Art and Warfare Introduction Video Transcript

Propaganda played a key role in motivating and maintaining support for the war effort during the second world war, and poster art was one of its key tools. It is estimated that in the U.S. alone, more than 200,000 different posters were produced during the second war, each country used posters as an inexpensive and striking device to convey the messages that would best promote the party's agenda, while reflecting the culture and values of its people.

While few of the artists that created the art are known today, the creators, as graphic artists were keenly aware of the tools at their disposal to deliver the messages convincingly.

In a sense, propaganda was, and still is, a type of advertising. It aims to sell, an idea, an ideology, by appealing to our emotions, our sense of belonging (to a country, a party, etc.) and engaging us as active participants (real or perceived) in the cause at hand. As you explore the art of propaganda from WWII, you may recognize visual devices still used in advertising today. How do these characteristics engage you, as a viewer? How might it have affected the population at that time? What visual devices reinforce the words of the message?

In this lesson we will first look at how different countries and parties used design to promote their messages. We will look at the role of culture, ideology and also shape, proportion, angle, viewer engagement, overt and subliminal messages and symbolism, as we analyze what makes a successful propaganda poster.