Cartoon Critique:

Learning to Read Critically

Jayme Causey, Jefferson High School
Linda Christensen, Oregon Writing Project

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Rationale

Before our students ever reach not only our classroom, but any classroom, there is a “secret education” that occurs in their life. They are surrounded by influences that shape the way they see the world and the way they see themselves. These images, portrayed to them from family, siblings, neighborhoods and media, have effects on them that they may not be cognizant of until the later stages of their development. That last influence, media, holds a special place in many of our students’ hearts. From the comics and cartoons they grew up idolizing, to the movies that define their childhoods, students are bombarded with images of other races, genders, cultural backgrounds, and the ideas surrounding these entities. However, once students “grow out” of these cartoons, they rarely take time to revisit them and obtain a deeper understanding the effects of this “literature” on their views about themselves or society. As Ariel Dorfman wrote in *The Empire's Old Clothes*:

> There has also been a tendency to avoid scrutinizing these mass media products too closely, to avoid asking the sort of hard questions that can yield disquieting answers. It is not strange that this should be so. The industry itself has declared time and again with great forcefulness that it is innocent, that no hidden motives or implications are lurking behind the cheerful faces it generates.

Like a Swiss army knife, this unit serves multiple functions. This unit aims to unpack those “secret’ messages using a variety of cartoons, from both past and present, to give students the tools to examine how different stereotypes and cartoons are pushed through under the veil of “child entertainment.” Through the unit, which we will teach at the opening of the year, students will learn the ropes of critical lenses— how to examine the literature for stereotypes, for misrepresentations and for the marginalization of multiple groups.

The content of this unit is a mix of articles, videos, and short stories that both engage students and also well equip them to analyze the world. This unit focuses on four critical lenses that are prevalent in cartoons and comics: gender, race, class, and heteronormativity. While many of these issues are intersectional, both in reality and within the examples, the opening lessons will focus on one issue per lesson as to give the students time to isolate a theme and dissect it.

Students will then use the tools given to them, through their work in each of the lessons and in selected readings and group activities to do independent research to further their understanding and analysis of world of cartoons. The unit builds to a critical essay where students choose to follow their interest—examining the ways women’s bodies have been portrayed over time in cartoons, hypermasculinity of males, heteronormativity in cartoons, roles of people of color, or the role language plays in developing cartoon characters.

In the final lesson, students will create a “take-it-to-the-world” project to demonstrate their knowledge about cartoons. These might include a short story putting a cartoon character in the real world, a report card for cartoons, an animated video critiquing cartoons.

Common Core/State Standards

Reading Literary Texts
RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

RL.9-10.10 By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Reading Informational Texts
RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Writing

W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Suggested Sequence

Opening Act: ● Annotating text ● Popeye meets Ali Baba	1 — 90 minutes
Main Act #1: Hypermasculinity ● Be a Man ● Man of the House ● Hypermasculinity	2 days
Main Act #2: Women and Cartoons	2 days
Main Act #3: People of Color	1 day
Closing Act: Analytical Essay	2-3 days
Out Into the World	2-3 days

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Popeye the Sailor meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves

We chose this Popeye episode as the opening because we want students to think about the frameworks that the media fashions for us gender, class, race, and militarism— the roles of women and men, fat and thin characters, the purely bad guys and the purely good guys, the cleansing role of violence, the contempt for non-Western cultures and languages.

We open by reading aloud a quote from Ariel Dorfman's book *The Empire's Old Clothes,* in which he introduces the idea of the "secret education" that children absorb from cartoons, comics, and "industrially produced fiction." We ask them to write about the quote, silently on their own, then in community with other students. We want the question of a secret education to linger throughout the unit. What do we learn from these seemingly innocent childhood entertainment? (See Annotating Text and the student handout “Dorfman Quote.”)

1
2
3
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5

Annotating Documents/Silent Conversation

1. Read the document silently on your own. Reading is a conversation between the writer and the reader. Sometimes in conversation, you might nod agreement. Other times, you might disagree. Sometimes, the text might confuse you. All of this should be noted in the margin of your paper. Please note:

- Ideas that resonate for you or ideas that you disagree with.
- Places where you learn something new or connect to something you learned previously.
- Think about cartoons you have watched. What did you learn from them?
- Places that make you wonder? What else do you need to know?
- Places that you could use in an essay to argue for or against the topic.
- Strategies that you notice the writer using—quoting experts, using metaphors or anecdotes, alliteration.

