

Lesson Plan 6

The Ethics of Propaganda

Examine the ethics of propaganda through examining the short and long-term consequences from the point of view of the producer and the consumer

Rationale

Each of us applies a moral compass when it comes to the contemporary propaganda we come across in daily life. We can evaluate the ethical dimensions of propaganda by thinking about its impact in the short-term and over a longer period of time and we can assess propaganda's impact by considering the point of view of the producer, the consumer and the society. In this lesson, students share their ideas about the ethics of propaganda by exploring two case studies and using an extemporaneous online public speaking tool to share their ideas in a public forum.

Essential Question

What are the short- and long-term consequences of living in a world full of propaganda?

Learning Outcomes & Key Messages

- Reflect on diverse interpretations of media messages in ways that promote understanding of and respect for others' perspectives
- Consider ethical dimension of propaganda from multiple points of view
- Consider the short- and long-term consequences of propaganda to appreciate how it might be beneficial or harmful

Preparation

In a low-tech classroom, make copies of Worksheets 6.1 and 6.2 for all students. In a high-tech classroom, use a projector for video display and then enable students to work online, using a computer, to use [FlipGrid](#), an extemporaneous online public speaking tool that requires no special login or account. The computers must have a video camera option in order to complete the high-tech activity.

Two Case Studies

These two case studies have distinctively coded messages about gender. You may use the "Dove Beauty Patch" as a whole-class model and then have students work independently to analyze "American Sniper." Or you may choose to have girls and boys break into two teams; each team analyzes one of the messages, followed by whole group discussion. Use these case studies to explore the short- and long-term positive and negative consequences of contemporary propaganda on individuals and society.

Activity 6.1. The Ethics of “Dove Beauty Patch”

The Beauty Patch

View: <http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/694>

This 4-minute Dove commercial which illustrates one of the company’s beauty campaigns, “Beauty Patch.” This campaign tricked women into thinking that the patch contained a special formula that would make them feel confident and beautiful; as long as they wore the patch, their confidence and beauty would shine.

Q: What was Dove’s intended message?

A: You don’t need the patch to feel beautiful.

Q: What did you like about the commercial?

A: Answers will vary. The commercial features real women with real confidence issues; it offers true insight into the struggles that women face when it comes to body image; sheds light on the issue of body image and makes it a relevant and important conversation; the overall message seems positive.

Q: What did you dislike about the commercial?

A: Answers will vary. It makes women look like they are vulnerable, helpless human beings who are easily tricked. Why does the company manipulate women in order to make them feel good about themselves? Although there is an admirable message, the company is not altruistic. They are promoting their brand.

Review the Activity presented on Worksheet 6.1 which introduces the definition of ‘ethics’ and invites students to reflect on short- and long-term consequences of the ad from two different points of view. Invite students to work individually, with a partner or in a small group to complete the chart on Worksheet 6.1.

ANSWERS TO WORKSHEET 6.1 “Dove Beauty Patch”

What are the long- and short-term ethical consequences for the company, viewers and society?

| | BEAUTY COMPANY | VIEWERS | SOCIETY |
|------------|---|---|--|
| Short-Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate sales • Increases the sense of the “company as hero “ or “savior” • Links company to the cause of improving self-esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short burst of positive feeling • Feel the urge to support company by buying something | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutralizes criticism of the industry as activating or exploiting women’s fears and insecurities |
| Long-Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of trust in the company brand and message. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel manipulated, taken advantage of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains the status quo beauty culture |

Activity 6.2. The Ethics of “American Sniper”

American Sniper – Film Trailer

VIEW: <http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/735>

This film trailer promotes a Warner Brothers film – a true story -- about Chris Kyle, a soldier working in Iraq for the special forces as a sniper. The film trailer introduces us to the character and encourages us to identify with the sniper as he considers whether to kill. The film also hints at the contradictions between the soldier’s life as a sniper and his life back at home, as a husband and father.

Q: What was Clint Eastwood’s intended message?

A: We are introduced to an actor playing the role of real-life Chris Kyle, the most lethal sniper in U.S. history, who killed more than 250 people in Iraq. We are brought into the suspense and anticipation in the moment of the sniper’s decision to shoot and kill.

