

Yom HaShoah: Understanding the Holocaust

UNIT OVERVIEW

Essential Question: How did propaganda and lies help the Nazis gain power, and how can we recognize propaganda and lies in our own world?

Unit Learning Objectives: By the end of this series, students will be able to:

- Understand what propaganda is and how it works
- Recognize how the Nazis used propaganda to spread hatred
- Analyze propaganda techniques and their effects
- Understand the dangers of believing lies and spreading hatred
- Recognize propaganda and misinformation in the modern world
- Understand the importance of critical thinking and seeking truth
- Recognize the power of standing up for what's right

Lesson 1: The Rise of Hitler and the Power of Propaganda

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will understand how propaganda was used to gain power and spread hatred.

Materials:

- World map showing Europe 1930s-1940s
- Timeline poster (1918-1945)
- Chart paper and markers
- Images of propaganda posters (age-appropriate)
- Photos of Howard Melton (from Stories of Strength document)
- Lesson 1 Student Handout

Instructional Sequence:

HOOK

Ask: "What is propaganda? Has anyone ever heard that word before? Propaganda is when someone spreads messages—through posters, videos, or stories—to make people believe something, even if it's not true. Today we're going to learn how propaganda was used during the Holocaust and how we can recognize propaganda today."

Take 2-3 responses. Say: "We're also going to learn about Howard Melton, a man from our community who lived through the Holocaust and learned to stand up against lies and hatred."

MINI-LESSON: GERMANY AFTER WORLD WAR I

Explain: "To understand how propaganda worked, we need to understand what Germany was like in the 1920s and 1930s."

After World War I ended in 1918, Germany was in terrible condition. The country had lost the war. Millions of soldiers had died. The economy was destroyed. People had no jobs. Families couldn't afford food. People felt humiliated and angry.

In 1933, a man named Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party promised to make Germany great again. He told people that Germany's problems weren't because of the war or bad economic decisions. He blamed Jewish people. He said Jewish people were controlling the banks, the media, and the government. None of this was true.

But Hitler was a powerful speaker. He told people what they wanted to hear. He promised to restore Germany's power and pride. People who were desperate and afraid believed him."

Create a timeline on the board:

Year	What Happened	Impact
1918	World War I ends. Germany loses.	National humiliation. Economic collapse.
1929	Great Depression begins	Economic crisis. Mass unemployment. Desperation.
1933	Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor	End of democracy. Beginning of totalitarianism.

WHAT IS PROPAGANDA?

Explain: "Propaganda is a way of spreading messages to make people believe something. Propaganda can use:

- Lies and exaggerations
- Emotional language instead of facts
- Repetition—saying the same thing over and over until people believe it
- Simple answers to complex problems
- Blaming one group of people for all problems
- Fear and threats

Propaganda works by:

- Controlling what information people see and hear
- Making people feel strong emotions (anger, fear, pride)
- Making people feel like they're part of a group
- Making people distrust other sources of information

The Nazis were very good at propaganda. They controlled newspapers, radio, movies, and schools. They made sure people only heard Nazi messages."

HOW THE NAZIS USED PROPAGANDA

Explain: "Hitler and the Nazis used propaganda in ways that had never been done before. They controlled newspapers, radio, movies, and schools. They created posters, films, and speeches designed to spread hatred of Jewish people and make people believe Nazi ideas.

The Nazis had a Minister of Propaganda named Joseph Goebbels whose job was to control what people thought. He said: 'If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.'

The Nazis spread lies about Jewish people. They said Jewish people were:

- Controlling the banks and making people poor
- Controlling the media and spreading lies
- Lazy and unwilling to work
- Dangerous and evil

None of these things were true. But by repeating these lies over and over, through posters, radio, movies, and schools, the Nazis made many people believe them."

Show age-appropriate propaganda images (if available) and discuss: "What messages do these posters send? What emotions do they try to create? How would seeing these messages everywhere affect what you believe?"

ANTISEMITISM: A LONG HISTORY

Explain: "Antisemitism—hatred of Jewish people—didn't start with Hitler. It had existed in Europe for hundreds of years. Jewish people had been blamed for problems, excluded from certain jobs, forced to live in separate areas, and attacked in violent riots called pogroms.

