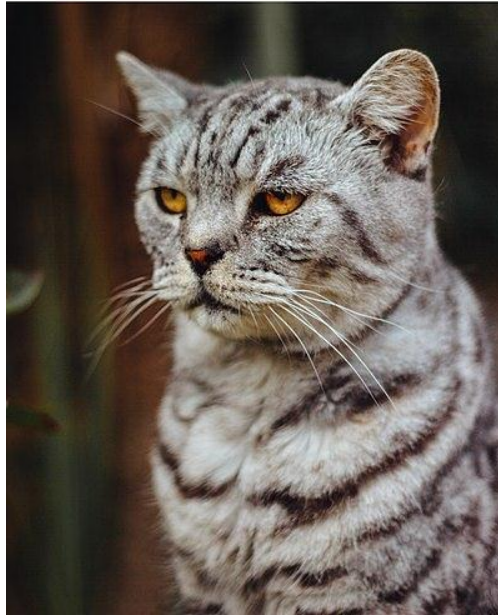


Cartooning the Age of Flight

Warming Up

If you are like most young people, you have seen thousands and thousands of Internet memes. These are the images and short text combos that litter the Internet and social media.

TFW it's Monday, and you now
have to wake up early for 5 days
after a weekend of staying up.



Example of a "Twitter-style" Internet meme;
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Example_of_a_%22Twitter-style%22_internet_meme.jpg

If you know these memes, then you know that they are frequently both funny and poignant. They often convey messages in ways that other mediums cannot.

Can you think of your favorite Internet memes? Discuss these with your class, and keep a running tally of class favorites.

- What makes these memes interesting and effective?
- How would you present these memes if you could only use text?
- Would they be as effective as just text? Why?

Getting Started

In the early years of the 20th century, it seemed to many in the developed world that progress, especially technological progress, was on the march. In the second half of the previous century, engineers mastered steam technology and captured the power of electricity in lightbulbs and electric streetcars. In this time, industrialists rolled out one marvelous invention after another: railways, steamships, the electric telegraph, steel construction, and many more. Ordinary citizens watched as these inventions transformed their lives and the world around them.

Countries in Europe and the United States saw these technological inventions as tools to engage in competition with each other. They competed for markets, land, and even for national status. Each country wanted to prove that it was on the top of the pack or superior to others in some way. As these countries entered the Age of Flight, their progress in developing flying machines became the measuring stick they used to engage in this competition.

Newspapers eager to sell copy helped stoke the flames of this competition and published article after article on the progress and setbacks each nation experienced. The most biting form of this news coverage, however, was not the print, but rather the editorial cartoons. These drawn scenes frequently depicted caricatured representations of nations like Germany, France, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States competing over mastery of the air. These editorial cartoons were splashed across the pages of different newspapers, encouraging citizens in these countries to engage in international competition.

Imagine that you are a young editorial cartoonist looking to make a name for yourself in the publishing world of the early 20th century. Now that all the U.S. newspapers are looking to publish stories on the Wright brothers and their new invention, you feel that this is the time to draft some interesting cartoons for publication. You just need to find the right topic. What topic will you choose to address? What message can you send with your cartoon?



Wilbur Wright and Orville Wright papers, 1809-1979, Library of Congress;
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=198>

Real-World Topics

- Messages can be conveyed in a number of different ways and in different mediums.
- Some ideas are more easily conveyed in graphic format, such as in editorial cartoons.

Readings:

The following list of readings and sources should be used to complete the activity.

Books:

- Russell Freedman, *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane* (New York: Holiday House, 1991).

Archival Sources:

Scrapbooks: January 1902–December 1908

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=14>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=56>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=76>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=86>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=87>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=89>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=97>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=133>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=160>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=213>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=214>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=219>

Scrapbooks: January 1909–December 1909

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=37>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=84>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=101>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=126>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=198>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=273>

Scrapbooks: January 1910–December 1913

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05004/?sp=6>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05004/?sp=53>

Scrapbooks: December 1910–March 1914

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=3>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=4>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=45>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=80>

Exploring the Power and History of Editorial Cartoons

Like so many technological innovations, editorial cartoons were a product of the modern age. The earliest cartoons emerged in the 1600s and 1700s. But it was really in the 19th century that editorial cartooning entered a golden age. It was during this period that printing technology made it possible to reproduce images economically. It was also at this time that the circulation of newspapers printed in large cities around the world reached historically high levels. These two developments combined to create an environment in which editorial cartoons and cartoonists flourished.

Review some of these brief histories of editorial cartooning to learn more about what they are, how they work, and why they are effective.

