Propaganda and Persuasive Cartography
A historical thinking lesson about propaganda maps

Author:

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Overview: In the modern era, students are constantly surrounded by digital and non-digital forms of persuasion. This is not a new phenomenon: propaganda and persuasion have long been used as a method to influence the perspectives of citizens. Maps, seemingly based in mathematical 'realities', are spatially malleable and subject to intentional distortion, for geopolitical, economic and/or other aims. World War propaganda maps are one example of the use of persuasion techniques that continue to evident in modern media. Students will first be exposed to a variety of persuasive maps from the 20th and 21st century, learn to identify and critically analyze the aims and audiences of these maps. Then students will be divided into small groups that act as mini public relations companies who have been contracted to make a persuasive map that persuades United Kingdom audiences to vote to either leave or remain in the European Union. This activity increases student understanding of how persuasive tools are used, and how citizens must be critical consumers of information.

Historical thinking connections from The Historical Thinking Project:

1. Establish *historical significance*
2. **Use *primary source evidence***
3. Identify *continuity and change*
4. **Analyze *cause and consequence***
5. Take *historical perspectives*, and
6. Understand the *ethical dimension* of historical interpretations.

Time Required: 80 minutes.

Grade Level: 20th Century World History 12 (or possibly Political Studies 12)

Prior learning:

- Basic map reading skills.
- Understanding of different map projections (Robinson, Mercator etc.)
- Exposure to geopolitics
- Understanding of the era of colonialism, and of WWI and WWII
- Solid understanding of the Brexit vote and arguments of both remain and leave campaigns (approx. 2 lessons of background knowledge minimum)

Curricular Connections

- **Core Competencies**
  - Communication: interpret, reflect, and present.
  - Critical Thinking: question, analyze, investigate and critique.

- ○ Positive Personal and Cultural Identity: relationships and cultural contexts in a pluralistic society/globally connected world.
- **Big Ideas**
  - ○ Nationalist movements can unite people in common causes or lead to intense conflict between different groups. (20th Century World History 12)
  - ○ The rapid development and proliferation of communication and transportation technologies in the 20th century led to profound changes in personal and national identities (Social Studies 11 adapted from 20th Century World History 12).
- **Curricular Competencies**
  - ○ Assess the justification for competing historical accounts after investigating points of contention, reliability of sources, and adequacy of evidence (evidence
  - ○ Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at particular times and places (continuity and change)
  - ○ Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, and developments, and analyze multiple consequences (cause and consequence)
- **Content**
  - ○ migrations, movements, and territorial boundaries (20th Century History 12)
  - ○ civil wars, independence movements, and revolutions (20th Century History 12)
  - ○ current issues in local, regional, national, or global politics as represented in mass media (adapted from Political Studies 12)
  - ○ fundamental nature of knowledge, existence, and reality (adapted from Philosophy 12)

Learning Outcomes

- Practice in critically viewing primary sources and assessing how persuasive tools and propaganda techniques have causes and consequences across time and space
- Develop an awareness of how propaganda and persuasion is used in visual texts in everyday society, and has historically been done so to incite people to anger or xenophobia
- Learn to critically view/deconstruct illustrations and maps
- Understand persuasion techniques, underlying aims, and spatial distortion in propaganda illustrations and persuasive cartography

Materials required:

- Projector, internet, laptop/computer
- **Handout 1:** map package a different illustrated/persuasive map for each group
- Sticky notes, tape and classroom world map
- **Handout 2:** Public relations contract package
- 5-10 laptops (one per group)
- Printer

- [Lesson overview mind map](#)

Lesson:

1. Show students the "Carriers of the New Black Plague" propaganda map (10 mins)
https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:3293963

"Read" the map with the students.

Discussion points *(Adapted from EAVI, Media Literacy for Citizenship)***:**

- What is the message?
  - What do you think the author(s) is/are trying to communicate?
  - <u>How</u> are the author(s) is/are communicating this message? (Persuasive techniques/tools)
    - Consider language, fonts, symbols, spatial dimensions, colour etc.
- Who created the message (author, organization, country etc.)?
- Who is the intended audience/target group?
  - What are they being convinced of?
  - What does the map/propaganda/illustration suggest about the beliefs/values of the intended audience?
- What is the purpose of the map/propaganda/illustration?
- What don't you know/what do you want to know more about/what do you wonder?

