



OUTSMARTING PROPAGANDA: COMBATting THE LURE OF EXTREMIST RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

It seems that terrorism and extremism in a variety of forms are always in the news. Among other incidents, within the last year we have seen the recent terrorist attacks in Brussels, Belgium (March 22, 2016) Paris, France (November 13, 2015) and San Bernardino, CA (December 2, 2015) that were inspired by the terrorist groups ISIS and Al Qaeda, and the mass shooting of nine African American parishioners in Charleston, SC (June 17, 2015) by Dylann Roof, a man who espoused white supremacist ideology. Terrorist and extremist groups actively try to recruit new members to join their causes in a variety of ways and the Internet has been a powerful tool in their arsenal, especially when trying to entice young people to their cause. Terrorist and extremist groups and their supporters use websites and social media platforms to share propaganda and to foster a sense of community for supporters, which serves to amplify their perceived influence.

This high school lesson provides an opportunity for students to understand what propaganda is and how it is used, learn about domestic and international extremism and terrorism and their recruitment methodology and consider actions they can take to counter those strategies.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* "[Terrorist Attack in Paris and Scapegoating](#)," "[Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Being an Ally](#)," and "[Addressing Hate Online: Countering Cyberhate with Counterspeech](#)," "[Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam](#)," [Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories About Bias and Injustice](#), [Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2015](#), [With Hate in Their Hearts: The State of White Supremacy in America](#) and [The ISIS Impact on the Domestic Islamic Extremist Threat](#).

Grade Level: grades 10–12

Time: 70 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand what propaganda is and the ways it is both similar to and different from advertising.
- Students will understand some of the most common elements of propaganda.
- Students will learn about domestic and international extremism and terrorism and the recruitment methods used, especially those targeting young people.

- Students will reflect on actions they can take to counter the propaganda and recruitment methods of extremists and terrorists.

Compelling Question: How do terrorists and other extremists use propaganda to recruit followers, especially young people?

Material:

- *Coca-Cola - Share a Coke This Summer* video (1½ mins., Coca Cola, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUzPwIP9BqE)
- [Examples of Propaganda](#) (videos and pictures to project for the class)
- [Elements of Propaganda](#) (one for each student)
- “This Is How You Become a White Supremacist” (*The Washington Post*, June 25, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/25/this-is-how-you-become-a-white-supremacist/), one copy for each of half of all students
- “Why young American women are joining ISIS” (*The Washington Post*, November 17, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/11/17/why-young-american-women-are-joining-isis/), one copy for each of half of all students

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

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| • advertising | • frailties | • paranoid | • stereotypes |
| • assault | • genocide | • perpetuate | • swastika |
| • caliphate | • hostility | • propaganda | • ubiquitous |
| • counter-terrorism | • ISIL or ISIS | • radicalized | • utopia |
| • culprit | • isolation | • recruitment | • white supremacy |
| • demographic | • materialistic | • revolutionaries | • Text |
| • extremism | • objectified | • skinhead | |

NOTE: It is important to consider that you may have students in your classroom that may be affected by terrorism or extremism and/or by stereotypes about who extremists are—particularly those that would suggest that Islam promotes terrorism or violence and that Muslims are all extremists. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, taking into account the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom and plan accordingly. It is important to be aware that some students may feel uncomfortable, sad, relieved or a host of other feelings in having these discussions.

In addition, while you are teaching this lesson—especially the “Information Sharing” section where terrorism is discussed—make sure not to conflate any one particular group, and specifically Islam/Muslims, with terrorism, extremism or violence. Explain to students that they may hear people cast blame for terrorism on specific religions or ethnicities, particularly Muslims or Arabs, and equate people who identify with those groups with terrorism. Explain that no particular religion or ethnic group is responsible for terrorism. State clearly and explicitly that Muslims should not be associated with terrorism

just because of their faith and be mindful that you are not conflating terrorism, extremism and violence with the religion of Islam. Assert that stereotyping and bias directed at Muslim people is wrong and is not acceptable (as it is with other groups). There are 1.6 billion Muslim people in the world, roughly 23% of the world population. Follow this [link](#) to learn more about Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam. Explain, as well, that in the course of the classroom conversation about terrorism and extremism, students will discover that terrorism is associated with multiple different groups and sets of beliefs.

