

Her Letter to her Soldier



Step by step instructions

- (i) Remind the students that cartoonists often express the common day to day concerns and problems of many Australians.
- (ii) If the students have not studied the Australian home front during World War Two take them through that information now using the following context points.

CONTEXT:

- Australia entered World War Two in 1939 against Germany and later Italy.
- Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 the United States, Britain, Australia and other allies declared war on Japan.
- The Japanese forces captured Singapore on 15 February 1942 and bombed Darwin on 19 February 1942. Many Australians thought that the Japanese then intended to invade Australia.
- By 1943 Japan had expanded its empire in Asia to just north of Australia. The Australian Government had introduced rationing of essential goods as part of its drive for a 'total war effort'. The reason for doing this was to reduce domestic needs to a minimum in order to devote scarce resources to fighting the war.
- Many men with families had joined the AIF and were fighting overseas, leaving their wives to take responsibility for the home and all family matters such as raising children. Many of these home and family matters were traditionally the duties of husbands so at this time women were taking on extra burdens and responsibilities. By 1943 women also had to cope with the additional difficulties of wartime rationing.

Teaching point of the cartoon: Use of caption and text to clarify and provide the cartoonist's bias to the pictorial message.

Sheet 1: Origin of Cartoon

Teaching point: Context of events and how the publication source can provide useful information

Tell the students that the date shown at the bottom of a cartoon is the date the cartoon was first published. This date provides major clues for historians of what events were considered important and worthy of comment by the media (newspapers and magazines).

Ask students to think about what was happening in Australia around 24 March 1943. Some leading questions could be:

- In what overseas actions had Australian servicemen been involved since 1939?
- Make a list of some of the daily problems that would be causing concerns for Australians at this time and which would be commented on in newspapers, magazines and on the radio.

Tell the students that the name of the publication (the *Bulletin*) informs historians where the cartoon was published (Australia) and provides a clue to an Australian bias.

The Cartoonist: Ted Scorfield was born in England and served with the Royal Engineers before coming to Australia. He joined the *Bulletin* in 1923 and stayed with them as a cartoonist for 40 years.

Sheet 2: The room and furniture

Teaching point: Symbols of the Australian family home.

Before showing this overhead: **Brainstorm** symbols that you would use in a drawing to indicate family life in Australia. How could a cartoonist depict a happy family scene? How could a cartoonist depict a sad family scene?

Show the overhead.

- What room is this?
- What items of furniture helped you to decide?
- How is this room different from yours today?

Sheet 3: The children, a case, ink well and paper

Teaching point: Setting the tone/mood of the cartoon.

- Identify the gender and approximate age of the children.
- How does the case help us identify the age of the boy? (*School aged*)
- What mood (happy, sad) does their body language suggest?

Sheet 4: Mum

Teaching point: reinforcing the mood (tone) of the cartoon

- Identify this adult person and what she is doing.
- What does her body language suggest about her mood or attitude? (*Sad, reflective*)
- What is the tone of the cartoon so far? (*Quiet, sad, contemplative, melancholy*)

Sheet 5: Shading and photo on wall

Teaching point: Further reinforcing of the mood(tone) of the cartoon

- Why is there so much dark shading in the cartoon and what does the shading tell us about the time of day?
- What would you expect the boys to be doing at this time of day after school? (*Playing outside while it was still light. T V was not available in Australia at this time.*)
- Who is the person in the photograph on the shaded wall? (*Dad/Husband*)
- Does the cartoonist want us to make a connection between the dark shading, the person in the photograph and the feelings of the people? (*Yes, sadness*)
- What do you think is the meaning of the cartoon now?

Sheet 6: Caption and text

Teaching point: Use of caption and text to apply a twist to the message conveyed in the drawings.

Discuss with the students the use of inverted commas as a convention to show dialogue or extract from a text (in this cartoon- an extract from the woman's letter).

- To whom is the woman writing? (*Husband*)
- What is she writing about? (*Serious problems for her at home in Australia. She is battling against rationing and strikes to keep family fed*)
- Why would rationing of milk, a baker's strike and not being able to buy fish or meat be considered a problem for mothers?

Tell the students that 'wish you were here' is a traditional holiday postcard message. **Then ask:** what twist has the cartoonist made in the message by using the words 'wish we were with you!'

