Holocaust Museum Repackages Multimedia Propaganda Exhibit for Media Literacy Educators

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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, through its USHMM.org initiative, recently launched an initiative designed to help teachers use "State of Deception: The Power of Propaganda," a multimedia exhibit to teach digital and media literacy skills.

The exhibit, according to the State of Deception website, "reveals how the Nazi Party used modern techniques as well as new technologies and carefully crafted messages to sway millions with its vision for a new Germany.

It includes a powerful online component, featuring an interactive timeline http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/timeline/ , a gallery of original artifacts http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/exhibit/ , a multimedia resource library (including books, audio, mining images and more) and a catalog of resources http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/ to explore. Each theme:

"Making A Leader" http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/makingaleader/ , "Conquering Youth" http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/conqueringyouth/ , etc.) combines explanatory text with historical artifacts and features such as short videos, slide shows, and interactive features (for example, see "The Man from Hitler's Flag" http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/themanfromhitlersflag/ ). The website also hosts a vast collection of resources http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/Resources/ , including lesson plans, historical sources and video features.

During January and February of this year, over 300 English teachers from across the country participated in a digital and media literacy online workshop: http://englishumpt.org/ SnapshotPanelist/2014/09/01/ww/ . The workshop introduced the exhibit and key media literacy concepts through a combination of videos, lesson plans and online discussions. Carol Daniels and Laurie Schwober, both Museum Teacher Fellows http://www.ushmm.org/education/teacher-fellows/ and members of the USHMM Regional Education Council http://www.ushmm.org/education/teacher-fellows/ , delivered a virtual teacher training program, facilitated the online workshop.

The initiative used the English Companion Ning http://englishump.org/ snapshotpanelist/2014/09/01/ww/ , an online resource-sharing community for over 25,000 English and language arts teachers, as a platform. According to Peter Friedl, Director of National Outreach for Teacher Initiatives for the museum, this platform was chosen because the museum's educational team wanted to "engage the broadest number of people possible, and the potential for impact was really high." In addition, the Ning platform provided a pre-existing structure and audience, making it "a perfect venue for experimentation."

The goals of the workshop were to:

1. Introduce middle and high school teachers to the State of Deception Online Exhibit,
2. Inform teachers of the many dangers of Nazi propaganda during the Holocaust,
3. Examine propaganda using key media literacy concepts, and
4. From an online community where English teachers incorporating the State of Deception exhibit into their classrooms could share their reflections and resources.

The workshop included four modules:

Module 1 - "Making a Leader" http://englishump.org/ snapshotpanelist/2014/09/01/ww/ . Each module included a lesson plan, a video resource, an instructor's guide and an online discussion forum. Each module introduced teachers on how to analyze the themes on the website using the "State of Deception: Propaganda in Media Literacy" http://www.ushmm.org/collections/exhibits/stateofdeception/uncoveringtruth/ as a framework. While the modules incorporate features of the website, teachers notice that lesson plans were developed with museum Internet access issues in mind. "We wanted to make it more than just 'Stick your way through our website.'" Accordingly, the lesson plans can be completed either on or offline.

On each module page, teachers were invited to share their reflections and resources as they complete their classroom experiences. Although the comments are now closed, the teacher feedback for each module is quite insightful, providing guidance for others who wish to teach about propaganda as well as potential evaluation data for the museum.

In order to better understand the teachers who participated in this program, the museum's educational team employed a short survey after the completion of the program. Some of the data provided interesting insights for example, the teachers overwhelmingly (79%) taught at public schools. Only 35% of survey respondents posted comments in the discussion forum, yet over 90% read the discussion forums. The survey results also indicated that teachers were likely to use downloadable content from the museum website but unlikely to interact with the social media features. While the survey focused more on understanding participants and the extent of their participation, it also invited participants to share their comments and criticisms, and provide input on potential material for future educational programming. Plans for future programming are not set in stone at the moment, but the museum may involve teachers back to share their classroom experiences implementing the curriculum on the English Companion Ning. Aside from this survey, the museum has not yet implemented a formal evaluation of the program.

In addition to be educational programs, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is working on more ways to engage people through media. For example, a "Propaganda Mobile Initiative" is currently in development. Holocaust survivor volunteers will guide visitors through the exhibit using a combination of cell phone voice recording and interactive text messaging. Considering all of the new media emphasis at the museum, Friedl says he "really likes the media literacy focus, because everything we do uses media: photos, documents, speeches, etc. We've always been engaging people with media-related to the Holocaust and encouraging them to reflect on the contemporary relevance."

This article is part of our series on digital and media literacy education initiatives .

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