

Propaganda: Using Canadian War Posters to Develop Critical Thinking

Who is Valour Canada:

Vision:

Valour Canada is a nationally-recognized, charitable, not-for-profit organization dedicated to connecting Canadians, especially youth, to Canada's military heritage.

Mission:

Valour Canada will create engaging and effective programs to educate Canadians, with a focus on youth, about Canada's military history.

www.ValourCanada.ca

Resources:

Valour Canada has almost 40 years of experience delivering military history education programs in museums and classrooms.

- ❖ Educational documentaries (190+ short videos)
- ❖ Online military history library (290+ youth-accessible articles)



**GENERAL SIR ARTHUR CURRIE,
GCMB, KCB**

Exploring the life of Canadian General Sir Arthur Currie, one of the best of First World War.



D-DAY SERIES: RCN AND OPERATION NEPTUNE

"RCN and Operation Neptune" provides a 5 chapter description of the RCN's involvement in Operation Neptune, and the larger Operation Overlord.



MOLLY LAMB BOBAK

Molly Lamb Bobak and her experience in the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) and with the War Artists Committee.



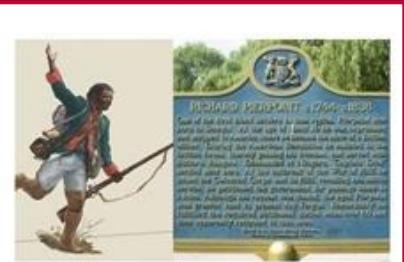
OPERATION APOLLO

Exploring Operation Apollo, part of the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan.



INUQ L/CPL JOHN SHIWAK

Inuk Lance Corporal John Shiwak and his experience sniping in the First World War with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.



RICHARD PIERPOINT

Richard Pierpoint: traded as a slave, then won freedom. Fought as a Ranger, then established the Coloured Corps. Assisted the underground railroad, became a legend.



WEAPONS IN STAR WARS

Examining Han Solo's German Mauser C96 and the Stormtroopers' Sten/Sterling-inspired submachine guns.



CONN SMYTHE

The story of Conn Smythe's WWI military service and the NHL trophy that bears his name.

Resources (cont'd):

- ❖ Juno Beach VR

Plus 10 other virtual tours

- ❖ History and Heritage Scholarship

Annual; Contest ends in mid-June:

\$2,000 1st place, \$500 2nd place

Task: Create a 4 - 6 minute YouTube video

- ❖ Girl Guides

Canadian Women of Valour Program

- ❖ Speaker Series

2025 highlight: Historian Tim Cook

www.ValourCanada.ca/Education



Full Session Outline:

1. Propaganda: Definitions, Devices, Complexity, Curriculum (1h)
2. 10-minute Break
3. Classroom-ready Activities; Transition to Groups (10 min)
4. Teacher Pair/Group Work (40-65 min)
5. Wrap-up & Takeaways (5 min)

Session Goals:

1. New perspective(s) and 2-3 things you can try in your class (Pt. 1).
2. Sharing of Resources (end of Pt. 1).
3. Drafted 1-3 class/period, subject-specific, Lesson Plan (Pt. 3&4).

Question:

What is a teacher's ultimate goal regarding their students?

Granted, the age of the student is a big factor, so let's say:
for high school graduates.

Critical, diligent, thinkers that have the courage to think for themselves.



August Landmesser, 1936,
Hamburg, Germany

MaryFisherArt.Medium.com

Aiming to defend against:

Pluralistic Ignorance:

“. . . occurs when people mistakenly believe that everyone else holds a different opinion from their own. This often leads to a false consensus, where people conform to the thought-to-be majority opinion, even though it . . . (is not the opinion of the) . . . majority of the people.” SimplyPsychology.org

Atomization:

“. . . the act or process of splitting into smaller parts, sections, groups, etc.; fragmentation or disintegration;
The atomization of society into isolated individuals . . . is largely a modern phenomenon.” Dictionary.com

4 Important Experiments:

Asche Conformity (Which of the lines is longer?)

