

Lesson Title: Messages That Move Us - Propaganda in WWII

Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles



Mission:

This Lesson Plan has been developed by the National Museum of Military Vehicles (NMMV) to facilitate scholastic visits to our institution. This Lesson Plan provides instructors with the framework to develop a detailed lesson plan for a field trip to the NMMV, by providing references to Wyoming State educational standards. This Lesson Plan is intended to serve as a starting point, recognizing that every School District has different standards and formats for their Lesson Plans.

Description:

During World War II, propaganda was used to convey a variety of messages to the American Homefront including a scarcity of goods and materials, recruit military and civilian workers, vilify the enemy, preserve morale and promote Patriotism. In this lesson, students will compare and contrast a variety of different examples of American and foreign propaganda. Students will also explore the morality of messaging and discuss a government's obligation to the truth and the consequences of negative propaganda.

Grade Level: 3-5

Theme: Understanding how governments use messages to influence people during times of war

Wyoming Social Studies Standards Alignment (Grades 3-5)

Grade Standard	Description
3 SS5.1.1	Identify how people, events, and ideas shape communities.
4 SS2.4.1	Explain how communication and technology influence culture.
5 SS2.1.2	Describe the role of government and citizens in a democracy.
5 SS2.4.2	Analyze how media and communication influence public opinion.
3-5 SS2.5.1	Use visual tools (e.g., posters, timelines, maps) to interpret information.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify key features of propaganda posters (symbols, slogans, emotions).
 - Explain how messages were used to influence people during WWII.
 - Compare historical propaganda to modern messaging (e.g., ads, social media).
 - Create a poster that communicates a positive civic message.
 - Reflect on the responsibilities of citizens and governments when sharing information.
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Vocabulary

- **Propaganda** - A message meant to influence how people think or act.
 - **Symbol** - A picture or object that stands for something else.
 - **Message** - What someone wants to say or share.
 - **Civic Responsibility** - The duties we have as members of a community.
 - **Media** - Ways people share information (TV, posters, internet, etc.).
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Materials

- Age-appropriate WWII propaganda posters (printed or digital)
<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers-of-persuasion>
- Poster paper, markers, crayons
- Gallery Walk worksheet (see previous handout)
- Sentence starter strips for presentations

Procedure

1. Hook: What Is a Message?

Show students familiar symbols (e.g., recycling sign, flag, school logo). Ask:

- What do these symbols mean?
- How do they make you feel?
-

2. Explore WWII Posters

Share 3–5 simplified propaganda posters. Guide students to notice:

- Colors, slogans, emotions
- Who the poster is talking to
- What action it encourages
-

3. Gallery Walk Activity

Students rotate through poster stations using the worksheet to record observations.

4. Class Discussion

- What messages did we find?
- Were they clear or confusing?
- How do we see messages like this today?

5. Create Your Own Poster

Students design a poster that shares a helpful message for their school or community (e.g., “Be Safe Online,” “Help Others,” “Respect Differences”).

6. Present and Reflect

Students use sentence starters to present their posters and explain their message. Discuss:

- Why is it important to think carefully about the messages we share?
- How can we be responsible citizens when we see or share media?

Assessment

- Completed Gallery Walk worksheet
 - Student-created poster and verbal explanation
 - Participation in discussion and reflection
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Handout 1: Gallery Walk Worksheet

Title: What Do You See? What Do You Feel?

Instructions: Look at each poster. Circle what you see, then write what you think the poster is saying and how it makes you feel.

Poster #	What do you see? (Circle or draw)	What do you think this poster is saying?	How does it make you feel?
1			
2			
3			

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Handout 2: Create Your Own Poster

Title: Share a Message with Your Community!

Instructions: Think of a kind or helpful message you want to share. Draw a picture and write your message below.

 My message is:

 My drawing:

 Ideas: “Be Safe Online,” “Help Others,” “Respect Differences”

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Handout 3: Poster Presentation Prompts

Title: My Message Matters!

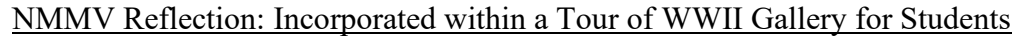
Instructions: Use these sentence starters to help you share your poster with the class.

- - Why is it important to think carefully about the messages we share?
 - How can we be responsible citizens when we see or share media?
-
- “My poster shows _____.”
 - “I made this because I want people to

_____.”
 - Why is this message important?
 - Why is it important to think carefully about the messages we share?
 - How can we be responsible citizens when we see or share media?

Tip: Practice with a partner before presenting to the group!

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1. What was your favorite propaganda poster in the museum?
2. What story does the poster tell you about the past?
3. What groups of people would this propaganda poster be most strongly connected to and why?
4. What new information does this give you about soldiers' lives, especially during WWII?
5. What significant event from WWII plays a role in the present?

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Rubric: Civic Message Poster & Presentation

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Good	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Support
Message Clarity	Message is clear, thoughtful, and age-appropriate	Message is mostly clear and relevant	Message is somewhat unclear or off-topic	Message is unclear or missing
Use of Symbols & Visuals	Strong use of symbols and visuals to support message	Good use of visuals and some symbols	Limited use of visuals or unclear symbols	No visuals or symbols used
Presentation Skills	Speaks clearly, explains message with confidence	Speaks clearly with some explanation	Needs prompting or support to explain	Unable to explain without help
Connection to Community	Strong connection to civic values or community needs	Good connection to school or community	Some connection to civic ideas	No clear connection to civic ideas

Use this rubric to guide feedback and celebrate student growth in visual literacy, civic thinking, and communication.

Extension Ideas

- Compare WWII posters to modern public service announcements
- Interview a veteran or museum educator about wartime messaging
- Create a classroom “Message Wall” to celebrate civic values
- Explore how misinformation spreads and how to spot it

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