

World War II

INTRODUCTION

Throughout World War II (WWII), the United States government sought to gain and maintain the public's support for the war effort. The government needed to win the hearts and minds of the public in order to finance the war, eliminate dissent, conserve resources, and keep up recruitment. Public relations was as much a wartime effort as developing weapons and strategizing attacks. Therefore the U.S. government developed a propaganda campaign that included newsreels, radio shows, posters, and movies. In this lesson, students will learn about the strategies and uses of government propaganda by examining two original WWII posters from the Special Collections Research Center.

GRADES: 9– 12

MATERIALS

- » Primary Source Documents: Two WWII Posters.

STANDARDS

NY State Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

NY State Standard 2: World History

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

Common Core: CC6-8RH/SS2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner: 2.1.1

Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Using examples of WWII propaganda posters, students will:

- » Learn about primary sources, what they are and how they can be used to help understand the past.
- » Expand their knowledge of WWII, when it was, how it came about, and what significance it has in history.
- » Apply critical thinking skills to analyze the propaganda posters used during WWII.
- » Create a WWII propaganda poster that uses text and image to convey a message about the war.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be based on the student's creation of a WWII poster, which demonstrates their ability to:

- » Decipher a primary source document.
- » Expand their thinking about propaganda and how it has been used.
- » Use text and images to convey a message about the war.

Students should take what they have learned during the lesson about WWII and about the uses of propaganda to create a poster. Each poster should convey a message about the war through the creative use of image and text. Each student should be able to express the message and the intended audience of their poster.

GETTING STARTED

- » Explain that primary sources are original documents that tell us about the historical moments in which they were created. Ask the following questions: How can you tell that you are looking, touching, or listening to a primary source? What is a secondary source? Explain that secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources.
- » Introduce the skill of the lesson. In this lesson, students will learn about the strategies and uses of government propaganda by examining two original WWII posters from the Special Collections Research Center. Students will use what they have learned during the lesson about WWII and about the uses of propaganda to create a poster. Each poster should convey a message about the war through the creative use of image and text. Each student should be able to express the message and the intended audience of their poster.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

1. Write the following words on the board: "Advertisement," "Poster," "Billboard," "Commercials," and "Propaganda." Ask the students to give examples for each word. Then ask: Where did you see it? Who paid to have it made? How do these things impact our lives? What is their purpose? How are these examples similar or different? Try to get the students to think of a variety of examples for each (i.e.: pharmaceutical advertisements, political campaign commercials, movie billboards, STD awareness posters).
2. Show the class the WWII posters: "Our Women Are Doing Their Bit—Give Them Funds to Work With," and "Your Scrap...Brought It Down."
3. Explain that during WWII public relations was as much a wartime industry as developing weapons and recruiting soldiers. Therefore the U.S. government developed a propaganda campaign that included newsreels, radio shows, posters, and movies that disseminated the government's message. Some posters

asked for donations, others recruited men and women to join organizations. Others warned against the danger of spies.

4. Bring the students back to the words on the board. Ask the students if they think these forms of publicity are always truthful or accurate? Ask the students if they can think of examples of how publicity might be misleading. How does publicity try to persuade us? What rhetorical tactics does publicity often use (i.e.: fears, hopes, stereotypes, statistics, etc.)? What visual strategies does publicity often use (i.e.: bold graphics, big text, eye-catching images, and brand logos)?
5. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of the two WWII posters. Ask each group to determine the following:
 - Who is the intended audience? (i.e.: men, women, young, old, etc.)
 - What is the message that the poster is trying to present?
 - What rhetorical tactics does the poster use to convey this message?
 - What visual strategies does the poster use to persuade us?
6. Discuss the two posters as a class. Have each group share their answers to the above questions. The teacher may need to help guide the students by providing context for the posters. For example, explain what “scrap” is and how recycling was part of the war effort. Additionally, the teacher may want to compare the American Red Cross logo with a logo the students would be familiar with, such as the Nike logo. Both logos are simple, but they also convey a lot of information through their form (the red of the cross connotes blood, while the swoosh of the Nike logo conveys speed and agility).
7. For homework, have each student create a WWII poster that utilizes the rhetorical tactics and visual strategies discussed in class. Students should use their textbook to identify a real issue that concerned the U.S. government during WWII and make a poster that tries to persuade the American public through image and text.

REFLECTION AND SHARING

- » The teacher should hang the finished posters around the class room. Each student should be able to express the message and the intended audience of their poster.



“Your Scrap...Brought It Down,” 1942. Benjamin Spock War Posters Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.



“Our Women Are Doing Their Bit—Give Them Funds to Work With,” 1942. Benjamin Spock War Posters Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.