Section Three: Chunking Cartoons for year 12 (1900-1945)

Disclaimer- There could be more than one valid student response to cartoon interpretation. All student responses have to be judged in relation to the cartoon being analysed.

How to Chunk a Cartoon:
A step by step approach

1. While ‘scaffolding’ a cartoon is the process of building a cartoon up piece by piece, ‘chunking’ is about highlighting or shading parts of a cartoon in order to give that part of the cartoon greater attention.

2. In this section, look at the instructions for each cartoon, then make as many copies of the whole cartoon onto overhead sheets as the instructions require. One cartoon may require 5 copies while another may require 6 copies. Mark the chunked cartoons as ‘copy 1’, ‘copy 2’, and so on.

3. Highlight or shade according to the instructions. Each copy of the cartoon will have different shading or highlighting. The cartoon copies are NOT designed to be overlaid on one another.

4. Tell or remind students that cartoonists often express opinions about the actions of Australians or important events that affect Australians.

5. On the following page is an overview example of how to ‘chunk’ a cartoon.
The message of this cartoon is:

Agreeing that austerity is a good thing is not enough. Everyone has to make an effort to reduce their spending on non-essential items (including frivolous things like a fun fair), to recycle goods and to put money into war loans. If everyone pulls together then the ‘homefront army’ will have a much bigger impact (like the soldier with the big mallet) than just a few people on their own (like Prime Minister John Curtin and his small mallet). It’s a ‘put your money where your mouth is’ idea.
**Pegged**

**CONTEXT:**

- From December 1941 the Australian home front was put on a ‘total war’ footing as fear grew about the rapidly approaching Japanese forces.
- February 11 1942 Prime Minister John Curtin promised ‘equality of sacrifice’ through government control of profits, wages and prices.
- Make and show the overhead photograph of John Curtin on page 78 before introducing the cartoon.
- The Federal government also took sole control of income tax which until then had been levied by both state and federal governments (this remains the case today).
- The Federal government also introduced daylight saving, identity cards, rationing, blackouts and an austerity campaign so that, wherever possible, resources could be used to maximise the war effort.

**Copy 1**

**Highlight:** Name of cartoonist
Publisher
Date of publication

The cartoonist: George Finey was born in New Zealand. He worked as a lithographic apprentice with the New Zealand Herald before settling in Sydney after World War One, where he worked for the Bulletin, Smith’s Weekly, Daily Telegraph and other papers.

Ask students about the information they can glean just from this introductory information, especially for questions about **CONTEXT**.

**Copy 2**

**Highlight:** A man holding a heavy mallet labelled ‘100% war effort’

Who is the man? (Prime Minister John Curtin of the Australian Labor Party).

Why would he be holding such a mallet at that time?

What **MESSAGE** is the cartoonist conveying about Curtin’s intentions?

How does your knowledge of the beliefs of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) help you to understand Curtin’s purpose?
Copy 3

Highlight: Three men Pegs

What does the clothing of the men reveal about their occupations? (They ought to recognise a worker with sleeves rolled up, a shopkeeper, possibly a grocer or butcher, wearing an apron and a businessman or banker in a formal suit).

What is the purpose of the pegs? (Students may not have seen these 'dolly' pegs and may need to be told they were the most commonly used type at the time and would have been familiar to the people seeing the cartoon).

What do the labels on the pegs mean?

What MESSAGE is the cartoonist conveying about Curtin's actions?

What MESSAGE is conveyed about the effects of these actions on the people represented?

Copy 4

Highlight: Clouds on the horizon

Ask students about the SYMBOLISM of clouds. What could they represent? (Given the context of this cartoon they should suggest wartime smoke from bombs etc).

What does the location of the clouds suggest about the threat to Australia?

Copy 5

Highlight: Caption: 'Pegged'

Remind the students that the caption is often 'a play on words' where multiple meanings are possible.

What does the word 'pegged' mean?

What is the cartoonist suggesting the government is doing to the groups of people represented in the cartoon?

What might be the cartoonist's attitude towards the government's actions?
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.

Question: What is the message of the cartoon?

Example Answer:
• That Prime Minister Curtin, in his commitment to Total War, needed to control the activities of most sections of the economy (the businessman/banker, the shopkeeper and the worker) so their behaviour does not hinder the war effort.
• That the federal government, through the prime minister, has become much more powerful in the wartime situation.
• That Curtin is a determined, ‘no nonsense’ leader.

Question: What do you think could have been the cartoonist's purpose in drawing this cartoon?

Example Answer:
• To draw attention to the government’s actions
• To publicise the likely effects of government regulations
• To show the three men as subservient to the government’s wishes
• To demonstrate Curtin’s decisiveness and leadership capacities
• To argue either for a change in, or offer support for, government policy with respect to the control of the economy during wartime.

Question: What significant themes from the period 1900-45 are represented in this cartoon?

Example Answer:
• Response to international conflict
• Growth of federal government power
• The role of leadership in wartime

Question: What might soldiers overseas have thought of these government actions?

