



THE 30 MINUTES

5 min
HOOK

10 min
TEACH

12 min
ACTIVITY

3 min
CLOSING

OVERVIEW

Students analyze how visual manipulation has been used to influence public opinion throughout history, from wartime posters to doctored photographs to modern deepfakes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

What students will understand

Students will analyze how visual manipulation has been used to influence public opinion throughout history, identify six common propaganda techniques, and apply critical analysis skills to both historical and contemporary examples.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

C3 D2.His.6.6-8: Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

C3 D2.His.11.6-8: Use other historical sources to infer a plausible maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WWI/WWII recruitment and propaganda posters (multiple nations)
- Soviet-era doctored photographs (showing removed political figures)
- Modern examples of political image manipulation (age-appropriate)

HOOK • 5 MINUTES

The Disappearing Commissar

Display two versions of the famous Soviet photograph — the original showing Stalin with Nikolai Yezhov at the Moscow Canal, and the altered version with Yezhov removed after his 1940 execution.

“These are the same photograph, taken on the same day. What’s different?”

Let students identify the missing person.

“In the Soviet Union under Stalin, when political leaders fell out of favor — often executed — they were literally erased from photographs. The government controlled what people could see, rewriting history by manipulating images.”

DIRECT INSTRUCTION • 10 MINUTES

Six Propaganda Techniques

Define propaganda: Information — especially biased or misleading — used to promote a political cause. Not always lies; often selective truth, emotional manipulation, or exaggeration.

01 Bandwagon

"Everyone is doing it — join in!"
Appeals to desire to belong.

02 Fear

"Something terrible will happen if you don't act." Appeals to survival.

03 Name-Calling

Negative labels to create prejudice.
Depicts enemies as subhuman.

04 Glittering Generalities

Vague positive words: "Freedom,"
"Honor," "Patriotism."

05 Transfer

Connecting respected symbols (flag,
family) to your cause.

06 Testimonial

Famous or trusted person endorses
something.

ACTIVITY · 12 MINUTES

Analyzing Propaganda Through Time

Part 1: WWI/WWII Posters (5 min) — Display 2–3 wartime posters. For each, ask:

- "What do you notice first?" (Visual hook)
- "What emotion does this create?" (Fear, pride, anger, guilt)
- "Which propaganda technique(s) is this using?"
- "Who was the intended audience? What action did they want?"

Part 2: Photo Manipulation (4 min) — Show examples: Soviet erasure of political enemies, Nazi manipulation of crowd sizes, Civil Rights-era photo cropping that changed meaning.

Discussion: *"Why is changing a photograph different from creating a poster? What makes doctored photos more dangerous?"*

Part 3: Modern Connection (3 min) — Briefly show a modern example (political ad, manipulated social media image, deepfake concept). *"The techniques are identical — only the technology has changed. How can you apply what you've learned to images you see today?"*

CLOSING · 3 MINUTES

From Awareness to Action

Key takeaways: Ask: Who made this? What do they want me to feel/do/believe? Identify the technique being used. Check: Is this fact, opinion, or manipulation? Seek multiple perspectives before forming opinions.

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

Option 1 — Visit: Spirit photography examples show how visual manipulation exploited grief for profit. Victorian illusion cards demonstrate the era's fascination with visual trickery.

Option 2 — Virtual: Explore the exhibition online:
minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/seeing-is-deceiving

ASSESSMENT

Formative: During poster analysis, check that students correctly identify techniques and explain intended emotional impact.

Exit ticket: "Choose one propaganda technique. Explain how it works and give an example from history AND an example you might see today."

DIFFERENTIATED STUDENT HANDOUTS

GREEN LEVEL MORE SUPPORT

Technique reference with word bank,
guided analysis of one image

YELLOW LEVEL GRADE LEVEL

Analyze 2–3 historical images, identify
techniques independently

RED LEVEL GO DEEPER

Compare propaganda from opposing sides,
research project