



## MEDIA LITERACY ACTIVITY GUIDE

**PURPOSE:** This guide developed by the Georgia Historical Society is meant to support development of critical thinking skills through media literacy and explore the rise of mass media during the Cold War and the Late 20th Century.

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# **WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER TO HISTORY?**

## **MEDIA LITERACY:**

Media literacy is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create various forms of communication.

## **MEDIA LITERACY AND SOCIAL STUDIES:**

Media literacy is a set of real-world skills for navigating a complex media landscape that includes newspapers, radio, television, film, and social media. Media literacy requires curiosity, research, and problem solving and promotes critical thinking. It supports the development of smart consumers who are able to manage wide varieties of information and helps people become engaged and effective citizens.

## **HISTORICAL LITERACY:**

Historical literacy is the practice of studying the past through various perspectives and points of view. Like historical literacy, media literacy aims to help learners' question dominant stories, conduct effective research, and form evidence-based conclusions.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT:**

Media literacy was first introduced during the rise of mass media and television in the 1960s as traditional education shifted from solely focusing on ancient and classical texts to also using current events and popular culture to teach lessons.

Over the last 50-60 years media literacy has evolved from a time when students who brought newspapers to class would have them confiscated by a teacher, to a time where most students have access to overwhelming amounts of information via the internet and technology in classrooms on a daily basis.

## SPOT THE AD

**(2nd-5th, 6-8th)**

Students use observational and analytical skills to distinguish between an advertisement and a real-life event through primary sources.

Review the terms “advertisement” and “brand” with students. Advertisements are meant to promote products, services, or events. A brand is a type of product, service, or event that is created by a particular company. Review examples with students by asking them where they might see advertisements (television, billboards, internet, magazines, stores, etc.) Review branding with students by asking them what products they like and what brands make those products (food and drink, clothing, games, etc.)

Present each pair of sources and ask students to decide which one is a staged advertisement and which one is an image of real life. Guide their analysis with the following questions:

- How can you tell which one is the advertisement?
- Can you find a brand name? What does that tell you?
- Can you always tell if it’s an advertisement or not?



"Blotter," 1945. From the Georgia Historical Society collection of World War II papers and other materials, MS 1548.



"241 Drayton Street, Savannah, Ga.," 1938. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



“Savannah Benne Candy Co. Ad, Savannah, Ga.,” 1948. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



“17 Bull Street, Savannah, Ga.,” 1940. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



"Friedman Jewelers Ad, Savannah, Ga.," 1939. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



"Friedman's Jewelers," 1954. From the Hoyt D. Jordan photograph collection at the Georgia Historical Society.



"Independent Taxi Service Ad, Savannah, Ga.," 1934. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



Jiggetts, Martha, and Susan Levitas. Martha Jiggetts behind the wheel of a taxi. United States New Jersey Paterson, 1994.-08-18. Photograph. Library of Congress.



Bain News Service, Publisher. Starting a Ferret After Rats, undated. Photograph. Library of Congress.



"Ike's Rat-Glu Ad, Savannah, Ga.," 1934. From the Foltz Photography Studio photographs collection at the Georgia Historical Society, MS 1360.



# FACT VS OPINION

**(4th-5th, 6th-8th, 9th-12th)**

Newspaper articles or news broadcasts can contain both fact and opinion and often there is not a clear distinction between the two. Although news stories should not contain opinions, there are parts of the newspaper and segments on broadcast news in which opinions are allowed, for example editorial columns, letters from the public, and commentary from hosts and guests on news entertainment programs.

Students should be equipped to distinguish between fact and opinion.

Discuss the difference between fact and opinion with students. Review examples. Explain that news articles or segments should be based in facts without the personal opinion of the journalist. Explain that some things you read or hear on the news are based in opinion and note that editorial pages or opinion-based news is often about presenting different points of view on a topic that may be subjective.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What are facts?
- What are opinions?
- How can you tell them apart?

