



How can examining original satirical illustrations give us deeper insight into life in Regency England?

A Window into Regency Culture and Visual Satire

Background Information

The Regency Period in England (1811-1820)—fraught with problems stemming from an ineffective monarchy and the rise of industrialization—employed satire to skewer everything in society. Many novelists and illustrators used satire to criticize the church and the hereditary class system, as well as the clothing, hairstyles, manners, and attitudes of their world. In these illustrations, William Heath satirizes the hypocrisy of Regency society; his satire often asks the reader to observe the contrast between what should be expected of the middle and upper class versus the reality of their behavior in accessing social privileges.

During the Regency Period in England, affluent members of society gathered in Assembly Halls to drink, dance, see, and be seen in order to cultivate the “right” kind of connections with the “right” kind of people. These halls were popular for city dwellers and gave country gentry a reason to travel to London or Bath. Access to these rooms required very specific invitations from one of the “grande dames” who determined who would receive a voucher to attend the balls, the hottest tickets every season. Marianne Spencer Hudson’s work *Almack’s; A Novel* (1826) satirizes one of the first upper class mixed-sex clubs for the socially elite in London, which met on Wednesdays during the Season. In his book *Illustrations to Almack’s* (1826), William Heath created illustrations to offer visual commentary in support of Hudson’s satirical take on the world of the Assembly Halls.

Lesson Description

Students will examine images from *Illustrations to Almack’s*, as well as an original invitation to Almack’s, and analyze them for what they reveal about the people who attended and controlled meetings and balls at Almack’s, one of Regency England’s most coveted invitations.

Grade Range: 9-12

Time to complete lesson: 90 minutes

Resources needed:

- Huntington Library materials (provided)
- Student handouts (provided)
- Teacher Analysis Guide (provided)

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By the end of this lesson, students will **know:**

- The social hierarchy and social power that influenced the Regency Period.
- The significance of social connections inherent to Meeting Halls.
- The value of primary documents in offering an immediate window into a time period.

By the end of this lesson, students will **be able to:**

- Identify and critique upper class life in Regency England.
- Compare the social structure of the Regency to that of today.
- Identify and examine a primary document.

Supported Standards

History Social Science Standards 9-12. Research, Evidence, and Points of View 2. Students identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

NCAS Anchor Standard 8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.



Lesson Plan

Activity #1 Introduction to primary sources

- 1) Ask students to define the term “primary source” and to provide an example of one.
- 2) Ask students why people might choose one kind of document over the other. Why would people want to refer back to primary sources? What is the value of something like The Huntington’s collections to scholars?
- 3) Reveal the primary document from The Huntington’s collection: An Invitation to Almack’s. Ask the students to look for details which offer evidence of it’s “primary” status. Record the students’ answers. (Note: Students might point out the date, wax seal, fading script, even the large stain.)
- 4) Ask the students what this primary document tells us about Almack’s and the Regency. Record the student answers. (Note: students might identify the structured, formal rituals of the upper class, including the use of titles as part of society or the importance of the wealthy being able to mingle only with approved guests. Explain that this exclusivity matters, especially to parents arranging meetings between their daughters and potential husbands.)

Activity #2 Examining visual satire

- 1) Ask students if they know of any exclusive clubs or organizations that the elite belong to today. Ask them about what these organizations offer their members.
- 2) Tell them about Almack’s — a famous club for the elite of London during the Regency.
- 3) Explain Almack’s and other exclusive clubs and meeting halls and the importance in Regency High Society (see the background information on page 1). Admittance was exclusive and demanded a voucher (like the one from Activity #1).
- 4) Distribute **Handout A** to each student. Have students complete the handout individually or in groups. Allow students time to examine and respond to the image.
- 5) Optional: use the **Analysis Guide** to help students in identifying and analyzing the satire within the illustrations.

Alternative Execution: Ask students to create a slideshow presentations that identify the observations from the answers with “close-ups” of where they found those objects in the image.

Activity #3 Class discussion

- 1) Project one of the supplemental images.
- 2) Ask the students responsible for examining that image to highlight the observations they have made from their group discussion.
- 3) Ask students how the analysis changes their initial impressions.



Alternate Execution: Shuffle the class groups so one member from each original team joins a new group.

Alternate Execution: Ask students to formally present the information with a PowerPoint as an aid.

Alternate Execution: If students have completed the assignment for homework, they can be placed in pairs or small groups to share and compare their findings.

Conclusion

- 1) Review the insights the students offered about individual illustrations. Find common insights among the varying illustrations.
- 2) Ask the students to summarize what they have learned about the time period from these illustrations. How are these illustrations satiric? How do these wealthy people compare to the wealthy today as we see them in the media? What are some contrasts between the wealthy today and 200 years ago?



