

Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda



TOPIC

Propaganda, Nazi Youth

AGE GROUP

Years 7-11 (ages 12-16)

Progression Steps 4 and 5

LENGTH

1 hour

AREAS OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

Health and Well-being

Humanities

Languages, Literacy and Communication

DESCRIPTION

In this activity, students will learn about how the Nazis used youth organisations and propaganda to cultivate the support of millions of Germans for their political goals and to shape public opinion and behaviour before and during World War 2.

The activity aims to provide a foundation to examine how prejudice and propaganda can contribute to persecution, violence, mass atrocity, and genocide.

The activity includes video testimonies of Irene Kirstein Watts and Ellen Kerry Davis, Kindertransport refugees. These testimonies allow students to reflect on how the Nazis used multiple layers of propaganda and how it influenced those who were included in, and those excluded from, German society at the time. The activity encourages students to consider the human impact that this propaganda had on individual families, emphasising the humanity of the victims of the Holocaust.

The activity also explores how contemporary propaganda continues to affect people today. Students will be asked to connect these reflections to their own roles and responsibilities in a democratic society and to reflect on the role of media in their own lives, focusing on how to develop a critical lens in interpreting modern media messages.

The activity can be split easily into two sessions where necessary – Tasks 1-3 can be covered in the first session and Tasks 4 and 5 can be completed in a second session.*

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the concept of propaganda.

*A full list of activities can be found at the end of this document.

Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda

LEARNING AIMS continued

- Understand how propaganda messages can be constructed and spread and the factors that can influence their success.
- Learn that propaganda and the indoctrination of youth played an integral part in advancing the Nazi Party's idea of the German 'national community' and created a climate of indifference (or even support) as Jews experienced persecution and eventually genocide.
- Learn how Nazi propaganda interplayed with the political, economic, and social context of the time to be effective.
- Reflect on the human impact that this persecution had on the Jewish community.
- Explore the individual's responsibility to critically assess contemporary media messages and challenge dangerous propaganda today.
- Learn about the connection to Wales through the video testimony of Kindertransport refugees.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Whiteboard/markers, projector, computer to listen to testimony.

Consider

Inform students that they are going to consider and discuss the idea of 'propaganda'.

The Collins English Dictionary defines propaganda as: "*information, often inaccurate information, which a political organisation publishes or broadcasts in order to influence people*".¹

On the board, draw a mind map and ask the class for words that automatically come to mind when thinking about propaganda. Rather than the types of propaganda – encourage the students to think about the general concept. You may want to ask the students questions such as:

- What is the general aim of propaganda (i.e., to influence opinion and behaviour)?

¹ Collins, *Definition of 'propaganda'* <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/propaganda>> [accessed 11 April 2022].

Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda

Consider continued

- What are the key characteristics of propaganda (e.g., promotes a particular cause to a specific audience, uses half-truths and lies, plays on emotions and fears, attacks opponents)?
- How is propaganda spread (e.g., through newspapers, social media, film)?

Now, ask the students to read the dictionary definition of propaganda provided on the student worksheet.

Ask the students to write down what impact they think propaganda may have on society and/or everyday lives if it goes unchecked (**Task 1**).

Collect

Explain to students that the lesson will focus on certain types of propaganda tools used by the Nazis before and during World War 2 – specifically those aimed at young people.

Working in pairs, ask the students to read **Handout 1**. This handout sets out some key terms and historical events that provide the context for the analysis of this propaganda. One student should read the first page of the Handout and the other student should read the second page. The students should then share with the rest of the class what they have learned.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the first question on the student worksheet (**Task 2**).

Next, ask the students to read **Handout 2**.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to analyse the image in Handout 2 and to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 2**).

Explain to the students they will be hearing from Irene Kirstein Watts and Ellen Kerry Davis, child refugees, who came to Wales during the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution.

Ask the students to read the biographies of Irene and Ellen (provided in the student worksheet) and watch two short videos, where Irene and Ellen describe different experiences from their childhood in Germany in the 1930s.

