

**Lesson Title:**

Propaganda and World War II

**Subjects:**

U. S. History, World History

**Suggested time:**

One 50-minute class period

**Grade Levels:**

7-12

**Essential Questions:**

- How is public opinion shaped and controlled?
- Why do governments and institutions want to manipulate attitudes?
- Why is propaganda an effective approach for shaping public opinion?

**Learning Targets:**

- Students will identify how the imagery and words of propaganda posters were used to shape opinions during WWII.
- Students will demonstrate their understanding of vindictive peace by explaining barriers that propaganda creates for “peace without victory.”

**Overview:**

In this lesson, students examine the effect of propaganda on the war effort, and how propaganda made it difficult for nations to have “peace without victory” rather than a “vindictive peace.” Students will create a sample propaganda poster related to an issue/event/condition during World War II. It will be best for this lesson to take place after they have had some exposure to the causes of WWII, and to some of the controversies and public attitudes about the war effort. For a brief overview of war efforts that benefitted from the use of propaganda, visit the sites listed under Materials. These could also supplement course textbooks.

**Materials:**

- The National World War II Museum provides a concise description of US efforts that benefitted from propaganda posters:  
<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/at-a-glance/propaganda-posters.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>
- The History Channel offers a broad overview of the causes of WWII:  
<http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/world-war-ii-history>
- This site provides a lengthy description on Britain’s efforts to sway public opinion in the US to join the war effort prior to Pearl Harbor. It is appropriate for students, but better as background information for the teacher: <http://www.historynet.com/britains-propaganda-war-on-america.htm>

**Procedure:***Warm-up activity:*

To open the lesson, project overhead or on the board the following definition of propaganda: “The spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.”<sup>1</sup>

Ask students to turn to a partner and come up with at least two examples of propaganda using the definition as their guide. Depending on what they have learned in class, ask them to identify at least one example of propaganda from World War II. Bring the class together and have several pairs share what they discussed. As examples are shared, have the class ensure that they meet the attributes of propaganda:

- 1) Spreading ideas, information, or rumor
- 2) Intention of helping or injuring
- 3) Focus is on an institution, cause, or person.

*Step 1: Topics of propaganda*

Shift the focus of the discussion to propaganda during WWII by asking the following and hearing from students during a classroom discussion. List their ideas on the board for use during Step 2:

- 1) What topics of propaganda did the U.S. and the Allies use to help support for the war, or injure Germany and the Axis?
- 2) What topics of propaganda did the Axis powers use to help support for the war, or injure the Allies?

*Step 2: Exploring messages in propaganda*

In pairs, have students select one of the topics above, and then think of an image or picture that would help convey this message. Providing them with the following two examples might help their thinking. Project each image, or hand them out as you briefly talk about each image/words and ask students to consider why this was an effective example of propaganda:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda>

Example #1:



The message “I Want You for U.S. Army” was commissioned as a WWI recruitment poster, and sought to increase the number of soldiers. It was used again during WWII. It tried to appeal to honor and duty.

Ask students:

- What messages does the poster attempt to convey?
- How is the poster effective in conveying the message?
- What sorts of positive and negative feelings and ideas does the poster cause a World War II era viewer to have?

Example #2:



Car-sharing intended to use less fuel, and make it more available for military purposes. Other posters encouraged growing your own food and recycling to help war efforts.

Ask students:

- What messages does the poster attempt to convey?
- How is the poster effective in conveying the message?
- What sorts of positive and negative feelings and ideas does the poster cause a World War II era viewer to have?

### *Step 3: Creating posters*

Instruct the students that they will be drawing “propaganda posters,” but their assignment is to draw posters that might have been used to sway popular opinion in favor of US/Allies involvement in WWII, or supporting the war from the home front. Divide the class into groups of four, with each group producing one poster idea.

Note: It may require too much time for students to find an image. Instead, have them describe the imagery, even sketching some general shapes and figures, and then write the text that would accompany the image.

Each poster should contain the following elements:

- A persuasive “headline” and text
- At least one original graphic idea that will serve to help convince the viewer to be involved in the war
- The poster should be written in a style and format that would convince a viewer in the 1940s

PLEASE NOTE: Many propaganda posters from WWII would be considered racist and sexist today. As students elect their poster topics and images, require them to use imagery and phrases that are appropriate for today. For example, derogatory references to the Japanese occurred in the propaganda from WWII, but should not be part of the students’ creations for this activity.

### *Step 4: Thinking about consequences*

Ask the students to reflect on a negative result of propaganda in war: public opinion may be persuaded away from a peaceful victory; justice would require a vindictive peace, or an end that included punishment of the enemy.

Have students write down 3 to 5 sentences to this prompt:

What effect or impact would your poster have on the peacemaking process? How would it lead people to want punishment for the enemy? How would it allow for a peaceful end to the war?

### **Extension Activity #1:**

A visit to the Why War: The Causes of Conflict exhibit at the Flying Heritage Collection allows students to view examples of propaganda posters. As they view the posters, they should compare the primary sources posters to the examples they created and look for similar messages and uses of imagery. As students tour the exhibit, have them answer these questions:

- Are the artifacts in the exhibit examples of propaganda? Why/Why not?

- What sorts of feelings would citizens of the United States, Britain, or France have regarding making peace with Germany after being exposed to several years of propaganda similar to what the Allied governments exposed them?
- How would the Germans react to Allied peace proposals considering the types of propaganda about the Allies they had been exposed to throughout the war years?

**Extension #2:**

Ask the class to brainstorm current forms of propaganda being used, either by government or private groups, today. Some students may note that political parties use propaganda to convey a particular message that favors their view or supports a state, local, or national candidate. Others may recall propaganda that was promoted by Nazi Germany in World War II, and other students may have more current examples. Once students have come up with several recent propaganda sources, ask if they can predict what effect or impact propaganda would have on building a peaceful agreement/consensus about this topic.

**Language Support:**

To aid those with limited English proficiency or others who need help with academic language, place them in groups with at least one student who speaks English as a first language. The handout on risk factors can also be given to ELLs the day before this activity, and ELLs should be told which risk factor they will examine.

**Standards:**

**Washington Standards (EALRs/GLEs)**

**8th Grade Social Studies**

**EALR GLE GLE Description**

History 4.3.1 Analyzes and interprets historical materials from a variety of perspectives in U.S. history (1776—1900).

**9th and 10th Grade Social Studies**

**EALR GLE GLE Description**

History 4.4.1 Analyzes how an understanding of world history can help us prevent problems today.

Skills 5.11 Analyzes consequences of positions on an issue or event.

**11th Grade Social Studies**

**EALR GLE GLE Description**

Civics 4.2.3 Analyzes and evaluates the causes and effects of U.S. foreign policy on people in the United States and the world in the past or present.

History 4.1.2 Understands how the following themes and developments help to define eras in U.S. history: • World War II, the Cold War, and international relations (1939—1991). • Movements and domestic Issues (1945—1991). • Entering a new era (1991—present).

Skills 5.1.1 Analyzes the underlying assumptions of positions on an issue or event.

## **12 Grade Social Studies**

### **EALR GLE GLE Description**

History 4.2.1 Evaluates how individuals and movements have shaped contemporary world issues.

4.2.2 Analyzes how cultural identity can promote unity and division.

4.3.2 Evaluates the ramifications of monocausal explanations of contemporary events in the world.

## **Common Core State Standards:**

### **Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 9-10**

Edies » Grade 9-10

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

### **Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 11-12**

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

**NCSS C3 Framework (College, Career, and Civic Life)**

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action