

Political Satire: What Makes the Political Parties So Funny?

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Rationale

Why is it we understand important issues when someone makes fun of it? Think about the presidential campaign with Sarah Palin in 2008 running for vice president. Many of us got a good laugh by watching how Tina Fey portrayed Sarah Palin on Saturday Night Live. Fey had Palin's personality, looks and accent down to a tee. The issues that were covered in the satirical skits were sexism in politics during the 2008 campaign. But one of the most memorable satirical political skits was one that involved McCain and Palin working for QVC in order to get their campaign out there. Campaign advertisements are very costly, so in order to cut some costs, McCain and Palin bought airtime on QVC.¹ By taking a look at this particular skit, I want students to be able to pull out the underlining meaning behind political satires.

By looking at the skits, I want the students to compare the skits with today's political advertisements. I want them to identify the issues and research them in order to make an educated decision on whom to support or what issues are important to them in the here and now. Through this unit, I hope it will lead to a better understanding on how symbols work in literature, how to infer and analyze different types of text, how to analyze satires. Students will create their own political satires in the form of a magazine, an advertisement, a skit and a writing piece.

Background

I teach eighth grade Language Arts at Bailey Middle School in Cornelius, NC. It is located in a suburban area of Mecklenburg County with a population of 1300. I teach about 120 students everyday for five class periods at about 60 minutes for each class period. My classes consist of two honors level classes, one standard plus level class and one inclusion standard plus class. The standard plus and inclusion standard plus classes are a mixture of students who are on and below grade level. The honors classes consist of students who are on and above grade level. I do co-teach my inclusion standard plus class. This unit is for all my levels of eighth grade Language Arts, but it could be modified for English II and English III. For the unit I plan to start with literary satire early in the school year and continue through April. I would like to start with the basics of satire, defining satire, looking at satire with the use of short stories and poetry so students will be able to understand how satire fits into literature. Then we will dive into the political side of satire. We will look at clips from Saturday Night Live, The Colbert Report, and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart then move into novels that are considered

to be political satire. I want the concentration to be on how political satires effect how we look political parties.

Being that this is the age of technology, we are able to find more resources and information today than many were able to do twenty years ago. As I listen to my students in their everyday conversations with each other and staff members, it is evident that they are picking up their information from a variety of resources. Students are willing to question more about something they heard on television or read on the internet than question about what their parents or teaching said. By looking at satire, it will give students an opportunity to question what is real and what the truth is. My students will become consumers of political and satirical knowledge. With use of humor, students will be able to understand, or even remember something, about political parties and the satire writing style.

For the focus of this paper, students will be looking at political satires from many different media and literary forms. They will then create their own political satire. Students will have a choice of writing a political satire essay or writing a script for a political satire commercial. Before students can focus on writing political satires, the students must examine what goes into a satire. We will begin by looking at what satire means literally and how does it affect us. By definition, satire is a literary genre that uses irony, sarcasm, or ridicule in exposing human folly. Satire can be found in graphic and performing arts. In order to understand satire, I will provide examples of satire for students to examine and pick apart the characteristics of each satire. We will classify the three main forms of literary satire: Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean satires.ⁱⁱ

Oldest type of satire is the Menippean satire and it was named for the cynic Menippus. This is considered to be one of the more chaotic and complex forms of literary satire. Menippean satire can be characterized by its criticism of the subject matter and the structure of the world. It also criticizes everything in an abstract way. Dialogue is a major characteristic in this form of satire. The Menippean satire views human folly and evil as a social disease. It deals with mental attitudes; for example stereotypes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another form of literary satire is Horatian satire. It is named after the Roman poet/satirist Horace. This form of satire seeks to criticize, rather than attack. Some of the common characteristics include sarcasm, wit, and exaggeration. Horatian satire is a form of satire that has a softer side. It is sympathetic and kind of tolerant of human foolishness. In a Horatian satire, it seems to ridicule human foolishness rather than attack specific groups or persons.^{iv} This form of satire will make one smile. Stephen Colbert can be connected to Horace and the Greek playwright Sophocles because of “his single-character political satire is unique” to television.^v

The last form of literary satire is Juvenalian satire. This form of satire is named after another Roman satirist Juvenal. Juvenalian satire is much harsher than Horatian satire. It attacks and shows contempt for people. It addresses some sort of evil in society through

scorn and ridicule.^{vi} Laughter and ridicule are used in Horatian satire to make a point, for instance Stephen Colbert, but the Juvenalian satirist will attack to make a point like the writers for The Onion. Many popular books use this form of satire.