2. Put students into pods (approx. 3-5 students per group), give each pod a different map from <u>handout 1,</u> and sticky notes. (**10 mins)**

- Students work in pods, looking at their map and the discussion points from handout 1.
- With several minutes remaining, ask each group to write down on a sticky the title of their map, and the date they think it was created.

3. Present readings: pods take turns presenting their map, their reading of the map, and the outstanding questions they have/things they wonder. (10 mins)

- Students tape their map to the approximate corresponding space on the classroom world map
- Groups put their sticky note on a timeline on the board (teacher quickly draws a chalk/whiteboard timeline on the board). As each group comes up, they insert their sticky note.
- This will serve to visually demonstrate to students the use of propaganda maps/persuasive cartography over time and space.

4. Overview of Persuasion Tools/Techniques (10 mins)

- Brainstorm forms of propaganda (over time - discussion on modern and 1900 equivalents -.e.g. old movie reels, tv advertisements, instagram ads, print newspaper, digital newspaper articles, reddit, twitter, newspaper website ads etc).
- Discuss persuasive tools and propaganda techniques, including allegorical, satirical and pictorial mapping; selective inclusion; unusual use of projections, color, graphics and text; and intentional deception.
- Discuss types of messages: religious, political, military, commercial, moral and social.
- Point out parallels and discontinuities of maps being used (are there certain clusters of these maps? E.g. lots around world wars, regional conflicts etc.)

5. Students create their own persuasive maps (30 mins)

- Students are put into groups/"public relations firms" - half are given a Brexit Leave contract, half are given a Brexit Remain contract.
- In their groups, students brainstorm the messages and persuasive tools that are strongest to use for their contract.
- Students draft their own map based on their group brainstorm.

5.1 Optional: extend map creation into another work period to increase quality and detail of maps.

5.2 Optional: Depending on how far students got on creating their map, move them on to the next part of the project - pull the strongest elements from each group member's map, then create one final map that represents their public relation firm's product.

5.3 Optional: Have other teacher's come in to view the final products as a 'panel' audience.

6. Debrief, class discussion to identify persuasion techniques present in 2019, make connections to students lives. (10 mins)

- Discuss types of persuasive tools, connecting these tools and strategies to students real lives: why do they notice in their own worlds that they could use their awareness and understanding of these persuasive tools? How does this help their critical thinking?
- How does the medium of the message impact how persuasive it is, the audience it reaches, unintended audiences it reaches, unintended 'readings', intended and unintended consequences etc. (Prompt students to consider these in relation to the Brexit vote).

Extension Activities:

1. Add other perspectives to bring in variety of voices and audience considerations: have some groups create maps from the European Union perspective (both remain and leave).
2. Students can create a graphic design version of their map using programs like Adobe InDesign or Illustrator.

3. Idea adapted from Junius Wright: Students write an essay or blog post to further explore the presence and use of propaganda in modern society and popular culture. Have students look at propaganda techniques used in political advertisements, consider how voters are influenced.
4. Have students look at old National Geographic magazines to find traces of persuasion and propaganda, as well as how certain audiences, cultures, and places are omitted or ignored in ways that are different from modern society (e.g. Christopher Columbus map in 1980's National Geographic article - how does it take into account Indigenous perspectives?).

Adaptation Ideas: This activity could easily be shifted to other time periods and places (or subjects and grade levels):

- Quebec Referendum
- The U.S. buying Alaska/Seward's folly
- Berlin cityscape
- Hudson Bay Trading Company maps
- Indigenous maps

Resources

- https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/10/propaganda-war-maps-gallery/#/01_war_maps_robida.jpg
- https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/10/151022-data-points-how-make-maps-influence-people/
- https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2016/12/27/misleading-maps-and-problematic-projections
- https://eavi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Propaganda-Lesson-Plan.pdf
- https://persuasivemaps.library.cornell.edu/
- http://historicalthinking.ca/historical-thinking-concepts