

# Using Political Cartoons to Understand Historical Events

A cartoon is a way to quickly say how you feel or what you think.

Presidents have always been looked at through the eyes of the cartoonist.

Drawing a cartoon of the President is the cartoonist's way of telling the readers something about the job of being president. The cartoon at its best is used to simplify and get to the heart of the matter.

**Intended Grade Level:** Upper Elementary and Middle School

**Lesson Purpose:** This lesson uses political cartoons to engage students in a deeper understanding of U.S. and world history and specifically the life and times of Herbert Hoover.

**The Hoover Presidential Library invites students who visit the museum on a school field trip to draw political cartoons focusing on President Hoover's life. These cartoons will be displayed on our blog "The Hoover Blackboard."**

## Lesson Objectives:

- To use political cartoons as a device for interpreting events in Herbert Hoover's life
- To hone critical-thinking skills
- To involve students in the process of cartoon analysis
- To encourage further historical research

**Definition:** A political cartoon is a drawing or comic strip containing a political or social message portraying persons, things, political events or situations, etc., in an exaggerated way.

## Activity #1 Captioning History

### Materials:

- Uncaptioned political cartoon
- Captioning History Worksheet

### Directions for Teacher:

1. Have students work in pairs or small groups. Give each pair or group an *uncaptioned* version of one of the political cartoons provided.
2. After completing the worksheet and discussing the historical issue with their partner(s), students will brainstorm a caption for their cartoon based on their understanding of the historical issue.

3. Have student groups present their cartoons with captions to the rest of the class.

How do the captions differ? How are they similar?

4. Conclude with a class discussion:

How effective do students think political cartoons are in expressing viewpoints?

### Optional Extension Activity:

**Submit your students' original cartoons about Hoover's life to [mary.evans@nara.gov](mailto:mary.evans@nara.gov) for submission on our moderated blog or post them directly to "The Hoover Blackboard" at:**

<http://blogs.archives.gov/hover-blackboard/>



Write your caption in the box:

Background information:

Jay "Ding" Darling's cartoon appeared on November 10, 1928, the week following Herbert Hoover's election. The gentleman handing the pen to president-elect Hoover is nicknamed Uncle Sam. He has already signed the long list, and now it's Hoover's turn to sign.



Write your caption in the box:

Background information:

Jay "Ding" Darling's cartoon appeared on March 4, 1929, the day of Hoover's inauguration. Herbert Hoover took the oath of office promising "...to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States." The man standing behind Herbert Hoover is Uncle Sam, a symbol of the United States.



Write your caption in the box:

Background information:

Jay "Ding" Darling's cartoon was first published on March 24, 1929, during the first month of Hoover's presidency.

## Activity #2 Finding Inspiration

Ideas for cartoons can come from published memoirs, newspaper articles, or books. We asked Jay Harding to create three original cartoons. His first inspiration came from this excerpt taken from “The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920,” Volume 1.

*Clark and I were anxious to obtain access to the old workings to see the nature of the deposits and what the sulphides were like. There were in the hillsides many low tunnels about four feet high and three feet wide, preserved fairly well by the hard rock. They had been cut by hand-tools, probably with the help of water poured on the rock after subsequent fires in the fashion of*



*Hannibal’s road-building in the Alps. We started to crawl into these tunnels one by one, but sooner or later were baffled by falls of the roof. In the last one we entered I, in advance of Clark, was crawling on one hand and my knees, carrying a candle in the other hand. By chance I looked down into a puddle of water ahead, and there, as big and plain as life loomed the fresh track of a tiger. He had been going in. I pointed it out to Clark. To fight a Bengal tiger with a miner’s candlestick made no appeal whatever to either of us. With no delay and with steadily increasing panic we made for the entrance. The tiger, fortunately, was not of an inquiring turn of mind and did not come to greet us. Anyway, we explored no more tunnels. When, later on, we came to build a great double track tunnel through which to operate the mines, I named it the Tiger tunnel. It provided more room in case of such conflict.*

## Activity #2 Finding Inspiration

# Wild Young Mountaineers Swarm to Hoover School

## Dark Hollow Scents Book Learning and Sends Twenty Children Up Blue Ridge on First Day

DARK HOLLOW, Va., Feb. 24 (A. P.) —Book learning came to Dark Hollow to-day to join mountain lore. The opening of the community school, sponsored by President Hoover brought twenty eager children and many parents trudging up the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The youngsters were to begin the magic trail of the printed word, and they came early, with wonder-filled eyes.