WHAT IS ADVERTISING AND PROPAGANDA?

1. Begin the lesson by showing this commercial: [Coca-Cola - Share a Coke This Summer](#) (or another one of your choosing). After watching the video, engage students in a discussion by asking: *What happened in the video? How did you feel while watching it? What is the overall message of it? How do the feelings it is meant to evoke connect with the product?*
2. Explain that the commercial is a form of advertising. Ask students: *What is advertising?* Come to a definition of **advertising** as speech, writing, pictures or films/video meant to persuade people to buy something. Explain that advertisements can take a variety of forms including:
 - television commercials
 - online video commercials
 - billboards and other outdoor advertising (in stadiums, etc.)
 - magazine and newspaper ads
 - online banner ads
 - text ads on cell phones
 - email advertisements
 - ads on radio and podcasts
 - ads on social media networks
 - ads before movies
3. Explain to students that we are now going to discuss another form of persuasive media information, which is propaganda. Ask students: *What is propaganda?* Elicit from students the following definition of **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. Ask students if they can share any examples of propaganda that they have seen.
4. Ask students: *How are advertising and propaganda similar? How are they different?* Explain that advertising and propaganda are both media tools used to convey something. Propaganda is similar to advertising in that it uses similar media formats in order to spread its message. However, unlike advertising, propaganda does not try to encourage the sale of a product, service or idea. Propaganda is a verbal and visual presentation used to change public attitudes about a particular person or subject.

ELEMENTS OF PROPAGANDA

1. Share a few [Examples of Propaganda](#) (pictures and videos) from the list and read aloud the descriptions of each before showing them. Explain to students that some are current day and some are historical examples. After showing each, ask the following questions:

- What's going on?
 - What are they trying to convey?
 - Is this propaganda and if so, how do you know?
2. Engage students in a general discussion by asking:
 - What do some of these forms of propaganda have in common?
 - How are they different?
 - How is this propaganda similar to or different from propaganda you have seen?
 - What strategies did they use to influence and/or persuade you to believe something?
 - (Record their responses to the last question on the board/smart board.)
 3. Explain that propaganda often includes an element of truth. Many propaganda examples will be based off of a fact or sentiment that is true, but is distorted or surrounded by other information that is not true.
 4. Explain that propaganda often has some common elements. Distribute a copy of the [Elements of Propaganda](#) handout to each student. Together, read each element aloud, sharing the example noted on the sheet and asking students if they have other examples for each element.
 5. Show one or more of the propaganda examples again, one at a time, and this time ask students to discuss what may be true and false in each example and to refer to the Elements of Propaganda handout and identify which element(s) are used in each example.

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: *What do you know about extremism and terrorism, both domestic and international?* Allow students to share what they know for just a few minutes as this won't be an exhaustive lesson on terrorism. If they don't share this, remind them about the recent terrorist attacks in Brussels, Belgium, Paris, France and San Bernardino, CA as well as the mass shooting murder of nine parishioners at a church in Charleston, SC in which the perpetrator espoused white supremacy ideas.
2. Explain that there is a lot to learn about it and we will share some basic information.
3. Share the following information:
 - Terrorism is usually defined as the use of violence against non-combatants in order to achieve a political goal. By inspiring fear in the population, terrorists hope they can force governments to do what they want.
 - Many different types of ideological movements have attempted to use terrorism to achieve their goals. Some examples include: anti-government (people who do believe there should not be any government), environmental extremists (people/groups who believe that violence should be used, especially against property, against businesses or persons believed to be damaging the environment or hurting plants or animals), religious extremists (including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and more), white supremacists and some nationalist movements (groups that are fighting for sovereignty over a geographic area).
 - Terrorist groups actively try to get new members to join their causes. One of the ways they do this is using the Internet. Most terrorist groups have their own websites and they and their supporters have profiles on different social media sites. They use these to share propaganda and to become

