

### **The Poster Art of Revolutionary China**

These posters are from the early 1970s, the era of the Cultural Revolution in China. They were used by the government to teach important lessons in a land where many people were not well educated. Students should examine each poster, describe what they see, and try to figure out the lesson the poster is designed to teach. Students can work individually, as a class, or in groups.

As an introduction to the activity, a class can discuss the uses of propaganda. These posters have been called propaganda because they are intended to convince people to support government actions. Students should discuss examples of propaganda by our government and identify other examples of propaganda in our society and in other countries. During the discussion, students should explain why they think their selections are examples of propaganda, whether propaganda and education are the same or different, and whether propaganda is necessarily a good or a bad thing.

The posters from China and explanations below are from Stewart E. Fraser, 100 Great Chinese Posters (New York: Images Graphiques, 1977). They are available from Poster Please, Inc., 601 W. 26th St., NY NY, 10001 (212/787-4000).

**Brigade's Ducks-** This painting shows the prosperity of the communal farms and the dynamic grass-roots agricultural movement in China. It also encourages other farmers to raise ducks.

\* What does this poster tell us about life on a collective farm in rural China?

**Commune Fish Pond-** The cultivation of fish in fish ponds is a traditional Chinese peasant activity but growth during the past decade (the 1960s) has been phenomenal. Fish is a diet staple of coastal villagers and inland rural communities that use China's extensive river system to create fish ponds. This painting shows the bountiful and spectacular crop gathered by net in the communal ponds.

\* When you think of people fishing, what do you usually image?

\* What image is presented in this picture?

**Picking Herbs-** The gathering of herbs for medicinal and culinary reasons is traditional. During the 1970s there was a revival in the use of herbs. The Red Cross satchel suggests both the medicinal reason for their excursion into the hillside and the potential hazards associated with herb gathering.

\* Look at the two girls. How has life for girls changed under communism?

\* What does this poster tell us about the relationship between past and present in China?

**Army and People are One Family-** A soldier is giving a haircut to a young boy. The slogan on the window says "Support the Army, Love the People."

\* What is happening in this poster?

\* What does this poster say about the relationship between the army and the people?

#### **Summary Questions:**

\* Based on these posters, what can we learn about the message the Chinese government is teaching its people during the Cultural Revolution?

\* In your opinion, are these posters examples of propaganda or education?

#### **Follow-up Projects:**

\* Design and create a poster that teaches a lesson about life in your community or that teaches a lesson about an issue you think is important.

\* Select another society and era you have studied in history. Design and create a poster that rallies people to either support or challenge the government.