Portraits and Propaganda
What is a portrait?

• A portrait is a painting, sculpture, photograph, or other artistic work that captures a person’s appearance and often their mood and expressions. Portraits traditionally show a person’s face and upper body.

• Throughout history, people with wealth and power were able to have artists create their portraits. We will look at some examples of portraits in the Worcester Art Museum’s Collection.
What is propaganda?

• Propaganda is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.”

• Portraits often present the person featured in a flattering way. It is the tradition that the portrait of the current American President and/or Governor is placed in important public buildings such as court houses and city halls. As you will see, this type of portrait has long been used in world history.

• Think about how a leader would want to be portrayed in his/her portrait.

This carved work depicts Prince Arikankharer in a triumphal scene. The prince’s Meroitic civilization, contemporary with early imperial Rome, flourished along the fertile banks of the Nile River in the land of Kush, in what is now the Sudan. This African dynasty traded with people in Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Near East. Meroitic art reflects aspects of these cultures. This image of Prince Arikankharer derives from classical Egyptian reliefs that showed Pharaohs smiting, or striking down, their enemies.
Meroitic, *Prince Arikankharer Slaying His Enemies*, A.D. 25-41, Sandstone
Museum purchase, 1922.145

The carving establishes the prince’s power by showing how he has conquered his enemies. This demonstrates that as heir to the throne, he has already learned the skills of warfare and can defend his people. It also shows that he is favored by the gods, with the winged victory swatting away flies so the prince can focus on the issue at hand. While his father paid Egyptian sculptors to create a strong image of his son, the crown prince died before he could come to power.
Gaius Julius Germanicus Caesar was nicknamed Caligula (“Baby Boots”) as a child growing up in a Roman military camp. He became the third Julio-Claudian emperor, ruling from A.D. 37-41. Caligula was one of the most despised Roman emperors; he was assassinated at age 29.

He was described as “very tall and extremely pale, with an unshapely body, but very thin neck and legs. His eyes and temples were hollow, his forehead broad and grim, his hair thin and entirely gone on the top of his head, though his body was hairy. Because of this to look upon him from a higher place as he passed by, or for any reason whatever to mention a goat, was treated as a capital offense.”

- Suetonius, Life of Caligula, p. 50.
This larger than life size head was made to fit onto a monumental statue of the Emperor standing and wearing a toga. In our modern world, we rely on photos and videos to see world leaders. In ancient Rome, citizens got to know their rulers through portraits in two forms: minted coins and sculptures of marble or bronze. The use of three-dimensional portraits, allowed artistic copies to be displayed throughout the ruler’s lands. Sometimes the sculptures were realistic.

This Caligula has idealized features that convey a calm, cool, and confident leader.
While national leaders commissioned portraits of themselves, people in lesser military and political roles also ordered paintings of themselves. John Farnham commissioned this portrait of himself three years after Queen Elizabeth I made him a Gentleman-Pensioner, a significant position at the English royal court. The inscription at the top refers to his service to his country: "When in my youth I was a soldier, I was considered a prize; and now when my country calls, I shall be a soldier again." Farnham's personal motto appears on the column: “Hope is my truth.”

Farnham’s attire and the words that he had added to this painting show how he wanted people to remember him.
In early America, the portrait of the President was often the only official image citizens saw of him. Each President has had an official portrait. While this tradition of painting the head of state followed a European tradition, Americans adopted their own style.

This portrait of President Andrew Jackson is a print based on the painting by J. Wood. Jackson became famous as a victorious general who saved New Orleans from the British during the War of 1812. That fame would lead him to the Senate and then to The White House, where he served as the seventh President from 1829 through 1837.

Official portraits present American Presidents in a more flattering light than some of the images created of them while in office. President Jackson vetoed the charter for the Second Bank and there were some financial crises that occurred during his administration.

This Andrew Jackson Coin, often called a “hard-time coin,” reads, “My Substitute for the U.S. Bank. My Experiment, My currency, My Glory.” While the opposite side shows a pig and reads, “Perish Credit Perish Commerce 1834 My Victory My Third Heat Down with the Bank.”

The portraits of American presidents are often used to add legitimacy to government programs. Our Treasury Department and that of other nations stamps currency with the portraits of former leaders.

During World War One, former wartime President Lincoln was used to inspire citizens to purchase Liberty Bonds to support the country. A line from *The Gettysburg Address* adds to the design of this government poster.