Since the late 1990’s, heated debate has swirled around the introduction of genetically engineered strains of staple food crops such as rice, corn, and soybeans. Proponents argue that these strains are resistant to cold and drought, can reduce pesticide use, and that some strains, like “golden” rice, can stave off malnutrition among human populations largely dependent on a single crop. Critics argue that the safety of these foods for human consumption has not been completely established, and that unintended interbreeding with adjacent indigenous crops could threaten the biodiversity of our food supply. While genetically engineered foods are now an industry standard, controversy has continued apace. In 1997 and 2003, the European Union passed legislation requiring labeling of genetically modified (or GM) foods, and calls for labeling to continue in the United States.

Many anti-GM foods activists dubbed them “Frankenfoods,” and some newspapers, such as Britain’s *Daily Mail*, conducted entire campaigns against them. The editorial cartoon included here is from the pages of the *Daily Mail*. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will discover the power of visual humor to deliver a political message.

Ask students to identify the point of view represented by a political cartoon.

**AHA!**: This cartoon isn’t just funny, it’s asking me to take sides in a political argument!

**Key Question #4**: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

**Core Concept #4**: Media have embedded values and points of view

**Grade Level**: 10+

**Materials**: Political cartoon — to access [click here](#) for PDF of Science newsletter (page 12).
The "Franken-Foods" Debate

Written by Quentin Hancock
Thursday, 10 September 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 10 September 2009 10:16

Note: Questions for Discussion and Further Questions for Discussion are partially adapted from material in Developing Scientific Literacy: Using News Media in the Classroom, reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Questions for Discussion: What issue is this cartoon about? Do you think the cartoon is in favor of GM food or against GM food? Why do you think this? Is the cartoon fact or opinion? What opinion or viewpoint is the cartoon communicating?

Further Questions for Discussion:

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Tell students that this cartoon was part of a newspaper campaign against GM foods, then ask students: why would a news source create a campaign for or against an issue? Do you think it’s possible for an editorial cartoon to show readers different sides of an argument?

Extended Activity for Science Teachers (from Exemplar in Scientific Literacy, pps. 130-134) Students are reminded that in both the article and editorial cartoon, the newspaper provided us with information that supported only or predominantly one side of the argument in the GM debate. However, if we are to make up our own minds we need to seek out and consider all sides of the argument. How might we find out the arguments both in favor of and against growing GM crops and selling GM food? Working in groups, students explore one or two information sources relating to GM food (interesting examples may be drawn from scientific societies, environmental groups, the BBC, etc.) and compile a list of advantages and disadvantages of growing GM crops for food or other purposes. As a class, they collate the results of their research. Finally, in whole-class discussion, students evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the diverse resources they consulted as sources of information.
The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2008, Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.com