



The National Archives

Education Service



World War Two : Government Posters

How did Britain encourage people at home to help win the war?

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Introduction

During World War 2, Britain wanted all men and women to help win the war. Like the armed services, the people at home had to do their bit too! The government used posters, leaflets, film and radio broadcasts to get its message over to the public. There was no television or internet in those days.

In this lesson you are going to look at some posters and a film clip from World War 2. These sources show how the government encouraged people to salvage certain materials for the war and pointed out the dangers of “careless talk”.

Posters were put up in shops and shop windows, council buildings and village halls. Different posters were used to put over different messages. For example, the famous “Dig for Victory” posters were used as the government wanted people to grow their own food during wartime.

Special government films shown in cinemas were also used to persuade people to behave in certain ways.

The sources used in this lesson show how the government hoped to get people at home to play their part in the war.

Key words:

Salvage: collecting and reusing or recycling waste material.

Persuade: to try and change a person’s mind or way of thinking.

Slogan: catchword or catch phrase e.g. “Dig for Victory”

Tasks

Look at Source 1, 2, 3 and 4

1. Look at each of the salvage posters. Explain how they use the following ways to persuade people to save waste:
 - How do the posters use slogans?
 - Do they use powerful/forceful words?
 - Do they appeal to feelings and emotions?
 - How do the posters use humour?
 - How do the posters use different font sizes?
 - How do the posters use colour to help make their point?
 - Which do you think is the most persuasive poster? Give your reasons, use the questions above to help.
 - Are the posters aimed at different types of audience (men, women, children or all groups)?

Look at Source 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9

2. Look at each of the “careless talk” posters and answer the questions below:

- List the situations in which you must be careful about what you say
- Which poster warns about being careful who to trust? Can you explain how the poster makes this clear?
- Which posters show the results of “careless talk”?
- Are the posters aimed at different types of audience (men, women, children or all groups)?
- Which do you think is the most persuasive poster? Give your reasons, use the questions from task 1 to help.

Background

All of the posters used in this lesson are the work of artists who worked for the government Ministry of Information formed in 1939. The posters were used to try and influence public opinion.

For example, people were encouraged to grow their own food, and save waste. This was because it was difficult to import food from other countries during wartime. Kitchen waste could be fed to hens and pigs. People were asked to salvage as many materials as they could. Wastepaper, metal or bones could be made into planes and ammunition.

Travel within Britain was to be limited at all times. Posters with the slogan “Is your journey really necessary?” were used to remind people to save fuel and allow trains to transport soldiers and war supplies instead.

Some posters encouraged women to work in factories to make weapons or planes. Others called women to join the Land Army to work on farms “for a healthy, happy job”.

The Ministry of Information was also keen to explain to the people the danger of “careless talk”. They wanted the public to become much more careful about security because information or secrets might be used by enemy spies listening in.

Posters were also used to up keep morale or wartime spirit. They made it clear that everybody was in this war together and everybody had an important part to play. This also helped the public to feel involved. This really mattered if Britain wanted the workers in the factories to make as many planes, bombs, and tanks as they could or farmers to grow as much as possible.

During World War 2, the people faced many dangers such as the bombing of cities, ports and factories. They also had accidents caused by the blackout. Health during the war was a big worry for Britain. The public needed to keep fit and healthy in order to work and keep up production in the factories and on the land. Therefore the Ministry of Information produced many posters on these subjects.

Teachers Notes

This lesson can be used to support the Primary Framework in Literacy for key stage 2, unit 3 Non-fiction: Persuasive writing. Students can explore how the language of these government posters is used to persuade. They can look in detail at persuasive devices such as slogans, humour and emotive language. They can consider how persuasive language is used to gain attention, influence and inform and can be adapted for different audiences and purposes.

The lesson could serve as an introduction to the concept of government propaganda within the literacy or history classroom for key stage 2. Students could be encouraged to use a dictionary to find the meaning of propaganda then discuss if these posters help explain the term.

Using these sources pupils can examine the power of the images themselves and their techniques of persuasion. They could discuss the differences between the strength of the visual over the written. How effective would the posters be without their words? The film clip used here offers further opportunities to compare the power of the moving image. Which is more effective, poster or film?

The questions increase in difficulty. Task 2 builds on the understanding of the concept of “persuasive writing” acquired in Task 1. Task 3 gives students an opportunity to transfer it to the medium of film. This work could also be extended using the film archive in Focus on Film that contains clips from a wide range of public information films for World War 2. For example, in the archive there is a film that was used to encourage people to save scraps to feed hens featuring a talking chicken, this directly relates to the illustrative image used at the top of the web page for this lesson!