2. After you have silently read and marked your text, you will collectively annotate the text with a group. **Silently write first. Write your individual notes on the large paper. Respond to other people's notes.**

3. As a group, discuss the Ariel Dorfman quotes.

Read the following quotes from Ariel Dorfman's author of *The Empire's Old Clothes*, subtitled, "What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds" wrote:

> Industrially produced fiction has become one of the primary shapers of our emotions and our intellect in the twentieth century. Although these stories are supposed to merely entertain us, they constantly give us a secret education. We are not only taught certain styles of violence, the latest fashions, and sex roles by TV, movies, magazines, and comic strips; we are also taught how to succeed, how to love, how to buy, how to conquer, how to forget the past and suppress the future. We are taught more than anything else, how not to rebel.
>
> There has also been a tendency to avoid scrutinizing these mass media products too closely, to avoid asking the sort of hard questions that can yield disquieting answers. It is not strange that this should be so. The industry itself has declared time and again with great forcefulness that it is innocent, that no hidden motives or implications are lurking behind the cheerful faces it generates.

In the margins of the paper, annotate—write your comments—about the two quotes.

Do you agree with Dorfman's position that children receive a "secret education" in the media? Write a commentary about the two quotes.

Popeye the Sailor meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves

As students watch the cartoon, ask them to think about aspects of the secret education children are exposed to in this video. We distribute the handout “charting cartoons” and ask students to fill it out while the watch the 17-minute cartoon.

As they view the episode, they fill in a chart answering these questions. (See page 51.) Students immediately start yelling out the stereotypes because they are so obvious. Early in the unit, I show a Popeye cartoon, “Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves” that depicts all Arabs with the same face, same turban, same body — and they are all thieves swinging enormous swords. At one point in the cartoon, Popeye clips a dog collar on helpless Olive Oyl and drags her through the desert. Later, the 40 thieves come riding through town stealing everything — food, an old man’s teeth, numbers off a clock — even the stripe off a barber pole. The newer cartoons — like *Mulan, Aladdin,* and *Pocahontas* — are subtler and take more sophistication to see through, but if students warm up on the old ones, they can pierce the surface of the new ones as well.

After the video, we ask students to write a commentary and contribute to a theme and evidence wall before we discuss the cartoon. This will be the habitual practice after each lesson. The hope is that students have a collection of commentaries that help seed their essays.

Link to Popeye:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJbj6TBYgf0

Charting Cartoons

As you view “Popeye the Sailor Meets Ali Baba’s Forty Thieves,” fill in the following graph. Note the characters’ actions, appearance (human/animal). Are they in positions of power? Are they servants? What is their “mission” in life? Notice they way their language is characterized. Are they male or female? Are they a positive or a negative character? What do children learn about the racial/ethnic group as they watch the video?

Character	**Appearance: Race/Class/ Body Type**	**Mission in Life**	**Speech/ Language**	**Who has power?**
Main Character Male				
Main Character Female				
Servants				
Enemies				

Commentary: After viewing the film, write a one-page response which answers some of the following questions, using specific details from your chart.

- Who is the reader supposed to root for? Whose lives “count”?
- Who is given voice? Who is silenced? Who is marginalized?
- How does the author use language to develop character?
- What understandings might a child make about men, women, people of color, militarism from this cartoon?