Student Handout:

Analysis Prompts for *Illustrations from Almack's*

Your name:

Name of Illustration:

- A. Who are the primary **figures** in the illustrations?
- B. List details describing the clothing of these figures.
- C. List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).
- D. What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

- A. What is the primary **activity** of the illustration?
- B. List details of the activity.
- C. What does this activity reveal about life among the wealthy in Regency England?

- A. What is in the **background** of the illustration?
- B. List details that make up the background.
- C. What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?

- A. What is the **caption** under the illustration?



Student Handout:

Analysis Prompts for *Illustrations from Almack's*

B. How is the caption satiric? Or what do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true, between the image projected and the truth behind it?





Analysis Guide (for teacher use)

Illustration: *The Board of Red Cloth*

Who are the primary figures in the illustrations?

Women around a table (The Board of Red Cloth from the illustration's title), man off to the side with papers at a small desk (students may realize he is some kind of secretary or record keeper).

List details describing the clothing of these figures.

Dresses are low cut, off the shoulder; women wear necklaces and earrings; man in jacket and pants, collar at neck so stiff and high he cannot look straight ahead.

List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).

Women are mostly plump, some smiling, sitting in primarily upright positions, some leaning forward; man off to the side, has a haughty or serious expression, sits very upright, almost arching his back.

What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

The wealthy in this era are well-fed and have pretty clothes and jewels; they also have servants to attend to them.

What is the primary activity of the illustration?

The women write and talk, the man shuffles papers.

List details of the activity.

The women each have pens in hand and some sort of portable writing desk or wooden wedges on the tables in front of them; the desks have papers with writing; the man also has papers with writing, and a small desk on which to work.

What does this activity reveal about the illustrator's view of life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The wealthy have the money for specialized objects and take themselves very seriously. Having the portable desks, not just writing on the table, shows they think what they are doing is important and worth money for their comfort.

What is the background of the illustration?

A room with a central table and other furnishings.

List details that make up the background.

The room has a chandelier, draperies, table with tablecloth, two smaller writing desks (one in front of man, one against wall), various chairs (two padded and embroidered), a sign that reads "Rules," two decorated baskets labeled "accepted" and "rejected."

What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?



The furnishings reveal that the wealthy spend their money on comfort and specialized items for specific tasks. The padded chairs reveal the hierarchy on the “Board,” since only two women have them. The baskets reveal the supposed selectivity of the “Board.”

What is the caption under the illustration?

“City Ladies admitted if extremely Rich, and who give good dinners, and elegante balls, —All Foreigners admitted however Ugly, Ignorant or poor, they will all be Liars , —good Dancers, good Tale bearers, good Gossips -- good Flirts, and amusing Liar’s, are allways (sic) admitted.” (Students should preserve the errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.)

How is the caption satiric? Consider the title here as well. What do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true?

We might expect the rich to value the social hierarchy and their place in it, and, therefore, to behave respectably and manners. However, the caption reveals that these women want to be entertained, to be told funny lies and to be flirted with. They will include “foreigners” because the Ladies of Red Cloth see them as exotic, and the Ladies believe they will be amused by the foreigners’ novelty. These elite women have a double standard: they value any foreigner who can gossip and entertain them over any lower-class English person.



Analysis Guide (for teacher use)

Illustration: *French frippery and Impertinence!!*

Who are the primary figures in the illustrations?

English “girls” and older women, some from society, some working class; some of them are possibly mothers and daughters.

List details describing the clothing of these figures.

Two central young women in nice, low cut dresses, jewelry, fancy shoes; the mothers (possibly mother and grandmother, or mother and personal maid) have less attractive dresses, hats (indicating they are not at home, since a lady does not wear a hat in her own home), purse, one has red shoes; the older of these two women has a shawl and apron, perhaps indicating her age, perhaps her status as servant.

One young woman, in only her underwear, has her back to the viewer, facing a mirror and is drawn more hastily.

The three other women are maids or shop workers. The older woman is perhaps a shop owner; their clothes as well as actions betray these distinctions: their clothing is plainer with no decoration or jewelry and only one color; additionally, they wear aprons and caps to protect from and to cover up dirt.

List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).

Girls and younger workers or maids are smiling, while the older women have stern, disapproving looks, perhaps related to the caption. Most of the figures are drawn to seem active; the central figures lean toward each other, the workers seem to be bustling in with new boxes, and the foreground older women lean in or gesture toward the central figures.

What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

The wealthy want to show off with clothing that displays their wealth, while the poor must protect the few items of clothing they have. The older generation disapproves of the new styles and manners of younger people.

What is the primary activity of the illustration?

Trying on clothing in what appears to be a dress shop, in order to find an outfit for the Assembly.

List details of the activity.

Open and closed boxes lay about, a dress is tossed on a chair, one central woman holds a shawl, one dress seems to be standing up on its own, workers hurry in with new items in boxes.

