

EXPLORING AMERICA THROUGH ART

“Wartime”

Essential Question

What role did posters play during U.S. participation in World War I?

Objective

- I will be able to understand the term propaganda.
- I will recognize the need to unite a diverse population in the war effort.
- I will analyze the use of symbols, color, and words in propaganda posters
- I will discover the contributions of women outside of combat.

Materials

Five posters: *Remember, Fight, Before, Buy, Over the Top*

5 sheets of newsprint and markers

Terms

- Propaganda – information presented in a way to promote a cause or idea
- Bonds/ liberty loans/savings stamps – purchased to financially support the war
- “over the top” – leaving the trenches to mount an offensive; achieving a goal
- personification - the artistic representation of an idea as a person

Engage

Ask students to talk about a current war, considering how we learn about the war (computer, newspapers, television, radio, speakers), and how the people of the United States may become involved (with financial contributions, medical supplies, arms & machinery, volunteering to fight, accepting refugees).

Provide background leading up to the involvement of the United States in WWI.

Explore

Divide the class into five groups, one per poster, and have each group consider the following questions. Students should record their answers to the questions on the sheet of newsprint in lettering large enough for the class to see.

- Describe the images used in the poster.
- Record two important words used in the poster.
- List the colors used in the poster. Why do you think the artist chose those colors?
- What is the poster encouraging the viewer to do?

Elaborate

Post the 5 newsprint sheets next to each other. Encourage students to look at the lists and compile a new sheet recording similarities and differences. As the students look for similarities and differences, the teacher should ask students to consider why the five different artists might have approached the task of designing a poster in this way

Similarities:

5 include the word "buy"

5 include the use of the American flag

4 use red, white, and blue

4 include the word liberty

4 include women

Differences

2 use the Statue of Liberty and 1 uses a woman modeled on Delacroix "Liberty"

2 show fighting men

2 emphasize immigrants

2 include the ocean

Evaluate

George Creel of the Committee on Public Information Division of Pictorial Publicity said, "I had the conviction that the poster must play a great role in public opinion. The printed word might not be read, people might choose not to attend meetings or watch motion pictures, but the billboard was something that caught even the most indifferent eye."

See <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/women-in-wwi>

Based on your viewing of these posters, explain whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

For Further Exploration



The five posters we studied emphasized buying war bonds. The famous poster above created by James Montgomery Flagg was a recruiting poster. Visit either of the two sources below to see many other European and U.S. posters, choose one and use the same techniques we used in class to analyze the way art was used for propaganda.

Library of Congress:

www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-posters

Smithsonian Institution

<https://www.si.edu/spotlight/women-in-wwi/war-posters>

-MP