

**On All Fronts**  
**World War II and the NFB**  
**Lesson plan for the theme:**  
***Propaganda: The Battle for Minds and Hearts***

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**Overall Objective**

Students will analyze NFB-produced World War II propaganda clips to see the Canadian government-sponsored messages of the period. Through their own practical application of similar publicity techniques, students will reflect on contemporary approaches to propaganda and the practice of image management.

**Grade level**

Grades 9 – 12

**Content Areas**

Social Studies  
History  
English – Language Arts  
Writing  
Media Studies  
Canadian Studies

**Content items used**

Whole film:

*Keep Your Mouth Shut*, 1944 (2 min 20 s)

Excerpts from:

*Wings on Her Shoulder*, 1943 (6 min 8 s – 7 min 59 s)

*To the Ladies*, 1946 (9 min 4 s – 9 min 40 s)

*Churchill's Island*, 1941 (15 min 23 s – 21 min – 18 s)

*Corvette Port Arthur*, 1943 (14 min 57 s – 20 min 52 s)

*Train Busters*, 1944 (7 min 22 s – 12 min 34 s)

*Tomorrow's World*, 1943 (18 min 1 s – 21 min 10 s)

*Food: Secret of the Peace*, 1945 (3 min 51 s – 6 min 25 s)

*Labour Front*, 1943 (8 min 37 s – 11 min 24 s)

*Warclouds in the Pacific*, 1941 (6 min 8 s – 9 min 21 s)

*Warclouds in the Pacific*, 1941 (12 min 11 s – 15 min 25 s)

NB: Content items can be viewed online free of charge at <www.nfb.ca/ww2>.

**Materials required**

Access to a computer lab, Internet connection.

## Summary

In viewing video clips taken from NFB films made during World War II, students will discover some of the messages Canada put forth during the War and will consider whether the term “propaganda” fits. Students will develop image-shaping campaigns using 21st century media and consider the propaganda potential of vehicles such as blogs and podcasts.

## Introduction Activity (20 minutes)

**Objective** – To distinguish between the concepts of propaganda and persuasion. An NFB film example will be used.

**Step 1:** Students watch *Keep Your Mouth Shut* (2 min 20 s). They learn that this film was produced by the National Film Board in response to a need felt by the Government of Canada to inform and motivate the public during the Second World War.

**Step 2:** Ask students to explain the message of the film. Would they categorize it as propaganda or persuasion?

**Step 3:** Discuss whether the message of *Keep Your Mouth Shut* is likely to be a *systematic* or organized attempt to put out a message. Or is it, rather, a message from the individual filmmaker? Ask the class to state the intention of the film and the targeted audience. Lead them to the notion that the term *propaganda* is used for materials that *systematically* target a particular audience. Whether a given material is or is not propaganda depends on the *context* in which it is presented and the reasons for its dissemination. Who produced it? Why? What is the social context? Who was supposed to be influenced?

**Step 4:** Work from the following definition of propaganda (taken from *Propaganda and Persuasion*, by Jowett, Garth S. and O’Donnell, Sage Publications, 2005).

*Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate thought, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the intent of the propagandist.*

*Because the term “propaganda” has come to be understood negatively and is often related to materials with focused and manipulative and/or wartime objectives, we can think of it as a **special class** of persuasive materials.*

The key element in this understanding of propaganda is the notion of an *organized* attempt to direct behaviour, sometimes without regard for the truth. Some propaganda is unclear or deceptive about where it comes from. Some propaganda actually falsifies information.

**Step 5:** After showing *Keep Your Mouth Shut* a second time, ask students to get into groups and discuss the persuasive techniques used in the film. Do these techniques work? Is the truth respected? Ask groups to come up with four or five examples of individuals, groups or businesses that make use of persuasion and propaganda today.

[Some relevant techniques are: animated materials, exaggeration, humour, attention-grabbing or shocking images, repetition, threatening consequences, short film, entertainment value, surprise...]

**Step 6:** Each group shares their examples and insights with the whole class.

**ACTIVITY 1: The wartime film: a persuasive document?**

**Objective** - To watch some film clips in order to answer these questions: What techniques were effective in the film clip shown? Do you think that film was probably an effective way of expressing the wartime message of the Government? What behaviours were the films intended to bring about?

**Step 1:** In groups of 4 or 5, students will watch one of the following excerpts or combination of excerpts:

*Wings on Her Shoulder* and *To the Ladies*

*Train Busters*

*Tomorrow's World*

*Labour Front*

*Warclouds in the Pacific*

*Churchill's Island*

*Corvette Port Arthur*

*Food: Secret of the Peace*

**Step 2:** Each group will complete a handout sheet (Appendix). After presenting the film clip to the class, the group will share their findings, already noted on the sheet. The teacher should advise the groups to set their film clips in context: release date of the film and its probable general relation to the war effort.

**ACTIVITY 2: What's the spin?**

**Objective** - To recognize the propaganda potential of several currently popular types of media and advertising and identify new techniques for influencing the public's beliefs and behaviours.

**Step 1:** Through class discussion, students will provide suggestions for new types of media where images and information are managed or given "spin" and desired behaviours are promoted in target audiences. (Discuss the meaning of "spin": it is the systematic promotion of a particular interpretation of an event or piece of information that will further the goal of the promoter.)

