

Persuading the People: Propaganda in World War I

World War I saw the mobilisation of the first large-scale, formalised propaganda campaigns. All sides produced propaganda, although Britain's strategy for producing and distributing it was considered particularly adept.

WWI is often described as a 'total war', which meant that all of the nation's population and resources were needed for the war effort. To garner support for the war, the Government used sophisticated methods and a wide range of media outlets to target its message to all levels of society. Mass-produced material was distributed through newspapers, films, photographs, posters, books, pamphlets, periodicals and cartoons.

In 1917, the Government set up the semi-official National War Aims Committee, which used sophisticated techniques of persuasion. Many of these techniques are still used today in advertising and marketing on billboards, television and social media.

This resource explores the propaganda methods developed by the British Government during WWI. It asks pupils to analyse historical and contemporary media to identify the techniques being used to persuade people to adopt a specific behaviour, choose a certain course of action or to buy a particular product or service.

The resource is designed to develop literacy, communication and critical thinking skills through creative learning.

Set the Scene

- What is propaganda?
- Why did the Government use propaganda during WWI?
- How did the Government disseminate propaganda?

Neil Postman, author and media theorist, has written that 'of all the words we use to talk about talk, the word propaganda is the most mischievous'. (See http://neilpostman.org/articles/etc_36-2-postman.pdf for his full article on 'Propaganda'.) This is because it has many potential definitions, meaning different things to different people depending on their experiences.

The Miriam-Webster Dictionary, perhaps the most neutral source, defines propaganda as:

- the spreading of ideas, information or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.
- ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause; *also*: a public action having such an effect.

During World War I, propaganda was used to persuade people to support the war effort. At the start of the war, the Government needed to persuade men to enlist and to persuade women and children to produce food, clothes and munitions to keep troops fighting. Later in the war, as casualties mounted and

hardship increased at home, the Government needed to persuade people to keep supporting the war and to convince them that their sacrifices were worth it.

The global nature of the war meant that European powers had to work hard to shape international opinion. An effective propaganda campaign could strengthen allies' support and ensure the active cooperation of neutral countries.

Some common objectives of propaganda were:

- to recruit soldiers.
- to finance the war through the sale of war bonds (loans from citizens to the Government)
- to encourage women to work to ensure the production of food, munitions and other supplies for the army and on the home front.
- to conserve resources necessary for the war effort, such as food and oil
- to silence or discourage dissent

Propaganda in World War I used many sophisticated techniques to persuade people to take or avoid certain courses of action. Similar techniques are used today in social marketing campaigns and advertising.

The Fear Appeal

An emotional appeal is a method of persuasion designed to create an emotional response; it targets the heart rather than the head. An emotional appeal using fear commonly involves presenting a risk and the dire consequences which can occur if one does not take the recommended action to remove the threat.

In WWI propaganda, this could be fear of the enemy, fear of invasion and fear of the brutalities that he could inflict on those at home. These brutalities were often depicted in atrocity propaganda, a type created not only to cause fear but also to emphasise the barbarity and otherness of the enemy, thus providing a justification for the conflict.

Fear is still used by the Government and businesses in social media campaigns and advertising. For example, various campaigns seek to stir up fear of death (drink driving, not wearing a seatbelt), fear of accident or getting sick (insurance, sunscreen), fear of being socially excluded (advertises for mouthwash, deodorant) and fear of missing out (upgrades and new technology). A successful propaganda, social marketing or advertising campaign will always present a solution to the proposed threat: enlist, buy war bonds, buy a certain product or adopt a specific behaviour to avoid consequences.

Guilt Tripping and the Shame Game

Guilt and shame are powerful emotions and during WWI they were used by the Government to target those who were opposed to or ambivalent about the conflict. Advertisers today use guilt and shame to attract consumer attention, sell products or change the way people behave.

Like fear, guilt and shame are negative emotions. People don't like feeling guilty or ashamed, so successful propaganda and advertising campaigns will suggest an action that will relieve a guilty conscience. With appeals to guilt, a quick-fix solution is usually offered while a longer-term solution is usually proposed to relieve shame.