But Hitler didn't just use existing antisemitism. He weaponized it. He used it as a tool to gain power and unite people against a common enemy. He made antisemitism the center of his political message."

Ask: "Why do you think blaming one group of people is an effective way for a leader to gain power? What does it do to people's thinking?"

Guide students to understand: When people are scared and struggling, they look for someone to blame. A leader who offers a simple answer—even if it's wrong—can be appealing. Blaming one group unites other people against that group.

HOWARD MELTON'S STORY: LIVING THROUGH PROPAGANDA

Read aloud: "Howard Melton was born in 1931 in Kaunas, Lithuania. He lived with his parents and two sisters. His father worked in a shoe factory. Life was simple but difficult.

When Howard was 10 years old, Germany invaded Lithuania. Suddenly, Howard's life changed. The Nazis spread propaganda about Jewish people. They said Jewish people were the cause of Lithuania's problems. They made laws that took away Jewish people's rights.

Howard and his family were forced to wear Stars of David on their clothing. They couldn't go to certain places. They couldn't do certain things. The propaganda made people believe that Jewish people were dangerous and evil—even though Howard and his family were just ordinary people trying to live their lives.

Howard was sent to a concentration camp called Dachau. There, he made a friend named Albert. Together, they helped each other survive. They shared what little food they had. They encouraged each other. They refused to let the Nazis break their spirits.

After the war, Howard came to America. He learned English, married a woman named Evelyn, and had four children. He became a teacher. For the rest of his life, he told his story to schools and communities. He taught people about the dangers of propaganda and hatred. His message was simple: 'Treat others the way you want to be treated.'

Ask: "How did propaganda affect Howard's life? How did the lies the Nazis spread change how people treated Jewish people? What did Howard teach us about standing up against hatred?"

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students complete their handout: "Understanding Propaganda"

Prompts: "Propaganda is... The Nazis used propaganda to... Howard's experience shows that... I can recognize propaganda by..."

CLOSURE

"Propaganda is a powerful tool. The Nazis used propaganda to spread lies and hatred. They made people believe things that weren't true. But Howard Melton's story shows us that we can stand up against propaganda and hatred. We can think critically. We can seek the truth. We can treat others with kindness. Next lesson, we'll learn more about how propaganda works and how to recognize it."

Lesson 2: Recognizing Propaganda and Standing Up for What's Right

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will analyze propaganda techniques and understand the importance of critical thinking and standing up for what's right.

Materials:

- Chart paper and markers
- Lesson 2 Student Handout
- Examples of propaganda (historical and modern, age-appropriate)
- Photos from Stories of Strength document

Instructional Sequence:

REVIEW & HOOK

Quick review: "Last lesson we learned about propaganda and how the Nazis used it to spread hatred. We learned about Howard Melton and how propaganda affected his life. Today we're going to learn how to recognize propaganda and how to stand up against it."

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

Explain: "Propaganda uses specific techniques to make people believe things. Let's learn about these techniques so we can recognize propaganda when we see it."

Create a chart: "Propaganda Techniques"

- **Repetition:** Saying the same message over and over until people believe it
- **Emotional Language:** Using words that make people feel strong emotions (anger, fear, pride) instead of using facts
- **Simplification:** Making complex problems seem simple by blaming one group of people
- **Scapegoating:** Blaming one group for all problems
- **Bandwagon:** Making people feel like everyone believes something, so they should too
- **Authority:** Using powerful leaders or experts to make people believe something
- **Controlling Information:** Making sure people only hear one viewpoint

Ask: "Can you think of examples of these techniques? Where do you see propaganda today?"

HOWARD MELTON'S RESISTANCE THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

Read aloud: "Howard Melton was sent to Dachau concentration camp. The Nazis tried to dehumanize prisoners—to make them feel worthless and break their spirits.

But Howard resisted. He made a friend named Albert. Together, they chose to maintain their humanity. They shared what little food they had. They encouraged each other when things seemed hopeless. They even buried potatoes in secret places so they would have food later. They supported each other emotionally and physically.

This was a form of resistance. By maintaining their friendship and their humanity, Howard and Albert resisted the Nazis' attempt to break them. They refused to believe the propaganda that said they were worthless. They knew they had value. They knew they mattered.