friends with people who seem to display some interest in what they are saying. Newcomers might become friends with several different terror-supporters online. As they see their new friends' posts, they grow more and more exposed to terrorist propaganda and also begin to feel like many other people agree with it. They also can talk about it with their new friends online, and sometimes with their in-person friends, too. They come to feel that they are a part of a *community* with these extremist friends online and to feel like these new online friends are real friends. They do not realize that the extremists don't like them for who they are, but rather are just trying to take advantage of them to further the goals of the extremist group. As people are drawn into these new social groups, they want to maintain their new 'friendships' and may also begin to trust their online contacts and believe what they are saying. A few people can forget why terrorism is evil and begin to believe that their new friends have legitimate viewpoints. Over time many come to believe that they have no choice but to use or advocate for violence.

- The term **extremist** refers to someone adhering to an ideology that is considered far outside the acceptable mainstream attitudes of society. Not all extremists are terrorists—some people hold extremist beliefs but do not resort to violence in an attempt to enact those beliefs. Some extremists hold extreme versions of views that could be considered normal. Religious extremists, for example, claim to believe in the same religions that millions of non-extremist individuals believe in.
4. Engage students in a discussion by asking:
- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - Why do you think that some people become friendly with extremist or terrorist groups online?
 - What more do you want to know?

READING ACTIVITY

1. Divide the class into two groups, designating one group "A" and the other group "B." Distribute the first article [This Is How You Become a White Supremacist](#) to all of the students designated as group A and the other article [Why young American women are joining ISIS](#) to all of the students in the B group. Give students 15 minutes to read their articles and encourage them to write notes in the margins (or highlight) aspects of the article they want to remember and vocabulary words for which they may be unfamiliar.

NOTE: To save class time, you can distribute the articles to read the day before as a homework assignment.

2. After students have finished reading their articles, pair students up so that each pair of students has a student who read one of the articles, A and B. Give the pairs 5–7 minutes to give a summary of what was shared in the article and if time permits, students can also share their thoughts and reflections about their articles.
3. Engage students in a class discussion by asking:
 - How do you feel about what you read?
 - How did you feel about what you learned about from your partner's article?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - Did anything surprise you and if so, what?
 - What stood out for you in what you learned?
 - How does the reading connect to what you know about propaganda?

- Why do you think these extremist groups target young people?
- What do you think can be done to be aware of and counter the propaganda?

CLOSING

Hand out index cards to each student and ask the following question: *Given what you learned and now know, what is one thing you can do about propaganda and extremism?* (Tell students it can be something on a very personal level like awareness or something larger such as engaging in activism.) Have students write their ideas on their index card, collect them, mix them up and redistribute them and then have each student read aloud what is on their index card. If time permits, choose some of the suggestions to explore in greater depth as an extension activity or long-term project.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto Are Posted on Website”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 20, 2015)
- [Five Key Questions Form Foundation for Media Inquiry](#) (Center for Media Literacy)
- [“ISIS and the Lonely Young American”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 27, 2015)
- [National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism \(START\)](#)
- [The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy](#) (Quilliam, 2015)
- [“Want to help the Islamic State recruit? Treat all Muslims as potential terrorists”](#) (*The Washington Post*, November 30, 2015)
- [“Who Will Become a Terrorist? Research Yields Few Clues”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 27, 2016)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.
Standard 5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
Language
Standard 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
Standard 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

EXAMPLES OF PROPAGANDA

EXAMPLE 1



Description: This poster is called “Rosie the Riveter” and was designed to boost the morale of women who were encouraged to work during World War II (while men were at war) including making airplanes and ships for the war effort.

