



## Journalist draws on humor to connect with crowd

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Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Joel Pett talked business at Whitman College on Tuesday.

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WALLA WALLA -- Armed with a drawing board and a set of slides, Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Joel Pett spoke to an audience at Whitman College's Maxey Auditorium on Tuesday, entertaining students with insightful comic strips and encouraging them to think critically about world issues.

Winner of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award in 1999, Pett, the staff cartoonist for the Lexington Herald-Leader in Kentucky and a regular contributor for USA Today, was quick to make light of the talent that has taken him far in the industry.

"I discovered I could only really draw about six different figures," he joked. "Sometimes I would just swap them around and see if people would notice. If you listen to my critics, I still can't draw."

But Pett drew an impressive and recognizable cartoon of former President George W. Bush in about 10 seconds near the beginning of his lecture entitled, "What in the World is so Funny?" He continued with a sketch of President Barack Obama, keen to point out his anatomical abnormalities, "He's got a really long neck," Pett said as he penciled in the details, "Check it out next time you see him."

His cartoon of President Bill Clinton was also strikingly familiar, as was its subsequent transformation, "I drew a beret, black mustache and angry eyebrows on Clinton and realized it looked just like Saddam Hussein."

Although most of his cartoons were more liberal than conservative, taking aim at popular targets such as Bush and members of his administration, Pett has shown an ability to reach beyond partisan arguments by tackling serious problems like childhood obesity, uniting readers in Kentucky with tributes to beloved racehorses, and, ultimately, making people laugh.

His drawings and comments amused many in the audience, but Pett explained that in the world of political cartoons humor is not necessarily everything.

"They're not intended to be funny," he explained and displayed several sobering selections, dealing with torture, corruption and death. "A good political cartoon has to hit hard and make an important point that no one wants to talk about."

However, Pett showed the audience that plenty of humor -- often unintended -- can always be found in other sections of any regular newspaper including bowling ball-related deaths in the obituaries, corrections to falsely reported lotto numbers, and misspelled advertisements for Kellogg's "Pot" Tarts.

While addressing the difficult future that faces the newspaper business, Pett encouraged students to step in and rescue the industry and consider traditional journalism when choosing a future career, "Democracy needs people to chase stuff down and expose it," he said.

"Young cartoonists come to me, thinking about going into advertising instead," Pett recalled, "but nothing will get you farther than passion. Find something you really like and do it."

See for yourself

Joel Pett's Pulitzer Prize citation, biography, works and jury information: [www.pulitzer.org/citation/2000-Editorial-Cartooning](http://www.pulitzer.org/citation/2000-Editorial-Cartooning)

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