



Propaganda Lesson Plan

Topic: Propaganda

Aim: Introduce students to the history of propaganda, identify current uses of propaganda in the media

In the modern era, where the tactics adopted to spread propagandistic messages have grown more and more refined, subtle, and persuasive, the minute we stop observing with a critical eye, we have already been persuaded. Those who are the most exposed to this phenomenon are the younger ones, thus we identified the necessity to design training materials that can address the problem and hopefully enhance the critical thought and independent judgement of students.

Most of the time, and this is valid for the youth as well as, sadly, for the grown-ups, we do not have time to sort through the information presented to us so that we may derive our own solution. Therefore, more often than we can imagine, we let ourselves fall prey to propaganda.

Competences: Develop a critical approach to messages coming from the media, either in form of news, information campaigns or advertisement

Learning outcomes: Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- **develop an awareness of how propaganda is used in everyday society**
- **develop an understanding of the ways in which propaganda is used to misinform, anger and incite people to hatred or xenophobia**
- **learn to adopt a skeptical approach to truth claims made by propaganda**

Age range: 14-18

Resources: Question list applicable to all three types of examples listed (see below)

- **Further examples of propaganda taken from different European countries (see Annexes)**
- **See Links to videos for further examples of propaganda in politics made through the endorsement of celebrities:**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaMaeNK_gqs

Joss Whedon "Save The Day - Vote" political TV commercial campaign broke new ground in the use of A-List and B-List celebrities in politics, from Robert Downey Jr. to Scarlett Johansson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptfmAY6M6aA>

Patrick Stewart's satirical take on the classic Monty Python sketch asks 'what has the European Convention on Human Rights ever done for us?' Apart from the right to a fair trial, freedom from slavery, freedom from torture ...

Tools:

TinEye Reverse Image Search

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES TO RECOGNIZE

<http://www.uvm.edu/~jleonard/AGRI183/propoaganda.html>

Slide 1 – Quote

It is good to start our full-immersion into the description of the concept of propaganda with the authoritative voice of Edward Bernays, one of the fathers of the concept of public relations and author of the 1928 publication "Propaganda". A short illustration of the content of importance of this work for the definition of the current understanding of the concept of propaganda might be useful.

After having tackled the subject starting from this historical perspective, the students will read the following quote taken from Bernays' work and they will try to understand its meaning by paraphrasing it.

"In the ethical sense, Propaganda bears the same relation to education as to business or politics. It may be abused. It may be used to over-advertise an institution and to create in the public mind artificial values. **There can be no absolute guarantee against its misuse.**" (Edward Bernays, Propaganda)

NOTE: At the end of the presentation we will come back to the opening quote and we will discuss whether it is true that nothing can be done to limit and consciently tell facts from propaganda. In order to achieve this goal, some definitions and techniques currently put in place by propaganda will be brought to the attention of the students.

Also the following quote, clearly establishing the parallelism between education and the alternative, biased

"Universal literacy was supposed to **educate** the common man to control his environment. Once he could read and write he would have a mind fit to rule. So ran the democratic doctrine. But instead of a mind, universal literacy has given him **rubber stamps**, rubber stamps inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with published scientific data, with the trivialities of the tabloids and the platitudes of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man's rubber stamps are the duplicates of millions of others, so that when those millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all receive identical imprints. It may seem an exaggeration to say that the American public gets most of its ideas in this wholesale fashion. The mechanism by which ideas are disseminated on a large scale is propaganda, in the broad sense of an organized effort to spread a particular belief or doctrine."
(Edward Bernays, Propaganda)

slide 2 – What do you think propaganda is?

Ask the students what they think propaganda is: brainstorming exercise during which some keywords will emerge. Some questions have been provided to help the students identify the issue starting from what they already know ('heuristic' process during which the student is accompanied and brought step-by-step to the discovery of new things starting from a consolidated base of knowledge that comes from English classes or History classes. For instance, a student from the age range 14-18 typically understands the word 'propaganda' under an historical perspective and refers it to absolutistic regimes from the XXth century such as Nazism and Fascism and recognizes propaganda as an instrument that has been used to achieve mass-consensus on a large, national scale, by the creation of personality cults and easily recognizable and ever-recurring symbols.

Key to this lesson is to make students aware of the fact that propaganda is not only what they found on history books. Propaganda is not all about dictatorships and absolutism, but is nowadays a widely spread phenomenon embedded in every act of communication.

We take processes and methods adopted in the flow of information that constantly bombards us as they are, but they in fact conceal techniques that are used to achieve some pre-determined results and that target specific audiences leveraging on their tastes and ambitions, on the values they believe in, promoting a vision of the world that comforts them in their beliefs.

slide 3 – Historical example of propaganda #1: Rosie the Riveter

Rosie the Riveter is a cultural icon of the United States, representing the American women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War II, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies. These women sometimes took entirely new jobs replacing the male workers who were in the military. Rosie the Riveter is used as a symbol of feminism and women's economic power.