Questions for students to answer in writing

Candidates' responses to some of the following questions will vary according to their understanding of the symbols and captions of the cartoon. **Teachers should reward valid explanations where students can logically explain and justify their interpretations with details from the cartoon.**

Level of difficulty of questions:

LO= Low Order of difficulty MO=Middle order of difficulty HO= High order of difficulty

Question: What is the message of the cartoon? **MO**

Example Answer:

- *Basically the message of the cartoon is that the wife misses her husband who is away fighting in World War Two.*
- *She wishes that she and her children were with him as life is difficult for a single parent with rationing of food, high prices and strikes.*

Question: How does the cartoonist present a sad picture of family life in Australia during 1943? **MO**

Example Answer:

- *The cartoonist conveys a sense of sadness through the dispirited postures of the two boys in the doorway. School boys would usually be depicted as active rather than stationary and downcast.*
- *The dark shading of the room, which crosses the father's photograph on the wall, creates an atmosphere of gloom.*
- *The sentiment of 'Wish we were with you!' in the caption also adds to the general tone of sadness. It is an ironic comment, to emphasise the homefront difficulties, and not meant to be taken literally.*

Question: What bias or sympathy is shown towards women in this cartoon? Justify your answer with examples from the cartoon and its caption and text. **HO**

Example Answer:

- *The caption clearly indicates that the cartoonist's sympathy is with the wife and mother as it states the problems of feeding the family during World War Two.*
- *The photograph that has pride of place on the wall and the empty chair highlight the missing father/husband.*
- *The cartoonist has created a sympathetic message about the burden women carry and their wartime separation from a loved one.*

Question: Do you think the cartoonist would agree with a war time statement that 'Women are fighting on a tough Australian battlefront so their men can win the war'? **HO**

Example Answer:

- *The cartoonist would agree with this statement as the caption clearly indicates wartime prob-*

lems that were occurring in March 1943.

- *Many women had to take on the additional role of a father, as well as mother, while their husbands were away at the war.*
- *A number of women went to work in factories to maintain the production of essential supplies for the war effort and this added another 'tough' burden to the role as wife and mother.*

Extension Work

Investigate rationing:

- who introduced it?
- what was rationed?
- how much were people allowed?

Investigate the role of women on the home front during the war.

Investigate how children's lives might have been affected by the war.

Investigate how health was affected by the rationing.

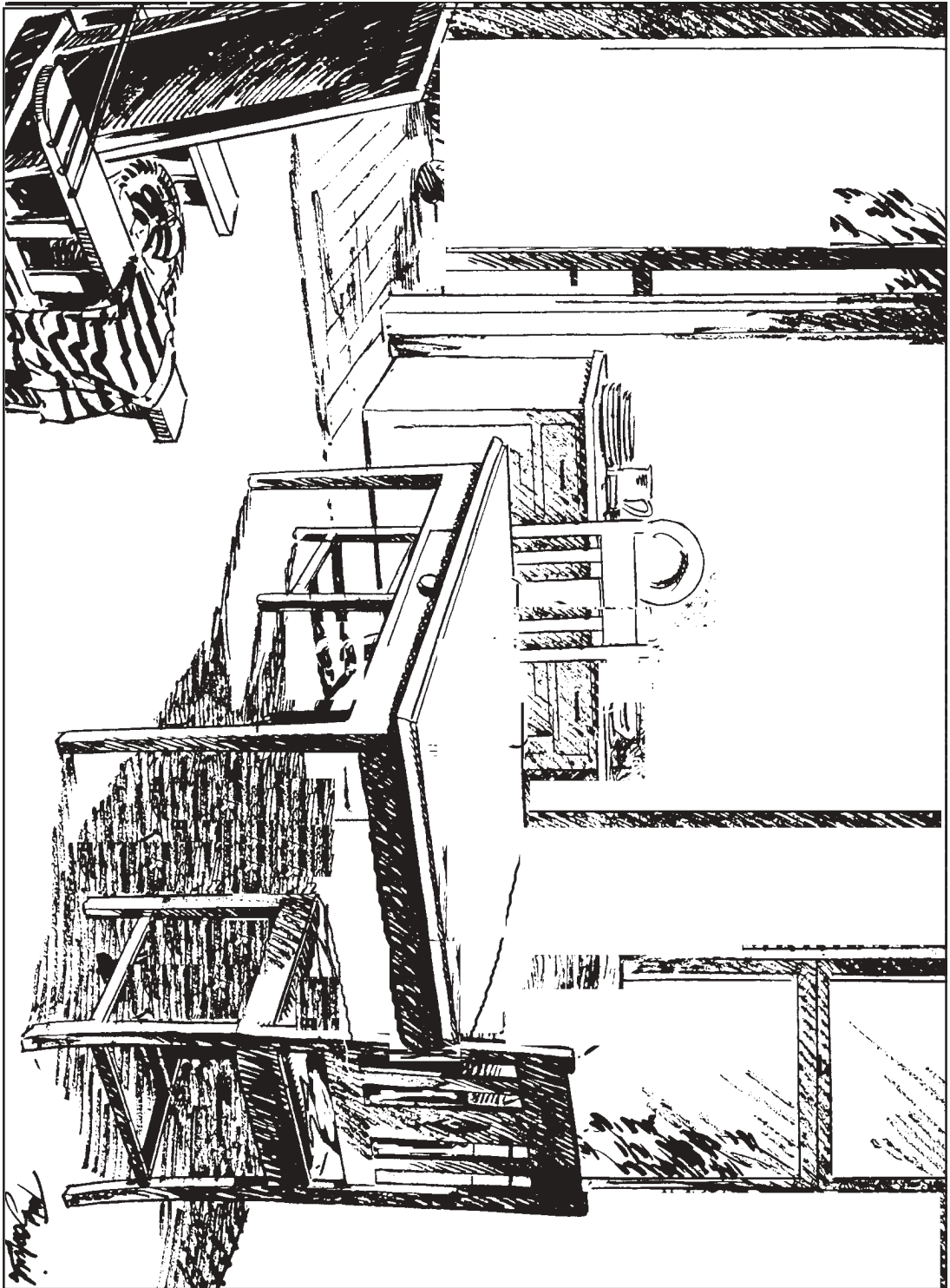
Note: Use the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library website to help you with this. <http://john.curtin.edu.au/1940s/index.html>

