

N S M  
National Museum  
of Singapore

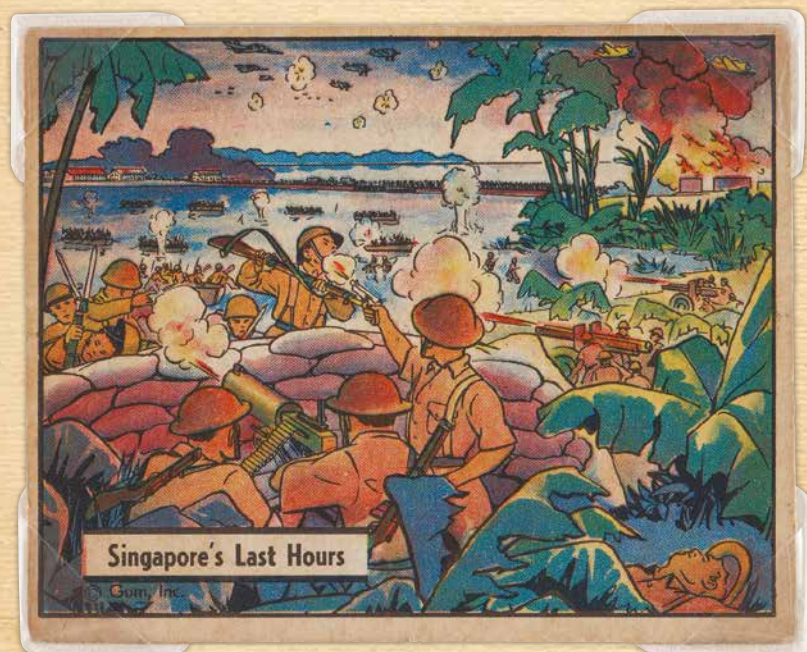
# WITNESS TO WAR

## REMEMBERING 1942

23 September 2017 – 25 March 2018

# A JOURNALIST'S NOTEBOOK

RECOMMENDED  
FOR AGES 13  
AND ABOVE



Bubble-gum card titled *Singapore's Last Hours*, which shows the opening shots of the Japanese invasion of Singapore via the Causeway (1942)  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 2000-03808-001

## From the desk of Chief Editor of *The Singapore Times*

Dear Young Journalist,

The National Museum of Singapore will be launching a new exhibition, *Witness to War: Remembering 1942*, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. *The Singapore Times* plans to publish a book in five years' time, for the 80th anniversary of the fall, in 2022.

You have been selected as part of a special project team to work on the publication. The book's content will centre on three key themes, and I would like you to embark on a trail around the museum's war-related galleries, analysing the artefacts, stories and personal memories on display to come up with your own personal responses to these questions, and to collect material for your book.

- 1) Why was the fall of Singapore historically significant, and what were its implications?
- 2) How did the war change the lives of people, especially young people like yourself, in Singapore? How did people cope with the war, and the Japanese Occupation?
- 3) What relevance might the fall of Singapore have to us today? Will it continue to be relevant to us in 5 years' time?

A museum's artefacts and oral histories can reveal many different perspectives on, and facets of, the past. I hope that you will be inspired as you journey through these galleries, and that you gain a greater appreciation of the various methods through which history can be examined.

I look forward to receiving your report soon.  
All the best!



Chief Editor

## FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

Use the navigational maps on the facing page to help you locate the different galleries. There are many artefacts to look at, oral histories to listen to, films to watch, and stories to read in each location.

During your information gathering, do take note of these important instructions from the Museum:



### 1 Look out for the trail markers

These markers have been placed to help you locate important information.



### 2 Look at and carefully examine the objects in the museum

Touch the objects only if the signs indicate that it is permissible to do so.



### 3 Enjoy food and beverages outside the galleries

It is important to keep the galleries free of food and moisture, as food could attract insects that can cause irreparable harm to artefacts and moisture could cause certain materials to deteriorate.



