Engel v. Vitale / Cartoon Analysis—Answer Key

“Leaving religion to private initiative is un-American!” *(published June 28, 1962)*

Caption label from exhibit—“Herblock Looks at 1962’: When the Supreme Court ruled against state-mandated school prayer in public schools in 1962 in the case of *Engel v. Vitale*, several Congressmen protested the decision. In his support of the Supreme Court, President Kennedy encouraged Americans to pray privately, which further fueled the congressional backlash. Herblock created this caricature of Senator James Glenn Beall of Maryland who led the call for an amendment to require school prayer.”

A 1962 Herblock Cartoon, © The Herb Block Foundation

**Observe**

1. What people and objects are shown? Make a list of what you see in the cartoon including captions.
   - There is a man standing and saying, “Leaving Religion to Private Initiative is Un-American.”
   - There are formal desks and people behind him.

2. What is the setting?
   - In the caption we learn the man is a senator protesting the decision in *Engel*, so the setting is the United States Senate after the *Engel* decision.
3. Are there any objects or people that seem to be exaggerated? If so, why do you think the artist exaggerated?
   The senator’s face looks distorted and his mouth is open wide as if he is yelling to show his anger. The men in the background are physically leaning away from him to show fear, intimidation, or disagreement. The legislator is large, which seems to imply that he is speaking loudly or has a powerful voice. It might stand for more than just his own opinion.

Reflect
4. What is happening in this image?
   An angry legislator is arguing that it is un-American to leave religion to private initiative. Others are listening to him.

5. What is significant about the date this cartoon was published (June 28, 1962)?
   This cartoon was published on June 28, 1962, just three days after the decision in Engel v. Vitale.

6. What does this image remind you of? Can you think of events or news stories that are similar? Do these images or issues relate to your community in any way?
   Student answers will vary, but may include school meetings, club meetings, or coverage of the Congress on television.

Evaluate the Message
7. In your opinion, what is the cartoonist’s message? What elements of the cartoon give you that impression?
   Student answers will vary. The artist is saying that legislators are upset about the decision not to allow prayer in schools. The caricature of the politician makes it seem that the artist is criticizing the politician for reacting so strongly. The dialogue suggests that the artist finds the senators’ reaction to Engel exaggerated and ironic, because the separation of church and state has long been a principle in American government. (Note: the politician is Senator Glenn Beall of Maryland, who was an outspoken opponent of the decision.)

8. Do you agree with the point of view and message of the cartoonist? Why or why not?
   Student answers will vary.

9. What, if anything, should be done about the problem portrayed in the cartoon? Who should do it?
   Student answers will vary but may include that Congress should propose an amendment to allow prayer in school or Congress should abide by the Supreme Court’s decision.

Question
10. What do you still wonder about?
   Student answers will vary.