Persuasive writing: Making a railway poster

Key Learning Area	Unit or lesson title and main focus questions	Most appropriate level and suggested number of lessons
English	**Persuasive writing: Making a railway poster** What is a good railway poster message that will attract the attention of passers by?	Stage 4
		1–2 lessons

Teacher briefing

Students will be familiar with the informational posters that share wall space with other advertising on railway stations. Students choose an aspect of the new Sydney Metro Northwest under construction and create their own poster informing people about the features of the new railway, progress with construction, transport safety, or the environmental advantages of using public transport.

This is a suitable activity for all levels of English, using iPad or computer Apps to quickly blend a photograph and text message, and discuss the use of persuasive language.

Requirements for these lessons

- Computers, iPads or laptops
- Appropriate design software. On iPads, Phoster is a recommended poster-creating App
- Alternatively, MS Word or PowerPoint can be used
- A4 paper, photocopies of photographs, glue and marker pens can be used
- Printer optional.

Assessment

Assess the skills and strategies used in creating persuasive language and images for posters, and the manner in which students respond to the texts created by the class.

Web links

Examples of historic NSW Railway posters
https://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au/index.php/galleries/travel/

Coping with competition: a short history of NSW Railways
https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/activity/155

Syllabus links

English K–10

(EN4–2A) effectively uses a widening range of processes, skills, strategies and knowledge for responding to and composing texts in different media and technologies.

Learning experiences

Step 1 – What is a poster?

Initiate class discussion by showing images of posters on the interactive whiteboard.

Focus questions:

- What is a poster?
- What is the purpose of a poster?
- What could be the purpose of a railway poster?

What is a poster? Ideas to discuss with students

A poster is a public sheet of paper conveying information through text (words) and/or graphic images (symbols or pictures). Its main target audience is the person walking by. A poster must convey its message with immediacy and purpose, because people on the street are often in a hurry.

A successful poster conveys a clear message with high-impact visual information and a minimum of text.

They may ask people to rally or celebrate, alert people to hazards, take precautions, be on the lookout, buy a ticket or attend an event. They must grab your attention, entice you to read them and present the information clearly so that you are persuaded by the poster's message.

Why a railway poster?

There is a long history to railway posters around the world. Effective posters convey their message with immediacy. Railway posters have many purposes: passenger safety; information about changes in service; new features and services; important information about the line; and marketing of destinations.

Topic Three:
Planning, designing and building a railway

Discuss the following passage with students:

The New South Wales Department of Railways and Tramways Annual Report, 30 June 1930.

"Attention has been drawn by the Commissioners in their Annual Reports for some years past to the effects of motor competition on the earning powers of this State's railway system. The use of private cars for excursions, for long distance travel, and even for daily suburban travel, has greatly increased during the last five or six years … so that today the private car is the railway's most serious competitor for passenger travel."

[To meet this challenge an extensive publicity campaign was undertaken which involved newspaper, magazine and radio advertisements supported by booklets and coloured folders.]

"A pictorial poster campaign, previously confined to single sheet displays, was continued with posters of larger sizes up to 24 sheet posters – 20 ft by 10 ft – with the slogan 'Go by Train'. The Departmental posters made a striking display on hoardings alongside the best commercial advertising on railway premises."

Notes on the passage above:

• A hoarding was another name for a billboard

• Posters were pasted on billboards in sheets

• In the 1930s, an advertising 'one-sheet' or 'single sheet' poster was typically 27 inches by 41 inches (68.6 cm by 104 cm)

• Multiple 'one-sheets' were used to assemble larger advertisements, which are referred to by their sheet count, including 24-sheet billboards, 20ft by 10 ft = 609 cm by 300 cm.

For further information about NSW Railways coping with competition, see a short history of NSW Railways on the State Records NSW site:

https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/activity/155

Step 2 – Class activity

Display examples of historic NSW Railway posters, either on the interactive whiteboard (see web links), or as print-outs.

