Who is to Blame? Analyzing Points of View in Gas Price Editorial Cartoons from the 1970s and 2000s
Rob Fetters, Mount Vernon High School

American History Content Statements: http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Social-Studies

4. Historians analyze cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including multiple causation and long- and short-term causal relations
13. An improved standard of living for many, combined with technological innovations in communication, transportation and industry, resulted in social and cultural changes and tensions.
26. Political debates focused on the extent of the role of government in the economy, environmental protection, social welfare and national security.
28. The United States faced new political, national security and economic challenges in the post-Cold War world and following the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Estimate duration of lesson: One class period
Learning objectives: Students will be able to analyze and compare points of view regarding who or what editorial cartoonists are blaming (or not blaming) for gas prices.
Summary of the lesson: Is the artist of a gas price cartoon providing the reader a direction of blame or is it undirected? If there is a direction of blame, what does the artist convey is involved in determining gas prices? Students will analyze editorial cartoons in mixed ability groups, and for each editorial cartoon discuss 1) if there is a direction of blame for gas prices and 2) if there is a direction of blame, what does the artist believe contributes to gas prices. Students then take turns reporting their group’s thoughts on each cartoon to the whole class.
Pre-assessment/diagnostic: If desired, this could be done by having students establish the direction of blame, if any, for all snake related or
Uncle Sam related cartoons. Scoring could be based upon student written explanations of directionality of blame by the artist.

**Instructional steps:**

The teacher leads a discussion with students about the influences on gas prices, including supply and demand. Using a gas price line graph (see Energy Information Administration at www.eia.gov), discuss major events which have preceded changes in gas prices, including the OPEC oil embargo in the early 1970s, the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, September 11th, oil spills, hurricanes hitting oil refineries, global economic contraction/recession, and any other times of oil supply uncertainty you choose to include.

Next show Matt Davies 2011 “Energy Habits” cartoon and have students silently write down their own interpretation of this cartoon. Discuss with students how editorial cartoonists have their own point of view or bias. Editorial cartoonists also want to sell their cartoons, and this can influence how they choose to reveal or hide their point of view. In creating cartoons about gas prices, they may choose to blame someone or something for gas prices, or they may choose to avoid directing blame, perhaps trying to find humor in a gas price increase or express people’s anger or frustration about it. Does the Davies cartoon “Energy Habits” have direction of blame? Is the finger pointing at the consumer because the gas nozzle is pointing at the consumer? If the cartoon is not blaming the consumer, is there any specific direction of blame? Discuss with students how editorial cartoons are often open to interpretation, and that it is okay to disagree about their meaning as long as we use examples to support why we think something and respect other people’s right to have a different interpretation then our own. Use OSU’s Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum’s Editorial Cartoon Analysis Worksheet if you have not taught with editorial cartoons before.

Divide the class into pre-determined mixed ability groups of four. Each group of four will discuss each cartoon, and establish if their group thinks there is a direction of blame or not, and who or what the artist is
blaming if there is a direction of blame. Students should agree who will share their group’s ideas with the class for each cartoon. In a group of 4 students, each student would present on 6 cartoons if all 25 cartoons are to be analyzed. Encourage them to write something down to help them remember. Students will probably need around one minute of discussion per cartoon. If you choose to use all cartoons, then 15 to 20 minutes total is probably all they will need to analyze the 25 cartoons, as they will hopefully get better and faster at analyzing with experience and practice. After all groups are finished or the time allotted has passed, start with the first group and go around the room having the presenter for each group of that cartoon state whether or not their group believed the artist was attributing blame or not, if so, to whom or what, and why their group thought that, using evidence from the cartoon itself and prior knowledge. On the next cartoon, start with the second group and go round the room, and so on, so that no group always has to present first. At the end, discuss whether more cartoons were blaming something for gas prices, or if more cartoon artists were not directing blame anything in particular to explain higher gas prices. What were the most frequent targets blamed? (American Consumers? American Government Policy? Oil Companies? OPEC? etc.) Why do students think that is the case? (My ideas of artists directing blame are included, so do not photocopy that part for students).

