

## Degrees of Truth: Propaganda During WWI and WWII

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### INTRODUCTION

I teach eleventh grade at Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions, a diverse, inner-city magnet school that specializes in health studies, science, and math. One of the reasons I love teaching history at this school is because, for many of my students, it is one of the few academic classes they have where there is an opportunity to be creative. The subject of propaganda is a perfect fit for this goal. My students will be able to watch films, examine ad campaigns, and better understand the impact of radio during our unit, and many of the lessons I have created provide students the opportunity to be their own authors and illustrators.

Teachers hope to prepare our students to be critical thinkers, learners, and conscientious citizens. In a time when they are exposed to persuasive messages through many types of media, it is important that students learn the value of information analysis. By this I mean that they learn to evaluate information disseminated by the media and government in order to distinguish fact from fiction. To meet this goal I want them to focus on the concept of propaganda. My 11<sup>th</sup> graders study U.S. History and much of the curriculum deals with American involvement in World War I and World War II. My unit aims to help my students better understand the role that propaganda plays in swaying public opinion, within the context of our study of both wars.

One of my primary goals is to create classroom activities that reach a variety of learning styles. History is a great subject for this because we can easily have class discussion, lectures, or small group work, and the ability to incorporate primary sources makes the material more understandable. When students are able to figuratively place themselves in the time of our topic, they better understand its relevance and impact. Political cartoons, posters, radio programs, and films are all excellent tools to help students see the bigger picture. When we finish our unit on propaganda, my hope is that students will better understand the historical period, better understand the influence of propaganda during that period, and be able to compare what they've studied to the propaganda that influences their thinking today.

### OBJECTIVES

**TEKS Objective (3) History.** The student understands the emergence of the United States as a world power between 1898 and 1920. The Student will be able to:

*(B) Identify the reasons for U.S. involvement in World War I, including unrestricted submarine warfare.*

**TEKS Objective (6) History.** The student understands the impact of significant national and international decisions and conflicts from World War II and the Cold War to the present on the United States. The student will be able to:

*(A) Identify reasons for U.S. involvement in World War II, including the growth of dictatorships and the attack on Pearl Harbor.*

**TEKS Objective (15) Government.** The student understands changes in the role of government over time. The student will be able to:

*(B) Explain the impact of significant international events such as World War I and World War II on changes in the role of the federal government.*

**TEKS Objective (20) Culture.** The student understands the relationship between the arts and the time during which they were created. The student will be able to:

(C) *Identify examples of American art, music, and literature that transcend American culture and convey universal themes.*

(D) *Analyze the relationship between culture and the economy and identify examples such as the impact of the entertainment industry on the U.S. economy.*

**TEKS Objective (24) Social Studies Skills.** The student applies critical thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology. The student will be able to:

(D) *Use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple sources of evidence.*

(G) *Support a point of view on a social studies issue or event.*

**TEKS Objective (25) Social Studies Skills.** The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student will be able to:

(D) *Create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.*

## **RATIONALE**

My teaching unit is a natural fit for the Houston Teachers Institute seminar “Great Films and Politics.” Many wartime films portray the feelings, attitudes, and prejudices of Allied countries during the war – *Hearts of the World, The Claws of the Hun, Caught in the Draft, Wake Island, Frank Capra’s WWII: Why We Fight, The Lion Has Wings* – and a film such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a valuable teaching tool because the film reveals the attitudes and biases of allies and enemies alike. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, in particular, shows how deeply patriotism is rooted in the social fabric of the society of the enemy. Other visual tools, featuring photographs of Victory Gardens and Rosie the Riveter, include posters, flyers, and pamphlets reflecting a number of themes such as Anti-German sentiment and American patriotism. My students often have difficulties understanding how deeply families were affected by the war because they have never lived during a time when there has been a military draft or when the United States has been involved in a large-scale global conflict that threatened our democratic institutions. Films and related visual aids can help my students to understand the ambiguous feelings of patriotism and disillusionment that wartime families had to endure.