- People often give a wrong answer just to fit in with the group

Stanford Prison (Inmate, guard, and warden all role playing (RP))

- Some people quickly overstep social norms once given power

Milgram (supervisor (RP), shockee (RP), and shocker (non-RP))

- Some will follow orders beyond what they thought they would do

Bobo's Doll (Children watch an adult care for or abuse a doll)

- Mimicry i.e., monkey see, monkey do

[VeryWellMind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com)

Activity:

4 Corners/Horseshoe Debate: Conspiracy Theories

(but for this we are going to imagine we do it)

- > Topic 1: The pyramids were built by aliens.
- > Topic 2: Hitler died in Argentina in 1962, not by suicide 30Apr45.
- > Topic 3: Jeffrey Epstein did not kill himself.

Group has good rapport.

The space is safe and facilitates open & respectful discussion.

The teacher is consistent and is also a learner.

Content to be covered:

1. Propaganda: Definitions and Purpose
2. Susceptibility: Who is ripe to be influenced?
3. Devices – with Canadian wartime poster examples

Name-calling

Euphemism

Loaded Language

Plain Folks

Transfer

Bandwagon

Testimonial

Fear (FUD)

Dehumanize

Repetition

4. Assessing Information & Adding Complexity
5. Curricular Connections & Resources

Propaganda defined:

Propagare

“information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions” [Cambridge Dictionary](#)

“dissemination of information—facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies—to influence (or manipulate) public opinion . . . beliefs, attitudes, or actions” [Britannica.com](#)

Propaganda: Why use it? What's its purpose?

The goal is to influence a person or group of people to think a certain thought or train of thought.

- This can be toward positive outcomes (e.g., healthy behaviour) or negative (e.g., hurtful behaviour)
- Militaries have used propaganda for centuries – “All warfare is based on deception.” – Sun Tzu
- During everyday life, everyone is a target!
Mostly to sell us consumer products.



A person/population is more susceptible to propaganda when:

- Fatigued (tired) and/or stressed
- More intuitive (feelings) than analytical (facts) thinkers
- Weaker in numeracy skills
- More frequently exposed to social media (repetition & confirmation)
- There is no clear evidence that highly educated people are less susceptible (because they can rationalize their thinking)

Here are 10 propaganda devices to watch for:

Name-calling

Use of negative words or labels to elicit prejudice against something without looking at facts/evidence.

Often this is “ad hominem” i.e., ‘towards the person’, a personal attack rather than an attack on the opposition’s argument or statement.

E.g., “that person is a jerk”, so all their ideas must be bad.



Euphemism

Use of a more bland/innocuous word or phrase in place of something more unpleasant. The goal is to reduce the chance that the audience will have a negative association to the topic at hand.

E.g., 'shell shock' (WW1) →
'battle fatigue' (WW2) →
'PTSD' (post-traumatic stress disorder)

[George Carlin video](#)



Loaded language

Aka “Weasel words”. Use of overly positive or negative words, e.g., fantastic, horrible, perfect, disgusting, etc.

The goal is to elicit an emotional response that is not based on facts or evidence.

Canada is now menaced directly on both coasts.

The war has spread in a twinkling across two oceans. This is now a **WORLD** war — Canada stands squarely in the path of conflict.

We who are fighting for freedom have great resources. But the enemy was ready years ahead of us.

Only work, sacrifice and grim determination to battle with all the weapons at our command will bring ultimate triumph.

From those of us unable to bear arms, dollars are needed to forge new tools of victory. We must be prepared to do OUR part — to the utmost.



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Get Ready
to Buy
the New

Come on Canada!