The modern little school is perched high on Stony Hill, hard by the summer camp of President Hoover. First to arrive was twelve-year-old Ray Burraker who last summer drew the attention of the Chief Executive to the need for a school in the section.

Then Ray brushed through the tangled growth about the camp to bring a 'possum to the President. This time Ray came to hoist Old Glory high on the school flagpole before the sun soared over Double Top Mountain.

He was so excited that he was not able to sleep last night, and breakfastless he led the procession, all of whom came early. The honor of lowering

the flag this afternoon fell to Ray's nine-year-old brother, George Harold.

Ray was the best groomed of the nine boys and eleven girls, whose ages ranged between five and fifteen. George Harold was high in his praise of the radio Mr. Hoover has installed in the school house.

There were twelve Burrakers at the opening, eight of whom were pupils. Grandfather Burraker, eighty-nine, a gray-bearded patriarch, and Grandma Burraker, seventy-two, wearing a blue bonnet and a black suit, walked two miles to arrive bright and early. Possibility of saying a few words with President Hoover brought out grandpa, and grandma said she came because she had eight grandchildren there. Neither had been in a school house before.

Lloyd Woodward and Mrs. Woodward came with seven young Woodwards, two of whom were twins. The mother also carried a baby in her arms.

All the boys, with the exception of Ray Burraker, wore overalls and heavy shoes. Enthusiasm for school rivaled their enthusiasm over their teacher, Miss Christine Vest of Yosemite, Kentucky, a graduate of Berea College.

Newspaper articles can be a source of inspiration for drawing cartoons, like this article published in the *New York World* on February 25, 1930. The article is about the opening of the school sponsored by President and Mrs. Hoover for children in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, who had never had the opportunity to attend school.

Ray Burraker, a student attending the new school, gave President and Mrs. Hoover a gift of an opossum.

Can you finish this cartoon by drawing the Hoovers accepting Ray's gift?



