

Your Shortcut to... Propaganda

It's been dropped from the sky during wars... it's appeared on posters, in cartoons, and now in your social media feed... and it is designed to change the way you think, feel, and act... This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to 'propaganda' — the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce... Do you know why are those balloons floating on the ceiling? Is that paper attached to them..

Hmmm, what, Oh, those... I have no idea.

Let me get one down.. Let's take a look..."Everyone in this room agrees Bryce should be in charge."

Well... do you?

Another one says, "Free snacks if you vote for Bryce."

Everyone loves a snack.

And this one says, "It would be dangerous to put Christie in charge... she has weird beady eyes..." Bryce?

Well ... I mean, sometimes when the light catches them, they can have a beady quality ... hey, look, I'm just putting messages out there - it's totally up to people whether they believe them or not

Right. So you're dropping messages everywhere, despite the fact they're just an opinion, and hoping people will believe them as fact?

Well ... when you put it like that ...

Well actually Bryce, that's totally fine ... because what you've done is accidentally hit on a perfect example — because that's exactly how dangerous ideas have been spread for hundreds of years... sometimes even falling from the sky.

Today, we're unwrapping what propaganda is, how it's been used throughout history, and why it still matters very much today. So grab your detective hat and your sceptical specs... and let's get started!

Listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end....and by the way, I like my eyes.

WHAT

So Bryce... what is propaganda — and how can something look like normal information... but actually be trying to influence you?

Yeah, because those papers I dropped felt a bit like ads... but also a bit more... sneaky.

Exactly. Propaganda is a type of communication that's designed to persuade people to think, feel, or act a certain way — usually to support a particular idea, group, or cause.

So... it's like convincing people?

It is — but with a twist. Propaganda often leans heavily on emotions rather than just facts. Things like fear, pride, anger, or even a sense of belonging.

Ahhh... so instead of saying, "Here are the facts, you decide"... it's more like, "Here's how you should feel about this."

Exactly right. And here's the tricky part — propaganda isn't always made up of lies. Sometimes it uses real facts, but only tells one side of the story... or presents them in a way that pushes you toward a certain conclusion.

So... what does propaganda actually look like?

It can look like a lot of things — a bold poster, a cartoon, a slogan you can't get out of your head...

Or even a meme?

Exactly. It might be a short video, a headline, an ad... or something shared by someone you follow.

So it doesn't always look serious?

Not at all. Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes it's dramatic. Sometimes it feels totally normal.... or you might see a message so often it begins to feel normal

Which makes it harder to spot.

Exactly. Because it's not about how it looks... it's about what it's trying to do.

Which is?

To influence you — what you think, how you feel, and what you do next.

Alright... so if that's what it is...when did people start using it?

HOW

So, when do you think we really start to see propaganda take off — and who do you think is usually behind it?

I'm guessing... around wars?

That's a big one. Propaganda has been used for thousands of years, but it really ramps up during times of conflict or big social change — when people are uncertain, worried or divided.

Because that's when people are more likely to listen?

Exactly. Let's rewind to the early 1900s — when women in countries like the UK, the US and Australia were fighting for the right to vote.

Ahh the suffragettes.

"That's right. They used posters, marches, and powerful slogans to spread their message — focusing on fairness, equality, and justice.

But here's the twist... their opponents were also using propaganda — and it wasn't very flattering.

Some posters and cartoons showed women as wild, angry, or out of control — with exaggerated features, shouting, neglecting their homes, or even bossing around helpless husbands. Others suggested that if women got the vote, families would fall apart, children would be ignored, and society would be turned upside down.

The message was clear: if women were given power, everything would go wrong."

A similar thing happened way back in the 1800s in Australia .. when there was a lot of Chinese immigrants moving to Australia, during the Gold Rush - which is a period of history you'll learn about in class. A cartoon was published in a very popular and influential magazine depicting an octopus, with the head of a Chinese man, and that octopus' tentacles wrapping around all bits of Australian life - strangling the so-called 'Australian way of life'...

I've seen those! The octopus was super scary and sinister ...

Right! A cartoon that was odesigned to instil fear in the Australian public about the impact that Chinese immigrants were going to have on the country. I mean, apart from being awfully racist, it was fundamentally wrong. But instead of an evidence-backed explanation or a calm and reasoned discussion of the issue of immigration - these sorts of cheap but powerful images were used to make people fearful - and led to all sorts of dreadful discrimination against migrants ...

And sometimes, those messages weren't just published in magazines ...they fell from the sky.

Like my paper drop!

Just like that. During wars, countries dropped thousands of leaflets over enemy territory — with messages encouraging people to surrender, question their leaders, or believe the war was already lost.

So instead of fighting with weapons... they were fighting with ideas.

Exactly. And those ideas were carefully designed to influence behaviour.

So who's usually behind all this?

Governments are a big one — especially during wars. But also political groups, organisations, activists... even companies.

So it's not just history — it's everywhere.

Exactly. The tools may have changed... but the goal hasn't.

Alright... so if it's been around for this long and people are aware of it...why does it actually work?

WHY

Why does propaganda work so well on us — and how is it being used in the world we live in today?

Yeah, because some of those examples felt a bit obvious... like monster cartoons and dramatic posters.

They did. But propaganda works because it taps into something very human — our emotions.

So... feelings over facts?

Often, yes. When something makes you feel scared, proud, angry, or like you belong to a group... you're more likely to believe it — and act on it.

Even if you haven't really stopped to question it?

Exactly. And it also works because of something called repetition.

Hearing or seeing the same thing again and again?

Yep. The more you see or hear something, the more familiar it feels... and the more likely you are to think it's true.

Even if it's not.

Exactly. Now here's where things get really interesting — because today, propaganda has some very powerful new tools.

I'm guessing... the internet?

Bingo. Social media platforms use algorithms — which are like sets of instructions that decide what you see based on what you click, watch, and like.

So if I watch one video about something...

You'll probably be shown more videos just like it. And more... and more... and more.

Exactly. Which can create something called a filter bubble or an echo chamber — where you mostly see ideas that match what you already think.

So it can feel like everyone agrees with you...even when they don't

That's a bit sneaky.

It can be. And it means propaganda today can be faster, more targeted, and harder to spot than ever before.

So what can you actually do about it?

"Great question. Well you don't have to avoid it...in fact unless you live under a rock that would be impossible — you just have to question it. Ask yourself:

Who made this? What do they want me to think or do? What might be missing? And how is this making me feel?"

So instead of just taking it in... you stop, think and check...

Exactly. Because once you understand how propaganda works... it loses a lot of its power.

It's kind of like having x-ray vision for information. And in a world full of messages, posts, and opinions... that's a pretty powerful skill to have.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. In the 1920s during Prohibition in the United States, how was alcohol often shown in propaganda cartoons?

- A) As a healthy drink for families
- B) As a monster or dangerous villain
- C) As a type of fruit juice"

2. During some wars, countries dropped leaflets from planes with messages designed to influence people on the ground. True or False?

"3 What is a "filter bubble"?"

- A) A bubble you blow with soap
- B) A device you attach to a tap to filter water
- C) An algorithm that only shows you ideas you already agree with"

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of propaganda.

Now get out there... be propaganda aware...., and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.