



**STATE OF
DECEPTION**
**THE POWER OF
NAZI PROPAGANDA**

Redefining How We Teach Propaganda



LESSON 1

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM ushmm.org

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

LESSON OVERVIEW

Lesson 1 is designed to prepare your students for a visit to *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*. This lesson is divided into two parts: an exploration of propaganda and an introduction to the Holocaust. The purpose of the lesson is to encourage students to think more deeply about the impact of context on the effectiveness and reception of messages.

LESSON RATIONALE

Propaganda has a long history and each of us has our own ideas about how to define the term. Propaganda was instrumental in the Nazi Party's persecution and murder of millions of people during the Holocaust. Through the lens of Holocaust history, students will gain a deeper understanding of how the political, economic, and social environment in Germany shaped the tone and effectiveness of Nazi propaganda.

TIME

Less than one class period

MATERIALS

1.1 "Holocaust survivor Bob Behr reflects on the impact of propaganda during his youth" (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEEuTEDfFqc>)

1.2 Defining propaganda handout

NOTE — Propaganda is an issue and term that comes with a lot of baggage and preconceived ideas. It is a subject that is heavily debated. We are going to make sure that we have a common understanding of its meaning.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON AND THE TERM "PROPAGANDA"

PROCEDURE

Before Class:

Download the video of Bob Behr.

During Class:

1. Introduce key topics to your students.

Define the Holocaust

- Ask students to share what they know about the Holocaust to gauge their level of knowledge and understanding.
- Share the Museum's definition:

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups for racial or biological reasons: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

Break down the definition, ensuring students come away understanding key components

- Time frame
- Geography
- Targeted groups and victims
- Perpetrators (including collaborators) and Nazi ideology
- Systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored process of persecution and genocide

2. Introduce the topic of propaganda by asking students: What are your perceptions of propaganda? Write their responses on the board.

- Consider perceptions of historical propaganda
- Consider perceptions of propaganda today

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

Distribute I.2 Handout

Propaganda is biased information designed to shape public opinion and behavior.

Ask students to underline or highlight three words from the definition of propaganda that stand out to them. Discuss which words students chose and why. Consider how each word contributes to our understanding of propaganda, how it is created, and its goals/effects.

Ask students to consider the techniques of propaganda. Which do they think are most commonly used?

- Truths, half-truths, or lies
- Selective omission of information
- Simplifying of complex issues or ideas
- Playing on emotions
- Advertising a cause
- Attacking opponents
- Targeting desired audiences

Emphasize that propaganda does not always achieve its aims. Its power depends on:

- A **message** that will resonate with a specific audience
- Using **techniques** tailored to the message
- Choosing the most effective **means of communication** (or medium)
- An **environment** or climate that is receptive to the propaganda message
- An **audience** that is sympathetic to the propaganda message

Key points

- Without strategically considering and tailoring the message and medium to the environment and audience, propaganda does not work.
- Individuals have control over how they receive messages. You have the power to believe messages or not.
- By thinking critically about how propaganda messages work, you have the power to either buy into messages or dismiss them.
- Propaganda has a long history. It was used long before World War II and continues to be a powerful, and sometimes dangerous, communication tool today.
- Critical consumption and production of information is an important responsibility of citizens in a democracy. Understanding context and what makes individuals and societies vulnerable to propaganda enhances our capacity for vigilance when extreme messages threaten our communities.

3. **Watch the video of Bob Behr** to frame class discussion and establish a personal link to the history of the Holocaust and its relevance for youth today.
4. **Ask your students: How did people communicate during this time period? How are these means of communication similar to and different from those commonly used today?** Write responses on the board.
5. **Ask your students: What are some examples of propaganda?** Write their examples on the board.
 - Ask students to consider messages that they feel target them
 - Ask students to consider the places where they find propaganda in their own lives
 - **Highlight themes they will see in the exhibit:** the targeting of youth and the use of new technologies to deliver propaganda messages

6. Transition to Exhibition Visit

Prompt students to consider the role of propaganda in the history of the Holocaust. What were the messages and how did they help the Nazis to advance their agenda, win public support, promote racist ideas, and create a climate of indifference?

Reinforce that when visiting the exhibit students should look for ways that propaganda was disseminated by the Nazis that they may not be used to considering as media (e.g., rallies, flags, banners, signs, posters, music, radio programs, buttons and uniforms, books, etc.).

Tell them that when they visit the exhibit, they should notice which context they are in—democracy, dictatorship, and war—and think about the power of citizens to respond differently in each section.

Prompt students to identify examples of propaganda that were effective and consider why those messages were successful. Prompt them to identify examples that did not work and consider why they failed to achieve their aims. They can look for these examples in pairs while they are in the exhibit.

Tell them that they will go on a texting tour in the exhibition, *Mind over Media*, hosted by Holocaust survivor Margit Meissner. So remember to bring their cell phones!