Lesson plan for “State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda” poster set

Object of Lesson Plan:

1. To use the “State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda” poster set as an interactive teaching tool,
2. To support knowledge of the history of the Holocaust, in particular, the role played by propaganda in creating an environment that facilitated persecution and finally genocide,
3. To support students’ understanding of how propaganda works and a consideration of the importance of being able to detect it, and
4. To support the development of critical thinking of students and their ability to analyze texts.

Suggested Methodology:

Use the “State of Deception” poster set as an interactive teaching tool.

Please note that the answers and time allocations provided are meant as suggestions and are not prescriptive.

1. Ice breaker: Brainstorming key terms
(5 min)

a. Display four terms: “Human rights”, “Genocide”, “The Holocaust” and “Racism”. Ask students to brainstorm/work in pairs/groups. Please reassure students it’s not a test.
   - The brainstorming should not take more than a few minutes.
   - Begin with “human rights”: most students will have something to say about human rights.
   - Ask students to give feedback, and capture the feedback.
Human rights

Suggested input: There are certain basic human rights that cannot be taken away from anyone. People have the right to dignity and life no matter their age, income, colour, religion, who or what they are, or what they’ve done or not done.

Genocide

Genocide is the intention to destroy in whole or in part, a group of people, as determined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 260 on 9 December 1948.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust took place from 1933-1945. What began with persecution and expulsion of the Jewish people by the Nazi regime and its collaborators, culminated in the murder of one third of the Jewish people, and countless minorities. The Nazis deliberately set out to destroy all Jewish people - a genocide - as defined by the Genocide Convention.

Ask students if they can understand why the Holocaust was a genocide. If they struggle to answer, explain that the Holocaust is a genocide because the Nazis deliberately set out to destroy all Jewish people. This meets the definition of Genocide Convention.

Racism

Is a belief that people are not equal but different biological species whose behaviour and values are determined by their inheritance – through their “blood”. Racism is a form of prejudice: judging people before you get to know them.

b. During the Holocaust people’s rights were taken away by the government and also by ordinary citizens, such as neighbours, teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, policemen and others. We’re going to examine how propaganda helped to make it possible that people would behave this way.

2. Propaganda, prejudice and the Holocaust
(3 min)

a. One of the most important reasons that the Holocaust was able to happen was that the Nazi government tried to fill people’s hearts with hatred and prejudice. The Nazi government wanted everyone to believe its racist and anti-Semitic view of the world.
Check that students understand the meaning of the term, “anti-Semitism”. *Anti-Semitism is prejudice against or hatred of Jewish people.*

The constant propaganda messages helped grow a climate of indifference to the fate of others. For the Holocaust to happen, it did not require that everyone hated the Jews, only that they were indifferent to what was happening to their neighbours.

b. The Nazis wanted everyone to believe that only certain people were fully human and that Jewish people especially did not deserve any human rights, simply because they were Jewish.

c. Ask students: “How did the government get people to believe their view of the world?” Explain that propaganda was one of the important tools that the Nazi Party used. Explain that propaganda is the focus of the lesson/briefing. We’re going to look at how the Nazis used propaganda to create an appealing vision of a national community and how this can draw people in. The dark side of this myth is that the Nazis did not consider all groups part of this community. It is relatively easy to overlook someone else's pain if they are not allowed to participate in the "in group."

d. Ask students: “What is propaganda and what is its aim?” Allow student feedback if any, and then conclude with these points: *Propaganda is a tool used to manipulate or influence what people think and how they behave."

e. Ask students: “How do we recognise propaganda?” What does propaganda look like and sound like and how does it work?” Explain that the exhibition will give us many examples of Nazi propaganda.

