

Grade 9 Creative Arts

Term 4 Study Notes

Visual Arts | Cartoons through history
Art, society and visual commentary | Ms S. Winkler

Study the definitions, visual examples and worked explanations. Grade 9 answers should explain how artistic choices communicate a viewpoint and should justify interpretations with specific evidence.

Section	Written examination focus	Marks
A	Cartoon development and terminology	4
B	Elements, principles and drawing techniques	6
C	Visual literacy and symbolic language	8
D	The artist in society	5
E	Popular culture and personal expression	2

Total: 25 marks | Time: 60 minutes

1 Cartoon development and audience

Broad class sequence: caricature → newspaper and printed cartoons → comic strips and comic books → animation → television → modern digital cartoons. This sequence is a guide to media development. The forms overlap and continue to be used today.

Editorial cartoon A cartoon expressing a viewpoint about a public or social issue. It may use exaggeration, symbolism, humour or irony to persuade or question.

Caricature Exaggerating selected recognisable features of a person. The distortion is deliberate and can draw attention to personality, status or behaviour.

Comic strip and comic book Sequential pictures tell a story. A strip is a short sequence; a comic book develops stories across pages. A panel is one framed scene.

Animation and digital cartoons Animation uses slightly different images shown in sequence to create apparent movement. Digital cartoons use computer technology and may be still or animated.

From newspaper to online circulation

A printed cartoon reaches readers through physical copies. Online publication can make sharing faster and extend access across countries. Audience reach still depends on language, connectivity, platform and interest. Publication online does not make a still cartoon an animation.

Historical context helps explain the original purpose and audience. Use the background provided in the examination; a long list of dates is not the main focus of revision.

2 Drawing techniques and visual effects

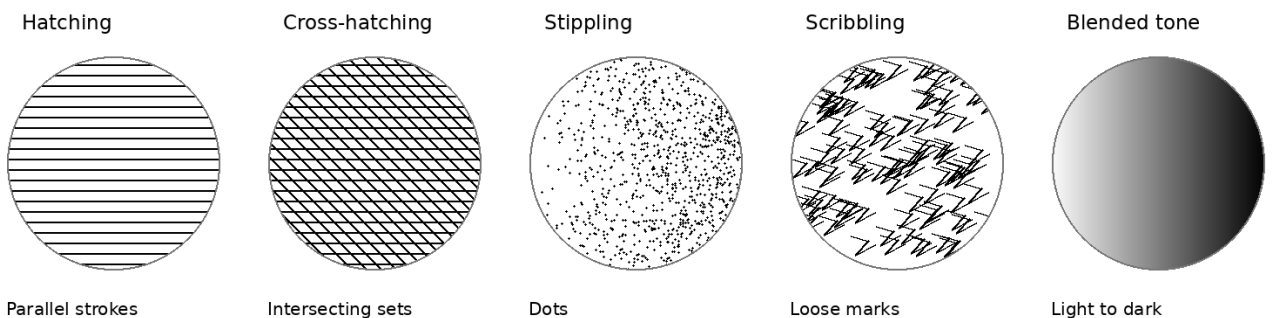
Line A mark with direction and length. Line can outline, divide, guide attention or suggest movement. Curved, jagged, thick and thin lines may create different effects.

Shape A flat enclosed area. Geometric shapes include circles and triangles; organic shapes are more irregular. Repeated small shapes can suggest pattern or surface texture.

Colour Hue identifies a colour, such as red or blue. Colour contrasts can create emphasis; a restricted palette can create unity. Interpret colour together with the scene and context.

Tone Light and dark values. A gradual change in tone can suggest a surface turning away from light, creating an illusion of rounded form.

Texture The surface quality shown or suggested: rough, smooth, scaly, grainy or soft. Repeated lines or shapes can imply texture on smooth paper.



Technique	How the marks work
Hatching	Parallel strokes. Closer or heavier marks normally make an area darker.
Cross hatching	Intersecting sets of lines. Closer spacing or more layers create darker tone.
Stippling	Dots. Closely packed dots create darker tone than widely spaced dots.
Scribbling	Irregular overlapping marks. These can create dark areas and suggest roughness.
Tonal shading	Light-to-dark values can indicate light, shadow and form.

