

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Analyzing Propaganda

Preparation

Overview and Objectives

This lesson is geared toward family audiences with adolescent children.

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 creating public service announcement connecting back to an important issue within the community.

Instructional Modalities

This activity was designed for both synchronous or asynchronous instruction.

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

For **asynchronous adaptations**, we provide suggestions for parents to provide additional support for the activities and for families 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)
- Poster
- Magazines, Newspapers, Scissors, Markers, Colored Pencils

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 its 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 (10-14).
 - 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 15-16, 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. Make Your Own Public Service Announcement

- Watch the [playlist](#) of public service announcements. **What elements do you recognize? What do each of these have in common, and what are the issues that make them stand apart?**
- Public service announcements, or PSAs, are advertisement campaigns with messages used to create a favorable action rather than a negative action. They are often commercials on television or radio. PSAs can also be printed as advertisements in magazines and newspapers. The goal of PSAs is to create awareness for social change.
- PSAs became popular during World War II when the United States entered the war. It was common to find advertising agencies and radio broadcasters offering their skills and work facilities to promote community action, such as encouraging the American public to purchase war bonds that would financially support the war effort.
- [Smokey Bear](#) is another example of an issue that focuses on protecting the environment. Other issues that might be the focus in PSAs include drug awareness, cancer awareness, and even wearing a mask during the pandemic.
- Using this [link](#) to guide you planning and writing your own PSA. Use the [worksheet](#) and poster to make your advertisement
- Keep in mind that PSAs use the following to focus their message:
 - Slogan
 - Symbols
 - Imagery

Asynchronous Adaptation

Have participants go through the [slideshow](#) on their own. Using their [worksheet](#), participants can brainstorm and prepare their own PSA. 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.

Explore More Propaganda in Film

Have participants view and discuss propaganda through the time period immediately following World War II, using the same questions from this lesson. Compare the tone and mood from the posters, *He May Be a Communist* and this segment from *The Day After* ([attack segment](#)).

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: CREATE A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Directions:

Brainstorm and create a poster that serves as a PSA for your community. This chart is your planning sheet. Use another piece of paper or poster to create your final PSA. Each person in the family should pick their own topic, and it should be for a good cause.

What are major issues or concerns in your local community? Make a list of at least 4-6 issues.	
Research each issue you listed before. Narrow down the list until you have only one issue, or problem, that you want to address for social change.	
Based on your research, think of a slogan or title for the issue. Remember that it should be catchy so people remember!	
Choose a symbol or symbols to represent your cause.	
What images can you use?	
Design and draw your poster. You can also use magazines, along with newspapers, scissors, markers, or color pencils.	