3. Nazi propaganda and the Holocaust: Guided exploration of the poster exhibition
(25 min)

Before students visit the exhibition:

a. Remind students that the Holocaust took place during the 1930s and 1940s. Ask students: How did the government communicate with the people? *The Nazi government communicated its message to people through the media such as radios, newspapers, films, theatre, rallies, flags, banners, signs, posters, music, buttons, uniforms, books.*

b. Explain that propaganda is successful when it responds to what is happening at the time and what people want or feel they need. For example, propaganda that promises work and security to people who already have jobs will not be as effective as when the people do not have jobs or are scared.

Posters 1-7 (Selling Nazism in a democracy)

- Poster 3:
  a. The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP or the Nazi Party) emerged from the turmoil that followed Germany’s defeat in the First World War.
b. Before 1929, the Nazi Party did not succeed in attracting many supporters.
c. Ask students to look at the photograph on Poster 3 and say when the photograph was taken: Weimar Germany, 1932: Nazi Party rally.
d. The photograph tells us that by 1932, the Nazi Party had become very popular. Ask students whether they know why this was so.
   - After the Great Depression began in 1929, German society faced tremendous challenges: poverty, hunger, unemployment.
   - This situation made the extreme messages of the Nazis very attractive.
   - The Nazis used broad, emotional appeals offering simple solutions to Germany’s grave problems to win popular support.

● Poster 4:
   a. The Nazis used propaganda to gain support.
   b. Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party and its first director of propaganda, was an important part of the propaganda machine. After 1929, increasing numbers of people came to listen to Hitler’s fiery speeches.
   c. Refer to the photographs of Hitler.
      - Ask students what they think is the message of the first photograph (top left). Strength.
      - Why is Hitler dressed in a suit, and not casual clothes or his Nazi party uniform? Remind students of the context in which the photograph was taken. Remind students that Hitler placed importance on creating an image of himself as a leader of strength, will, and determination, who could get Germany out of its troubles. Which image would be more appealing to a broad audience? The photograph wants to suggest that he is a reasonable and respectable man: someone who can be trusted.
   d. What was Hitler’s message, and why was it so popular?
      - Hitler’s speeches:
         o gave oversimplified answers to the complex causes of the challenges facing Germany,
         o used half-truths or lies, played on people’s emotions, and
         o falsely blamed the troubles facing Germany on Jewish people.
      - Having a scapegoat to blame made the people listening to Hitler feel secure and unified.

● Posters 5-7:
   a. The Nazi Party carefully researched its audience, and designed its propaganda to appeal to each part of German society.
   b. Let’s look at the examples of Nazi propaganda on these posters, and what techniques they are using to influence and manipulate the viewer:
      - Refer to the photograph on Poster 5:
         Ask students: “Which of these posters attracts your attention, and why?” Encourage students to consider the impact of colour, bold and clear images.
• Refer to Posters 5, 6, and 7:
  Ask students if they can find any images that suggest power and strength. On Poster 5: the poster with the very large man representing the Nazis; the large eagle; on Poster 6 (“the blow must hit home”): the big fist striking the person.
• Refer to the top poster on Poster 6 “Work and bread”:
  Ask students “Why would work and bread be emotionally powerful for the viewers?” Many Germans were unemployed and very poor. Thus the Nazi promise to give them jobs and food was very powerful.
• Refer to the poster on Poster 7 “Our last hope: Hitler”:
  Ask students what they think about the choice of words: “our” “last” and “hope”. Add to feedback: these words are emotionally powerful words. “Our” creates a sense of community. Art can also arouse emotions. Ask students to look at who is drawn as the “our”: working class men, woman with child, man in tattered suit (middle class), and how desperate they look.
  c. Many voters turned to the Nazi Party because of the impact of the Great Depression:
     • People were afraid of poverty.
     • Some feared revolutionary communism.
     • The extreme nationalism of the Nazis offered hope of a restored Germany.
     • People were frustrated with the inability of the other political parties in Germany to come to an agreement to work together to find a solution to the problems Germany was facing. People felt that democracy was failing them.
     • People were willing to overlook Nazi anti-Jewish ideology and racism.