To suit the needs of their individual pupils, teachers could adapt this online lesson; this is a suggested approach.

Extension tasks:

1. Students could examine a selection of television or magazine advertisements supplied by the teacher and consider their persuasive techniques. Students then create advertisements for their own products.

2: Students design a poster for recycling today:

- Make sure you have a slogan
- Does your slogan persuade or convince people to recycle?
- Make clear what things should be saved
- Make clear why they are useful
- Make your poster colourful

3: Students produce their own leaflet to persuade others of a particular point of view eg. ending school uniform, or presenting the case for or against changing school holidays and so on.

Sources:

Illustration : INF 13/143
Source 1 : INF 3/219
Source 2 : INF 3/196
Source 3 : INF 13/149 f15
Source 4 : INF 13/148 f8
Source 5 : INF 13/217f9
Source 6 : EXT 1/119f10
Source 7 : INF 3/271f8
Source 8 : INF 13/217f21
Source 9 : EXT 1/119f13

Schemes of Work

Hot war, cold war why did the major twentieth-century conflicts affect so many people?

Key Stage 3, Unit 18.

What was it like for children in the Second World War?

Key Stage 1&2 Unit 9

Source 1 : Salvage poster: “Up Housewives and at ‘em!” (INF 3/219)



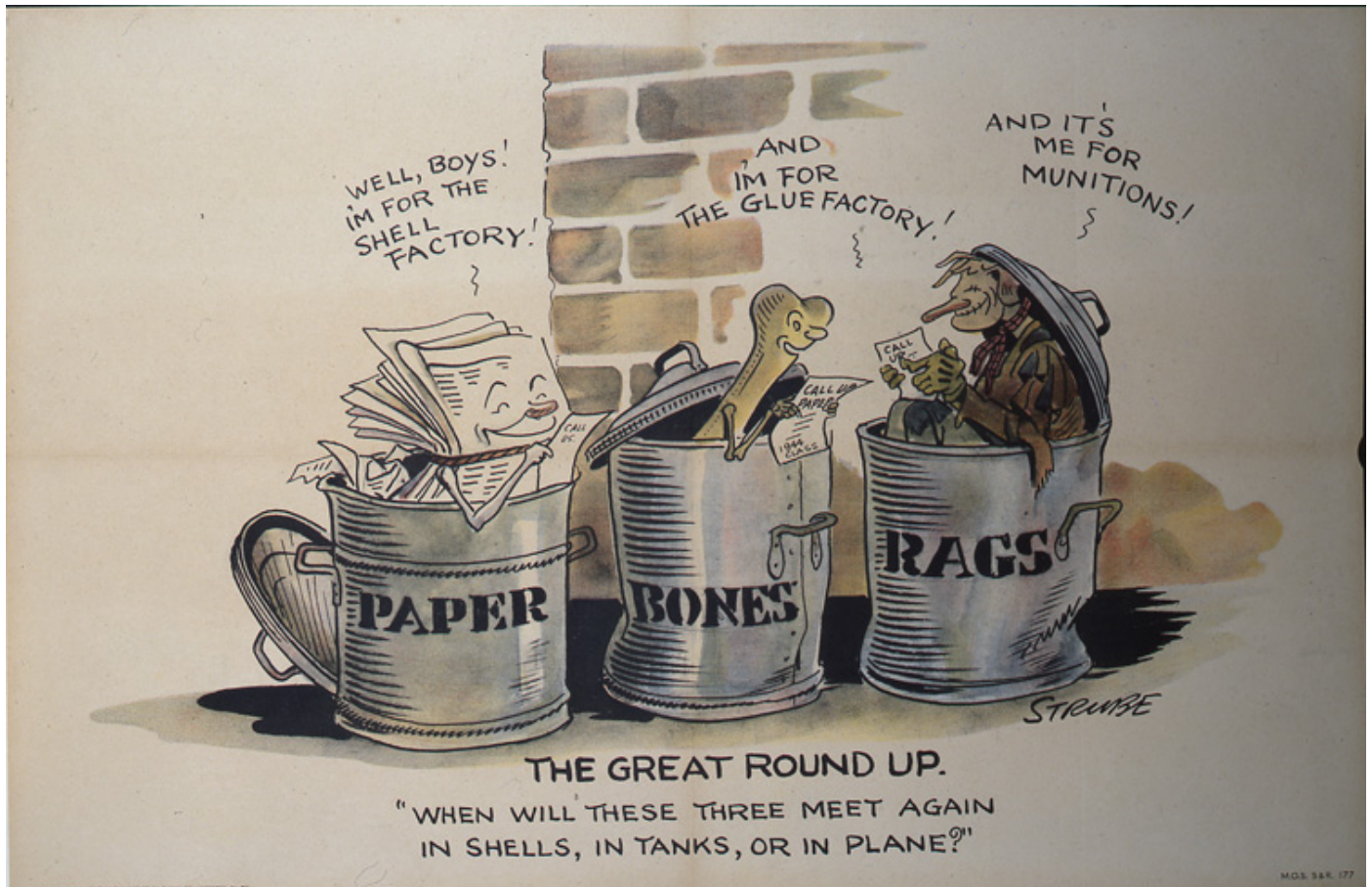
Source 2 : Salvage Poster: “Still more paper, rags, bones wanted for salvage” (INF 3/196)



Source 3 : Salvage Poster: “Please put your litter in the bin” (INF 13/149 f15)



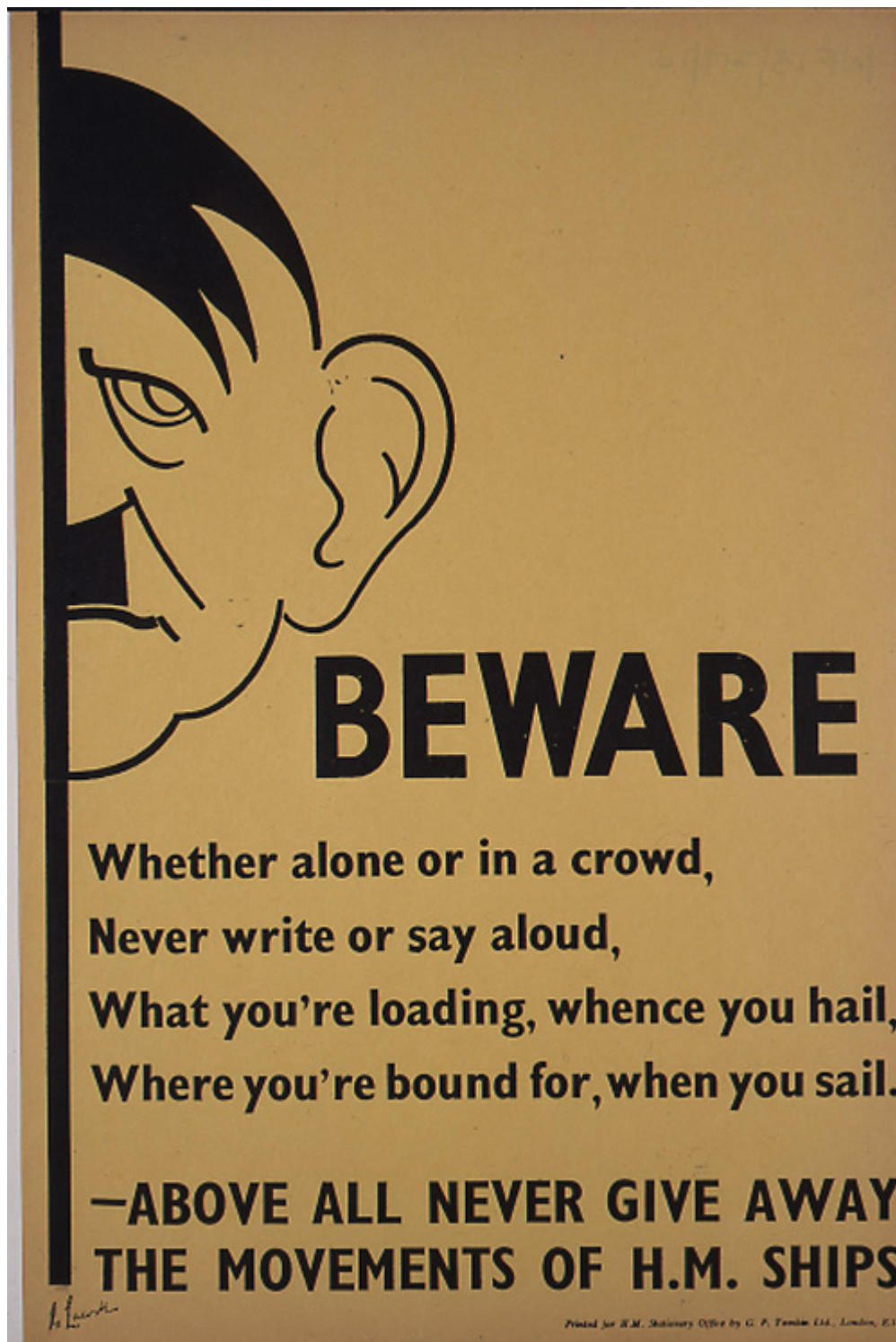
Source 4 : Salvage Poster: "The great round up" (INF 13/148 f8)



Source 5 : Careless talk poster: The test of soldier (INF 13/217f9)



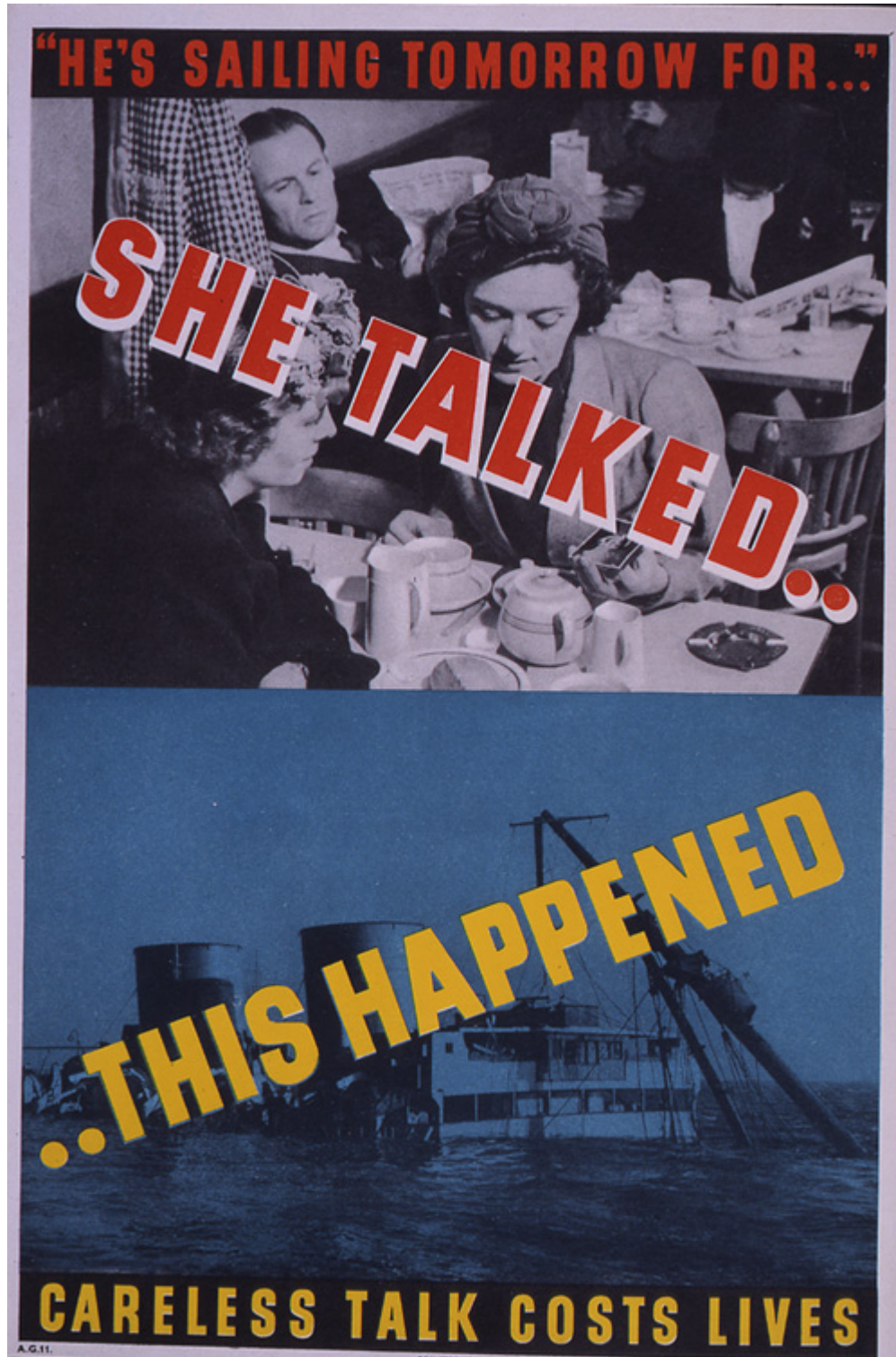
Source 6 : Careless talk poster: Beware (EXT 1/119f10)



Source 7 : Careless talk poster: You forget but she remembers by Whitear (INF 3/271f8)



Source 8 : Careless talk poster: She talked...This happened (INF 13/217f21)



Source 9 : Careless talk poster: Careless talk may cost his life (EXT 1/119f13)