### 4 Take photographs without flash

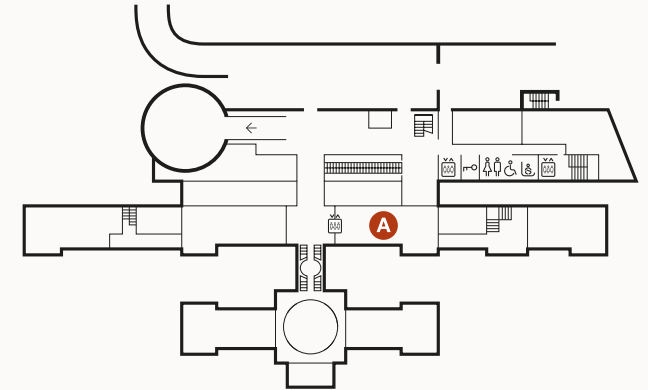
Flash from cameras damages sensitive materials like paper and textiles. It also greatly shortens their lifespan.

Most importantly, start your journey with a curious mind!

## NAVIGATION

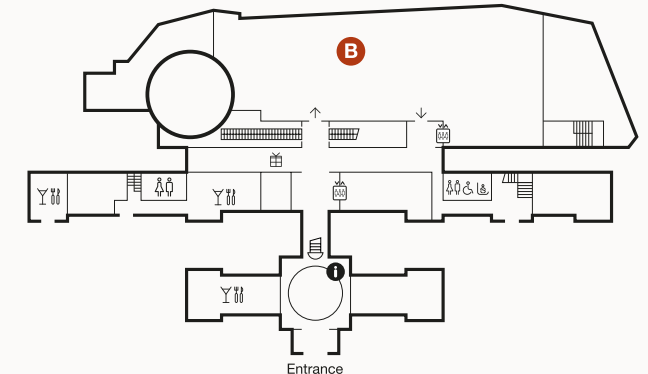
### Level 2

- A** Surviving Syonan gallery



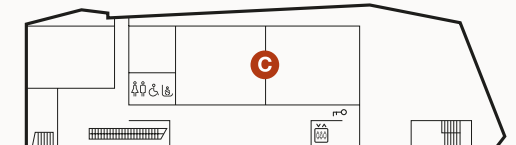
### Level 1

- B** Syonan-To section in the Singapore History Gallery



### Basement

- C** Witness to War: Remembering 1942 exhibition



**i** Visitor Services

Lift

Restrooms

Baby Changing Room

Locker (Basement & Level 2)

Pram Parking

Restaurant

Museum Shop



This special international exhibition was launched to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. It presents the complexities of the events that led to the outbreak of war in Singapore in 1942, and also features first-hand accounts from ordinary men and women who lived through the war. Many of them were young people, just like yourself, 75 years ago.

The exhibition also features artefacts from 10 overseas museums such as the Australian War Memorial and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. They highlight a shared regional history. The artefacts and war survivors are both witnesses to conflict: hear their voices as they speak; some for the very first time.

### Journalist Notes Column:

Summarise your findings for the book here, as you walk through the gallery:

1 Why was the fall of Singapore historically significant, and what were its implications?

2 How did the war change the lives of people, especially young people like yourself, in Singapore? How did people cope with the war?

3 What relevance might the fall of Singapore have to us today? Will it continue to be relevant to us in 5 years' time?

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill described Singapore's fall on 15 February 1942 as the "worst disaster" and "largest capitulation" in British history. On that day, he announced the news about Singapore to the British people and the world.

Singapore's fall was among Britain's worst defeats in the Far East.

## 1 THE 25-POUNDER GUNS



25-pounder field gun, brass shell casings and ammunition box with shell holder  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
c1941–1945

The 25-pounder gun was the standard field artillery weapon of the British and Commonwealth armies in World War Two. The gun was designed to be an improvement over the 18-pounder gun, which was the main field artillery equipment in World War One, and was used by Allied forces during the war.

Examine the photograph of an 18-pounder gun below. It was designed to be towed by a team of horses, and had a maximum firing range of approximately 6,000 metres, as opposed to the 25-pounder gun's range of 12,300 metres. The 25-pounder gun was towed by military tractors.



Gunner of the Royal Field Artillery, Britain, firing an 18-pounder gun, in World War One, Imperial War Museum, Q70189

Compare the 18-pounder gun and the 25-pounder gun. What were the key improvements made to the 25-pounder gun, as opposed to the 18-pounder?

In World War Two, each side worked to create more advanced weapons, the most significant of which were the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945. What does this tell you about the use of military technology in warfare?

2 THE DAYS LEADING TO THE BATTLE FOR SINGAPORE

The attack on Singapore was part of a larger campaign waged by Japanese forces across the Pacific. Learn more about the Pacific War at the map table within the exhibition gallery.

7 December 1941: A large-scale Pacific War broke out across 6,000 miles of ocean, with a simultaneous Japanese military attack on:

- a

The United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
- b

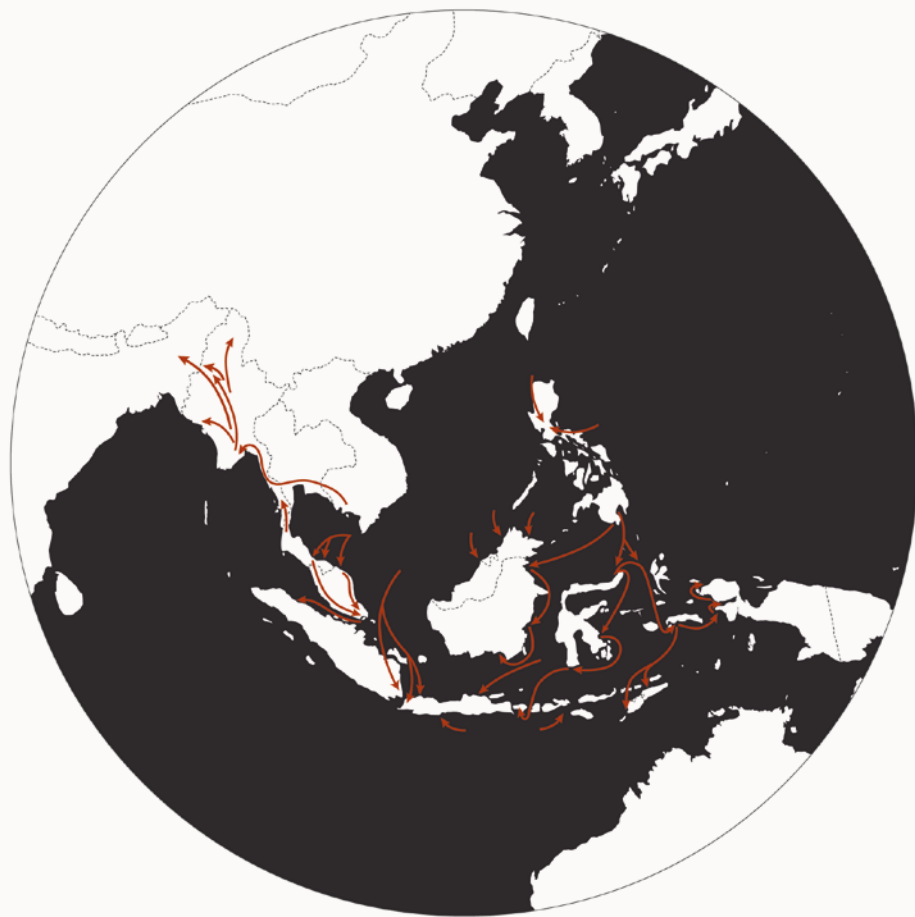
Hong Kong
- c

Philippines
- d

Malaya

The timeline of many “falls”: In the table below, label the dates on which various colonies fell, and use your pencil to shade the areas in which Japanese troops established their presence. This will provide valuable information for your book in the future.

Colony	Date of Fall
Hong Kong	
British North Borneo	
Singapore	
Burma (Rangoon/Yangon)	
Dutch East Indies (Java)	
The Philippines	



### 3 THE INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

Investigate the showcase to see how the fall of Singapore had consequences far beyond Singapore's shores.

The Axis powers congratulated Japan on its victory in Singapore. For instance, Nazi Germany issued a commemorative medal, which is exhibited in the gallery.



This two-sided commemorative medal carries the inscriptions "Einnahme Von Singapore", which means "Capture of Singapore" in German, and "Befreit gross-ostasien von fremdherrschaft", which refers to the liberation of the Greater-East Asia from foreign domination. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board (11 February 1942) Accession Number: 2001-05092

Look for the artefacts related to Australia and New Zealand. How did the fall of Singapore affect both nations?

Pick two other items that show how serious the fall of Singapore was for the world and the British Empire. Which items did you pick, and why?

1

2

#### 4 CAPTURING THE STORIES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

The curators of this exhibition interviewed war survivors, veterans and their families, and have presented eleven of these stories here. These memories – oral histories, photographs, diaries and animated illustrations – are treasure troves of historical information about how the lives of people in Singapore changed during the war.

Some people lost family members; others had to flee from home to home, scrounging for food by the roadside. Many were young people, just like yourself.



Name of interviewee:

What are 3 interesting points you would like to highlight from this interviewee's story?

What do you think it reveals about the lives of people during the war?

Why did you choose this story?

Are there any artefacts, photographs or quotes from the story you chose, that you would like to feature in your book?

**Optional Activity  
for  
Secondary School  
Students**

Take a look at "A Child's Perspective", a family activity space designed for young people such as yourself. During the war, young children and students lived through air raids and food deprivation.



Locate this letter postcard in the “Looking Ahead” zone of the exhibition gallery.



Did any of the war survivors or veterans inspire you? Write a letter to a war survivor, or their families, telling them how you felt!

Drop it into the letter box, and the National Museum will deliver your letters to these seniors or their families.

The Syonan-To section of the Singapore History Gallery illustrates the Japanese conquest of Singapore and Malaya, drawing attention to the military tools and machinery used by both British and Japanese troops. With the British surrender on 15 February 1942, Singapore was placed under military occupation, and renamed Syonan-To, which means “Light of the South” in Japanese.

It also tells the story of one of Singapore’s war heroes – Elizabeth Choy – whose courage and resilience in the face of her ordeal makes her an inspiration.

### Journalist Notes Column:

Summarise your findings for the book here, as you walk through the gallery:

- 1 Why was the fall of Singapore historically significant, and what were its implications?
- 2 How did the war change the lives of people, especially young people like yourself, in Singapore? How did people cope with the war?
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During the war, the British defence of Malaya was called the "Singapore Strategy". What was the "Singapore Strategy"?

What were the limitations of this strategy?

How did it contribute to Singapore's fall?

## 1 THE JAPANESE'S ADVANCE TO SINGAPORE



Replica of a Type 95 Ha-Go Japanese Tank  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

The Type 95 Ha-Go was the most common Japanese tank used in World War Two.

The exhibit in the Singapore History Gallery was one of the four that were constructed for Tom Hanks' and Steven Spielberg's television mini-series, *The Pacific* (2010).

## Journalist's notes about this tank



A Japanese Type 95 Ha-Go light tank halted by Australian anti-tank fire in Malaya  
Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial  
Accession Number: 011298

When was this tank introduced?

What is the brand of its diesel engine?