Explore other railway posters online. Search Google for 'railway posters', for many examples to analyse and discuss.

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=railway+posters

Use these questions to review each poster:

• What is the poster asking or telling the audience or observer?

• Is the poster's message clear?

• Is the poster's message readable at a glance?

• Are the graphics and text well matched?

• Is it striking or attention-grabbing? Will people remember the poster message?

• Is it persuasive?

Ask students to look at the posters and signs around their local bus stops and when they visit Sydney Trains railway stations.

Step 3 – Design a poster

Ensure that students have access to various images and appropriate design software, or alternatively, photocopies of images, blank sheets of paper, glue and marker pens. Use the following pointers to begin designing a poster:

- Decide what you want people to know

- Select a message

- Design a slogan around your message.

When completed, students' work can be viewed for discussion as a slideshow on the interactive whiteboard, or printed.

Here are some examples of the types of messages students may want to convey:

Did you know?

- Sydney Metro Northwest – You can go to the airport from Castle Hill by train

- There will be a train every four minutes! You won't need a timetable

- Park and Ride: Turn Up and Go

- It will take you less than an hour to go from Rouse Hill to Wynyard.

Why don't you?

- Use the train to go to the beach – you can take your surfboard with you

- Read a book on your way to work or school: reduce your stress – don't drive.

Rail safety messages

- Warning: Trains move rapidly in and out of stations

- Stand behind the Yellow Line on the platform until the train has stopped.

Progress with construction

What will happen here? Similar to 'Did you know?', but letting people know about a construction activity at that location.

- Tunnelling is beginning here in 2014

- Your new railway station is going to be right under your feet.

Changes are coming

- Read on the train, don't drive to work

- Sleep in this morning: Catch the train to get to the city in under an hour.

Teacher references

These albums of posters and brochures are part of NSW State Records, NRS 16410 – Albums of Travel and Advertising Brochures, 1938–1957.

