

First Call: American War Posters of World War I

An Educational Program Field Trip Summary

MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History

Essential Questions

What is propaganda? Does it affect how a person or group thinks about people, society, and events? Why or why not?

In preparation for the field trip, provide definitions for the following terms which will be discussed during the program: war bond, alliance, draft, neutral, and propaganda.

Objectives

- Students will analyze the relationship between wartime propaganda and its influence on citizens' sense of community, patriotism, and role in society.
- Students will encounter a variety of U.S. government propaganda.
- Students will evaluate the role of propaganda during World War I.
- Students will compare propaganda art and analyze its development over time, commenting on the visual context used within the art.
- Students will evaluate if poster propaganda was an accurate depiction of World War I conditions and events.
- Students will experience how citizens during World War I were often called to support the war.
- Students will understand the process of how propaganda posters were made.

Guiding Questions

- What were some different forms of propaganda during World War I?
- What kinds of emotions did World War I propaganda posters make people feel?
- What kinds of actions did World War I propaganda posters make people take?
- Were propaganda posters accurate depictions of World War I conditions and events?
- What are the various ways in which Americans were encouraged to support the war effort?

Program Overview (90 minutes, the lesson plans are geared for grades 6-12, but the content of the program can be adapted to include grades 4-12)

Throughout U.S. history, the government has often used propaganda to encourage citizens to bond together. The use of posters, movies, speeches, pictures, and songs have been common tools used by the government to rally support for a specific cause or war. Especially during World War I, colorful and dramatic wartime posters were used to create patriotic support on the homefront while soldiers waged a war overseas.

The following videos provide a brief overview of World War I at home and abroad:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XPZQ0LAIr4 (*World History*)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y59wErqg4Xg> (*U.S. History*)

Students that participate in this program will experience three separate, yet relevant, activities aimed to stimulate different learning styles and enhance their understanding of World War I and propaganda. Students will learn key terms and definitions important to the lesson. Students will also receive an overview of World War I by observing primary source artifacts and how they differ from secondary sources. Students will experience a hands-on activity of how wartime posters were made prior to digital innovation, along with theatrical art that supported the war effort. By the end of the program, students will be able to evaluate the role of propaganda and how it affects citizens.

Activity

Activity #1 – Introduction to World War I Propaganda

Summary: Students will receive a brief introduction to how the war began, the United States entry into the war, and the use of propaganda, specifically propaganda posters, by the U.S. government to drum-up support for the war effort.

Activity #2 – Gallery tour

Summary: Students in this activity will receive a tour of the “First Call” war posters exhibit, accompanied by a poster analysis group activity. However, the tour will emphasize visual artifacts, interact with students to encourage critical thinking skills, and engage audio-oriented learners. Students will learn the historical context of what caused World War I, the United States’ role in the conflict, and the government’s use of wartime posters on the homefront to gather men, money, and resources for the war. Students will also learn how multiple posters purposefully depicted images such as the American flag, Uncle Sam, and other patriotic symbols to make citizens feel and act a certain way. Students will then be presented with critical thinking challenges regarding how people throughout history have perceived war, and whether or not the propaganda posters accurately depicted World War I conditions and events. Finally, students will learn what led to the end of World War I, its immediate effect on U.S. society, and the activity’s relevance to the modern-day world.

Activity #3 - Screen Printing

Summary: In 1914, European countries allied and waged war on a global scale. The United States declared war on Germany and entered the war in 1917, but lacked men, money, and material to wage war on a global scale. It was vital that every American contribute by either enlisting into the armed forces to fight the enemy abroad, or support the war effort at home through food conservation, factory work, or buy war bonds to financially support the war.

Posters as a means of communication had more impact during World War I than at any other time in history. The ability of posters to inspire, inform, and persuade, combined with vibrant colors and designs in many of the participating countries, produced thousands of interesting visual works. These posters are valuable historical resources because they provide multiple points of view for understanding this global conflict. As artistic works, the posters range in style from graphically vibrant works by well-known designers to anonymous broadsides that were predominantly text. Posters were a major tool for broad dissemination of information during the war. Countries on both sides of the conflict distributed posters widely to garner support, urge action, and boost morale. Despite its late entry into the war, the United States produced more posters than any other country.

Students in this activity will have the hands-on opportunity to create their own poster using screen print. Screen printing was a process done before World War I and continued throughout the war, but to a lesser degree than more complicated and professionally produced lithographs. In the end, students will learn about how some posters were made during World War I (well before digital innovation the students are familiar with) because they will have their own screen print poster that they created and can keep.

Activity #4 – The Bond, a film by Charlie Chaplin; 1918

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The effort by the United States government to generate public support for the war extended beyond posters to include every form of media possible, in order to gain the widest audience. By 1917, movie theatres existed across the country. Movies were silent and accompanied by live piano or organ music while the audience watched. Movie technology had yet to find a way to flawlessly switch from one movie reel to the next. Watching a movie in 1917 and 1918 meant that the movie reel would run out of tape every 10-15 minutes, and it took about four minutes to insert the new reel of film before the movie could continue. During this pause, individuals all over the nation took advantage of a captive audience and spoke on behalf of supporting the war. These volunteers became known as “Four Minute Men.” The volunteers told movie audiences how they should support the war effort, and always encouraged the people to buy Liberty Bonds as a way to show patriotism.

For this activity, students will watch an original 1918 film called *The Bond*, which was written and directed by, and starring Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin was the biggest movie star of the

silent-movie era, and although a British citizen, did all that he could to support the war effort in the United States where he lived. *The Bond* is 10 minutes long, and includes an explanation of Liberty bonds. Halfway through the movie a four minute break occurs, at which time a member of the museum staff will address the students as if he were a Four Minute Man speaking about food conservation and similar topics in favor of the war effort. After the speech, students will finish watching *The Bond*, completing the experience of watching a movie during the time of World War I.

Students will then have the opportunity to ask questions. They will learn about the Four Minute Men and the use of film to advance the pro-war message of the U.S. government during this time. Through participation in this activity, students learn about homefront efforts to support the war because they will be exposed to a primary film and a representation of individuals that promoted war bonds.

Further information on Four Minute Men

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4970/>

<http://libcudl.colorado.edu/wwi/subjectResults.asp?id=66419>

<http://www.starts-thursday.com/2011/05/propaganda-between-reels-four-minute.html>

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