Explain rather than only identify

“The artist uses cross-hatching” identifies a technique. A fuller explanation is: “The intersecting marks become denser on the shadow side, creating a darker tone and making the sleeve look rounded.”

For texture: “Repeated small curved marks suggest a scaly surface.” Identify the visible marks and explain what surface quality they suggest.

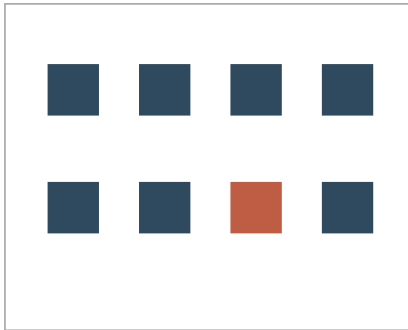
Observation and interpretation

Observation records what is visible: “There are closely spaced diagonal lines.” Interpretation explains the effect: “They darken the area and create a tense, heavy mood.” The effect must fit the whole artwork.

3 Design principles and composition

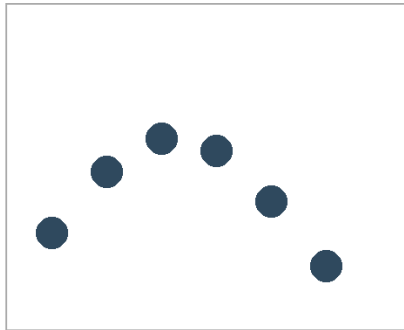
Composition is the arrangement of forms, figures, text and space. It influences where viewers look first and how they connect different details.

CONTRAST AND EMPHASIS



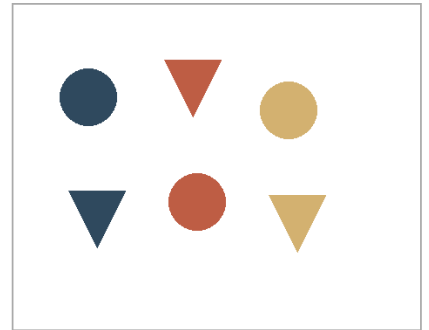
One different form attracts attention

RHYTHM



Repetition and spacing create flow

UNITY WITH VARIETY



A shared palette connects varied shapes

Concept	How it can communicate meaning
Contrast	Differences in tone, colour, size, shape or texture can separate forms and direct attention.
Emphasis and focal point	Emphasis makes an area stand out; the focal point is where attention is drawn first.
Balance	Distributing visual weight. Symmetrical balance uses similar weight on either side; asymmetrical balance uses different forms that still feel balanced.
Scale and proportion	Scale concerns size relative to surroundings; proportion concerns size relationships between parts. Exaggerated size can suggest power, importance or a large problem.
Rhythm	Repetition and spacing create a visual beat or flow that guides the eye.
Unity	A sense that the parts belong together. Repeated colours, line styles or related shapes can connect different elements.

Positive and negative space Positive space is occupied by the main forms. Negative space is the area around and between them. Empty space may isolate a figure or make an object more noticeable.

Foreground and background The foreground appears closest to viewers. Background details establish context and may support or contradict the foreground message.

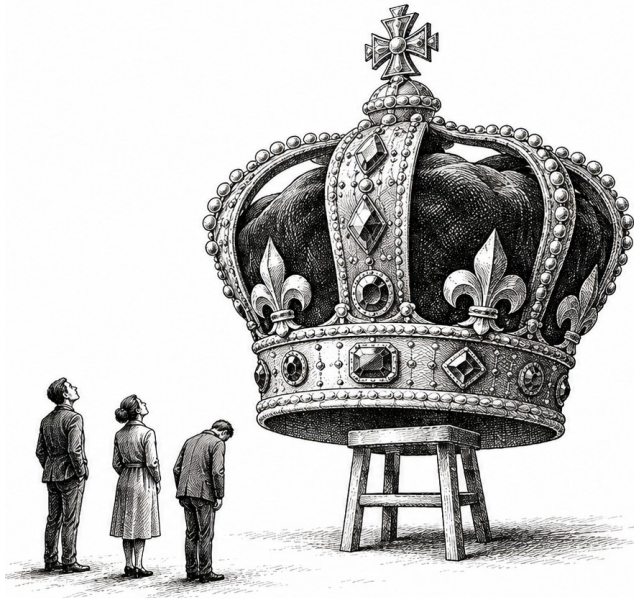
Diagonal placement Can lead the eye across a page, connect parts and suggest movement or instability. Explain the effect in the particular composition.

