

Wartime Propaganda

Image Collection on Media  Smart DVD-ROM



READING 12A Evaluate how messages presented in media reflect social and cultural views in ways different from traditional texts.

12C Evaluate how one issue or event is represented across various media to understand the notions of bias, audience, and purpose. **12D** Evaluate changes in formality and tone across various media for different audiences and purposes.

What's the **POWER** of a poster?

KEY IDEA Think about what persuades you to act. Are you more likely to respond to cold, hard logic or to an emotional appeal? Creators of propaganda have long understood that targeting such human emotions as guilt, fear, and national pride can have potent effects. They attempt to tap into these emotions to convince large numbers of people to follow their agenda. In this lesson, you'll examine British and American propaganda posters from World War II. You'll analyze the persuasive techniques propagandists use to **influence** people's opinions and behavior.

Background

Pretty Persuasion The idea of propaganda often carries negative connotations, as it is thought of as a means of spreading false information. Technically, though, propaganda simply refers to any attempt to influence other people's beliefs or actions. Propaganda can be as innocuous as a magazine ad or as sinister as a Nazi war film.

No matter the form of government, leaders know that it is crucial to have the support of the people, especially during wartime. Effective propaganda can be used both at home and abroad to fuel support of the home country and its allies and to demoralize the enemy.

The United States and Britain used propaganda in World War II as a major weapon of war. For the British, the fighting was close to home, and its effects were apparent to the people. For Americans, however, the war was far away, so the average citizen could not see its effects firsthand. Much of the U.S. propaganda, therefore, attempted to convince Americans to contribute to the war effort with money and labor and to view the Germans and the Japanese as evil threats. The propaganda was meticulously designed and came in many forms, including films, radio broadcasts, leaflets, and posters such as the British one you see on this page.

Whether it's in the form of a political speech, a biased news report, or a television commercial, propaganda remains an important tool used to influence public opinion.



R.A.F. day raiders over Berlin's official quarter.

BACK THEM UP!

Media Literacy: Propaganda Posters

Artists during World War II designed propaganda posters to raise money, encourage productivity and conservation of resources, create negative images of the enemy, increase enlistment, and boost morale. Propaganda posters use the same design elements—**color, line, shape, and texture**—as other works of art to effectively convey their message. In addition, propagandists use some of the same **persuasive techniques** as advertisers to influence their audience.

STRATEGIES FOR ANALYZING PROPAGANDA POSTERS

- Identify the overall **message**. What action does the poster call for? What attitude or belief does it promote? Notice how the message is conveyed with a combination of words and visual images. Often, just a few carefully chosen words can drive home a powerful message.
- Recognize the **emotional appeals**. To persuade people to do something that doesn't directly benefit them, propaganda must hit at a deep emotional level. Watch for **appeals to fear**, messages that tap into people's fear of losing their safety or security, and **appeals to guilt**, which build support for an action or idea by tapping into the audience's conscience.
- Look for **symbols**, visual images that represent something beyond themselves. For example, the depiction of a country's flag, or even its leader, might come to symbolize the country as a whole. Think about how a given symbol might tap into very different sentiments for people on opposite sides of a conflict.
- Understand how the message is directed at the individual citizen. For propaganda to be successful, it must appeal to a large number of people on a personal level. Ask yourself: How does the poster address the average citizen as an individual?



Media Smart DVD-ROM

- **Selection 1:** “Back Them Up!”
- **Selection 2:** “When You Ride Alone You Ride with Hitler!”
- **Selection 3:** “Don’t Let That Shadow Touch Them”
- **Genre:** World War II Propaganda Posters



Viewing Guide for Propaganda Posters

Use the DVD to examine these and other World War II propaganda posters more closely. As you study each, try to identify the persuasive techniques at work. Be aware of the feelings that are triggered by any symbols you see. Look for the ways each poster attempts to appeal to various emotions. Identify the poster’s message, and think about how that message stands up independently of the poster. Consider these questions as you analyze each poster.

NOW VIEW

FIRST VIEWING: Comprehension

1. **Identify** In the “Don’t Let That Shadow Touch Them” poster, what emotions do you see in the expressions on the children’s faces?
2. **Clarify** According to the “When You Ride Alone You Ride with Hitler!” poster, what is the driver doing wrong?

CLOSE VIEWING: Media Literacy

3. **Interpret the Message** Look closely at the “Back Them Up!” poster on page 1298. What message do you think this poster is attempting to convey?
4. **Analyze Symbols** Identify any symbols you see in the “Don’t Let That Shadow Touch Them” poster on this page. Explain what each symbol represents and the possible emotions it might have triggered in a citizen during World War II.
5. **Analyze a Poster** In your own words, describe how you think an American in 1943 would have reacted to the “When You Ride Alone You Ride with Hitler!” poster. Cite specific elements to support your analysis.
6. **Evaluate Persuasive Techniques** Choose one of the three posters and evaluate the effectiveness of its persuasive techniques. Think about
 - the use of symbols
 - the emotions the poster attempts to appeal to
 - how the poster is directed at its audience
 - the actions or beliefs the poster promotes

Write or Discuss

Compare Propaganda Posters The “Back Them Up!” poster on page 1298 is British. The other two posters in this lesson are American. Write a paragraph to compare the three posters. Examine the persuasive techniques used in each poster to influence the audience. How effective is each poster? Think about

- the message of each poster and how it’s presented
- how emotional appeals and symbols are used
- the different ways that British and American citizens were affected by the war



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Produce Your Own Media

Create a Propaganda Poster Choose an issue in the news today. Decide which side of the issue you support. Create your own propaganda poster to influence people’s opinions or call them to action. Use the persuasive techniques you’ve learned in the lesson to create your poster.

HERE’S HOW Here are a few ideas to keep in mind as you design your poster:

- Think about symbols that are associated with the issue you’ve chosen. Consider the feelings these symbols might trigger and how you can use them to persuade your audience.
- Personalize your message. Remember, however, that you must appeal to a large number of people.
- Decide how you want to present your message. Propaganda posters can deliver their messages directly or indirectly. Use the method you find most effective.



Tech Tip

If available, use a design program to create your poster, using photographs, clip art, computer drawings, and text.

Further Exploration

The Art of Persuasion Look at the additional propaganda posters included on the DVD. Consider the message of each and the persuasive techniques used to communicate it. Now think about the design elements—line, color, shape, and texture—in each poster. Discuss these elements and how they’re used to convey the poster’s message. Which posters do you think have the most effective design elements? Explain why you think so.

Propaganda vs. Advertising During World War I, the United States launched a massive propaganda campaign through the Committee on Public Information. Scholars, businesspeople, psychologists, and artists were hired to develop sophisticated techniques to generate public support for the war. Many of these techniques have since been put to use in the advertising world. Collect several print ads and compare them with the propaganda posters you’ve examined. What, if any, propaganda techniques do you see in the ads? How do the feelings the ads try to trigger compare with the emotions conveyed in the posters? Where does advertising end and propaganda begin?