

The Political System

Do Not Believe the Hype

OBJECTIVES

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify types of propaganda.
- Discuss propaganda in their community that is directed toward them.
- Determine the effectiveness of propaganda.

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students will identify propaganda in their community. For three to five days, each time they see a piece of propaganda, they are to write down and record certain facts and impressions about it in a log created for that purpose. At the end of the designated period, students will categorize the propaganda into one of the six types listed in the chapter. Students will then collectively attempt to discern the message the propaganda is intended to convey and rate its effectiveness. Students will choose one piece that they designate as especially effective and write a letter to the source of the message and a letter to the editor of the local newspaper explaining how the piece affected them.

PLANNING

Suggested Time Plan to spend at least two 45-minute class periods and two homework assignments on this activity. Students will carry a log with them for three to five days in preparation for this activity.

Resources Students can use any source available, including newspapers, magazines, billboards, television, books, or radio.

Preparation You may want to have students look at examples of propaganda to help them identify it. You may choose current examples or use historical examples, such as the government propaganda to end prohibition.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Discuss the project with the class. You might begin by asking students to think of an example for each type of propaganda listed in the chapter. Their examples do not have to be confined to political issues but can encompass other types of advertisements with which they might be more familiar. Distribute copies of the Planning Guidelines, Standards for Evaluating Your Work, and Task Sheet to the class. Give the students a time frame for completing the project.
2. Have students create a log in which to record their findings for a time period of three to five days. The log should include a place to describe the propaganda; the facts included in it, if any; the impression the student received from the piece; and the effectiveness of the message. Organize students into groups of three or four and have them record their findings in the log for the designated period of time.
3. When the groups reconvene, have them divide their findings among the categories of propaganda and rate the pieces from most to least effective.
4. After groups have finished this task, have them present their examples to the other students. As a class, decide which example is the most effective. Then have students write a letter to the source of the propaganda and to the editor of the local newspaper expressing their opinions about its effectiveness and explaining their feelings about it.

ASSESSMENT

To evaluate students' work, use the Standards for Evaluating Work on page 43 of this booklet, along with Rubric 15: Journals, Rubric 17: Letters to Editors, and Rubric 41: Writing to Express, in the *Alternative Assessment Handbook* or in a customizable format on the One-Stop Planner.

Planning Guidelines

In this activity, you will be working in small groups to learn about the propaganda that influences how the people in your community think and feel about things or people. You will gather information from sources you observe in your community that may be positive or negative and that meet the definition of propaganda as defined in the chapter. You will keep a log of the sources you see and compare with the other students the propaganda that you identify. After evaluating these sources, your class will choose the best example and express an opinion to your community via letters to the editor of a local newspaper and to the source of the propaganda. You will learn what influences different populations in your community and what methods are used for different effects.

1. Before meeting with your small group, develop a log. This log should have a place for you to document each instance of propaganda that you encounter over the period of time that you are assigned to collect this data. In the log should be a space for you to document the place where you saw the item, a description of it, whatever facts, opinions, etc., were expressed in it, and your feelings about it as you saw it. You can include anything else you think might be important. The log can be as simple as you want to make it, and may just be a small notebook. The important thing is that everyone collects the same types of information.
2. In your small group, discuss what kinds of propaganda you will be looking for and try to think of sources that might contain that type of propaganda. For example, newspapers, magazines, billboards, and flyers might be good sources, but other sources may be available, especially if an election is under way in your community.
3. Keep your log with you at all times and record every piece of propaganda that you see fits your categories. Be sure to record how you feel about what you see and whether it has a negative or positive impact, or whether it has no emotional effect. You should record your findings for about three to five days.
4. Meet with your group and compare your logs. Compare your entries and see how many different items you have. If more than one of you recorded the same items, compare the emotional responses you described. Discuss any differences. Categorize the propaganda items into the groupings listed in your chapter. Rate the effectiveness of the items, and choose the most effective.
5. Present your group's selections to the class. After each group has presented its selections, as a class vote on the most and least effective. Decide, as a class, which item you want to write about. Then write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, telling him or her why you chose the item, what you thought about it, and what made it effective. Write a similar letter to the source of the propaganda.

Standards for Evaluating Work

EXCELLENT

- Student has participated fully in creating the log and understands the task. The log has entries that help to document the propaganda. The log is brought back with complete results that add to the overall task.
- Student has valuable insights into the messages conveyed in the propaganda and can articulate those messages. Student also can identify the type of propaganda used in the message. Student has used a variety of sources in collecting data.
- Student contributes important data to the letters to the editor and source, identifying in precise terms the type of propaganda, the category it belongs to, and exactly why it is the best example.

ACCEPTABLE

- Student has helped to create the log. Student has some entries in the log, but entries are off-subject or incomplete. Logs have some value, but are not very helpful in adding to the overall task.
- Student has some insight into the messages but is unable to articulate the motivation behind the messages or identify the type for each item. Student has not collected items from a variety of sources but has relied on just a few.
- Student contributes somewhat to the letters to the editor and source but lacks insight into what makes the chosen item effective. The student does not have a good grasp of the level of influence contained in the item.

UNACCEPTABLE

- Student's input into creating the log indicates a lack of understanding of the overall task. Student's log does not have sufficient entries or is incomplete.
- Student has little or no appreciation of the type of propaganda he or she has collected. The student cannot identify the category of propaganda and has not used many sources.
- Student contributes little to the letters to the editor and source. Student has not correctly categorized the item selected and does not have a grasp of the influence of the item and its intended audience or purpose.

Task Sheet

Check off the following tasks as you complete the activity.

- 1.** Create a log to be used by each group member to document each item of propaganda seen during the observation period.
- 2.** Meet with your small group to discuss the types of propaganda you are looking for.
- 3.** Observe your community for three to five days for different types of propaganda displayed on or in as many different sources as you can find. Record each item you find, filling out the log completely.
- 4.** Meet in your small group and compare the items from each student's log. Make a list of all of the different sources and then rate them from most effective to least effective. Discuss with your group why you have rated the items this way, and decide which item your group will present to the class.
- 5.** As a class, decide which item of propaganda is either the most effective or least effective. Compose a letter to the editor of your newspaper and the source of the propaganda. Explain what effect the item had on your class, why you think it was very effective, and whether that piece of propaganda should be continued or eliminated. Be sure to defend your position in your letter. Give the editor all of the information that he or she needs about the piece, including what type of propaganda it is, what effect it had on the majority of the students who viewed it, what your emotional response was to the item, whether it contained facts or opinion, and whether the class thought it met the goal intended by the creator of the item. Pay attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.