Getting the Message

How Governments Use Public Information Posters to Inform and Inspire Generations

Background

The use of arts and artists to both build morale and emphasize a particular point of view has been commonplace throughout the history of the United States. Whether directly recruiting for the war effort (such as the famous I Want You for the U.S. Army Uncle Sam poster) or to encourage new social norms, the work of artists has been a central platform of how society responds to times of great social change.

Posters are an amazing source of historical information. A unique combination of words, color, and art they grab the viewers' attention with the goal of portraying an obvious message. However, most artists, organizations, and advertisers did not design posters with the intention of documenting history. Posters are meant to be a method of persuasion. For most of American history, posters were produced quickly, printed on low-quality paper, for as cheap as possible. They were meant to be posted, serve their purpose and then be disposed of. As advertising and art changed throughout the second half of the 20th century so too did the public's relationship with posters. Posters went from disposable products posted on the sides of buildings to a respected art form often displayed in museums and galleries.

"Food: Don't Waste It"
World War I Poster

What You Can Do

Using the resources included below, create your own public information poster. In keeping with what is going on around us in the world today with COVID-19, the posters will either have a public health and safety message or they will have a call to action to help promote social change, well-being and community spirit.

Below is a lesson plan designed for use by educators and adaptable for any grade level. Feel free to use as many of the resources as desired.

- Use the template included in this lesson to create your poster.
- Take a photo of your poster.
- Upload it to Facebook and/or Instagram with the hashtag **#BIGHistoryIsHappening**.

Send your questions to: education@wisconsinhistory.org

Enduring Understanding

By engaging with posters and other forms of artistic expression, marketing, and propaganda designed specifically to address a need or problem of the past, students will gain a better understanding of current events.

Essential Questions

- How do events influence artistic expression?
- What role did government play in the creative arts?
- How are marketing and propaganda similar? How are they different?
- Why are the arts a useful form of morale building?

Terms

- Propaganda
- Marketing
- Call to Action

Performance Task

1. Have students examine various examples of historic marketing or propaganda. Links to various poster sets from the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Library of Congress are found in the Resources section.

   a. Students will compare and contrast different eras of posters (WW1 vs WW2 for example)
   b. Ask: What message is <this poster> trying to convey
   c. Ask: What problem is this poster hoping to solve
   d. Ask: What "call to action" is this poster hoping to create?

2. Using the provided template, students will create a piece of informative/persuasive artwork based upon one or more of the following themes:

NEW POSTER THEMES

Shelter in Place

HISTORIC EXAMPLES

"You Can Help"
wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM128880

"Wake Up America"
loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.40985

NEW POSTER THEMES	HISTORIC EXAMPLES
Support Medical and Essential Services Employees	"Help Him Win" loc.gov/resource/cph.3g09559 "If I Fail" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM128879
Social Distancing	"Are You Breaking the Law" loc.gov/resource/cph.3g12666
Education at Home	"The Teacher Serves the Nation" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM133970
Wash Your Hands / Take Recommended Precautions	"Don't Talk" loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.53575
We Get Through This Together #1	"Teamwork Wins" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM130203 "Togther We Win" loc.gov/resource/cph.3g01660
Conserving Resources	"Save" loc.gov/resource/cph.3g09740/ "Food is Ammunition" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM130163
Assisting Elderly Friends, Family and Neighbors	"Join the Civilian Defense" dc.library.northwestern.edu/items/23b4658e-1af0-4993-959f-3336721a7a99
Helping Each Other Food Drives / Support Local / Relief Funds / Etc.	"Knit Your Bit" loc.gov/resource/cph.3g09863 "Spirit of '18" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM130169
We Get Through This Together #2	"I Want You" wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM32145 "For Every Fighter" loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.40823

3. Resources
    a. loc.gov/free-to-use/wwi-posters
       WWI poster collection from the Library of Congress

    b. wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15825
       WWI poster collection from the Wisconsin Historical Society

    c. wisconsinhistory.org/Records?&terms=gugler&facets=CONTENT_
       TYPE%3a%22Poster%22
       WWII poster collection from the Wisconsin Historical Society

    d. dc.library.northwestern.edu/collections/faf4f60e-78e0-4fbf-96ce-4ca8b4df597a
       WWII poster collection from the Library of Congress via Northwestern University