EXAMPLE 2

"Ice Cream Ad" video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ty4T5MuYRZw>

Description: Referred to as "**Girl with Ice Cream Cone**", this was a television campaign ad for Lyndon B. Johnson who was running against Barry Goldwater for President in 1964.

EXAMPLE 3

Daisy Ad video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cwqHB6QeUw>

Description: "**Daisy**", sometimes known as "**Daisy Girl**" or "**Peace, Little Girl**", was a controversial political advertisement also aired on television for Lyndon B. Johnson who was running against Barry Goldwater for President in 1964. Though only aired once (by the campaign), it is considered an important factor in Johnson's landslide victory over Barry Goldwater and an important turning point in political and advertising history.

EXAMPLE 4

It's Time for Americans to Come Out of the Shadows video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQOuf_AzMfM

Description: This is an ad produced by the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#), an anti-immigrant group in the U.S. FAIR advocates for limits on legal immigration and for ending undocumented immigration.

EXAMPLE 5



Description: This Tweet by an ISIS supporter includes a photo collage produced by ISIS propagandists allegedly depicting an ice cream shop in ISIS controlled territory. ISIS regularly releases these type of photos intended to show that life in its territory is normal, if not ideal.

EXAMPLE 6

STOP THE INVASION!



“KEEP AMERICA AMERICAN”

Say “NO!” to the massive influx of third world immigration. Take a stand against these criminal invaders. Mass immigration and forced assimilation is genocide by the United Nations own definition. “Deliberate inflicting on the groups conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing of measures intended to prevent births within the group.” Honorable native born white American men and women the time for patriotism is now, take a stand and defend our country, and stand valiant in defense of its original ideals and institutions our forefathers fought and died for!

**Texas Knights
Of the Ku Klux Klan**

Description: This is a flyer that was distributed by a Texas branch of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a right-wing extremist and white supremacist organization. In this flyer, the KKK attempts to suggest that immigration leads to the demise of ‘real Americans,’ who are necessarily white and Christian.

ELEMENTS OF PROPAGANDA

Almost all propaganda shares one element in common: It presents a little true information surrounded by a lot of misleading or untrue information. People see the true information and so may believe that everything the propaganda piece says is also true. Most elements of propaganda are different ways of using true information to be misleading.

1. **Bandwagon:** Conveying to the audience through an advertisement that since everyone is doing it, so should you, or in other words, if it is good enough for the people in the propaganda, it is good enough for you.

Example: All of these great people agree that their cause is right and that everyone else is wrong. Who are you to disagree with them?

2. **Scapegoating:** Assigning blame to a group or individual, when that group or individual is really not the cause of the problem. This takes away the blame from responsible parties.

Example: The Nazis used scapegoating against the Jews. They blamed the Jews for their bad economy.

3. **Assertion:** An enthusiastic statement that is presented as fact, but may not actually be true.

Examples: If an advertiser claims that their product is the best, but doesn't include any evidence.

Stating that people don't have jobs because they are taken by immigrants, even though research proves that immigration creates more jobs.

4. **Omission:** Not presenting the whole truth. This leads people to jump to conclusions about the evidence being presented.

Example: Showing the hijacked planes hitting the twin towers on 9/11 conveys a message of revenge and anger, but only showing the aftermath conveys a message of sorrow.

5. **Plain folk:** Using a prominent person to convince the audience that this person and his ideas are "of the people."

Example: Showing an actor buying groceries or paying taxes or showing an important politician eating at a fast food restaurant.

6. **Fear:** Use fear to convince the audience that if they do not take a particular course of action, like getting home insurance, something bad will happen, like flooding.

Example: This was used in the Holocaust as well. The Germans became convinced that the Jews were going to take over the government, and they needed to do something to prevent this from happening.

7. **Half the information:** Convincing the audience to choose one option by presenting it as the best of the worse options. Alternatively, making predictions based on the future that are based only on a few facts or allowing the audience to come to false conclusions by only presenting some facts, but not all of them.

Example: There are some real problems in society, including poverty and high divorce rates. The only way to escape these problems is to join our group.