Radio is also another medium that I can use in the classroom to assist students to comprehend propaganda and media manipulation. The idea of “news radio” is a concept lost on my students since they were born and raised in the age of television. I would like to introduce them to radio by means of American broadcasts from the war years (1914-1918 and 1939-1945). As students are listening, they can find hidden meaning and messages in this very valuable instrument of propaganda.

My broader goal has always been to reserve time in our curriculum for student-created work. So much of our schedule is relegated to standardized testing and assessments that I feel that we rarely reserve the opportunity for students to examine subjects we study in alternative, imaginative ways. To accomplish this, my ideas include having students write and perform their own war-time radio addresses, create and illustrate their own propaganda posters, and perhaps rehearse and perform some of the more prominent speeches from the time period. FDR’s famous Pearl Harbor speech is one example. My students relish any chance they have to be creative, such as the opportunity to showcase their writing, artistic, or acting talents.

Because much of our year is devoted to the study of WWI and WWII, in my opinion, this justifies the importance of the study of propaganda because it is a topic that can be linked to so many different classroom discussions. What I also find very useful about exploring the idea of

propaganda with my students is that it can be connected very easily to pertinent issues of modern society. Students will be able to use their understanding of propaganda to assess how attitudes and opinions are manufactured and shaped by the government and media. Such issues as the Iraq War, abortion, and the upcoming 2008 presidential election are just a few of these controversies. This quotation by Walter Lippmann seems like a great place to start: “We must remember that in time of war what is said on the enemy's side of the front is always propaganda, and what is said on our side of the front is truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and a crusade for peace.”

By introducing the concept of propaganda and allowing my students first to discuss its meaning and value, I can then tackle larger curriculum subjects like WWI and WWII. Hopefully, I can provide them with the chance to see the face of war from a variety of different perspectives.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

One of the things that makes teaching the concept of propaganda so interesting is the variety of media through which it is purveyed. My unit will focus on three of these: posters and flyers, radio, and film. During both wars each of these became an effective tool in shaping public opinion and often persuading citizens to reconsider their original opinions and attitudes. Frequently governments propositioned radio broadcasters and filmmakers to create programs and movies showcasing acts of patriotism, civic duty, and nationalism.

As nations of Europe called upon their allies in 1914 to confront the possibility of going to war, the United States remained isolationist, in large part due to President Wilson's fear of “entangling foreign alliances.” Our policy of isolationism became less clear as we loaned Britain and France large sums of money and produced the heavy armaments and machinery needed for trench warfare. This policy rather quickly segued into one of partial isolationism. Although no U.S. soldiers would be deployed to Europe until late in the war (1917), it was quite clear whose side we were on. For many Americans, however, support for the war was not a feeling that came naturally. At that time nearly a quarter of U.S. society could claim full or partial German heritage, which proved to be controversial. Some, regardless of their ancestry, were slow to warm to the notion of being involved in a conflict that was not their own, but over time this attitude changed. H.C. Peterson says this about American feelings prior to decision to abandon neutrality in 1917:

In spite of their profound repugnance, Americans began to enjoy the fight. Responding to the stimulus of British propaganda, they thought of the French and Belgians as pathetic heroes, the British as gallant defenders of the right, and the Germans as deep-dyed villains. (169)

Propaganda was used much more strategically and frequently during WWII. One of Roosevelt's speech writers, Robert Sherwood, headed up a committee in 1941 whose aim was to “fight a war of words against the Axis.” Although this committee worked to boost U.S. support, it also wanted to spread information about America's involvement to Axis-controlled territories overseas (Schulman 13). And as the Nazi party grew stronger in the late 1920s and 1930s, mass media became a very powerful outlet for gathering the immense support they would soon have (Osley 7). “Propaganda was a word assiduously avoided by government officials, smacking as it did of totalitarian mind control. The U.S. in turn preferred the word ‘information’ ” (Rupp 4). Whatever the term, it was a war of words and images that everyone was out to win.

