

State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda

Unit: Redefining How We Teach Propaganda

Unit Overview

The United State Holocaust Memorial Museum’s traveling exhibition, ***State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda***, promotes new understanding about the nature and consequences of propaganda. The exhibition illustrates the Nazis’ use of the latest, most sophisticated technologies and techniques to disseminate propaganda. It chronicles their use of propaganda to win votes in a democracy, to consolidate power in a dictatorship, and foster hatred and to create a climate of indifference as they persecuted and systematically murdered Jews and others portrayed as enemies of the state. The exhibition asks us to consider—and act—upon the lessons and implications of this powerful history.



This unit, paired with a visit to *State of Deception*, will increase your students’ ability and commitment to critically analyze messages presented in both traditional and new forms of media. As students learn about the use and devastating consequences of propaganda leading up to and during the Holocaust, they will more deeply understand why media literacy is an essential skill for citizens in a democracy.

These lessons provide an opportunity for teachers to use a new framework for teaching propaganda. Where traditional methods typically focus on identifying propaganda techniques, this approach encourages critical thinking and reflection. It explores contexts in which societies can become vulnerable to extreme messages, equips students with skills to assess propaganda’s potential consequences, and empowers them to respond to messages that could be dangerous, including hate speech.

Throughout this unit, students will be asked to reflect on the three guiding questions posed by the exhibition.

When is propaganda most dangerous?

What makes you vulnerable to propaganda?

How can you guard against propaganda?

Structure:

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Holocaust, Analyzing Propaganda from the Exhibit

- **Time Requirement:** 1 class period
- **Description:** Students will be introduced to the concept of propaganda. A discussion will help to complicate students' understanding of this topic and to dispel misconceptions. A brief video by Holocaust survivor Margit Meissner will provide a personal entry point to prepare students to visit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*.

EXTENSION 1

- **Time Requirement:** 1 class period
- **Description:** Students will gain a foundational knowledge of the Holocaust while examining how political, societal, and economic factors shaped Nazi propaganda messages. A new framework for analyzing propaganda is introduced. It examines key aspects of propaganda such as message, context, audience, creator, and consequences.
- Emphasis is placed on the role of Nazi Party propaganda in a democratic context. Discussion will center on the takeaways for citizens in democracies and the need to critically evaluate competing messages.

EXTENSION 2

- **Time requirement:** 2 class periods
- **Description:** Students will gain a foundational knowledge of the Holocaust and examine how political, societal, and economic factors influenced the effectiveness and danger of Nazi propaganda. Teachers will model critical analysis of historical propaganda found in *State of Deception* so that students can practice these skills during their exhibition visit.

Lesson 2: Visiting *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*

- **Time Requirement:** One hour
- **Description:** Holocaust survivor Margit Meissner will guide students through an interactive texting tour of the exhibit. The tour will prompt students to examine key themes within the exhibit and respond to questions at multiple stops.

Lesson 3: Exploring *State of Deception's* Online Exhibition

- **Time Requirement:** 1 class period
- **Description:** Using the online exhibition for *State of Deception*, this interactive lesson will guide students' exploration of key historical themes and content. Students will employ critical thinking skills to analyze and contextualize Nazi propaganda and consider the effects of propaganda historically and today.

Lesson 4: Reflection and Discussion Connecting Past and Present

- **Time Requirement:** 1 class period
- **Description:** Students will reflect on the themes and questions prompted by their visit to *State of Deception* and the ways in which propaganda continues to influence students' lives and public discourse today. Students will practice critical analysis of messages as they deconstruct propaganda examples from the exhibition in small groups. Students engage in a group activity deconstructing propaganda examples they saw in the exhibition. This activity will help them to synthesize key themes and apply the new framework to propaganda they may encounter in their own lives.

Lesson 5: Propaganda Today

- **Time Requirement:** 1 class period, brief homework assignment
- **Description:** Students will analyze examples of contemporary propaganda and use the new analytic framework to critically evaluate the potential consequences of messages they encounter today.

Lesson 6: Moving To Action

- **Time Requirement:** 2 class periods
- **Description:** Students will identify potentially problematic messages or hate speech in their community and become empowered to respond. Examining case studies of youth who took on similar challenges offers concrete role models and actions.

Learning Outcomes:

The *State of Deception* Propaganda and Media Literacy lesson plans align with recognized content standards.

- 1) *Knowledge*: Students will gain knowledge of the history of the Holocaust and the many factors that contributed to it, including the role of propaganda. Students will gain an understanding of the definition of propaganda. They will develop higher level understanding of the propaganda techniques and factors that impact its effectiveness. They will learn that propaganda operates in diverse contexts and continues to affect our society today.
- 2) *Skills*:
 - Students will gain critical thinking skills by learning to analyze propaganda messages. Students will learn to identify the techniques used in propaganda, as well as consider the author, audience, and potential impact of messages.
 - By examining Nazi propaganda messages produced in three distinct contexts (democracy, dictatorship, and war), students will gain an understanding of the importance of context on the effectiveness and potential consequences of propaganda.
- 3) *Reflection*: Students will reflect on key questions, such as what propaganda is, what makes people vulnerable to it, and what responsibilities producers and consumers of propaganda bear for its consequences. They will reflect on themes such as the impact of new technologies, the vulnerability of youth, the prevalence of indifference, and the failure to recognize dangerous speech.
- 4) *Application*: Students will be able to apply knowledge, skills and reflective thinking during their visit to State of Deception. They will use new strategies for contemplating and analyzing propaganda messages they encounter today. They will create plans to take action to respond to problematic messages and/or hate speech that challenge their communities.

Common Core Reading Standards

Content	Standard
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text , including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	4
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.	6
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats , including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	7
Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.	8

National Center of Teachers of English: Standards for the English Language Arts (5-12)

Content	Standard
Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.	1
Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features.	3
Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.	6
Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.	11

National Center for History in the Schools, Standards for U.S and World History (5-12):

Content	Standard
The student understands contemporary American culture. Examine the influence of media on, and the role of propaganda in contemporary American culture.	U.S. History, Era 10, Standard 2D Historical Thinking Standard 1
The student understands the causes of World War II and Explain the role media played in the rise of the Nazi ideology in Germany and across Europe. Analyze the relative importance of the legacy of World War I, the depression, ethnic and ideological conflicts, imperialism, and traditional political or economic rivalries as underlying causes of World War.	World History Era 8, Standards 4A 4B Historical Thinking Standard 3
The student understands how liberal democracy, market economies, and human rights movements have reshaped political and social life. Asses the strengths of democratic institution and civic culture in the United States and consider contemporary case studies.	World History Era 9, Standard 2C Historical Thinking Standard 4
The student understands worldwide cultural trends of the second half of the 20th century. Analyze connections among electronic communications, international marketing, and the emergence of popular “global culture” in the late 20th century.	Word History Era 9, Standard 2F Historical Thinking Standard 4