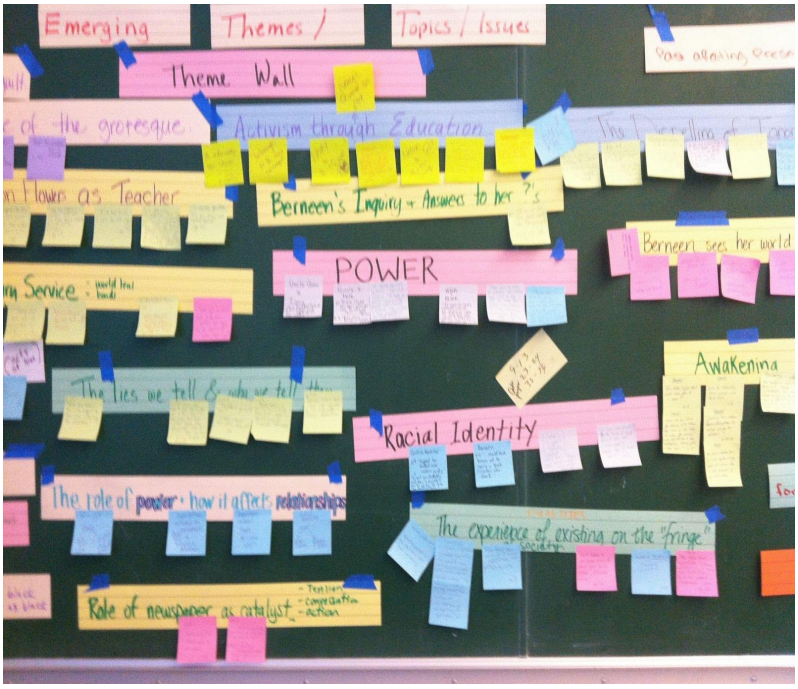
Construct a Theme Wall

To help students understand how to build essays based on their own passions and interests, we will build an “Emerging Theme Wall” as we read. During class discussions, when a student makes an excellent point, the teacher might say, “Let’s put that on the theme and issue wall.” **Add to the theme and evidence wall at the end of each day to capture students’ thinking as you move through the unit.**

Collecting Evidence:

1. At the end of a class discussion about cartoon, students get in small groups and create sentence strips with themes that they see emerging or ideas they want to follow up on as we go through the unit. Some of these will not bear fruit. This is a good real life lesson: Sometimes our original ideas need to be tweaked, amended, or abandoned as we read deeper into a novel, history, or science.

2. Stop the class regularly to collect quotes, arguments and insights on sticky notes and place them under the appropriate theme. In this way, students collect evidence (with page numbers) along the way, instead of flipping back through the play at essay writing time.



Hypermasculinity and the Veil of Power and Strength

The second lesson of our unit focuses on the idea of hypermasculinity and the messages that are portrayed to both young men and women as to the roles and actions they are to serve in our society. In the opening lesson on Popeye, we briefly touch on this idea, but with this lesson we aim to focus in on the impact that the ideal of “manhood” has on the youth. Through the examination of videos, articles, and cartoons clips, students will interact with different viewpoints on what it means to be “a man” and will deconstruct where these ideas come from and what outcomes they aim to produce. Using the same tools (annotating sheet, cartoons chart, commentary) from the previous lesson, students will continue to unlearn their secret education. While our lesson focuses on manhood, student will work to understand the intersectionality of all manhood. How is manhood experienced differently from men of color? Are gay men represented accurately, or at all? Do poor men carry the same societal expectations as rich ones?

Students will start by writing and sharing about what it means to be a man before watching a short video in which males ages 5-50 explain what that phrase means to them. Students take notes and respond. Students then read a narrative and annotate the text to respond or gain a deeper understanding of the concept of manhood and the function it plays in a household. To end, students will watch clips from a number of different cartoon and comic sources in order to explore messages of masculinity aimed towards children and finish by writing a one page commentary about what they’ve learned.

“Be a man”

1. To open, have students do a quick write about what it means to be “a man.” Encourage them to do word associations, recount examples of manhood or manliness, or write about how their definition of manhood was shaped. After a few minutes, have students share their answers in small groups before reporting out to the entire class. On the whiteboard or on poster paper, chart the words they come up with. After compiling a list on the board, ask students, “where do these ideas come from?” Have them share with a table partner before introducing the People.com video discussing the idea of “being a man”

Be A Man

Since the video goes in order from ages 5-50, I stop the video once they reach the 14 year old (roughly the age of our students) and recount the answers given in the video. Words like strength, courage,and toughness pop up repeatedly. The question rises again, where do kids, as early as five, get these messages?