After students have examined the three forms of literary satires, students will move into the political satire. I am treating this as if the students do not know anything but the basics about politics and political parties. We will do a brief overview of political parties just to make sure the students know what a democratic and republican is. From talking about the September 2012, Charlotte Democratic National Convention with my students, the majority of them know the basics and has formed opinions about what political party they support. The problem will be to get them to form their own opinions and ones that are not influenced by their parents. It is important for them to be able to form their own opinions so they can further research them and discover facts on their own. I'm hoping that this could provide research topics for their research papers in the future.

After we look at the basics of political parties, we will venture into political satire. Molly Ivins once wrote: "Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful."^{vii} This statement fits with political satire because satire is the one way the little person can communicate to a larger, more powerful audience and a way for everyone to understand what events are of major concern to the population. Political satire has been a powerful weapon to make the most unaware person become aware and inspire change, politically and socially. It is a subgenre of satire that is intended to get laughs by mocking politics, politicians, and political affairs. Many times, it is used as a political and social commentary. We will look at how newspapers or magazines include a satirical political cartoon in their editorial sections or even in the Sunday comics sections. We will examine editorials and political cartoons from local newspapers, like the Charlotte Observer or even the Huntersville Herald. The intention of these cartoons is to mock, or even exaggerate, politician and political topics. We will also look at how the media uses political satire to inform the general public what the issues are. With the "emergence of satire news," we need to look at how we understand what the faults are in the electoral system.^{viii} I will include skits from Saturday Night Live in particular the skits that deal with Sarah Palin. I will also in segments from The Colbert Report and The Daily Show. We will consider how these programs are considering a "gateway for greater civic engagement for young people."^{ix} I want the students to understand why they are passionate about their beliefs and the connections to the political parties. Once students start to see how political satires are used, we will move into political satires on paper. We will look at experts from The Onion and editorials from the Charlotte Observer or other newspapers. After we look at the nonfiction text structure, we will move into fictional text.

While looking at all the forms of literary satire and political satire, students will create their own political satire using one of their selected novels for their final assessment. Students will have a choice to read one of the following: Gulliver's Travels, Lord of the Flies, parts of the Hunger Games trilogy, and Animal Farm. While working

with my inclusion class so far this year, I have noticed that they struggle with reading outside of the classroom and completing reading assignments longer than five pages. So with that class, we will read Animal Farm and we will read the majority of it in class and assign five to ten pages as homework every other night. My other standard plus class also has the same problem, but on a different level. The student in my inclusion class have things that hinder their learning capabilities, for instance ADHD or another learning disability. With my other standard plus class, it is a time management and organization struggle. They will have a choice of Animal Farm or Lord of the Flies to read. Each of the books are on different lexile levels so I can still reach the high flyers in the classroom and challenge those that are on or below reading grade level. Their political satire will include an advertisement and a written piece, either a script or essay. Students will have to identify the major issue that the author is trying to make us aware of during that time period. They will create a political satire using the political satire from their books issues.

Strategies

As I teach Language Arts all year, I would start this unit early in the year so we can build on previous knowledge of literary terms and devices from the past years. One of the main focuses, or skills, in eighth grade Language Arts is how we make inferences while we read a given text. By looking at the four types of satires, students will have make inferences on about the issues and political parties. Making inferences is a weak skill for my students so many of the activities and strategies will have that focus in mind. We will also build on note taking skills. Many of my students do not know how to take good notes. They are used to a teacher or tutor telling them that if something is in bold, highlight it. They have no idea why they are highlighting a term or idea. They are just doing it because that's what they were told to do. In the first week of school, I will teach my students how to do Cornell notes. We have been working on using different graphic organizers to take notes on such as a fill in the blank handout that guides the students in the reading of an informational text and helps them see what the important items are in the selection. For learning satire, it will be a good way for pick apart each type of satire and reflect on what makes it that certain form of satire. Students will complete a self evaluation questionnaire to see how they would grade themselves in the learning process for the notes of the day and for the group work activities, so I can gage them in what they understand or don't understand and how the groups are working or are not working.

