

Sample assignment from *Writing Exposition*

PROPAGANDA

This exercise was created to help you to:

1. Recognize and understand the function of the eleven most common propaganda techniques used by writers
2. Write an effective piece of propaganda
3. Protect yourself against written propaganda by recognizing when it's being used to influence you

You will be writing a short piece of propaganda and an expository piece explaining how propaganda works.

As an example of the techniques used in propaganda, I have written a short satire of propaganda. You must understand that propaganda is not writers telling readers something they need to know or something which is true, or even partly true or is a fair way to give information. Propaganda is a well organized lie. Most organizations use propaganda to some extent. It's often seen by them as "putting the best forward." You will recognize this in action if you notice the information that the tobacco industry gives about the links between smoking and lung cancer. Once you recognize the techniques that propagandists use, you will be able to protect yourself against their words.

The following satire of propaganda makes the techniques very obvious. You will be able to pick them out. When I first used this example in my English class, some people got excited because they thought I was serious. They did not understand satire and they felt that I really thought Santa Claus was a bad person. Oh, well.

"The Devil's Advocate," a parody of propaganda, was written to demonstrate a number of techniques that are commonly found in the writings and speeches to which you're exposed. One or more of these may be found in most of the works of persuasive speakers/writers. "The Devil's Advocate" was written to make it easy for you to recognize what was being done to the reader. The examples found there of these techniques are exaggerations of them as they're used by serious propagandists. The techniques will be easy to find in "The Devil's Advocate" and some you will be able to find in "Let's Face the Truth George" which appeared in our local paper.

Exercise #1

After studying the parody of propaganda use and the very funny satire of propaganda about George Washington, you're to write a piece of propaganda employing as many of the eleven techniques as you can. Choose your own subject. It can either be something in the news or an issue that you feel strongly about. You should not try to write satire or try to be funny. Do not worry about insulting anyone or appearing bigoted yourself that is the nature of propaganda.

Exercise #2

You're to write an explanatory piece about the techniques used by propagandists. You're to use the information in this book and your own experiences writing propaganda to support the position you take in your paper.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

1. Identify the Major Problem:

The writer often begins by identifying a problem and then talks of it as if there were no question about its importance to the reader.

2. Give Evil Motives to Those Attacked:

The writers do not claim the act, person or group they attack is evil, but they imply as much. One way this is done is to label the possible evil motives of the person or group. Hitler did this when he wanted to propagandize against the Jews in the 1930's. He claimed all Jews were part of an international Jewish conspiracy, and he said further that they were members of an inferior race. He claimed they were motivated by greed for power and money.

Senator McCarthy did the same thing in the 1950's when he attacked the State Department for harboring communists. He claimed many members of the State Department were motivated by a desire to overthrow the government of the United States.

There are religious leaders in the world who claim that people who do not think as they do are motivated by the Devil. Some of the religious leaders in the Mid-East feel that Christians are unclean and motivated by Evil. Large businesses claim unions are motivated by a desire to take power away from corporations, destroy initiative, and subvert capitalism. Communists claim capitalists want to dominate the world and destroy the opportunity for workers to have good lives. A close examination of the writers' motives often shows them to be exactly those which they attribute to their targets.

3. **Suggest Guilt by Inference and Negative Assumption:**

The writer implies the attacked person or group is guilty of (whatever) by claiming an association or relationship between the person or group attacked and some mutually agreed upon evil. "If Bill is in favor of not banning books, he must be in favor of pornography." "If Betty is in favor of woman's liberation, she must be in some doubt about her own sexuality." "If John doesn't stand up for the 'Pledge of Allegiance,' he must be a communist."

Propagandists suggest that the issues are so clear that the choices must be either all for or all against. Things are either black or white. There's no room for any other conclusion than the ones they have come to. They deny all evidence and experience which might lead to conclusions other than their own, such as John's desire not to stand being motivated by his religious beliefs.

4. **"Recognized Good" as Motives for Attack:**

Writers claim to be motivated by values they know are popular with their readers, thereby impugning the motives of the attacked person or group. "Because I am one-hundred percent American and I attack him, he must be less than one-hundred percent American and motivated by some anti-American value." They set up their own criteria as a standard of what is right and wrong. "I love children and want to protect them from harm, so if he doesn't agree with everything I say about burning books, he must not love children."

5. **Substitute Questions for Evidence:**

If writers cannot prove the attacked persons or groups guilty of something, they ask questions in such a way that they imply the answers would prove the guilt. "The man is forty-three years old, and he has never married. Let me ask you: Why? He doesn't belong to any club, he doesn't have any friends we know about, he is never seen with anyone, but he spends lots of time watching the schoolboys practice football. Why is this? Does this man sound like the kind of man we want to have for a scout leader?" By employing this technique, even the most innocent act can be made to seem suspect.

6. **Claim Guilt by Symbolic Association:**

There have been and are powerful symbols in our culture which have been seen as both positive and negative, depending on who observed them. There was a time, not too long ago, when women schoolteachers couldn't wear red dresses, men who wore beards were seen as evil and young men who wore long hair were thought of as troublemakers.

Propagandists link the attacked person or group with objects they know their readers see as negative symbols. Religious leaders in Iran link women in slacks and short dresses with

Western Infidels. Woman's liberationists have been linked to tennis shoes, African-Americans with watermelon and ghetto blasters, capitalists with cigars, revolutionists with beards and combat clothes, small town Chambers of Commerce members with green leisure suits and/or white shoes and belts. "I wouldn't say she hates men, but she always wears slacks, sensible shoes, never puts her hair up, wears no makeup, and she carries a book around with her all the time. Now that by itself don't mean a whole lot, but there has to be something wrong with a girl who don't like a slightly off-color joke now and then." This kind of stereotyping makes it easy for the propagandists to lump into a large negatively identified group, diverse peoples and behaviors and make them seem to have a common, threatening aspect.

7. Imply Co-Interest:

Writers who successfully propagandize, suggest their readers and they have the same values, goals and desires. Hitler appealed to the pride the German people had in Germany and told them he felt the same pride. The people who would ban books in a library talk of their love of kids. The political leaders of all countries who want to go to war appeal to the patriotic feelings of their people: "A war to make the world safe for democracy," "A popular struggle for the freedom loving peoples of North Vietnam," "Since we all love peace, this will be a war to end all wars." Listen to the bigot here: "We both want the same thing, we want our women safe to walk on the street without being spoke to by one of them. We got this meeting tonight. You think just like we do and we need a man like you to help us. You can even use my sheet." The implication is, of course, the reader feels the same way the writer does any right thinking person has to have the same interests "we" do.

8. Identify Threats From Without:

Writers suggest that the danger has been imported. They're appealing to tribal instinct. During the voter registration drives in the south in the 60's many of the police and politicians blamed the troubles on "outside agitators." The idea is to suggest that "We" don't have a problem, "They" have the problem and have brought it to us. "Sure we have drugs in the school, but they're brought here by the dropouts and older kids." Or, "Our union members were happy till those outside agitators came here."

Just before he invaded Poland, Hitler told the German people that the Poland was going to attack. In our recent past there were military and political leaders who advocated dropping the atom bomb on China so the Chinese wouldn't get strong enough to destroy America.

Does this sound familiar? "We have to support a South American dictatorship because, if we don't the Russians will take over." We would rather have a home-grown dictator run a repressive government than have our neighbors influenced by outsiders. In a satiric

fictional study, *The Iron Mountain Report*, published in the late 60's, the point was made that if our leaders didn't have the Russians to use as a threat to maintain a unified American consciousness, it would be necessary to invent a threat from outer space in order to keep the people of this country working together. The thrust of this report was that people are easier to control if they're asked to unify against a potential foreign threat than if they're asked to work for a common good.

9. Demand Pre-Conclusion Agreement:

Writers want a positive response from their readers\listeners before they ask them to agree with their main points. Remember The Music Man in the play by the same name ends his song with "We have trouble right here in River City." He starts with questions, each of which can be answered with a "Yes" response. "Does your son roll his knickers above the knee? does he say, 'So's your old man?'" the writers want their readers used to answering in the affirmative before they propose their big questions.

10. Use of Urgent Tone:

Writers speak as if the problems must be solved now. If the decision to agree with them and act as they direct is not made now, there will be dire consequences. There must be a pressing need to act, and this has to be communicated to the readers. "If we don't act now before it's too late. . ." "Now is the time for all men to stand up and be counted . . ." "Unless we all agree and work together to solve this problem now. . ."

Propagandists want their readers to act before they have time to think out the positions the writers have given them. "Write your congressman now." "Can we afford another generation of illiterate children?" "It's not too late to stop the effects of pollution, but we must act now." "If one country in Southeast Asia falls, the rest will fall. We must stop this spread now."

11. Concluding With An Assumption of Conviction:

Writers end their propaganda with the attitude that they have convinced their readers of their positions. There can be no thought that the positions are weak or that a thinking person, once presented with the facts, might disagree with them.

In the following satire of propaganda techniques, the techniques are labeled T (#) to correspond to the above listing.

The Devil's Advocate

T (1) I put it to you that there are some suspect aspects to Santa Claus. There are some things that aren't right. *T (2)* Here we have an elderly man who is inordinately fond of children, young children. *T (3)* He lives with a woman called Mrs. Claus. Nowhere in the literature is there a record of their marriage or where she comes from. There are no children. *T (5)* Could she be his sister? Or, instead of incestuous relationships, do we have to look for Oedipal possibilities? *T (2 & 3)* If this bearded man is still living with his mother and likes small boys and girls, does this not fit a familiar pattern? *T (3)* If these two are not married, what sort of role models are they?

T (6) The color red long has had a vile connotation for most of us. Yet, this man flaunts red colors in his clothing. *T (2)* Even his surrogates are found wearing red in malls and department stores, holding onto and whispering to other people's little children. And giving them candy! And promising them gifts!

T (3 & 4) In many of our churches we are warned against consorting with the Devil. *T (6)* The Devil wears red. The devil has pointed ears. Have you seen the pictures of Santa's helpers? Have you noticed their ears? Pointed! We are told the Devil has familiars who have strange and supernatural powers. What of Rudolph? *T (6)* His red nose! He flies! He sings songs in English yet! If this isn't supernatural and suspect, I don't know what is.

T (7) We have been warned about the International Communist Conspiracy corrupting our children.

T (3) We have known for a long time that sugar like that found in candy canes can change the behavior of children. This is the manipulation of children's minds through behavioral conditioning. Is this American? That doesn't even sound nice. What color do we associate with the communists? Right, red! Doesn't look so good now, does it?

T (7 & 8) And what about the American capitalist way of life? Where do all his toys come from? Not Sears. Not Penny's. Some workshop at the North Pole. Foreign imports! What does this do to the balance of payments? *T (7 & 8)* What about American jobs? We have unemployment in this great country of ours, and he uses slave labor and exports his goods in the dead of night. *T (5)* In secret! What about flying right over customs officers at the border crossings? Does he cheat on his import duties? *T (7)* You know he does! I know he does. Who complains? Nobody.

We have to ask ourselves some questions. *T (5 & 9)* Is there a conspiracy of silence at this time of year? Have you seen adults whispering more lately? Have you heard of secret, hidden lists. Are children denied knowledge about their own futures? Are threats of reprisal more common lately? Are things as good now as they were four months ago? Do we have a problem?

T (10) You bet we do, and it's serious.

I gave this satire to some students one year near Christmas vacation and, it may be hard for you to believe, but I had some parents get upset when they read this parody of propaganda. Many people are very unsophisticated in their reading and are quite easy to manipulate. You, after having read through the listing of techniques, recognize what this piece is, but, even as outrageous as it is, some people are still affected by it.

Here is another fun piece of propaganda. This is also a satire on the techniques. This one appeared about February 14th in a small town paper.

Let's Face The Truth George Washington Was A Vandal

With George Washington's birthday at hand, it's time to re-examine the matter of the cherry tree.

Over the years, the first president of the United States has received much acclaim for telling the truth and admitting that he chopped down the cherry tree.

"Father, I cannot tell a lie" Washington's quaint response to his father's cross-examination has become engraved on the collective American consciousness as a glorious example of incorruptible integrity.

But the fact that he did in fact chop down said tree a brutish act of mindless vandalism is blithely swept under the rug.

It takes a long time to grow a cherry tree. The cherry tree belonged not to Washington but to Washington's dad. It was a cheap, gutless trick to chop it down.

If George Washington had lived in a society that wasn't so soft on crime, the story would be retold today as the occasion when the right hand of the future president of the United States of America was justly severed in retribution for his heinous crime.

In my opinion, this disgusting episode should be stricken from the record of American folklore. It sets a terrible precedent for the youth of this great nation, goading them to wantonly destroy property, encouraging them in the belief that they can get by with it simply by repeating the wretched formula, "Father, I cannot tell a lie."

But the truly appalling feature of this sordid tale is the threat it poses for our national security by exalting the poisonous idea that it's good to tell the truth.

Honesty may be admirable in common folk, but in politicians it's a flaw that raises questions about fitness for office. Where would our government's capabilities to deceive, confuse, baffle and distort be if our politicians were incompetent liars? How could we sow disinformation and keep our enemies guessing if we had a chief executive who was forever babbling, "I cannot tell a lie"?

Unless our government can freely deny that it's doing what it's doing and promise to do what it has no intention of doing, its hands are tied. How can we

hope to compete with the Russians if our country is run by a bunch of Boy Scouts enslaved to truth? Candidates for office should be required to take a lie detector test to prove their aptitude for lying.

Now is the time for soul-searching. We need to ask ourselves some serious questions. What kind of parents were the Washingtons to let their child play with axes? What kind of nation elects a vandal to its highest office?

Can we afford to continue venerating Washington's heinous crime? Isn't it just a matter of time before aspiring politicians run amok with axes chopping down cherry trees just to provide them with a media event for confessing the truth?

It doesn't require much imagination to see the direction this country is headed: deforestation, a fatal decline in oxygen levels, not to speak of the extinction of the cherry crop and the tragic demise of the banana split as we know it today.

Before it's too late, I humbly propose that the evidence of Washington's honesty be suppressed. Let us rehabilitate the myth of our first president, depicting him as a facile liar, a Machiavellian serpent who shrewdly deceived his dad like any healthy American kid would do. Let's rewrite the story of the cherry tree.

"I cannot tell a lie, Pops. Benjamin Franklin chopped down your cherry tree. I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen to me. I hope you'll teach him a lesson he'll never forget."

You should be able to pick out many of the listed techniques from this piece also.

In your explanatory paper you will have to decide the point you want to make. You can decide that the techniques are not effective or that they are a powerful tool. The process can either be developed from the list of techniques propagandists use supported by examples, or you can use the two propaganda pieces supported by the techniques. You might want to find your own propaganda piece to use with the one you write to support your expository paper.

PROPAGANDA NOTES

1. The subject of the propaganda piece:

2. How the reader should feel about the subject after reading the propaganda:

3. The intended audience: Age: _____ Education: _____

Socio-economic position: _____

4. About this subject, the majority of people in this group feel that:

5. _____
The major fears or anxieties connected with this topic that this group has:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

The techniques planned for use in this piece:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____