### **Advertisements and Newspapers**

In 1917 the U.S. government created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) designed to generate support for the war, a greater sense of patriotism, and a fervent belief in democracy. Wartime films featured scenes showing German soldiers as heartless and dangerous brutes. Posters used patriotic colors and symbolism to show the strength of America and its Allied friends. The National War Garden Commission, which encouraged people to plant and can

vegetables, even created an ad campaign that featured Kaiser Wilhelm's head in a jar, surrounded by cans of vegetables that said, "Can Vegetables, Fruit, and the Kaiser too" (Boyer and Stuckey 373).

When it became clear that Americans could no longer remain neutral, the CPI created posters and ads that encouraged people to join the military. One particular ad used a tragic event to stir up the emotions of Americans. The *Lusitania*, a passenger ship traveling from New York to London, was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland and sank, killing thousands, including 128 Americans (Boyer and Stuckey 362). Shortly afterwards, ads ran that featured a rendering of a drowned woman holding her young child that simply said, "ENLIST." Both governments, American and British, used the *Lusitania* tragedy to their advantage. "The anger of the American people made it possible for the American and British newspapers to gloss over their own governments shortcomings in this connection" (Peterson 121). Although the *Lusitania* was a passenger ship, the point of dissension lies in possibilities of the use of the *Lusitania*. It was outfitted with multiple supports for weapons, yet no proof exists that the *Lusitania* was in fact armed and ready, but there was no denying that the ship, by design alone, was not built solely for the purpose of passenger travel (Peterson 118). Many Americans and British, in their growing anti-German sentiments, felt the destruction of the *Lusitania* had been planned. However, many historians have concluded that their meeting was likely accidental. The *Lusitania* was off its prescribed course, and there are no documented instructions from the German Navy to go after that particular ship (Peterson 121). In the end, it seems German's U-boat warfare hurt them more than it helped.

During WWII, the British government distributed a number of pamphlets with persuasive messages, some of which used dry or dark humor to rouse support for the British in the war effort. Following the evacuation at Dunkirk, a pamphlet titled, "What would happen if Hitler won?" was disseminated throughout England stating the following:

If Hitler won you couldn't make a joke in the pub without being afraid that a spy may not get you run in or beaten up. You could not talk freely in front of your children for fear they might give you away (in Germany they are encouraged to); if you were a worker you would be at the mercy of your employer about hours and wages, for you would have no trade union. (Osley 21)

This type of propaganda applied not only to the possibility of life under Hitler's dictatorship, but also to issues such as individual health and well-being. The British Minister of Health even went so far as to issue a publication called, "How to Keep Well in Wartime." British citizens were encouraged to exercise, eat healthy, and to avoid smoking or drinking. They were expected to be in top physical shape because their labor was needed in order to fuel this war. The rather shocking part of the publication followed, encouraging people to be careful in regards to sexual intercourse. Despite this rather personal information, it was always connected back to the war. "A hospital full of cases of gonorrhoea means loss of tanks, loss of airplanes, loss of guns. It also means loss of happiness, health, and efficiency" (Osley 63-64). It seems no subject was too personal when it came to being prepared for the war.

Anti-gossip campaigns became huge across Britain, as it became necessary to keep Allied plans and preparations under wraps. People who knew any information that could be of value to the enemy were encouraged to keep quiet. Slogans appeared throughout England with sayings like, "Your talk may kill your comrades," and "Be like Dad – Keep Mum" (Osley 43-44).

Newspapers also became a crucial means of both swaying public opinion and recruiting much needed support. In the case of WWI, there's no getting around the fact that Americans were at first put off by the war. The notion of a "senseless" war permeated throughout the country, but attitudes began to change as British propaganda became more prevalent in newspapers (Peterson

169). The world-renowned *New York Times* became one of the strongest voices of allied support. Although fiercely democratic in its views it was more representative of British sentiment than it was of American, and was widely representative of how many Americans in urban areas felt: “*The New York Times* has been notable for its friendliness to the Allies, and reports what commercial circles think in, and not what agriculturists think in the West” (Peterson 161-162). However, not all papers were fervently pro-British. Famous media mogul William Randolph Hearst presented pieces in his papers that contained British propaganda, but he made sure not to discount the “two sides to every story” concept. Hearst became a fly in the web of British propagandists and was soon tagged as a German sympathizer (Peterson 165).