After the war, Howard came to America. He became a teacher and spent his life telling his story. He taught people about the power of friendship, kindness, and standing up for what's right. His message was: 'Treat others the way you want to be treated.'

Ask: "How did Howard resist propaganda? How did friendship help him? What does his story teach us about standing up for what's right?"

CRITICAL THINKING AND SEEKING TRUTH

Explain: "When we see propaganda, we need to think critically. That means:

- Asking questions: Is this true? Where is this information coming from? What evidence supports this?
- Seeking multiple sources: Don't just listen to one viewpoint. Look for different sources of information.
- Recognizing emotions: If a message makes you feel very angry or very afraid, it might be propaganda.
- Checking facts: Look for reliable sources that provide evidence.
- Thinking about who benefits: Who benefits from this message? Who is it trying to hurt?

Critical thinking helps us recognize propaganda and seek the truth."

STANDING UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

Explain: "Howard Melton's story teaches us about standing up for what's right. Even in terrible circumstances, Howard:	Standing up for what's right doesn't always mean big, dramatic actions. Sometimes it means:
• Maintained his humanity and dignity • Helped his friend Albert survive • Refused to believe the propaganda that said he was worthless • After the war, told his story to teach others • Taught people about kindness and standing up against hate	• Refusing to believe lies • Treating others with kindness • Speaking up when you see injustice • Including people who are left out • Seeking the truth • Telling your story You have the power to stand up for what's right. Your voice matters."

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students complete their handout: "Analyzing Propaganda"

Prompts: "This propaganda technique is... It makes people feel... I can recognize this by... I can stand up to propaganda by..."

CLOSURE

"Propaganda is a powerful tool, but we can recognize it and resist it. Howard Melton's story shows us that even in the darkest times, we can maintain our humanity, help others, and stand up for what's right. We can think critically. We can seek the truth. We can treat others with kindness. Next lesson, we'll learn about Yom HaShoah and what it means for us today."

Lesson 3: Yom HaShoah and Our Responsibility

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will understand Yom HaShoah as a commitment to truth and justice, and recognize their responsibility to stand against propaganda and hatred.

Materials:

- Chart paper and markers
- Lesson 3 Student Handout
- Optional: Candle or memorial object
- Photos or names of community members (with permission)

Instructional Sequence:

HOOK

Ask: "What responsibility do we have to remember the Holocaust? How can we use what we've learned about propaganda to prevent future atrocities? Today we're going to explore Yom HaShoah and what it means for us."

Take 2-3 responses. Say: "Yom HaShoah is a day to remember, to honor survivors, and to commit to truth and justice."

MINI-LESSON: YOM HASHOAH AND THE COMMITMENT TO TRUTH

Explain: "Yom HaShoah means 'Day of the Holocaust' in Hebrew. It's a day when Jewish people around the world remember the Holocaust. But it's more than just remembrance. It's a commitment to truth and justice.

When we remember the Holocaust, we're saying: We will not allow propaganda and lies to spread unchecked. We will seek the truth. We will stand up against hatred. We will treat others with kindness and respect."

Create a chart: "What Yom HaShoah Means"

- Remember those who died
- Celebrate survivors and their strength
- Commit to truth and critical thinking
- Stand against propaganda and misinformation
- Treat others with kindness and respect
- Stand up against injustice
- Protect freedom and democracy
- Stay connected to our Jewish identity

SURVIVORS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Explain: "Many Holocaust survivors came to America after the war. They built new lives. They had families. Some are part of our community. Their children and grandchildren are our neighbors, our friends, our community members."

Share: "Howard Melton survived Dachau. He came to America and became a teacher. He spent his life telling his story to schools and communities. He taught people about the dangers of

propaganda and the importance of kindness. His family is part of our community today. When we remember Howard's story, we're honoring his strength and his legacy."

Ask: "Why is it important that survivors are part of our community? What responsibility do we have to their stories? How does knowing Howard's story change how we think about propaganda?"

RECOGNIZING PROPAGANDA TODAY

Explain: "Propaganda didn't end with the Holocaust. We see propaganda today in:

- Social media posts that spread lies
- News sources that only show one viewpoint
- Advertisements that use emotional language instead of facts
- Messages that blame one group for all problems
- Messages that make us feel very angry or very afraid

We can use what we learned about Nazi propaganda to recognize propaganda today. We can:

- Think critically about what we see and hear
- Seek multiple sources of information
- Check facts from reliable sources
- Notice when messages use emotional language
- Question who benefits from a message
- Refuse to spread lies or hatred

By recognizing propaganda, we help prevent the spread of hatred and injustice."