**Post-assessment:** This could be accomplished by having students establish the direction of blame, if any, for all snake related or Uncle Sam related cartoons, whichever was not used in the pre-assessment. Scoring based upon student verbal or written explanations of directionality of blame by the artist.

**Materials needed by teachers:** Photocopy enough sets of cartoons for every group to have one. If available, use SmartBoard or computer projector to show each cartoon being discussed during presentations.

**Materials needed by students:** paper and writing utensil
**Extension activities:** Possibly challenge students to find a different gas price editorial cartoon, or even to create their own.
Matt Davies Copyright 2011 Tribune Media Services

Creator: Matt Davies
Title: Energy Habits
Publication: Tribune Media Services
Publication Date: 2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: gas nozzle and finger pointing “BLAME”
Source: http://theweek.com
Blame Direction: Self? Consumers?
Bottom Cartoon
Creator: Bob Taylor
Title: “Hey, man...like I don’t CARE what it’s costing me...”
Publication: Dallas Times Herald
Publication Date: 1980
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Uncle Sam shooting up drug of OPEC oil
Source: Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year 1980
Blame Direction: American Consumers? American Government Policy?

Bill Day Copyright 2011 Cagle Cartoons
Creator: Bill Day
Title: “In addition to global warming, another reason for alternative energy sources.”
Publication: Cagle Cartoons
Publication Date: 2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Uncle Sam shooting drug oil into his arm
Source: Cagle Cartoons
Blame Direction: American Consumers? American Government Policy?
Top Right Cartoon Creator: Eugene Craig
Title: Carter’s Energy Commandments
Publication: Columbus Dispatch
Publication Date: 1980
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Carter returns from the mount bearing new Energy Commandments, to find Americans worshiping the large car
Source: Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year 1980
Blame Direction: American Consumers worshipping the false idol of the large car?
Carter’s unrealistic energy policy?

Bottom Cartoon Creator: Jack Bender
Title: Gasoline One Mile
Publication: Waterloo Courier
Publication Date: 1980
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: many cars waiting in line for gasoline, including a lawn mower
Source: Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year 1980
Blame Direction: No blame? (There are similar photos from 1970s gas lines).
Borgman Cincinnati Inquirer
Creator: Jim Borgman
Title: 2007/2008 Car/Bike contrast
Publication: Cincinnati Inquirer
Publication Date: 2009
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: 2007 bike hanging in garage. 2008 car hanging up
Source: Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year 2009
Blame Direction: No blame?
Creator:  Jimmy Margulies
Title:  Big Oil Tax Breaks
Publication:  The Record of Hackensack, NJ
Publication Date:  5/11/2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source:  Revolutionary War/Tea Party flag modified
Source:  http://theweek.com
Blame Direction:  American Government Policy of tax breaks for big oil companies?

By Brian Fairrington, Cagle Cartoons  -  1/28/2011
Creator:  Brian Fairrington
Title:  Middle Class Snake Bite
Publication:  Cagle Cartoons
Publication Date:  1/28/2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source:  gas pump nozzle as snake having bitten a consumer
Source:  www.cagle.com
Blame Direction:  No blame?
John Darkow Copyright 2011 Cagle Cartoons
Creator: John Darkow
Title: Tar Pit
Publication: Cagle Cartoons
Publication Date: 2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Dinosaurs warn of the trap of this oily stuff
Source: www.caglecartoons.com
Blame Direction: No blame?