## **Radio**

Radio was fairly inexpensive and could be relayed to large numbers of people. As a result, radio was one of the more efficient means of communication between the government and its citizens. In Italy there was *Radio Corse Libre*, which used air time to generate propaganda about Italian possessions. Mussolini used the radio namely to persuade Italians of their claim to Corsica, which was controlled by the French. Broadcasts weighed heavily in the minds of Italians, as Mussolini convinced them that Corsica, which had a population largely of Italian descent, rightfully belonged to Italy. *Radio Corse Libre* was also heard in Spain prior to the outbreak of WWII. Radio in Spain became a powerful tool for the growing Fascist movement. Mussolini was able to use the radio to gather support for fellow Fascist General Francisco Franco, forging an alliance that was beneficial to Italy in its quest for territorial expansion (Soley 10).

Radio propaganda, however, was not just used to gather support for Fascist leaders. Britain and France also had their own secret radio stations that aired anti-German propaganda, two of which were known as “German Freedom Station” and “Radio Liberty.” Even the names professed support for Allied victory. These stations were able to broadcast to transmitters in both Germany and Austria, encouraging civilians in these countries to support the Allied armies and government (Soley 11).

Axis powers did just the same. In Germany the Ministry of Propaganda was formed and actually purchased radios for its citizens that were programmed to receive output from stations controlled by this new agency. In response, Britain started its own Ministry of Information. The BBC (British Broadcast Corporation) got its start with radio programming during the war (Osley 8). In territories which had been occupied by Nazi soldiers, and particularly in France, where French Nazis were gaining power, these converted soldiers used the radio in an attempt to gain support for their cause. “Germany conducted a word war against France between 1937 and 1940. The German attack was skillfully designed to ‘demoralize the enemy, to destroy the cohesion, discipline, and collective morale of France...to break the enemy’s will-to-win or simply his will-to-resist’” (Soley 13).

Radio as a means of persuasion was not a new policy for the United States. During the 1930s, Roosevelt used the radio for his “Fireside Chats,” weekly radio addresses that used propaganda to boost morale and to encourage people to support his New Deal policies. For the U.S. military, radio became a tactic for distraction. The U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) teamed up with the British Special Operations Executive to create radio broadcasts throughout Nazi-occupied territories that would help perpetuate the idea among Nazi officers that Allied soldiers would soon be launching offensives in a variety of locations. They did this in the hopes that it would distract Germany and pull military attention away from the real offensive location in North Africa (Soley 83).

## Film

In his book *The Censored War*, George Roeder says that WWII was almost a movie in itself, with a complex plot and many a climax (44). Film as a medium became integral in expressing the tragedies and triumphs of war, as well as swaying public opinion. Propaganda in film is not a concept foreign to my students; they are able to identify it in even today's films. There are many films made about WWI and WWII that are excellent films not only for classroom use and study, but also for helping students better understand how both Allied and enemy governments used film to rally support for their causes.

One excellent film is D.W. Griffith's silent film *Hearts of the World*, financed by the British government and created to persuade Americans of the need to join WWI. The film centers on a young couple (actor Robert Harron and actress Lillian Gish) who are separated by the war. When Germany invades France, the young man is forced to fight and leave his female counterpart (Gish) behind. Griffith actually went out into the trenches to film some of the movie's scenes, giving the film great authenticity (Elliot, par. 1).

Another film about WWI that highlights the atrocities of war and the decreasing idealism young soldiers faced is *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This is an important film for young students because it shows the motivations of the enemy, particularly that of Germany, and also shows that although they were our adversaries, the war was destructive and devastating for them as well. Young German boys enlist in the military to serve in WWI, and the experience of trench warfare is far more different than what they expected. It is through their service in WWI that these young German boys grow into adults, and see that war is not as glamorous as they once believed.

