

## Propaganda of War

**Subject:** English

**Grade level:** British Literature – American Literature - English III

**Rationale or Purpose:** This lesson is designed to aid in students' understanding and recognition of PROPAGANDA (particularly WAR propaganda): information that is spread for the purpose of promoting some cause. Because PROPAGANDA is by definition, used to influence popular opinion, it is important for everyone to understand how to discern when propaganda is being used. \*It is vital for the teacher to have a strong understanding of the elements and uses of propaganda.

**NOTE:** This lesson can be used alone or as part of a larger lesson on War Literature—including some or all the following: American poetry, letters of war, novels, and short stories.

### **Materials:**

- Handout Quotes

“We must remember that in time of war what is said on the enemy's side of the front is always propaganda, and what is said on our side of the front is truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and a crusade for peace.”

— *Walter Lippmann*

“The first casualty when war comes is Truth.”

— *U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917*

“In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.”

— *Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during World War II*

“Those who promote the negative image of the “enemy” may often reinforce it with rhetoric about the righteousness of themselves; the attempt is to muster up support and nurture the belief that what is to be done is in the positive and beneficial interest of everyone. Often, the principles used to demonize the other, is not used to judge the self, leading to accusations of double standards and hypocrisy.”

“Next the statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception.”

— *Mark Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, 1916, Ch.9*

**Source:** Shah, Anup. “War, Propaganda and the Media.” *Mainstream Media*. 1999-2006 [online]  
<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp>. 30 May 2006.

- From Ransom Center Collection:

Couglin, John A. First in France. U. S. Marines. Poster, 1917-1918.

Sidney H. Riesenberg. Lend as they Fight, Buy more Liberty Bonds. Poster, 1917.

Henry Raleigh. Halt the Hun. Buy U. S. Government Bonds. Poster, 1918.

Howard Chandler Christy. I Want You for the Navy. Poster, 1917.

Charles Livingston Bull. Keep Him Free. Poster, 1917-1918.

#### OTHER:

\*Other miscellaneous War Propaganda (i.e. Posters, news reels, etc.)

\*Computer access and Microsoft Word or PowerPoint software (clipart or other images) OR poster paper (or butcher paper), markers, colored pencils, crayons, and magazines – which can be used in lieu original art work

#### Possible LINKS:

<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/amposter.htm>

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/posters/index.htm>

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fgulib.lausun.georgetown.edu%2Fdept%2Fspeccoll%2Fbritpost%2Fposters.htm>

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pma.edmonton.ab.ca%2Fvexhibit%2Fwarpost%2Fenglish%2Fhome.htm>

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.the-forum.com%2Fposters%2Fwarpost1.htm>

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.worldwar1.com%2Fposters.htm>

<http://www.historians.org/Projects/GIroundtable/index.html>

**Lesson Duration:** Maximum of two 90 minute Blocks or four 45 minute lessons (Time will vary depending on availability of computers, Internet, etc. AND on student ability levels.)

#### Objectives:

TEKS 1, A - write in a voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose

TEKS 4, D - represent information in a variety of ways such as graphics, conceptual maps, and learning logs

TEKS 4, E - use writing as a study tool to clarify and remember information

TEKS 7, H - use study strategies such as note taking, outlining, and using study-guide questions to better understand texts

TEKS 12, B - evaluate the credibility of information sources, including how the writer's motivation may affect that credibility; and

TEKS 12, C - recognize logical, deceptive, and/or faulty modes of persuasion in texts.  
TEKS 14, A - demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of the listening process such as focusing attention, interpreting, and responding  
TEKS 14, E - use effective listening to provide appropriate feedback in a variety of situations such as conversations and discussions and informative, persuasive, or artistic presentations.  
TEKS 15, A - use the conventions of oral language effectively;  
  
TEKS 15, B - use informal, standard, and technical language effectively to meet the needs of purpose, audience, occasion, and task;  
TEKS 15, C - communicate effectively in conversations and group discussions while problem solving, and planning;  
TEKS 15, D - use effective verbal and nonverbal strategies in presenting oral messages;  
TEKS 15, E - ask clear questions for a variety of purposes and respond appropriately to the questions of others; and  
TEKS 15, F - make relevant contributions in conversations and discussions.

