Government posters

How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

Key Stages 2-4 | Second World War 1939-1945
Lesson pack
Introduction

During the Second World War, Britain wanted everyone to help win the war. Like the armed services, the people at home had to do their bit. The government used posters, leaflets, film and radio broadcasts to get its message over to the public.

Posters were put up in local shops, public buildings and village halls. These posters were used to give different messages. For example, the famous ‘Dig for Victory’ posters were used as the government wanted people to grow their own food during wartime. Special government films were made and shown in cinemas to persuade people to behave in certain ways. There was no television or internet in those days.

Use this lesson to take a closer look at some posters and a film clip to find out how they were used to persuade people to play their part on the home front during the Second World War.

Suitable for:
KS 2 - 4

Time period:
Second World War 1939-1945

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 1 & 2:
Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally.

A study over time tracing how several aspects of national history are reflected in the locality (this can go beyond 1066)

Key stage 3:
Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day

Key stage 4:
Edexcel GCSE History: c1900–present: Warfare and British society in modern era
OCR GCSE History: War and British Society c.790 to c.2010; attitudes and responses to war
How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?
The posters used in the lesson show how the government encouraged people to salvage certain materials for the war and pointed out the dangers of ‘careless talk’. Teachers are advised from the start to ensure that students understand the meaning of key words such as:

- Salvage: collecting and reusing or recycling waste material
- Persuade: to try and change a person’s mind or way of thinking
- Slogan: catchword or catch phrase, such as ‘Dig for Victory’

The lesson can be used to support literacy for Key stage 2 on the concept of persuasive writing. Students can explore how the language of these government posters is used to persuade. They can look in detail at persuasive devices such as slogans, humour and emotive language. They can consider how persuasive language is used to gain attention, influence and inform and can be adapted for different audiences and purposes. Teachers may wish for the students to work in pairs or small groups on individual sources and report back to the group.

The lesson could also serve as an introduction to the concept of propaganda within the history classroom for Key stage 2. Students could be encouraged to use a dictionary to find the meaning of propaganda, then discuss whether these posters help explain the term and why did the government felt the need to do this.

Using the sources pupils can examine the power of the images themselves and their techniques of persuasion. They could discuss the differences between the strength of the visual over the written. How effective would the posters be without their words? The film clip used here offers further opportunities to compare the power of the moving image. Which is more effective, poster or film?

The questions increase in difficulty. Task 2 builds on the understanding of the concept of ‘persuasive writing’ acquired in Task 1. Task 3 gives students an opportunity to transfer it to the medium of film. This work could also be extended using the film archive in The Art of War website in Related Resources that contains clips from a wide range of public
information films for the Second World War. For example, in the archive there is a film that was used to encourage people to save scraps to feed hens, featuring a talking chicken. This directly relates to the illustrative image used at the top of the web page for this lesson.

**Extension tasks**

1. Students could examine a selection of television or magazine advertisements (supplied by the teacher) and consider their persuasive techniques. Students then create advertisements for their own products.

2. Students design a poster for recycling today:
   - Write a slogan
   - Does your slogan persuade or convince people to recycle?
   - Make clear what things should be saved
   - Make clear why they are useful
   - Make your poster colourful

3. Students produce their own leaflet to persuade others of a particular point of view, presenting the case for or against ending school uniform or changing school holidays, for example.

**Sources**

Banner image: ‘Save Kitchen Waste to Feed The Hens’, Ministry of Food, 1939-1945. INF 13/143


Teacher’s notes


Source 6: Flyer, part of ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ and ‘Keep It Dark’ campaigns, 1939-1945. EXT 1/119 f10


Source 8: ‘She talked…’, part of ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ and ‘Keep It Dark’ campaigns, 1939-1945. INF 13/217 f21

Source 9: ‘All Hands’, Imperial War Museums, © IWM (UKY 249)

External links

History KS2: How propaganda was used during World War Two
A helpful video on the meaning of propaganda with eyewitnesses.

Second World War Posters
More government posters shown on the Imperial War Museums website.

1 https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/history-ks2-how-propaganda-was-used-during-world-war-two/zr77wty
2 https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/second-world-war-posters
Government posters

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## Background

All of the posters used in this lesson are the work of artists who worked for the government Ministry of Information formed in 1939. The posters were used to try and influence public opinion.

For example, people were encouraged to grow their own food, and save waste. This was because it was difficult to import food from other countries during wartime. Kitchen waste could be fed to hens and pigs. People were asked to salvage as many materials as they could. Wastepaper, metal or bones could be made into planes and ammunition.

Travel within Britain was to be limited at all times. Posters with the slogan ‘Is your journey really necessary?’ were used to remind people to save fuel and allow trains to transport soldiers and war supplies instead.

Some posters encouraged women to work in factories to make weapons or planes. Others called women to join the Land Army to work on farms ‘for a healthy, happy job’.

The Ministry of Information was also keen to explain to the people the danger of ‘careless talk’. They wanted the public to become much more careful about security because information or secrets might be used by enemy spies listening in.

