Useful phrases describing a picture / interpreting a cartoon

The beginning of your description

- The situation is at … / the situation is near…
- The picture / painting / cartoon introduces us / the viewer / the spectator to …
- In the / this picture / painting / photo / cartoon / illustration we see / come upon (stoßen auf) / catch a glimpse of … (flüchtigen Eindruck von etw. bekommen)
- We / the viewer come(s) upon a strange / unusual / beautiful sight of / view (Ansicht) of…
- The picture / cartoon / gives / presents / conveys (vermittelt) a view / a glimpse of…

For the middle of your description of a picture or painting etc. pp.

positions: in the middle / in the centre

at the top / at the bottom
on the left / on the right
in the top right-hand corner
in the bottom left-hand corner
in the background / in the foreground

- In the foreground / on the left… there is / there are…
- In the foreground we can see / come in sight of (erblicken) / catch a sight of / get a good view of / have a fine / shocking view of…
- The picture / scene is dominated (wird beherrscht) by a / two / three groups of people / objects / elements …
- The group on the left / on the right is standing near / at / next to…
- The group … moves towards … / moves in the direction of …
- The group … looks at / up to / down from …
- Behind X we see / there is / there are / there goes / runs Y.
- In front of X we see / there is / there are / there goes / runs Y.
- To the right / left of (rechts von / links von) X we see / there is / there are / there goes / runs Y.
- To the back of X we see / there is / there are / there goes / runs Y.

For the end of your description of a picture or painting etc. pp.

- In the background there is … / there are …
- From left to right there is / there are …
- From below to above (von unten nach oben) the picture is dominated by …
- The general impression we / the viewer get(s) is that of peaceful togetherness / violent uproar / an idyllic scenery …
Intention / message:

- The artist wants to show / explain / …
- The cartoonist / artist wants to convey the message / idea that … /
- The picture conveys the impression that…
- An element of the photo / painting has the effect that… / indicates or represents sth.
- The artist creates an atmosphere of … / The photo appeals to me… / touches me … / leaves me cold /
- In my opinion, the picture is effective / convincing…

When describing what people are doing in a picture use the present progressive.

Cartoons (Jochen Lueders) under: http://www.jochenenglish.de/

In my opinion the cartoon is supposed to … Meiner Meinung nach soll die Karikatur …

cartoon: a funny drawing in a newspaper or magazine, especially about politicians or events in the news

The cartoonist may want to convey that … Der Karikaturist will vielleicht vermitteln, dass
to convey: to communicate or express something without saying it directly

His message might be that … Seine Botschaft könnte sein, dass …

message: the main or most important idea that someone is trying to tell people about in a film, book, speech etc

Perhaps his intention is to show that … Vielleicht ist es seine Absicht zu zeigen, dass …

The cartoon implies that … Die K. deutet daraufhin / impliziert, dass …
to imply: to suggest something without saying it directly

At first glance one might think that … Auf den ersten Blick könnte man meinen, dass

at first glance: when you first look at something

but a closer analysis shows that … aber eine genauere Analyse zeigt, dass …

You could draw the conclusion that … Man könnte den Schluss ziehen, dass …
to refer to … / a reference to … sich beziehen auf … / ein Hinweis auf …
to allude to an event / an allusion to sth. auf ein Ereignis anspielen / Anspielung auf etwas
to allude: to mention something or someone indirectly
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a speech bubble / thought bubble
eine Sprechblase / Gedankenblase

*speech bubble: the circle around the words said by someone in a cartoon*

a funny caption
eine komische Bildunterschrift

*caption: the words printed below a picture or cartoon*

on the (visual) surface
auf der (visuellen) Oberfläche

on the figurative / symbolic level
auf der übertragenen / symbolischen Ebene

X stands for / symbolizes …
X steht für / symbolisiert …

to exaggerate character traits
Charaktereigenschaften übertreiben

to satirize sth.
etwas satirisch darstellen

*to satirize: to use satire to make people see sb.’s faults*

to criticize the behaviour of politicians
das Verhalten von Politikern kritisieren

*to criticize: to express disapproval of someone or something*

critical (towards) / sharp criticism (of )
kritisch (gegenüber) / scharfe Kritik (an)

an outspoken critic (of)
ein freimütiger Kritiker (von)

*outspoken: expressing your opinions honestly and directly, even when doing this might annoy some people*

to disapprove of sth. / strong disapproval (of)
etwas missbilligen / starke Ablehnung (von)

*to disapprove: to think that someone or something is bad or morally wrong*

to make fun of / to poke fun at sb./sth.
sich über jemand/etwas lustig machen

to ridicule sb.
jemand lächerlich machen

*to ridicule: to laugh at a person, idea etc and say that they are stupid*

heavy sarcasm
eißender Sarkasmus

*sarcasm: a way of speaking or writing that involves saying the opposite of what you really mean in order to make an unkind joke or to show that you are annoyed*

to make a sarcastic comment (on)
einen sarkastischen Kommentar machen