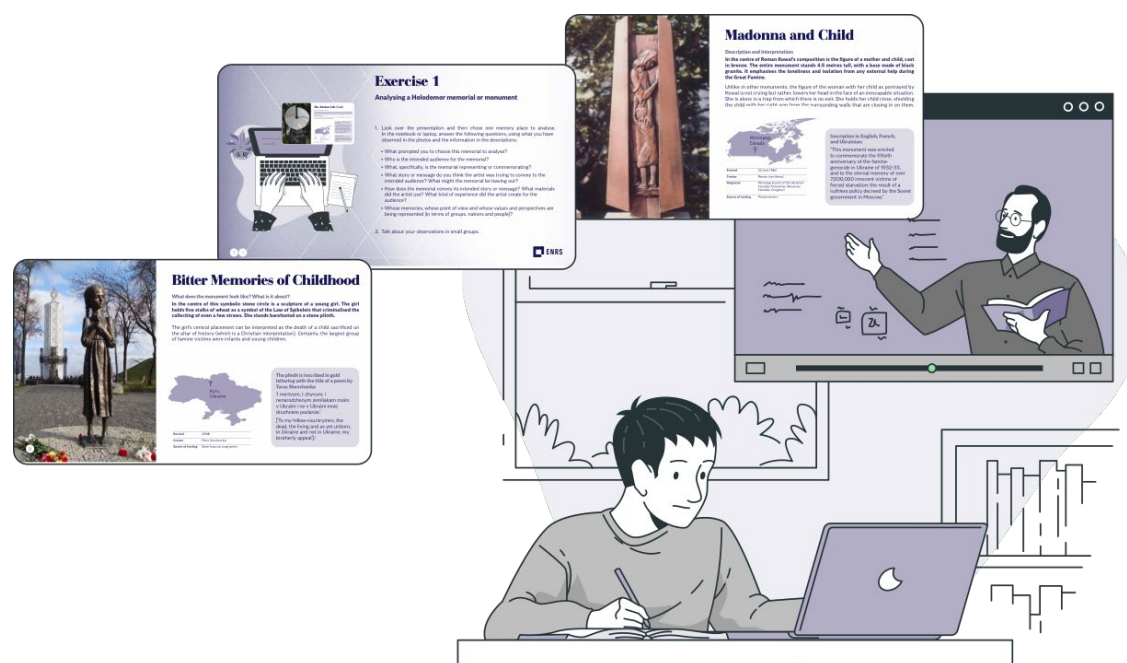


# The Holodomor as an Example of Disinformation

## Ninety Years of Hiding the Truth

Łukasz Migniewicz



### Keywords

- totalitarianism
- disinformation
- manipulation
- myth
- journalism
- Ukraine
- genocide in the USSR
- propaganda
- the Holodomor
- history falsification

### For the teacher

This lesson scenario is intended for students aged 14 and above. The subject matter discussed allows for its use in interdisciplinary classes of such subjects as history, culture, native language and social sciences.

The material has been divided into three parts: the lesson scenario proper, a worksheet and a set of source materials. Individual elements of the scenario can be modified to the target audience.

### **Operational goals**

The student is able to:

- explain the reasons for hiding the truth about the Great Famine in the context of the events of the 1930s juxtaposing them with contemporary events;
- characterise the process of how historical lies operate;
- use diverse information sources: propaganda posts and tweets on social media; photographs; book covers; interviews; propaganda posters; scientific essays and press articles and define their usability for analysing the phenomenon of history falsification

Skills developed:

- analysing diverse historical sources, pointing to the cause-and-effect connections between them and a historical event;
- recognising the features of historical lies and manifestations of disinformation;
- making use of source material for the creation of historical narratives;
- creating arguments and counterarguments and participating in a debate.

### **Teaching methods**

- teaching discussion
- groupwork; individual work
- brainstorming
- analysis of source materials, texts and illustrations
- Philips 66 problem-solving technique
- decision tree
- Socratic debate
- Metaplan
- Long-table discussion principle
- Work with a set of exercises

### **Teaching aids**

- board/flipcharts, marker pen/chalk,
- large paper sheets/Bristol board sheets.

### **Before the lesson**

The teachers recommends reading the essay and presentation entitled *Remembering the Holodomor*.

