

N S M  
National Museum  
of Singapore

# DISLOCATIONS

DISLOCATIONS: MEMORY & MEANING OF THE  
FALL OF SINGAPORE, 1942

Student Guide

Curating the Fall of Singapore in 2042

(Recommended for ages 13 and above)



Japanese postcard, 1943, Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (1995-03519)

This postcard (a card that is used for sending messages by post without an envelope, especially one that has a picture on one side) was part of a commemorative set marking three major events in the Pacific War: the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the battle of Hong Kong, and the Fall of Singapore.

The scene depicts the General Officer Commanding Malaya, Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival and Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita heading to the Ford Factory on Bukit Timah Road to sign the surrender documents, which signified the unconditional surrender of Singapore to the Japanese.

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

*Dislocations: Memory & Meaning of the Fall of Singapore, 1942* is a commemorative exhibition that marks the 80th anniversary of the British surrender to the Imperial Japanese Army in Singapore on 15 February 1942. It features physical objects, documents and oral histories woven into specially-designed spaces meant to evoke reflections and conversations among visitors, as they explore the notion of “war memory” and the different ways in which it can be remembered and retold.



## ABOUT YOUR TASK

You have been selected to be part of a team of curators (a person in charge of the objects or works of art in a museum or an art gallery, etc.) who will put together an exhibition commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore in 2042.

As you explore *Dislocations*,

### TASK #1

Consider the questions below and answer the reflection questions in each section.

- What was the impact of the Fall of Singapore on the colony and the people who were growing up after the war?
- What relevance might the Fall of Singapore have to us today?
- Will it continue to be relevant to us in 20 years' time?

### TASK #2

What kinds of objects or experiences would tell the story of the Fall in a way that is meaningful to visitors to your 100th anniversary exhibition?

At the end of this booklet, note down **two artefacts and one story** that you would feature in your exhibition.

Here are a few tips to take note of as you explore the gallery:



### **1. Be aware of your surroundings**

When you enter the exhibition gallery, take some time to get used to the lighting in the space. There are mirrors and projection in the first two sections of the exhibition.



### **2. Examine the objects in the museum carefully**

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



### **3. Limit food and beverages to 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! All the best!

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## FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

Use the map to explore the different sections of the exhibition.



## 1a. PROLOGUE



The Japanese invasion of Malaya began on 8 December 1941. In the following weeks, the Japanese advanced through Malaya, moving closer and closer to Singapore.

As war drew nearer, the people of Singapore had to decide whether to evacuate the island (if that was an option for them) or move from their homes to another location on the island.

- 1 Listen to the oral history recordings playing in the background and observe the quotes projected on the floor. How do you think the people of Singapore felt as war gripped the island?

- 2 What do you think the design of this section is trying to convey to visitors?

## 1b. EVACUATION

In the week before the surrender, thousands of people tried to leave Singapore. Others fled from their homes as the Japanese advanced inland, seeking shelter with relatives in other parts of Singapore.



- 1 Take a look at the videos in this section. Describe the situation in Singapore when evacuations were carried out.



- 2 In the event of war, would you choose to stay in Singapore or evacuate? Why?



As people were evacuating, they had to decide what personal belongings to take with them. This section also features “objects” (e.g. clothing, teddy bear) that people may have brought with them during evacuation, mounted on the walls and shown on video projections.

1b. EVACUATION

This 19th-century clock belonged to the Tessensohn family, a prominent Eurasian family in Singapore. The family brought it with them when they moved to another home during the Battle of Singapore. It survived the war intact.

3 If you had to evacuate or abandon your home, what would you bring with you and what would you leave behind?

Items to bring	Items to leave behind
•	•
•	•
•	•

4 Why would you bring and leave behind the items that you listed above?



French grandfather clock, early 19th century, Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2013-00058). Gift of Elisabeth Chan

## 2. DEFENCE PREPARATIONS

Less than a year before the evacuation, the British had been making defence preparations in Singapore. Soldiers, warships and aircraft were sent in to reinforce the defences, volunteers were trained, and bomb shelters were built. Many people believed that Singapore was an "impregnable fortress", and that war would never come to Singapore.

- 1 Observe the photographs of the men and women who were shoring up Singapore's defences. Name three activities that were being carried out by the people.



a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

### CAN SINGAPORE BE DEFENDED?

Play this interactive game to explore the decisions made by the defenders of Singapore. Follow their choices and see how they worked out – or why they didn't.



### 3. THE BATTLE OF SINGAPORE

By 31 January 1942, the remaining Allied forces had completed their retreat from Malaya and joined the units tasked to defend the various strategic areas of Singapore. At this stage, it was clear that whatever hopes there might have been to defend Singapore were now in tatters.



Medals awarded to Sgt. Beppo Wahid, c1910s–1940s, Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (1999-02767)

- 1 Observe the artefacts in the section. Besides British Malaya and Singapore, which other countries sent troops to assist in the defence of Singapore?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 Locate this artefact to find out more about Sgt. Beppo Wahid, who was part of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF) that aided the British in defending Singapore. Who did the SSVF consist of?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY!