VICTORY BONDS

WASTE NOT-WANT NOT



PREPARE FOR WINTER

Save
Perishable Foods
by
Preserving Now



Plain folks/normal-linking

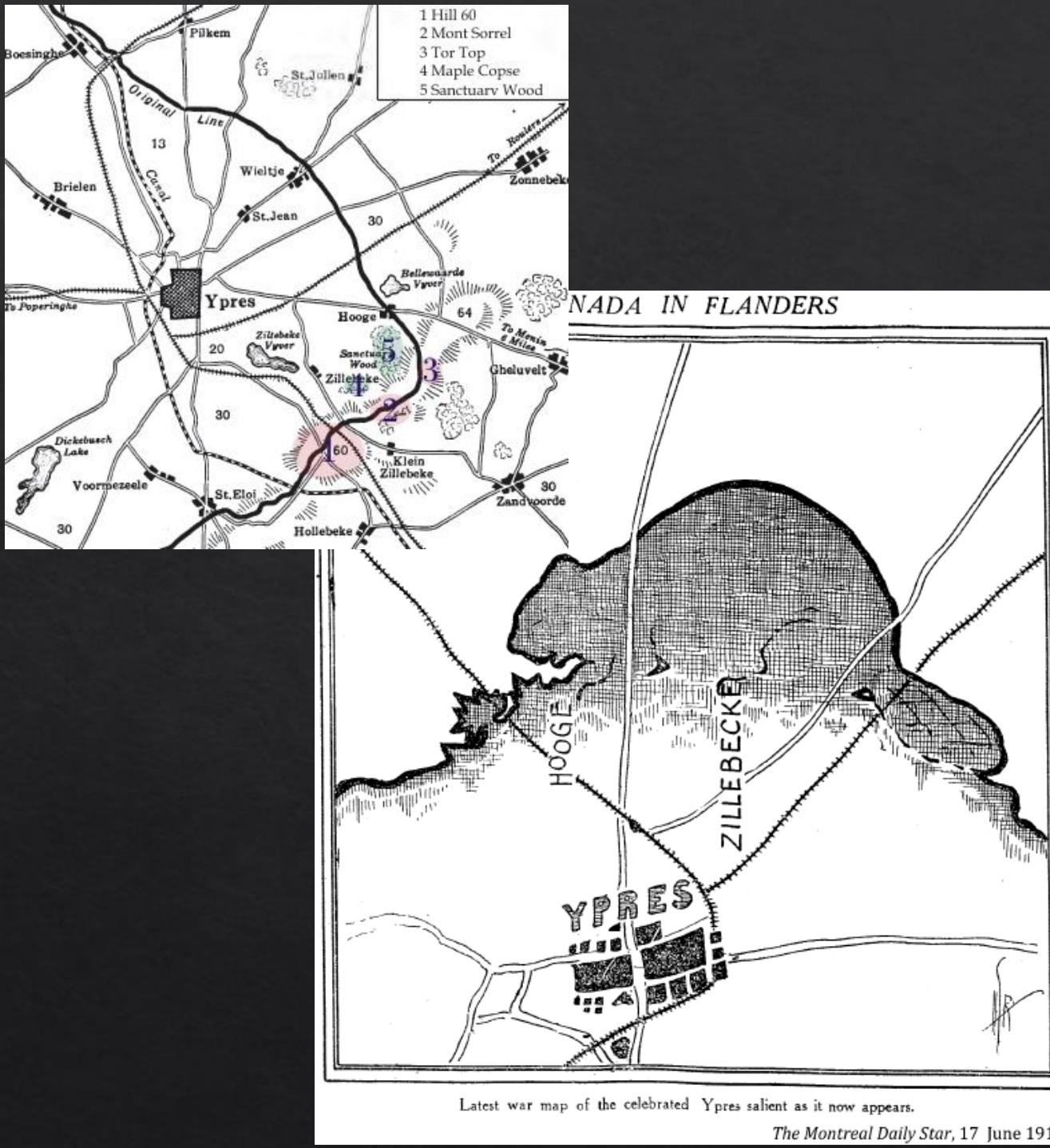
Subtle association of normal or moral people to elicit connection to a group, most often the common people. It can also be a speaker/ leader trying to appear to be ordinary (i.e., normal) to gain trust.

E.g., Obama's use of "folks" and Trump's use of "patriots".

Transfer/symbol-linking

Subtle association of positive or negative symbols (e.g., flags, flowers, etc.) to elicit emotion about a person, idea, etc.

Other examples include: finishing a speech with a prayer or song, or linking to an “undeniable” truth.



