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Theory of knowledge

Video study activity

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In the 1940s Disney studios produced a series of propaganda film designed to influence the way in which the American public responded to the war in Europe. One film called *Reason and Emotion* explores the presumed conflict between the two. Emotion is characterised as an unrefined caveman and a petulant young girl, while much more brainy and mature (but significantly less interesting) figures are used to represent reason. Claims about the interplay of emotion and reason are used to argue that Hitler is using emotion to manipulate the German people.

The film is full of topics that you could explore as part of your TOK studies:

- The exploration of propaganda in TOK is often reserved for totalitarian regimes. This film (and other Disney films like it) might be used to explore ways in which governments and cultures across the world use propaganda.
- How are gender stereotypes used in this film and what do these suggest about the roles of men and women in the 1940s? Look at what the 'emotional' characters inside the mind of the man and women desire. What does this suggest about how society viewed men and women?
- How does the language used in the film guide the thinking of the viewer? What words does the narrator use to describe the relationship between emotion and reason and how does this influence the argument presented? What claims about language are made when exploring how the media stirs up the public?
- How are certain images used to move the argument along? In particular consider: the look of the characters representing emotion and reason, the similarities between the German soldier and the baby at the beginning of the video (comparing this with the image of the Allied airman), the ways in which Hitler is drawn, and the imagery used in showing the German advance and the Allied response.
- Does the video use the same sort of propagandising techniques that it at the same time tries to warn the viewer of?
- Can you think of any instances of these sorts of subtle messages at work in government publications, reports or publicity today? Using TOK to explore modern-day propaganda is very effective. Don't just assume that only other governments use propaganda, or that we're too clever to be fooled by it nowadays.

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