Included should be: podcasts, viral marketing, popular music, social software such as Facebook, U-Tube, cellphones, instant messaging, e-mail span, Internet ads, blogging, digital photography, interactive Internet sites.

**Step 2:** As an assignment to be completed both in and out of class, pairs of students will devise publicity (also known as image management campaigns or propaganda) based on the use of a maximum of three of the new media identified in Step 1. Make sure the students understand that the object of the activity is to assess the potential of various types of media to sway opinion and affect behaviour. Students may opt for some traditional media such as written text or posters as one of the types of media used.

The subject of the campaigns can be determined by the World War II knowledge background of the class. They could put together, for example, a Facebook profile for Winston Churchill or Mackenzie King, or a viral marketing campaign to promote recruitment for Canada's WWII forces or a digital photography contest showing ways to "make do" in time of war.



Students should consider 1) the existing beliefs of the target audience in order to anchor the ideas being promoted, 2) the appropriateness of the choice of media for the target audience, 3) the desired results of the campaign. They should discuss the propaganda potential of the media chosen for their campaign.

(As an alternative activity, students can choose contemporary issues, products, personalities and polemics for their spin campaigns.)

**Step 3:** Students present their propaganda or persuasion campaigns to the class and complete the self-evaluation rubric (Appendix). The presentations should include both a presentation of the elements of the campaign and an explanation and analysis of the subject, audience and intent of the campaign.

### **Closure Activity/Check for Understanding (10 minutes)**

General discussion of the role of all types of media in influencing us today. What are the differences between Canadian society in the 21st century as compared with the society at the time of World War II in terms of medias' ability to dramatically affect society? Are we more or less vulnerable today? Are we more analytical about these social forces?

Students respond to: What questions might we ask in order to recognize propaganda and persuasion in media? Are both these terms still relevant? It is important to ask: Who produced the material? Who is it aimed at? What is the message? What are the symbolic elements (e.g. people having fun, people being popular, appearing carefree and wealthy). What behaviours does the material wish to motivate?

### **References and Resources**

Mrs. Donn's propaganda lesson plans on media, politics, advertising, conflict  
<http://propaganda.mrdonn.org/lessonplans.html>

Lesson plan: Thinking about hate  
[http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/secondary/internet/thinking\\_about\\_hate.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/secondary/internet/thinking_about_hate.cfm)

## Appendix

Handout for activity 1:

The wartime film: a tool of persuasion or propaganda?

Name of film (clip):				
Main message				
Other messages				
Techniques	Storytelling	Exaggeration	Shock	Sex appeal
	y/n	y/n	y/n	y/n
	False info	Admirable people	Strong images	Music
	y/n	y/n	y/n	y/n
	Sound effects	Admirable lifestyles	Villainous people	Mystery, Fear
	y/n	y/n	y/n	y/n
Other techniques discovered (Group fills in)				
Sponsor organization?				
Target audience?				
Behaviour desired?				
Propaganda or persuasion?	Why?			

## Student self-evaluation guide for activity 2: What’s the spin?

Description of image-management or “spin” campaign				
Names of (2) students in group				
Media types used (Max 3)				
Subject of campaign				
Target audience				
Desired behaviours or type of influence				
Self Evaluation (one for each student)				
Preparation	I was well-rehearsed and well-organized. My points were clearly made and were summarized at the end.	I was fairly well rehearsed, but there was some confusion when I went to present my work.	I should have practised more. I did not always present my work clearly, but I generally covered the main points.	My lack of practice was obvious in my presentation. It was difficult to think on my feet, and I felt confused.
Score	4	3	2	1
Delivery	I spoke clearly in an animated way and established eye contact with classmates. I showed an interest in my work.	I spoke clearly, but sometimes forgot to look up and engage listeners. I forgot to show excitement about work.	I had to look at my notes often. I am not sure I was heard. I forgot to show excitement about my work.	I was ill-at-ease in front of the class. Listeners (teacher or students) had to ask me to speak up. I lost my train of thought sometimes.
Score	4	3	2	1
Use of media	I was comfortable with the media I presented and could show the media’s potential.	I was competent with the media once I got going. The media worked smoothly as part of the campaign.	After a few technical problems, I managed to present the media chosen.	I was unfamiliar with the new media I was using and found it difficult to explain its use.
Score	4	3	2	1

Analysis of media's potential	I was able to suggest many ways that the media could be used in similar or different campaigns.	I had one or two ideas about other applications of my chosen media. I had ideas about how these applications could be effective.	I had a suggestion for another use of the media I chose. I didn't develop the idea very creatively, however.	I had not thought of any other applications of the media I used.
Score	4	3	2	1
Reflections on persuasive techniques today	I was able to speak thoughtfully about ways that persuasive techniques influence our lives and the potential relationship of new media to persuasion. I brought examples.	I had one or two comments to make about the potential of new media to influence our lives. I could think of one example.	I understood what was being asked, but I couldn't think of any original examples. I did express my opinion on the importance of these media today.	I didn't have any original ideas on the subject. I didn't understand how to evaluate persuasive techniques in contemporary media.
Score	4	3	2	1
Final score	/20			