

Lesson Plans: Propaganda and the Chinese Cultural Revolution

Rationale for study: The following lessons are designed to be used within a larger unit on the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As students embark on the following exploration and inquiry, they already have a general understanding of the political and cultural forces that erupted into the Cultural Revolution and these lessons are designed to help students deepen their understanding of the role of propaganda within this larger historical context. These lessons are constructivist in their approach as students are required to examine and analyze visual texts and other primary sources and draw conclusions about the power of propaganda and images to mold people's perception of reality, mobilize them to action and to draw inferences about the larger political and cultural climate that gave birth to those images. By the end of this study students will have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the images, symbols, colors and themes specific to this historical period in China.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will develop a deeper understanding of the values, the political and cultural environment of China during the Cultural Revolution by examining primary texts, images, symbols and visuals such as propaganda
- Students will understand the power of propaganda and its effectiveness as a persuasive tool and will develop an appreciation of the power of images to influence people's perception of reality and mobilize them to political action within a specific historical context
- Students will apply close reading and inference skills as they examine primary and visual texts and other sources and produce oral arguments and expository writing
- Students will draw conclusions about a historical and political period by examining primary sources
- Students will produce a compelling analysis of the imagery and symbolism and other propaganda techniques and draw connections to the historical context of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in a clear and coherent expository essay

Materials:

- *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art by Mao Zedong*, Chinese propaganda posters, Handout A, online sources: www.chineseposters.com, www.morningsun.org, www.iisg.nl/landsberger, www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/index.htm and other websites, chart paper, student journals, textbook: World History Modern Times

Day 1: Reading "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art"

Focus Question: What did Mao propose was the relationship between art and politics? What were the artistic principles espoused by Mao and what are the larger political and cultural consequences of these rules/principles?

- Teacher asks students the question: What role does artistic expression have in our society? What are some of the purposes of art in our culture? Students brainstorm ideas with a partner and then offer responses as a class
- Teacher tells students that today we will explore these questions as we read one of Mao's writings and learn about his musings on the questions we discussed and explore these questions within the historical context of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.
- Teacher passes out primary text: *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art* and students preview the text: read title, introduction, topic sentences, conclusion so as to get a general sense of the arguments and flow of the text.
- Students are divided into small groups and each group is assigned a section of the text to do a close read of that section only. Each group is assigned a section of the text (Teacher chunks the text into sections and groups students before class).
- In their small group, students highlight, circle key words, write their reactions to the text as they discuss the main gist of their section. As a group, their task is to summarize key arguments/points in a few sentences and/or bullet points. Their task is to be concise and brief in their statements. Students will record their statements on chart paper, post this and present their conclusions to the class
- Teacher leads the entire group in a discussion around the following questions: What is Mao Zedong advocating for in this essay? Why is he advocating for this? What is the purpose of art according to Mao? What does he mean that art can be correct in orientation? What are some of the implications of his view within larger historical context of Chinese Cultural Revolution?

Assessment: Teacher informally assesses group responses and their answers to the discussion questions

Day 2: Propaganda during the Chinese Cultural Revolution

Focus Question: How was propaganda art used during the Chinese Cultural Revolution? How did it work to influence people's perceptions of reality? How did propaganda posters reflect the values and ideas espoused by Mao and what does this reveal about the cultural and political climate within China during the great Cultural Revolution?

- Teacher begins the class by showing students one to two propaganda posters used during the Cultural Revolution. These posters can be acquired from website: www.chineseposters.com
www.iisg.nl/landsberger
- Teacher presents the following questions to students: What is being depicted in each image? What is happening? What message is being offered and how is this message conveyed visually—think about the use of colors, symbols, size, expressions, exaggeration, juxtapositions? Students write out responses for each poster answering the questions in their journals and then engage in a large group discussion. Teacher facilitates the discussion by assisting students to look at both the aesthetics of the poster and effectiveness of its message
- Teacher explains that these posters were produced and regulated by Mao and Communist party during the Chinese Cultural Revolution and as such, are examples of PROPAGANDA and that today they will be learning about the purpose and effectiveness of propaganda art during the Cultural Revolution and the power of images to affect people's perceptions and enforce compliance during this tumultuous political period in China.
- Students will work in small groups to explore and examine 2-3 posters issued by teacher. Each group will examine/explore the same questions for each poster and teacher further assists their examination by presenting the following questions: What action might this poster inspire? What deeper values do these images point to? Is this propaganda? How do you know? What rules are at work in the creation of such propaganda? What images are most appealing? Explain with concrete details from each poster. What images, colors, symbols move you? Is this effective propaganda?
- Students examine each poster and gather evidence for their observations. Groups write out responses to these questions in handout A. Students will select one poster and will present their conclusions and observations along with the selected poster to the class.

- Teacher debriefs the group work by pointing out some of the patterns/themes particular to the Chinese Cultural Revolution such as the colors, the red book, the exaltation of the workers, peasants and soldiers, glorification of Mao, etc. and discuss the purpose of these images and their effectiveness in influencing people's perception of reality and mobilize them to action.
- In small groups, students continue their study of propaganda art by examining propaganda posters from other historical periods in China and/or the Cultural Revolution by visiting online websites: www.chineseposters.com, www.morningsun.org, www.iisg.nl/landsberger and other web resources. Each group will select one propaganda poster and they will compare/contrast this poster to one selected from their previous group work and submit a compare/contrast expository two paragraph writing piece
- Students summarize their conclusions/findings in journal: what did they learn about propaganda, its purposes, techniques, effectiveness and themes during the Cultural Revolution in China?

Assessment: Teacher will assess group responses in handout A, expository writing piece and journal entries. All work will be assessed according to accuracy of observations and quality of thought

Day 3: Culminating Task

- Teacher begins the class by showing a clip of a propaganda video used during the Cultural Revolution. Students discuss the following questions: Based on our study of propaganda, is this an example of propaganda? What images are included? Is it effective? Rate the effectiveness of the message and images included. Students brainstorm responses in journals and then offer their responses in a class discussion
- Students will now begin their final work on propaganda and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Student will select a propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution period and will analyze the imagery, symbols and other propaganda techniques and elements we have discussed in previous lessons in a well written expository essay. In order to complete this assignment students will use their work from previous lessons, class textbooks and web resources to research the images selected and explain their significance within the larger historical context of the Cultural

Revolution. Students will evaluate both the historical significance of the symbols and images and the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the images as propaganda

- Students will research, think and write during this class session and will ultimately produce their final writing piece.

Assessment: Students will be assessed by the accuracy and thoughtfulness of their arguments in expository essay