“Man of the House”

2. After the video, hand out the short narrative by Donald Rose where he recounts an episode in his life where his duty as “the man of the house” manifests itself at only 4 years old, when his mother employs him to remove a robin that had flown into the kitchen and hurt itself. Ask the students to refer to their annotation sheet and mark up this text using the same tools. After doing so, discuss the implications of what this means to someone as young as four and how that affects their ideas about masculinity for the rest of their life. As part of their notes, have students write times in their lives where this idea of masculinity or manliness was brought to their attention.

Man of the House

Hypermasculinity

3. Pass out the “Charting Cartoons” sheet (see appendix) and show them the following clips from cartoons to lead our discussion. The first clip comes from the Disney movie “Hercules” in which the lead character “saves” the female lead from a beast even after she denies his help. Ask the students to take notes on what this cartoon is saying about manhood, and by proxy womanhood, while filling out their sheets.

Hercules' First Fight

The next step is to do character silhouettes for Dr. Bruce Banner and his alter-ego The Hulk. The strategy for character silhouettes can be found in this folder. Divide students into groups of 5~ and assign half of the groups to the character of Bruce Banner and the other half to The Hulk. They’ll need to do independent research on each character to find out his traits. Who is he? Where did he come from? What are his “powers”? What’s his goal? Who does he serve? Here is the link to doing character silhouettes with students, take about a full day to do this with students and modify the instructions to fit the assignment as needed.

End by having students talk back to this quote by Bruce Banner,

“Tony Stark and Reed Richards use their genius to save the world every other week. That's how they'll be remembered in history. Meanwhile, I – I who, forgive me, have just as much to contribute – will be lucky if my tombstone doesn't simply say "Hulk Smash."’

Have students write their commentary on the back of the “Charting Cartoon” sheet and keep for their records. The end goal is for students to have a catalog of different critiques and commentaries that they can draw from in order to craft their essay.

The Token Superhero

Read “The Token Superhero” by David Walker and use your annotating tools to mark up the text. (https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BxZsEz4G-Q97S3RZbG4yMEFITkE)

As you read, consider the following: Why is Alonzo’s dad wary of his son joining the Teen Justice Force? How does Alonzo’s belief about being a superhero and the reality of his position differ?

What role does the media play in how Alonzo sees being a superhero?
Think outside of the text, who are the superheroes in our society? How does the media portray them? Are they celebrated or condemned? How did they reach their status?

Women and Cartoons: Starting with our own lives

This lesson focuses on messages young people receive about what it means to be a "woman" in our society. In the opening lesson on Popeye, we briefly touch on this idea by looking at Olive Oyl, but with this lesson we aim to focus on the ways women/girls are portrayed. Through the examination of videos, articles, and cartoons clips, students will interact with different viewpoints on what it means to be "a woman" and will deconstruct where these ideas come from and what outcomes they aim to produce. Using the same tools (annotating sheet, cartoons chart, commentary, thesis wall) from the previous lesson, students will continue to unlearn their secret education.

Again, we want to challenge students to think about the intersectionality of these lenses. *While our focus is on women, we will also look at how the definition of woman is drawn. Does it include women of color? Lesbians? Transgender? Which class of women are depicted? Which women are humans? Which ones are animals? How are their bodies portrayed? How do they resolve conflict?*

Students will start by writing and sharing what it means to be a woman. Begin by asking them to write a few paragraphs about what it means to be a woman in our society today. What messages have they received about women? What are women supposed to look like? Act? Who are models in their lives or the media? Have they ever felt like being a woman opens doors that might be closed to others? After students write, ask them to share in small groups. Then come back to a large group and collect notes in a class brainstorm? "What did we learn about what it means to be a woman in society today?

Follow this discussion by reading Denice Frohman's article, "The Cost of Being a Girl." Ask students take notes and respond to Frohman's article. How does Frohman's article support their ideas? Argue against their ideas? Did being a woman open doors for her or close them?

Students will watch clips from a number of different cartoon and comic sources in order to explore messages of women aimed towards children and finish by writing a one page commentary about what they've learned.

Show a series of youtube clips. Start with the older clips. Tinkerbelle, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty. Stop and notice the similarities — body types, hair colors, women have no friends except animals. Servants are animals. Proceed to more contemporary clips — Beauty and the Beast, Mulan, Frozen — Note what has changed and what hasn't. Let the students lead the way on the critique, so they feel smart for noticing.

