services. To relieve the pressure on services, and in response to the problems at Long Creek, the administration has also proposed creating a series of regional secure facilities as an alternative. There is disagreement over the merits of this model, but even the organizations that approve of it say they could not operate such a facility at the payment rates being proposed.*

*We are spending a lot of money for a system that doesn't even come close to covering the demand. We are doing it in a way that delays care for troubled kids until their problems are impossible to ignore, then sometimes sends them to a place that makes it more likely they won't get better.*

*The question isn't if we have failed these kids, but whether we have the will to really help them.*

- 3. In 1-2 of your own sentences, summarize the opinion being expressed in this article.**
- 4. Give an example of where this article uses (a) ethos, (b) pathos and (c) logos.**

One important thing to keep in mind when writing opinion articles is that if you've done a good job, you don't need to tell readers how they should feel. If you lay out anecdotes and facts calmly, the reader will feel what you want them to feel. The following poem is a great example of this:

**the bullet was a girl** by Danez Smith

the bullet is his whole life.  
 his mother named him & the bullet  
 was on its way. in another life  
 the bullet was a girl & his skin  
 was a boy with a sad laugh.  
 they say *he asked for it*—  
 must I define *they*? *they* are not  
 monsters, or hooded or hands black  
 with cross smoke.  
*they* teachers, *they* pay tithes  
*they* like rap, *they* police—good folks  
 gather around a boy's body  
 to take a picture, share a prayer.  
*oh da horror, oh what a shame*  
*why'd he do that to himself?*  
*they really should stop*  
*getting themselves killed*



Poet Danez Smith

- 5. What is the point of this poem?**

**6. What emotions do you think Smith wants his readers to feel? Did you feel these emotions as you read?**

In 2018, the nation was outraged by President Trump's policy of separating the children of illegal immigrants from their parents at the US border. One former foster parent wrote an opinion article for The New York Times against this policy. Here is an excerpt from that article:

**The New York Times: "If It Could Happen to Them, Why Can't It Happen to Us?"**

By Jeanine Cummins | June 19, 2018

*The kids showed up in our driveway on a Tuesday afternoon. The boy wore a backpack full of diapers for his sister; she wore neon-pink tennis shoes and wouldn't let go of his hand. Their case worker gave me some paperwork and was gone before I had time to process the thought: Now I'm a foster mom. Their panic was palpable. Mine probably was, too.*

*The little one didn't sleep so much as lose consciousness in moments when her small body demanded a break from her otherwise ceaseless crying. This happened with no discernible pattern. My two biological daughters, then 7 and 3, watched with concern as her cries turned to whimpers and then sloped into the ragged breath of sleep. She could nod off anywhere except in her crib: at swimming lessons, at the dinner table, sprawled on the kitchen floor.*

*Sometimes her cries went the other direction, too, spiking into screams, her body rigid with terror. Attempting to remove her sneakers provoked such hysteria that for the first three nights, my husband and I let her wear them to bed.*

*We may have been experienced parents, but we were inexperienced at parenting a traumatized child. I didn't know how to change the diaper of a baby who was afraid of me. I didn't know how to comfort a child who became frantic when I tried to touch her.*

*During the months that followed, the crying diminished and the children began to trust us. We tried to provide a safe, stable home for them. We gave them clothes, toys, grandparents. We laughed at their jokes and cried with them when visiting their parents was difficult. We loved them.*

*And yet we were, inherently, part of their trauma. Their parents were, for the moment, unable to provide a safe home for them. But even when it's necessary, removing children from their parents causes acute distress. I witnessed that suffering. It lived in my home.*

*My older daughter began having nightmares that "the people" would take her away from us and give her to another family. She was inconsolable. "If it could happen to them," she asked with the clear-eyed logic of a 7-year-old, "why can't it happen to us?"*

*I tried telling her that it happens only to parents who don't, or can't, take care of their children. It happens only when parents aren't doing what they're supposed to do.*

*It turns out she knew something I didn't.*

*I've tried not to read the headlines about migrant children being separated from their parents. The stories of frantic parents and sobbing children are painfully familiar. It is too easy to imagine a little girl shrieking in her new foster mother's kitchen, writhing and kicking at the unfamiliar hands attempting to soothe her. I can see her falling into a fitful sleep in her hot-pink sneakers.*

*I told my kids this kind of separation happens only to children whose parents don't do the right thing. But now it's happening to people who are behaving exactly as good parents should. To parents who endure inconceivable hardship to get their children to this country, precisely in order to protect them. They come from places of violence and poverty and they travel, in some cases, thousands of miles carrying their children on their backs, all in the hopes of providing those children with a chance at safety. Their perseverance is the very model of parental sacrifice.*

*My husband, an immigrant, tried to soften the emotional spasm of my response to this news. "Surely a temporary separation would be worth it," he said, considering how we would feel if we were asylum-seekers, "if that's what it took to get our children out of a dangerous situation."*