Show the present slide and the next one as ask student if they consider it to be propaganda. Why or why not? Do not correct students or try to reach a consensus – it is sufficient to gather contributions and go on.

slide 4 - Historical example of propaganda #2: Sexist advertisement

Now show the second slide and ask whether it is different from or similar to the first one and why. The point that you want to make by putting forward this comparison is that indeed propaganda does not need to be 'inherently' bad.

In the first example, it promotes the idea that women are perfectly capable of doing tasks traditionally reserved to men, *de facto* empowering women and contributing to spread values that are symmetrically opposed to the ones evoked in this second ad.

slide 5 - Definitions

Show students a couple of different definitions that will allow them to highlight some basic and recurrent aspect of the phenomenon of propaganda.

After having read and commented on these definitions, some fundamental concepts need to be pinpointed.

- Propaganda appears in a variety of forms
- Propaganda is strategic and intentional
- Propaganda aims to influence attitudes, opinions and behaviours
- Propaganda can be beneficial or harmful
- Propaganda may use truth, half-truths or lies
- To be successful, propaganda taps into our deepest values, fear, hopes and dreams
- But, most important of all, propaganda uses several means and techniques to accomplish its goal (s).

slide 6 - Good or Bad?

Propaganda uses any means to accomplish its goal, which might not necessarily be bad.

Ask the students whether they think propaganda is good or bad then explain that it is neither good or bad: by its very definition, propaganda is a tool and it is at the disposal

of the company, organization or party that put it in place, regardless of the fact that its scope might be more or less noble or morally acceptable.

Therefore, contrarily to common belief, propaganda might be used for good causes as well. NGOs resorted to it as much as populist parties leveraging on emotions instead of rational and elaborate explanations. Rather than weighting pros and cons, it suffices to present a phenomenon under one only perspective or point of view instead of mentioning voices of dissent or what might be detrimental to the image that must be conveyed, thus lying by omission.

slide 7 – Propaganda can be found everywhere

In order to understand how propaganda operates and which techniques are concretely put into practise, we will look closer into some examples taken from three different fields of public communication:

- 1) journalism;
- 2) public policy domain;
- 3) information campaign of a NGO.

“While propaganda is most evident in times of war as in the “I want you for US Army” poster, it is constantly being used as a political and social means in even less obvious ways to influence peoples attitudes. This is currently evident with all the election commercials on TV, where the candidates are using propaganda techniques to elevate themselves above their competitor. Another place propaganda is being exploited is by the use of the media in its portrayal of countries that have nuclear technology.”

“Modern propaganda uses all the media available to spread its message, including: press, radio, television, film, computers, fax machines, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing, handbills, buttons, billboards, speeches, flags, street names, monuments, coins, stamps, books, plays, comic strips, poetry, music, sporting events, cultural events, company reports, libraries, and awards and prizes. It is most likely that some of these media uses are surprising, but that only serves to show how easy it is to not even recognize propaganda as such.”

(Media's Use of Propaganda to Persuade People's Attitude, Beliefs and Behaviors, Johnnie Manzaria & Jonathon Bruck).

slide 8 – First example: Vote Leave Propaganda #1

This image was first published by the blog *Spectator* and then it was proposed by a multitude of other sources such as *The Independent*, de facto spreading over the Internet and serving the cause of the Leave campaign in the Brexit confrontation.

The map clearly advocates for the Leave side because it is addressing the immigration issue in a biased way. How? What enables us to recognize this image as part of a wider propaganda strategy? The truth lies in the details: the only countries that are named directly on the map are Syria and Iraq, and this is clearly stated in order to convey the following message: “if we do not stop migrants from the Middle East currently based in Turkey to come to our country, this might cause a severe security problem because there might be terrorists among them, since Iraq and Syria are next-door, immediate neighbours of Turkey”.

It is necessary to highlight how the graphics and the way this map is presented is in line with the purpose the author wants to achieve, how it reflects their ideology and to which extent it aims at conveying a very specific message.

In order to track down all steps that underpin the scope and creation of this image, it is advisable to carefully accompany the students through the following question list, letting them answer one question after the other and thus leading them towards the ‘solution’. The present question list has to be used as a reading tool for the other two examples as well and it might be a handy instrument.

<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/files/2016/06/Ref-address1.pdf>

(in order to retrieve the document and find the source that first posted it, a reverse research with the image search tool “TinEye” has been made)

slide 9 – Questions to analyse the image in slide 8

The image must be “read” and interpreted following a question list that is applicable to all three types of examples listed (see below).