Another film that is unique and unlike many other war films is the documentary *WWII: Report from the Aleutians*. This film looks at the exhausting and labor-intensive lives of American naval soldiers stationed at Adak Island in Alaska. The film is narrated by John Huston, whose deep and rather emphatic voice lends itself to characterizing the soldiers as hard-working and selfless. Soldiers are shown doing all sort of manual labor in preparation for the possibility of battling the Japanese in the Pacific. Although the film is at times slow (and students will groan at the very outdated graphics) it does a good job of showing the less glamorous and often forgotten side of war. As a propaganda piece it is very powerful in its attempt to encourage American citizens to support its country's armed forces.

For a change of pace from the serious and often sobering war film, *Caught in the Draft* is a light-hearted comedy starring Bob Hope. Hope plays a movie star who unwillingly enlists in the draft, but Hope's character, Don Bolton, is desperate to avoid serving in the war. Upon the encouragement of his managers, Bolton is pushed to marry so that he can avoid getting "Caught in the Draft." A lifelong bachelor, Hope's response to the plan is not positive. At one point he even says, "Getting married to avoid the draft? Isn't that a bit like cutting your throat when you have laryngitis?" Although the film is at its heart a comedy, it gives the viewer a better idea of the hysteria many men felt when the draft was being put into place.

One final film worth mentioning is *Mission to Moscow*, a film made at the request of President Roosevelt in 1943 in the hope of fostering a greater liking and support for the Soviet Union. They were our allies, but they were also communists, and that went against just about everything the United States stood for. The film is based on the novel by Joseph E. Davies, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, and chronicles the time he and his family lived there. Some parts may be thematically difficult (contextually for students), but the film does an excellent job of showing the importance of bias and the ability to turn grey skies blue when it is of the utmost importance.

Film not only served to convince the public to increase their support for the war, the medium portrayed the military as a place of opportunity for all young men. This could not have been further from the truth. Author George Roeder addresses this in his book, *The Censored War*. Roeder argues that much of the media portrayed the war as one of opportunity for different religious and ethnic groups, when in reality, this was not true. The media sent positive messages about the war; messages that would help to increase U.S. support for the war (44). Discrimination was a real problem during WWII, so much so that Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in 1941 to combat the problem, not just in the military, but in all companies contracted for defense work. The FEPC was only moderately successful; many African-Americans and Hispanics who served in the U.S. military were often kept from higher ranked positions, despite the quality of their service and experience (Boyer and Stuckey 538-539).

### **Women and the War**

As soldiers were shipped off to the far corners of the earth, the industrial world back at home had quite a conundrum to solve. Who would fill the empty factories? How could countries produce the needed war materials and munitions when all our strong, young workers were away at war? This was going to be the turning point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the role of women in the workforce. In German society women had been viewed as crucial to the economic fabric of society long before this could be said of the United States, but when America abandoned its neutrality following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, this would quickly change. But not all people in the United States were as quick to abandon more traditional views about women's roles, and the shift, however progressive it might have been, was seen as a temporary situation (Rupp 138-139). After all, beliefs about women and their place in society as home-makers were long held, but the desperate need for female labor proved to be more important. "Basic ideas about the proper roles of the sexes change extremely slowly, but public images are subject to sudden and temporary changes imposed by economic need" (Rupp 4). World War II changed the prewar image of women permanently. Factory and manual jobs that were off limits to women before the war were now entirely dependent upon female labor as American soldiers were shipped overseas in 1941 (Rupp 4-5).

Recruitment of women for the war effort now gave American propagandists another avenue to explore. Advertisements and campaigns targeted women on two levels: one was with the patriotic plug by getting them to help any way they could, while the other was to create a manifestation of guilt: if you don't you could be responsible for the death of our boys overseas (Rupp 156). Rosie the Riveter became one of the more famous symbols of women in the workforce. With overalls and some seriously intimidating biceps, Rosie worked hard for her country, while never losing her sense of style (perfectly done hair) or female charm (she is always found smiling – often with a heavy dose of blush on her face). She was the new American woman: tough and hard-working and committed to the cause of supporting our boys. She was, in essence, the perfect "housewife-turned-factory-worker" (Rupp 145-146).