Tinkerbelle in Peter Pan: https://youtu.be/FvMPKJ2Tm2M
Snow White and the birds: https://youtu.be/hQZ6zzLpoNQ
Snow White—the Jealous Evil Queen: https://youtu.be/l9GJtM9lN-I
Snow White and the apple: https://youtu.be/pMTWmqFBWBo
Snow White and the Kiss: https://youtu.be/96vvSvdI5BU
Sleeping Beauty—the kiss: https://youtu.be/JmM-XX8atlQ
Beauty and Beast — Belle goes to prison https://youtu.be/sCGMgV17U4A
Beauty and the Beast — "There's something there" — https://youtu.be/nwZEcdBMLLU
Beauty and the Beast — Kill the Beast — https://youtu.be/h0l5I42kKjY
Aladdin Shows the World — https://youtu.be/-kl4hJ4j48s
Little Mermaid— Ursula: https://youtu.be/zDGrSgTKEuw
Mulan: A Girl Worth Fighting For https://youtu.be/RqrV6wefC78
Frozen: https://youtu.be/CuFLaSqNvQk

And for a change of pace:
Brave—http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2321930/Parents-fury-Disney-gives-Brave-heroine-Merida-Victorias-Secret-hairdo-Barbie-waist-sexy-princess-makeover.html#v-2368699558001

Rating for Women in Cartoons

According to *New Internalist,* March 2014 magazine, "In 1985, comic-book writer Allison Bechdel proposed a test to assess films for gender bias. Nearly 30 years later, the test is officially in use for the first time.

"To pass—and gain—a Bechdel A-rating, films must have at least two female character to talk to each other about something other than a man. It comes as a shock to learn that of all of the 10 highest-grossing films of all time, only three score a pass."

As you watch these cartoons featuring, think about whether or not they would earn a Bechdel A Rating. Why or why not?

Think back to the lessons on men in cartoons and create rating system for those cartoons.

Cartoon Essay

What have you learned/relearned about cartoons? Our only rule is that you have to write a piece using evidence from cartoons or other media. We want you to find your passion: What stirred you up? What made you angry? What are you happy about? You don't have to stick to cartoons — use your life and the world. Where do you see the themes from cartoons in the rest of your life? Use evidence to support your thesis. The examples might come from cartoons, advertisements, novels, your mother or father's advice. You might use lines from TV or movies or presidential campaigns. Think about an audience for your essay: Who could your analysis touch enough to bring about real change?

Here are some possible options:

> Focus on one cartoon — critique it in depth. Write about Mulan or Peter Pan. Using the chart and theme wall, analyze the representation of men, women, people of color, and poor people in that movie.
>
> Focus on the portrayal of one group. Write about how women, men, African Americans, Latinos, Arabs, overweight people or the poor are depicted and give examples from several cartoons or across time. (See "Help Me Syndrome.)
>
> Look at the positive changes. Are there signs of progress from early cartoons to contemporary cartoons?
>
> Take an issue —like the representation of women — and relate it to their life and/or society at large. (See "Looking Pretty, Waiting for the Prince.)

By Lila Johnson

Looking Pretty, Waiting for the Prince

[As a senior, Lila Johnson uncovered the "secret education" that cartoons, advertising, and the media slipped into her life. She wrote this article to educate others about the inaccurate visions Disney & Co. sell children.]

My two brothers and I lived for our daily cartoon fix. We hungered for the vibrant reds, blues, and yellows that raced around our screen for an insane hour or two.

When we were away from the tube, we assumed the roles of our favorite characters: Bugs Bunny, that wisecracking, carrot-munching rabbit, Yosemite Sam, rough and tough shoot-'em-down cowboy, and Popeye, the all-American spinach-guzzling sailor. We took our adopted identities outside and to school where our neighbors and friends did the same.

Now, as a senior in high school, I see that cartoons are not just lighthearted, wacky fun. Animated material touches on such sensitive issues as roles of men and women in society, and people of color.