Q: What did you like about the film trailer?

A: Answers will vary. It’s suspenseful and the feeling of anticipation creates tingles. We are offered flashbacks – or flashforwards? – of Kyle’s home life in the United States, including scenes that suggest the birth of his child. This juxtaposition between death and life creates a feeling of curiosity.

Q: What did you dislike about the film trailer?

A: Answers will vary. The character is a professional killer and we are encouraged to identify with him. The film may communicate the idea that the special-forces troops are the true heroes of the Iraq War.

Review the Activity presented on Worksheet 6.2 which introduces the definition of ‘ethics’ and invites students to reflect on short- and long-term consequences of the film from two different points of view. Students can work individually, with a partner or in a small group to complete the chart on Worksheet 6.2.

ANSWERS TO WORKSHEET 6.2 “American Sniper”

What are the long- and short-term ethical consequences for the filmmaker, the viewer and for the society?

| | FILM COMPANY | VIEWERS | SOCIETY |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Short-Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate sales • Increases the filmmaker’s and company’s reputation • Inspires people to create similar stories, characters and themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a short burst of feeling • Increases interest in seeing the movie • Promotes feelings of respect for the special-ops forces. • Increases curiosity about Iraq War | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports a “hero complex” about lone individuals with special talents in killing • May influence the attitudes and behavior of current and future soldiers |
| Long-Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions the company as addressing important and serious contemporary public issues • Contributes to continuing social dialogue about war • Offers a portrait of soldiers that deepens public awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fictional character becomes more “real” than actual soldier • Encourages good vs evil thinking about the Middle East • Increases feelings of war as justified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distorts public understanding of recent history • Desensitizes people to war violence • May affect public decision-making about future wars |

Activity 6.3. Create an Extemporaneous Oral Presentation Online

Students summarize their analysis charts by making an extemporaneous oral presentation.

HIGH TECH CLASSROOMS

You don’t need logins or passwords to use [Flipgrid](http://www.flipgrid.com), just a mobile device or computer with Internet access, a microphone and a webcam. This software enables to students to post, share and review the video comments others on “Dove Beauty Patch” and “American Sniper.” Flipgrid provides your students with access to a wider audience that goes beyond the classroom.

DOVE BEAUTY PATCH. Students can click on this link <http://flipgrid.com/#ccfe6e27> to leave a comment. When they press the green “plus” button, they can create a oral presentation up to 90 seconds in length. In a low-tech classroom, students give 90-second oral presentations, responding to this question:

AMERICAN SNIPER FILM. Students can click on this link <http://flipgrid.com/#5fd9d0ff> to leave a comment. When they press the green “plus” button, they can create a oral presentation up to 90 seconds in length. In a low-tech classroom, students give 90-second oral presentations, responding to this question:

When students have completed their response, host a class discussion based on their answers. Give students the opportunity to volunteer and show their FlipGrid responses to the class. Have the class make comments and share their opinions on the case study.

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATION STUDENT ORAL PRESENTATIONS

| Content | Feedback and Comments |
|--|------------------------------|
| The response includes short- and long-term consequences from multiple points of view, including individuals and society. | |
| The response considers how media depictions of human behavior have ethical dimensions and consequences. | |
| Format | |
| The presenter’s voice is clear and easy to listen to. | |
| The presenter seems confident and relaxed. | |
| The presenter’s pace is dynamic but not rushed. | |
| The presentation has a clear beginning, middle and end. | |

Teacher Reflection

To explore ethical issues, it’s important to be able to “walk a mile in the shoes of another.” When students visualize themselves as the advertiser, the filmmaker, the audience, and the society as a whole, they are more likely to truthfully and honestly generate positive and negative short-term and long-term consequences.

Evaluation

Students create a FlipGrid response (or give an informal oral presentation in a low-tech classroom) by providing a thoughtful analysis of the short- and long-term consequences faced by the consumer and the producer. They should be able to understand the different roles and how people’s perceptions of the ethics of propaganda reflect their point of view.