Posters 8-12: (Propaganda and Dictatorship from 1933)
  a. The Nazis came to power in 1933. Shortly after coming to power, the Nazis turned Germany into a dictatorship.
  b. Within months of Hitler becoming chancellor, the Nazi regime destroyed the country’s free press. The Propaganda Ministry took control of virtually all media.
     • Ask students why the Nazis wanted to control the press. Include in feedback, a free press would have allowed questioning of Nazi propaganda, and encouraged critical thinking.
  c. The Nazis passed laws to create a new state based on racism, anti-Semitism and prejudice.
  d. All Germans lost civil rights including the right to the freedom of speech, of association, of religion, and the right to choose their government.
  e. Any opposition to the government was severely punished.
  f. Jewish people had lived in Germany for centuries and were very much a part of German society. They were doctors, lawyers, teachers, writers, policemen. They spoke German as their mother tongue, had fought for Germany in the First World War, and were German citizens. The Nazis passed laws that took away the citizenship of Jewish Germans. Nazi laws segregated Germany, forbidding Jewish Germans from entering parks or places of
public recreation such as cinemas, theatres, swimming pools or restaurants. Jewish children were eventually forbidden from attending the same schools as other children.

g. **Refer to Poster 8:** The Nazis considered propaganda so important that they established an entire state department dedicated to it. **Here (Poster 8) is a photograph of the large Department of Propaganda and Enlightenment,** with its head, Dr. Joseph Goebbels.

h. The Nazis continued to use propaganda after they came to power, to:
- make racism, antisemitism and prejudice appear normal and acceptable,
- make their unjust laws appear reasonable, and
- consolidate their power.

i. **Poster 9:** A cornerstone of Nazi propaganda was the idea of building a new and exclusive “national community”, which was supposed to be a union of so-called “Aryan” Germans. The Nazis defined “Aryans” as having so-called “pure” blood, which contained their superior moral, intellectual and physical abilities. In the “new” Germany, all “Aryans” would be equal with the same opportunities and the economy would be rebuilt through their collective effort. Many Germans liked the “positive” ideas of unity. However, the Nazi idea of the “national community” masked persecution, exclusion, marginalization and discrimination of groups it perceived to be “undesirable”. The Nazis excluded from the “Aryan family”, Jews, Roma and Sinti, Germans of African descent and mentally and physically challenged Germans. The Nazis stripped these groups of their basic human rights. The Nazis also persecuted homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others viewed by the Nazis as political enemies. Nazi propaganda contributed to the success of the Nazi regime’s policies of exclusion by publicly identifying, through stereotypes and other signs, who belonged and who did not.

- Explain “stereotype”: A stereotype is an oversimplified and generalized belief about a group.
- Ask what the problem is of stereotyping. *Stereotypes create a false impression.* *Stereotypes limit people’s potential and take away their individuality.*

j. Examine **poster on Poster 9:**
- Nazi propaganda used stereotypes to show what the “Aryan” looked like, and how an “Aryan” behaved. The poster shows a stereotype of the “Aryan family”.
- What do the students notice about what an “Aryan” is supposed to look like? *Include in feedback: blond hair, light skin colour, physically strong and able bodied.*
- Remind students that this is a stereotype: not all Germans had blond hair (e.g. Hitler). There were Jewish Germans who had blond hair and blue eyes. The poster shows that behaviour was as important as physical features in defining who was “Aryan” or not. For example, “good” Aryans supported the Nazis, discriminated against Jewish people, had many children, married only other “Aryans”, taught their children to love the Nazis and had their children participate in Hitler Youth groups.
● What is the role of the man? Why is the man drawn so large? He has to be in charge of the family.

● What is the role of the woman? She is to have children. Explain to students that the Nazis had strict gender roles: women were to have many children, and look after the home. Men were to work and protect their families as soldiers.

● Ask the students if they can find any images of strength? Eagle, large size of the man.