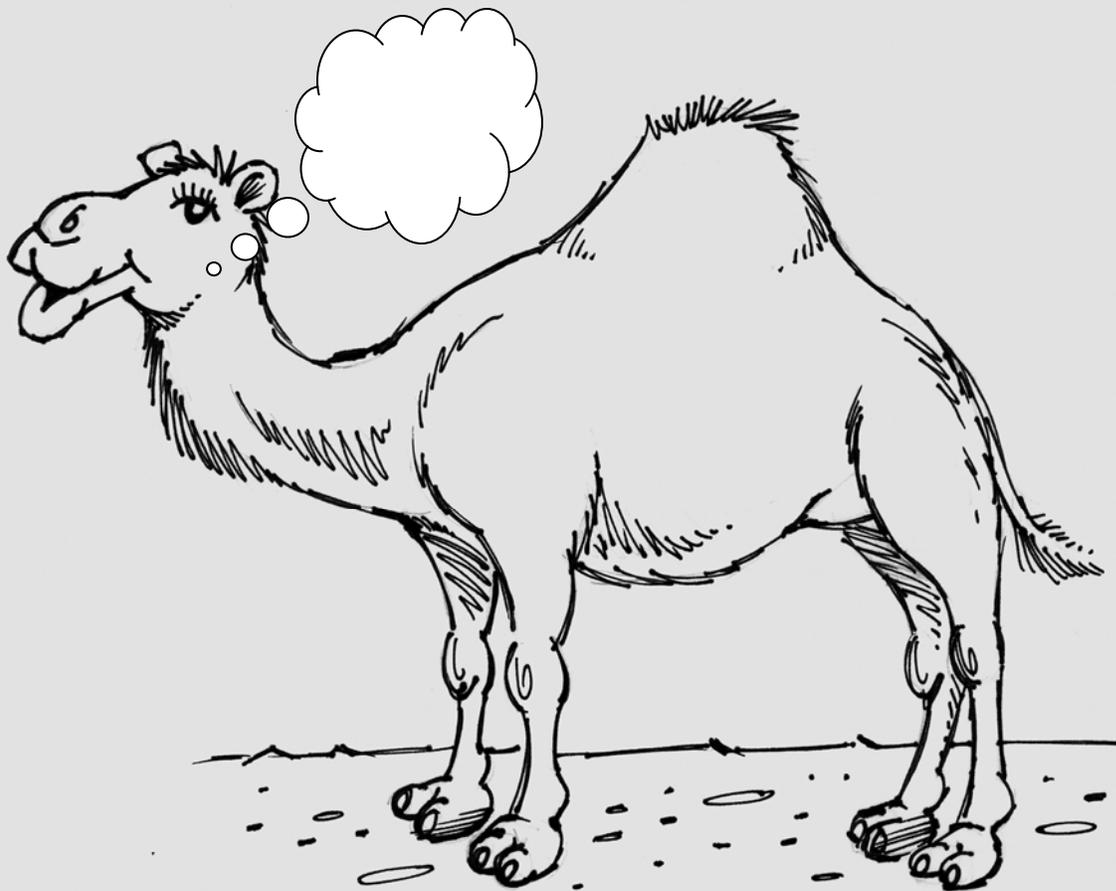
## Activity #2 Finding Inspiration

Jay Harding got his third idea for a cartoon by reading an excerpt from *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Engineer, 1874-1914* written by George H. Nash.

[Page 54 talks about mining towns in Western Australia.]

*Gradually dwellings made of burlap bags and corrugated iron gave way to more permanent structures. In 1898 Coolgardie had twenty-six hotels, fourteen churches. To the east the twin cities of Kalgoorlie and Boulder were also thriving and soon displaced Coolgardie as the metropolis of the goldfields. By the beginning of 1898 they had attained a combined population of approximately 20,000. In 1897 an impressive stone edifice known as the Palace Hotel was erected at Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie became known for its remarkable wide streets – wide, it is said, because camels will not back up and must have ample space in which to make a U-turn.*

**I wonder what this camel is thinking.**



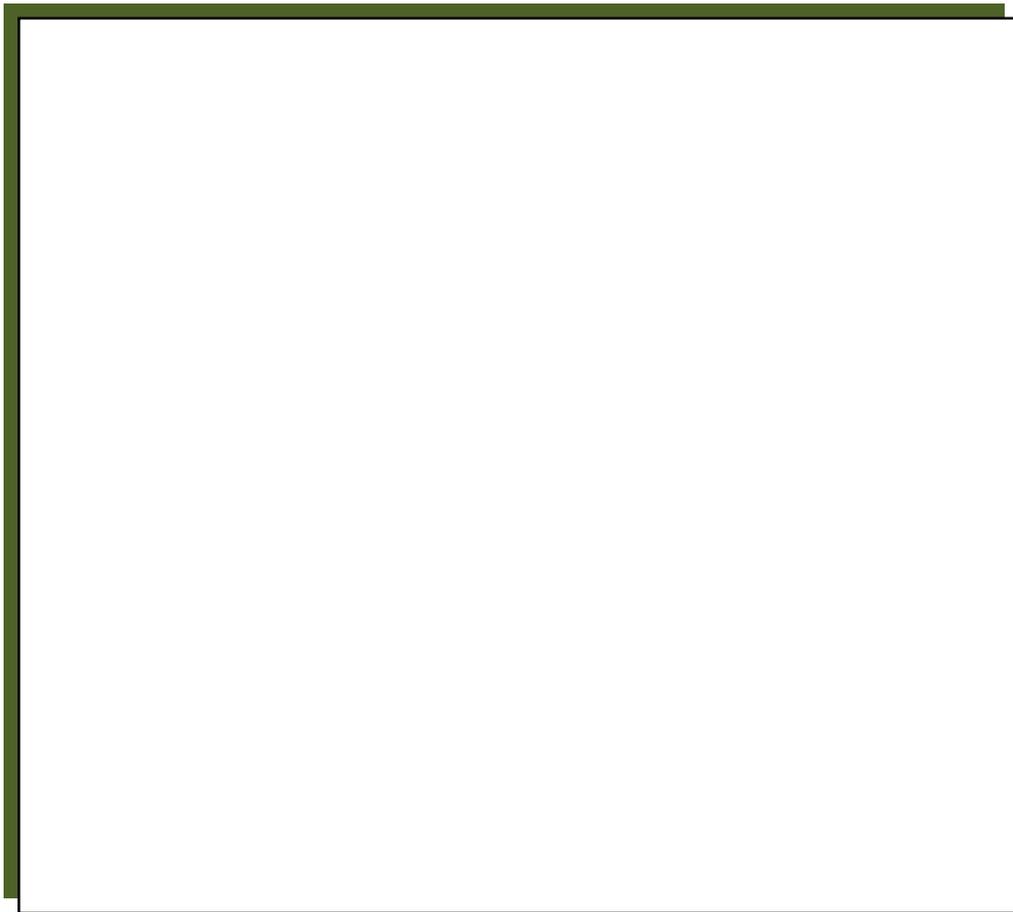
### Activity #3 Drawing Your Own Cartoons

