Project: Analyzing World War 1 Propaganda Posters

Course/Grade Level
This activity was designed for a 10th grade Advanced Placement U.S. History class but with minor modifications could be used in many grade 9-12 Social Studies or English classes.

Learning Objectives
After completing this project, students will be able to
- explain the controversies surrounding America's participation in World War 1
- describe the U.S. government's efforts to influence public opinion during wartime
- interpret primary source documents by analyzing their visual imagery, intended audience, and appeals to emotion.

Background reading
Students will read and discuss the texts listed below to gain some background understanding of
- a) the controversies surrounding American participation in World War 1, and
- b) the federal government's creation of the Committee on Public Information to shape and mobilize public opinion in support of the war while extinguishing dissent.

Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda.* St. Martin's Press, 2009, pp.134-145.

Adam Hochschild, *American Midnight: The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy's Forgotten Crisis*. Mariner Books, 2022, pp. 93-96, 149-158.

Skills practice
Students will utilize the online guide *"How to Interpret Propaganda Posters"* found on the *History Skills website* to practice identifying some of the common visual symbols, stereotypes, and appeals to emotion found in historical advocacy posters.

Selection of World War 1 propaganda posters
Working either as individuals or in pairs, students will peruse the online digitized images of World War 1 posters in the *Robert and Frank Neikirk Collection* of the Osher Map Library as well those in the *Howard Solomon Collection* housed in the Glickman Library's Special Collections. Students will then select one poster that will be the focus of their project.

Examination of posters
The class will have a scheduled visit to the Osher Map Library which will enable each student to examine their chosen poster in person. They will take notes on various components of the poster (as indicated on the "SAMPLE NOTE SHEET" page.)

Analysis of posters
After completing any additional research needed, students will use their notes to write a script which will serve as narration for a 2 minute documentary-style video about their poster. The video will analyze the visual symbols, intended audience, and messaging of the poster (see "VIDEO ASSIGNMENT" page for details.)

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SAMPLE NOTE SHEET

Text *What written message is conveyed?*
Images *What people and/or places are shown? What recognizable symbols are represented? Why/how are they being utilized in this poster? Are there other well-known images from the time that can be compared with this?*
Audience *What specific group or groups is this poster most likely targeting with its appeal? How can you tell?*
Emotional impact *What feelings is this poster meant to evoke in the viewer?*
Call to Action *What is the viewer specifically being asked to do?*
Artist (*optional*) *Are there any relevant facts known about the artist who created this work?*

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VIDEO ASSIGNMENT

DIRECTIONS: Use iMovie to produce a 2 minute documentary-style video with scripted voice narration. This video is your way to explain the design, purpose, and message of the poster you've selected.

Step 1: **Write your script.** You will create a script that describes your insights into the poster's visual imagery, audience, and messaging.

- Your analysis should address the components you documented on your note sheet as well as any additional information you have gathered.

- Since 130-150 spoken words per minute is considered standard in a documentary film, the script for your 2-minute video should contain approximately 260-300 words.

Step 2: **Record your video.** Use your script as narration that corresponds with the images featured.

- Show the entire poster, then zoom in on various important details as they are described.

- Incorporate other relevant images to add context or provide comparison/contrast.

- Add background music if appropriate.