In World War I, the Government often used guilt and shame to encourage men to join up by presenting those who did not as shirkers or cowards. Today, charities are the prime users of guilt to elicit donations. Advertisements for dieting products, exercise classes and health clubs all speak to consumers' guilty consciences about their bad behaviour to encourage them to change.

Bandwagon

The bandwagon technique appeals to group mentalities to encourage people to do something by convincing them that everyone else is doing it, too. It works on the assumption that most people want to be part of the crowd. In WWI, pieces of propaganda often showed a group of friends joining up and suggested that you would be missing out if you didn't do the same. Bandwagon adverts work in much the same way by suggesting that the customer will be left out of the group experience if they do not buy what's being sold.

Glittering Generalities

This technique uses words that sound good but have little real meaning. Certain words and phrases are used to evoke positive emotions and instant approval.

Testimonial

This technique involves associating a behaviour, action, product or company with a famous person or desirable state of being. These ads encourage an emotional response in customers, which then is linked to the product, action or behaviour being advertised, making it attractive through transference.

Third and Fourth Level

Tasks

1. In small groups, ask the students to analyse one or more examples of WWI propaganda. For each example, the pupils should:
 - describe what is happening in the posters, cartoons or leaflets
 - describe what the poster, cartoon or leaflet is trying to persuade people to do and/or think
 - describe what technique or techniques it is employing to achieve its objective

You can use some of the examples provided in this pack or the students can do some research to find other examples.

2. Once the group has analysed the piece(s) of propaganda, ask them to feed back their findings to the class.
3. As a class, ask the pupils if they think they would have been swayed by WWI propaganda. Do they think similar techniques used today would persuade them to act or behave in a certain way or to buy one brand rather than another?
4. In their original groups, ask the pupils to select examples of advertisements that use the same techniques as the propaganda posters they have just analysed. They can choose from the examples provided in this pack or carry out their own research to find examples from social media, television magazines, etc.

Ask each pupil to think of an advert that has persuaded them to buy a product or brand. What techniques did this advert use? Why do they think it worked?

Curriculum Experiences & Outcomes

Third

When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role and use contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking. **LIT 3-02a**

To help me develop an informed view, I am learning about the techniques used to influence opinion and how to assess the value of my sources, and I can recognise persuasion. **LIT 3-08a**

Fourth

When I engage with others I can make a relevant contribution, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute and encourage them to take account of others' points of view or alternative solutions. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, exploring and expanding on contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking. **LIT 4-02a**

To help me develop an informed view, I can identify some of the techniques used to influence or persuade and can assess the value of my sources. **LIT 4-08a**

When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can:

- communicate information, ideas or opinions
- explain processes, concepts or ideas
- identify issues raised, summarise findings or draw conclusions. **LIT 3-09a**

I am developing confidence when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning. I can communicate in a clear, expressive way and I am learning to select and organise resources independently. **LIT 3-10a**

Core Skills

- Thinking
- Communication
- Literacy
- Working with others

When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can:

- communicate detailed information, ideas or opinions
- explain processes, concepts or ideas with some relevant supporting detail
- sum up ideas, issues, findings or conclusions. **LIT 4-09a**

I can communicate in a clear, expressive manner when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning, and can independently select and organise appropriate resources as required. **LIT 4-10a**

Approaches & Methods

- Creative learning

Materials & Resources

Propaganda IMG1 A Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster produced in 1915 to encourage men to enlist. It uses fear to create a sense of immediacy, although it doesn't actually define the threat. The Union Jack is used to appeal to patriotism, reminding men that they will be fighting for their country. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 0308)

Propaganda IMG2 Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster produced in 1915 to encourage men to enlist. This poster uses a couple of emotional appeals. It suggests that people's friends will not think well of them if they do not join the Army, thus raising fears of social exclusion. It also plays with feelings of guilt or shame by associating pride - the correct emotion - with joining up, so if one has not enlisted what emotion should one associate with oneself? © IWM (Art.IWM PST 5252)