### **African Americans and the War**

Many African Americans bravely served their country during WWII as members of the armed forces, but more often than not were treated as inferior to their fellow white soldiers. Segregation was an integral part of American society, and it proved to be no less important in the military; units were almost always segregated. African American soldiers were often given the most degrading tasks (such as burying the dead) and photos that highlighted this were often not reproduced for the public (Roeder 41). This was due to the need for wartime labor. The Black population, particularly in the industrialized North, was needed to help keep production levels high. Photographs and visual images of Black and White workers plugging away together in

harmony were circulated to send the message that racial barriers were being broken down in the industrial world, even if this was far from the truth: one famous poster produced and distributed by the War Manpower Commission of Washington, D.C. featured two young men, one Black and one White, working side-by-side under an American flag. The tagline read, “UNITED WE WIN” (Roeder 76). “Virtually all images, whether questioning or affirming existing social relations, shared on thing in common: they suggested that the point of view to which to which they gave visual support served the needs of the war effort” (Roeder 44).

## **Censorship**

Propaganda during WWII was drastically censored because of failed campaigns during WWI. Particularly graphic or disturbing images were not immediately released to the public. Although they tried to maintain a “positive and upbeat outlook” during WWI, the methodology to do so in WWII was very different. Many early setbacks for Americans in WWII pushed the government to make a concerted effort not to disclose information or images considered “demoralizing” (Roeder 7-8). In fact, censorship of material during WWII became systematic. Roosevelt gave the green light to create an official Office of Censorship after Pearl Harbor, but despite this, Roosevelt was often inclined to give leeway and many times supported the policy of “truth for the American people.” At one time during WWII, the office changed their strategy altogether. Previous images had shown wounded (but not severely) soldiers in images that were considered relatively harmless. Their new approach showed much more devastating images, feeling the need to prepare the public for the heavy casualties to come (Roeder 10). However, not all agencies or groups had such artistic freedom. Margaret Bourke-White, noted *Life* magazine photographer, was required to first send her war photographs to the Pentagon, who would then approve selected photos the magazine could then publish. The censorship not only applied to the photographs, but also to textual information or captions attached to the published images (Roeder 9).

## **Conclusion**

These are just some of the many angles from which to explore the subject of propaganda. As a topic it can be examined further in not just a history classroom, but within the study of art, literature, rhetoric, mass media, politics, and sociology. My hope is that my students will have a better understanding of the impact of various types of propaganda by looking at propaganda in such areas as film, speeches, art, and radio. The lessons that follow provide an opportunity to put into practical application what students have learned about propaganda and to create work that is reflective of an in-depth study of this complex subject.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan 1: Creating Your Own Wartime Propaganda**

**Objective:** The students will be able to analyze and better understand the importance of propaganda by creating their own artistic pieces of propaganda.

TEKS Objective (20) Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the time during which they were created.

TEKS Objective (6) History. The Student understands the impact of significant national and international decisions and conflicts from WWI and WWII.

TEKS Objective (25) Social Studies Skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

**Materials:** poster board, white paper, colored pencils, markers, scissors



## ***Procedures***

This should be assessed as an individual project grade, due to the length of time required to complete it. I have, in the past, given students some class time to work on this, but the bulk of the work will be done at home. Students who need to be in the classroom in order to have access to materials have stayed and worked in my room after school. This activity is best done when you are either presently studying WWI or WWII, or have finished studying both. Students will need a certain amount of background information in order to be successful in the project.

Start by asking them to define propaganda. What does propaganda look like? What forms does it take? Students will have a variety of answers, so it is important to find a way to incorporate lots of individual ideas into one strong definition the class can go by. I also ask students to think about propaganda today. What are some of the messages they hear and see? How does it shape their thinking? Once they have grasped this concept, they are ready to create a piece of propaganda to shape someone else's thinking. Past topics have included (but are not limited to) enlistment, women's efforts, raising financial support for the war, or ad campaigns that highlight the atrocities committed by the Central and Axis powers.