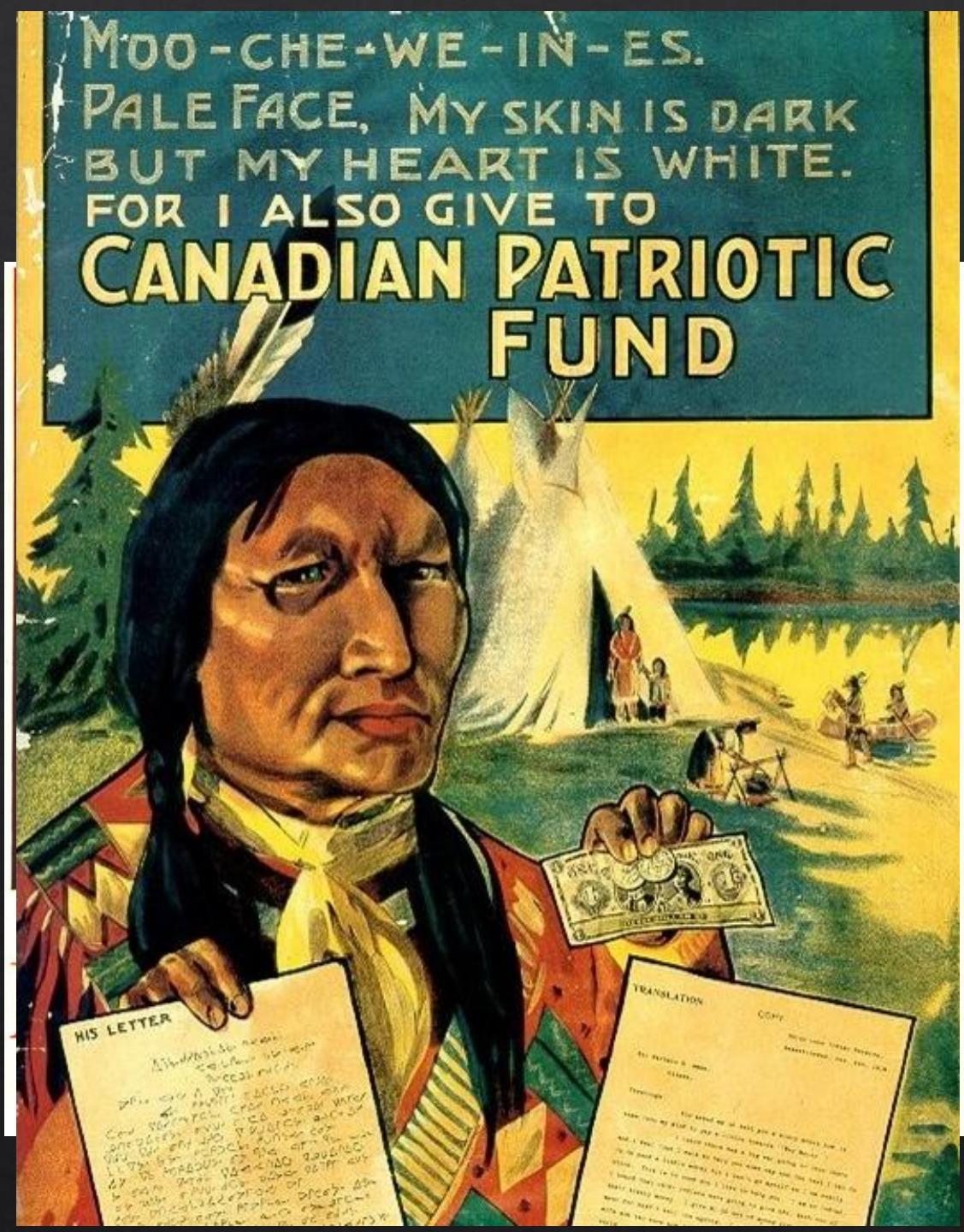
Bandwagon

Exploits the desire to fit in with a certain group; *“everyone else is doing it”*

E.g., McDonald's has served hamburgers to billions; Mr. Beast is the most followed YouTube channel; --- So get on board!!!

‘Sock puppets’ and ‘Bots’ online media can easily make it appear that an idea, concept, statement, etc., is much more/less popular than it really is.





Testimonial

Using a person, often a celebrity and/or someone widely known, to 'sell' a product or idea.