Have students pick a historical event from Herbert Hoover's life that they saw at the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum and draw a political cartoon. Remember, a political cartoon is a picture sentence conveying a point of view.

Try your hand at creating cartoons from the following excerpt.

#### Fire and Smoke!

*Saturday afternoon a cauldron of tar which J.C. Hoover was heating for a coating for fence wire took fire and immediately great clouds of fire and smoke were sent up, causing much excitement among the people of West Branch. Everybody with buckets in hand, rushed pell mell for the scene of the conflagration. . . .* [Excerpt taken from page 7 of *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Engineer, 1874-1914* written by George H. Nash.]



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#### Football for 300!

*I found that among the Christmas gifts from the States for the Mission Chinese children were four second-hand regulation footballs. The missionary’s daughter seemed stumped on what to do with them. I suggested that, as I was experienced in that line, if they would produce the players I would instruct. She produced 300 alert youngsters in usual Chinese dress with loose Chinese shoes—but there was snow on the ground. With the aid of the daughter I divided the youngsters into two equal squads, instructed them to get the balls to the opposite fences and put all four balls into play at once. In a minute 300 pairs of shoes were flying in the air but not even stocking feet in the snow slowed up the vitality of those kids. [Excerpt taken from page 44 of “The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920,” Volume 1.]*



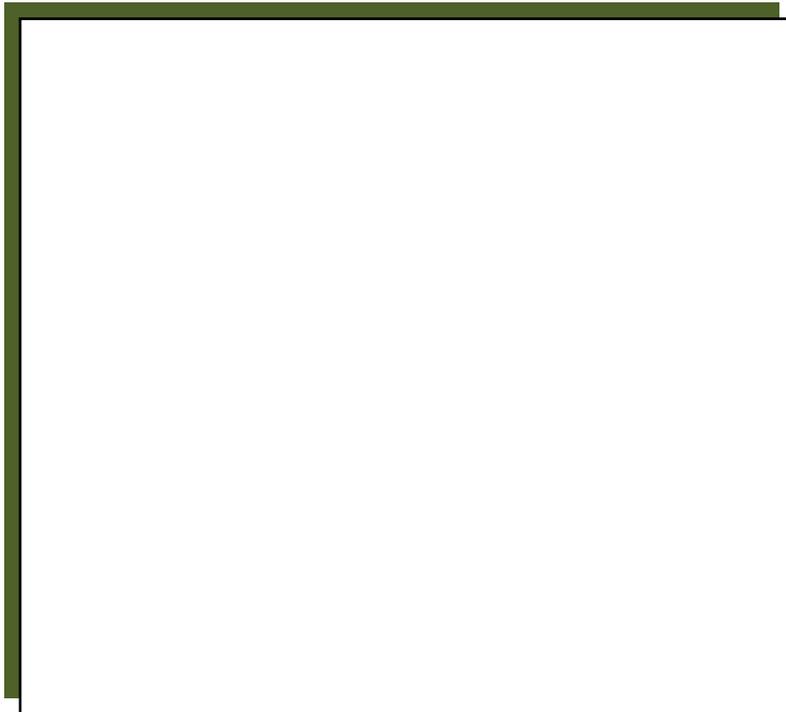
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#### #3 Fresh Fish!