Mike Keefe Copyright 2011 Cagle Cartoons
Creator: Mike Keefe
Title: You’re ours
Publication: Denver Post
Publication Date: 7-3-11
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Big Foreign Oil dangling Uncle Sam wrapped in gas pump hose
Source: www.cagle.com
Title: Energy Policy Wake-up Call
Publication: Tribune Media Services
Publication Date: 2010
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Uncle Sam hits the “OOZE” button on his alarm clock
Source: www.theweek.com

Title: Pick Your Grade
Publication: Cagle Cartoons
Publication Date: 2010
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Pick your grade of gasoline – dead bird, dead fish, dead turtle
Source: Cagle Cartoons

Mike Keefe copyright 2010 Cagle Cartoons
Creator: Mike Keefe
Title: We Will Pay, Won’t We?
Publication: Denver Post
Publication Date: 05-07-10
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: BP executive passing cost of oil spill clean-up on to consumer
Source: www.cagle.com
Chuck Jones Copyright 2011 Creators Syndicate
Creator: Chuck Jones
Title: Shared Prosperity
Publication: Creators Syndicate
Publication Date: 2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Big Oil executive sharing picture of himself on his yacht with a consumer tied up by gas pump hose
Source: www.theweek.com
Blame Direction: Big Oil Companies? American Government Policy?

Mike Keefe copyright 2010 Cagle Cartoons
Creator: Mike Keefe
Title: Don’t Spread On Me
Publication: Denver Post
Publication Date: 2010
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: American Revolutionary War Flag/Tea Party flag “from the angry sea party”
Source: www.cagle.com
Blame Direction: No blame? Oil Company oil spills? American Government Policy?
By Daryl Cagle, MSNBC.com - 5/19/2007
Creator: Daryl Cagle
Title: Gas Prices Curse
Publication: MSNBC.com
Publication Date: 5/19/2007
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: consumer cursing high gas prices
Source: www.cagle.com
Blame Direction: No blame? American Consumers?
By Daryl Cagle, MSNBC.com - 6/10/2008
Creator: Daryl Cagle
Title: Summer Gas Prices 2008
Publication: MSNBC.com
Publication Date: 6/10/2008
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: consumer cursing high gas prices again
Source: www.cagle.com
Blame Direction: No blame? American Consumers?

By Keefe, The Denver Post - 4/1/2004
Creator: Mike Keefe
Title: Hooked
Publication: Denver Post
Publication Date: 4/1/2004
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: OPEC fisherman, Uncle Sam fish
Source: www.cagle.com
By Bill Schorr, Cagle Cartoons - 4/21/2011 12:00:00 AM
Creator: Bill Schorr
Title: Urp
Publication: Cagle Cartoons
Publication Date: 4/21/2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: Gas hose snake swallowed consumer
Source: www.cagle.com
Blame Direction: No Blame?

Creator: Milt Priggee
Title: April Fool
Publication: www.miltpriggee.com
Publication Date: 3/31/2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source: consumer states he doesn’t need things that might help reduce gas prices
Source: www.cagle.com
Blame Direction: Certain American Consumers? Certain American Government Policies? (People opposed to mass transit, people opposed to alternative fuels, people opposed to hybrid cars, people opposed to electric cars, people opposed to scooters)?
Walt Handelsman Copyright 2011 Tribune Media Services
Creator:  Walt Handelsman
Title:  Cheap Gas
Publication:  Tribune Media Services
Publication Date:  2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source:  sign says “CHEAP GAS compared to what you’ll pay next week”
Source:  www.cagle.com
Blame Direction:  No blame?

Creator:  Jeff Stahler
Title:  “We must reduce our dependency on Mideast oil.”
Publication:  Columbus Dispatch
Publication Date:  March 31, 2011
Summary/Description of cartoon or source:  all US presidents saying the same thing since Nixon
Source:  the Columbus Dispatch
Blame Direction:  Every US President (and policy) Since Nixon?  No Blame?
http://www.eia.gov/

Real Gasoline Pump Price: Annual Average 1919-2009

http://zfacts.com/ (opinionated site, so chart may be biased ...but it was the clearest chart I found online)

Regular Gasoline Price in Today’s Dollars (01/01/2011)

http://zfacts.com/