# The course of the lesson

---

## Introduction

1. Explain to the students that the aim of the class is to learn about the mechanisms and reasons for deleting and falsifying the history of the Great Famine in Ukraine. During the class you will look at the earliest ways of denying the tragedy and the gradual adoption of the perpetrator's narrative while ignoring the words that confirm the victims' story.
2. Distribute the worksheets and source kits. Inform the students that they will work independently or in groups during the class and that this will result in a joint discussion of the issues raised. Free expression of ideas and the ability to create arguments and counter-arguments is important.

---

## Development

1. In a brief teaching discussion, remind the students what the Great Famine was using the information in the essay *Remembering the Holodomor* – draw their attention to the number of victims of the Great Famine and its causes.
2. Introduce the students to the realities of the time by reminding them of the characteristics of a totalitarian state. To do this, write the term 'totalitarianism' on the board/flipchart. Distribute the worksheets and ask the students to complete **Exercise 1**. In the meantime, let them search for information freely and consult others. After completing the mind maps, the students come up to the board to present their results and write down any characteristics of a totalitarian state that they consider relevant.

### **Example answers:**

single leader; one-party rule; a unified security apparatus controlling all areas of citizens' lives; subordination of all aspects of life (including daily life) to the state, the ruling party and the leader; mass-media monopoly; human-rights violations; terror targeting citizens

Leave the large mind map you have created with your students in a visible place. It will facilitate their work during the following stages of the activity.

**Teacher's comment:**

As an introduction to the next section, emphasise that the Great Famine was caused artificially as a result of an economic experiment – collectivisation – and a brutal policy of requisitioning the crops, applied to the areas of greatest resistance to the totalitarian system of government. Tell the students that the first accounts of events in Ukraine reached Western Europe as early as March 1933, thanks to the Welsh journalist **Gareth Jones**. Western correspondents and diplomats were not allowed to travel in the country without permission from the Soviet authorities. Special trips were organised for them, where, under the control of OGPU<sup>1</sup> agents, they met with a strictly selected population and saw only 'model' factories, farms, etc. It was almost impossible to obtain information from sources other than official state ones. Many journalists residing in Moscow therefore reproduced official information without checking it for accuracy. Jones travelled on his own to the famine-stricken southern part of the USSR's European territory. What he saw and described disturbed the created image of a model communist state.

3. Divide the students into teams of four to six persons. Ask half of the groups to look at **Source A** (on Gareth Jones) and to look at **Source B** (on Walter Duranty). This could also be homework given to them in the previous lesson.

Tell them that the **teamwork** will be based on the **Philips 66** problem-solving technique. The aim of the exercise is to compare the two accounts and to draw conclusions as to where the differences in their creation came from.

The Philips 66 method is **brainstorming** in groups of six for six minutes. The method involves working quickly and intensively on a given problem, allowing the whole group to develop a thorough analysis of the collected source material.

---

<sup>1</sup> OGPU (Obyedinionnoye gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravleniye), the Joint State Political Directorate, was the main body of the Soviet security services. Its operations evolved into mass terror of civilians, including the construction of a system of labour camps (Gulags), where the inmates were forced into slave labour. OGPU agents would frequently stage show trips for foreign guests in order to present the USSR as an ideal country.

- Hand out the appropriate decision trees to the groups (Exercise 2). In the first phase, the groups will meet to complete them based on the sources they have read.
- In the second phase, the groups meet to discuss the results of their reflections and exchange ideas, which you will write down on the board/flipchart.
- In phase three, each team again works independently and revises their ideas or reaffirms them.
- In phase four, the students do Exercise 3 based on Source C.

The number of stages can be determined freely (we suggest a minimum of three). After the final one, the students collectively – by means of a discussion based on the principles of direct democracy – leave two solutions to each of the decision trees that they think best illustrate the cases and the relationship of the two journalists.

Summarising this part of the lesson, point out to the students that the Soviet authorities tried to hide the truth about the events in Ukraine from the very beginning.

4. Visual techniques were used particularly in totalitarian systems. Ask the students to read Source D and to offer their views on the claim that:

**a picture, a photograph and propaganda posters are great for manipulating historical facts.**

5. One of the best methods to summarise the conclusions of the work is a Socratic debate. Ask the students to sit in a circle (preferably on the floor)<sup>2</sup>.