Posters were also used to up keep morale or wartime spirit. They made it clear that everybody was in this war together and everybody had an important part to play. This also helped the public to feel involved. This really mattered if Britain wanted the workers in the factories to make as many planes, bombs, and tanks as they could or farmers to grow as much as possible.

During the Second World War, the people faced many dangers such as the bombing of cities, ports and factories. They also had accidents caused by the blackout. Health during the war was a big worry for Britain. The public needed to keep fit and healthy in order to work and keep up production in the factories and on the land. Therefore the Ministry of Information produced many posters on these subjects.
 Tasks

1. Look at Sources 1, 2, 3 and 4. Explain how each of the salvage posters uses the following ways to persuade people to save waste.

- How do the posters use slogans?
- Do they use powerful/forceful words?
- Do they appeal to feelings and emotions?
- How do the posters use humour?
- How do the posters use different font sizes?
- How do the posters use colour to help make their point?
- Which do you think is the most persuasive poster? Give your reasons, using the questions above to help
- Are the posters aimed at different types of audience (men, women, children or all groups)?

2. Look at Sources 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 and answer the questions below.

- List the situations in which you must be careful about what you say
- Which poster warns about being careful who to trust? Can you explain how the poster makes this clear?
- Which posters show the results of ‘careless talk’?
- Are the posters aimed at different types of audience (men, women, children or all groups)?
- Which do you think is the most persuasive poster? Give your reasons, use the questions from task 1 to help

3. Look at Source 10. This is a film called ‘All Hands’ made in 1940. Answer the questions below.

The film shows two women who work at a railway station restaurant and they are busy chatting. They give away a lot of information that would have been very useful if overheard by an enemy spy.
Tasks

- What jobs do these women do in the film?
- What are they talking about?
- How does the film make clear that they should not talk in this way?
- Does the film closely match any of the ‘careless talk’ posters you have looked at?
- Why do you think the film is called ‘All Hands’?
- Do you think that the film or the posters are more effective in warning people about the dangers of ‘careless talk’? Give your reasons
How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

Transcript: Source 1

“How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

“UP HOUSEWIVES AND AT ‘EM!”

PUT OUT YOUR PAPER – METAL – BONES

THEY MAKE PLANS, GUNS, TANKS, SHIPS & AMMUNITION
How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

Transcript: Source 2

STILL MORE

PAPER RAGS BONES

WANTED FOR SALVAGE
Catalogue Ref: INF 13/149 f15

Please put your litter in the bin
Transcript: Source 3

[Bin:]

WASTE PAPER HERE PLEASE

[Slogan:]

Please put your litter in the bin
Government posters

How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?


"When will these three meet again in shells, in tanks, or in planes?"

“WELL, BOYS! AND I'M FOR THE SHELL FACTORY!”

“AND IT'S ME FOR MUNITIONS!”

THE GREAT ROUND UP.
[Left bin:]  
PAPER

[Newspaper figure:]  
Well, boys! I'm for the shell factory!

[Middle bin:]  
BONES

[Bone figure:]  
And I'm for the glue factory!

[Right bin:]  
RAGS

[Rags figure:]  
And it’s me for munitions!

[Caption:]  
THE GREAT ROUND UP.

“When will these three meet again in shells, in tanks, or in plane?”
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How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?


The Test of a Soldier

is to keep his mouth shut when he would look big if he told what he knew
THE TEST OF A SOLDIER –

is to keep his mouth shut when he would look big if he told what he knew

BEWARE

Whether alone or in a crowd,
Never write or say aloud,
What you’re loading, whence you hail,
Where you’re bound for, when you sail.

—ABOVE ALL NEVER GIVE AWAY
THE MOVEMENTS OF H.M. SHIPS

BEWARE

Whether alone or in a crowd,

Never write or say aloud,

What you're loading, whence you hail,

Where you're bound for, when you sail.

—ABOVE ALL NEVER GIVE AWAY THE MOVEMENTS OF H.M. SHIPS
How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

Catalogue Ref: INF 3/271 f8

You forget—
but she REMEMBERS

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
Transcript: Source 7

You forget – but she REMEMBERS

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
Source 8: Poster, part of ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ and ‘Keep It Dark’ campaigns, 1939-1945. Catalogue Ref: INF 13/217 f21
Transcript: Source 8

“HE’S SAILING TOMORROW FOR...”

SHE TALKED...

...THIS HAPPENED

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
Government posters

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Watch the film here.¹

¹ https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/government-posters/source-10/
Transcript: Source 9

Sailor's girl:
Can I come and see you off?

Sailor:
I'll have plenty to say if you don't

Younger tea maid:
Oh, I could almost cry I could really

Older tea maid:
Well nobody's stopping you

Younger tea maid:
That poor sailor on the Cambridge, waited all this time for his girl, now he's got to sail tonight, really those fellow's in whitehall have no consideration

Older tea maid:
What has he got to go all the way to Liverpool tonight?

Younger tea maid:
Portsmouth, but it's nearly as far

Older tea maid:
Sickening

Younger tea maid:
He's got to be there by nine, he's got no time for a film or anything

Older tea maid:
Well we've all got to do our duty, war is war
Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren’t always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our Onsite Workshops are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I’s signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our Online Workshops allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We’ll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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