Questions to be addressed:
Identify the message , the sender or author of the message and the recipient of the message.
- What is the map’s/ad’s/article’s purpose? What do you think it wants to communicate?
- How does it communicate this message ? Pay particular attention to details: <u>Think about the use of colour, language, space, fonts or symbols.</u>
- Now put yourself in the shoes of the recipient : what is the target group? <u>Since the message has to match with the expectations, convince the audience or at least gain the confidence</u> , what do you think are the expectations of the public that the map’s/ad’s/article’s deliberately addresses and fulfils?
- What does this poster suggests about the audience’s beliefs and values? Do you think these assumptions made about the target group <u>are accurate? If yes, the use of the</u> map’s/ad’s/article’s will be effective and the <u>propaganda is likely to reach its goal.</u>

- **slide 10:** Recap on the message, the sender or author of the message and the recipient of the message and the role they play to contribute to the formation and transmission of a propaganda message.
- **slide 11: Second example: Vote Leave propaganda #2**

This second example is even more straight-forward and explicit because it collects the front pages of a well-known magazine.

The aim is to generate fear, insecurity and dismay. A concrete threat is looming over the reader: millions of migrants are on the doorstep of Europe and they need to be

stopped. The only way to do that, it is implied, is for the UK to put a cap on immigration by stepping out of the European Union.

- slide 12 – Third example taken from the political arena: the populist campaign of UKIP

This is a very well-known example coming directly from a party campaign, the one carried out by UKIP in order to convince British voters to choose for the Leave side.

It must be pointed out that the ad insists on an element that is perceived as a basic need for people, such as a more efficient and a more affordable health system. It thus leverage on emotions and inner fears, such as the one of being left (or heaving your loved ones being left) without appropriate care in case of illness, incident or when the old age approaches.

slide 13 – Fourth example taken from the information campaign of a NGO

Despite being less evidently infused with propaganda, also information campaign posters can be biased and convey messages that do not really care about the reliability of their sources. PETA's most recent campaigns provide a valid example of it.

slides 14, 15 – What kind of effect do you think this kind of propaganda has on society?

Do you see similar examples in your home country?

See **Annex** with further examples taken from several European countries, and especially from populist parties such as *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy or right-wing extremist and xenophobe parties in Austria (Freedom party) and Hungary.

slides 16, 17 – Propaganda turned into parody

- Australian party campaign and its poster turned into parody: Pauline Hanson's One Nation manifesto
- Italian "Fertility Day" campaign and its parody

slide 19 and ff. – Propaganda techniques to be isolated and recognized:

PROPAGANDA QUIZ

Enumerate all the following definitions of propaganda techniques without providing examples. It would be useful to list them and write them down on the blackboard or on post-its and then show the examples to be found starting from slide 14.

The students will have to identify which technique has been adopted.

#1
NAME CALLING or STEREOTYPING: Giving a person or an idea a bad label by using an easy to remember pejorative name. This is used to make us reject and condemn a person or idea without examining what the label really means. Examples: "Republican", "Tree-Hugger", "Nazi", "Environmentalism", "Special-Interest Group".
#2
VIRTUE WORDS or GLITTERING GENERALITY: These words are used to dupe us into accepting and approving of things without examining the evidence carefully. Examples: "Natural", "Democratic", "Organic", "Scientific", "Ecological", "Sustainable".
#3
TESTIMONIAL: When some respected celebrity (or alternatively someone generally hated) claims that an idea or product is good (or bad). This technique is used to convince us without examining the facts more carefully.
#4
PLAIN FOLKS: This is a way that a speaker convinces an audience that an idea is good because they are the same ideas of the vast majority of people like yourself. Examples: "This is the will of the People", "Most Americans...". Another example would be when the speaker tells a story about a family or people that are "just like you" to reinforce the speaker's point of view.
#5
Band Wagon: This common propaganda method is when the speaker tries to convince

you to accept their point of view or else we will miss out on something really good. The Band-Wagon technique is often used in advertisement but more and more also transposed into populist speeches and claims of the political rhetoric.
#6
ARTIFICIAL DICHOTOMY: This is when someone tries to claim there are only two sides to an issue and that both sides must have equal presentation in order to be evaluated. This technique is used to dupe us into believing there is only one way to look at an issue, when in fact there may be many alternative viewpoints or "sides". Like most propaganda techniques it simplifies reality and therefore distorts it, often to the advantage of the speaker. A classic example is the "intelligent design" versus "evolution" controversy.
#7
HOT POTATO: This is an inflammatory (often untrue) statement or question used to throw an opponent off guard, or to embarrass them. Examples "Have you stopped beating your spouse", "When will you pay the taxes you owe?" The fact that it may be utterly untrue is irrelevant, because it still brings controversy to the opponent.
#8
SCAPEGOAT: This often use with Guilt-by-association to deflect scrutiny away from the issues. It transfers blame to one person or group of people without investigating the complexities of the issue. Examples: "George W. Bush got us into Iraq", "President Reagan caused the national debt".
#9
FEAR or GUILT: "Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger."

(Source: PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES TO RECOGNIZE

<http://www.uvm.edu/~jleonard/AGRI183/propoaganda.html>)

- **slide 20**
- **slide 21**

- **slide 22**
- **slide 23**

Annexes

- Italy: Propaganda Movimento 5 Stelle
- France: Marine LePen and Le Front National
- Austria
- Hungary