Example Answer:
• Some may have applauded them as showing serious commitment to the war effort
• Some may have seen them as infringements of the civil liberties they were fighting to preserve.
• Some may have seen them as an attempt to prevent war profiteering as occurred in World War One.
**Question:** In the community at that time what other points of view might there have been about this situation?

**Example Answer:**

- That Curtin had become a dictator.
- That Labor had abandoned the capitalist system and used the opportunity of the war to introduce some of its socialist objectives.
- That government officials would be too powerful.
- That the economy would crumble under such tight control because government bureaucrats were not capable of running it efficiently.
- That freedom of action was being curtailed.
- That Curtin's actions did not go far enough in controlling some sections of the economy such as the banks.

**Question:** How would Curtin have justified these actions?

**Example Answer:**

- In order to maximise the use of all of the nation’s resources for the war effort it was necessary to control all aspects of the economy.
- It was necessary to avoid any potential conflict between capital and labour which may have interfered with the efficient prosecution of the war.
- Control of prices charged by shopkeepers would prevent inflationary pressures experienced in the 1914-18 war.
- Control of the goods sold by shopkeepers would help direct resources to where they were most needed for the war effort.
John Curtin
Prime Minister of Australia (1941-1945)
Published in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 14 February 1942

Pegged
Leg-roped

CONTEXT

- World War Two began for Australia in 1939 when Britain declared war on Germany.
- The Prime Minister of Australia at this time was Menzies.
- Australian soldiers who went to fight in the Middle East and North Africa were volunteers.
- John Curtin, leader of the Australian Labor Party, became Prime Minister in October 1941.
- The Japanese attacked the United States' Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour (Hawaii) on 7 December 1941. This brought America into the war against Japan and Germany.
- After the attack on Pearl Harbour, Australia declared war on Japan.
- After 7 December 1941 the Japanese forces quickly moved south through Asia and by January 1942 were closing in on Singapore. The Japanese aim was to capture the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) within six weeks and the oil wells there.
- Australia was relatively unprotected from a possible Japanese invasion as most of the experienced soldiers were in North Africa or returning to Australia and Singapore in ships.
- There were conscripted militia soldiers in Australia at this time. The militia soldiers were only allowed to fight within Australia as outlined in the 1911 Defence Act, therefore they could not fight in Singapore and the Dutch East Indies.

Copy1

Highlight: Name of cartoonist
Publisher
Date of publication

The Cartoonist: Bill Mahony began as a cadet for Smith's Weekly, becoming a cartoonist for the Evening News in Sydney from 1928-30, a political cartoonist on the World, 1931-32, followed by periods with other newspapers. (His father was also an illustrator and cartoonist for the Bulletin). Bill Mahony was also a teacher at the Sydney Technical College.

Ask students about the information they can glean just from this introductory information, especially for questions about CONTEXT.
Copy 2

Highlight:  
Australian map  
Dutch East Indies map  
Suggestion of New Guinea map

What locations are shown in the cartoon? (They may not know that Dutch East Indies is now Indonesia).

How does this information add to the contextual knowledge?

Copy 3

Highlight:  
Clouds

What could the clouds represent? (Given the context of this cartoon they should suggest wartime smoke from bombs etc).

What does their location suggest about the threat to Australia?

Copy 4

Highlight:  
Soldier labelled Militia

Who is the person? (An Australian soldier)

What is the meaning of ‘militia’? (Refer back to its formation before World War One as a form of compulsory home defence).

Where is the soldier heading?

Why is he looking back over his shoulder?

Copy 5

Highlight:  
Leg rope staked to the ground

Cartoon’s caption ‘Leg-Roped’

What message is being conveyed about the effect of the Defence Act?

Why would the cartoonist be making this point in January 1942?

What would he hope to achieve?
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.

Question: What is the message of the cartoon?

Example Answer:
• That Australia was potentially under attack from the near north
• That the Defence Act in its present form was a restriction on the desire of Australian troops to leave Australian shores to defend the country against potential aggression.
• That the soldiers were ready and willing to fight but they were being held back by the law.
• That it would be preferable for Australian troops to fight the enemy outside Australia before the country was attacked or invaded.

Question: Explain the various symbols used in the cartoon.

Example Answer:
• Uniform and weapon: identifies person as Australian soldier
• Smoke: conflict
• Stake and rope: the Defence Act tying soldier to Australian soil

Question: Is there any evidence of bias in the cartoon? Justify your answer by referring to examples.

Example Answer:
• The caption suggests the belief of the cartoonist is that the Defence Act is an impediment to Australia’s security.
• The facial expression and body language of the soldier indicate his frustration at not being able to leave Australian soil in order to save Australia from potential harm.

Question: How effective is this 1942 cartoon in presenting concerns for Australia’s future? Give reasons for your answer.

Example Answer:
• The cartoonist is highlighting concerns about Australia’s safety and presenting a powerful visual argument for changing the Defence Act to free up the use of the Militia.
• Clarity of its point of view through the simplicity of its style (drawing technique) increases its effectiveness.
• (For those who argue the cartoon is not very effective) Cartoonist does not suggest an alternative approach to the Defence Act.
Question: What attitudes towards government policy are revealed in this cartoon?