*But, I countered, "It's like forcing someone to choose between diabetes and cancer." It's not a deterrent; it's forcing migrants to make an absurd, unnecessary, detestable choice: Would you prefer to keep your children in a dangerous place or risk losing them in a place you can only hope will be safer?...*

*After six months, our foster kids went home to their parents, and what remained with me was a new perspective on the fragility of family. We love our children so much, it's easy to mistake the strength of that feeling for invincibility. Now I understand that it's not always merit-based, who gets to keep their kids and who doesn't. It can be arbitrary — a matter of unlucky geography — even in 2018, even in the United States of America.*

*My daughter was right to be afraid.*

7. **How did you feel while reading this article?**
8. **Why do you think Cummins mentions the pink sneakers several times in this article? What purpose do they serve?**
9. **Do you think Cummins' discussion of her husband's comment strengthens or weakens her case? Explain.**

How did the government justify this policy? Jeff Sessions, Trump's Attorney General, wrote an opinion piece arguing that the policy was necessary:

**USA Today: "We don't want to separate parents from kids"**

By Jeff Sessions | June 19, 2018

*Some years ago, it was decided that law enforcement might arrest adults who crossed the border illegally by themselves, but anyone who brought a child with them would not be prosecuted, a form of immunity.*

*Word got out about this loophole with predictable results. The number of aliens illegally crossing with children between our ports of entry went from 14,000 to 75,000 — a fivefold increase — in just the past four years.*

*These trends undermine the integrity of our system. That's why the policy that is causing them must end, too.*

*Ending this blanket immunity means prosecuting adults for illegal entry whether they have children with them or not. That is what we are doing at the Department of Justice.*

*And these children are well cared for. In fact, they get better care than a lot of American kids do. They are provided plenty of food, education in their language, health and dental care, and transported to their destination city — all at taxpayer expense.*

*In total, HHS is spending more than one billion taxpayer dollars a year providing quality care.*

*Separations are temporary and rare. The vast majority of children in custody came to this country by themselves.*

*Many unaccompanied children have been abused by smugglers or recruited by criminal gangs such as MS-13. There is nothing humane about encouraging human trafficking — but that is what open borders policies do. Everything the Trump administration is doing is helping put traffickers out of business.*

*If people have a genuine asylum claim, they can come to a port of entry, make their claim legally, and remain with their children while their case is processed.*

*We do not want to separate parents from their children. What we want is a safe, lawful system of immigration that would end this question altogether. We want to build a wall to prevent illegal entry. Congress could make that happen quickly — and they should.*

*Those who want to come to this country can and should apply legally. We have the most generous immigration laws in the world — but they should be enforced. At the Department of Justice, that is what we intend to do, and we ask Congress to be our partners in this effort.*

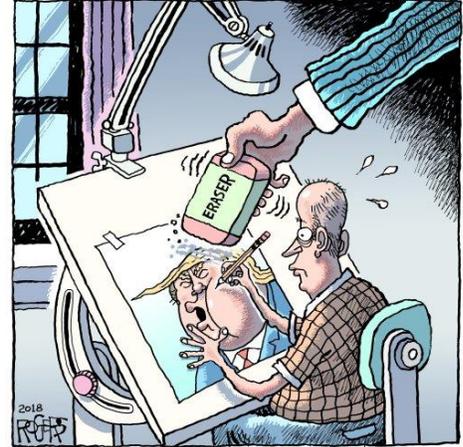
- 10. What do you imagine Jeanine Cummins would say in reply to Jeff Sessions?**
- 11. Whose article (Cummins' or Sessions') did you think was more convincing? Why?**
- 12. Write an opinion article about an issue that you care about. Use the modes of persuasion. Show, don't tell, to strengthen your argument.**



Above is a political cartoon about immigration. Political cartoons can make the same points as opinion pieces. This one gets at the hypocrisy of Trump saying he supports Christian family values, then splitting up families. In the next section, we'll discuss political cartoons in greater depth.

### Political Cartoons

Don't let the word "cartoon" mislead you. Political cartoons are often just as contentious as written opinion pieces, if not more so. Cartoonist Rob Rogers would certainly agree. He was fired from his job at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2018 after 25 years of work and believes he was fired for making fun of Donald Trump. He shared his experience with The New York Times, drawing a cartoon of a big hand erasing his work and writing, "The paper may have taken an eraser to my cartoons. But I plan to be at my drawing table every day of this presidency."



