

LESSON: Exploring Nazi Propaganda

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60–75 minutes (extensions available)

RATIONALE

This lesson is an opportunity for students to dialogue and reflect on the ways in which propaganda affected society during the Holocaust and how it continues to affect people today. Students will be asked to connect these reflections to their own roles and responsibilities in a democratic society. Students will consider options for ways to respond to dangerous propaganda.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did propaganda help the Nazis advance their political, racial, and genocidal goals?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- The definition of propaganda
- Common techniques of propaganda
- Factors that influence the success of propaganda (audience receptivity, choice of message and means of communication, the context in which it is spread).
- That propaganda was an essential tool used by the Nazi Party to win votes in a democratic Germany, to win support for their vision of a “National Community,” and to create a climate of indifference (or even support) as Jews experienced persecution, segregation, deportation, and eventually genocide.

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Explore [State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda](#) online exhibition. The exhibition covers the role of propaganda in four distinct contexts and time periods:
 - Selling Nazism in a Democracy (1918-1933)
 - Propaganda and Persecution in a Dictatorship (1933-1939)
 - Propaganda for War and Mass Murder (1939-1945)
 - Propaganda on Trial (1945-1948)
- Read Holocaust Encyclopedia article [Nazi Propaganda](#) and special series (optional)
- Students will work in groups to explore the online exhibition content. You may wish to pre-select groups.
- Distribute [graphic organizers](#) to students.

MODIFICATIONS

Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence, however, the lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses.

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LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Additional terms can be definitional work
- Exhibition sections can be assigned as pre-work to allow for additional time
- The Holocaust Encyclopedia article and series *Nazi Propaganda* is available in additional languages
- Students can share answers to discussion question in written form
- Survivor Testimony video provides captions
- Students can view similar content from the online exhibition in the Holocaust Encyclopedia series [Nazi Propaganda](#) or in the *State of Deception* [Poster Set](#)

PART ONE: INTRODUCING PROPAGANDA AND EXPLORING THE ONLINE EXHIBITION IN GROUPS (30 MINUTES)

INTRODUCING PROPAGANDA

1. Ask students to define the term **propaganda**

ASK THE STUDENTS

- What is propaganda? How would you define it?

Provide the Museum's definition of propaganda:

- Biased information spread to shape public opinion and behavior
2. Explain that this lesson will explore **how propaganda helped the Nazis to advance their political, racial, and genocidal goals.**
 3. We will see how propaganda was a critical tool for the Nazis, and how their messages, means of communication, and the context in which the messages were spread were essential to their propaganda success.

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EXPLORING THE ONLINE EXHIBITION IN GROUPS

1. To dig in further, we will explore the online exhibition, [State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda](#) in four groups. Each group is responsible for research focused on one of the four time periods.
 - a. A democratic Germany to win votes and political support (1918-1933)
 - b. A dictatorship to implement racial persecution (1933-1939)
 - c. A climate of war to justify fighting and mass murder (1939-1945)
 - d. A post-war climate in which Allies were challenged to purge German society of Nazism and to hold propagandists to account in post-war trials (1945-1948)
2. Students use their [graphic organizers](#) to research answers to the key questions using information and examples of propaganda from the exhibition. Instruct students to read their entire assigned section, examining images and reading text, before responding to questions on their graphic organizer.
 - a. What was happening politically, socially, and economically during this time period? What form of government was in power? Was there free speech or opportunities to express dissenting viewpoints?
 - b. What were the range of messages spread through Nazi propaganda? What types of communication were used?
 - c. How did the context of the time influence propaganda messages and the ways in which they resonated with German citizens?
 - d. What were the consequences of the messages?
3. When they finish reading, groups will discuss the propaganda in their section, and answer the key questions. They should prepare a summary of their section to share with the rest of the class.

PART TWO: SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Sharing Research

1. Students share their research from the online exhibition with the other groups. This can be done either as a jigsaw (in small groups of one student from each research group) or as groups reporting to the whole class. Students should share examples of propaganda from their exhibition section to illustrate what they learned about the Nazis' messages, vehicles of communication, and context in which messages were spread.

Option: Students can prepare a slideshow using images from the online exhibition to share with the class.

Discussion

1. Either back in small groups, or in a whole class discussion, return to the key questions. Compare and contrast conclusions drawn about each time period. Consider the following additional questions:
 - How did the context change over time, and what did that mean for propaganda?
 - How did new communication technologies amplify the Nazis' messages?
 - How and why were youth targeted by Nazi propaganda? Why were youth more vulnerable to Nazi messages?

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- What examples of propaganda made the strongest impression on you and why?

CONCLUSION

ASSESSMENT

Return to this essential question and reflect on some additional themes raised by the exhibition.

- How did propaganda help the Nazis advance their political, racial, and genocidal goals?

Reflection (discussion or writing assignment)

Students may reflect on one or more of the questions below, using both historical content discovered in the online exhibition and their own lived experiences and observations about the use of propaganda.

- How did Nazi propaganda create a climate of indifference to the plight of the Jewish people?
- How do the themes and questions connect to your experiences with propaganda?
- What can we take away and apply when we encounter propaganda today?
- What makes communities vulnerable to extreme messages?
- How can we identify problematic propaganda as a “warning sign” of a potentially dangerous situation?
- What might be the consequences of harmful propaganda unchecked? What can individuals in communities do to respond to problematic propaganda?

EXTENSION

Before or during class, students watch a [30 minute video](#) featuring Holocaust survivor Bob Behr’s testimony about growing up in Berlin, Germany, and his reflections on Nazi propaganda. This will help to put the history presented in *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* into a personal context. Bob’s anecdotes reveal the impact of propaganda on young people during the Holocaust.

After watching the video, ask students for their reactions and impressions.

- How do Bob’s stories relate to the broader history presented in the exhibition?
- What does Bob’s testimony reveal about the impact of propaganda on young people in Nazi Germany? Why can propaganda have such a powerful impact on youth?
- What are your takeaways from watching the video and exploring the exhibition?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Nazi Propaganda [Bibliography](#)
- *State of Deception* [Poster Set](#)
- Holocaust Encyclopedia [articles](#) on Propaganda