

Inquiry #1: Messaging Through Visual Art

Audience: High school-level students

Timeframe: 1 class period (40-60 minutes)

Objectives

Through this activity, students will be able to:

- Understand best practices for analyzing visual primary sources
- Begin to develop a preliminary understanding of propaganda
- Place visual materials within a historical context; in this case American war recruitment during World War I

Materials Needed

Poster A	" Gee, I Wish I Were a Man! " By Howard Chandler Christy
Poster B	" Help! The Women's Land Army of America, New Jersey Division " by Charles Dana Gibson
Teaching Guide	' Analyzing Photographs and Print ' <i>Teacher's Guide</i> – the questions from this guide could be modified with different, specific guiding questions based on students' interests or focus

Instructions

Part I - Assessing Prior Knowledge

5-10 minutes

1. Begin by asking students to consider two terms: patriotism and propaganda. Using the handout, have students try to define these terms in their own words. How do you understand these terms? Are there specific examples that come to mind?
2. Give several minutes for students to think, independently, and record any relevant thoughts to answer the questions.

Part II - Analysis of Primary Sources

15-20 minutes


1. Display/hand out copies of the image "Gee, I Wish I Were a Man" by Howard Chandler Christy. Ask students to use the Primary Source Analysis Tool (or a variation of it) to analyze the piece and answer the following questions about what they see and think about the source:
 - ☐ What stands out about the image and text of this poster?
 - ☐ What might be the purpose of this poster? What is the story being told?
 - ☐ Who do you think is the intended audience?
2. Display/hand out copies of the image "Help! Women's Land Army of America, New Jersey Division" by Charles Dana Gibson. Ask students to similarly assess the poster using the Primary Source Analysis tool and the provided questions.
3. Encourage students to compare the two images: how are they similar? How are they different? Do you believe they intend to have the same effect on the viewer? Why or why not?
4. Lastly, ask students to use sources to answer the essential questions posed in the overview:
 - ☐ What do these sources say about how Americans should think and behave?
 - ☐ What do these sources say about how Americans should feel about the war effort?

Part III - Group Discussion and Reflection

15-20 minutes

1. After students have recorded their responses, have them share some of their thoughts and findings. Allow students to respond to each other.
2. After the initial discussion, provide some background about these pieces and their creators:

Howard Chandler Christy



Among the best known of the "pretty girl" illustrators of the early 20th century, Howard Chandler Christy was considered so knowledgeable about beautiful women that he was chosen to be the sole judge of the first Miss America contest in 1921. Christy first won notice when drawings he made while he accompanied U.S. troops to Cuba during the Spanish-American War were published in Scribner's and Leslie's Weekly. Not long after, he concentrated on drawings of women – collectively known as the "Christy girl" – that were published in McClure's and other magazines. This navy recruitment poster began circulation in 1917. ¹

1. Online Exhibition - American Beauties: Drawings from the Golden Age of Illustration | Exhibitions - Library of Congress. Loc.gov.
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/beauties/exhibition-items.html>

Charles Dana Gibson

During World War I, Charles Dana Gibson led the Division of Pictorial Publicity for the Committee on Public Information, an independent government agency created by President Woodrow Wilson. The CPI recruited top illustrators to design posters and billboard to build popular support for America's entry into the war. In his own work, Gibson radically transformed his archetypal "Gibson Girl" into the various allegorical figures whose monumental, and sometimes militant forms, stand out as powerful wartime images. This particular image is to promote the Women's Land Army, the women-organized and run collective that worked on a number of agricultural endeavors through the country to help harvest the country's food supply and fill in the labor gaps caused by the number of men who went overseas during the war.



2. Political Cartoonist - The Gibson Girl's America: Drawings by Charles Dana Gibson | Exhibitions - Library of Congress. (2013, March 30). [www.loc.gov](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gibson-girls-america/political-cartoonist.html).
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gibson-girls-america/political-cartoonist.html>

3. Maloney, W. A. (2018, March 26). *World War I: The Women's Land Army*. Blogs.loc.gov. <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2018/03/world-war-i-the-womens-land-army/>

1. Once background has been provided, ask students to reassess their interpretation:
 - ☐ Does knowing who created these images and/or why they were created affect your view of them? Why or why not?
 - ☐ What, if anything, surprises you about this information?
2. Finally, have students return to their initial definitions of patriotism and propaganda. Ask them to consider how these images relate to the terms and their created definitions:
 - ☐ In what ways do these posters exemplify your understanding of patriotism?
 - ☐ In what ways do these posters exemplify your understanding of propaganda?
 - ☐ In what ways do these posters contradict your understanding of patriotism and propaganda?