

Resource 6 (1 of 5)**Social Security: Visualizing the Debate**

Teacher's Guide

The debate about Social Security, its value, and its affordability continues today. Use any of the following four cartoons to identify how the current debate is framed. (Larger illustrations are provided here for reproduction and distribution, or projection.) For each cartoon, ask students to study the cartoon for several minutes. Ask them what they notice, drawing students out on the detail of what they see. If students jump to an interpretation of the cartoon, ask them for the basis of the interpretation and ask other students if they agree or disagree. Consider the following questions to draw students out on each cartoon.



Ask students to make guesses about why the artist chose the metaphor of Humpty Dumpty to depict the modern Social Security system. What view do they think the cartoonist holds about the program?

[The problems facing Social Security are so severe they threaten to topple Uncle Sam. Students could argue that the artist believes the program is dangerous to the country or that the artist believes it is essential to the country.]



Ask students to identify the people in the cartoon, and the position the Tea Party appears to take on the role of government in solving the economic problems of individual people. What view does the cartoonist seem to have?

[The people in the cartoon are middle class people who have suffered significant losses following the 2008 economic downturn. The man behind the desk is a member of the Tea Party, a group that has opposed raising taxes in any way and under any conditions. The cartoonist seems to think that the position of the Tea Party is not going to help people from the middle class.]



Ask students to identify the people in this cartoon and the point the cartoonist is making. Explain to students that Social Security is thought of as an entitlement. Ask them why the lady seems so harmless compared to the other two. Is that a clue about the cartoonist's point of view? How does this cartoon compare to Humpty Dumpty?

[The cartoonist is suggesting that entitlement programs are now perceived as being as much a threat to national security as Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were—or that they are being presented that way, presumably in the media. Student answers may vary on why the lady looks so harmless. It is open to interpretation. Students will probably find this cartoon to be more of a commentary on how we define threats to national security than a commentary on the programs themselves.]



Explain to students that AARP originally stood for the American Association of Retired Persons, and ask them to identify the people in this cartoon and the point the cartoonist is making. Why are the younger people running from the older people? What does the *Planet of the Apes* reference suggest?

[The suggestion seems to be that the number of elderly are increasing at such a rate that they will “take over” and pose a threat to the future of the younger people because the cost of mandated retirement programs, like Social Security and Medicare, will sap their resources.]

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Illustration by Taylor Jones



Politicalcartoons.com

by Taylor Jones, politicalcartoons.com

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by Joe Heller, politicalcartoons.com

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TOP U.S. THREATS IN..

CAM OTTAWA CITIZEN
Capitolartoons.com
synkam.com



1991



2001



2011

by Cameron Cardow, politicalcartoons.com

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by Mike Keefe, politicalcartoons.com