Example Answer:

• That the Defence Act is hindering Australia's security through placing restrictions on the use of the Militia.

• It is presenting a stark case for changing the terms of the Act.

• There is a hint of blame being directed towards the government if this situation is not rectified.

Question: In the community at that time, could there have been other points of view about this situation?

Example Answer:

• Some would have been appalled at the alteration to traditional Labor policy against conscription for overseas service, others might have objected on pacifist grounds and still others who felt that only volunteer forces could be effective.

Question: What significant themes from the period 1900-45 are represented in this cartoon?

Example Answer:

• International conflict

• Conscription

• Role of federal government

• Divisions within the community

• Labor ideology

(Remind students that the effect of the Defence Act depicted in this cartoon was overturned in February 1943 when a new bill was passed which allowed the militia to be sent to a defined area within the south west Pacific.

The second AIF soldiers were volunteers and, before 1943, they were the only ones allowed to fight outside Australia.)
Published in the Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 6 January 1942

Leg-roped
Choose Your Bonds

CONTEXT

- The Japanese were coming very close to Australia's shores by 1942.
- By 1942 the Australian government, led by Prime Minister John Curtin, had committed the nation to 'total war'.
- Make and show the overhead photograph from page 78 before introducing the cartoon.
- Government controls on wages, prices and profits attempted to create an 'equality of sacrifice' where every Australian (at home or on the battlefront) contributed to the war effort.
- Money, such as War Bonds was needed to pay for the war effort.

Copy 1

Highlight: Name of cartoonist
Publisher
Date of publication


Ask students about the information they can glean just from this introductory information, especially for answering questions about CONTEXT.

Copy 2

Highlight: Person in dark suit holding papers labelled 'war loan bonds'

Who is the person? (Students should recognise John Curtin.)

What are war bonds? (War bonds are loans made by ordinary people to the government to pay for the war effort. They would be repaid with interest after the war).

What does John Curtin's body language (stance, gesture) suggest? (He is behaving like a salesman.)
Copy 3

Highlight: Soldier holding manacles

Sunrays

• What country does the soldier represent? How do we know? (Students should recognise the sunrays from the Japanese flag and the uniform).

• How would you describe the expression on the soldier’s face? Why has the cartoonist used this expression?

• What does the soldier’s body language suggest?

• What is the purpose of manacles?

• For what purpose did the cartoonist draw both Curtin and the soldier in the same pose?

Copy 4

Highlight: Caption: ‘Choose Your Bonds’

• Remind the students that the caption is often a ‘play on words’ where multiple meanings are possible.

• How does the caption help you to understand the cartoonist’s message?

• Does the cartoonist suggest that the choice is really a fair one?

• Which choice does he try to convince the reader to make?

• Did he achieve this?

• What does he suggest might be the consequences of failing to buy the government’s war loan bonds? (That Australians may find themselves prisoners of the Japanese or, at least, under Japanese control.)

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.

Question: What is the message of the cartoon?

Example Answer:

• That the Australian people are faced with a choice.

• They can EITHER choose to contribute to the cost of the war through buying government bonds OR they will have to suffer the consequences of Japanese victory.
**Question:** What techniques are used to convey the message?

**Example Answer:**
- The use of two panels highlights the stark choice and indicates there is no other alternative.
- The depiction of Curtin as an unthreatening salesman and the Japanese soldier caricatured as extremely threatening (manacles), positions the viewer to choose the safe alternative ie Curtin’s war bonds.

**Question:** Is there any evidence of bias in the cartoon?

**Example Answer:**
- The drawing of the two key figures indicates the cartoonist’s preference for the offer being made by Curtin.
- He shows the alternative to be fearful and unpleasant.
- He is biased towards achieving an Australian victory in the war and the defeat of the enemy.

**Question:** What appears to be the purpose for producing this cartoon?

**Example Answer:**
- To encourage the purchase of war bonds by Australian citizens
- To emphasise that the situation is dire and that procrastinating will only aid the enemy.

**Question:** What significant themes from the period 1900-45 are contained in this cartoon?

**Example Answer:**
- International conflict
- The homefront’s role as part of ‘Total War’
- Racial stereotyping

**Question:** Could this cartoon be used by the Australian government for propaganda purposes?

**Example Answer:**
- Yes, because it concurs with the government’s aims to convince the populace of the urgency of the situation and the need to buy the war bonds.
- It also helps consolidate a view of the enemy as loathsome.

**Question:** How does the use of propaganda in wartime create difficult issues for democratic governments?

**Example Answer:**
- The nature of propaganda is to be one-sided, emotive and manipulative while a liberal democracy is supposed to value the informed will of the people based on reason rather than emotion.
- Propaganda limits free speech, another democratic value.
- Propaganda encourages intolerance (through distortions) which conflicts with the right to hold diverse opinions in a liberal democracy.
Published in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 19 June 1942

Choose your bonds