To practice discerning fact from opinion, students should read, watch, or listen to an opinion-based news piece such as an editorial from a newspaper. Students should write down or underline as many claims or facts that they can find in the article.

One by one, students should review each statement and determine which are accurate facts that are provable and which statements are potentially false and based on opinion. If students are unsure if it is fact or opinion, they can search for other sources on the topic to find out if the information is confirmed or refuted.

**ASSESSMENT:** Students write an analysis of the news piece based on their assessment.

Student-friendly opinion pieces can be found through the following resources:

- Opinion Page, *TIME for Kids*. <https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/sections/opinion/>
- Student Opinion, The Learning Network from *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-student-opinion>
- Political Cartoons and Public Debates primary source set, Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/political-cartoons-and-public-debates/>

# LATERAL READING

**(6th-8th, 9th-12th)**

Lateral reading (as opposed to vertical reading) is the act of verifying what you're reading as you're reading it. Instead of staying with one website or article, you open multiple tabs in your browser to follow links found within the source and do searches online for facts, names, organizations, or topics you find in the article you are reading. This additional information will help you evaluate the original article for bias or false information.

- Students should read a current event article from a news outlet such as a local newspaper. (Choose any article you or they would like to read.)
- Fact-check the article through the ART of reading laterally and assess its bias with the lateral reading strategy by conducting searches (opening new tabs in a browser) regarding the facts, opinions, and other details presented.
- Create a report explaining your findings.

To check on the truth and accuracy of a source, fact-checkers assess an article by conducting online searches and practicing the ART of reading laterally. (Adapted from a lesson by Gail Desler and Kathleen Watt, EGUSD Digital Citizenship)

**AUTHOR:** Who is the author of the site/article and is there a motive behind the message? What can you learn about the author? What biases might the author have?

**RELIABILITY:** How recent is the site/article? When was it published or last updated? What do other fact-checking sites (Snopes, Wikipedia, [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org/)) say about the author and their claim?

**TARGET:** Who is the intended audience and why is the author targeting them? What does the author want their target to believe, take a stand against, support, and/or purchase?

Student-friendly news sites for finding current event articles:

- Current Events, The Learning Network from *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/learning-current-events>
- Student News Daily. <https://www.studentnewsdaily.com/>
- NBC News Learn (videos). <https://www.youtube.com/Nbclearn/videos>
- Kids News – Current Events, DOGO News. <https://www.dogonews.com/>

**ASSESSMENT:** Create a news report to share your findings. This could be in the format of a written report or an oral “newscast.”

# ASSESSING POINT OF VIEW AND AUDIENCE IN PROPAGANDA

**(9th-12th)**

Propaganda is a method of spreading information and ideas with bias. Propaganda as a governmental and media tool first became common in the United States during World War I when posters and media were published to support troop enlistment, sway public opinion towards the war, and vilify the country's enemies. Propaganda as a political tool aims to spread particular points of view and seeks support or favor from its audience.

