

Rudi Florian: Propaganda and Personal Responsibility



TOPIC

Propaganda and Analysis

GRADE LEVEL

9th-10th grade

DURATION

45 minutes

SUBJECT AREA

Holocaust Studies
Genocide Studies
Character Education
History Social Science
Civics & Government

DESCRIPTION OF THE LESSON

In this activity, students will recognize the dangerous power of propaganda. They will explore the effects of propaganda through the study of antisemitism in Nazi Germany. Students will watch and analyze testimony from two individuals who share their experiences with antisemitic propaganda in Nazi Germany and the influence that it had on children. Students will then reflect on the importance of asking questions and considering an alternative point of view. By the end of this activity, students will understand the power of language and images to propagate antisemitism and racism. They will also understand their responsibility as global citizens in discerning between factual information and propaganda.

This activity contains testimony from Rudi Florian, a German eyewitness during World War II and Esther Clifford, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust.

To experience this program, schedule a lesson with a [Mizel Museum](https://mizelmuseum.org) educator, who will virtually engage with your students. Contact Details@MizelMuseum.org to book.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary and/or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

MATERIALS

- Teaching Materials:
 - Paper and pen
 - Audio-visual equipment (projector and speakers)
- Handouts
 - Three images from the children's magazine, *Der Giftpilz (Poisonous Mushroom)*
 - [Student Handout- School Children and Nazi Germany](#)
 - [Student Handout- Children's Book Cover](#)
 - [Student Handout- Caricature of a Jew with Aryan Children](#)
 - [Student Handout- Hitler Youth Overview](#)
- Clips of Testimony and Biographies
 - Rudi Florian- Witnessing Propaganda (1:08)
 - Rudi Florian- Message to Students (1:03)
 - Esther Clifford- Impact of Propaganda (1:45)

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of this lesson, students will...

- Identify propaganda and its effects on an individual
- Analyze audiovisual testimony
- Reflect on the importance of considering an alternative perspective and demonstrating civic responsibility

Consider

Definition: To begin, project the word “propaganda” for all students and call on volunteers to share what they already know about the term. (Note: If using a digital platform like Zoom, share your screen and have students respond in the chat box.) To clarify the definition of propaganda for students, share the following definition from Echoes & Reflections:

Propaganda: *false or partly false information intended to shape people’s opinions and actions that fulfills the propagandist’s intent*

Key Characteristics:

- Repeats the same information over and over
- Often twists and exploits the truth
- Appeals to people’s emotions
- Gives the illusion that most people agree with the message
- Talks to people in their own language
- Uses accessible media (e.g., newspaper, radio)

Think Write Share: Next, ask students to reflect on the definition of propaganda and its key characteristics and consider the short/long term impacts propaganda may have on an individual or society. Have them write their ideas in their journal. Then, call on student volunteers to share their thoughts with the whole group.

Analysis of Nazi Propaganda: Now, have students consider examples of antisemitic propaganda in Nazi Germany and its effects on children. Begin by providing them the following definition of antisemitism: *prejudice or discrimination against Jews. Antisemitism can be based on hatred against Jews because of their religious beliefs or their group membership (ethnicity), but also on the erroneous belief that Jews are a race. Nazi antisemitism was racial in nature; Jews were viewed as racially inferior to Aryans and destructive of the world order.*

Then, project three images from the children’s magazine, *Der Giftpilz (Poisonous Mushroom)* that promoted Nazi ideology/antisemitism in schools. Ask students to choose one image and analyze the message it promotes and how it may have affected children. (Note: If using a digital space, “Share Screen” to present the images to students.)

Use the following questions to help guide students’ analysis.

- What do you see in this image?
- What might be the message this image was trying to convey to its viewers?
- How do you think this image might have affected young children?

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Brief History Hitler Youth: Next, have students read and annotate a secondary source, “Hitler Youth” focusing on key points that demonstrate the effect of Nazi propaganda on Hitler Youth. Answer any clarifying questions students may have about the reading.

Reflection: Now that students have examined these sources, ask them to add new insights they may have on the short/long term impact of propaganda in their journal.

Collect

Audiovisual Testimony: Next, tell students that they will hear from two individuals who will describe their exposure to antisemitic propaganda. Through their stories, students will reflect on how antisemitic propaganda was used to influence the beliefs of children within Nazi Germany at this time.

Testimony 1 - Rudi Florian: To begin, have students watch a clip of testimony from Rudi Florian, a German eyewitness of World War II, who shares his childhood reflections of antisemitism during school and how his parents encouraged him to consider alternative views. Have students read his biography to learn more about his background and life story. Then, have them watch his testimony twice. Follow the guidelines below to prepare students for viewing this testimony.

- **First Viewing** Have students watch Rudi’s testimony all the way through with their pencils down, listening closely to how he describes his experience. Then, have students describe how Rudi’s school experience was an example of propaganda.
- **Second Viewing** Have students watch Rudi’s testimony again. This time, ask them to reflect on the importance of considering alternative views/perspectives. Have them write their thoughts in their journal.

Testimony 2 – Esther Clifford: Next, have students watch a clip of testimony from Esther Clifford, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, who shares her childhood memory of antisemitic propaganda in Nazi Germany and how it personally impacted her. Have students read her biography to learn more about her background and life story. Then, have them watch her testimony twice. Follow the guidelines below to prepare students for viewing this testimony.