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS THE NEXT GENERATION

Explain: "You are the next generation. Survivors like Howard Melton are not here anymore. But their families are. And you are part of this community. You have inherited their stories and their responsibility.

What does that responsibility mean?

- Learn about the Holocaust and propaganda
- Think critically about information you see and hear
- Seek the truth
- Stand up against propaganda and misinformation
- Treat others with kindness and respect
- Stand up when you see someone being treated unfairly
- Include people who are left out
- Speak up when you see hatred or injustice
- Tell the stories of survivors

You have more power than you might think. Your critical thinking matters. Your voice matters. Your choices matter."

Ask: "What does it mean to be a 'keeper of truth'? How can you carry forward Howard's message? What choices will you make to stand against propaganda and hatred?"

Prepare Students for Respectful Listening:

Say: "We're going to have a special guest who will share their family's story with us. This person's family member survived the Holocaust. We need to be respectful listeners. This is an honor and a responsibility."

Create a chart together: "How to Be a Respectful Listener"

- Listen with your whole heart and mind
- Don't interrupt
- It's okay to feel sad, moved, or emotional—all feelings are valid
- Ask kind and thoughtful questions
- Thank them for sharing
- Remember what they shared
- Respect their experience

Generate Questions Together:

Ask: "What would you like to know about their family's story?"

Write student questions on paper. Guide them toward respectful, thoughtful questions that connect to propaganda and truth.

CLOSURE

"Yom HaShoah is a day to remember, to honor, and to commit to truth and justice. Next lesson, we'll hear directly from someone in our community about their family's story. This person's family survived the Holocaust, and they're going to share what that means to them and what they want us to know."

Lesson 4: Guest Speaker & Reflection

Objective: Students will listen respectfully to a community member's family story and reflect on their responsibility to stand against propaganda and hatred.

Materials:

- Guest speaker (relative of Howard Melton or another Holocaust survivor from the community)

POST-VISIT REFLECTION DISCUSSION

Ask students:

- "What did you learn from the guest's story?"
- "How did that story make you feel?"
- "What will you remember about this story?"
- "How does knowing this story change how you think about propaganda?"
- "What did the survivor's family member teach us?"
- "What responsibility do you feel after hearing this story?"

ACTIVITY: REFLECTION LETTER

Students write a reflection letter to the guest speaker using sentence stems:

"Dear [Guest Name],

Thank you for sharing your family's story with us. I learned that _____. Your story made me feel _____. I will remember _____ forever. This story teaches me that _____. I promise to _____.

Sincerely,
[Student Name]"

CLOSURE

"Our community is strong because of survivors and their families. When we remember their stories, when we think critically about propaganda, when we stand up against hatred—we're honoring their strength and their legacy. You are the next generation. You have the power to recognize propaganda, seek the truth, and stand up for what's right. Thank you for listening with your whole hearts and minds."

Trauma Informed Teaching Notes

Throughout All Lessons:

- **Emphasize resilience, resistance, and agency**, not victimization
- **Use respectful language** and avoid graphic descriptions
- **Focus on what people did** (survived, resisted, helped each other, stood up for what's right) rather than what was done to them
- **Normalize emotions:** "It's okay to feel sad, angry, or moved when we learn about injustice."
- **Provide safety:** "These terrible things happened a long time ago. You are safe."
- **Have support available** for students who become upset

If a Student Asks Difficult Questions:

Q: "How did people believe the propaganda?"

A: "That's a great question. When people are scared, angry, or feel like things aren't fair, they look for someone to blame. A powerful leader who offers simple answers—even if they're wrong—can be appealing. This is why it's important for us to think critically, to ask questions, to seek out different sources of information, and to stand up when we see someone blaming a whole group of people."

Q: "Could this happen again?"

A: "That's an important question. History shows us that when people ignore warning signs—when they allow propaganda to spread, when they don't speak up against injustice—terrible things can happen. But it also shows us that people have the power to prevent it. When we think critically, when we seek the truth, when we speak up for what's right—we help prevent atrocities."