    e. usdac.us/artisticresponse
       As natural disasters and social emergencies multiply, the need has grown for ethical,
       creative, and effective artistic response—arts-based work responding to disaster
       or other community-wide emergency, much of it created in collaboration with
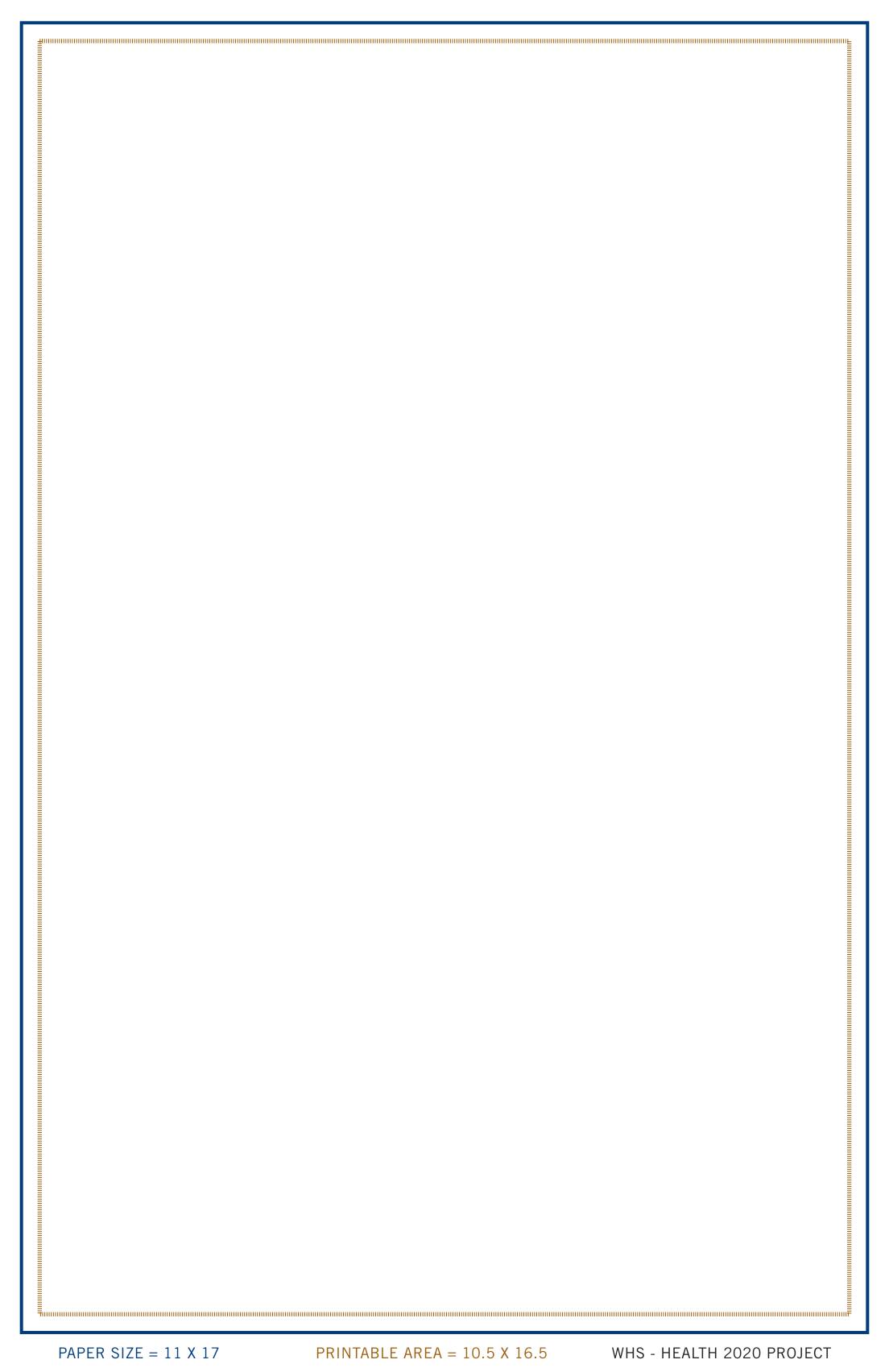   community members directly affected.

4. Thinking Like A Historian: Using the Past (to make sense of the present)
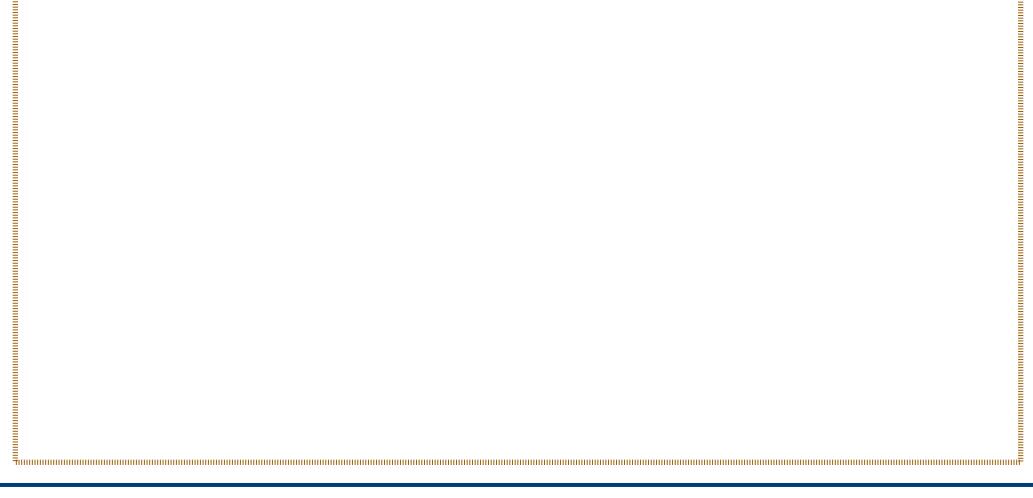   wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3632

Extension

community.amplifier.org/campaign/global-open-call-for-art/

YOUR art has power. Art can heal, art can save lives, and art can bring us together even while
we are apart. It can be a compass to guide us through this storm. This is your chance to make
work that will be distributed worldwide and will inspire us all to stay strong, safe, and united.