Sheet 1

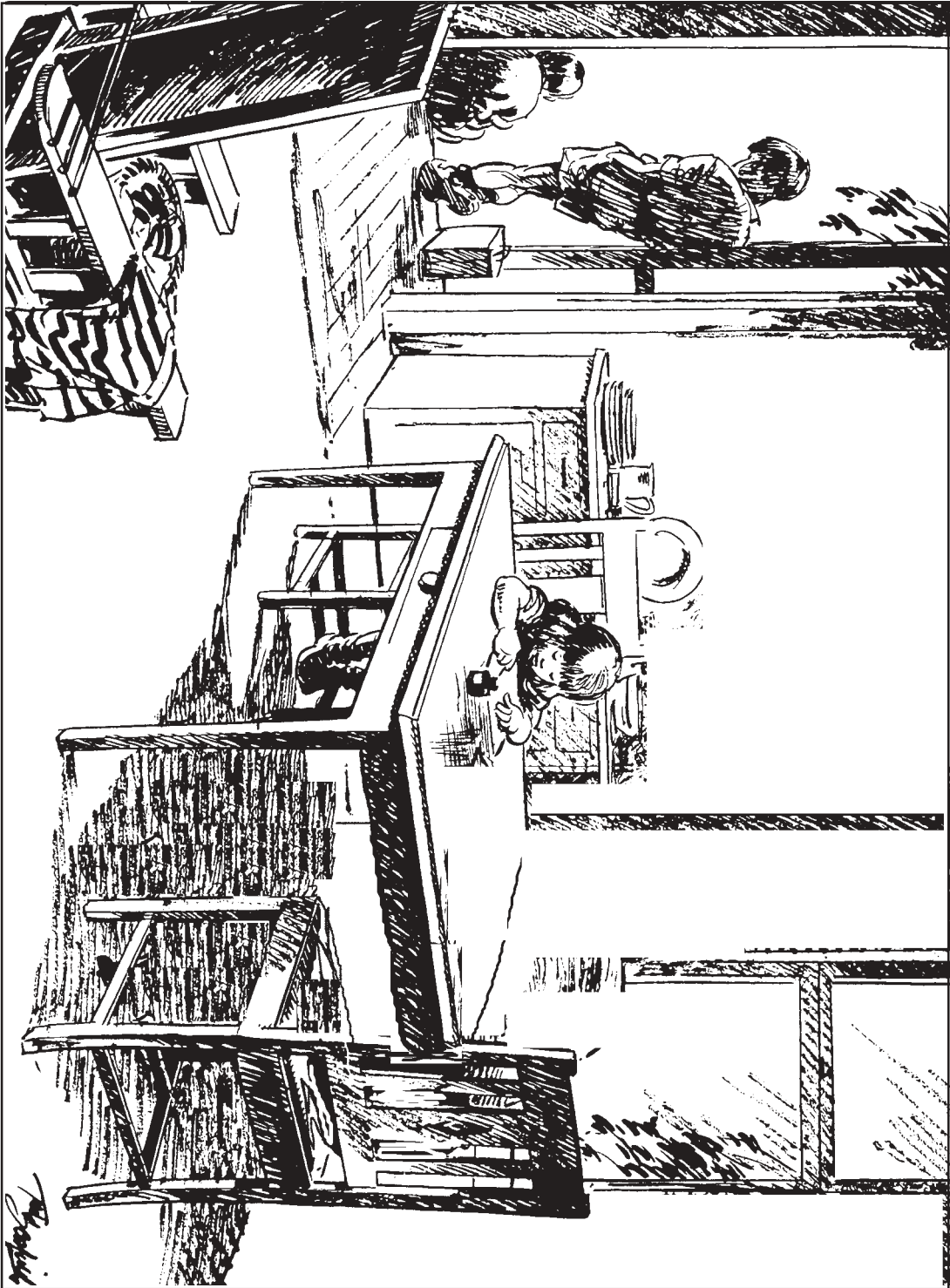
Published in the *Bulletin*, 24 March 1943



