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**The Art of Communication**

**Writer:** Jill Taylor, NCMA Educator

**Grade Level:** 9–12

**Related Big Picture Concepts:** Communication, Persuasion, Perspective

**Subject Areas:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, Social Studies

**Essential Question:** How does propaganda write history?

**Abstract:** Students will investigate the power of propaganda by studying a portrait of King Louis XV and the situation behind its creation and by creating an example of propaganda that could have been created during the time of Louis XV.

**Duration:** 2–4 class periods

**Focus Works of Art:**

[](http://68.169.57.134./sites/default/files/Rigaud,%20Louis%20XV,%2052.9.132.jpg)

Hyacinthe Rigaud (French, 1659-1743)

***Louis XV* (1710-1774), circa 1715-17**

Oil on canvas

70 1/2 x 53 1/2 in. (179.1 x 135.9 cm)

[www.artnc.org/node/401](http://www.artnc.org/node/401)

**North Carolina Standards Correlations:**

Visual Arts: B.V.1.4, B.CX.1.1, B.CX.1.4, I.V.1.3, I.V.1.4, I.V.3.2, I.CX.1.2, P.V.1.4, A.CX.1.1

English Language Arts: 9.RI.4, 9.RI.6, 9.RI.8, 9.W.1, 9.W.8, 9.W.10, 9.SL.2, 9.SL.5, 9.RH.6, 10.RI.4, 10.RI.6, 10.RI.8, 10.W.1, 10.W.8, 10.W.10, 10.SL.2, 10.SL.5, 10.RH.6, 11.RI.4, 11.RI.6, 11.SL.2, 11.SL.5, 11.RH.6, 11.W.1, 11.W.8, 11.W.10, 11.SL.2, 11.SL.5, 11.RH.6, 12. RI.4, 12.RI.6, 12.SL.2, 12.SL.5, 12.RH.6, 12.W.1, 12.W.8, 12.W.10, 12.SL.2, 12.SL.5, 12.RH.6

Social Studies: WH.1.2, WH.6.1

**Student Learning Objectives:**

* Students will interpret a portrait from 18th-century France after viewing and discussing the work of art.
* Students will keep writing process journals to monitor individual progress throughout the project.
* Students will create propaganda pamphlets to demonstrate an understanding of how rhetorical information is communicated visually and verbally.
  + - The text will provide relevant and clear reasons to support a point of view and use style, tone, and rhetorical strategies to present a case.
    - The portrait image will complement the tone of the text by emphasizing positive or negative attributes of the subject.

**Activities:**

1. Introduce Rigaud’s portrait of Louis XV to students. Begin a discussion about the ways art communicates information visually using the portrait as an example of a persuasive tool and the text for the Art of Communication topic [see below]. Discuss:

*What does this portrait tell you about this person? (social status, age)*

*How is he dressed?*

*Why was the portrait made? (to commemorate the succession of a new king)*

*What can we learn just from looking at this painting?*

Have students write their initial impressions of the painting in their writing journals after the discussion.

1. Provide students with the handout on 18th-century France and attitudes toward Louis XIV and Louis XV. Students may attempt additional research, but the handout includes information that may be difficult to find online or in general encyclopedias. Ask students to consider the portrait from the point of view of an 18th-century French person based on the information in the handout. Consider:

*What would this person think of Louis XIV and his reign?*

*What is their opinion of the regent, Philippe, duc* d’Orléans*?*

*How would you feel about the future of your country with a five-year-old king?*

*How does this portrait persuade them to regard the king?*

1. Inform students that outside of official court portraits, French citizens also saw the king’s portrait on a propaganda pamphlet published by supporters or detractors. Ask students to visualize what the portrait would look like, based on the point of view of the person publishing the pamphlet. *How would a noble person make the king look? How would an anti-royalist depict the king?* Have students respond in their writing journals.
2. Have students get in small groups of three to four to create a propaganda pamphlet about the new king from one of the following perspectives: natural (illegitimate, but recognized) child of Louis XIV; Philippe, duc d’Orléans; or a French anti-royalist. Before writing, have students bring in examples of modern documents with rhetorical language, such as newspaper editorials, campaign endorsements, advertisements, and real estate pamphlets. In their groups, ask students to determine frequent characteristics that appear in these texts, such as word choice, verb tense, subject (first, second, or third person). As a group, determine:

*How is this text an example of propaganda?*

*What is the topic of the text?*

*What is the purpose of this text?*

*Whose point of view does it represent?*

*How do the writers use language to make a case or persuade readers? How do factors such as word choice, verb tense, and tone influence the reader?*

1. Using the informational handout and language analysis of rhetorical texts, have students write text for a propaganda pamphlet from their chosen point of view as a group. Instruct them to:
   * + Select appropriate information from the handout to provide relevant and clear reasons to support their point of view.
     + Use style, tone, and rhetorical strategies to present a case.
2. Once students have written and revised their text, ask them to create a portrait of Louis XV; Louis XIV; or Philippe, duc d’Orléans to accompany their texts. Remind them of the discussion about visualizing a portrait from a specific point of view from Step 3. Have students strategize and complete a design for the pamphlet that uses the text and image effectively.
3. Have the groups reproduce their pamphlets for the class. Discuss the different strategies groups used to communicate their assigned point of view. Have students reflect in their writing journal on the process of creating an argument. Consider: *How did your point of view come across in the pamphlet? How persuasive was your argument? What parts of your argument worked well? What could have worked better? What would you change about your argument after seeing the efforts of the other groups? How did your portrait contribute to your argument?*

**Assessments:**

* Discussion and writing journal entries will assess students’ interpretation and analysis of a work of art, its intended message, and the similar functions of written language.
* The pamphlet will demonstrate the students’ ability to:
  + - provide relevant and clear reasons to support a point of view and use style, tone, and rhetorical strategies to present a case.
    - create a portrait image that complements the tone of the text by emphasizing positive or negative attributes of the subject.

**Resources:**

Vocabulary:

propaganda

regent

portrait

rhetoric

Lesson Resources:

Art of Communication Info

King Louis XV Handout

Versailles Web page: <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/history->

**King Louis XV Handout**

The Death of Louis XIV and Louis XV’s Succession to the Throne

Olivier Bernier:

“All through Europe the statesmen were feeling a mixture of relief and anxiety: relief because they would soon be rid of the man who had determined the course of Continental politics for so long, anxiety because he left a sickly five-year-old as his successor. If the little boy died, the complex settlement reached at Utrecht [ending the War of Spanish Succession] only two years before might well become obsolete, and no one wanted the European war to start all over again.”

“Even if his great-uncle ruled, however, Louis XV remained all-important: everything depended on his remaining alive, besides which he was just as much the elect of God as if he had been twenty years older. Miraculously, given the usual paucity of good looks among European royalty, the young King actually looked the part. He was a handsome child, we are told (and his portraits confirm it), with delicate features, dark hair, big black eyes, and a perfect complexion. All who saw him admired him and said so: more than a little boy, he was a kind of icon whom people came to worship, and though, uneasily aware of it, he behaved with preternatural dignity.”

“The child was enormously popular because it was generally assumed, as was always the case in France during minorities, that once he was old enough to rule, he would bring forth a new golden age.”

Phillipe, duc d’Orléans

Some courtiers attributed the death of Louis XV’s parents and brother to him, and “it was an easy and widely shared assumption that he would clear his way to the throne by arranging the little boy’s demise” (Bernier).

Rigaud’s Portraits of Louis XIV and Louis XV

While on one level the images of Louis XIV fulfilled a “collective need” for a “French hero-king” (153), they also tricked the public by neglecting to mention that the king stood only 5’3” tall in his bare feet and that his wig was more than a fashion choice—it hid the fact that he had lost hair in an illness (Burke 125).

Rigaud painted one of the most famous portraits of Louis XIV and used much of the same imagery in the portrait of Louis XV.

This portrait depicts Louis XV in coronation regalia at the time of his succession to the throne at the age of five. His actual coronation took place when he was 12.

Sources:

Bernier, Olivier. *Louis the Beloved: The Life of Louis XV*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984.

Burke, Peter. *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

---. *The Fabrication of Louis XIV.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.