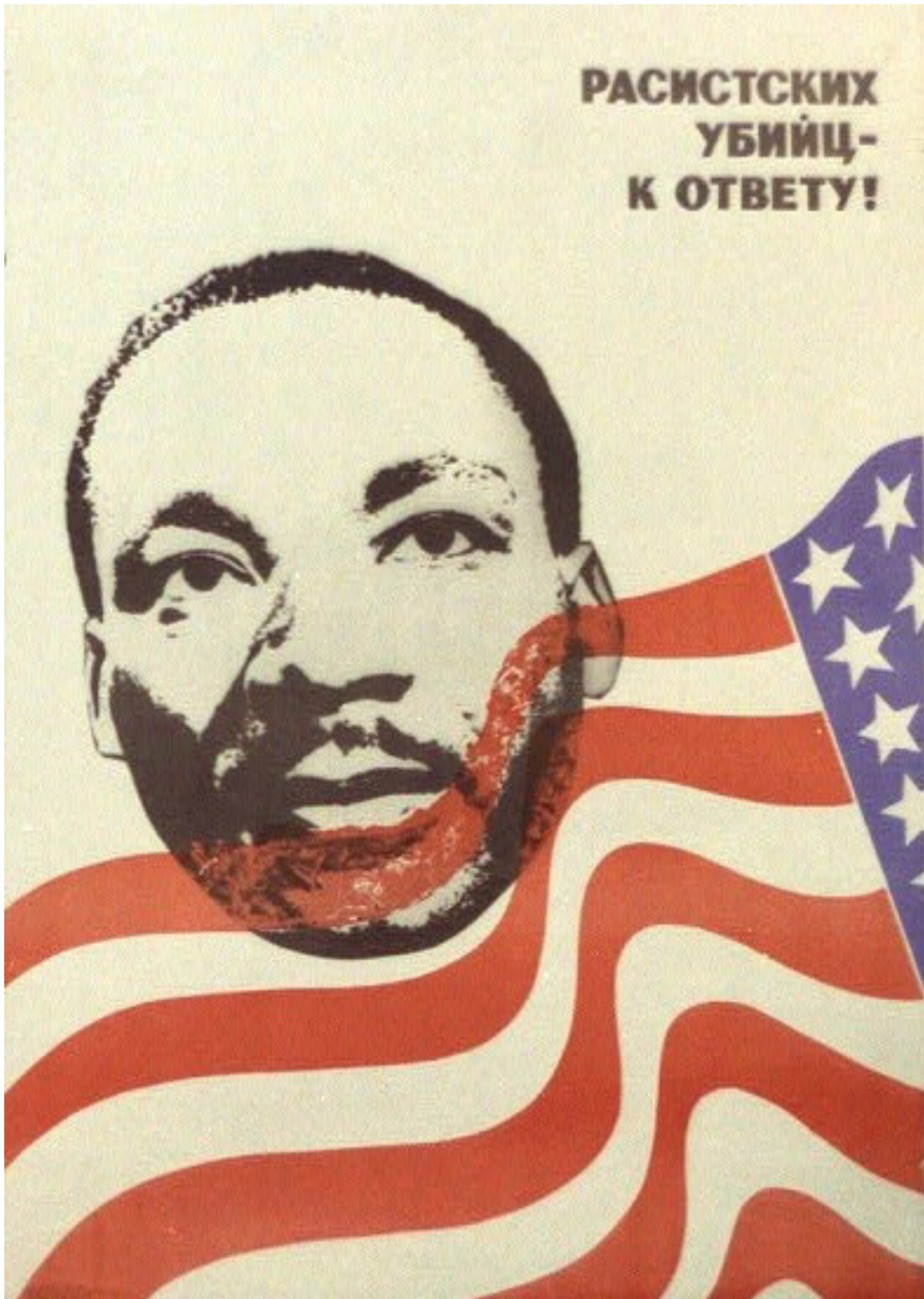
Students should analyze a propaganda poster or video from a time period or topic you are studying. Use the following criteria to assess the piece of propaganda:

- What is the ad “selling” or what is its overall message or point of view?
- Who is the target audience for the ad?
- What objective facts are included in the message?
- What subjective opinions are included in the message?
- What symbols, words, phrases, or design elements are used to “sell” the message?
- What details illustrate biases in the message or point of view?
- Is the message clear? Would the intended audience support the message, why or why not?

