

LESSON: Critically Analyzing Propaganda

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Up to 120 minutes
(extensions available)

RATIONALE

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to dialogue and reflect on the ways in which propaganda affected society during the Holocaust and how it continues to affect people today. Students will engage in a hands-on activity analyzing examples of propaganda from *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*. They will synthesize and understand how and why Nazi propaganda worked through an opportunity to practice critical analysis of messages. This lesson reinforces media literacy skills.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How and why did the Nazis' propaganda messages work? What were the consequences of Nazi propaganda?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- The role propaganda played in the history of the Holocaust
- How propaganda messages were constructed and spread
- How propaganda interplayed with the political, economic, and social context of the time to be effective
- Factors that influence the success of propaganda (audience receptivity, choice of message and means of communication, the context in which it is spread).
- The consequences of Nazi propaganda
- How gaining media literacy tools to analyze propaganda can help them to be more informed

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Preview [Path to Nazi Genocide](#), noting the role of propaganda during the Holocaust
- Review [State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda](#) online exhibition
- Review timeline of key events that will provide context for student activity. Print [timeline presentation](#) and post on classroom wall(s)
- Review [overview of Nazi propaganda presentation](#) to frame the activity
- Preview examples featured in [propaganda analysis worksheets](#) and [teacher's guide](#)
- Print [propaganda analysis worksheets](#)
- Students will work in six groups, each examining an example of propaganda. You may wish to pre-select groups.

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MODIFICATIONS

Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence, however, the lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses.

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Additional terms can be definitional work
- Share slides ahead of time for review of propaganda images
- Students can share discussion question answers in written form
- The Holocaust Encyclopedia article and series [Nazi Propaganda](#) are available in additional languages
- Students can view similar content from the online exhibition in the Holocaust Encyclopedia series [Nazi Propaganda](#) or in the *State of Deception* [Poster Set](#)

PART ONE: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PROPAGANDA DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Option 1

Assign students to watch [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#) for homework ahead of class, noting the role of propaganda and the media during the events. In class, ask students to share what they learned and what, if anything, surprised them about the role of propaganda during the Holocaust.

Option 2

Watch [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#) during class time. Ask students to note where they see the media and propaganda playing a role in the Holocaust. Following the film, ask students what they learned and what, if anything, surprised them about the role of propaganda during the Holocaust.

PART TWO: INTRODUCING PROPAGANDA AND ITS FEATURES (10 MINUTES)

INTRODUCING PROPAGANDA

ASK THE STUDENTS

- What is propaganda? How would you define it? What are examples of messages you would consider to be propaganda?

Use the [presentation](#) to introduce the concept of propaganda to your students.

1. Provide the Museum's definition of propaganda (slide 2):
 - Biased information spread to shape public opinion and behavior

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2. Remind students that propaganda is not all-powerful and it does not always work. Show them the factors that influence the success or failure of propaganda (slide 3) including the message, technique, means of communication, the context in which it is spread, and the audience's predisposition to be receptive to the message.
3. Share the facets of propaganda (Slide 4, messages do not need to embody all of these characteristics, but many examples of propaganda use many of these features):
 - It uses truths, half-truths, and lies
 - It omits information selectively
 - It simplifies complex issues or ideas
 - It plays on emotions
 - It advertises a cause
 - It can attack opponents
 - It targets desired audiences

PART THREE: ANALYZING EXAMPLES OF NAZI PROPAGANDA

1. Divide students into groups. Assign each group an example of propaganda using the [propaganda analysis worksheets](#). You may wish to model analysis of one example with the whole class.
2. As students analyze their example, they should use the timeline on the wall to examine their example in context.
3. When students complete their analysis worksheets, ask each group to share a summary of their responses with the class. Use the [presentation](#) (pages 6-11) to project the larger image to the class.
4. Following each student summary, use the [Teachers Guide](#) to lead students through an in-depth examination of the following questions:
 - a. **Ask students about how the message is communicated:** How are color, line, graphics, depictions of people, words, and symbols used in this example to communicate a message? What is the message?
 - b. **Ask students about the context in which the message was spread:** Given the hopes, fears, and grievances present in society at the time, why might this message have had power?
 - c. **Ask students about the intended audience:** Who is the target audience? What about this message would be appealing to this group? What reactions might different people have had? Could people access and express alternative viewpoints?
 - d. **Ask questions about the propagandist:** Who created this message? What did they hope the audience would think, feel, and do?

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- e. **Ask students about the impact this message could have on society:** What were the consequences of this propaganda?
5. Ask students to compare and contrast examples in each of the contexts (democracy, dictatorship, and war).
 - a. What stands out about each example? What most captured their attention and why?
 - b. How did propaganda messages change over time?
 - c. When and why does propaganda become problematic? What factors are important to consider in making that assessment?

CONCLUSION: CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT

ASSESSMENT

Return to this essential question and reflect.

- How and why did the Nazis' propaganda messages work? What were the consequences of Nazi propaganda?

Reflection (discussion or writing assignment)

Propaganda was not invented by the Nazis and it did not go away in 1945. It continues to be present in our lives, on a massive scale, today. Reflect on the following questions to consider how we interact with propaganda today and its potential consequences.

- When is propaganda most dangerous?
- What makes you vulnerable to propaganda?
- How can you guard against harmful propaganda?

EXTENSION

Explore how propaganda continues to impact our world and practice media literacy skills on the Media Education Lab's site, [Mind over Media](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Nazi Propaganda Bibliography](#)
- [State of Deception poster set](#)
- [Holocaust Encyclopedia articles on propaganda](#)