To learn about another group who fought bravely against the Japanese, visit Reflections at Bukit Chandu. Flip to the back of the booklet for more details!

# 4. THE SURRENDER

Although we now think of the Fall of Singapore in February 1942 as a single definitive event, the news of the surrender did not reach everyone at the same time as news was transmitted mostly by the newspapers or public announcements in the past. Additionally, not everyone reacted to the news of the surrender in the same way.



Japanese postcard, 1943, Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (1995-03519)



Defeat, Singapore, 1946, Reproduction. (ART22927). Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial

1 Take a close look at these two artefacts, read the captions and answer the questions below.

a. What major event inspired both paintings?

b. What emotions are being conveyed by the artists? Why do you think the artists wanted to convey these emotions?

	Defeat, Singapore	Japanese Postcard
Emotions		
Reason		

## 4. THE SURRENDER



The Fall of Singapore meant different things to different people. Over the years, numerous accounts of the surrender have been recorded, remembered, and shared.

Explore the interactives to discover how individuals interpreted and coped with this momentous event.

2 What were the different emotions felt by people regarding the surrender?

*"This was the ultimate, ghastly, irrevocable message. Singapore had surrendered – unconditionally. The wail sank to a whimper, then died away. The silence that followed was complete. Nothing stirred. Nobody spoke. Not even whispered. We just looked at one another."*

- Harry Miller, The Straits Times journalist

## 5. AFTERMATH

The aftermath could be as brutal, or even more so than the battle itself. The *Sook Ching* massacre, which took place during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, killed thousands of people and is an event that is remembered with much grief even to this day. Families were also separated by death, imprisonment, evacuation, or simply the chaos of fighting.

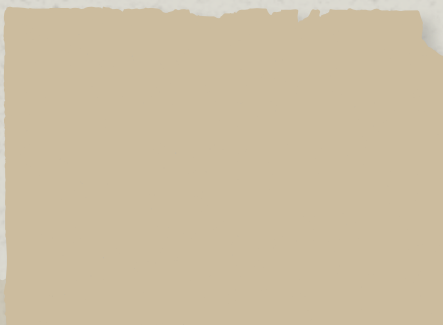
Take some time to look quietly at the objects retrieved from a *Sook Ching* burial site.



- 1 What do these objects reveal about the people who died?



- 2 Read the personal announcements in the newspaper advertisements. How do you think the individuals who put up the advertisement felt not knowing if their loved ones were missing, dead or safe?



## 6. MEMORIES



Although the Fall of Singapore took place 80 years ago, it continues to be remembered up to the present day. This event has been commemorated by many different people and groups, through a variety of mediums, and in different ways throughout time.

- 1 Observe the various commemorative materials that are displayed in this section. Do you think the Fall of Singapore is a significant moment in Singapore's history that should continue to be commemorated and remembered, and why?

## 6. MEMORIES

In this section, we showcase three specially selected student archivist video interviews which explore stories of war passed down through the families of those that lived through World War Two. As part of the Student Archivist Project, the museum engaged students to help record, preserve and share the experiences of war survivors, as well as the memories inherited by the generations born during or after the war.



Watch one of the interviews and answer the questions below.

2 Name of Interviewee

---

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

•

•

•

4 What do you think this story reveals about the people who inherited memories of World War Two from their families?

## 7. CONCLUSION

2042 will be the 100th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. It will be a landmark anniversary in the sense that almost an entire generation who lived through the Battle of Singapore and the Japanese Occupation will no longer be around to witness the event.

As you explored this exhibition, did you observe any objects or stories that would tell the story of the 100th anniversary of the Fall in a meaningful way?



Write or draw **two artefacts and a story** that you would feature in your 100th anniversary exhibition and record them in this booklet! Note: You can also include artefacts or stories that you have seen in other exhibitions, books or videos, or heard from your own family!

Artefact

Artefact

Story

## REFLECTIONS

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

- 1 What are **three** new things that you have learnt about Singapore's World War Two experience?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 What are **two** questions that you have about Singapore's World War Two experience after today's visit?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

- 3 Name **one** artefact or story that is most memorable to you after today's visit.

## OTHER WORLD WAR TWO EXHIBITIONS TO EXPLORE!

To find out more about the World War Two experience in Singapore, you may also visit the National Museum of Singapore's permanent galleries – the **Singapore History Gallery on level 1** and **Surviving Syonan on level 2**.



Singapore History Gallery, level 1



Surviving Syonan gallery, level 2

Or take a trip to one of the **World War Two commemorative centres managed by the museum**:



- 1 Changi Chapel and Museum**  
Opening hours: 9.30am to 5.30pm,  
Tuesdays to Sundays

The newly-revamped Changi Chapel and Museum features new content and artefacts that tell the story of the prisoners of war and civilians interned in Changi prison camp during the Japanese Occupation.



- 2 Reflections at Bukit Chandu**  
Opening hours: 9.30am to 5pm,  
Tuesdays to Sundays

Reflections at Bukit Chandu is a World War Two interpretative centre that commemorates the battle of Pasir Panjang and the men of the Malay Regiment who fought in it, as well as the history of Bukit Chandu itself.

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