Cartoons are often the birthplace of the cultural stereotypes we learn and remember, as I do today: the idea that Indians are savages — tomahawks and moccasins, teepees and war paint – the bad guys who pursued my favorite cowboys, or the belief that Arabs have nothing better to do than to tear across deserts in robes while swinging fierce swords and yelping like alien creatures.

These notions didn't just occur to my brothers and me magically. We saw Indians in our afternoon cartoons and on some of our favorite Disney movies like Peter Pan. We witnessed villainous Arabs thieve their way through violent episodes of Popeye.

What is not seen in relation to people of different cultures can be as harmful as some of the things that are seen. People of color are rarely seen as the heroes of animated presentations. I can think of only one Disney classic where a person of color is the principal and heroic character – The Jungle Book. Not an impressive list.

Children search for personal identity. In first grade adored Bonnie Bondell, a girl in my class. She wasn't a cartoon character, but she could have been. She had glossy blonde hair and blue eyes. She had a sparkly smile and a sweet voice. She could have been Cinderella's younger sister or Sleeping Beauty's long lost cousin. For those reasons, longed to be just like her.

I look at old photos of myself now, and have decided that I was pretty cute. I wasn't a traditional Cutie, and that's exactly what bothered me then, My father is African-American and my mother is German and Irish. Put the two together and I'm the result. Olive complexion, dark curly hair, brown and green eyes. All wrong. At least according to the "FairyTale Book of Standards."

The pride that had in myself as a person with a colorful heritage did not blossom before it was crushed. - The pride that I had in myself as a female was following the same path.

Women's roles in cartoons lack the cleverness and depth of their male counterparts. Instead, they are laced with helplessness and ignorance. The women are often in need of rescue – they seem incapable of defending or helping themselves. When they aren't busy being rescued, they spend their time looking pretty, waiting for a prince.

In first grade, these illustrations moved me to action. They influenced me to push aside my slacks and rus-tic bike and turn to dresses and dolls. I had to start practicing perfection if I was going to be happy, Weak,

helpless, boring, I struggled to be all of those, then could call myself a princess, an awkward one, but a princess nonetheless.

At the same time, my brothers swung guns and swords like they were attached to their hands. They tossed aside their piles of books and tubs of clay – heroes didn't read or create — they fought! So they flexed their wiry muscles and wrestled invisible villains. They dressed, ate, talked, became miniature models of their violent heroes.

Sometimes it was fun, like a game, playing our parts. But we began to feel unhappy when we saw that some things weren't quite right. As I said – I wasn't Bonnie Bondell or Cinderella, My brothers, never destined to be hulks, went to great lengths to grow big, but gallons of milk and daily measurements didn't help. It wasn't a game anymore.

I have some fond memories of those afternoons with my brothers, yet I know that I will also remember them for the messages I swallowed as easily as gum drops. My newfound awareness has enabled me to better understand those messages absorbed and the ones I observe daily, whether on billboards, in movies, or in magazines. I see them in a new light. A critical one. I don't have to be a princess to be happy or pretty. I don't need to rely on characters to learn about real people.

I proudly perceive myself as an exuberant, creative, responsible, open-minded individual who will never be reduced to a carbon copy of a fictional being.

READ I NG, WRITI N G A N D R | S | N G UP

Help Me Syndrome

by Hasina Deary

It's a typical cartoon scene: Popeye off sailing or toting a sledgeharmmer doing whatever Popeye does to make a living, while Olive Oys who does not have a job lounges around. Olive is skinny to the point of hospitalization. Popeye obviously does not share his spinach. Olive Oyl, in her frail condition has a tendency to be vulnerable to Bluto's frequent abductions. Bluto is the big, brawny bully who Popeye grapples with from cartoon to cartoon. Poor Olive is whisked away by the hair or thrown kicking and screaming over Bluto's shoulder. Her only Salvation is knowing that Popeye will be coming to save her. "Help me, help me, Popeye!" Magically, he hears Olive's call for help. Popeye, her hero. He struggles with his can of spinach, but in the end the tattooed avenger saves Olive Oyl, it is so silly. Olive Oyl's only redeeming quality as a woman is the fact she is never stuck in the kitchen. Popeye, the strong and courageous, also prepares his own meals.

Why wasn't Olive ever smart enough to lock the doors so Bluto couldn't get in or clever enough to save herself? It is a disgusting example of the "Help Me Syndrome" so often portrayed in cartoons.

