

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Analyzing Propaganda

Preparation

Overview and Objectives

This lesson is geared toward adult audiences interested in the topic of propaganda and its use in popular culture.

The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum is a former Navy aircraft carrier that served during World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. While the Intrepid Museum showcases the history with the men who went off to war, this lesson deals with the broader scope of propaganda and its influence in American culture. The United States government used propaganda posters to encourage citizens in supporting the effort at home.

This lesson includes a [slideshow](#) in which an instructor can lead participants through developing a critical understanding of propaganda elements and how to analyze propaganda posters. The lesson culminates with participants critically discussing and analyzing film and music clips from the Cold War.

Instructional Modalities

This activity was designed for both synchronous or asynchronous instruction.

For **synchronous instruction**, we recommend a platform that allows both for group discussion and interaction.

For **asynchronous adaptations**, we provide suggestions to provide additional support for the activities and ways for adults to share their work with each other.

Discussion Questions

Does something have to be a lie to be propaganda?

How is propaganda different from education?

To what extent do we all use spin in our lives to project images of ourselves to get what we want?

Materials

- [Analyze Propaganda slideshow](#)
- **Worksheet** (p. 6)

Lesson**1. Introductory Activity**

- Ask Participants:
 - **What do you think of when you hear the word propaganda?**
 - **How do you know if something is propaganda?**
 - **What are key elements to propaganda?**
 - **How do we all use spin in our lives to project images of ourselves to get what we want?**
- Discuss the responses with the group.

2. Core Activity

- Inform participants they will be learning about key elements of propaganda and how creators of advertisements used these elements to persuade public attitudes and actions at home in the United States during World War II and into the Cold War. Participants will identify issues that required the use of propaganda during this historical period. It may help their understanding if they consider other documents or other historical evidence to explain these historical events.
- **What is propaganda?** Have participants discuss the meaning of propaganda. Discuss propaganda as a form of communication that is aimed at influencing the attitude of a community toward some cause or position. These were often used as posters. More importantly, propaganda tends to be visual and is often referred to as a negative form of advertisement because people would use media (print, tv, radio) to bias their listeners/readers.
- **How do we analyze propaganda?** When analyzing propaganda, we want to consider:
 - the creator's tone, or attitude, toward the cause.
 - the mood, or feeling, you have when you see or hear the propaganda.
 - how propaganda is also used for positive persuasion.

- **What issues required the use of propaganda during World War II?**
Discuss the effects of 13 million men leaving the United States to go to war had on our job market. **Who could fill in the labor gaps? What ways could we motivate women to join the workforce?** Have participants discuss how millions of women left their home towns and were living on their own for the first time. They were earning good money and discovering they could handle jobs traditionally reserved for men. For the first time, many women experienced both social and economic independence.
- Have participants watch the [video](#) on Rosie the Riveter. Be sure to have them identify characteristics of the two images they see. **Who made these posters, and how effective is the persuasion?**
- Identify key elements used to make propaganda effective:
 - Propaganda as more than just words.
 - Use of symbols, such as flags, empty slogans, exaggerated images, currency, music, generalities, parades and other spectacles as tools used by those in power to make their audience feel an emotional response.
 - Carefully selected truths to persuade and manipulate.
- **What were some actions the United States wanted its citizens to take during World War II?** Guide participants through several propaganda posters from World War II. Use these as guiding questions for the next four slides (10-13).
 - What's going on in this image?
 - What is the tone?
 - What other documents or historical evidence can you use to help you understand this event?
 - Who made it, and how effective is its persuasion?
 - What generalities, slogans, or symbols were used, and how did they make you feel?
- For slides 14-15, have participants consider how the creator of the two posters wanted the audience to respond. Refer back to the video as an additional resource for discussion.

3. Propaganda and Popular Culture

- By the end of World War II, the ally relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was deteriorating. Both countries held dramatically different world views. The Soviet Union believed in communism, or the idea of common ownership of property and wealth divided equally among all citizens or according to the needs of an individual. The United States, on the other hand, leaned into capitalism, an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state. With growing political disagreements mounting, this rhetoric from both nations turned into a stronger battle, with little hope for negotiations.
- Americans' fear of Communism throughout the world during the Cold War led to efforts to contain it on the home front.
- In the 1950s, the Soviet Union attained atomic secrets from spies who infiltrated the U.S. government.
- China became a Communist country and the Korean War started, leading to increased concerns about the international spread of Communism.
- Joseph McCarthy capitalized on these fears by accusing many U.S. citizens of being affiliated with the Communist Party. As a result, popular culture shifted. Under McCarthyism, the House Committee on Un-American Activities flourished. Anyone suspected of being a communist, including actors in Hollywood, were blacklisted.
- This era saw a rise in targeted messages of patriotism and anti-Communist sentiment in film, political cartoons, and music, lasting well into the early 1990s.
- One of the most popular movie series of the 1970s and 80s featured a boxer from Philadelphia named Rocky Balboa. In Rocky IV (1985), Rocky returns to the ring from retirement to do battle for the United States itself. World War III is close, but instead of being fought with guns and atom bombs, it will be fought with fists. In the film, Rocky represents the free world battling Ivan Drago, the gigantic Russian.
- Reflecting on the historical context in popular culture of the Cold War, participants use this [worksheet](#) to examine propaganda in popular film and music.

Asynchronous Adaptation

Have participants go through the [slideshow](#) on their own. Using their [worksheet](#), participants can explore propaganda themes found in film and music. Participants can then share their thoughts on a Padlet or Google Doc.

Extension Activities

To deepen participant engagement with this content, you may choose to add the following activities :

Analyze Political Cartoons of the Cold War

Have participants view and discuss propaganda through the time period immediately following World War II, using the same questions from this lesson. [Political cartoons](#) often use exaggerations.

Additional Resources/ References

<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers-of-persuasion>

<https://the-artifice.com/world-war-ii-weapon-propaganda-film/>

<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/lessons>

Masur, Matthew, ed. *Understanding and Teaching the Cold War*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.

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ACTIVITY 1: COLD WAR KIDS REMINISCE! PROPAGANDA IN POPULAR CULTURE

Directions:

Reflect on slogans, images and symbols found in popular films and music during the Cold War. Divide your group into smaller working groups to view or listen to these clips, or work together to analyze them. Discuss your findings.

Reflection Questions:

- What's going on in this clip or song?
- What is the tone?
- What other documents or historical evidence can you use to help you understand this event?
- Who made it, and how effective is its persuasion?
- What generalities, slogans, or symbols were used, and how did they make you feel?

Films	Music
View the playlist here: https://youtu.be/n541A3Q7xFw	View each song individually. Search for lyrics here: https://genius.com/
<i>Red Dawn</i> (1984) (The colonel explains: 2 min 43 sec)	The Kavaliers Get That Communist, Joe (1954) https://youtu.be/MzKW-oz1Lbw
<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (1956) (Pods open: 2 min 46 sec)	Nena 99 Red Balloons (1983) https://youtu.be/Q86nf7mpOXk
<i>The Day After</i> (1983) (Attack segment: 5 min 54 sec)	Sting Russians (1985) https://youtu.be/wHylQRVN2Qs