*Efficiency began to permeate the entire White House staff. The people of Bangor, Maine, sent a fresh salmon to the President, entrusting it to one of their Congressmen. He sent it to the White House by messenger, intending to come by later to be photographed with the fish and the President. Meanwhile efficiency, working at a mad clip, shuttled the fish to the White House kitchen, where its head was removed and it was set aside to be prepared for cooking. All was chaos. The congressman wondered what he would say to the folks back home. I felt so sorry for him that I decided to make an attempt at saving the situation. I got a needle and thread and sewed the head back on the fish's body. The picture was taken and Maine did not go Democratic for three years. [Excerpt taken from pages 284-285, *Starling of the White House* by Colonel Edmund W. Starling.]*



## Activity #4 Analyzing a Political Comic Book

Students will analyze a political comic book prepared for Hoover's 1928 campaign.

The comic book, summarizing the life of Herbert Hoover from his birth in 1874 to his role as president, was produced by Robert W. Satterfield for the Republican Party as a political propaganda tool. I am including pages 1-7 for this activity.

[The following quote is taken from Education Director Mark Adams from the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.]

*When focusing on biography writing, students can view this comic book as an example of a unique way of summarizing the life of an individual, rather than using a standard essay format. Print off copies of the comic book and have students analyze its contents and then brainstorm what parts are effective and how the story of this person's life progresses through the pages. If groups or partners are researching famous people, they can use this comic book as an example of sticking to basic and interesting facts to provide a quick and effective summary of someone's life. Students could then produce comic books of individuals they are studying.*

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/teacher\\_lessons/democomic\\_lesson.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/teacher_lessons/democomic_lesson.htm)

