

Published Persuasion

Analyzing the Use of WWI Posters in Shaping Public Opinion

Overview

Public opinion is shaped and swayed through innumerable marketing strategies, and these practices have been used throughout history for many purposes. In this program, students will use 16 posters created between 1917-1919 to understand how the U.S. government shaped public opinion in relation to World War I. They will analyze several posters to determine the target audience, message, and symbolism used. After gaining an understanding of these posters, students will design their own poster to sway public opinion.

Grade

9th – 12th Grade

Duration

45-50 minute lesson

Subject

Social Studies

Language Arts

Fine Arts

Standards of Learning Met

Social Studies

- SS12.1.2: Explain and/or demonstrate how to participate in the political process and form personal opinions
- SS12.2.1: Analyze and evaluate the ways various groups (e.g., social, political, and cultural) meet human needs and concerns (e.g., individual needs and common good) and contribute to identity (e.g., group, national, and global), situations, and events
- SS12.2.2: Analyze human experience and cultural expression (e.g., language, literature, arts, traditions, beliefs, spirituality, values, and behavior) and illustrate integrated views of a specific culture
- SS12.3.1: Analyze the impact of supply, demand, scarcity, prices, incentives, competition, and profits on what is produced, distributed, and consumed
- SS12.3.4: Explain how financial and government institutions make economic decisions (e.g., banking, investment, credit, regulation, and debt)
- SS12.3.5: Evaluate how values and beliefs influence microeconomic and macroeconomic decisions
- SS12.4.1: Describe patterns of change (cause and effect) and evaluate how past events impacted future events and the modern world



- SS12.4.4: Describe the historical interactions between and among individuals, groups, and/or institutions (e.g., family, neighborhood, political, economic, religious, social, cultural, and workplace) and their impact on significant historical events
- SS12.4.5: Using primary and secondary sources, apply historical research methods to interpret and evaluate important historical events from multiple perspectives
- SS12.5.3: Analyze, interpret, and evaluate how conflict, demographics, movement, trade, transportation, communication, and technology affect humans' sense of place
- SS12.6.1: Analyze, evaluate, and/or synthesize multiple sources of information in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem

Language Arts

- W.12.3: Uses valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence to develop claims and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, establishes the significance of the claim(s), and distinguishes the claims from alternate or opposing claims
- W.12.4: Creates an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence; includes transitional words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text; provides a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- W.12.5: Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone
- SL.12.1: The student comes to discussions prepared to: work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision making, propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence, and respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives.
- SL.12.2: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media
- SL.12.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric
- SL.12.4: Presents information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective; makes a strategic use of digital media; adapts speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.

Fine Arts

- FPA 11.3.A.2: Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, eras, and environments
- FPA 11.3.A.3: Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, environment, and culture and place their work within the continuum of the visual arts
- FPA 11.4.A.3: Students analyze the contributions that art and visual artists make to their local community and contemporary society

Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Explain how the U.S. government used posters to shape public opinion.
- Identify the objective and message of a WWI poster.
- Design a poster around a controversial topic discussed in class.



Materials

Included

- 16 WWI Posters (see included inventory list)
- Large sheet construction paper for student posters
- *Wake Up, America: World War I and the American Poster* by Walton Rawls
- *About the Object* Information Sheet
- *Poster Analysis Worksheet*

Need

- Colored pencils/markers

Key Terms

Propaganda – Information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution, nation, etc.

Target Audience – the intended group for which something is performed or marketed

Stereotype – a set of inaccurate, simplistic generalizations about a group that allows others to categorize them and treat them accordingly

Visual Distortion – the change or exaggeration in size, shape, emotions or gestures in an image that often add extra meaning to symbols.

