

Educational Activity

War and Media

Guidelines

Silent Cinema in Quebec, 1896-1930

www.cinemamuetquebec.ca

War and Media

Students are invited to prepare a poster or a Power Point presentation comparing the media coverage in the following three conflicts: the Boer War, The First World War and the Vietnam War.

This activity is addressed to Secondary 3, 4 and 5 students for classes in History, Economy, French and Visual Arts.

Introduction and Objectives

In times of war, newspapers, television and information networks inundate us with battlefield images. In the days of Silent Cinema, images of soldiers training or on parade were some of the most common and popular subjects in film actualities. In the 1960s and 70s, during the Vietnam War, the U.S. army permitted many soldiers and journalists equipped with portable cameras to film images of war. Through these images, the general public witnessed the day-to-day life of soldiers and the horrors of war. How are we to understand these images? Do they inform or misinform? Are we to interpret them as a manipulation of public opinion, as propaganda?

In this activity, students are invited to prepare three presentations illustrating the media coverage of the three major conflicts.

The goal of this activity is to provide students with an understanding of the different roles the media play in our culture. Students will be encouraged to ask questions about the influence of the media on the decision-making process and on political life. They will be asked to pay particular attention to the issue of politics and media discourse: do politicians influence media discourse, or does media discourse influence politicians?

The group review will enable students to discuss the role of the media in times of war.

Length: 2 sessions, 60 minutes each.

Sources: The newspapers *La Patrie*, *The Quebec Chronicle* and *Le Canada français*. The NFB's *Images of a Forgotten War* website, which enables students to view on-line a number of films about Canadian participation in the First World War.

<http://www.onf.ca/enclasse/grandeguerre/index.html>

The Radio-Canada archives also enables students to view on-line many news reports on the Vietnam War, such as:

“Sud Vietnam: un pays en guerre”

<http://archives.radio-canada.ca/clip.asp?page=1&IDClip=6142&IDCat=186&IDCatPa=148>

“La marche contre la mort”

http://archives.radio-canada.ca/guerres_conflits/guerre_vietnam/clip/1759/

“Des Canadiens dans l’armée américaine”

<http://archives.radio-canada.ca/clip.asp?page=1&IDClip=6134&IDCat=186&IDCatPa=148>

“Un médecin canadien envoyé au Vietnam”

http://archives.radio-canada.ca/guerres_conflits/guerre_vietnam/clip/6144/

“Agent Orange”

http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/vietnam_war/clip/9130/

Preparation

Begin the activity by showing shocking images of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War and the consequences of these images in the United States, for example the protests it spawned in a number of universities.

Activity Guidelines

The activity will be done in groups of three.

Give instructions (the time limit for Power Point presentations, the dimensions for the poster.)

In addition to familiarity with media coverage, what should emerge from this activity is an understanding of the role and influence of media and the tone of news reports. For instance, the patriotic tone of Canadian newspaper coverage of the Boer War and the First World War should be emphasised, in contrast to the more critical tone of American media during the Vietnam War.

Procedure

Some groups of students may need help in organizing the assignment. You can suggest each student in the group examine one period and gather appropriate information. Students could start by browsing the on-line media database in PDF format on the site, which contains a selection of documents pertaining to Canadian media coverage of the Boer War and the First World War. Time permitting, students could do more research by using the search engine available on the "Silent Cinema in Quebec" website. For the Vietnam War, students should search the Internet for material.

Once all the information is gathered, students should examine it in groups.

Group Review of the Activity

In this activity, students will learn about the extent to which newspapers and cinema echoed Canadian governmental politics during the Boer War and the First World War. They will also learn about the influence that American media may have had on the Vietnam War.

Questions to reflect upon

- Should newspapers censor themselves for reasons of patriotism?
- Is the role of media in times of war to misinform or disseminate government propaganda?
- Are the various accounts of the war focused more on patriotic ideas and geopolitical issues or on the human drama of the conflict?
- According to the media, who benefits from war?

To push students' thinking a bit further, you can also use the issue of "Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq", a lie constantly repeated by the Bush administration and which many American media chains echoed.