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 1

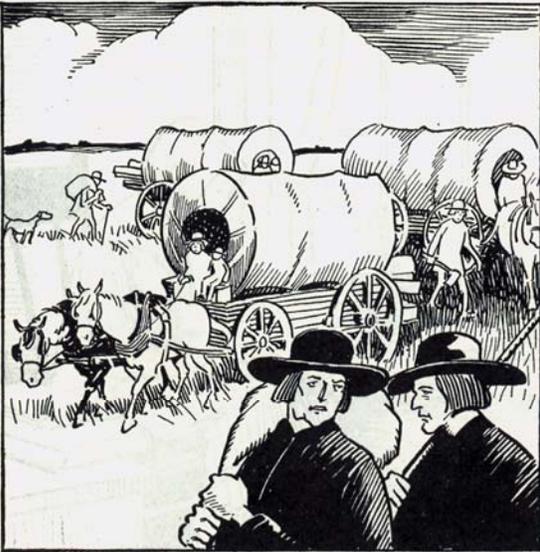
By Satterfield



1. Herbert Hoover's ancestors, of Quaker faith, came to America from France and Holland.



2. They became settlers first on farms in Maryland, thence moving to North Carolina and Ohio.



3. In 1853 the Hoovers migrated to Iowa, where they and their neighbors founded the town of West Branch.



4. Before clearing the land for their farms, these Quaker pioneers built a Meeting House.

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 2

By Satterfield



1. Herbert Hoover's father, settling in Iowa, wrested a hard-earned living from the soil as a pioneer farmer.



2. His natural bent for machinery asserted itself, and he opened a blacksmith shop and sold farm machinery.



3. Grandfather Minthorn, on his mother's side, was a bookish farmer, who used to read as he rode horseback.



4. Hoover's mother was a great reader and a serious-minded critic of such literature as reached the farm.

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 3

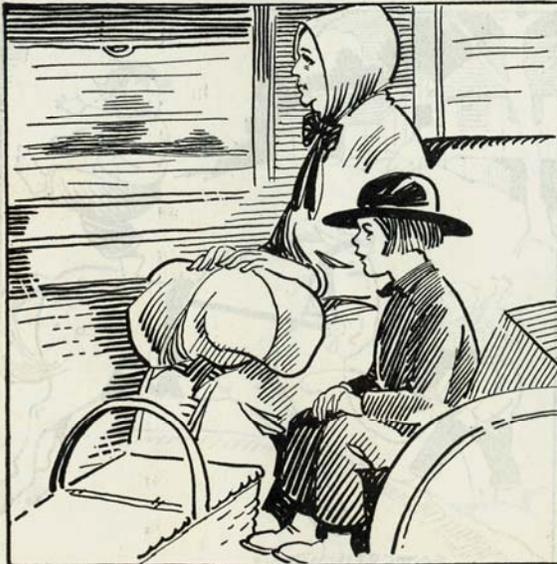
By Satterfield



1. On Aug. 10, 1874, Herbert Clarke Hoover was born in West Branch, Iowa. He had one brother and a sister.



2. As a boy, Herbert loved all sports and outdoor pastimes. In winter he delighted in snow sports.



3. Herbert's father died when he was six, and Aunt Agnes took him on a visit to Oklahoma.



4. The boy's playmates during this visit were little Osage Indian boys, who taught him many Indian sports.

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 4

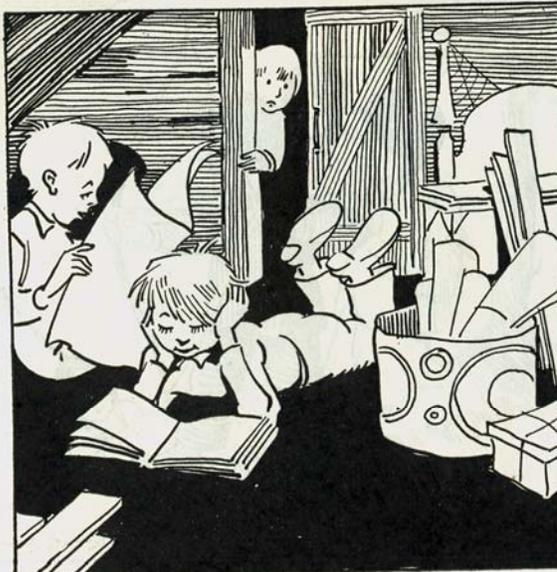
By Satterfield



1. After Herbert Hoover's father died in Iowa, the three children went to live at Uncle Benajah's farm nearby.



2. Here Herbert had his share of the housework, which included this important engineering job.



3. The children's playhouse was the farm attic, where they read Youth's Companion and Robinson Crusoe.



4. First prize always went to Herbert when the children played circus with Uncle Benajah's old white mare.

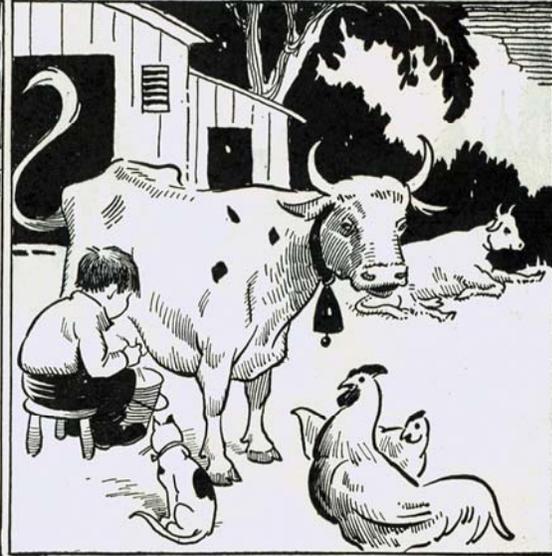
# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 5