Worked explanation

“The small pale figures contrast with the large dark form. The difference makes the dark form the focal point and suggests that it dominates the scene.” This connects a visual choice to its meaning.

4 Symbolism and visual metaphor

The two original teaching images below use different visual styles. Image A is on the left; Image B is on the right. They are new examples, not historical source documents.



Symbol An object, image or gesture standing for an idea beyond its literal appearance. Meaning depends on the context.

Visual metaphor Presenting one thing through another to suggest a comparison. A person carrying a mountain of work, for example, can suggest an overwhelming burden.

Exaggeration Deliberately increasing or reducing size, features or action to emphasise an idea. It is a meaningful choice rather than simply an inaccurate drawing.

Juxtaposition Placing contrasting or related things next to each other so viewers compare them. A luxury meal beside an empty bowl can highlight inequality.

Read Image A

The crown can symbolise authority. Its enormous size compared with the small people suggests power that dominates ordinary individuals. The bowed posture of one figure can reinforce submission. The image does not prove that any real ruler has these qualities.

Read Image B

The thumbs-up can symbolise approval. The matching masks suggest conformity, while the person holding a mask down can suggest individuality. The oversized stamp may imply that outside approval strongly shapes people's behaviour.

Interpretation is a reasoned reading. Different readings are acceptable when supported by visible evidence and the context.

5 Reading cartoons critically

Context changes interpretation

Read the supplied background before judging a historical cartoon. Ask who made it, when, for which audience and for what purpose. An image reused in a later context can carry a changed message.

A caption about cooperation could persuade an original audience facing a shared threat. Reusing the same image in a later protest could give it a different political meaning. An image's meaning does not stay fixed merely because its design stays the same.

Viewpoint and factual evidence

A fact is a claim that can be checked against evidence. A viewpoint is a perspective, judgement or interpretation. A cartoon can include factual references while presenting a selective or exaggerated viewpoint.

A giant figure standing over land may symbolise ambition or dominance. It does not prove that the figure literally owned the land or that nobody lived there. Evaluate the picture against the historical background rather than treating exaggeration as documentary evidence.

Caption and image

A caption can identify the subject, narrow an interpretation, explain context or urge action. Its size and placement can create emphasis. If asked whether an image would work without its caption, evaluate both what remains clear and what becomes less certain.

Worked judgement using Image A: "The oversized crown would still suggest power because the people look tiny beneath it. However, without a caption or background, viewers could not confidently identify a particular ruler or event."

Compare two cartoons using evidence

Discuss a relevant detail from each, then explain a meaningful similarity or difference. Avoid writing two unrelated descriptions.

Worked comparison: "Image A enlarges a crown over tiny people, while Image B enlarges an approval stamp above masked figures. Both use scale to suggest power over individuals, but A focuses on authority and B on pressure to conform."

Assess how persuasive a message is

Consider how the cartoon selects evidence, uses symbols and appeals to emotion. Notice whose experiences are shown and whose are absent. A newspaper, website or large audience does not automatically make an opinion true.

For alternative interpretations, explain the evidence supporting your reading. A confident statement without evidence is still an unsupported interpretation.

6 The artist in society

One artist can act as a contributor, observer and social commentator in the same work. The roles overlap, but they describe different contributions.

Role	Meaning	Application to Image B
Contributor	Adds creative work, ideas or images to shared culture.	Creates an image that can start discussion about approval and individuality.
Observer	Notifies and represents aspects of people and society.	Notifies that people may copy behaviour or appearance to gain acceptance.
Social commentator	Uses art to express a perspective or question social behaviour.	Uses the stamp and matching masks to question pressure to conform.