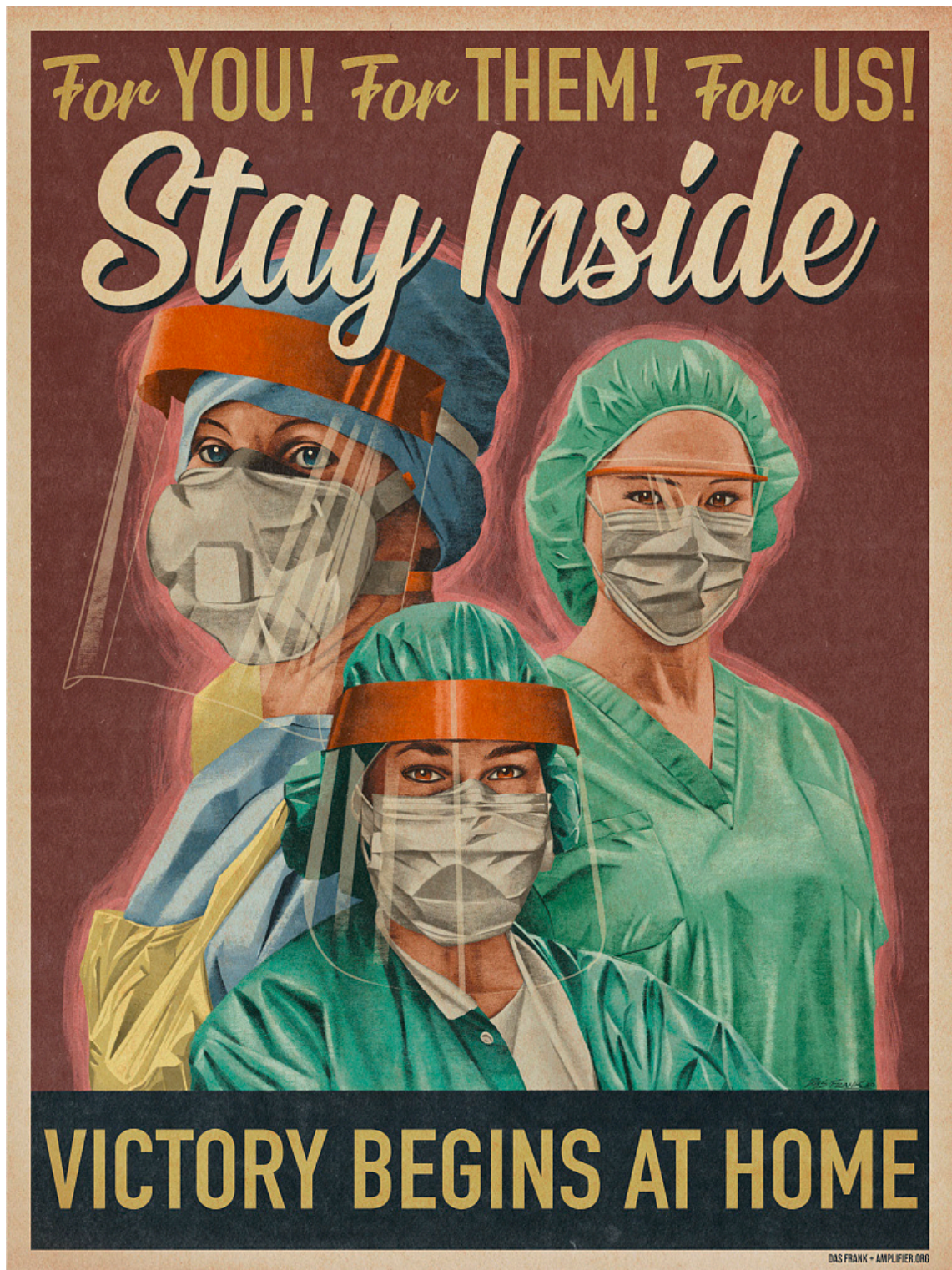
Suggested pieces of propaganda to be assessed:



Irakli Toidze, "In the Name of Peace," Soviet space travel and support for peace. From the Museum of Cosmonautics, Moscow.



Fedotov, A. (1968). "Rasistskikh ubiits — k otvetu!" Sov. Khudozhnik. Library of Congress.



Frank, Das, Artist, Sponsor Amplifier, and Publisher Amplifier. For YOU! For THEM! For US! Stay Inside. Victory Begins at Home., 2020. [Seattle: Amplifier] Photograph. Library of Congress.



# GIs United Against the War. Ft. Jackson.

## Fighting men.



GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee, Sponsor/Advertiser. GIs united against the war, Ft. Jackson. Fighting men. South Carolina United States Fort Jackson, 1969. [New York, N.Y.: GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee] Photograph. Library of Congress.