The strategies that I will use to utilize instruction:

KWL charts

Tic-Tac-Toe Board

Think-pair-share

Cornell notes

Socratic seminar

Analyzing literary satires, political satires (written), and political skits (visual)

TP-CASTT

Peer editing and review
Gallery Walk
Venn diagram
Literature Circles^x

Students are required to keep a three ring binder for my class. Some of the work will be done in their binders individually and also in groups or partners. This is an easy way for students to keep the information organized and to keep themselves organized. They put everything they receive from me and the work that they do in class into the appropriate sections of the binder. This also helps the students to review the material on an as needed basis.

Activities

Activities one and two: Students will go to Pew Research online and complete the political parties quiz at home.^{xi} I will show them how to get to the website and where to find the quiz. Students will also be given a handout with the instructions about how to get to the website and the political parties quiz. Students will print off the results and turn them in for a grade. Upon decisions about political parties, the candidates (presidential and North Carolina governor) and the election, my students seemed to have a good foundation of politics. Now, I can expand their thoughts on politics and political parties by using political satires.

After the 2012 election, I had a mock election for all my classes. Students had a ballot similar to the one voted on from Election Day. The only difference is I included a picture of each presidential candidate with the candidate's name and party affiliation.^{xii} The names on the ballot were Barak Obama (Democrat), Mitt Romney (Republican), and Gary Johnson (Liberation). In the honors classes, Mitt Romney won with 63% of the votes, Barak Obama had 30% of the votes, while Gary Johnson had 7% of the votes. In the standard plus classes, the votes were flipped with Barak Obama winning 75% of the votes, Mitt Romney had 20% of the votes and Gary Johnson had 5% of the votes. After we compared ourselves with the other classes, we compared ourselves with the nation. We learned that Barak Obama obtained 332 electoral votes (62, 611, 250 popular votes) and Mitt Romney obtained 206 electoral votes (59, 134, 475 popular votes).^{xiii} By viewing the website www.politico.com, we were able to click on a state and view the results of that state for the 2012 election.^{xiv}

After we discussed the results between the class and nation, students wrote an one paragraph reflection comparing their class results (class to class), state and nation results (class to state, class to nation). Many of them asked if they could compare their results from the political party quiz to the mock election. It was allowed. The last part of the assignment was to evaluate political advertisements from 2010. We viewed "The 2010 Election in 120 Seconds."^{xv} After the video, we evaluated the video using a tic-tac-toe board. On the board were nine items. We discussed all nine items and used them to evaluate the video. Using the same website, www.rollcall.com/news/-2002256-1.html, students had to pick a 2010 political advertisement and complete the tic-tac-toe board for homework. With the tic-tac-toe board, students picked three out of nine items to

complete. They had to pick from three across, down or diagonal. The topics range from cost, spread of ideas, use of technology/social media to debates, theme.^{xvi} After viewing their selected video, students will use the tic-tac-toe board to write a three paragraph evaluation of the political advertisement.

Activities three and four: Students will begin reading their literature circle novels at home. They may chose from Animal Farm by George Orwell, Gulliver's Travels by Jonathon Swift, selections from the Hunger Games trilogy by Susanne Collins, and Lord of the Flies by William Golding. Before we get into the basics of satire, I need to know where my students are in terms of politics and political parties. I need to know what pre-conceived ideas that the students already have about politics and political parties. Items needed: copies of pre-test, think-pair-share, gallery walk. I will give a pre-test from Pew online or another credible source to see what they already know.^{xvii} Students will think- pair-share with two other students to compare and contrast answer from the pre-test. A think-pair-share helps students to check their answers and/or thoughts with a person that is next to them. It can also help a student to think outside of the box on answers to the pre-test so they can formulate their own ideas and opinions about politics and political parties. We return together as a class, students will be able to share their ideas that they gained from the think-pair-share.^{xviii}

As a class, we will discuss the answer to the pre-test. From what we learned from the class discussion and pre-test, students will create a list of characteristics or beliefs for each party. Depending on the day and how the students behave, I would like to break up into small groups and let students pick out the political parties out of a bowl. I want to include the democratic and republican parties of course, but I want to include the parties that are not talked about in the debates. As I was talking with my students, a majority of them had no idea that other political parties even existed. They thought there was only two choices for presidency.^{xix} I would then use the technology in our classroom to research characteristics of their chosen political party. Students will have also have group roles to fulfill. Students will participate in a gallery walk to learn more about the characteristics of the political parties. When the activity is over, the students will have a ticket out the door. Students will have to write three sentences describing the top three characteristics or beliefs of their assigned party.

Activities five and six: Introduce satire. Items needed: format for Cornell notes, KWL chart, power point on satire and the forms of satire, and You Tube. Before we start the unit on political satire, as a class we will create an ongoing KWL chart. A KWL chart is a way for students to preview a topic without being frustrated about not knowing anything about a given topic. We start with the K which what do the students already know about the topic. This is where the students can list what they think it means and connections to the topic. Next we will move to the W of the KWL chart. The W stands for what do you want to know about the topic. In this section, students will list questions about what they feel like they need to know more about. The questions can range from something they hear about from the K category to something they heard their parents or

other teachers talk about dealing with the topic of politics. As we look at the video clips and the power point, students will fill in the L section of the KWL chart. The L section refers to what they learn about the topic, in this case politics. The L section will be ongoing throughout the unit because students will be able to add what they learned to the L section of the KWL chart. The KWL chart will be hanging up in the class room so students can write what they learned on the chart as we work through the lesson.^{xx}

To introduce satire, I will show a couple of clips from the trailer to The Campaign. Last year as an EOG review, I showed clips from Will Ferrell movies that sounded how he was using literary elements in his acting. At this age, they love Will Ferrell and can connect to his style of humor which helps them to see what the big picture really is. Well, this is the same idea behind that. The trailers for The Campaign show Will Ferrell and Zack Galifianakis in their own campaign ads a political position. After viewing the clips, we will discuss what makes them appealing to the audience. Of course the students will comment on the fact that they are funny and how it relates to the presidential campaign (loosely relates), but it will be a good way to introduce satire.

I will have created a power point presentation on the different types of literary satire and political satire. Students will use Cornell notes to define each type of satire, the characteristics and how do we analyze it. The students will be responsible for identifying the types of satire by reading a passage and using the given characteristic in order to figure out the correct form of satire. I will model to the students first how to figure out what type of satire it is. I will walk through how to find the characteristic in order to determine what kind of satire is in front of them. Students will receive a paragraph of each of the four types of satire. They will need to decide what the paragraph is. Is it Horatian, Juvenalian, Menippean or a straight forward political satire? This will be a homework assignment.

Activity seven: quiz day. Items needed: five question quiz and You Tube clips. Students will take a five question quiz on what we learned in days three and four. The questions will be based off of the satire power point from the previous two days. The quiz will start basic with having the students describe what satire is and the three forms of satire. Then students will have to identify what type of satire is used in a given passage. They will need to decide if it is Horatian, Juvenalian, Menippean, or just a political satire. They will have to find clues within the text to prove their selection of satire choice. We will go over the homework from the night before. For students to get a good idea of what political satire is currently, I will use clips from The Daily Show with John Stewart and The Colbert Report. We will focus on how the characters create the satire and the humor used. We will also focus on how Colbert is using pop culture to show what is happening in the now with politics. I want the students to realize that “our democracy is in a tough spot now, when corporations are exercising increasing power over government, and that Colbert captures this moment as they did.”^{xxxi} Students are already discovering what has happened to the economy and are questioning how the problem can be solved. By looking at John Stewart and Stephen Colbert, we can discuss why the television pick

those topics or political figures to bring light to the situation. We will look at the question how does humor help the population to understand important political issues? We will also begin talking about writing a political satire for the final assessment.^{xxii}

Activities eight and nine: Continue discussing You Tube clips. Items needed: print political satire advertisements, Venn diagram, and You Tube clips. In these activities, I want to know what their prior knowledge about politics are and how they feel about them. We will create a web map with politics in the center and create branches with what the students know about politics and the feeling(s) they get from when they heard the word politics. The purpose of a web map is to get the students thinking about words or ideas that can describe a main idea or topic. The main idea is in the center of the web, and the ideas from the branches of the webbing. From the branches, the students can stem off other ideas that relate to both the main idea and branches. The students will use the web map to help them focus on ideas for their political satire video. Using a Venn diagram, students will review the You Tube clips from John Stewart and Stephen Colbert. They will focus on what makes them similar and different. They will look at what each issue(s) they focused on for their satires.

I will introduce the Sarah Palin political satire skits from Saturday Night Live as well as a few print resources such as The Onion, “The White House,” and “McGuffin’s The Untrue News.” Students will answer the following prompts in their groups about their political satire: 1. what is the format of your political satire? 2. In a paragraph, describe your news source’s web site. Does the source use convincing language to show the credibility or is it a “spoof”? How user friendly is the source? What are the “headlines”? 3. Does your web site convey a political or partisan bias? If so, what are the two examples? 4. What type of satire does this source seem to use the most? 5. Who or what are the main targets of political satire in this source? 6. Choose a story or article from your website and evaluate it for its satirical effectiveness. Is it funny? Why or why not? Does it ‘ridicule, expose, or discredit’ its target? If so, how? If not, how does it fail in its efforts?^{xxiii}

Students will share their findings with the class in a gallery walk or group presentation. A gallery walk consist of the students moving from group to group learn about the other groups topics.^{xxiv} Each group will have a reporter. It is the reporters’ job to present, or teach, the visiting groups about their group topic. The reporter is considered to be the expert of the group, even though everyone will work together on the research of their political satire example. Students will move from group to group investigating and taking notes on each group’s political satire example. Students will be moving in five minute segments to each group. Students will create a list of the characteristics that make the skits a political satire. Students will compare two campaign advertisements of today. Then they will design a political satire advertisement. It will be a print ads and a video advertisement. Students will work in groups of three to four students. It must be a presidential campaign either democratic or republican, and must have the characteristics of the chosen party and satire represented. Students will have a week to complete the

assignment. It will be counted as an informal assessment which is 45 percent of their grade.

Activities ten, eleven and twelve (possibly thirteen): begin literature circles. Items needed: chosen literature book, guided questions. Students will meet with their literature circles for the first time. Literature circles are when groups of students read the same passage, novel or text to participate in a mutual reading experience. Based on the previous stated common core standards of the unit, students will take on a variety of roles throughout the reading experience. The students are able to select novels based on individual preferences, or I will help to select on the based on the demands of the text. For example, students will pick their top two choices of the four books. If the majority of the class picks Animal Farm, I will give the first ten people that choice then the last ten students will get their second choice book. Overall, the purpose of literature circles is to provide the students with opportunities for students to interact with one another as they read, respond to, and interpret a common text.^{xxv} The groups will be chosen based off grades, reading and writing levels, and previous self evaluations on completed group work assignments. Their groups are decided by which novel they choose. We will also mix up the groups so one day a groups will consist of a representative of each book. Each book is considered a political satire and all have the same theme. Students will be able to share thoughts and ideas with each other and develop support and an argument for their political satire magazines. They will be able to use the other books to support their opinion section in their magazines. Student will be reading their chosen novels when we first start the unit. They will have to choose one of the following: Gulliver's Travels, selected parts of the Hunger Games trilogy by Susanne Collins, Lord of the Flies, and Animal Farm by George Orwell. As the students read their chosen novel, they will have a choice of graphic organizers to use while they read. Students can choose from tiered graphic organizer, flower of detail graphic organizer, cubing graphic organizer, and complex cluster graphic organizer. With the tiered graphic organizer, students will pick the level of difficulty of describing the elements of fiction in their novel. A flower of detail graphic organizer will be used to promote a depth of understand when thinking about the theme of the book. It can also be used to go into more depth on the element of fiction in their novels. With cubing graphing organizer, students will have to answer the questions describe it, compare it, associate it, analyze it, apply it and argue for or against it. They will record what they read on their graphic organizer every day. Weekly, students will have to respond in a double journal entry. A double-entry journal is used by creating a two-column with a student-selected passage in one column and the student's response in the second column. For example, possibilities for entries may include asking questions of the text, forming personal responses and global connections, interpretation of the text itself, and reflecting on the understanding of the text. The purpose of using double-entry journals in the classroom is to assist in organizing textual elements and responses noted during their reading. It is a way for them to generate support that can be built into a piece of writing that can be used at a later time; such as their political satires.^{xxvi} They will be given a literary focus each week. One week might deal with characterization, setting, symbols, conflict or theme. Students will have to include a quote

from the text and make a connection to it. Students will begin creating a political satire magazine for their novel.

Activities twelve through seventeen: work on magazine. Items needed: chosen literature book, guided questions, double entry journals, television, DVD player, and computer lab. Students will present their political satire videos to the class. We will view two to three videos a day. Students will be assessed according to a rubric. They will be graded on how well they interpreted the ideas of the campaign advertisements and political satires, the script, how they incorporated the previous assignments into the video, performance of the group members in the video and the video process. Students will go to the computer lab to work on their political satire magazines. Students will use a combination of Microsoft Publisher and Microsoft Word to complete the magazine. Each magazine will contain a map of the setting, a political satire advertisement and a written political satire dealing with a character or issue from their book, an editorial, advertisements dealing with what the characters need (I.e. food, shelter, etc.), an article from the point of view of the main character, an advertisement from the antagonist point of view, and other items that the group feels acceptable to the magazine. Even though this is a group project, students will be assigned roles to insure that the magazine is completed by the due date. The group roles have been established from the beginning of the year so the students so the students know what the roles are right from the beginning of the group work. Each group will have a leader that leads the groups and communicates the tasks to the group members. Each group will have a note taker where the student will dictate the conversations and come up with a conclusion for the notes. A timekeeper will be present in each group in order to keep track of the time and to help the leader make sure everyone is on task. With the political magazines, a checker is needed. The role of the checker is to check for grammatical errors and mistakes in the magazine. They will also check the data to make sure it is appropriate to the assignment. Each group will have a reporter that will present the information from the magazine to the class. Each group will have a gopher to go and get the supplies that are needed for the group. The students will have a wild care member in their group. The wild card member will stand in the place of an absent group member. If the note taker is absent, the wild card will fill in for the note taker for the day. Students can work on the magazine as a group or assign individuals within the group certain pages to work on and complete then assemble the magazine as a whole. This will be the final assessment to this unit. I hope this unit will challenge my students to think outside of the box when it comes to politics and political parties. I want them to be able to research information and make an decision for themselves, and I hope this unit helps them to do that.

Endnotes

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Bellantoni, Christina. "The 2010 Election in 120 Seconds." Roll Call. <http://www.rollcall.com/news/-200256-1.html> (accessed November 1, 2012). This website was provided to us by our professor. It provides great videos to have the students analyze and evaluate.

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Farhi, Paul. "Stephen Colbert: A Study in Political Satire." The Washington Post. July 11, 2012. <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/ae/tv-radio/stephen-colbert-a-study-in-political-satire-644187/> This was a good website to see how Stephen Colbert became a popular political satirist over the years.

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Center for the People and the Press." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. <http://www.people-press.org/political-party-quiz/> (accessed November 2, 2012). This is where I found the political party quiz for my students. It was recommended by Dr. Roberts.

Prososki, Lisa. "Political Analysis through Satire." NOW Classroom. http://www.pbs.org/now/printable/classroom_satire_print_.html. September 26, 2012. This was a fantastic website that gave lots of example of print text. It also was helpful to see how political satires can be incorporated in any classroom.

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<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5h6bctg7-NRMhhdMa50LeNRWb7Tpa>. Retrieved 2008-11-06. This website was good because it helped me to see how the clips of the skits can be used in the classroom.

"SpringBoard Instructional Strategies Index: Reading Strategies." In *SpringBoard English Textual Power Level Three*. United States of America: College Board, 2011. 406-412. This is a wonderful resource that includes lessons and multiple learning activities. I used it to help define learning strategies.