What does this activity reveal about the illustrator's view of life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustrator sees these rich young ladies are careless with their things (dresses tossed, shawl a bit crushed) but want to show their wealth through their clothing and accessories.



What is the background of the illustration?

A dressing room or private area in a ladies clothing shop.

List details that make up the background.

Paintings on the wall, an elaborate mirror, a dresser, drapes, chairs and a patterned carpet all indicate a prosperous shop which appeals to the upper classes.

What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustrator believes, as with clothing, the wealthy want to see their money around them; the upper classes would expect to have a shop furnished in a manner similar to their own homes.

What is the caption under the illustration?

“Que les Anglaises sont Bêtes” (The English women/girls are dumb animals, or like dumb beasts)

How is the caption satiric? Consider the title as well. What do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true?

The title of this illustration applies to the analysis along with the caption. The illustration suggests that the older generation thinks the younger is rude because these young women view foreign (specifically French) fashion as better than English goods. Their interest in and knowledge of French fashion satirizes these young ladies for fetishizing all things French. The use of “frillery” suggests that the older generation view all this dressing up and going to assemblies as a waste of time; clearly, the younger generation disagrees.



Analysis Guide (for teacher use)

Illustration: *Petitioners for Admission at Almack's.*

Who are the primary figures in the illustrations?

OUTER ROOM/VESTIBULE/FOREGROUND: Men and women, all in fancy dress, seemingly all potential Almack's attendees.

INNER ROOM/BACKGROUND: All women, also in fancy dress, seated at a table, seemingly those already inside Almack's, perhaps some member of the Board of Red Cloth.

List details describing the clothing of these figures.

Colorful clothing with varying trims, some jewelry, feathers in women's hair.

List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).

FOREGROUND: Many look angry or desperate, some look in pain, some on the floor.

BACKGROUND: All happy, calm, upright posture, heads lean indicating conversation.

What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

While the upper classes may look good, they aren't as refined as they seem. This piece satirizes the upper class member's desperation to get into the club.

What is the primary activity of the illustration?

An Assembly, with some trying to get in to Almack's and some already inside.

List details of the activity.

FOREGROUND: Pushing, shoving, stepping on others, falling, elbowing someone in face, one person on their knees, one completely on the ground. Almost everyone is waving their admission ticket.

BACKGROUND: Sitting, chatting (heads inclined), perhaps smiling at the chaos outside.

What does this activity reveal about the illustrator's view of life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The image satirizes that even those people with invitations are so anxious to get in that they behave in a very improper, undignified way, like animals stampeding. The illustrator emphasizes with the image that the upper classes do not behave properly, as they would be expected to; instead, they act just as they imagine the masses who they denigrate do.

What is the background of the illustration?

The Assembly Room and the vestibule at Almack's.

List details that make up the background.

INSIDE/BACKGROUND: chandelier, draperies, patterned carpet.

VESTIBULE/FOREGROUND: plain, bare floor, perhaps a plaque on the wall.



What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustration suggests that the wealthy want to show off their money, and they also spend it on comfort.

What is the caption under the illustration?

“They even stooped to the most degrading submission to obtain tickets.”

How is the caption satiric? Consider the title as well. What do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true?

The image satirizes the people who attend the parties who want others to think they always maintain proper manners, but these displays of propriety are really just a facade; these people are so desperate to be included they would go to humiliating lengths just to be seen.



Analysis Guide (for teacher use)

Illustration: *The Ball Room Scene*

Who are the primary figures in the illustrations?

Four men, two foreground, two background; more than seven women, some drawn incompletely, one almost transparent.

List details describing the clothing of these figures.

All figures appear in very fancy clothing. The women's clothing features lace and floral trims, jewelry, feathers, gloves and very low cut dresses. The men have vests or waistcoats, jackets and a tie or cravat; one man does not wear gloves, and appears unconventional, even wild.

List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).

Most expressions are neutral or restrained, except for the central figure, the unconventional man, who looks angry, haughty, and aggressive. He is also the only man with facial hair, and his hairstyle is elaborate, almost like the women's feathers. Most of the figures lean away from this central man, but one woman leans in as if to take his hand or get a closer look.

What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustrator exaggerates the conventionality and similarity most of those present; as well as, how easily someone unconventional can appear to upset this world.

What is the primary activity of the illustration?

The Ball or Assembly. One woman in the center has fainted or swooned.

List details of the activity.

The fainting woman seems to react to the unconventional man. He holds out his invitation, as if to prove he belongs there, while her friend brings a restorative ("aromatic vinegars"?). In the background, the couples dance.

What does this activity reveal about the illustrator's view of life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustrator satirizes the fragility these women feign when confronted with an anomaly or an unusual event.

What is the background of the illustration?

The Ball Room itself.

List details that make up the background.

Elaborately patterned carpet, large, decorative ceiling fixture (may be a chandelier), couples dancing.

