

# Read Like This: Using Informational Text Strategies -- Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

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**Background:** Railroad owners held extensive power and fortune in the 1870s in America. They used shady practices to increase their personal fortunes and win over their rivals. They used their economic power to get their way politically, and forced state and federal legislatures to increase their subsidies, give them more land, and protect them from taxes and regulations. Source: [U.S. History – Evidence 2: Frank Bellew, "The American Frankenstein," 1874](#)

Examine the political cartoon below to figure out what it is saying about Frankenstein and about America in the 1870s.

## The American Frankenstein



Agriculture, commerce, and manufacture are all in my power," My interest is the higher law of American politics."

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

- Symbolism – using an object to stand for an idea.
- Exaggeration – overstating or magnifying a problem or a physical feature or habit.
- Captioning & labels for clarity and emphasis.
- Analogy – a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics.
- Irony – the difference between the way things are and the way things are expected to be.

Use the guiding questions on the following page to analyze the political cartoon.

1. Examine the cartoon carefully. Find the portion of the cartoon that most stands out. Most often, this will be a *caricature*, which is an exaggeration or distortion of a person or object with the goal of providing a comic effect.
  - a. What is it? Describe it. Is it exaggerated? How?
  - b. What is it doing? Why did the cartoonist draw the caricature this way?
  - c. What other visual details do you see?
  - d. Who might the people represent in the cartoon?
  
2. Think about the title, "The American Frankenstein." From what you know about the story of Frankenstein, the creator and his creature, what might the cartoonist be saying about the train coming to life as a huge monster?
  - a. What is significant about the train coming to life?
  - b. Why is the train so large?
  - c. Why are the people scared?
  - d. So the cartoon seems to be comparing the railroad industry to Frankenstein's creature. If it is an analogy, what unlike things is the cartoon comparing? What characteristics do they share?

3. The caption of the cartoon reads, "Agriculture, commerce, and manufacture are all in my power. My interest is the higher law of American politics."
  - a. What does the caption say about the power of the railroads?
  - b. What is the "train" wielding? What words are written on the paddle?
  - c. What does it mean that the train has the capital (money) to overpower the people in the cartoon?
  - d. What is the cartoonist worrying about concerning the power and money of the railroad industry in 1873?
  
4. What message does the cartoon convey?
  - a. Why did Bellew call the railroad "The American Frankenstein"?
  - b. How does the cartoon convey through its depiction, title and caption the concern that the railroads had gotten too big?
  - c. How does the cartoon depict the abuse of power by railroad officials?
  - d. How does Bellew's use of Frankenstein's creature hone in the point he is making about the railroads?