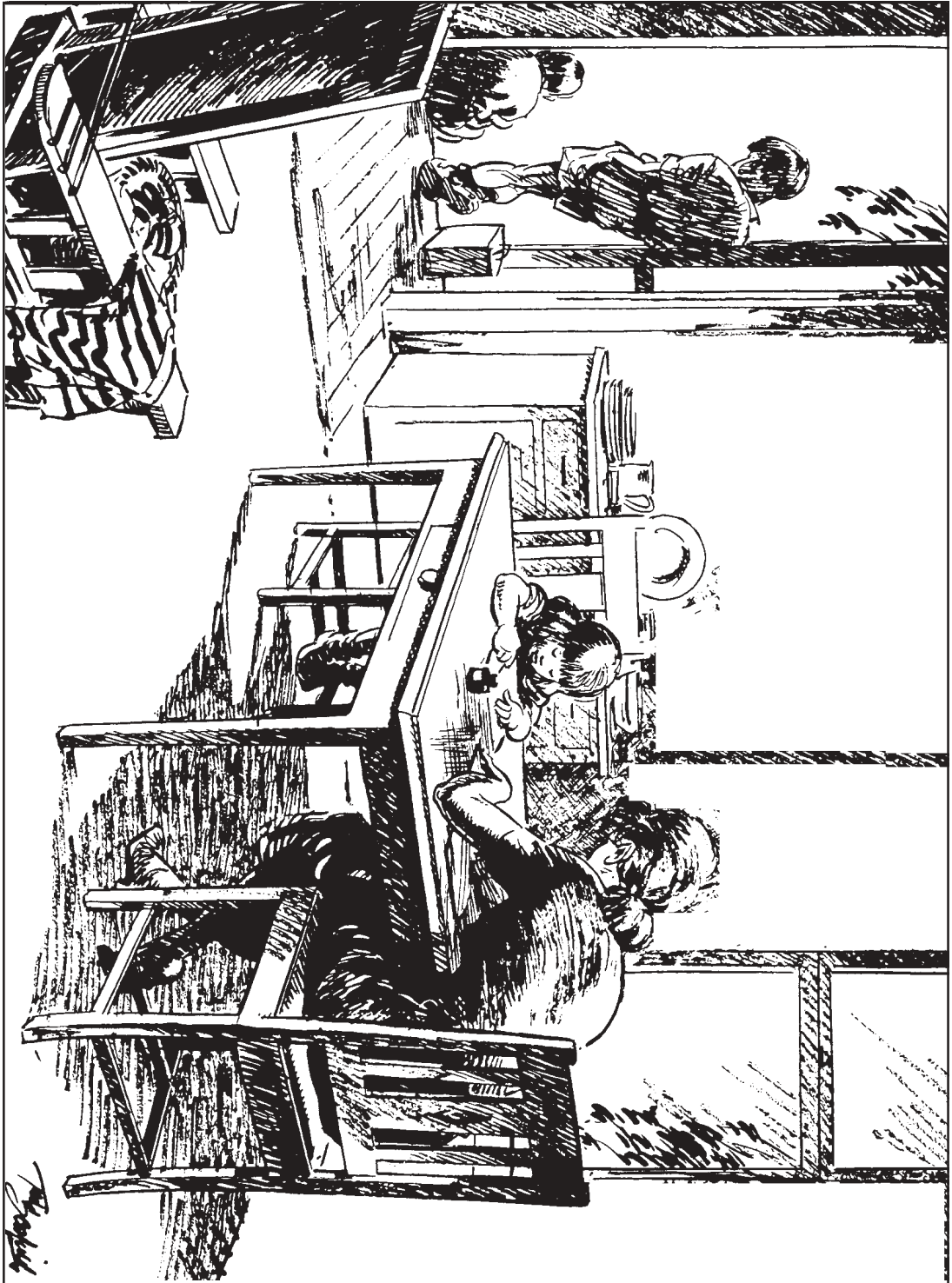
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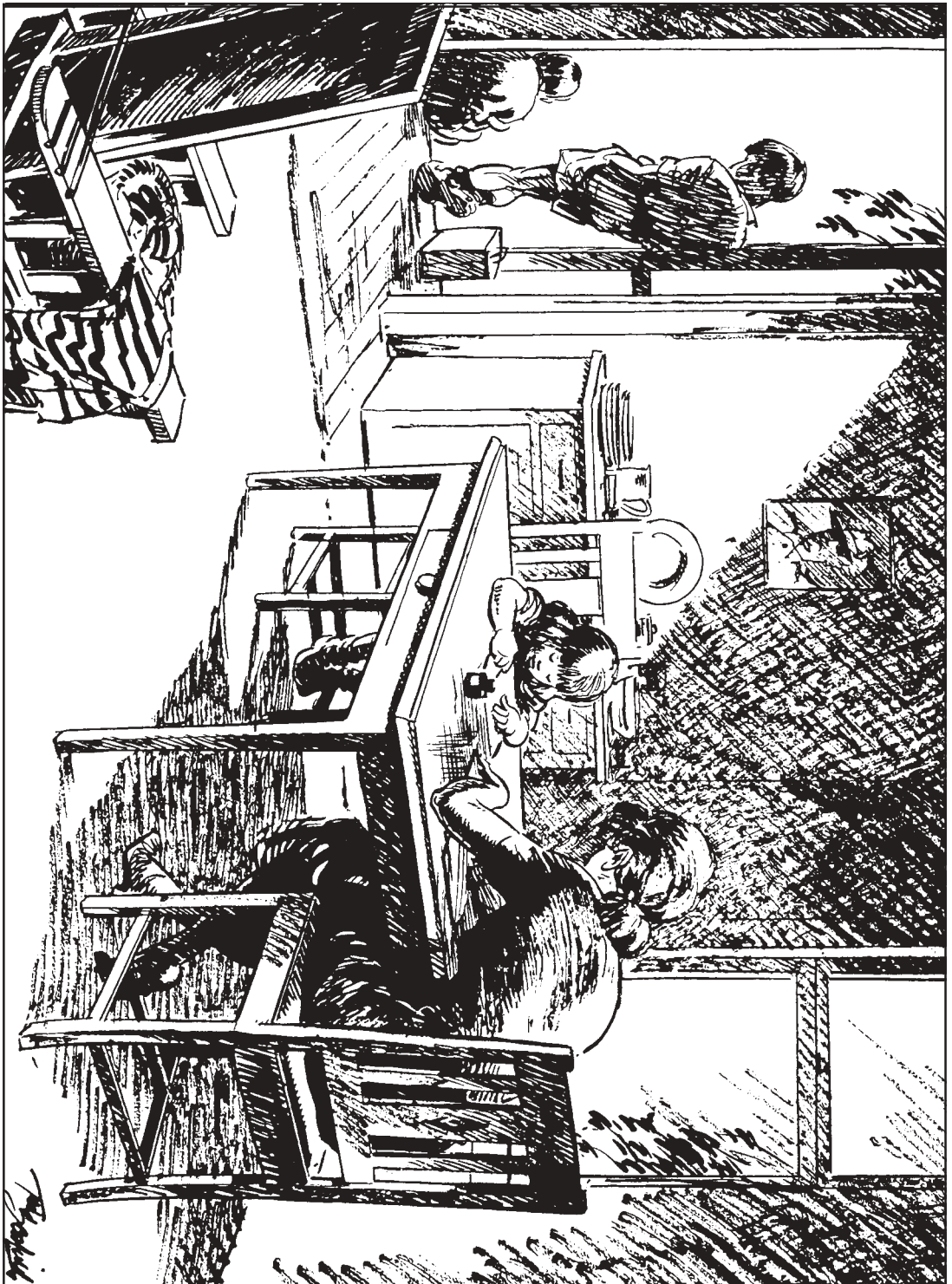
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Sheet 6



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Her letter to her soldier

'Milk's rationed, meat's dear, I can't buy fish or fruit and the bakers are on strike. Wish we were with you!'