● Who does the poster suggest is excluded from the “Aryan family”? Anyone who doesn’t look like this, for example, people with darker skin, or who were not able bodied, or anyone who didn’t behave in this way – women who wanted careers or women and men who chose not to have babies or men and women who did not choose to form a family together.

k. Nazi propaganda justified the treatment of the “undesirable” groups, incited hatred and encouraged indifference towards those the propaganda identified as not belonging.

Posters 10 and 11: Targeting the youth

a. The Nazis used propaganda to indoctrinate youth.

b. Ask students, what does “to be indoctrinated” mean? To accept certain ideas and beliefs without questioning them.

c. Ask students, why Nazi propaganda targeted youth. The Nazis targeted youth in order to ensure that Nazi beliefs continued generation after generation.

d. Refer to the photograph on Poster 10: Ask students when the photograph was taken (1932) – this shows that even before the Nazis came to power in 1933, they had focused on getting the support of young people. By 1933, the Nazi Party had recruited tens of thousands of students along with thousands of young teachers. Ask students, “what made the Nazis attractive to young people”? The photograph gives some clues: Explain emphasis on belonging to a group; wearing uniform; rallies; being taken seriously.

● The Nazis also banned all youth groups apart from the Hitler Youth.

● In 1939, the Nazis made membership of the Hitler Youth compulsory for all “Aryans” between the ages of 10 and 18.

● Once in power, the Nazis banned Jewish people, and individuals deemed “politically unreliable”, from the civil service, including public schools and universities. Ask students why the Nazis would not have wanted Jewish teachers in schools and universities. The Nazis were worried that having Jewish teachers or university lecturers who were respected for their knowledge, would challenge the lies of Nazi propaganda that Jewish people were intellectually inferior and bad people.

● Nazi education did not encourage independent or critical thinking. Its aim was to feed students Nazi ideology. Nazi education was a powerful propaganda tool.
The classroom and the Hitler Youth aimed to produce obedient, self-sacrificing Germans, willing to die for their country, believing themselves superior to others, and filled with antisemitism and prejudice.

e. **Poster 11: Prejudice**: Nazi propaganda reflected Nazi antisemitism, and played on existing negative stereotypes of Jewish people. Jews were falsely labeled as “alien”, “anti-human”, and “parasites” responsible for Germany’s cultural, political, and economic breakdown. Propaganda posters depicted Jewish people as physically and morally weak and unattractive. Nazi propaganda justified stripping away of citizenship and all the rights from Jewish Germans, and encouraged people to see Jewish people as unwanted and threatening outsiders.

**Poster 12: Propaganda to justify war**

a. In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, beginning the Second World War.
b. Propaganda became an integral weapon in Hitler’s military strategy.
c. Propaganda was used to persuade Germans to support the war by disguising military aggression as a necessary means of defense.
d. **Refer to the propaganda poster on Poster 12:**
   - Ask students: “What reason does the propaganda poster give for fighting the war?”
   - The slogan is “why we fight— for our children’s bread” in other words, to protect OUR children. Point out to the students the effect of the word “our”: it creates a sense of “us” against “them”. Also point out that the war was not only being fought to “protect our children”: there were complex reasons for the war. The propaganda is oversimplifying complex issues, and telling half-truths. The war was being fought to take land from other countries.
   - How does the propaganda artist try to arouse strong emotions in the viewer? Using a photograph of children and babies will arouse strong emotions. The children are innocent, vulnerable, needing protection, and are the hope of the future. The red lettering will catch the viewer’s attention and suggest both the importance and urgency of the message, and the danger that the children face.

e. Nazi propagandists prepared Germans to accept increased hardships at home during war time and to ignore the brutalities against the people in occupied territories.

