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US-Japan Enmity – WWII Wartime Propaganda Posters [History]

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Abstract

This assignment was developed to be used in SSH 110 (East Asian Civilizations), but can also be used in SSH 106 (World History from 1500) and SSH 114 (Modern Japanese History). All three courses are primarily for non-majors and are beginning-level (survey) courses. This assignment comes towards the end of the semester, in week 10 or 11, when we are discussing World War II. This assignment is aligned with the Global Learning core competency, and meets those specific learning objectives by giving students a chance to analyze in-depth one dimension of a global event (the widespread use of propaganda during WWII), and more importantly gets them to consider and negotiate competing perspectives on “the other” during this tumultuous period. It also gets students to consider and analyze the ethical consequences of both propaganda and of censorship by governments. The assignment is aligned with the Written Communication ability, as students will be graded upon the organization and support of their thesis, the reliability of their sources, and the clarity and fluency of their writing. Students will receive a grading rubric alongside the assignment, so that they are aware of the criteria through which their papers will be evaluated (rubric is attached to this assignment, after the wartime propaganda posters).

This assignment would take approximately two weeks to complete: students would first complete a reading assignment for contextual background on US-Japan enmity in the 1930s-40s (from John Dower’s *War Without Mercy*), would spend one class-session doing the Think/Pair/Share activity, and would have one week to complete the 3-4 page writing assignment. This assignment would be worth 15% of their overall grade (equivalent of a midterm exam).
1) Assignment prompt

Target Courses (can be used in all three courses):
SSH 110: East Asian Civilizations
SSH 106: World History from 1500
SSH 114: Modern Japanese History

Core Competency:
Global Learning

Communication Ability:
Written Communication

Assignment: US-Japan Enmity – WWII Wartime Propaganda Posters

**Think| Pair | Share** in-class activity, followed by an individual, at-home writing assignment

In Class (low-stakes):
--Distribute WWII propaganda posters to students (3 or 4 copies of each)
--Have students respond to the following questions, first on their own and then find classmates with the same poster and compare responses:
  1) How do nations depict an enemy in wartime propaganda?
  2) How and why do nations dehumanize an enemy?
  3) Does propaganda reflect the “real” sentiments of a nation?
  4) Why do nations try to control and censor the media during wartime?

At home (high-stakes):
Write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) paper that synthesizes the in-class discussion we had about wartime propaganda. **Your paper must have a thesis statement that takes a position on the role of wartime propaganda posters, and must use at least two of the distributed posters as evidence supporting your thesis statement.** Please use the four discussion questions above to help guide and formulate your original thesis statement.

Learning Objectives:
1. To understand the dehumanizing ways that nations depict one another in their wartime propaganda (i.e., how they make it easier to hate and kill the “other”)
2. To understand that war is not just about bullets and bombs but that it is also about shaping and controlling images of oneself and one’s enemy in order to facilitate the death and destruction.
3. To be aware of the hatred that Japanese and Americans had towards each other during the war. (And how quickly, for the most part, this hatred disappeared in the postwar period. Or at the very, least, how this hatred did not lead to an insurgency against the American Occupation or violence against the Japanese during the Occupation).
4. To try to connect blatant racism in propaganda to other forms of dehumanization (e.g., political rhetoric) that continue to be effective tools of warfare
Writing Assignment Grading Rubric
Dr. Kietlinski

1: Main Idea: There is a clear thesis statement that states a position and can be supported using research and/or evidence from texts. The thesis is clearly stated, effectively placed, and responds direction to the assignment prompt.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing

2: Organization and Coherence: The essay is clearly organized, with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Each paragraph addresses one main idea and supports that idea with properly-cited sources. There is an easy-to-follow progression of ideas and clear transitions between paragraphs.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing

3: Analysis and Development: The thesis is supported by a combination of details, examples, statistics, and facts. Each main idea is fully elaborated on and clearly supports the essay’s thesis.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing

4: Voice, Purpose, and Audience: The essay’s tone is appropriate for an academic essay. It avoids repetition and uses varied sentence structure.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing

5: Incorporation of Sources: Quotations and paraphrases are relevant and taken from appropriate academic sources. Use of quotation marks, in-text citations, and a Works Cited page are complete and formatted according to current MLA guidelines.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing

6: Conventions of Standard Written English: The essay has been edited carefully so that mechanical errors such as incorrect grammar, sentence structure, word choice, spelling, punctuation, and/or capitalization do not interfere with the clarity of the essay.

_____Excellent       _____Satisfactory       _____Weak        _____Failing
Overall, this assignment very effectively meets the objectives of the Global Learning Competency. Students gain familiarity with World War II and with the use of propaganda as a tool of warfare. Grappling with the latter issue in their papers also further allows the students to gain more self-awareness, as it should push them to think about how they “read” and receive propagandistic messages in their daily lives (even outside of war-related issues). And further still, the assignment will help students ethically engage with the issue of war propaganda, as they will confront the very real and violent effects that this propaganda had as well as how the violence and negative attitudes Americans and Japanese people felt for each other diminished once the propaganda ceased.

The assignment also meets the Written, Oral, and Digital Communication competency, with one caveat (below). The assignment asks the students to support their claims with specific evidence from the texts, which is a crucial aspect of this competency. It also asks the students to carefully organize their ideas in order to express them coherently, so that another person can understand.

The only issue with the instructions concerns the development of a thesis statement:

1) Is the development of thesis statements something that the instructor will have already discussed and given the students to opportunity to work on prior to this assignment? If so, the instructor should indicate that in the abstract. As a reader of the abstract, without knowing what work the students have done on thesis statements prior to this assignment, I wonder if they will be able to effectively develop thesis statements based on an article and some primary sources. If they have already done that work, the assignment instructions are effective, as the students will (hopefully) understand what is expected of them in the development of a thesis statement. The assignment writer just needs to make that clear in the assignment abstract.

2) If, however, the development of thesis statements has not been extensively (or even minimally) discussed in class and practiced in other assignments, then the assignment writer should offer a few more clues to the students about how to develop a thesis statement. Perhaps it could be useful to suggest that the students develop a thesis statement by writing a one-line answer to one of the questions posed in the “low-stakes” section? That way the students would have a better sense of what is expected of them in the development of a thesis statement.

Oh, and very powerful images! The students will likely be highly engaged in this assignment because of how impactful those images are.