

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

# Analyzing Propaganda

## Preparation

### Overview and Objectives

This lesson is geared toward students in grades 8-12.

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 analyzing a short video clip.

## Standards

ELA/SS CC STANDARDS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL  
STUDIES FRAMEWORK:

11.9 Cold War (1945-1990)

8.7 Foreign Policy

### Instructional Modalities

This activity was designed for both synchronous or asynchronous instruction.

For **synchronous instruction**, we recommend a platform that allows both for whole class discussion and for students to interact in small groups.

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

### Materials

- [Analyze Propaganda slideshow](#)
- [Worksheet](#) (p. 5)

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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. Reflect and Analyze a Video

- Have participants reflect on what they observed in the posters in the slideshow. Then introduce the video [He May Be a Communist](#) as either an independent or small group activity. Be sure that participants analyze the title and predict what they think they will see before showing the video.

## Asynchronous Adaptation

Have participants go through the [slideshow](#) on their own. Using their [worksheet](#), participants can identify the key elements of propaganda in the posters and analyze them for effectiveness according to the guiding questions. 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. Students can choose a political cartoon and add it to the background of a [Flipgrid](#) response where they can stand or sit in front of the image and point to key features as they talk

### **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: ANALYZE PROPAGANDA VIDEO

### Directions:

Use the following questions and other questions from the lesson to analyze what you see and hear in the video clip.

1. You will be watching a video segment called *He May Be a Communist*. Think about that title. What do you think you will see?

Now watch the video [He May Be a Communist](#).

2. What is the mood or tone?
3. How do you think the creator wanted the audience to respond?
4. What other documents or historical evidence can you use to help you understand this event?
5. Who made it, and how effective is its persuasion?
6. What generalities, slogans, or symbols were used, and how did they make you feel?
7. Write one sentence summarizing this video.