Students may create a sketch, a political cartoon, a painting, or even a short film. Please bear in mind that there may be a need for additional technology resources in the room should you have students who have made PowerPoint presentations or short films. Students should be given a deadline at which they are to share their piece of propaganda, whether it is a visual or a performance piece. Students should also include a typed, one-page rationale that explains the purpose and theme behind their piece of propaganda. This should be a holistic grade. Students should be graded on the perceived effort put into their project and the evidence and argument included in their rationale. Is the piece creative and thoughtful? Is it a valid representation of the information students have learned. Creating a rubric with the elements you find necessary can be very helpful, especially if students have it before the project is due. This way they have a clear idea of what a solid "A" project would include. I have hung some of the better pieces of work up in the classroom, which the students love. This serves to reward hard work and is great motivator for many of them!

## **Lesson Plan 2: Comparing *Hearts of the World* and *Mission to Moscow***

**Objective:** Students will be able to better understand the use of film as a means of persuasion (propaganda) by watching two important films: *Hearts of the World* and *Mission to Moscow*

TEKS Objective (20) Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the time during which they were created.

TEKS Objective (6) History. The Student understands the impact of significant national and international decisions and conflicts from WWI and WWII.

TEKS Objective (25) Social Studies Skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

**Materials:** TV/DVD/VCR, sheet with film questions

## ***Procedures***

Students will be able to view two very important wartime propaganda films. If you have the time and you are able to show both films in their entirety, please do so. This lesson uses roughly 45-50 minute segments of each of the films. Begin by reviewing with your students how one would define propaganda. Ask them to recall examples from their textbook, from discussions, or modern-day surroundings. Introduce these two films by providing background information and a set of guiding questions.

*Hearts of the World* and *Mission to Moscow* are movies from the World War I and World War II eras that use film as a vehicle for spreading propaganda. *Hearts of the World* was a silent film made by the British to encourage the United States to join the Allies in World War I. *Mission to Moscow* was a movie made by the United States government to convince its people that the Russians were a valuable and trustworthy ally. Because of the technology available in 1943, *Mission to Moscow* is not a silent film.

As you are watching segments of the films, consider the following:

- 1) How does a silent film (*Hearts of the World*) convey its message differently? Is it more or less powerful than the dialogue in *Mission to Moscow*?
- 2) How does the overall message of the film relate to the historical time period? What is *Hearts of the World* saying about life during WWI? What does *Mission to Moscow* reveal about the status of the world prior to WWII?
- 3) What persuasive tactics are used in each film? Is there an identifiable cultural difference in each message (*Hearts* – British; *Mission* – USA)?
- 4) How does the language and tone of the film impact the viewer?
- 5) What stereotypes are at play in these films? Are they accurate with what we've learned about people of this time period?

**Assessment:** Ask students to pose two or three of their own questions to be discussed by the class following the film viewing. As an individual assessment, have each student write a review of one or both of the films. Try to encourage them to go beyond, “Yes, the film was good,” or “No, the film was bad.” Ask them to analyze a theme or explore a particular scene within the film. What did they think of the main characters? Were these persuasive? Was one film more persuasive than another, and if so, why? If you had been the director, what might you have done differently? Students can receive either a homework grade or small project grade for their reviews at the discretion of their teacher.

### **Lesson Plan 3: What would you say about the war?**

**Objective:** Students will be able to imagine themselves as either a WWI or WWII soldier or volunteer. They will write both a journal entry and letter home to their family.

TEKS Objective (20) Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the time during which they were created.

TEKS Objective (25) Social Studies Skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

**Materials:** Paper, textbooks

#### **Procedures**

This lesson gives students an opportunity to imagine they are a soldier, nurse, officer, or volunteer in WWI or WWII. Using what they have learned in class from their textbooks and from the film segments they've viewed, students are asked to create two written assignments: a journal entry and a letter home. The following should be addressed in both assignments:

- 1) If you could tell your country's public (America, Germany, England) anything about the war, what would you say?
- 2) As a member of the war, what does the propaganda issued by the government mean to you?
- 3) If you had the opportunity to showcase the very tragic and destructive side of war to your family members, would you? Would you choose to keep this information to yourself?