We see this everywhere, often as paid promotion.

E.g., A doctor speaking about a medical treatment. (Note that a doctor also has 'authority'.)

'Influencers' on social media provide testimonials whether paid or not.

Fear

Use of **FUD** (fear, uncertainty, doubt) to ensure better compliance for action X, e.g., if you don't do X then this horrible thing will happen.

This is often used when people have incomplete info about a topic.

TO THE WOMEN OF CANADA

1. You have read what the Germans have done in Belgium. Have you thought what they would do if they invaded this Country ?
2. Do you realize that the safety of your home and children depends on our getting more men NOW ?
3. Do you realize that the one word "GO" from you may send another man to fight for our King and Country ?
4. When the War is over and someone asks your husband or your son what he did in the great War, is he to hang his head because you would not let him go ?

**WON'T YOU HELP
AND SEND A MAN TO
ENLIST TO-DAY?**



Will you outbid the Axis?

MAKE NO MISTAKE if the Axis should win this war your children would be doomed to a life of slavery and moral degradation. To control their future the enemy is bidding all the power built up through years of totalitarian scheming and preparation.

But you can outbid the enemy . . . it's up to you! No power in this world can equal that of a free people, provided that each is determined to contribute to the last ounce of his or her strength. Canada asks you to invest every dollar you possibly can in the new Victory Bonds as an essential duty of the freedom-loving citizen.

Every bond you buy will be a bid for your children's future. Every bond will help to make victory *sure*. And victory will open up a glorious destiny for the youth of Canada — in a land singularly blessed by Providence and in a new world at peace.

How to Buy — Give your order to the Victory Loan salesman who calls on you. Or place it in the hands of any branch of any bank, or give it to any trust company. Or send it to your local Victory Loan Headquarters, or you can authorize your employer to start a regular payroll savings plan for you. Bonds may be bought in denominations of \$50, \$100, \$500, \$1,000 and larger. Salesmen, bank, trust company or your local Victory Loan Headquarters will be glad to give you every assistance in making out your order form.

Come on Canada
BUY the new **VICTORY BONDS**

FUD (cont'd)



“The Dance
of Death”

- Grain Growers'
Guide, Winnipeg,
MB, Oct. 1914



Dehumanize

Similar to name-calling, but this specifically tries to frame a person/people as less worthy of respectful treatment due to their 'badness'. Often seen are references to the opposition being animals, vermin, or diseases.

Note that Genocide researchers see dehumanization as one of the steps.

The goal is to justify that since they did X, we need to do Y.

When both belligerents repeatedly do this to their opponent, the result can be catastrophic.



HARRY LAUDER'S STORY.

THIS Story was told by Harry Lauder to the Montreal Canadian Club, as it was told to him by his Son, Capt. Lauder, who gave his life for his Country :

THE Germans had captured Six Men of the Black Watch.

THEY stripped them naked, made them stand at Attention through the Cold Night, and at Dawn said, "You Swine! Get Back to your Trenches."

THEN, as the Helpless, Frozen and Naked Men stumbled over No Man's Land, they were Mown Down by Machine Guns.

THIS IS "KULTUR"

Repetition

Utilizes the belief that something said or heard repeatedly, irrespective of truth, will eventually be perceived as truth

E.g., the "Kultur" posters from WW1.

"Kultur" in this context implies that all Germans are evil, uncaring people who will stop at nothing to promote their way of life AND the more "Kultur" is repeated, the more people will believe it.

SirHarryLauder.com

BBC.com



Propaganda is widespread, continuous, and can be used for good or bad.

It is unescapable!

**How can we
protect ourselves?**

Tips for assessing information

Try to keep the following in mind:

- Who is presenting the info? Is it recent? Is recency good? Does the author's record show accuracy? Are they reputable?
- Who paid/who received? Are there any conflicts of interest or incentives to present a certain perspective?
- Who benefits? (Qui bono)
- Does the info make you feel a certain way? Why might that be?
- Is the math/data plausible?
- Logic and Occam's Razor

Switching gears . . .