Inform them that the most important thing in the debate is to think critically and formulate questions that would allow for an open and multi-faceted discussion, so the possibility of wandering and ‘venturing’ into the dead ends of history is allowed. As an introduction, ask the question:

**What did you feel when reading the materials and coming to terms with the fact of the Great Famine?**

---

<sup>2</sup> During on-line lessons, ensure an appropriate order for the students’ oral contributions, e.g. using tools making it possible to express themselves.

During the discussion, you are the facilitator, taking on the role of a limited 'gatekeeper' to the discussion and making sure that it does not stray too far from the subject under discussion. During the debate, the students use conclusions and insights from the case study (the worksheet exercises they did will be helpful here). The aim is not to reach a consensus, but to clarify the issues and build some rational ideas. As the discussion proceeds, the facilitator writes the emerging conclusions on the board/flipchart.

### **Discussion topic: Does visual propaganda work as well or perhaps even better than the written word?**

#### **Teacher's comment:**

The policy of genocide denial during the Great Famine was not only the domain of the direct perpetrators of the tragedy – the authorities of the Soviet Union. After its collapse, it already took on a particular significance in Russia, especially after the concentration of power by the former KGB functionary Vladimir Putin. It was then that resentment about the collapsed Soviet empire began to take real shape. Its materialisation was to be preceded by a company to improve the image of the USSR in the eyes of the former and now independent republics of the defunct state. As in the 1930s, there was an intense denial of the crimes and a dilution of the nation's tragedy through the creation of a myth about the suffering of the entire country. Propaganda modes harnessed loyal historians to produce studies denying the narrative of genocide during the Great Famine in Ukraine<sup>3</sup>.

6. Again, divide the students into groups of four to six. Distribute Sources E and F to be used for a mini-panel discussion, following the long table principle, i.e. a representative from each group sits at the table and discusses the assigned topic. The others are the audience. You will play the role of a facilitator.<sup>4</sup> During an ongoing discussion, at any time, any participant who feels they have exhausted the topic can leave the table and make room for the next discussant from the audience. The principle also works the other way round. Observers can also ask for a seat at the table and replace a debater.

<sup>3</sup> Ivan Petrenko, 'Dlaczego Rosja wciąż zaprzecza Wielkiemu Głodowi' [Why does Russia still deny the Great Famine] in: <https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/news/chomu-rosiia-j-dosi-zaperechuie-holodomor/> (accessed 16 July 2023).

<sup>4</sup> The long-table method does not provide for such a function, yet if you conclude that some control over the discussion is necessary, you can easily introduce it.

It is important that as many students as possible take to the floor during the exchange of views and opinions. By applying this principle, a lively, dynamic exchange of opinions is possible. At the end of the discussion, the participants write down the results and conclusions on a flipchart. <sup>5</sup>

**Discussion topics: Are Russian actions falsifying the truth about the Great Famine having an effect? What arguments are put forward by the Russian side and by the European Union? What is the purpose of falsifying the facts?**

Summarise the discussion by drawing the students' attention to the arguments emerging. Emphasise that Russian propaganda aimed at denying the genocide in Ukraine has often resorted to manipulated facts and proven methods from the past - the USSR era.<sup>6</sup>

---

## Summary

In the course of this activity, you have traced with your students the 90 years of manipulation and falsification of the history of the Great Famine. Using active methods, you have recreated with them the significant influence of politics on the development of the historical narrative and its falsification or reliance on half-truths only. In conclusion, collect all the material you have worked on together with your students and create a mental map (mind map) with the central theme **'myth - historical falsification'**.

Ask a supplementary question:

**Why does the truth about the planned genocide during the Great Famine continue to cause controversy and international disputes?**

---

<sup>5</sup> The long-table formula may be successfully applied to on-line learning. The students who are willing to hold a debate, do so while the other discussants join it. Some online-learning programs provide for the creation of separate rooms for groupwork, which greatly facilitate the performance of this exercise and application of all groupwork methods.

<sup>6</sup> It is worthwhile to refer here to information concerning the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the information war parallel to military operations. Of particular importance is the fact that the denial of genocide and the purposeful operation against the Ukrainian nation is one of the arguments used by the propaganda of the Kremlin authorities. See: <https://oko.press/ukraine-stworzyla-komunistyczna-rosja-bylo-inaczej> (accessed on 20 July 2023).

### Additional material

In this section, you could provide students with an extract from a draft resolution of the European Parliament on the commemoration of the Holodomor (**Source G**)

This is an interesting source indicating that some historical events can inspire actively conducted political debates.