What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The image suggests that those with money want to show it off, and they value decoration and



comfort.

What is the caption under the illustration?

“Eau de Cologne; -- Aromatic Vinegar; thro’ and thro’ the Thorax -- Oh for the love of Heaven.”

How is the caption satiric? Consider the title as well. What do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true?

The caption can be interpreted in two different ways, but both interpretations out that anything unconventional can easily mark someone as an outsider. Following very specific social customs is a key value of this culture. It shows that you know them, and therefore likely belong. The slightest error could make you look like an outsider. Insiders always knew how to behave.

Interpretation 1: The unconventional man’s “Cologne” is so cheap and overwhelming (“thro’ the Thorax”), it has made the young woman faint, which the illustrator sees as ridiculous (“for the love of Heaven,” toughen up!).

Interpretation 2: The woman behind the fainting woman is bringing “Aromatic Vinegar” in the jar in her hand; she may be trying to revive the woman who has fainted because of the interloper. This interpretation focuses on the strict rules of this closed society. The balls were only supposed to supply acceptable candidates for admission, candidates who would not deviate from the society’s strict rules and social scripts.



Analysis Guide (for teacher use)

Illustration: *Comforts of the Drawing Room*

Who are the primary figures in the illustrations?

Guests at the Assembly of various classes, ages, and both sexes.

List details describing the clothing of these figures.

All figures appear in very fancy clothing. The women's clothing features lace and floral trims, jewelry, feathers, gloves and very low cut dresses. The men have vests or waistcoats, jackets and a tie or cravat. However, the clothing is dragging, disarrayed, pushed up.

List details describing the physical appearance (not clothing) of these figures (faces, postures, etc.).

Almost all the faces are angry or shocked at being stepped on, pushed, and poked.

What do these clothing and figure details reveal about the wealthy in Regency England?

The images satirizes that attendees want to move out and away quickly; they are willing to be physically hurt or publicly embarrassed in order to move on to spread gossip about whatever just happened at the Assembly.

What is the primary activity of the illustration?

Leaving the Assembly rooms.

List details of the activity.

People step on others, elbow others in the face, poke others, and disarrange their clothing; most seem to be shoving and hustling to get out of the room.

What does this activity reveal about the illustrator's view of life among the wealthy in Regency England?

The illustrator suggests that attendees may begin the night with a proper appearance and conduct, but by the end of the party, they appear disheveled and unkempt.

What is the background of the illustration?

Assembly room entrance or exit area.

List details that make up the background.

Single-colored carpet on the floor, uniformed "guard" standing near the door with a pike, spear, or lance. Debris from the evening lays about on the floor. An archway to the left provides an exit.

What do these details reveal about the life among the wealthy in Regency England?

They have a desire to impress (guard in livery) but also seem careless about their behavior. Perhaps they are drunk after this evening of entertainment?

What is the caption under the illustration?

"I really had that little Man's queue in my mouth -- Sir your Hat is in my Eye -- My Rose's are gone!!!"



How is the caption satiric? Consider the title as well. What do the caption and illustration satirize? In other words, how does this caption reveal the contrast between what we expect to be true about these figures and what is actually true?

The caption presents lines of dialogue from the scene; each piece can be found somewhere in the illustration. The lines also suggest that while the people may value an invitation to these Assemblies, they don't always enjoy their time at them. Again, the illustrator exposes the hypocrisy of those who live in the circle of a club like Almack's: They complain about these occasions and the people present, but they will still humiliate themselves for an invitation, and they will come again.





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Illustrations of Amuck's - Page 102.



Rules by Swiftover. Precisally

The Board of Red Cloth.

Jan'y 15th 1827

** City Ladies admitted if extremely Rich, and who give good dinners, and
elegant Balls. All Foreigners admitted however ugly. Ignorant or poor, they
will beall Lions-, good Dancers, good Tale bearers, good Gossips- good Flirts, and
amusing Liars, are always admitted.*



Illustrations to *Amazons*. Page. 168



*French Frigidity and Impertinence !!
Que les Anglaises sont Bêtes*

Publ. Feb. 10, 1827
by Geo. Jones & Co. N.Y.



Illustration of Amnack's, Page 209



Patrons for Admission at Amnack's, by S.W. Jones. Possibly they were stopped in the most degrading submission to obtain tickets.



Illustrations of Almack's, Page 283



Pub. Feb. 18. 1827. by W. Jones. — The Ball Room Scene — 41. Praceilly London —
Sau de Colange, — Dramatic Vignette; thro and thro the Thurox — do for
the love of Heaven —



Illustrations of Almack's Page 303.



Publ. Feb 13. 1827 by SWires
Comports of the Drawing Room.
I really had that little Man's queue in my mouth - for your Hat is in
my Eye - My Ropes are gone...
W. Peckably London.