**Poster 13: Propaganda to justify genocide**

a. Nazi propaganda sought to encourage hatred of Jews. It portrayed Jews as the enemy, guilty of betraying Germany from within.
b. Nazi propaganda blamed Jews for starting the war and demanded a solution to save Germany and the rest of the world from destruction.
c. The war shifted Nazi anti-Jewish policy from expulsion to murder. The Nazis used propaganda to make this change in policy appear justifiable.
d. **Refer to the propaganda poster on Poster 13 “He is to blame for the war”:**
   - The poster was drawn in 1943. The slogan reads, “He is to blame for the war”.
   - Ask students, “How does the propaganda poster show who is to blame?” *The finger pointing to the caricature of the Jew; the way the Jewish man is cowering, suggesting guilt or shame or fear of being found out.*
   - What sign indicates that the person being accused is Jewish? *Yellow Star of David that the Nazis forced Jewish people to wear.*
   - Whose hand is supposed to be pointing at the accused? *By making the hand appear from the sky and so large, people would be encouraged to view it as the hand of G-d or of the German nation.*
   - How might this poster have made Jewish people feel? *Isolated, fearful*
   - Why is the poster dangerous? *It spreads lies about Jewish people. Germany was not losing the war because Jewish people were betraying Germany. It encourages the viewer to hate the accused and see them as the enemy and not part of the German people. People are likely to remember the images. Even if someone couldn’t read, they would understand the message of the image.*

e. Through posters like this one, Nazi propagandists helped to create the climate of indifference, hate and fear that made possible the systematic mass murder of six million European Jews.

**Poster 14: Propaganda on trial**

1. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment, who oversaw the production of the propaganda you’ve seen here in the posters, and much more, committed suicide just before the war ended.
2. Had he lived, he would have been charged at the Nuremberg Trials, along with two other Nazis, for “crimes against humanity” for inciting (encouraging) the hatred that aided the Holocaust.
3. It was the first time that an international court recognised the dangerous role propaganda can play in provoking mass murder.

**4. What the exhibition shows about how and why the Nazis used propaganda**

**Group activity 1**

(5 min)

- Students can work in groups, or pairs.
- Ask students to think about what they’ve seen in the exhibition, and to discuss how the Nazis used propaganda and what they thought the Nazis were hoping to achieve.
- Capture key words from the feedback. If not included in feedback, remind students of the following:
  - The Nazis used ,
posters,
- the media (for example newspapers, radio broadcasts, banners, film),
- schooling,
- the Hitler Youth,
- words, art and images that evoked strong emotions.

- to influence how people viewed
  - Jewish people,
  - Hitler and the Nazis,
  - themselves and their identity.

- The propaganda used stereotypes to create an “us” and “them”. Victims are portrayed as animals or insects. Example: during the Holocaust, the Nazis called Jewish people “rats”. During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, victims were called "cockroaches".

- The Nazis used propaganda to
  - dehumanise the victims,
  - make some people feel superior and others inferior,
  - encourage little compassion for the victims,
  - spread hatred,
  - cause division,
  - make people feel excluded or isolated,
  - encourage violence,
  - encourage mass murder,
  - encourage prejudice,
  - encourage selfishness and exclusivity.

5. How propaganda works

Group activity 2
(10 min)

- Students can work in small groups or in pairs, depending on time and size of student group.
- Each group is given one of the three Nazi propaganda posters viz. (See Appendix for the three posters)
  - “Image of idealized “Aryan” Germans”
  - “Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-Year-Olds into the Hitler Youth”
  - “Our Last Hope: Hitler”
- Display two questions:
  - What techniques does the propagandist use? For example, stereotyping.
  - What were the propagandists hoping the audience would feel, think and do?
- Ask students to discuss their poster by answering the two questions displayed.
- Depending on the size of the entire group and time, each group could report on their analysis to the plenary.

Suggested responses for the activity.
Ask students to consider the impact the propaganda would have had on Jewish Germans.
“Image of idealized “Aryan” Germans”
What techniques does the propagandist use?
- Stereotyping – not every person can, or did, look like the people in the drawing
- Uses half-truths or lies about what people look like
- Oversimplifies complex issues: the propaganda suggests that looking a certain way and behaving a certain way is an indication of moral value. Good people do not always look like this or behave like this
- Plays on emotions: in this instance through the use of image eg. Image of the baby and mother; the muscular man suggesting strength being protective; the blue sky suggesting hope.