13. Do you think that the firing of a cartoonist differs from the firing of a columnist? Explain your answer.

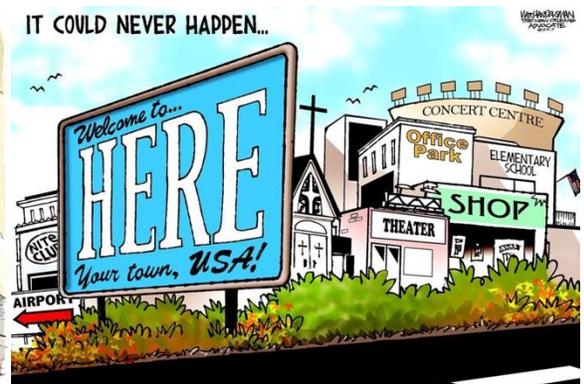
One of the earliest political cartoons in the US was created and published by Benjamin Franklin in 1754. The cartoon shows a snake cut into 8 segments, representing 8 colonies or regions that made up the United States. "N.E." is New England, "N.Y." is New York, etc.



Franklin's simple, visual message beside a written opinion piece encouraged the colonies to stand together during the Seven Year's War against the French and their Native American allies. The cartoon later became used during the Revolution, when the colonies had to unite to win their independence from Britain.

14. Why do you suppose Franklin chose a snake to represent the colonies instead of another animal or symbol?
15. Today, the United States is divided in many different ways. Do you think Franklin's message is still relevant today? If you had to re-label the snake for modern times, how would you do it? Explain your answers.

Below are three political cartoons concerning gun violence.

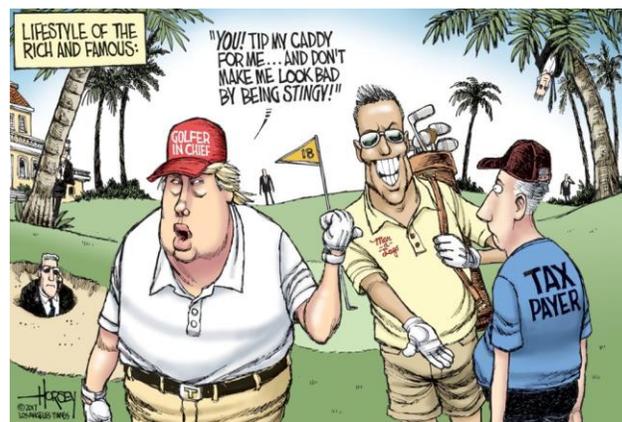


It may be hard to read in the second cartoon, but the boy is holding a microphone that says "truth" and his backpack is labelled "Parkland Students". (Parkland is a school that suffered a mass shooting in 2018.) The

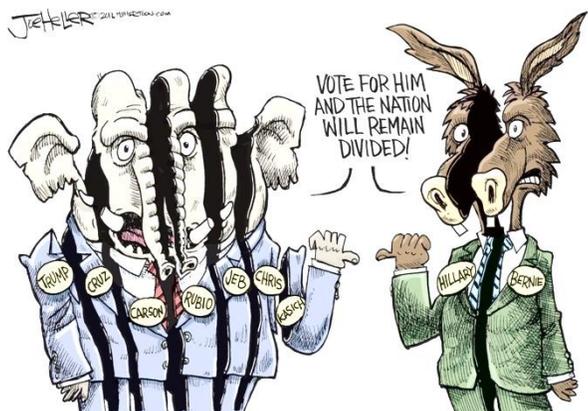
armor says NRA which stands for National Rifle Association. Labelling of symbols is a common tactic for political cartoonists.

16. Choose the cartoon out of these three that you think is the most powerful and explain its statement.
17. Draw your own political cartoon about the gun control debate. You could agree or disagree with the cartoonists above. Don't worry about the quality of the drawing—your message is more important. Feel free to use labels to make your point clear.

The 2017 political cartoon to the right has a lot going on. This cartoon is anti-Trump. It depicts an innocent tax payer being forced to pay for the President's luxurious lifestyle. His hat reads "golfer in chief", criticizing him for spending so much time golfing as opposed to doing his duties to the country. There are five secret service agents hidden in this picture, perhaps placed to emphasize that this is no ordinary "rich and famous" person but a person who is President. Looking closely, the caddy's shirt says "Mar-a-Lago," which is the name of Trump's resort in Florida. The caddy represents how the resort collects money for Trump from his wealthy supporters.



There are some commonly used symbols that usually go unlabeled. A donkey represents Democrats and an elephant represents Republicans. (Democrats and Republicans are political parties that lean conservative and liberal respectively.) The US is sometimes represented by the character of Uncle Sam or Lady Liberty.



18. Analyze the political cartoon to the left, using the above analysis as an example. Identify the cartoonist's opinion and comment on the details you see that serve to support this opinion.
19. Draw a political cartoon about the same issue that you chose to write an opinion article on (number 12). It can be funny or serious, and again, don't worry about the quality of the drawing itself!

*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*

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 Sources: <https://www.wikipedia.org>, <https://www.poets.org>, <https://www.pressherald.com>, <https://www.nytimes.com>,  
<https://www.usatoday.com>