This tank is armed with:

- a 1 \_\_\_\_\_ gun
- b 2 \_\_\_\_\_ guns

What are some qualities of this tank, which enabled the Japanese to break through British defences and reach Bukit Timah within a few days of the initial Japanese army landings in northern Singapore?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

How did the rest of the soldiers advance towards Singapore?

Why do you think such vehicles were used?

## 2 ELIZABETH CHOY: TORTURED BUT NOT SHATTERED



*"It was a nightmare. I cannot believe it happened. It was 200 days of starvation, torture, without a comb, toothbrush... What saved me were my prayers and faith in God."*

– Elizabeth Choy

Source: "Choy's Remarkable Life on Show",  
*The Straits Times*, 1 November 1997, p. 3.

Elizabeth Choy, June 1953  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 1992-00221

This set of clothes belonged to Elizabeth Choy, who, together with her husband, worked in the canteen at Miyako Hospital. Together, they secretly brought food, medicine and even radios to British prisoners-of-war interned at Changi. The husband and wife were arrested by the Japanese Kempeitai shortly after the Allied commandos successfully launched an attack on Japanese ships that were stationed in Keppel Harbour.

You can read more about her story in the exhibition and find out what she had to endure when she was held captive.



Elizabeth Choy's clothing (1940s)  
Gift of Elizabeth Choy

## Syonan-To

Location: Singapore History Gallery, Level 1

How would you respond if you were to go through the same experience as Elizabeth Choy? What would you do to help yourself survive 200 days of torture?

How would you describe Elizabeth Choy as a person?



The Young Men's Christian Association building at Orchard Road, early 20th century. It served as the Japanese East District Kempeitai branch during the Japanese Occupation. Elizabeth Choy was kept captive here.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 1997-03238

## Surviving Syonan

Location: Life in Singapore galleries, Level 2

This exhibition shows how the people of Singapore coped with daily life and responded with grit and resourcefulness to the Japanese Occupation, a period of great adversity and scarcity.

### Journalist Notes Column:

Summarise your findings for the book here, as you walk through the gallery:

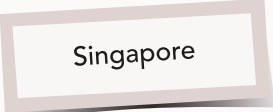


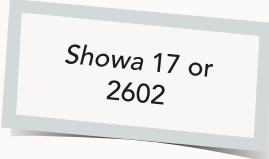



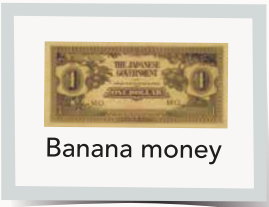



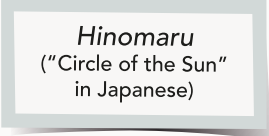
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1 FROM SINGAPORE TO SYONAN-TO

How did Singapore change with its fall? Match the changes to the original below:


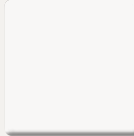


	Singapore BEFORE the Japanese Occupation	Singapore DURING the Japanese Occupation
Identity:		
Flag:		
Anthem:		
Papers:		
Date:		
Currency:		

2 A NEW LANGUAGE FOR STUDENTS

Students returned to schools in April 1942 and found that they had to learn a new language – Nippon-Go (“Japanese language” in Japanese). The Japanese believed that Nippon-Go was important because of two reasons:

- a To inculcate the Nippon spirit
- b To sweep away the language of the enemy

The “Nipponphonics” section in the gallery provides an example of how students learnt the Japanese language. Use the cubes to match the Chinese characters to the new Japanese words that students had to learn.

Japanese Characters (Katakana)	Chinese Characters
 a shi ta (meaning: tomorrow)	  
 sen ta ku (meaning: to wash clothes)	  



"People only made use of the language in so far as they had to communicate with the Japanese... people working in situations where they do not see very many of the Japanese, I don't think they bothered very much about learning the language."

Dr Tan Ban Cheng, who was 13 years old in 1942, expressing his thoughts on Japanese efforts to promote their language and culture in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation.