What were the propagandists hoping the audience would feel, think and do?
- Idolize and worship people who looked like the images on the poster
- Idolize “white Aryans”
- Wish to belong to the group called “Aryans” represented in the poster
- Hoping that people would believe in the idea of “social purity”
- Hoping that people would be inspired to have more children so that there would be future generations of “pure Aryans”
- They would believe that to have a better world, they need to be “Aryans”

“Youth serves the Leader: All 10-Year olds into the Hitler Youth”
What techniques does the propagandist use?
- Stereotyping: not all boys who were members of the Hitler Youth looked like this
- Plays on emotion: using images: they draw Hitler so large as to suggest he is a god. By having both the boy and Hitler look into the distance, it suggests that they are both the future of Germany;

What were the propagandists hoping the audience would feel, think and do?
- They would see Hitler as their protector, their savior: of god-like proportions
- Idolize Hitler
- Want to be strong and beautiful like the young boy (if the audience is the young boy) by serving Hitler
- Believe that serving Hitler is the right thing to do (“Serving” means that one would do anything that Hitler asks)
- Advertises a cause: Hitler Youth, Hitler and the Nazis

“Our Last Hope: Hitler”
What techniques does the propagandist use?
- Oversimplifies complex issues: possible solutions to the social and economic woes brought about by the Great Depression were complex
- Plays on emotions using words like “our”, “last” “hope”; connecting Hitler to “hope”. The colours used emphasises the despair of the people.
- Advertises a cause: Hitler and the Nazis

What were the propagandists hoping the audience would feel, think and do?
- The people would see Hitler (and the Nazis) as their only way out of economic troubles.
- Hitler alone could bring about a better Germany.
● The people would believe that no other political party would be able to save them.
● Hitler was their saviour.

6. Conclusion: Considering propaganda today
(10 min)

a. Ask students: “Where do you find propaganda in your life today?”
   Include if not given in feedback: Advertising uses many of the propaganda tools we’ve discussed. Advertising is designed to influence a person’s thoughts and choices. Thus it can be seen as a form of propaganda.

b. What messages do you feel target you today?

c. Ask students: “Why should we care about propaganda?”

d. When does propaganda become dangerous?
   Get feedback. Include these answers: Propaganda is dangerous when it encourages hatred, racism, and prejudice, such as xenophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia, homophobia and makes discrimination and violence appear an acceptable response. Propaganda can make us accept injustice and discrimination as normal.

e. Ask students if they can remember reading in the exhibition what happened to some of the Nazi propaganda leaders. Ask students what they think should happen to people or institutions who use propaganda to incite hatred?

f. What’s the best weapon against manipulation?
   Get feedback. Include: The best weapon against manipulation is to know when someone is trying to manipulate you. You can’t be manipulated when you know you’re being manipulated. You have power when you can identify propaganda techniques. You can make your own choices about whether to believe the message or not.

g. Why would media literacy (for example, being able to recognise propaganda) be important in a democracy? Everyone needs to be able to examine critically the aims of politicians and political groupings.

Concluding question:
How do you think learning about Nazi propaganda can help us today?

The use of propaganda by the Nazi Party to gain support and then justify laws that removed civil rights, reminds us of the dangers of not recognising propaganda, and the importance of protecting democratic values so that people can challenge propaganda.
Our last hope: HITLER

Mjölnir [Hans Schweitzer], artist, 1932
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-Year-Olds into the Hitler Youth

Unknown artist, 1939
Bundesarchiv (Plak 003-011-018), Koblenz, Germany
Image of idealized “Aryan” Germans, from a calendar for the Racial Policy Office of the Nazi Party

Ludwig Hohlwein, artist; 1938
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany