

LESSON: No Laughing Matter: Editorial Cartoons And HIV/AIDS

Overview

Students often use a variety of mediums to express their voices about a serious issue. In this lesson, the medium they are encouraged to use is the editorial cartoon. The editorial cartoon is selected as the medium here since some cartoons use humor and fear simultaneously—laughing at what scares us takes some of its power away. At the same time, students are required to reflect about facts they feel other students should realize about AIDS in order to produce their cartoons.

The cartoons in this lesson were drawn from a collection that was published in 1992 in a book entitled: *Cartooning AIDS Around the World* (Eds. Dr. Maury Forman and David Horsey). In this lesson, youth are asked to first discuss the sample cartoons and then create their own cartoons for an updated collection that could potentially be published by their class/school.

Objectives:

- Examine how editorial cartoons can reflect social perceptions of HIV/AIDS
- Design and create an editorial cartoon for contemporary perceptions

Level: High School

Time: 1-2 class periods

Preparation and Materials:

- Teacher Reference: "HIV Infection and AIDS: An Overview"
- Teacher Reference: "AIDS & HIV—Questions and Answers"
- Background Info on HIV/AIDS Epidemic in US, Kaiser Family Foundation, Sept. 2009
- Basic Statistics
- Cartoon Discussion Guide Handout
- Johnny and Sue, by Joel Pett
- AIDS Doesn't Discriminate, by Joel Pett
- Chaperone, by Milt Priggee
- Protection, by Chris Britt
- Romeo and Juliet, by David Horsey
- The New Sexual Revolution, by Steve Greenberg
- Paper, pens, pencils, markers

Introduction

1. To begin, review the facts. Ask students what they know about HIV/AIDS, including its transmission. Responses may include, but are not limited to:
 - HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the sexually transmitted infection that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).
 - HIV breaks down the immune system, making the body vulnerable to infections.
 - HIV can be transmitted through blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. That means HIV can be spread through unprotected vaginal or anal sex, sharing drug needles, and from mother to baby (through breast milk).

- HIV may have no visible symptoms for up to 10 years. A blood test is the only way to tell if someone is infected.

For a teen-friendly presentation of basic information about “HIV and AIDS, you might want to check out Just The Facts,” produced by our Canadian neighbors. References include resources from the US as well as Canada and UK. You may wish to distribute copies of this short piece to students for reference.

Teacher references include: “HIV Infection and AIDS: An Overview,” from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, available at www.niaid.nih.gov, AIDS & HIV—Questions and Answers,” from Planned Parenthood, available at (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hiv-aids-4264.htm>), background Info on HIV/AIDS Epidemic in US, Kaiser Family Foundation, Sept. 2009. Also, Basic Statistics from CDC.

2. Briefly send students to the interactive timeline from the Kaiser Family Foundation, at HIV/AIDS Policy, or select your own facts. Focus on: since initial warnings of the disease in 1981, how many people are living with HIV/AIDS today?

EDITORIAL CARTOONS: WHAT ARE THEY?

An editorial cartoon is “an illustration or comic strip containing a political or social message [...] Most editorial cartoons use visual metaphors and caricatures to explain complicated political situations, and thus sum up a current event with a humorous picture”

Editorial cartoons, like the selections used in this lesson, can capture public perception—and perhaps even emotional response—to complex issues, including HIV/AIDS.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL CARTOONS

Tell students that they will be looking at a number of editorial cartoons about HIV/AIDS. Encourage them to examine each cartoon carefully.

Check out a teacher’s cartoon discussion guide regarding each of the sample cartoons.

Activity

CREATING THE CARTOON

- Distribute the paper, pens, pencils, and markers to students. Have students work together or have each student design and create her/his own editorial cartoon about HIV/AIDS. Point out that they do not have to be a terrific artist to create a cartoon.
- Remind them that a cartoon like *AIDS Doesn’t Discriminate* didn’t even have any people shown in it. Stick figures will be fine if they are uncomfortable drawing characters.
- Encourage students to be creative, and remind them that like the examples they’ve seen, editorial cartoons can range from funny to scary, from simple to complex, and from a single cell to a whole strip. But they all have something important to say!

DISCUSSION

Have students share their cartoon ideas with the class. Before showing their creation, ask the students to first write and then later share verbally with the class the message they were trying to convey with their cartoon. Ask them to explain why they decided on that message and how they thought their cartoon idea could help convey that message.

Some cartoons use humor and fear simultaneously—laughing at what scares us takes some of its power away. Ask class to comment on the humorous content of the editorial cartoons dealing with HIV/AIDS. Are they funny? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

The class could select a group of cartoons that they would like to assemble into a comic book on HIV/ AIDS. They could create a cover for their book, make hard copies of this book and/or create an electronic copy and distribute it on their school website to other teens in their school or community.

Assessment

Assessment can be based on the cartoon the student creates and his/her explanation of their rationale in creating this particular cartoon.