Warmer – What do you think?

Propaganda posters send a message to people. Look at the propaganda posters below.

- What different messages are they sending?
- Do you think the messages are for men or women?

A

B

C

Task 1 – Talking about propaganda

Match the words and phrases with their meanings. You can use your dictionary to check.

1. portray
   Propaganda portrayed soldiers as heroes.
   - a. draw or plan something

2. enrol
   He enrolled in the college as a part-time student.
   - b. make

3. design
   She designed the presentation in black and white
   - c. get someone to do something in a positive way

4. encourage
   Her mother encouraged her to go to University.
   - d. give someone a job

5. recruit
   The company recruited 500 people this month.
   - e. make for a certain person to see/use

6. aim at
   They aimed the toy at very young children.
   - f. join

7. produce
   The factory produces shoes and boots.
   - g. show

Now use these words to talk about the posters to your partner.
**Task 2 – Reading for main ideas**

*Read the text below and match the paragraphs to Posters A, B and C on the previous page.*

**Propaganda 1914-1918 – Did women keep the home fires burning?**

In the past, wars produced a lot of propaganda in the form of leaflets, posters and even songs. In 1914 there was a popular English song called ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’. The words said women should not to cry as they watched the men leave to go to war and they should stay positive at home waiting for the soldiers to return. This was in line with the traditional image of passive women in the home, supporting their husbands by looking after the house and children. Posters also presented women and children as needing protection from the dangers of war. The posters directed men to take up their traditional roles of protecting the **weaker sex** by joining the army.

Propaganda aimed at women contained quite different images. Before the War, most women worked in the textiles industry or in teaching or domestic work. They were not expected or encouraged to work in more ‘male’ roles. With the new absence of men in the workforce, however, women were now required to do much of the work previously done by men. Organisations were set up to recruit women in areas such as transport and communications which would support the army both at home and abroad.

In addition to this, there was a whole new area of work which desperately needed recruits. This was the munitions factories, where the supplies such as chemicals and explosives made to support the **war effort** were produced. Posters designed to encourage women in their new roles were bright and cheerful and the women portrayed in them were attractive and healthy, pleased to be ‘**doing their bit**’ for their country.

**Task 3 – Reading for detail**

1. True or false?
   a. The song ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’ was produced to encourage women to join the army.
   b. Before 1914, many women worked in clothing factories and schools.
   c. In the War, women were asked to do men’s jobs.
   d. The women in the munitions factories helped the War by making food supplies.

2. Understanding meanings

What is meant in the text by the phrases in bold in the text?

   a. The weaker sex  
   b. The war effort  
   c. ‘Doing their bit’
Task 4 – Speculating about the past

Discuss the questions below with your partner. You can use the grammar box and the language in the speech bubbles to help.

2. What do you think the women’s response was to the propaganda posters? What do you think the reality was like?

- They might have been excited.
- They must have wanted to enrol straight away!
- No, it must have been awful. They must have been so scared.
Task 5 – Reading and sharing ideas

You are going to read about some experiences of women in the First World War. Did they match the portrayal in the propaganda? Did they match your ideas about the reality of women’s lives in the War?

**Student A** will read about the experience of Katherine who enrolled in the army, and some facts about women’s roles in the army.

**Student B** will read about the experience of Mrs Hall who was a munitions worker and some facts about women in factories.

 Highlight some key words and discuss with your partner what you have learned.

Task 6 – Writing about past possibilities

Do you think these women’s ideas about their role in the war effort changed after they started working?

Write some sentences below using modal verbs.

* e.g. She *must* have felt disappointed when she arrived at the camp.

1. ...............................................................................................................................

2. ...............................................................................................................................

3. ...............................................................................................................................

4. ...............................................................................................................................

Task 7 – Discussing wider issues

Talk about these questions in your group and be ready to share your ideas with the class.

1. Do you think these women’s lives were different when the War finished?

2. What do you think about women being called ‘the weaker sex’?

Homework

1. Find some other propaganda images from the internet or other sources.

2. Think about who they are aimed at and how the portrayal might have differed from the reality.

3. How important is propaganda in wartime? Is it wrong for governments to use propaganda?
“I enrolled in the army and went to the camp with another girl, Richardson. I wrote my name down for work as a storekeeper, but when I went to the camp there weren’t any jobs in the stores. Richardson got a job in the pharmacy so she was OK, but for me it was terrible. The only jobs available were digging the toilets for the camp. It was hard and dirty work. I hated it. It wasn’t what I joined the army for – to dig toilets!

I complained, but we were told we were in the army and in the army you do as you are told and don’t ask questions!” - Katherine

Women’s work in the army during the First World War

- Women worked in hard, dangerous and unpleasant roles such as ambulance driving, grave digging and pig farming.
- Many people did not agree that women could or should be in the army, so the women often faced problems with the general public or male officers.
“After a long day at the munitions factory, we got home and immediately had a bath to wash away the chemicals. The chemicals on our skin changed the water colour to blood red, which was scary. Some of the sulphur got deep inside so our skin actually became yellow, and this didn't wash off. My toenails were bright yellow for 12 months after the War. Horrible!

There were worse things though. Some of the chemicals, like mercury, didn’t have a colour so you couldn’t see them. They were the most dangerous. I got mercury poisoning and didn’t even find out until after the War!” – Mrs Hall

**Women’s work in factories during the First World War**

- The women worked long hours and the work was often very dangerous because of the explosives that they produced.
- Their skin turned yellow from the sulphur in the explosives and so the women factory workers got the nickname ‘canary girls’ after the small yellow bird called the canary.
- Many factory workers were mothers. They returned in the evenings to look after their families with the chemicals still on their skin.