Adding complexity 1: Standard/traditional tools

Tools:

- Objective reporting - striving towards non-bias . . . really?
 - Omission
 - Manufacturing Consent (Chomsky)
- Public relations, marketing, and advertising
- Polling firms
 - “Push” Polls
- Interviews and focus groups
- Astro-turfing

<< Normative psychology >> (basic social conformity)

Adding complexity 2: Modern Digital Media

Recent additions to the propaganda toolkit:

- Advocacy journalism
- Likes & Dislikes; The comment section
- Algorithms: Social media & Big Tech (*Dopamine exploit*)
- Shadow-banning
- Censorship
- Bots & Sock Puppets
- AI (Artificial Intelligence)
- Your data . . . Used to keep your attention or sell you goods

<< Dark psychology >>
(hacking brains)

Adding complexity 3: The Biggest Hitters

Governments, businesses, and military have always used traditional propaganda tools. They have had decades to perfect them and now they have the internet!

Other things to be aware of:

- False flags
- Operation Mockingbird
- Agitation and agitprop
- ‘Nudge’ units
- Psy-ops (psychological operations),
e.g., CF 36 and 37 Cdn Bde Groups, US: INSCOM Cyber Brigade



Curricular Connections:

Specific Subject Areas: (often 'Media Literacy')

- Social Studies 4-5, 7-9, 10, 20, 30
- ELA 5-6, 7-9, 10, 20, 30
- Knowledge and Employability 10 & 20
- Sociology 20 & History 20

General:

- Dimensions of Thinking (Critical & Historical)
- Communication (Visual & Written)

Resources: Imagery

Canadian Primary Sources: FWW – SWW – Cold War and much more! Posters, cartoons, images, quotations, etc. (BC Social Studies Teachers) <http://canadianprimarysources.org/canadianPS.htm> ← This has an overwhelming amount of high-quality content!

McGill Digital Library: FWW/SWW searchable.

<https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/warposters/search/search.php>

Canadian History Bits:

WW1 Posters <https://cdnhistorybits.wordpress.com/2015/03/24/canadian-ww1-propaganda/>

WW2 Posters <https://cdnhistorybits.wordpress.com/2015/03/31/canadian-ww2-propaganda/>

Library and Archives Canada: Search Results for “propaganda”. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Search?q=propaganda&num=50&start=0&enviro=prod&DataSource=Images>

Archives Ontario: A selection of posters from the FWW.

<https://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/posters/index.aspx>

Digital Archives Ontario: A selection of posters from the SWW.

<https://digitalarchiveontario.ca/collections/objects/103>

Canadian War Museum: A digital exhibit with a limited selection of posters.

https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/index_e.html

Resources: Additional Info

Propaganda Critic:

<https://propagandacritic.com/>

Centre for Inquiry: Critical Thinking Resources.

<https://centreforinquiry.ca/wiki/critical-thinking-resources/>

Southern Methodist University (TX): A thorough list of propaganda devices.

<https://www.physics.smu.edu/pseudo/Propaganda/alldevices.html>

Note: Following the Questions & Discussion slide, there are an additional 4 slides with sources and references.

Questions and/or Comments?

- Followed by a 10-minute break -



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CANADIANS
TO THEIR MILITARY
HERITAGE

Part Two: Group Work

1. Classroom-ready Activities; Transition to Groups (10 min)
2. Teacher Group Work (40-65 min)
3. Wrap-up & Takeaways (5 min)

Examples of Classroom-ready Activities:

- “Spot the Device/Fallacy” scavenger hunt
- Sorting activity (propaganda or not)
- Create your own propaganda (including an ethical reflection)
- Analyzing Propaganda (ads, posters, TikToks, book covers, song lyrics, etc.)
- Freeze-frame deep analysis
- Audience swap test
- Truth sandwich

Pair/Group work:

Task: Create a draft plan for 1-3 periods, by grade and/or subject

KIM: doesn't need to be perfect; focus on student thinking, not polish

- Please sit with alike grade-bands or subjects.
- At each table are some writing utensils, LP templates, graph paper, post its, etc.
- I will be floating around.

I'd also like to save 5 minutes at the end for
a wrap-up & some takeaways.

Wrap-up and some Takeaways:

This portion is audience led.

Thank you!



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