- **First Viewing** Have students watch Esther’s testimony all the way through with their pencils down. Then, have students describe Esther’s experience.
- **Second Viewing** Have students watch Esther’s testimony once again. This time, ask them to reflect on the impact of propaganda on Esther and to write their thoughts in their journal.

Discussion: Now that students have explored these two examples, have them think about the long-term impact that propaganda can have if it goes unchecked. Have them consider the recourse and reach propaganda can have once it spreads. Then, call on student volunteers to share their thoughts with the whole group. (Note: If using a digital platform like Zoom, share your screen and have students respond in the chat box.)

Construct

Reflection: Student will listen to a second clip of testimony from Rudi Florian in which he shares a message to students about the importance of learning about the Holocaust, as well as about the importance of questioning information. After watching the clip once, ask them to reflect on Rudi's message and what he means by "responsible."

Personal Responses: Next, explain to students that propaganda is still prevalent in our world, including antisemitic and racist propaganda. Ask if anyone has encountered such messaging on their social media, in films/books or via other multimedia. Allow students to share, as time permits. Then, have them consider how their new understanding will influence their actions if and/or when they come across such messaging. Ask: "What would you do if you encountered antisemitic or racist propaganda? Why?" Have them write their responses in their journal.

Communicate

Gallery Walk: Have students share their reflections with their peers. This may be done as a gallery walk or students may present their reflections. (Note: If using Zoom, students can hold up their work to their camera for a "Zoom Gallery Walk," use the Zoom Chat function to share their reflections or they may share their work via Zoom camera/audio.)

Final Reflection: Close the discussion about the statements by asking: "How can your actions help counter hate-based propaganda more widely?"

Additional Teacher Notes

Using this lesson on Zoom:

- **Zoom Share Screen** If using this lesson with Zoom and a slideshow, use Zoom Share Screen function to share your slideshow presentation with students and to play clips of testimony embedded in your presentation.
- **Zoom Chat** Have students write their individual reflections using their own journal. When asked to share their reflections with the whole group, have student use the Zoom Chat feature.

If students need additional context about Nazi ideology and antisemitism, have them read the supplemental student handouts from Echoes & Reflections listed here:

- [Student Handout- Nazi Ideology](#) (Echoes & Reflections)
- [Student Handout- Antisemitism](#) (Echoes & Reflections)

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Biography

Rudi Florian

Rudi Florian was born on May 25, 1934, in Schneidemühl, Germany (now Piła, Poland). His parents were devout Catholics and did not support the Nazi party. The family owned a butcher shop. In school, Rudi was taught Nazi propaganda which emphasized the antisemitic views of the Nazis. Through propaganda and indoctrination, the Nazis used two youth groups, the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, to shape the thoughts, views and activities of “Aryan” children. Children aged ten to fourteen were expected to join the Young Volk or the Young Girls’ League; youth age fourteen to eighteen were expected to join the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls. Rudi’s parents were opposed to the Hitler Youth, and after Rudi attended a few sessions, they made up an excuse to keep him from attending the meetings and being a member of the youth group. Towards the end of World War II, as the Allies were nearing Germany, Rudi’s family fled to Poland. They lived in Poland from February 1945 until November 1945, when they moved to East Berlin. The family later moved to West Berlin. With the end of the war, Rudi’s family’s home in Schneidemühl was now inside the new borders of Poland, and the family could not return there. Rudi emigrated to Canada in 1956; he was sponsored by a friend in the United States and moved to Chicago. He was drafted into the US Air Force and served from 1957 through 1987. Later, Rudi was a committed docent and educator of Holocaust education at the New Mexico Holocaust Museum. After moving to Denver, Colorado, Rudi became a presenter for students at the Mizel Museum. This interview was conducted by the Mizel Museum in Denver, Colorado, on December 26, 2016.



Esther Clifford

Esther Clifford was born in Munich, Germany on December 5, 1920, although her family moved to Frankfurt the next year. She had three sisters, Regina, Mary, and Rosa, and one brother, Leo. Esther’s parents were originally from Poland. Her father owned a leather goods store, which earned them a modest living until 1936, when Esther’s father’s business permit was denied because he was Jewish. Esther remembers a happy childhood where she loved to sing and dance and aspired to be a Hollywood movie star. Although they often attended Yiddish services at their synagogue, Esther and her siblings preferred to worship in German. In 1926, Esther entered school. Not long after, her parents became mildly worried about the rise of Hitler and Nazism. In 1933, Esther remembers reading antisemitic propaganda and witnessing public book burnings. By 1934, Esther was forced to leave school because the presence of the Hitler Youth had made it too dangerous for her to attend. In 1938, Esther and her family were arrested along with other Polish Jews and deported. She was separated from her parents and two siblings during a forced march, and was sent to a nearby makeshift prison from which she escaped. Afterwards she returned to Frankfurt, retrieved some of her family’s possessions, and hid in the attic of her family’s apartment for a couple of months before being discovered and forced to sign the apartment over to Nazi officials. Eventually, she was able to secure a visa to England, where she met her future husband, Rudi, who was also a German-Jewish refugee. In 1948, Esther and Rudi immigrated to the United States. She was interviewed in Cranbury, New Jersey on November 3, 1996.

