Cartoonists use 5 main elements to convey their point of view.

- symbolism – using an object to stand for an idea.
- captioning & labels – used for clarity and emphasis.
- analogy – a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics.
- irony – the difference between the way things are & the way things are expected to be.
- exaggeration – overstating or magnifying a problem or a physical feature or habit: big nose, bushy eyebrows, large ears, baldness, etc.

Examples of Symbols Used in Political Cartoons

- peace – dove, olive branch, victory sign, scales of justice.
- United States – Uncle Sam, flag, stars and stripes, shield, lady liberty.
- Democrats – donkey.
- Republicans – elephant.
- death – vulture, skeleton w/ shroud, skull and crossbones, grim reaper.
- love – heart, Cupid, Venus
- money – dollar bill or dollar sign.
Steps to analyzing a political cartoon:

1) Identify the characters, symbols, and objects in the cartoon.
2) Look for clues and details that would give further meaning.
3) Identify the main idea of the cartoon by reading any captions and by putting the message in your own words.
4) Identify any bias the cartoonist might have (what side of the issue is he/she on?).

Questions to answer:

1) What is the event or issue that inspired the cartoon?
2) What background knowledge do you need to understand the message?
3) Are there any real people in the cartoon?
4) Did the artist use caricatures? (caricature: a picture, description, or imitation of a person or thing in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a desired effect)
5) Are there any symbols in the cartoon? What do they represent?
6) What is the cartoonist’s opinion about the topic portrayed?
7) Does the caption help you understand the message? How?
8) Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist’s message? Why?