Observer and commentator are different

Observation identifies a social pattern. Commentary communicates a view about it. “People follow trends” identifies something noticed; “the pressure to follow trends can hide individuality” expresses a judgement about the pattern.

Popular culture

Popular culture includes widely shared entertainment, characters, fashion, online trends, games, music and media habits. Cartoons can reflect these experiences, question them or add new images and ideas to them.

Recognisable cartoon characters can circulate through print, film, merchandise and online sharing. Repetition can make a character familiar, while exaggeration and distinctive design help people recognise it.

The global world and belonging

Digital media can connect audiences across countries. Shared images may create a sense of belonging, while differences in language, experience and cultural meanings can affect interpretation. A symbol may not communicate exactly the same meaning to every audience.

A cartoon about exclusion from an online group can address personal experience and a wider social issue. Explain the connection between the visual details and the issue rather than only saying that the cartoon is “about society”.

A supported answer about influence

“The identical masks could encourage viewers to question whether they change their identity to gain approval.” This connects a visible device to a possible influence. It does not assume that every viewer will react in the same way.

Artist intent and viewer response

You may infer a possible purpose from the work and context. Unless the artist's explanation is supplied, use wording such as “may suggest” or “could criticise” instead of claiming certainty about private intentions.

7 Mixed media and personal expression

Mixed media means combining at least two different art materials in one artwork. Choose materials for how they support your meaning, as well as for their appearance.



Teaching example: belonging while keeping individuality. A differently coloured figure reaches towards an open group; the joined hands bridge the gap.

Material	Visible effect and possible meaning
Torn coloured paper	Separate paper shapes create distinct figures. Different colours can suggest different identities; their arrangement can show connection or separation.
Charcoal	Dark marks add tone and rough texture. Strong marks around a gap can emphasise tension or exclusion.
Pencil	Fine outlines and lighter marks can add details, expressions or connecting lines without overpowering the paper forms.

Plan a mixed media message clearly

Example: “I would use torn paper to make separate figures and an open circle, showing a place for someone to belong. I would use charcoal to darken the gap between them and the isolated figure, making the distance more noticeable.”

This names two materials and explains what EACH does. A list such as “paper and charcoal” alone does not show how the materials communicate meaning.

Personal expression is your own response to an experience or issue. Explain what you chose, how you used it and why it supports your message.

8 How to construct Grade 9 answers

Move from detail to interpretation

Identify → describe → explain → interpret. Name the technique or feature, describe where it appears, explain its effect and link that effect to a possible message.

Example: “The artist repeats identical masks across the queue. The repeated shapes create rhythm and suggest that the people are being encouraged to conform.”

Use the wording and marks

Question type	What a complete response includes
Identify	The correct term or feature.
Describe and explain	A precise visible detail and its effect or meaning.
Interpret with two features	A clear interpretation supported by two different relevant details.
Compare	A detail from each source and an explained similarity or difference.
Evaluate or justify	A judgement supported by the reasons requested, using the artwork and context.
Propose mixed media	Two different materials and an explanation of how each supports the intended message.

When judging a caption

Consider both the picture and the words. Explain what a viewer could understand from the image alone, and what information the caption adds. If the wording asks for a judgement and two reasons, include all three parts.

When explaining contrast

Name both contrasting features: “the pale background and dark figure”. Then explain the effect: “the figure stands out as the focal point”. “There is contrast” alone is too general.

When interpreting symbolism

Name what the image represents in its context. Explain how one or more visible features supports that meaning. Do not substitute a memorised symbol meaning for evidence from the actual artwork.

Final study checklist

Revise cartoon forms and changes in circulation; line, shape, colour, tone and texture; mark-making; balance, contrast, emphasis, proportion, rhythm and unity; space and composition; symbols and metaphor; caption and context; fact versus viewpoint; artist roles; popular culture; and mixed media choices.

Sources and visual credits

Aligned with the supplied Grade 9 Term 4 Planner and both Grade 9 Visual Arts Term 4 papers. The two editorial-style images and mixed-media example are original AI-generated teaching illustrations. They are not historical evidence. The technique and design diagrams were created for these notes.