### **Activity:**

**Step 1:** Introduce Students to the definition and elements of Propaganda. This can be accomplished with a handout, a PowerPoint presentation and/or through note taking and lecture.

Handout –

Definition – **Propaganda** is a specific type of message presentation directly aimed at influencing the opinions of people, rather than impartially providing information (Wikipedia).

### **Elements of Propaganda**

Propaganda can serve to rally people behind a cause, but often at the cost of exaggerating, misrepresenting, or even lying about the issues in order to gain that support.

While the issue of propaganda often is discussed in the context of militarism, war and war-mongering, it is around us in all aspects of life.

As the various examples below will show, common tactics in propaganda often used by either side include:

- Using **selective stories** that come over as wide-covering and objective.
- **Partial facts**, or historical context
- **Reinforcing reasons and motivations** to act due to threats on the security of the individual.
- **Narrow sources of “experts”** to provide insights in to the situation. (For example, the mainstream media typically interview retired military personnel for many conflict-related issues, or treat official government sources as fact, rather than just one perspective that needs to be verified and researched).

- **Demonizing the “enemy”** who does not fit the picture of what is “right”.
- Using a **narrow range of discourse**, whereby judgements are often made while the boundary of discourse itself, or the framework within which the opinions are formed, are often not discussed. The narrow focus then helps to serve the interests of the propagandists.

### **Word Games**

Name-calling

Labeling people, groups, institutions, etc in a negative manner

Glittering generality

Labeling people, groups, institutions, etc in a positive manner

Euphemisms

Words that pacify the audience with blander meanings and connotations

### **False Connections**

Transfer

Using symbols and imagery of positive institutions etc to strengthen acceptance

Testimonial

Citing individuals not qualified to make the claims made

### **Special Appeal**

Plain Folks

Leaders appealing to ordinary citizens by doing “ordinary” things

Band Wagon

The “everyone else is doing it” argument

Fear

Heightening, exploiting or arousing people's fears to get supportive opinions and actions

**Source:** Shah, Anup. “Elements of Propaganda.” *Mainstream Media*. 1999-2006 [online]  
<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp>. 30 May 2006.

**Step 2:** Share and discuss the quotes and how they relate to propaganda.

**Step 3:** Show students the Ransom Center’s WWI posters (*Big Debates—After The War*) and as a class, look for any elements of propaganda. Using the chalkboard, overhead projector or document projector jot down elements used and student comments.

**Step 4:** Put students into teams of 2 or 3 and (if computers are available use internet or online sources viewing other war posters) provide each team with examples of a variety of war posters. Then have each team analyze at least 4 different posters for the elements of propaganda. Have each team write down or type descriptions of the elements used, how these elements were used and to what effect.

**Step 5:** NOW have the teams create their own war posters.

- This can be accomplished using PowerPoint, Microsoft Word or poster paper or butcher paper with markers, colors, colored pencils and perhaps magazine clippings.
- Then have the students explain in writing how their poster meets the qualifications of propaganda.

**Step 6:** Have student share posters with class and to explain which and how the elements of propaganda are used, using their written explanations as a guide.

**Modification:**

NOTE: This lesson can be modified for teaching British Literature, and can also be enhanced by incorporating war posters from both “sides” of the battle.

**Student Product:**

- Notes over propaganda
- Team notes on war poster analysis
- Team War Posters
- Written War Posters descriptions and explanations
- Poster sharing presentations

**Closure:** Evaluate the final posters Does the poster effectively propagandize some aspect of the war? What could be improved to enhance the concept of propaganda?

**Assessment or evaluation:**

- Check propaganda notes for completion (use for future quizzes or test on propaganda).
- Evaluate (with a rubric) the team notes on analysis.
- Use a simple rubric to score the team poster and written descriptions and explanations.
- Finally, use a presentational speech rubric to evaluate the final presentation – one that evaluates multiple speakers who are all required to speak about the poster.

**Extension:** As noted above, this lesson could be used as part of a Literature of War Unit, or it could be extended by creating more contemporary war posters and propaganda – Korea, Vietnam, Cold War, War in Iraq, War Against Terrorism. You could have students create full War Propaganda brochures (pamphlets) by using examples of longer war propaganda pieces.

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