



# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

# Propaganda & Symbolism

***Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.***

During the COVID-19/Novel Coronavirus pandemic, local, [state](#) and [federal](#) governments, and [companies](#), are trying to persuade people to take certain actions, such as social distancing, by using propaganda.

Propaganda is a method of communication that attempts to persuade individuals through a variety of media types, like posters, radio ads, or videos. It involves sharing ideas or information for the purpose of helping or hurting an institution, cause, or person, and may be positive or negative. Propaganda uses symbolism to convey messages. Symbolism is the use of images, which represent particular ideas or qualities, to send a message.



For example, during World War II, the U.S. government [used propaganda](#) to try and convince people to conserve resources. Before the Revolutionary War, the [famous image](#) of the Boston Massacre by Paul Revere was intended to persuade people to oppose the British and gain support for revolt. Today, we see something similar with [social media campaigns](#) targeting responses to COVID-19/Novel coronavirus. The goal is to be persuasive!

This poster is one of the most famous pieces of propaganda in American history. The patriotic colors with Uncle Sam pointing the finger and the slogan “I Want You!” is a great example of how the government used symbolism and propaganda to get the American public to feel a certain way. It played a role in getting hundreds of thousands of men to decide it was their patriotic duty to join the Army during World War II.

**To Do and To Think:** Utilizing this updated Uncle Sam poster, think about and answer the following questions:

- ✓ How is the artist conveying action through symbols?
- ✓ What does this Uncle Sam want from you?
- ✓ What is your patriotic duty?

**Learn MORE** about the concepts of propaganda and symbolism. Free registration may be required.

- [Bias, Symbolism, and Propaganda](#), from Civics360
- [World War II Leaflets](#), from PBS History Detectives
- [What are the Tools of Propaganda](#), from the American Historical Association



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(Courtesy Rob Walker)