In Sleeping Beauty, the silly little princess pricked her finger, causing an entire kingdom to slumber. Peace was restored after the prince rode into town, fought with a witch in dragon's form, then kissed the Sleeping Beauty. All is well, another princess saved.

Why are women constantly in need of male rescue? Does the industry feed on some women's twisted fantasy to be saved by a make-believe Prince Charming? It might be said that these are old cartoons and women today have evolved. But Disney's three latest productions have at least one scene where the female character's life was in jeopardy, only to be spared by her male counterpart.

In The Little Mermaid, Eric steers a ship's mast through the evil Ursula's torso, freeing Ariel from the curse. After Belle from Beauty and the Beast tries to leave the castle she is attacked by Slanty-eyed wolves. Lucky for her, the Beast came and fought off the angry hounds. A sigh of relief is breathed, another prettyface saved. Even in Aladdin, Disney's most progressive cartoon, Aladdin, the street smart hero, first comes to Princess Jasmine's aid when she nearly has her hand cut off after being accused of thievery. In the end of the movie, we see Jasmine trapped in a huge hourglass. Her cries for help are drowned out by the sand that fills the glass. Finally, Aladdin breaks the glass to save Jasmine. Ahh.

While the women in Disney's three recent cartoons are a step up from the nonstop pathetic whining of Olive Oyl, they still lack independence and basic survival skills. They may be called a heroine, but by no means are they the woman hero, Indeed, they are merely girls in need of rescue. The misconception that females must be male-dependent is reiterated, even if they basically have things going for them. Belle wanted more than her "provincial life." So they want more, but never can they attain it by themselves.

Rarely do we see brave women saving others, wonder woman is the only woman Cartoon character know who has ever been the rescuer. She saves men, women, and children (but mostly women and children). Of course, she has to have Super Heroine powers to do it. She could not just be Mindy MacGyver, the normal girl, who uses her mind to solve problems. Instead cartoons are made about beautiful girls who sing and read, and bright-eyed, headstrong princesses who are all capable of thinking, but ultimately succeed because of the love of a man. I think it is time to change the outdated formulas of love and near-death rescue scenes. I challenge the cartoon makers to find a new happy ending.

End of Unit Project: Cartoons

To close the unit on cartoons, you may work alone or with a partner to produce an out into the world project. We are providing a few samples, but we encourage you to think with us about ways to educate others about what you learned:

- **Cartoon Report Card:** Using Allison Bechdel's rating as a model, create a report card for cartoons. Think about audience. Who needs to know this? Where could you distribute this?

- **Write a short story:** Using David F. Walker's short story "The Token Superhero" from the book *Octavia's Brood* as a model, create your own short story that places a superhero—or cartoon character—in real life. Or create your own genre-bending story based on cartoons.

- **Create your own "Honest Trailer"** Watch an "honest trailer" and using their productions as a model, create your own about a cartoon you want to critique. **See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4V6rvcLsk8**

- **Create your own cartoon:** Create your own cartoon which both entertains but also also attempts to remedy some of the historic misrepresentations or absences.

- **Write a review of a contemporary cartoon:** Watch a contemporary cartoon movie or series. Look at newspapers and magazines that publish reviews, including the *Jeffersonian,* and decide who your audience might be.

  Create your own assignment: See us—must include—writing and cartoons.

Charting Cartoons

As you view the cartoons, fill in the following graph. Note the character's actions, appearance (human/animal). Are they in positions of power? Are they servants? What is their "mission" in life? Notice they way their language is characterized. Are they male or female? Are they a positive or a negative character? What do children learn about the racial/ethnic group as they watch the video?

Character	Appearance: Race/Class/ Body Type	Mission in Life	Speech/Language	Who has power?
Main Character Female				
Main Character Male				
Servants				
Enemies				

After you have watched the cartoon, write a commentary in which you discuss the following questions. Refer back to specific details from your chart.

- Who is the reader supposed to root for? Whose lives "count"?
- Who is given voice? Who is silenced? Who is marginalized?
- How does the author use language to develop character?
- What understandings might a child make about men, women, people of color, militarism from this cartoon?