---

## Homework

Write an essay on the following topic:

**‘He who does not know the truth is but a fool. But he who knows it and calls it a lie is a criminal’ (Bertold Brecht).**

Do you agree with the author's words? In your work, you can use sources from the lesson.

---

## Worksheet

### Exercise 1

Complete the mind map by entering features of a totalitarian state.

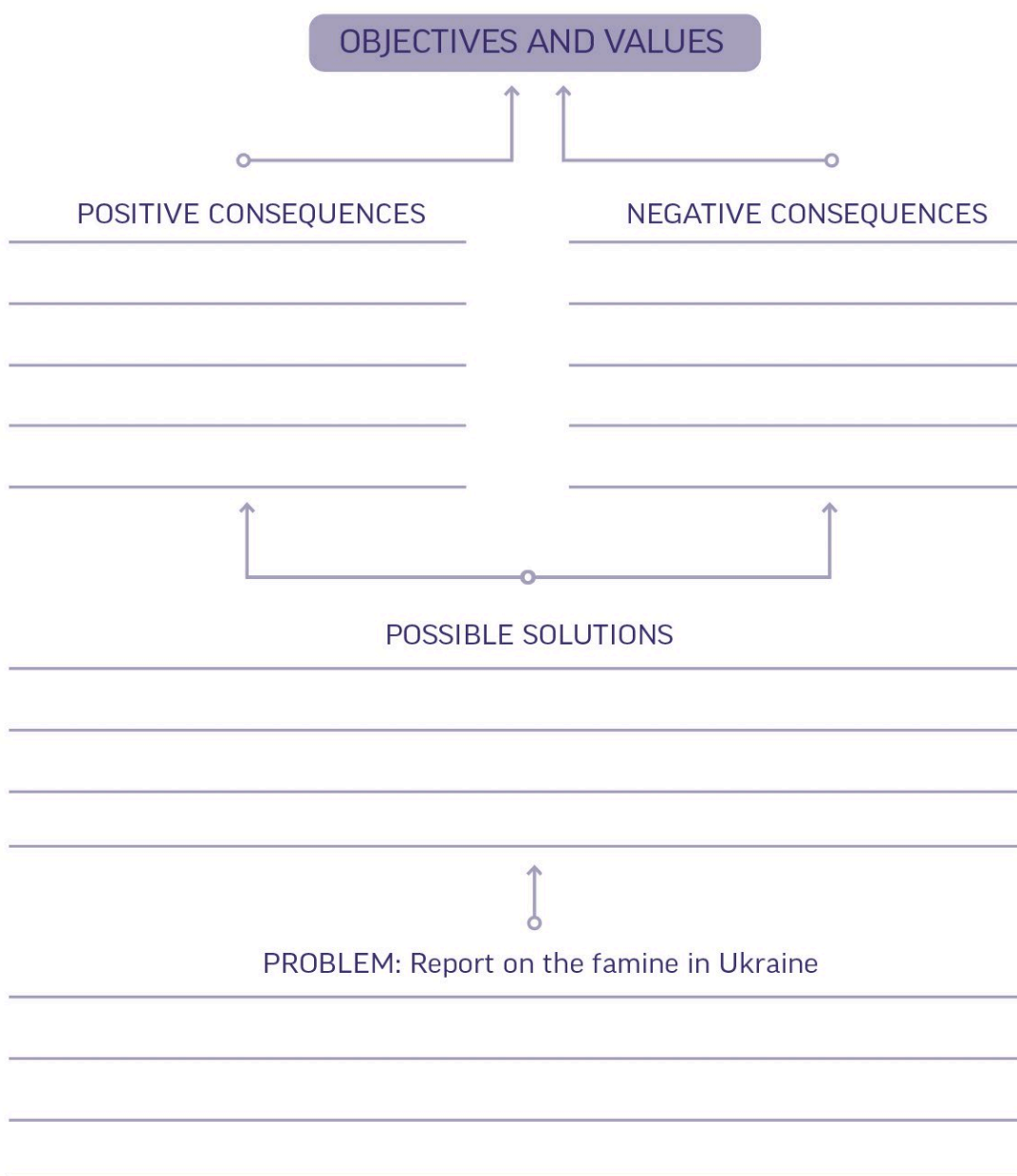




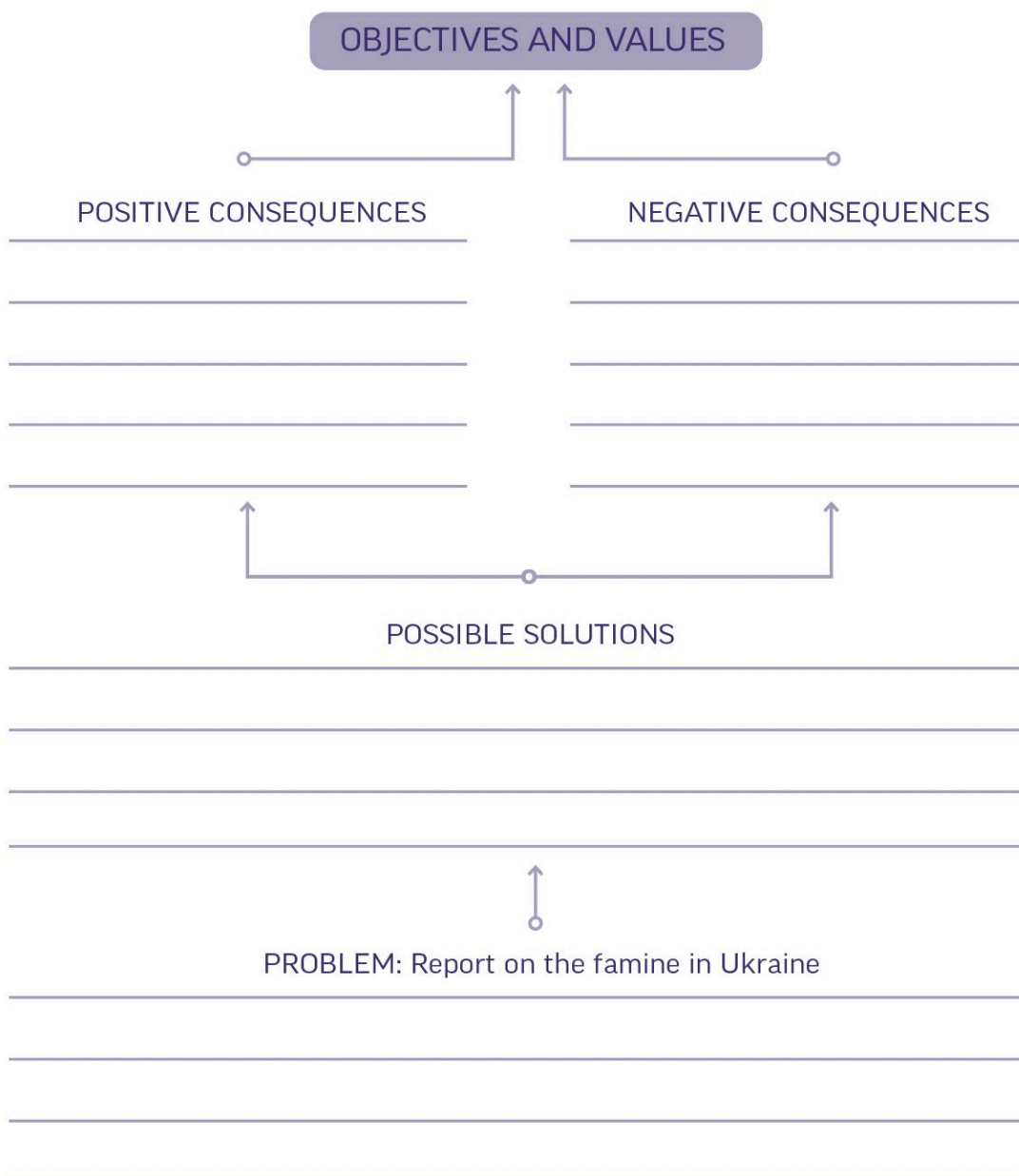
**Exercise 2**

On the basis of Sources A and B complete the decision tree for either of the two journalists.

**Decision tree: Gareth Jones**



### Decision tree: Walter Duranty



### Exercise 3

Do you think that the attempt to strip Walter Duranty of his Pulitzer Prize after his death was the right move? Justify your opinion on the basis of sources and present your reflections using a metaplan following the pattern below.

What is it?		How should it be?
	<b>PROBLEM Pulitzer Prize for Walter Duranty</b>	
Why is it not the way it should be?		What should be done?

Idea and content editing: **Urszula Bijoś (ENRS)**

Proofreading: **Caroline Brooke Johnson**