- [A Brief History of Political Cartoons](#)
- [The Norman Rockwell Museum, Cartooning: Political](#)
- [Liza Donnelly, "Editorial Cartooning, Then and Now," *Medium*](#)

Activity: Drawing an Editorial Cartoon

Like many editorial cartoonists in the early 20th century, you work as an independent artist, selling your art to various publications. You have noticed a trend in editorial cartooning since the Wright brothers became popular in the last few years. Cartoonists are now eager to depict the Wright brothers, their competitors, or airplanes in general in satirical or informative cartoons. Knowing that the idea of flight is exciting to the public, publications around the world have been eager to print high-quality cartoons when they find them.

This, you feel, is your opportunity to shine. Here are the steps you need to follow to produce a high-quality editorial cartoon that newspapers will gladly pay you to publish:

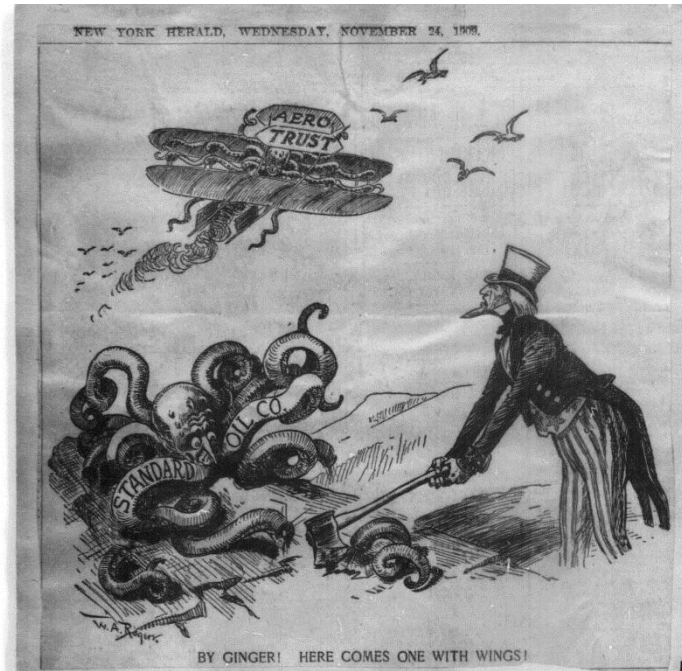
1. Determine the historical context. Select the time period for your cartoon. You will want to be as specific as possible, such as right after a particular airshow or after the death of a particular historical figure. Remember, this cartoon will be published in a specific historical context and should be understandable to people living in that context.
2. Research the competition. Review the cartoons from the scrapbooks linked above. These will provide you with examples of how different cartoonists depicted different scenes and events.
3. Draft your cartoon. Do your best to draw a cartoon that is within your abilities as an artist. Not everyone will be able to create sophisticated and complex editorial cartoons. Remember, however, that the goal is not to produce a great work of art. Rather, the goal is to communicate an idea or message about a historical event in graphic form effectively.
4. Summarize your cartoon. After creating the cartoon, write a short explanation of your cartoon. This should serve as a roadmap for those interested in understanding the meaning of the cartoon and its historical context. This summary should be one or two paragraphs in length.

To better understand your role as an editorial cartoonist, consider the following cartoon and analysis.

Uncle Sam and the Aero Trust

Beginning in the late 19th century, a few small industrial companies in the United States emerged as huge corporations. One of the largest of these very large corporations was the oil company established by John Rockefeller, Standard Oil. As the gasoline-powered internal combustion became more important in the developed world, oil companies like Standard Oil became more powerful. By the early 20th century, Standard Oil had become a multinational corporation with its arms in several different industries. It owned the land with the oil, the equipment to extract the oil, the railways that carried the oil, and the refineries that refined the oil. This meant that Standard Oil could manipulate the economic market in a way that made it impossible for others to compete.

American reformers in the 20th century realized that the power of Standard Oil and other huge corporations was a problem. These reformers decided that these large corporations, often called trusts, had to be broken apart. President Theodore Roosevelt (1901 – 1909) became a major champion for these trust-busting reformers. It was during this period that the Wright brothers and their competitors began racing to create airplane companies that had the potential to become the next large corporation.



Wilbur Wright and Orville Wright papers, 1809–1979, Library of Congress; <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=273>

In this editorial cartoon published by the *New York Herald* in 1909, Uncle Sam is shown chopping up an octopus labeled Standard Oil Co. This scene is a reflection of the attempts being made by reformers to limit the power and reach of large trusts like Standard Oil. But as Uncle Sam swings at this octopus, he notices an airplane flying above. At the controls is another octopus; and on the wings it says Aero Trust. As he sees this airplane, Uncle Sam exclaims, “By Ginger! Here comes one with wings!” The suggestion in this cartoon is that a new and more difficult-to-control trust was emerging in the form of airplane companies.

Reflect

Consider the following reflection prompts to use for a class discussion:

- How are early 20th-century editorial cartoons different from cartoons produced today?
- Why are editorial cartoons a more effective medium than just text?
- In what ways are editorial cartoons a less effective medium for conveying complex ideas?
- What did you learn about editorial cartooning in this activity?