- 4) If you could design one piece of propaganda to send home, what would it be? A visual, a speech, a radio address? What would it look like? What would be the most important idea to convey to others?

There are many collections of letters available at bookstores, libraries, and online that offer copies of letters written to family members during both wars. I also like to show clips of soldier interviews from Vietnam because although the time period, motives, and styles of fighting were very different, it offers the students a chance to compare different 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts. Vietnam was also the first time that soldier interviews had been captured on television, which helped to drastically change public opinion about American involvement in Vietnam. Be sure to remind students that the radio and newspaper served a very similar purpose in WWI and WWII to the television in Vietnam: changing public opinion and influencing beliefs.

#### **Lesson Plan 4: Propaganda and the Spoken Word**

**Objective:** The objective of this lesson is to give students exposure to some of the more important pieces of American and British propaganda by looking at the speeches of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Douglas MacArthur. Students will be able to hone their auditory learning abilities by listening to these speeches and then will use their written and performance-based communication abilities to write and present a persuasive speech of their own.

TEKS Objective (15) Government. The student understands changes in the role of government over time.

TEKS Objective (20) Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the time during which they were created.

TEKS Objective (6) History. The Student understands the impact of significant national and international decisions and conflicts from WWI and WWII.

TEKS Objective (24) Social Studies Skills. The student applies critical thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology.

TEKS Objective (25) Social Studies Skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

**Materials:** tape player and/or computer and hand outs (written copies of the speeches student will listen to).

#### **Procedures**

In this lesson there is a great deal of room for flexibility. Since this is an American history class and we will be studying WWII at the time of this lesson, I have chosen two speeches for students to listen to that are reflective of Allied propaganda. There are a multitude of recorded speeches and addresses available on the Internet, so you are not limited to using only the ones I've chosen to include. I ordered these tapes from Radio Spirits, an online company that sells recordings of famous speeches and broadcasts, but there are many other options out there ([www.radiospirits.com](http://www.radiospirits.com)).

My students will listen to segments from three speeches: FDR's *Day of Infamy* speech following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill's *Blood and Tears*, and Douglas MacArthur's *Japanese Surrender*. I will provide copies of the speeches so students will have a visual aid to follow along with. I will play each segment twice, once so that they may listen and twice so they have an opportunity to evaluate and make notes the speech. Some questions to have students consider:

- 1) What was the aim or objective of each speech?
- 2) What tactics or strategies were used to sway public opinion?

- 3) Did any of the information in the speeches contradict what you've learned or read in your textbook?
- 4) Did you find the speech to be persuasive? What feelings and images did it evoke in your mind as you were listening?

The next step in this lesson is to conduct a brainstorming session with students about how to write their own persuasive speech. Students should select an event in modern U.S. history (20<sup>th</sup> century) that they would like to write a persuasive speech about. I find that creating a web map on the board (have an example of an event or time in mind prior to the execution of this lesson) helps the students begin the process of their own assignment. Select an event or time that you and the students have already studied. Get them to really dig beneath the surface to look at the importance and impact of this event.

A rubric for the written speech and presentation is a good idea because it lets the students know ahead of time what to expect. Teachers can make their own rubrics from scratch at [www.rubistar.com](http://www.rubistar.com). Make sure to tell students to include a works cited page if they use any information outside of the textbook. Grade your students work along the following guidelines:

- 1) The quality of the written speech (appropriate examples, content, grammatically correct).
- 2) The persuasive and effectiveness of the argument made.
- 3) The presentation and reading of the speech (Did they show enthusiasm? Did they rehearse ahead of time?).

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*Hearts of the World*. Director D.W. Griffiths. Paramount Pictures, 1918.  
A silent film financed by the British government and created to persuade Americans of the need to join WWI.

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Propaganda film made at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to portray Russia and Josef Stalin as favorable allies in the coming war.

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