Oral History Interview with Dr Tan Ban Cheng  
Accession no. 000392  
Oral History Centre  
National Archives of Singapore

In your opinion, do you think that teaching a new language – Nippon-Go – helped to foster a Nippon spirit? Why or why not?

## 3 ROMANTICISING SYONAN



Japanese Propaganda Poster  
Collection of the National Museum of  
Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 2005-00943

Within weeks of the Japanese Occupation, the Department of Propaganda was established to extol the benefits of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It championed a new, harmonious and self-sufficient Asia liberated from its Western colonial masters, with Japan at the helm. Different channels of communication were used to convey the Japanese message.

What is this poster trying to convey?  
Why do you think that the Japanese government came up with this poster?  
Examine the source.

### I SEE...

Who do you see in the poster? Who are these people?  
What are they doing? What message(s) do you see in the poster?

### I THINK...

What do you think the creator of the poster wanted to convey?

### I WONDER...

Who would the audience for this poster be? How would they feel while looking at it?

### EXCITEMENT?

Would you be excited about this idea? What about it excites you?

### WORRY?

What are the possible downsides of the Greater East Co-Prosperity Sphere? Does anything worry you?

### NEEDS

What else do you need to know about this idea?

### STANCE, STEPS, SUGGESTIONS

What is your view on this idea? What are the next steps you should take to better understand this idea?

Imagine that you are a civilian in Singapore living under Japanese rule. What would your thoughts on the Greater East Co-Prosperity Sphere be?

## 4 THE FOOD SITUATION IN SINGAPORE



Painting of food rationing during the Japanese Occupation  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 2000-01479

What is shown in this painting?

\_ o o \_ R \_ \_ \_ o \_ \_ \_ g

Why do you think this happened in Singapore during the occupation?

If war were to occur in Singapore today, what do you think the people of Singapore can do to help each other?

## 5 FINDING SUBSTITUTES

The problem which you have identified on page 19 also led to malnutrition and diseases among the people. The death rate in Singapore increased from 1942 to 1945, reaching a peak of **42,749** in 1944. This was almost triple the rate a year before the war! As medical supplies decreased, people relied on home remedies and traditional medicine to treat common ailments such as malaria, dysentery, fever and diarrhoea.

Ailment	Method
Fever	
Vitamin B deficiency	
Calcium deficiency	
Anaemia (A lack of haemoglobin, which is the oxygen-carrying pigment of red blood cells. Anaemia causes people to be weak and breathless.)	

## 6 HOW A FAMILY COPED DURING THE OCCUPATION

Look for this family photograph under the section "War is bad for your health", and gather information on the main character.



Family portrait, late 1940s  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 2002-00865

### Case File

**Name:** Wu Sijing

**Real name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Born:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Country of birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father's occupation:** \_\_\_\_\_

In the photograph below, label what each family member worked as during the occupation:



**Sijing**

Worked in: \_\_\_\_\_

And \_\_\_\_\_



**Sijing's younger sister**

Worked in: \_\_\_\_\_



**Sijing's elder brother**

Worked in: \_\_\_\_\_

## Surviving Syonan

Location: Life in Singapore galleries, Level 2

Sijing and her siblings worked to supplement their family's income, even though they were children. What are two lessons which you think your readers can learn from Sijing and her siblings?

Lesson 1:

Lesson 2:



This set of mortar and pestle, which are used to pound herbs, belonged to Sijing's father. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession number: 2002-00276, 2002-00277

## Post-trip reflections

Now that you have completed your investigative journey, what are some of the lessons you will take away from your museum experience?

- 1 Why was the fall of Singapore historically significant, and what were its implications?
- 2 How did the war change the lives of people, especially young people like yourself, in Singapore? How did people cope with the war?
- 3 What relevance might the fall of Singapore have to us today? Will it continue to be relevant to us in 5 years' time?

Write your thoughts below:



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