

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Propaganda and Media Literacy: The Holocaust as a Case Study

Lesson Plan and Overview

Echoes & Reflections Lesson Plan: [Antisemitism](#)

This activity will focus on propaganda and media used by the Nazis during the Holocaust. **Prerequisite for this activity:** An introduction in Holocaust education and the basic events of the Second World War are required for ensuring that students have the background knowledge they need. In addition, this should not be the first time students learn about the Holocaust. Providing preparation and context regarding traumatic historical events and concepts is critical. If ideas are needed for this prerequisite, refer to the Optional Prerequisite Activity section below.

Media literacy is a key tenet in civics education. Students regularly engage with media from a variety of sources, and understanding its origin, intended messages, and outcome are skills covered in state and national standards across the country. This activity will use the historical case study of Nazi propaganda and Nazi ideology to examine antisemitic messages and images that stoked fear, and galvanized a population against their Jewish neighbors in the years leading up to the Holocaust.

This activity will help to situate media literacy in Nazi propaganda, and students will be encouraged to examine both the intentions of the media they use and encounter, and their own role in consuming media in today's information-saturated world.

Grade Level

Grades 9–12

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine propaganda using media literacy skills, and examine multimedia assets including the correlated visual history testimonies and other primary resources and materials.
- Students will identify opportunities to connect the lessons of the Holocaust with more current examples of hate propaganda.

- Students will understand the correlation between propaganda and ideology.

Materials Needed

Echoes & Reflections [Unit II: Antisemitism](#):

- [Summary of Antisemitism](#)
- [Nazi Ideology](#)
- [Key Questions of Media Literacy](#)
- *The Poisonous Mushroom* Illustrations ([Children’s Book Cover](#), [Women and Children Looking at Crucifix](#), [School Children and Nazi Ideology](#), and [Caricature of a Jew with Aryan Children](#))
- [Esther Clifford’s Testimony](#)

Words You Might Use

Antisemitism: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel. *(During the Holocaust, Nazi antisemitism was racial in nature, based on the erroneous belief that Jews are a race. Jews were viewed as racially inferior to Aryans and destructive of the world order.)*

Indoctrination: The process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically, especially with a specific point of view.

Propaganda: Information that is shared and spread in order to influence public opinion and to manipulate other people’s beliefs, often to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

Dehumanizing: As a political or social measure, dehumanization is intended to change the manner in which a person or group of people are perceived, reducing the target group to objects or beings not worthy of human rights.

Optional Prerequisite Activity

If students have not already been introduced to the Holocaust, this optional activity can be done in advance of the core activity to provide important and necessary context.

Introduce students to the handout [Summary of Antisemitism](#), and explain that it provides a brief overview of the history of antisemitism.

Introduce the handout [Nazi Ideology](#) and explain that this includes excerpts of several of Hitler's books and speeches that reflect his ideology.

Divide students into four groups, and assign each group to one of the four sections: Early Christianity, Middle Ages, 19th Century, and Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. Instruct them to do the following:

- Write on top the chart paper their assigned period of time, e.g., Early Christianity, and below that, write the key stereotypical tropes that emerged in those periods on chart paper, from [Summary of Antisemitism](#).
- Read through the handout [Nazi Ideology](#) and underline or highlight his words, phrases or sentences that reflect the antisemitic ideas explained in their assigned section of the [Summary of Antisemitism](#).

Reconvene the groups and ask the groups assigned to the Early Christianity, Middle Ages, and 19th Century texts, to present (a) the antisemitic ideas in their section, and (b) where it shows up in Hitler's writings and speeches.

Ask the group assigned to the Adolph Hitler and the Nazi Party text, "What does he and the Nazi Party introduce that is new to antisemitism, and how does he talk about it in the handout [Nazi Ideology](#)?"

Alternatively, lead a larger discussion using the questions, "What is your take-away from examining Nazi ideology using a historical antisemitism lens? How is ideology spread?"

Core Activity

Ask students to define propaganda. Where have they heard this word before? How might they explain propaganda?

With students, define propaganda as "Information that is shared and spread in order to influence public opinion and to manipulate other people's beliefs, often to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view." Break it down into its three parts:

- a. "False or partly false information": Propaganda include half-truths or lies, aiming to deceive.

- b. “Manipulate other people’s beliefs”: Part of the goal is to influence what and how people think about issues (belief), and therefore take action based on their opinions and attitudes.
- c. “Publicize a particular point of view”: The ultimate goal is not information sharing for mutual understanding, but a specific way of believing and acting to achieve the propagandists’

Share with students that propaganda is defined as media which conveys an ideology. Distribute the handout [Key Questions of Media Literacy](#). Share that these five critical questions serve as an objectivity test, especially when it comes to propaganda, and we will examine propaganda images with this in mind, using images from the Holocaust as a case study. Review the handout.

Discuss with students efforts to indoctrinate youth and the population through propaganda. In addition to the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, children were also inculcated through formal schooling, games, toys, and antisemitic children’s books. Focus on *The Poisonous Mushroom* (*Der Giftpilz* in German), written by Ernst Hiemer and published by Julius Streicher in 1938. Ask students why indoctrinating youth might be an aim of the Nazi party, and why.

Examine *The Poisonous Mushroom* using the four images in Antisemitism Unit: [Children’s Book Cover](#), [Women and Children Looking at Crucifix](#), [School Children and Nazi Ideology](#), and [Caricature of a Jew with Aryan Children](#).

Conduct a “quadrant” (by separating or folding image into four quadrants) exercise in a group with students, examining each image and answering the key questions of Media Literacy and connect to Nazi Ideology and the Summary of Antisemitism.

- What is the image trying to make you feel?
- What techniques are used to attract and hold your attention?
- How might different people interpret the message?
- What propaganda technique is being used (evoke emotions, simplifies ideas, responds to audience’s needs, attack opponents)?
- What are the antisemitic messages, and what is it based on? What is the intended change of attitude or behavior hoped?

Reconvene the group to discuss each image, sharing key themes.

Ask students to share which picture they find most disturbing or problematic, and why. Explain that what makes this a powerful propaganda tool was its ability to mix both historical forms of antisemitism with contemporary forms. Historical antisemitic ideas

serve as a familiar foundation from which to build learning about Nazi antisemitism.

Indoctrination of young people by media messages is nothing new. Although the social media age has brought about conversations about young people and the media, texts and images in *The Poisonous Mushroom* teach us that propaganda values its ability to inform and galvanize an audience, especially from a young age.

Show [Esther Clifford's Testimony](#) and conduct a discussion or a [See-Think-Wonder](#) activity on how the speaker expresses emotion. Ask students to choose one of the primary sources and complete the sentence, "This source made me think/wonder/feel/understand...." Invite students to share their thoughts with others.

To close, ask students to reflect on examples that reflect similar patterns of propaganda (language and images) in contemporary media and social media.

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk [Antisemitism Today](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will engage in a discussion about media literacy by analyzing Nazi propaganda in order to develop tools to critically view and discuss media in their own lives today. This will impact students' critical thinking skills about the ways media influence their perspectives and biases about themselves, others and society.

Virtual Variation

The resources required for this activity are available to view or download on echoesandreflections.org and the activity, in its entirety, can be added to online classrooms. If implementing virtually, we recommend that this activity be administered in a webinar delivery platform, such as Zoom or Google Classroom, to optimize the interactive elements of this activity, using large and small group discussions, polling, break-out rooms, and chat box.