

# Travelling Exhibition of Political Cartoons Depicting 40 years of Language Debates: A Perfect Language Learner Assignment

By Sarah Du Broy, Communications Officer for the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) has created a travelling exhibition of political cartoons that can help French and English second language teachers mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and celebrate the importance of the *Official Languages Act* (OLA) with their students. A perfect tool for teachers to discuss with their language learners what role language can and will play in a shared national vision and in the expression of cultural identity as Canada looks to the future.

The Parliament of Canada adopted the *Official Languages Act* on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1969, which recognized English and French as the official languages of all federal institutions in Canada and had, as an objective, the advancement of the equality of status and use of the English and French languages within Canadian society. Today, the Act continues to resonate as a living public policy and legal framework.

For over 40 years, Canada's leading cartoonists have illustrated the passionate political debates, challenges, and reactions to linguistic duality. Their political cartoons and caricatures were published in daily newspapers; reflecting both the playful and the serious aspects of language issues.

Since the adoption of the Act, Canada has become a more culturally diverse society. Linguistic duality was at the heart of Canada's foundation, however now it characterizes our society and is a feature of our national history. If tolerance and a sense of accommodation are engraved in Canadian values, it is largely thanks to our duality, which has taught us to respect each other.

Other resources are available to support discussion on the OCOL Web site: [http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/index\\_e.php](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/index_e.php). On this page, you will notice that there are two interesting tools: The timeline that traces the milestones of the official language history since the adoption of the Act: [http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/timeline\\_lignedutemps\\_intro\\_e.php](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/timeline_lignedutemps_intro_e.php), and the *Commissioners' Own Words* a series of video with excerpts from interviews with the present and past commissioners of official languages: [http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/video\\_ha\\_e.php](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/video_ha_e.php).

Teachers can encourage students to visit the exhibition as a field trip or as an after school homework assignment. Students returning from the exposition can answer the following three questions and teachers can discuss answers in class:

1. Choose a cartoon of interest. What symbols did the artist use to depict the Anglophone community? The Francophone community?

2. Compare two cartoons created in different decades. How do they depict similar circumstances? How do they depict changes in perception, tolerance, or acceptance over time?
3. Taking inspiration from the cartoons on exhibit, design a cartoon representing your personal view of the current state of bilingualism and its importance to Canada.

The complete exhibition is displayed at 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, from September 10 to December 31, 2009. A version of this exhibition will also be presented in a number of Canadian cities. In November, the traveling exhibition will be in:

Prince Edward Island  
November 16 to 20  
Jean-Canfield Building  
191 University Avenue  
Charlottetown

Ontario  
November 17 to 25  
Joseph-Shepard Building  
4900 Yonge Street  
North York

November 27 to December 10  
Terminal 1  
Toronto Pearson International Airport  
3111 Convair Drive  
Toronto

Nova Scotia  
November 24  
Pier 21  
1055 Marginal Road  
Halifax

Quebec  
November 25 and 26  
Industry Canada  
Centre Mont-Royal  
2200 Mansfield Street  
Montréal

November 27 to January 2  
Guy-Favreau Complex

200 René-Lévesque Boulevard West  
Montréal

New Brunswick  
November 30 to December 4  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
343 University Avenue  
Moncton

Background on the caricatures chosen for the exhibition, details related to the OLA and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and a list of upcoming dates and locations of the traveling exhibition can be found on OCOL's Web site: [http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/dejavu\\_cal\\_e.php](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/dejavu_cal_e.php).