Working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 3**).

Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda

Collect continued

Encourage the students to consider issues such as:

- Nazi propaganda and youth groups sought to shape every aspect of young people's thoughts, especially their perception of the self and the other, the German and the Jew.
- Young minds may have been particularly vulnerable to the tactics used by the Nazis. For example, the Nazi Youth movements were specifically designed to emphasise the group experience to enforce a spirit of community, promote comradeship, and give young people the illusion of a pioneering role in creating a new, rejuvenated Germany.
- Fundamentally, however, the goal of the Hitler Youth movements was not to encourage independent thinking but to inculcate students with Nazi ideology. Classroom and Hitler Youth instruction aimed to produce obedient, unthinking young people, who would support Nazi aims.
- Nazi propaganda campaigns incited hatred and violence against Jews or cultivated indifference to it.
- It is common for students to conclude after studying propaganda that the Nazis succeeded in 'brainwashing' the German population, but it is important to help them think carefully about this idea. The effects of propaganda are more complex than simple brainwashing. The Nazis built upon centuries of anti-Jewish prejudice and many German people shared the beliefs that were transmitted through Nazi propaganda. It is also notable from Ellen's testimony that she was rescued from a Nazi youth mob by a non-Jewish family, who were capable of making different moral choices at the time and had not been brainwashed.

Next, ask students to read the text at the beginning of **Task 4** on the student worksheet. This relates to The Community Security Trust Antisemitic Incidents Report 2021.²

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 4**).

Construct

Task 5: Ask the students to answer the questions set out on the worksheet and then to write a five-point manifesto for secondary school-aged students that is designed to raise awareness about the role and influence of media on this age group. The manifesto should explain how to evaluate media messages and challenge prejudice and propaganda.

² Community Security Trust, *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2021* (2021) <<https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/f/Incidents%20Report%202021.1644318940.pdf>> [accessed 10 April 2022].

Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda

Construct continued

Encourage students to use their independent judgement when viewing media messages by asking questions such as:

- Who is promoting the idea, who is the intended audience and am I being asked to take or not take a specific action?
- Is this a message that reports facts, based on evidence?
- Is that evidence available to be checked?
- Are any facts missing?
- Have any facts been misconstrued or distorted?
- Is the message based on opinion (i.e., a judgement or a reasonable conclusion based on factual evidence)?
- Can I identify any bias in the message?
- Is the message based purely on belief (e.g., a conviction that does not refer to factual evidence)?
- Have I evaluated a variety of viewpoints on the topic?
- Have I challenged any pre-existing prejudice or bias I may have on the topic?
- Is there any background context (e.g., political, social, or economic) that I should consider as part of my assessment of the message?
- Does the message target a vulnerable or minority group in an extreme or dangerous way?

Communicate

Ask students to read a manifesto written by another student. Then ask them to discuss the ideas they have read and whether these are the same or different from those in their own manifesto.

Appendices

1. Handout 1: Backdrop to Nazi Propaganda.
2. Handout 2: Nazi Youth Groups.
3. Handout 3: Video Transcriptions.
4. Handout 4: Student Worksheet.



Teachers' Notes

Activity 6: Prejudice and PropagandaList of Activities

- Activity 1: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 1 - Driving Forces.
- Activity 2: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey.
- Activity 3: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 3 - Arrival in Wales.
- Activity 4: Jewish Life in Pre-War Europe – Identity, Diversity and Commonality.
- Activity 5: The Legal Effect: How Laws can Persecute or Protect.
- Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda.
- Activity 7: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 1.
- Activity 8: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 2.
- Activity 9: Re-thinking Responsibility.
- Activity 10: Resistance and Remembrance.

Cover Image

Photograph of Ellen Kerry Davis and her family outside their home in Kassel, Germany around 1937. In 1939, Ellen escaped Nazi persecution via the Kindertransport. She was adopted by an elderly, childless couple in Swansea. Image from Ellen Kerry Davis's interview from the archive of the USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, 1996. For more information: <http://sfi.usc.edu/>.