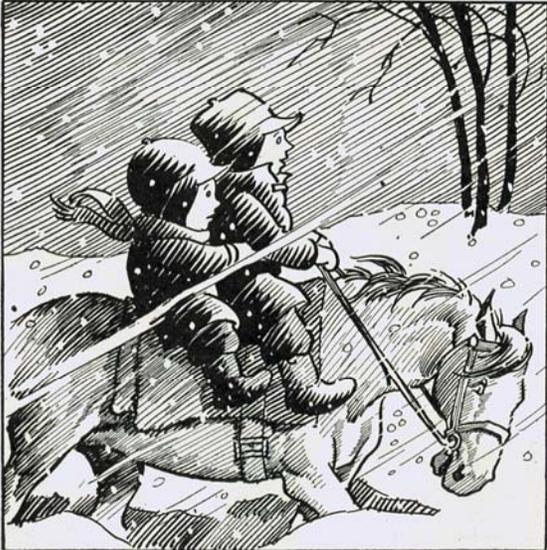
By Satterfield



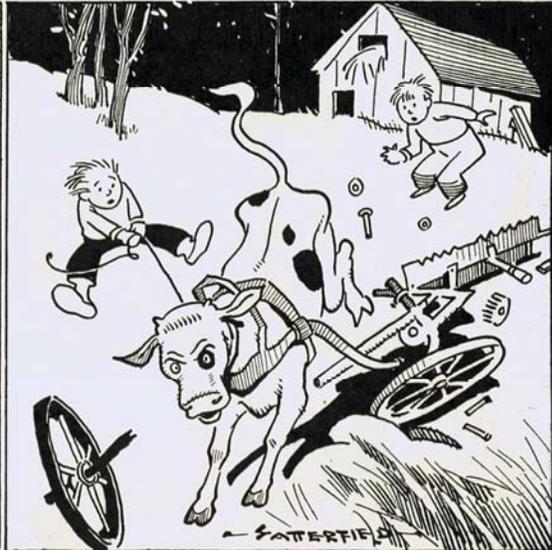
1. After the death of Herbert Hoover's mother he went to live with his Aunt Millie in Cedar Rapids, Ia.



2. He was now ten years of age—old enough to assume an important share in all manner of farm work.



3. In winter Herbert and his cousin rode horseback to school two miles away.



4. The future engineer constructed a mowing machine out of an old cross-cut saw, using a heifer for power.

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 6

By Satterfield



1. When Herbert Hoover was eleven, he moved from Iowa to Oregon, to live with his uncle John Minthorn.



2. Dr. Minthorn had a farm and an academy for boys. Herbert attended the academy and helped on the farm.



3. After a year, Uncle John went into business in Salem. Herbert's first business experience was as office boy.



4. "Why don't you go in for engineering?" suggested a mining engineer who came into Uncle John's office.

# PICTORIAL LIFE OF HERBERT HOOVER

No. 7

By Satterfield



1. Herbert Hoover entered Stanford University in 1891. Engineering was his goal.



2. Baseball was his favorite college sport, and he proved an expert at the strategy of the game.



3. His first field work as an engineer apprentice was in the Ozark Mountains, during college vacation.



4. Working his way through college he met Miss Lou Henry, now Mrs. Hoover. She promised to wait.

## Activity #5 Taking a Field Trip

Take a field trip to the Hoover Presidential Library – Museum to observe the life and times of Herbert Hoover, and then put your knowledge into a cartoon.

Analyze the collection of political cartoons your students created about Herbert Hoover to determine what information is present and what information seems to be missing to the story of the event. Students then develop questions as to what more they want or need to know to understand the situation the cartoons are addressing.

Be sure to submit your cartoons to the Hoover Presidential Library's BLOG at:

<http://blogs.archives.gov/hoover-blackboard/>