



Smokes for Soldiers

History nugget

In the decade after World War I, an American writing about the dangers of tobacco argued “the War maimed, killed, and devastated; but the worst thing the war did was entrench the cigarette.” (Leslie, 1928 cited in Tate, 1999)

Tobacco was not unique to World War I. In previous wars, it had served as an aid in maintaining morale and discipline. But in the years during and following the First World War, cigarettes started to move into mainstream culture in Canada and the United States, and historians argue various developments were at play.

The introduction of a rolling machine in the 1880s accelerated the production of cigarettes, but as the industry expanded, it faced opposition from a growing anti-smoking movement. With the onset of First World War, some argue the tobacco manufacturers initiated an extensive effort around supplying tobacco, in particular cigarettes, to soldiers. The aim was to mitigate the negative effects of the opposition movement and increase the use of their product.

But others argue while the industry was ready to combine opportunity with patriotism, the tobacco manufacturers were just one of several players involved. Military and government leaders, the media and charity organizations each had a hand in promoting tobacco products during the War.

One line of reasoning contends the US military and government took the lead in distributing cigarettes to American soldiers. This argument asserts government and military authorities were determined to fight a “clean war” untainted by alcohol or prostitution. Tobacco was seen as a way to steer soldiers away from greater vices. The thinking was that soldiers soothed by cigarette smoke would be less likely to seek other temptations. The US Congress banned the sale of alcohol to soldiers and established prostitution-free zones around military camps, but included tobacco products in rations and subsidized their sale at canteens. The US War Industries Board encouraged domestic production of tobacco by designating cigarette manufacturing as an essential industry.

For their part, Canadian and American newspapers emphasized the importance of tobacco for the war effort and linked tobacco with patriotism. *La Presse*, for example, declared that tobacco soothed nerves and made it possible for soldiers to face dangers. And, the *Montreal Gazette* encouraged the public to show their patriotism by donating to the Gazette Cigarette and Tobacco Fund, proclaiming “our boys are giving their lives; all they ask of us is something to smoke.”

Some historians argue while the manufacturers did not take the lead in encouraging the distribution of tobacco to soldiers, they recognized the value of being identified with the war effort. Tobacco manufacturers were major contributors to the tobacco funds and the newspapers publicly thanked them by regularly publishing the list of donors.

Charity organizations that had once opposed cigarettes, including the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, agreed to support their distribution to American and Canadian soldiers. This was seen by some charity members as a way to steer soldiers away from greater vices or as a source of comfort. One YMCA official, previously a supporter of the anti-smoking movement, wrote:

There are hundreds of thousands of men in the trenches who would go mad, or at least become so nervously inefficient as to be useless, if tobacco were denied them. Without it they would surely turn to worse things ... The argument that tobacco may shorten the life five or ten years, and that it dulls the brain in the meantime, seems a little out of place in a trench where men stand in frozen blood and water and wait for death. (Polling, 1918 cited in Tate, 1999)

But not everyone felt this way. Some staff involved with the YMCA and other charities wondered about the appropriateness of distributing a substance they had previously opposed. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Canada argued tobacco as a gift to soldiers exposed them to "gas poison hurled upon them from the enemy's side and tobacco poison thrust upon them from the side of their mistaken friends." (Bigelow, 1916 cited in Jarrett, 2005) Health professionals also spoke out and warned of the health consequences. For instance, one physician wrote: "more American soldiers will be damaged by the cigarette than by German bullets." (Kellogg, 1917 cited in Tate, 1999) However, those who protested were at risk of having their patriotism questioned. Various authorities had stressed tobacco was necessary for soldiers fighting a war and few were willing to challenge them.

Instructional strategies

1. Have students read the [Smokes for Soldiers](#) handout or cover the material in a short lecture. Then facilitate class discussions or have students work in small groups to address one or both of the following. You might use questions like those provided.

The role of governments and social institutions

- a. Why did the US government leaders support the use of tobacco by soldiers but prohibit the use of alcohol? What makes an action right or wrong?
- b. Do you think the decision made by governments to supply tobacco to soldiers was to the advantage or disadvantage of the soldiers?
- c. How about other people in society? In what ways might they have benefitted? In what ways might they have ultimately been harmed?
- d. Explore the idea of drugs as "tools." Can tools be helpful and harmful at the same time? When using a drug as a tool, what are the dangers? How could you minimize the risk?
- e. How can we evaluate the choices governments and communities make in these situations? Do they have an obligation to protect the "free-will" of individuals? What if they promote a behaviour that later causes harm to individuals?

Changing attitudes

- a. What factors might have influenced the charities to change their attitude towards tobacco in the context of WW I?
 - b. Have you ever changed your mind about something? What factors influenced the change?
 - c. Do you think someone who believes something is harmful can, at the same time, use it and appreciate it or even benefit from it? Explain.
 - d. What are the possible consequences of having a different attitude about a drug than the official attitude in the community?
2. According to the Canadian War Museum, propaganda is "the organized dissemination of information to influence thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions." Newspapers and other organizations used posters and postcards during WW I to encourage the public to donate to their campaigns to provide cigarettes and other tobacco products to soldiers. Have students review the appeal that appeared on page 8 of the [Montreal Gazette](#) on March 27, 1915 and the images in the [Smokes for Soldiers](#) handout looking for elements of propaganda. Facilitate a discussion with the class. You might ask questions like:
 - a. What are some of the ways the Gazette appeal and the posters use words and images to try to influence people? Give examples.

- b. What effect would the posters and Gazette appeal likely have had on people at the time? What thoughts, beliefs, feelings, values, emotions and actions are prompted?
 - c. Would the posters and newspaper page be effective today? Why or why not?
 - d. What are some examples of propaganda campaigns in our lives today?
3. Have students develop propaganda posters or other campaigns (video public service announcements, Twitter messages, etc.) about contemporary concerns such as drinking and driving, smoking or the environment. Invite students to present their work to the class, and facilitate a discussion with the class about how effectively the messages are conveyed by the images, words, colours or sounds used in the material.

Sources

Canadian War Museum. Analyzing Propaganda Posters. http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/wp-content/mcme-uploads/2014/07/4-a-4-all_e.pdf

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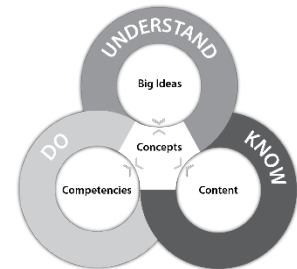
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Drug literacy

Big ideas

- People have been using drugs for thousands of years and in almost every human culture
- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other



Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>



Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story

Social Studies 9

Big ideas

- Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events
- The physical environment influences the nature of political, social and economic change
- Disparities in power alter the balance of relationships between individuals and between societies
- Collective identity is constructed and can change over time

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the justification for competing historical accounts after investigating points of contention, reliability of sources and adequacy of evidence
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions and development
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues and events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews and beliefs