Propaganda IMG3 This poster was published in 1915 for the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. It was designed by Robert Baden Powell, a lieutenant general in the British Army and founder of the scouting movement. The poster primarily uses the bandwagon technique. It shows different members of society - military personnel, a nurse and civilians (male and female) - working in munitions and heavy industry and even a boy scout delivering messages, all thus contributing to the war effort. The short sentence 'Are you in this?' suggests you should be. If not, you could be the young man in civilian clothes who is shown not doing his part; he is presented as a shirker. This introduces an element of shame. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 2712)

Propaganda IMG4 This poster, published by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, uses the bandwagon technique. It shows a column of soldiers followed by a column of people from every walk of

life, from lawyers to farmers and even well-dressed gentlemen. It is trying to persuade people to enlist in the Army because everyone else has already, so it is now your turn to join up. © Art.IWM PST 0318 1915

Propaganda IMG5 This recent advert from the Maybelline cosmetics company uses the bandwagon technique. The main message it conveys is that Maybelline Great Lash is 'America's favourite mascara'. It suggests since everyone in America is buying it, it must be good and you should buy it too, because you don't want to be left out of this trend.

Propaganda IMG6 Issued by the National War Savings Committee, this poster shows three young children, one of whom is consoling another who is crying. It uses the fear appeal by playing on people's concerns for their children and their fears about what might happen if Germany won the war. The recommended action is to take out war bonds. © Art.IWM PST 7935 1917-18

Propaganda IMG7 This is a Canadian recruitment poster published by Central Recruiting Committee, No. 2 Military Division, Toronto. The fate of Belgium was used a lot in WWI propaganda. Thousands of Belgian civilians were killed and many others became refugees as towns and villages were razed to the ground during Germany's invasion in August-September 1914. These atrocities were seized upon by recruiters and journalists and often exaggerated for propaganda purposes. Two key messages were used to encourage men to sign up: 1) the crimes committed by the Germans in Belgium need to be avenged and 2) if you don't join the Army, Belgium's fate may befall your country. The poster used the second message to elicit the emotional response of fear.

Propaganda IMG8 This is an advert for Listerine mouthwash dated 1928. Part of the advert reads 'No matter how charming you may be or how fond of you your friends are, you cannot expect them to put up with halitosis (unpleasant breath) forever. They may be nice to you—but it is an effort.' Listerine was originally invented as a surgical antiseptic and marketed for a variety of uses - foot cleaning, floor scrubbing and treating gonorrhoea. In the 1920s, the owner of the company came up with an incredibly successful marketing campaign. They re-branded bad breath as an embarrassing medical condition by giving it a new name, 'halitosis', using the low-level fear of social embarrassment and exclusion to convince people to buy their solution - mouthwash.

Propaganda IMG9 This is an advert for the charity Save the Children, which creates a direct and clear link between the individual consumer and the charity's cause. The photograph of a child apparently reaching out to the viewer is used to elicit the emotional response of guilt, which is designed to motivate the viewer to donate money.

Propaganda IMG10 This WWI Irish recruitment poster uses guilt to encourage men to enlist. The poster image and tagline imply that Irish men who do not sign up are failing in their duty to defend and protect their country. Women, at this time considered the weaker sex, would therefore be required to go out and fight for the nation instead. © IWM (Q 80367)

Propaganda IMG11 Nike's use of the slogan 'Just do it' is a prime example of how advertisers use glittering generalities to promote their brand. While the slogan lacks any real meaning, it evokes energy and decisiveness. The viewer is expected to make the connection between the brand and positive behaviours and attitudes.

Propaganda IMG12 This is a Australian First World War recruitment poster. It uses the technique of testimonial as it presents an image of the boxer Albert Jacka, the first Australian to be awarded a VC in WWI. Sport was an important recruiting tool during the war. It was a commonly held idea across Britain and its empire that sports, particularly ones that incorporated team spirit and a sense of patriotism, were good preparation for war - hence the rousing phrase 'Play up, play up and play THE game'. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 12226)

Propaganda IMG13 This advert uses the same technique as IMG12. The company Quorn have launched several ad campaigns based around successful athletes to endorse their food products. By creating this connection between the product and successful athletes, such as Mo Farrah and Adam Peaty, Quorn is suggesting that its foodstuff is part of a healthy diet and lifestyle. If athletes eat it, it must be good for you!