Sample Lesson Plan

1. Divide students into small groups (2-4). Provide groups with the included warm-up prompt and allocate 5-10 minutes for students to create an adequate list. Allow groups to share their lists with the class to create an inclusive class list.
2. Brainstorm ways to get American citizens to support and follow these changes. Remind students that this is before television, the Internet, and radio. If necessary, suggest posters as a viable option.
3. Display three (3) or four (4) posters and lead a discussion on how they may have shaped public opinion. Use the *About the Object* information sheet and *Poster Analysis Worksheet* to inform the discussion as needed. Have students verbally analyze the posters as a class.
4. Allow each group to select a poster from the remaining stack. Provide 5-10 minutes to analyze the poster using the same methods as above. Distribute copies of the *Poster Analysis Worksheet* if necessary. Allow each group to present their analysis to the class.
5. If time allows, discuss how these poster features continue to be used in current advertising campaigns. Have students list specific advertisements as examples. Discuss how new technologies have changed the distribution and impact of these advertisements.
6. Distribute large sheets of construction paper for students to design their own posters. These can be based on a subject from the World War I poster samples or from another topic (a sample is provided below). Encourage them to explore their message from different angles. Have students write a brief description and persuasive argument on their stance using the *Poster Analysis Worksheet* as a guide. This activity can be assigned as homework if time runs short

Warm-up Prompt

President Wilson has just declared war on Germany propelling America into World War I. As an advisory committee to the President, compile a list of the changes, actions, and/or laws that need to happen for the United States to win the war.



Alternate Poster Design Prompt (Homework Option)

In Carbon County, children sixteen and younger must abide by a 10pm curfew. This curfew has recently come up for re-authorization. Students strongly feel that this curfew should be extended to midnight and have organized to advocate for the change. Design a poster supporting the extension. Remember the different audiences who have a stake in this issue: students, parents, other adults, local business, police, etc.



About the Object

World War I Posters (16)

Carbon County Museum

WWI Propaganda Posters, James Montgomery Flagg, USA, ca. 1917 - 1919

General Information

During WWI, the impact of the poster as a means of shaping public opinion was arguably greater than during any other time in history. The ability of posters to inspire, inform, and persuade through vibrant designs motivated the United States to produce the largest amount of any participating country. Still, countries on both sides of the war used posters to garner financial support, recruitment, unite public opinion, and encourage the conservation of resources.

Who made it?

Each of these posters was designed by one of America's most illustrious illustrators: James Montgomery Flagg. Flagg first sold his drawings when he was twelve-years-old, and by the time he was fifteen, he was a staff artist for both *Judge* and *Life* Magazines. He studied art in New York, London, and Paris and tried his hand at illustrations for books, magazines, short stories, pin-ups, and personal sketches. Between 1917 and 1919, Flagg produced more than 45 posters for the U.S. government, the most famous of which is the Uncle Sam "I Want You" Army Recruiting poster.

What inspired it?

America's initial involvement in World War I was not a popular cause. The "War to End All Wars" was viewed as a European conflict, and Americans were reluctant to become engaged. When war for the U.S. became inevitable, government officials knew public opinion had to be changed. To do this, thousands of "pictorial publicity" in the form of posters were produced to address all aspects of the war effort.

Posters to look for...



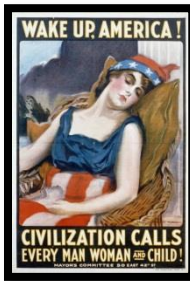
“I Want You” – Arguably the best-known war recruiting poster. Supposedly a self-portrait, Flagg’s design first appeared in 1917 and has been repurposed numerous times since.



“Every Garden a Munition Plant” – Food shortages were prevalent in war-torn Europe, and the U.S. home front was encouraged to adjust eating habits to ship food overseas. In addition to eating more fish and corn and eating less meat and wheat, Americans were urged to plant victory gardens and to eat canned fruits and vegetables.



“Save Your Quarters” – Children couldn’t afford liberty bonds, but to encourage them to support the war, the government sold war savings stamps worth \$0.10 and \$0.25. Like the war bonds, the stamps paid interest.



“Wake Up, America” – At the onset of WWI, Americans were not eager to join the war, and Americans of German ancestry tended to support Germany, not Britain and France. The government’s first task was to garner support for American allies and the war effort.



“Don’t Read American History, Make It” – Recent college graduates and college students were seen as prime recruitment material. Posters targeting these groups were common.



Student Name _____

Poster Analysis

What is the poster's message?

What is the target audience?

What behavior is the poster hoping to change or inspire?

How does the artist convey this message (i.e. visual symbols, metaphors, visual distortion, stereotypes, etc.)

Who developed the poster?

What other views might people have on this subject?

hmmm

