Fall of Singapore

Step by step instructions

(i) Remind the students that cartoonists often express concerns about Australia’s future or predicted dangers to Australia and its people.

(ii) If the students have not studied the Japanese entry into World War Two and the fall of Singapore take them through that information now using the following context points.

CONTEXT

• Australia entered World War Two in 1939 against Germany and later Italy.

• The USA and Japan were not involved in World War Two at this time.

• On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour. This action brought Japan and USA into the war.

• The Japanese forces quickly moved south through Asia and on 15 February 1942 they captured Singapore and thousands of British and Australian troops. These allied troops were trying to stop the southward movement of the Japanese to their goal of Indonesia with its oil wells.

• The fall of Singapore caused a drop in the Australian public’s wartime morale and this was made worse when the Japanese bombed Darwin on 19 February 1942.

• Many Australians thought that the Japanese intended to invade Australia and at that time Australia was relatively unprotected. Prime Minister John Curtin appealed to President Roosevelt of the United States for military assistance and it was granted.

Teaching point of the cartoon: Fall of Singapore and its impact on Australia.

Sheet 1: Origin of Cartoon

Teaching point: Context of events occurring around February 1942

Ask students to think about what was happening in February 1942.

• In which overseas actions had Australians been involved since 1939?

• What significant events had occurred in February 1942 that affected Australians?

This would be a good time to show any photographs that you can find on the bombing of Darwin and the Singapore docks on fire. Compare these to a photograph of the bombing of Pearl Harbour. All show destruction and black plumes of smoke. (Photographs of Pearl Harbour and the bombing of Darwin can be found on the Australian War Memorial website at www.awm.gov.au. Click on Online shop + Photosales, then Photosales: Search our collection. Try ‘Pearl Harbour’, ‘Darwin’ or ‘Darwin bombing’ as search terms and ‘second world war (1939-45)’ as the conflict to find many photographs. Some useful samples are 043820%, 043821%, 043822%, 042895%, 012953% and 304994%.)
Another option would be to show the 8 minute section in the film *Pearl Harbor* of the Japanese attack. This attack was very similar to the Japanese attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942. This should help students understand the fear of a Japanese invasion of Australia.

The Cartoonist: Peter Dent is a designer who creates educational materials for schools, including cartoons. He volunteered his time and expertise to create this cartoon for the package.

**Sheet 2: Figure in the boat**

**Teaching point:** Cartoonists’ use of visual symbols. If students have not been taught about symbols in cartoons before now, this would be an appropriate time to work through the section of this package titled: Common Symbols used in Cartoons.

- Who is this man?
- Why is he in tattered shorts and without a shirt? (He has been unsuccessfully fighting in the hot tropical climate of Singapore.)
- What is the relevance of 1942 as the name on the boat? (The fall of Singapore and bombing of Darwin.)
- What message do you get about the man’s situation? (He is in danger)
- How has the cartoonist conveyed the idea of life threatening danger to the soldier? (Water-spout from hole in boat and he is waving for help)
- Who does the man represent? (All Australian soldiers captured in Singapore that could have protected Australia from invasion by the Japanese. Another possible response is he represents all of Australia.)

**Sheet 3: Circling sharks and the dark sea**

**Teaching point:** Symbols of danger

- What symbols for danger has the cartoonist used? (Circling sharks, black sea, hole in the boat with water spouting)
- Why are the shark fins labeled ‘Italy’, ‘Germany’ and ‘Japan’?

**Sheet 4: Arrival of Uncle Sam**

**Teaching point:** Reinforcing the common symbol of Uncle Sam representing the United States of America.

- Who is the man in the boat on the horizon? (Uncle Sam)
- What does the man represent? (Americans, or President Roosevelt, who will come to Australia’s aid against the Japanese)
- What is the message of the cartoon?

**Sheet 5: Caption: Fall of Singapore**

**Teaching point:** An example of a caption that clearly states the event to which the cartoon refers.

- Why would the cartoonist use this caption? (To show and/or emphasise the disastrous event in February 1942 to which he is referring.)
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?  LO

Example Answer:
- The message is that Australia, depicted as a tattered soldier, is in great danger after Singapore had been captured by the Japanese in February 1942.
- Australia's wartime enemies of Japan, Italy and Germany are circling, waiting to attack.
- The soldier is signaling the United States for help and Uncle Sam, representing America, is coming to rescue Australia.

Question: Identify and explain the symbols in the cartoon.  LO

Example Answer:
- The slouch hat is a symbol for an Australian soldier.
- Tattered shorts and no shirt suggest the soldier has been in a fight.
- Symbols of life threatening danger are the sinking boat with a hole in it and the circling sharks.
- Symbols of hope are the United States seeing the danger to Australia and rowing/coming to the rescue.

Question: For what purpose would the cartoonist draw this cartoon?  MO

Example Answer:
- A cartoonist would have drawn this cartoon to make a statement about the danger to Australia after the 'fall of Singapore' during World War Two.
- In addition the cartoonist could have been supporting Prime Minister Curtin's decision to ask the United States for help.
- The overall purpose of the cartoon would have been to highlight the security fears of the Australian public.
Extension work

Written Questions

• To what extent is this cartoon useful in gauging (evaluating) the degree of public concern about the fall of Singapore?
• What is the visual metaphor for the cartoon? (A sinking boat.)

Group work

• Provide at least two other captions for this cartoon. Select which one your group considers the most appropriate. Present an argument why it should be used for the cartoon rather than the FALL OF SINGAPORE.

Draw a cartoon and write a caption

(The creation of a cartoon can be done individually and can be used as a possible assessment tool.)

• Brainstorm or use the list of historical events that could be used as a MESSAGE for a cartoon.

Historical events that could be used to create a cartoon

• The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour
• The bombing of Darwin
• Australia’s concern at the advance of the Japanese in World War Two
• Prime Minister John Curtin asking the United States for help
• Australia fighting the Japanese
• The Australian view of the Japanese during World War Two
• Western Australian concerns about a possible invasion by the Japanese
• Women and children killed by Japanese bombs
• Australia fighting back
• Prime Minister John Curtin leading Australia against the Japanese
February 1942
February 1942
February 1942