

## **Propaganda and “Truth”: How Do You Know?**

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### **Overview**

This curriculum unit on propaganda is intended for the high school level in English class. While it can be implemented as a stand-alone set of activities, it can also find its place as part of a more lengthy study of persuasion and rhetoric. Teachers should make their own decisions about the length of time provided for each portion of the unit, taking into consideration how much homework is appropriate and the speed at which students typically work. I suggest that the unit take 8 to 12 class periods (assuming each period lasts approximately one hour.) While some activities will be much easier to complete with access to internet-enabled computers, I have included suggestions for modification whenever possible.

Students will begin this unit by evaluating their previously held beliefs about persuasion and truth as they complete an anticipation guide, which will hopefully engender some debate. After reading and discussing two fiction selections—an excerpt from Orwell’s *1984* and “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut—students will explore the various nuances of “truth” and “lie”. The unit will conclude with time spent analyzing persuasive techniques, including a study of Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals, and finally, students will demonstrate their understanding of the unit concepts by creating propaganda materials.

As an educator, one of my objectives is to make all my lessons relevant to the everyday world, and I believe this objective is reflected in my curriculum unit. I hope students complete this set of activities with distinct and applicable media literacy skills, whereby they will be able to analyze new images as those images come to them. I hope they become more skillful at advocating for their own beliefs and of taking apart the persuasive arguments of others. I ultimately aim to inspire a spirit of constant inquiry and doubt in my students, whereby they will get into the habit of questioning every new piece of information that comes their way and never accepting information as true or reliable

without scrutinizing it carefully. After all, it is only through questioning that we arrive at new knowledge that we can be sure of. Ultimately, at the conclusion of this unit, students will be better able to differentiate between facts and ideology, and use that knowledge as they move through a culture permeated with all kinds of messages from the media.

## **Rationale**

In the award-winning documentary *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*, a survivor describes being humiliated by a teacher who brought him up to the front of the classroom during a curriculum unit on “Racial Hygiene” and said, “This is a Jew.” This got me thinking: what kinds of things are kids learning, in today’s classrooms and outside the classroom, that is ideological in nature and, therefore, may or may not be true? Contemporary parallels exist. A widely used secular science textbook in contemporary presents a pseudo-scientific basis for creationism, which flies in the face of the generally agreed-upon theory of evolution. And in some areas of the U.S., evolution and creationism are taught side-by-side as equivalently valid theories. Moreover, we can find additional bias in the history classroom, as is covered in James Loewen’s informative book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

While the word “propaganda” often has a negative connotation involving brainwashing and the spread of bigotry and ignorance, the term actually involves all kinds of messages, positive, negative, and neutral. Through the use of propaganda and by harnessing the power of the media, the Nazis were able to shape public opinion and drum up support for their agenda, and because their propaganda was so extreme and yet so effective it is often studied as an example of the power of ideas to bring about acceptance of intolerance and hate.

In other countries and at other times, groups have used propaganda in various ways to advertise their ideas and increase public support for their ideological position. Students should know that sometimes propaganda is positive or neutral. Some examples of what we might call “positive” propaganda is the USDA’s “Got Milk?” campaign, which is meant to encourage good nutrition by depicting celebrities and athletes drinking milk. An example of “neutral” propaganda (I would argue) is the various posters that promoted China’s One Child Policy during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These propaganda posters aimed to drum up support for the policy by depicting single-child families in a positive and even glamorous way. A contemporary example of a controversial propaganda topic is a recent television commercial I saw which explained the reasons why animal testing is ethical. In the commercial, a researcher stated that if it were not for animal testing, many people would die from diseases, and tried to combat the claims made by groups like PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) whose research is meant to prove that animal testing is not just unnecessary, but cruel and unethical too.

Clearly, students need to know that propaganda is used in a variety of ways to sell ideas, in the same way that companies use advertising to sell products.

Students should be aware that as they move through each day of their lives, they are bombarded with persuasive messages. They receive these messages from the media, which tries to get them to purchase or consume certain products, and buy into various ideas about how the world should work. At school (which, traditionally a haven from advertising, is not so much so anymore!) students are persuaded by teachers and administrators to follow school rules and work hard towards long-term goals such as graduation and college. Parents attempt to persuade these same children, perhaps to do chores or to do homework, and of course there is a constant persuasive connection among students. Depending on the messenger, the message changes shape, but the theme is the same, and once students gain an appreciation for the fact that they are constantly receptors of persuasion, they will be able to see the real-life implications of what this unit is intended to teach them.

The Center for Media Literacy, a group whose purpose is to train teachers in implementing media literacy concepts into their lesson plans, explains it thus: “The spectrum of communications technologies that we encounter in our everyday lives is much greater than the one we are educated to encounter in our schools. If schools intend to prepare people to function with efficiency and pleasure in the 21st Century, they need to catch up to this larger spectrum. As well as addressing the value issues in a play or novel, schools need to address the value issues in newscasts and feature articles. As well as addressing the aesthetics in a poem or painting, schools need to address aesthetics in a sitcom or magazine ad” (Andersen 1). Indeed, we can use traditional analysis skills to form an understanding of the media, and the article “Making a Case for Media Literacy in the Classroom” is essential reading for teachers of this unit, especially those who wonder what place media literacy has in the English classroom.

In order to fully integrate this set of activities into the English curriculum, and in the spirit of fostering connections between “traditional” English and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skill-building, I have incorporated literature into the curriculum unit. I chose the short story “Harrison Bergeron” because, apart from being an engaging and interesting story, it describes a world in which “equality” (one of the concepts discussed extensively in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade required text *Animal Farm*) takes on an interesting meaning. I believe Harry’s trials and tribulations will inspire discussion and debate among students as they connect Vonnegut’s vision to current questions about equality. I also chose to include excerpts from the beginning chapters of *1984* in order to invite students to explore concepts of media tampering with truth, and how names can create perceptions that may be completely different from reality.

The “How Do You Know?” question is central to this unit. Students will be asked to construct a definition of propaganda and understand the role of government in

disseminating ideology; this process will give them the tools to evaluate information they receive by asking themselves, “How do I know whether this is true?” When they compare their own beliefs about truth and lies to the strict morality they may have been raised with, they will ask themselves “How do I know this is right?” and will perhaps come to some perturbing conclusions. Examining examples of propaganda (existing examples as well as those created by their peers) they will perhaps wonder, “How do I know that what’s being promoted is something I should believe?” As they complete the activities laid out below and construct knowledge, they will learn how to ask questions and they will learn a process by which they can evaluate new information independently. Ultimately, I want students to embrace the idea of ambiguity as they discover that the truth is never as simple as they think it is.

Tenth-grade students in Philadelphia, whose English teachers have followed the English 2 Core Curriculum with fidelity, are in a uniquely beneficial position to receive the knowledge contained in this unit. This is due to the fact that the School District of Philadelphia’s Core Curriculum includes two texts that deal with issues of persuasion: William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. *Julius Caesar* deals with the themes of this unit in that during the power struggle after Caesar’s murder, both Antony and Brutus use various persuasive tactics—including a great deal of rhetoric which can be analyzed according to Aristotle’s designations—in order to gain the approval and support of the Roman populace. *Animal Farm*, clearly, contains examples of rhetoric, propaganda, and persuasion: the pig Squealer makes several speeches that include ethos, pathos, and logos and contain a great deal of misinformation intended to persuade the other animals on the farm that the actions of the pigs (the leadership of the farm) are justified according to the Seven Commandments of Animalism.

## Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of key terms: analysis, ideology, media, propaganda, persuasion, rhetoric.
- Build their reading comprehension and textual analysis skills through reading, discussing, and interpreting
- Increase their understanding of how the mass media works as a tool for shaping public opinion
- Analyze propaganda in terms of its rhetorical components (e.g. ethos, pathos, and logos)
- Evaluate the ways in which authors (and other creators of text) manipulate statistics to serve their goals.
- Use the internet to find reliable research materials
- Identify the ways in which mass-media propaganda shaped public opinion in the past, and continues to do so in the present

- Construct propaganda materials of their own
- Evaluate propaganda materials created by peers in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the intended message
- Reflect on what they have learned in order to demonstrate understanding

## **Strategies**

In my classroom, I find it very helpful pedagogically to follow the Madeline Hunter model (Wilson 1) direct instruction, followed by guided practice, and concluding with independent practice and an assessment of understanding. In some circles, this framework is known as the “I do/We do/You do” model. Direct instruction means that the teacher is modeling some particular skill or practice; in the guided practice portion of the lesson, the students and teacher are working together so that the teacher can scaffold for understanding; and finally, the independent practice portion has students working independently (or in small groups) to work through the activity without immediate input or assistance from the teacher. Finally, the assessment of understanding is a simple check for knowledge: that is, it provides the teacher with an opportunity to see whether the stated objective was attained that day. (For further reading on this topic, please refer to the reading list and annotated bibliography, particularly the article “Lesson Presentation”). Whenever possible in this unit, I have included a detailed lesson plan arranged around this structure.

In the cases where it may be useful to implement several short activities, the learning centers approach is conducive to focus and learning. This approach is most often used in elementary level classrooms, but it works great in the high school classroom too. In the context of this particular unit, I would recommend using learning centers when students are practicing the process of analyzing propaganda. Before students arrive, the teacher should arrange the classroom furniture to allow for small groups (3-4 students works best). On each group of desks, the teacher will have placed instructions for completing a different short activity (no longer than ten minutes); for our purposes, this would entail printing out a color copy of a propaganda poster and directing students to answer a set of questions related to analyzing the image. The implementation of this mode of learning allows students to create their own knowledge and gets them moving a bit, which provides a small break and improves focus. The teacher becomes a time-keeper, and the students are then responsible for completing each activity in a set amount of time, then rotating to the next set of desks.

Group work is another great way to hold students accountable for their own learning. I like to have students working cooperatively because I find that it allows students to develop the kinds of skills they will need to succeed in higher education or the workplace, such as collegial conduct, respect for differences, and avoiding the temptation to veer off-task when working with classmates who also happen to be friends. Teachers

have several options in grouping students: after deciding group size, the teacher can decide the groups, based on student ability or interpersonal dynamics, or the teacher can give students the chance to choose their own groups. In this unit, I encourage teachers to deliver as many lessons as possible incorporating student groups, as it is a strong instructional practice that serves the students—by inviting them to be creators of knowledge rather than recipients of information from a teacher—and also has the potential to make the teacher’s life a bit easier.

In terms of analyzing and interpreting literature, I use the BDA (Before/During/After) framework. That is, students will engage in particular processes depending on whether they are in the before-reading, during-reading, or after-reading stage. Typically, before reading students should be activating their prior knowledge and generating questions, previewing the text by reading headlines and glancing at graphics, and in general, getting a sense of what to expect from the text. During reading, students should be making inferences, monitoring for comprehension, making predictions, and comparing their prior knowledge to the new knowledge they are receiving. Finally, after reading, students should be assessing theme and main idea, ascertaining what they learned from the text, and synthesizing what they have just read with what they already know. I have structured the activities that call for reading and interpreting texts around this framework.

The Internet is extraordinarily helpful when learning about propaganda because there are several websites containing dozens, if not hundreds, of images of propaganda posters throughout history and in all different countries; I have included an index to one of these sites in the Annotated Bibliography. Please refer to the reading list and annotated bibliography for several websites students can visit.

Rather than recommend specific software programs for students to use in the creation of the propaganda project, which is the capstone of the unit, I urge teachers to assess what they already know and what resources are available to them. Useful programs include Microsoft Word, Microsoft Publisher, iPhoto, and PowerPoint/Keynote. Should the students want to take things a step farther by incorporating audio or video into their projects, they can edit video using iMovie or sound using GarageBand. Depending on the technological proficiency of the students and teacher, there are a great deal of options for creating propaganda (and low-tech versions too).

### **Classroom Activities**

As stated in the Overview, the activities described below are designed to guide students in the process of analyzing the persuasive tactics used in propaganda. The unit begins with a background lesson designed to walk students through the definitions for several important terms and concepts. After establishing this background knowledge, students will expand context by reading and discussing texts that are thematically pertinent to the unit topic. Next, they will begin the process of learning to analyze and

evaluate propaganda, including information on media literacy skills. The unit continues with several activities—some in which students work independently, others utilizing small groups—intended to teach particular skills (interpretation, analysis, etc) including a role-playing activity. The unit will culminate with students producing a persuasive texts of their own.

#### Activity 1: Background (One class period)

Students will activate prior knowledge through completing an anticipation guide, then build background knowledge by defining several key terms that will be used later in the unit.

#### *Narrative Description*

Anticipation guides are often used before reading a novel, in order to ascertain the students' current beliefs about the key issues discussed in a text. For our purposes, the anticipation guide will be used to evaluate students' opinions on issues related to propaganda, persuasion, and the ethical issues surrounding truth-telling. After students complete the anticipation guide independently, indicating on a scale of 1-5 how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement, then writing a sentence or two to explain each choice, they should discuss their answers (with a partner, in a small group, or as a whole class). Sharing viewpoints is a great way to begin a structured conversation (and reinforce classroom norms regarding discussion!) Hopefully, the anticipation guide will give the teacher a chance to stimulate controversy (when students disagree and are forced to defend their views), which will undoubtedly build the class's excitement surrounding the unit.

After the anticipation guide, the teacher should explain to students that in order to discuss these aforementioned issues, several terms and concepts need to be defined so that the class can establish a working vocabulary. To facilitate this, students build definitions of several key terms by working in groups, using their prior knowledge. The teacher can have groups define all terms, or use a "jigsaw" method whereby each group defines one term and then is responsible for teaching that term to the class.

#### *Anticipation Guide Statements*

The alphabetized list below can form the framework for an anticipation guide for students. Teachers should, obviously, feel free to add or subtract statements in order to best suit the needs and abilities of their students.

- Because the world has changed, it's reasonable to believe that what persuaded people hundreds of years ago is not persuasive today.

- Credibility and trustworthiness can go a long way towards persuading an audience.
- Deception is just as bad as telling an outright lie.
- Everyone should have free speech.
- It is acceptable for a government to try to shape public opinion through information campaigns.
- It is acceptable to lie to get what you want.
- It is okay for the government to mislead in order to promote security.
- It is possible to know the truth.
- Statistics are always true.
- Telling the whole truth is the only way to go, no matter what.
- Textbooks always contain the truth.
- The government sometimes misleads citizens in order to protect them.
- The term “propaganda” always refers to a negative message.

### *Terms and definitions*

The following list of terms should be defined by students as a way of constructing their own knowledge about the topics covered in the unit.

- Analysis
- Ideology
- Media
- Mislead
- Persuasion
- Propaganda

### *Options*

Should the teacher find that students are engaged and captivated by the concepts covered on the anticipation guide, he/she can arrange to have students who strongly agree with certain statements debate those who strongly disagree. Because this is a unit about persuasion, it would certainly serve the unit’s goals to have students try to win each other over in this manner!

Finding definitions to the background terms can also be a homework activity if the teacher would prefer to spend the entire period on debating the anticipation guide terms. Using this activity as a homework assignment might be interesting, as there is a likelihood of students returning to class with distinctly differing definitions!

Activity 2: Orwell’s *1984* (One to two class periods)

The objective of this activity is for students to read an excerpt from George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* in light of the anticipation guide they completed in the previous activity. During this activity, the teacher can also provide reading comprehension practice.

### *Narrative Description*

George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *1984* is considered by many to be the preeminent novel on totalitarian government control and the ways in which human nature will always prevail in its search for freedom. Upon close examination, I have determined that Part One, Chapter I and Part One, Chapter IV are essential to read as they provide extensive exposition regarding a totalitarian society and its control on the media, including information on Wilson's occupation as a rewriter of history. As discussed in the "Strategies" section, I am an advocate of the instructional practice of completing certain steps before, during, and after reading.

### *Before Reading*

Perhaps as a pre-class activity or a "do now," students should be invited to think about how they might react to statements such as "Big Brother is Watching You," "War is Peace," "Slavery is Freedom," "Ignorance is Strength," and so forth. Students should ponder whether they might be persuaded to believe such statements if they were bombarded with them on a constant basis. The teacher can use this as a springboard to introducing the dystopian society of Oceania.

### *During Reading*

Students should be invited to monitor their comprehension through making inference and using other active reading strategies. For these sections of the book, which contain a great deal of exposition, students should be asked to make inferences. In order to demonstrate understanding, there are several concepts students should be able to discuss. Students should be able to describe Oceania and imagine life in that society, making comparisons (both favorable and unfavorable) to contemporary American (or Western) society. They should compare Winston's job to the job of a journalist or historian and explore the notion that just as Winston manipulates facts and history, so do modern-day historians and journalists. Opinion is often presented as fact, and stories are slanted in order to fit an agenda. This is a natural part of the media, and as citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century our students should be aware.

### *After Reading*

After reading, it's important for students to discuss the main ideas and implications presented in the reading. Students should try to imagine what the world would be like if the mainstream media operated in the same way that Oceania's media did, if history was revised and updated on a constant basis and citizens did not trust their own memories enough to realize what was happening. One good after-reading activity is to have students write an essay which compares and contrasts Oceania's media with the mainstream media in contemporary America as they understand it, or the teacher can suggest other topics based on the tenor of the class discussions. *1984* is such a rich text, so who knows where discussion might lead!

### *Options*

Teachers can differentiate instruction for below-basic learners by using the Spark Notes summaries to help students to verify understanding. Another way to work with slower readers (because Part One, Chapter I is quite long!) would be to obtain an audio book of the novel and play it for the class.

Another option, as an extension activity, is to connect *1984* to readings from *Facing History and Ourselves*, in order to connect fiction to historical events. The annotated bibliography and reading list at the end of this unit lists suggested readings which can be inserted at this time.

### Activity 3: "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut (One to two class periods)

Students will evaluate the science fiction short story "Harrison Bergeron" and its connections to the themes of the unit: namely, how societies might be structured in certain ways in order to promote the idea of equality.

### *Narrative Description*

As with *1984*, I suggest that the teacher divides the lesson and the reading into its before reading, during reading, and after reading components.

### *Before Reading*

I suggest the teacher begin with a short discussion about the nature of equality. (Readers familiar with *Animal Farm* will certainly want to revisit the pigs' idea that "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others" and bring those events into the picture). They should examine the steps our society takes to bring about equality: free and compulsory public education, accessibility laws regarding the disabled, laws prohibiting racial discrimination, and so forth. The class can, together, brainstorm to generate a list.

Hopefully, the class will discover that what these programs and laws have in common is that they were designed by the government to promote equality by bringing people “up” rather than by putting them down. Public education is meant to help the children whose parents would not be able to pay for private schooling, and Affirmative Action is meant to promote diversity by giving preference to qualified “minority” candidates. The teacher should conclude by posing the following question: What if society promoted equality by putting people down—by handicapping them—rather than by strengthening the weak? In this way, the teacher can introduce the story “Harrison Bergeron,” in which Kurt Vonnegut depicts such a culture.

### *During Reading*

During reading, students should be encouraged to visualize the characters and events of the story. They can do this by producing drawings of Harrison, his parents, and the ballerinas his parents are watching on television. What is their impression of these appearances? In addition, they should be able to characterize Harry and his parents and appreciate the effects that their “handicaps” have on their personalities and views.

Students might have some disagreements about whether or not the government has a right to handicap its citizens, and they should be open to discussing the fact that while many have no problem with bringing individuals or groups “up” by providing them with assistance and government programs (i.e. unemployment and Affirmative Action), the converse seems ridiculous and laughable.

### *After Reading*

While there are many ways to appreciate “Harrison Bergeron” thematically, for the purposes of this unit it’s best to examine the ways in which American society circa 2081—as Vonnegut envisions it—is an exaggerated example of the dangers of conformity. That is to say, how is it that Diana Moon Glampers (and the rest of the Handicappers, by extension) became successful and obtained such tight control over the American population? How could this have happened? Is it possible that something similar could actually happen in “real” America, and to what extent?

The teacher might also want to discuss with students how, historically, conformity has caused terrible things to happen. An obvious example is, of course, the Holocaust, but there are others as well, such as Apartheid in South Africa, the prevalence of racism against African-Americans in the Jim Crow south, and 1950’s McCarthyism (with which some students might be familiar).

The following questions come from page 63 of the book *Facing History and Ourselves*, and are also useful for discussion after reading, or as writing prompts to complete independently:

- How would Harrison Bergeron define *freedom*? *Democracy*? *Equality*? How would Diana Moon Glampers define these terms? How do you define them?
- Why were the people in the story so obedient? So willing to conform? What could they have done to change things? Why didn't they do so? What were the consequences of their failure to act?
- Make an identity chart for Harrison Bergeron. What things influenced him? Did Harrison have the power to define himself or did society do it for him? Harrison tried to break the rules of his society. Should an individual go against society? If so, under what circumstances? What might the consequences be?
- If you were to design a perfect society, what would it be like? What rights would you give individuals? How would you balance their rights with the rights of others?

### *Options*

As an extension activity, consider showing the 1995 film *Harrison Bergeron*. A helpful practice to keep students engaged while watching a movie is to have them fill out a graphic organizer that compares and contrasts the film to the textual version. An effective culminating activity is to invite students to write a paragraph that analyzes the most striking differences in an attempt to explain them. (In other words, they should think about why the filmmakers decided to deviate from the plot and how this might affect the overall meaning of the story.)

Teachers might want to tackle the controversial and divisive issue of Affirmative Action after reading. The teacher should present all sides of the issue, as there are some who believe that, in the process of leveling the playing field for women and minorities, Affirmative Action effectively “handicaps” whites and males in the same way that Harrison was handicapped. This is certainly worth discussing!

Activity 4: What is truth? What is a lie? (One class period)

Students will do a role-playing activity that demonstrates the continuum of absolute truth to complete lies. Through completing this activity they will develop an awareness of this continuum and its subtle nuances.

### *Narrative Description*

Truth is nuanced. There isn't just one way to tell a lie: there are patently untrue statements; statements intended to mislead; statements that contain a misrepresentation of information (either deliberate or unwitting); misinformation by distraction, and so many more distinctions. There are also different types of truths. In this activity, students will

explore different types of truths and lies by concocting their own. They will be provided with index cards giving a type of truth or lie and a situation to act out.

The following situations can be used as starting points for the improvised skits; I encourage teachers to add to this list.

- A friend inconveniences you by being late. You are annoyed, by tell her “It’s all right” even though you are secretly kind of angry. This is an example of the “social lie”- it’s generally harmless but involves people not telling the complete truth in order to be polite.
- You accidentally broke your mother’s favorite mug. When she asks you, what do you do? [You might lie to blame it on someone else, or you might say you don’t know what happened to it. Which is “better” or “worse”?]
- A spin on the above version: your sister broke your mother’s favorite mug. When your mother asks you who broke it, do you “snitch” on your sister?
- Without knowing it, you gave someone wrong information: you told them a party was on 7<sup>th</sup> street, when it was really on 17<sup>th</sup> street. Did you do something wrong? Do they have a right to be angry?

Performance will help students learn to think on their feet and to become more outgoing and adventurous in the classroom. Acting in front of others is also a great way to involve kinesthetic learners. After students complete a series of skits, they will hopefully begin to build an understanding of the continuum between truths and lies, and see the ways in which the truth can be bent. They should be invited to think about the ways they go through life using different kinds of manipulations of information to suit particular purposes.

In the spirit of reflection, after the lesson students should be invited to think about the times they have manipulated the truth, or times (that they are aware of) when others have manipulated the truth. Why was the full truth not disclosed? Was the truth avoided in an attempt to avoid hurting someone’s feelings, or was it avoided in order to promote one’s own personal agenda? Is either situation acceptable? How do the students’ answers to these questions square with their previously held beliefs about truth and lies?

### *Options*

The teacher should, of course, choose to add different types of situations for the skits, or ask the students themselves to suggest situations. Quieter students can also be invited to write down their responses in a script rather than performing, if they are extraordinarily uncomfortable.

Activity 5: How to Analyze Propaganda (One to three class periods)

Students will learn the process of propaganda analysis, applying analytical process tools to analyzing examples of propaganda.

### *Narrative Description*

After completing background reading, the teacher will model the process of analyzing propaganda using a few very simple steps. The students will then work in groups to analyze several images before evaluating their understanding by analyzing an image as individuals.

Before beginning this lesson, students should have read the article “How Propaganda Works” by Alia Hoyt. The teacher should choose: will students read the material as a class, in groups, or individually? Should students read the entire article, or should the article be divided into segments? Should this be done during class time or as preparatory homework? If the teacher chooses to use class time for this article, he/she should allow one full class period (approximately 45-60 minutes) to complete the reading and ensuing discussion.

Regardless of how the article content is delivered, after reading the students should be able to address the following:

- What is propaganda?
- Do you agree with the article’s statement that “a failure to mention important details is as bad as an outright lie”? Why/why not? (Think back to the last activity!)
- Compare/contrast any prior knowledge you had about propaganda with what you read in this article.
- Define the following propaganda techniques, and provide examples: name-calling, bandwagon, glittering generalities, card-stacking, plain folks, subliminal message.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using each type of media to deliver propaganda?
- Define the following types of propaganda, and give examples: political propaganda, religious propaganda, thought reform, government propaganda, war propaganda.
- Why does there seem to be a resurgence of propaganda around wartime? What are some examples of wartime propaganda?

### *Structured Lesson Plan*

Do Now: Are you exposed to propaganda in your day-to-day life? If so, what kinds? What messages are you receiving? (After students answer this question in writing, I

recommend a brief class discussion whereby students can compare viewpoints and experiences.)

**Direct Instruction:** The teacher, in a brief lecture, will model the propaganda analysis technique for students, using a propaganda image (for a list of helpful sites containing a vast variety of images, consult the Annotated Bibliography). I recommend obtaining color printouts of these images for maximum visual impact. See below for the list of questions students should answer to guide them in the analysis of propaganda.

**Guided Practice:** The teacher will lead the students through the analysis of one image. By this point, students should be able to respond to the analysis questions with some prompting from the teacher.

**Independent Practice:** Students will rotate through two or three more images, analyzing them in small groups. The teacher should set up the desks in groups and have groups of students move around the room. I recommend allowing students 8-10 minutes for each image.

**Assessment of Understanding:** The teacher will provide students with a photocopied handout that contains one propaganda image and the analysis questions they have been answering (by now, these questions and the process should be quite familiar). If students can answer these questions with confidence, they have shown that they understand the process!

### *Propaganda Analysis Questions*

- Who created the image?
- What do you already know about the time period when this image was created?
- What is “happening” in the image?
- What assumptions are being made, and about what/whom? Why do you think the authors of the image made these assumptions?
- What is being left out entirely? (Ideas, facts, points of view, etc.)
- What facts are being skewed or misrepresented? Do you spot any outright lies?
- What do the producers of this image want you to believe? Why might they want you to believe that?
- How does the poster use visual effects (i.e. color, lettering) in order to persuade?
- Are there people in the poster? If so, what are they doing? Are there any aspects of their appearance that might be used to persuade?

Activity 6: Discovering Rhetoric (One to two class periods)

Students will learn about the persuasive techniques of ethos, pathos, and logos, connecting these terms to their prior knowledge and everyday lives.

### *Narrative Description*

Knowledge of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—is integral to an understanding of persuasive techniques. The teacher may or may not have covered Aristotle's appeals thus far relating to other texts; if the students have already mastered this material, only a short review may be needed. What follows is a highly structured lesson plan, following the Madeline Hunter method as in the previous classroom activity, for teaching Aristotle's rhetorical appeals. This tried-and-true lesson works exceptionally well!

**Do Now:** Students should write a few sentences that tell about a situation where they had convince someone of something. (After giving students a couple minutes to write, I suggest asking students to share out their experiences with persuasion.)

**Direct Instruction:** Introduce the following terms, illustrating them using examples from everyday life.

Ethos: appeal to credibility or trustworthiness.

Pathos: appeal to the emotions.

Logos: use of logic, reason, cause/effect relationships, etc.

**Guided Practice:** Ask students to generate examples of their own, of each term, in order to demonstrate a general understanding. They might want to think back to what they wrote down for their Do Now: when they used persuasion, what appeals did they use?

**Independent Practice:** Students should read an excerpt from a text that uses ethos, pathos, and logos, and underline the examples they find. I recommend *Animal Farm*; see the annotated bibliography for specific excerpt suggestions. To differentiate instruction, the teacher might want to break students into groups and have each group focus on one appeal; when the class regroups and discusses their findings, the students will discover that skillful rhetoricians can, in one sentence or even one phrase, hit all three rhetorical appeals.

**Exit Slip:** The teacher should give the students a hypothetical situation, such as, you want to be allowed to stay out past curfew. In response, students will write down how they might use each rhetorical appeal to convince their parents to bend the rules.

**Activity 7: Making Propaganda and Evaluating Peer-Created Propaganda** (Two to three class periods)

Students will create their own examples of propaganda, using the persuasive techniques discussed in class. This is a culminating activity which asks them to apply all the procedures and knowledge that they have gained thus far.

### *Narrative Description*

As the unit concludes, it's now up to the students to make their own persuasive texts. After the teacher decides whether students are working independently, in assigned groups, or in groups of the students' choosing, the first step is to decide what persuasive idea to promote in their poster. Students might want to think about issues near and dear to their hearts, either at school or socially. For example, they might argue that school lunch is nutritious, although certainly not delicious, and for health reasons should be eaten; they might advertise against cutting class or in support of arriving on time in the morning; they might persuade their peers that doing homework is worth the missed socializing time. Or, they could choose to take a position on current issues in the news: national security, immigration, same-sex marriage, and so forth.

Next, students should use the propaganda analysis questions found in Activity 5 to plan their project. As they work on their poster, they should be aware of how they use language, color, and images to persuade. They should also decide what kind of information to include and what to leave out; some groups or students might even want to incorporate different types of lies into their propaganda, in keeping with the spirit of persuasion.

Creating the projects is the next step in the process. Using various software programs to lay out their design, and using the internet to find suitable images if possible, students should create their posters according to the plans they have already laid out. (To instill good work habits in students, the teacher should definitely stress planning as an important step of the process!)

Finally, after the projects have been created and printed out or otherwise displayed, students should evaluate the work of others using the now-familiar propaganda analysis questions. The teacher might choose a handful of images for the class to analyze, or perhaps groups could rotate projects among themselves. No matter how the teacher chooses to facilitate the students' analysis of each others' work, their goal should be to evaluate whether their classmates' propaganda is effective. This could be done formally—by students producing written responses to their peers' work—or informally, as in a whole-class discussion of various student-produced work.

### *Options*

If no computers are available, provide students with art materials to make the posters by hand. I suggest obtaining (or asking the students to bring in) posterboard, construction

paper, markers, and glue. It might also be a good idea to bring in old magazines from which students might be able to cut out pictures and words, or ask them to print out pictures at home and bring them in. The options for a low-tech version of this project are virtually limitless.

Students love having their work displayed, so I also recommend making a few dozen photocopies of the best posters and having them hung up around the school building.

## **Annotated Bibliography and Resources**

### Background and Resources for Teachers

Andersen, Neil. "Making a Case for Media Literacy in the Classroom." Center for Media Literacy. 12 Apr. 2009 <[http://www.medialit.org/reading\\_room/article98.html](http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article98.html)>. As quoted in the introductory material, this article presents a persuasive argument for why media literacy is an important concept in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms.

Barthes, Roland. Image, music, text. New York: Noonday P, 1988. This text, specifically the section titled "Rhetoric of the Image," will help the teacher prepare to teach the process of analyzing images.

Chapman, Bill. "Classroomtools.com - Propaganda in the Classroom." Bill Chapman's Classroomtools. 02 June 2009 <<http://www.classroomtools.com/prop.htm>>. This article links to a helpful worksheet which can be used by students in the analysis process (cited below) and several other great activities. The article itself provides helpful background for teachers on how to teach propaganda in the classroom.

"Classroomtools.com - Propaganda Analysis Sheet." Bill Chapman's Classroomtools. Ed. Bill Chapman. 15 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.classroomtools.com/propanal.htm>>. A helpful worksheet to guide students in the analysis of propaganda materials.

Edis, Taner. "Islamic Creationism in Turkey." *Creation/Evolution*, 34:1 (1994). <http://www2.truman.edu/~edis/writings/articles/islamic.html> This article describes the ways in which education in contemporary Turkey is affected by creationism and propaganda related to science and science education.

"Lesson Plan: Propaganda Techniques in Literature and Online Political Ads." ReadWriteThink. 15 Apr. 2009 <[http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=405](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=405)>. This lesson plan contains helpful information for teaching propaganda analysis to high school students. The section on online political ads could be used by tech-savvy teachers as an extension activity.

"Lesson Presentation." *Effective Instruction: The Madeline Hunter Model*. Humboldt State University, CA. 1 May 2009 <<http://www.humboldt.edu/~tha1/hunter-eei.html>>. This site is a resource for teachers who need to know a bit more about the elements of Madeline Hunter's instructional model, as referenced in the "Strategies" section above.

Loewen, James. Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong, Revised and Updated. New York: New Press, 2008.

General background on textbooks and the effects of propaganda on education.

"Scrutinizing Propaganda." Secular Web: Atheism, Agnosticism, Naturalism, Skepticism and Secularism. 11 May 2009

<<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/features/2000/hill1.html>>.

An article which might be helpful to the teacher who wishes to develop a deeper understanding of various propaganda techniques and rhetorical appeals.

Strom, Margo. Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior. New York: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1994.

Compendium of readings on various Holocaust-related topics; while this is an excellent resource for planning a Holocaust-related unit, it can be used for our purposes as well because it provides historical examples of persuasion techniques from this time period.

Wilson, Leslie. "Hunter Lesson Plan I." Curriculum Strand. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. 1 May 2009

<<http://www.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/lessons/hunter/huntindex.htm>>.

This brief description of the Madeline Hunter model emphasizes Hunter's original intent to get something right the first time through with regard to teaching new skills.

"WWII Propaganda, Images, Art." Teacher Oz's Kingdom of History. 15 June 2009

<<http://www.teacheroz.com/WWIIpropaganda.htm>>.

This site contains dozens of links to intriguing propaganda posters from different time periods and points of view. There are many high-quality images accessible through this index, and I recommend that teachers spend some time searching for images that they find provocative and challenging to the students.

#### Reading List for Students

Hoyt, Alia. "HowStuffWorks "How Propaganda Works"" HowStuffWorks - Learn How Everything Works! 31 Mar. 2009

<<http://www.howstuffworks.com/propaganda.htm>>.

This article will help students understand different aspects of propaganda, as well as provide a method for understanding and evaluating propaganda. In addition to this text version, HowStuffWorks.com has also produced a podcast called "How Propaganda Works," which can be found on iTunes.com. This podcast might be helpful to listen to during class as a way of reviewing the main points presented in the article.

Orwell, George. Animal Farm. New York: Signet Classic, 1943.

I recommend using an excerpt from this novel as a way to teach ethos, pathos, and logos. The teacher can choose between Major's speech in Chapter 1, or Squealer's speech in Chapter 3 (justifying the pigs' decision to keep the milk and apples for themselves). The entire novel can be found online at <http://www.george-orwell.org/animal/index.html>.

Orwell, George. 1984. New York: Signet Classic, 1961.

Two excerpts from this novel are used as discussion-inspiring pieces over the course of the curriculum unit. The entire novel can be found at <http://www.george-orwell.org/1984/index.html>.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "Harrison Bergeron." Welcome to the monkey house. New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1998.

This collection of Vonnegut's short stories is the place to find the oddly prescient 1961 story "Harrison Bergeron." This story is also reproduced in Facing History and Ourselves. For those teachers who prefer an online version, see the following url: <http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/hb.html>.

Recommended excerpts from Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior:

    "Defining a Jew" (201-2)

    "Propaganda" (218-20)

    "Art and Propaganda" (223-4)

## **Appendix A**

### **PA State Standards for Literacy**

The following Pennsylvania Standards for Literacy (11<sup>th</sup> grade) are addressed within this curriculum unit:

- 1.1.D. Identify, describe, evaluate, and synthesize essential ideas
- 1.1.G. Demonstrate after reading understanding
- 1.6.A. Listen to others
- 1.6.D. Contribute to discussions
- 1.6.F. Use media for learning purposes
- 1.8.A. Select and refine a topic
- 1.8.B. Locate appropriate research materials
- 1.5.B. Write using well-developed, appropriate content
- 1.8.C. Organize, summarize, and present research