https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/series/16410

They promote the services provided by the New South Wales Railways such as helping you move house by railway, delivering parcels, refreshment rooms, sleeping berths and the all round benefits of using the NSW train services.
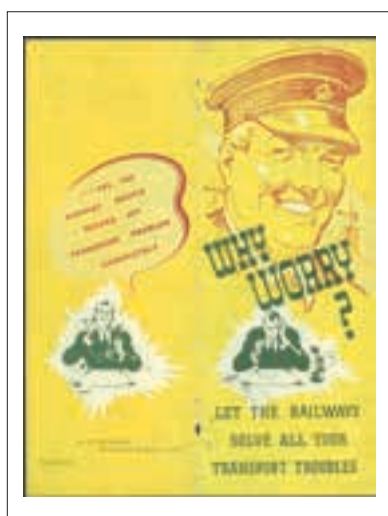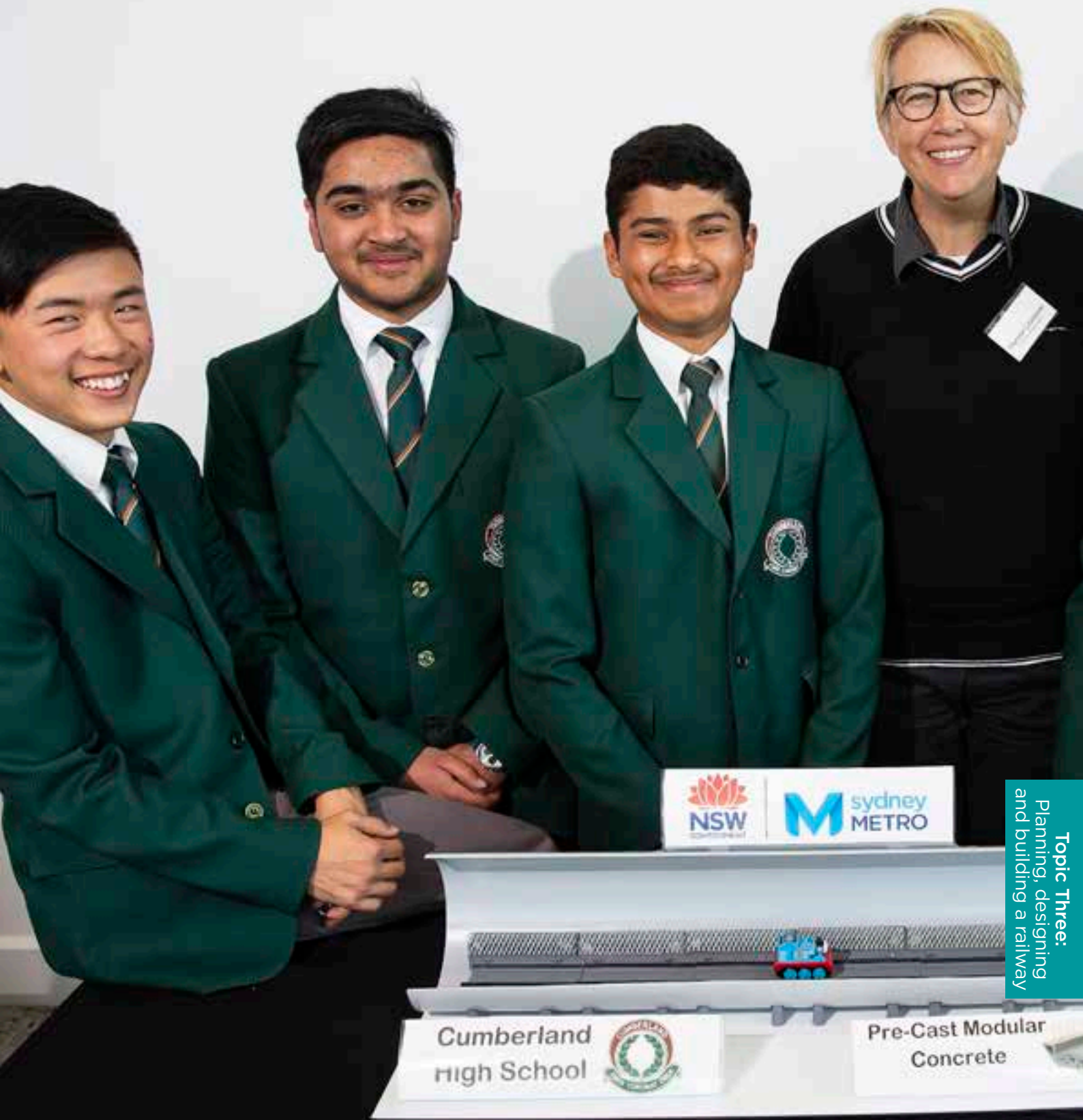

Figure 7: Let the railways solve all your transport trouble. Digital ID: 16410_a111_54a_000017_p1. State Records NSW.

Figure 8: All Ways and Always the Best Service. Digital ID: 16410_a111_54a_000022a. State Records NSW.
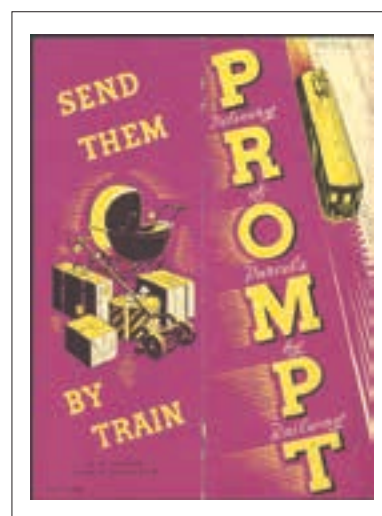
Figure 9: Prompt delivery of parcels by railway. Digital ID: 16410_a111_54a_000019_p1. State Records NSW.

Sydney Metro Minds STEAM challenge final held at the Sydney ICC, August 2018.