



MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE  
A SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER MUSEUM

## Teacher's Guide



### MEDIA LITERACY: PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES IN HISTORY AND TODAY

learn from the past   engage the present   shape the future

## LESSON: PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES IN HISTORY AND TODAY

### RELATED EXHIBIT: HOLOCAUST

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson looks at how the Nazis recruited young people through the use of propaganda techniques. After obtaining a general understanding of these propaganda techniques, students will be asked to apply them to today's marketing to teenagers.

#### OBJECTIVES

- Given the article *Indoctrinating Youth*, the student will be able to identify propaganda techniques the Nazis used to induct youth into Nazism.
- Given three Nazi propaganda posters, the student will be able to identify the elements of bandwagon appeal, transfers of one quality to another, and highly synthesized visual imagery.
- The student will be able to apply propaganda techniques to today's advertisement and social media platforms.

#### ENDURING UNDERSTANDING(S)

Students will take away some of the following enduring understandings:

- Words and images have powerful sway over people.
- Propaganda techniques are still used effectively today.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S)

- What are ways that the Nazis persuaded Germans to join their movement?
- What are the techniques typically used in propaganda?
- How does the media and advertisement manipulate our thinking today?

#### KEY ISSUE/CONCEPT

- The Power of Words and Images

For definitions related to this lesson see key *Vocabulary and Terms*

#### SUBJECT AREA/CONTENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, U.S. History, World History, Civics, Government, Politics, Global Studies, English

#### TIME & MATERIALS

- One class period (two if advertisement homework is given)
- A copy of the *Indoctrinating Youth* article for each child (can be copied on a one-page front-and-back)
- Hitler poster propaganda images on a PowerPoint (these – or images like them – can be found with a simple Google Image search of “Nazi Youth Posters”)
- The teacher should have ready some contemporary examples of brainwashing through media or advertising



## PROCESS

### STEP 1: INTRODUCE PROPAGANDA

Introduce this quote by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister in Nazi Germany: *"Tell a lie often enough and everyone will believe you."* Ask students what they think it means. Can they give an example of an often-told lie that many people believe? Ask them if they think lying is a form of propaganda (It most definitely is a form of propaganda!). Use this discussion as the introduction to this lesson.

*"Propaganda is truly a terrible weapon in the hands of an expert."* Adolf Hitler, 1924

Classic propaganda techniques – repetition, testimonials, bandwagon appeal, transfers of one quality to another, and highly synthesized music and imagery – are the techniques that the Nazis used to recruit young people into Nazism. Explain these propaganda techniques to students and then have them read the *Indoctrinating Youth* Handout.

Follow up the reading with these discussion questions:

- How many years of Nazi indoctrination did children get?
- What do you think is a main aim of instruction for Hitler Youth? What was the number one thing that the Nazis wanted the youth to "get"?
- What was the role of teachers? Were they compliant or did they rail against Nazi ideology?
- What are some strategies they used to increase the idolization of Hitler?
- Were the roles of boys and girls different? How so?
- All education – both schooling and youth organizations – had the same goals. What were they?

Show the three propaganda posters and review them with students in regards to the propaganda techniques of bandwagon appeal, transfers of one quality to another, and highly synthesized imagery.

Summarize with students the main propaganda techniques used by the Nazis: repetition, testimonials, bandwagon appeal, transfers of one quality to another, and highly synthesized music and imagery.

### STEP 2: MEDIA TODAY

The propaganda techniques used by the Nazis are also the same kinds of techniques employed in today's commercials. Of course advertisers don't refer to this as "propaganda," but instead use terms like "brand loyalty" or "product loyalty." Likewise, because of social media platforms, these very same propaganda techniques are the ones used every day by regular people to promote themselves online as well.

A few facts to get students thinking about the impact of media on their lives:

- Media encompasses television, movies, magazines, music, audio, the Internet, and video games.
- On average, adolescents spend more than 7 hours per day with media.
- Of 1,500 actresses on prime-time television, most were white (74%), then African American (16%), Asian (4%), and Latino (2%). It was more likely for viewers to see a female ghost or female angel than it is for them to see a Latino or Native American character.
- Overweight characters in situation comedies (sitcoms) are often characterized as "lazy and stupid" or they are eating constantly.

- African American girls in movies are portrayed as more violent than white girls.
- Of 1,026 girls ages 14 to 17 who were polled, 74% said most girls their ages used social networking sites to make themselves look cooler than they are and 41% admitted they'd done this themselves. The same study also revealed that, although 82% of the girls polled said they were smart and 76% said they were kind, when it came to presenting themselves on social media that they instead chose to categorize themselves as fun, funny, or social. They also stated that they received their best reactions from others on social media when they portrayed themselves as "sexy."
- Media affects our health as well. Current media ideal thinness, for instance, is really only attainable for less than 5% of the female population. A content analysis of leading young women's magazines found that 76% of the cover stories were about body image. It's no surprise then that in another study of women ages 15-18 who take weight control pills, the study found that 73% of these women were readers of health and fitness magazines that portray these unrealistic body image standards for women.

Repeat to students that the same propaganda techniques used by the Nazis are still utilized today by media.

### STEP 3: APPLICATION

For homework (or in class if you have magazines available to students), have students find an advertisement in popular media that demonstrates one of the propaganda techniques covered in class (repetition, testimonials, bandwagon appeal, transfers of one quality to another, and highly synthesized music and imagery). They can either show it and class and speak about it or you could have them write a paragraph explaining the propaganda technique.

### STEP 4: REFLECTION

Most everything teenagers are interested in has been marketed to them in one way or another. Have them discuss the following questions:

- What are the most popular things/brands to wear today? What makes them the most popular?
- What famous people pop into mind when you think of certain products? Why do you think those famous people agreed to market those products or why do you think those companies wanted that specific person as their representative?
- The next time you feel that you really need a certain item, how can you think about it to see if you're being manipulated through advertisement propaganda?
- Have you ever thought of the way you present yourself on social media platforms as a form of propaganda? Can you give an example?

### STEP 5: EXTENSION ACTIVITY

The National Constitution Center has a wonderful classroom-ready lesson plan on *Creating a Modern-Day Propaganda Poster*. The lesson has students identify a modern-day (social, political, personal, etc.) issue or theme and then use it as an inspiration for creating a propaganda poster. Find the lesson at:

<http://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/PropagandaPostersLesson.pdf>.

“These boys and girls enter our organizations at ten years of age, and often for the first time get a little fresh air; after four years of the Young Folk they go on to the Hitler Youth, where we have them for another four years... And even if they are still not complete National Socialists, they go to Labor Service and are smoothed out there for another six or seven months... And whatever class consciousness or social status might still be left... the Wehrmacht (German armed forces) will take care of that.” – Adolf Hitler (1938)

From the 1920s onwards, the Nazi Party targeted German youth as a special audience for its propaganda messages. These messages emphasized that the Party was a movement of youth: dynamic, resilient, forward-looking, and hopeful. Millions of German young people were won over to Nazism in the classroom and through extracurricular activities. In January 1933, the Hitler Youth had on 50,000 members, but by the end of the year this figure had increased to more than 2 million. By 1936 membership in the Hitler Youth increased to 5.4 million before it became mandatory in 1939. The German authorities then prohibited or dissolved competing youth organizations.

### **EDUCATION IN THE NAZI STATE**

Education in the Third Reich served to indoctrinate students with the National Socialist world view. Nazi scholars and educators glorified Nordic and other “Aryan” races, while denigrating Jews and other so-called inferior peoples as parasitic “bastard races” incapable of creating culture or civilization. After 1933, the Nazi regime purged the public school system of teachers deemed to be Jews or to be “politically unreliable.” Most educators, however, remained in their posts and joined the National Socialist Teachers League. 9% of all public school teachers, some 300,000 persons, had joined the League by 1936. In fact, teachers joined the Nazi Party in greater numbers than any other profession.

In the classroom and in the Hitler Youth, instruction aimed to produce race-conscious, obedient, self-sacrificing Germans who would be willing to die for Führer and Fatherland. Devotion to Adolf Hitler was a key component of Hitler Youth training. German young people celebrated his birthday (April 20) – a national holiday – for membership inductions. German adolescents swore allegiance to Hitler and pledged to serve the nation and its leader as future soldiers.

Schools played an important role in spreading Nazi ideas to German youth. While censors removed some books from the classroom, German educators introduced new textbooks that taught students love for Hitler, obedience to state authority, militarism, racism, and anti-Semitism.

From their first days in school, German children were imbued with the cult of Adolf Hitler. His portrait was a standard fixture in classrooms. Textbooks frequently described the thrill of a child seeing the German leader for the first time.

Board games and toys for children served as another way to spread racial and political propaganda to German youth. Toys were also used as propaganda vehicles to indoctrinate children into militarism.

## YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

The Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls were the primary tools that the Nazis used to shape the beliefs, thinking and actions of German youth. Youth leaders used tightly controlled group activities and staged propaganda events such as mass rallies full of ritual and spectacle to create the illusion of one national community reaching across class and religious divisions that characterized Germany before 1933.

Founded in 1926, the original purpose of the Hitler Youth was to train boys to enter the SA (Storm Troopers), a Nazi Party paramilitary formation. After 1933, however, youth leaders sought to integrate boys into the Nazi national community and to prepare them for service as soldiers in the armed forces or, later in the SS.

In 1936, membership in Nazi youth groups became mandatory for all boys and girls between the ages of ten and seventeen. After-school meetings and weekend camping trips sponsored by the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls trained children to become faithful to the Nazi Party and the future leaders of the National Socialist state. By September 1939, over 765,000 young people served in leadership roles in Nazi youth organizations which prepared them for such roles in the military and the German occupation bureaucracy.

The Hitler Youth combined sports and outdoor activities with ideology. Similarly, the League of German Girls emphasized collective athletics, such as rhythmic gymnastics, which German health authorities deemed less strenuous to the female body and better geared to preparing them for motherhood. Their public displays of these values encouraged young men and women to abandon their individuality in favor of the goals of the Aryan collective.

### Military Service

Upon reaching age eighteen, boys were required to enlist immediately in the armed forces or into the Reich Labor Service, for which their activities in the Hitler Youth had prepared them. Propaganda materials called for ever more fanatic devotion to Nazi ideology, even as the German military suffered from defeat after defeat.

In the autumn of 1944, as Allied armies crossed the borders into Germany, the Nazi regime conscripted German youths under sixteen to defend the Reich, along side seniors over the age of 60, in the units of the "Volkssturm" (People's Assault).

After the unconditional surrender of the German armed forces in May 1945, some German boys continued to fight in guerilla groups known as "Werewolves." During the following year, Allied occupation authorities required young Germans to undergo a "de-Nazification" process and training in democracy designed to counter the effects of twelve years of Nazi propaganda.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Shaping the Future: Indoctrinating Youth." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007820>. Accessed on February 28, 2015.





This is a large campaign poster with a drawing of a smiling mother and her 3 blonde children who have a bright future thanks to Adolf Hitler. (Source: USHMM 2008.342.7)



"The German Student Fights for the Führer and the People"  
(Source: <http://spartacus-educational.com/GERyouth.htm>)





"Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-Year-Olds into the Hitler Youth"  
(Source: <http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/archive/poster-hitler-youth/>)