



SSHEAN

*Social Studies & History Education
in the Anthropocene Network*

“A Good War”

Thinking Critically about the Climate Emergency

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Lesson Challenge

In this lesson inspired by Seth Klein’s book, *A Good War*, students will consider ways to effectively communicate climate change as an emergency by drawing lessons from other emergencies in the past.

Students will apply a set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of propaganda posters for the Second World War and climate change.

In groups, students will portray climate change as an emergency to a specific audience in the format of a poster.

The accompanying materials for this lesson include: a Lesson Plan (this document) for teachers, a Slideshow, and Activity Sheets and Evidence Sheets packages for students.



Inquiry Question

What are the most effective methods for communicating climate change as an emergency?

Lesson Details

Grade Level

- Grades 7-12 and postsecondary (ages 12+)

Subject Areas

- Social studies (history)
- Environmental studies
- Language arts & media studies

Duration

- 60-75 minutes

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn:
 - to apply criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of propaganda in the past and present.
 - to compare communication methods about emergencies in the past and present.
 - to consider how an audience's worldviews, perspectives, and historical contexts might impact persuasiveness.
 - to work in a group to creatively communicate a message about climate change.

Background Knowledge

- Consider what your students have previously learned about:
 - Climate change as a multi-faceted problem requiring action.
 - Propaganda and its use in the past and present.
 - The history of the Second World War on Canada's home front.

Vocabulary

Emergency

A serious situation requiring immediate attention.

Propaganda

Information and ideas used to promote or publicize a particular cause or point of view, usually political in nature.



Summary of Activities

1. Consider similarities and differences between emergencies in the past and present (e.g., the Second World War, climate crisis).
2. Consider the effectiveness of propaganda messaging for different audiences over time, based on their worldviews, perspectives, and contexts.
3. Apply a set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of propaganda posters created during the Second World War and the present climate crisis.
4. Apply criteria to effectively communicate climate change as an emergency to a specific audience in the format of a poster.
5. Reflect on why it is important that climate change be considered an emergency.

Considerations for Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Teachers are encouraged to consider the following while implementing this lesson:

- Consider allowing students to form their own groups to present climate change as an emergency, based on their interests and skills.
- Encourage students to delegate tasks within their groups to keep them on track and ensure each group member participates (e.g., drawing, writing, presenting).

Accommodations

- Provide verbal image descriptions for visually impaired students, and allow them to complete the activity in another format (e.g., song, poem).
- Allow students to verbally complete the Activity Sheets.
- Allow students to complete the group activity individually.

Criteria & Concepts

Recommended Criteria

- Persuasive language (e.g., descriptive words, persuasive words, memorable slogans)
- Represents example(s) of taking action or outcomes (e.g., Join up!, conserve energy)
- Creative visuals (e.g., attention-grabbing, colourful)
- Relatability (e.g., use of a familiar metaphor, analogy, or historical example)
- Portrays urgency (e.g., warnings, consequences)

Historical Thinking Concept(s)*

- Historical perspectives
- Evidence

* Seixas, P. & T. Morton. (2013). *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Nelson. www.historicalthinking.ca



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Lesson Activity

In this activity students will draw connections between a wartime emergency and the present-day climate emergency. They will apply a set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of various forms of propaganda, and then create their own posters in small groups to communicate climate change as an emergency to a specific audience.

Setting Up the Activity

Begin by moving through slides 2-9. Introduce the key lessons from the Second World War that are relevant to the climate emergency, according to the book *A Good War* (if more detail or context is needed, refer to Seth Klein’s book).

Refer to slides 6 and 7 to define propaganda, and lead a short discussion with students about positive and negative consequences, in the past and/or present (e.g., positive - inspiring hopeful action; negative – racism and persecution). Discuss how an audience’s worldviews, perspectives, and contexts might impact how they understand and respond to different messages. Then explain the historical thinking concepts “historical perspectives” and “evidence,” referring to slides 8 and 9, and how they are connected to the concepts in this lesson (historical perspectives guidepost 3: responses to propaganda messaging are shaped in different ways by historical actors’ contexts; evidence guidepost 4: propaganda can be examined for evidence of the conditions and worldviews at the time in which it was created).

Next, move into reviewing the set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of communicating emergencies (slide 10). Students may add to this list, but these are the main criteria to aim towards understanding and applying. To practice using the criteria, lead students through two examples. Begin by passing out Activity Sheet 1 and the Evidence Sheets.

Examine the “Poster Example 1” on slide 11 and, as a class, identify examples of the criteria within the poster from the Second World War. Students may record ideas in the appropriate column on their Activity Sheet 1, and then take up some of the suggested evidence on slide 12 as a class. Use the discussion questions on slide 13 to debrief the activity.

Now that students have practiced applying the criteria, allow them to form groups of 4-5 to examine “Poster Example 2” (slide 14). As a group, students should identify examples for all criteria and record them in the appropriate column on their Activity Sheet 1. Take up some of the suggested evidence on slide 15 as a class, and consider reading through the artist statement on slide 16 to identify further evidence together. Then, use the discussion questions on slide 17 to debrief the activity.

Estimated Time

- 60-75 minutes

Required Materials

- Slideshow
- Activity Sheets
- Evidence Sheets
- Paper/poster boards
- Coloured pencils/markers
- Electronic devices



The Activity

1. Once students are in groups of 4-5 members, provide each group with paper/poster boards, coloured pencils/markers, and/or electronic devices.
2. Pass out Activity Sheet 2 to all groups.
3. Encourage students to delegate tasks to each group member for this activity (e.g., writing, drawing, presenting).
4. Instruct students to brainstorm a topic and audience for their climate emergency poster, and then use the criteria on Activity Sheet 2 to develop ideas for a poster that meet the criteria. Circulate to each group and discuss with students how the poster they envision meets the criteria.
5. Next, students will work together to create a poster that effectively communicates climate change as an emergency. Students can use paper/poster boards, coloured pencils/markers, and/or electronic devices to create their poster.
6. Ask each group to present their poster to the class with a brief 2-minute rationale describing how it meets the criteria.
7. Provide students time to reflect on the Thinking Questions (slide 19) and discuss as a class.

Extension

Invite students to share their posters communicating climate change as an emergency within the school and/or local community.

Allow students to communicate climate change as an emergency using different mediums and formats (e.g., a song, a video).



A Good War

References & Further Reading

Canadian War Museum. (n.d.). Canadian wartime propaganda: Second World War.

https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/second_e.html

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