Investigative Inquiry: The Bombing of Darwin

The Bombing of Darwin

Bruce Acland - "I heard the roar of an aircraft and a role of holes appeared just above my head. I was lagging behind - and the role of five holes - I think it was five - I come back later to check up - sort of put the speed of lightning into my loins. I rushed up and fell into a slit trench."

Investigative Options

People and places

The Defence of Darwin Experience features a range of real life characters impacted on by World War II and the events that occurred in Darwin at that time. Over 40 characters are depicted and these include soldiers, sailors, nurses, civilians and public servants.

While some of the characters are local Darwin people, others travelled from areas of Australia and South East Asia to fulfil a necessary role in Darwin during the World War II period in history. Some of the locals were evacuated and experienced life in a ship for some time before they arrived at a safe port. The stories of the 28 characters are depicted on an interactive table map where their stories about events on 19 February 1942 are told.

During this Activity students will be asked to either adopt the role of one of the characters or take up the role of an investigative journalist who is researching the life and times of people in Darwin during World War II. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will investigate experiences of the characters in Darwin during World War II and map the journeys taken to join the war effort or to escape the impact.

Background Information

- Review the Defence of Darwin Experience Website at http://www.defenceofdarwin.nt.gov.au/ prior to planning the excursion and introducing the activity to students

Task Parameters

- Students are encouraged to work individually to research background of their individual characters and collaboratively to present the final stage of the project
- Final product has text, audio and visual elements
- Assessment is of individual and group work and can be teacher, peer and self-assessed
Ideas, hints and comments

- Task can be modified to suit the diverse learning needs of the student group
- The project can be extended to cover a terms work or facilitated over a shorter time frame, outputs to the project can be modified accordingly
- Other heritage sites are available and may compliment the museum excursion (see http://www.defenceofdarwin.nt.gov.au/index.php?id=7 for location of the military heritage sites around Darwin.
- If extending the project over a term then a subsequent excursion to the Northern Territory Library could be useful for research.

Lesson Stages

1. Tuning in - Introducing the topic and gain students’ interest through the following means:

   i. Open the topic by showing students the following ABC clip online –

   Remembering the Bombing of Darwin
   http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s2818198.htm

   And by listening to one or a number of the podcasts on the ABC’s Bombing of Darwin podtour: a journey back to 1942
   http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2012/02/10/3428056.htm

   ii. Introduce newspaper clips and other articles about the bombing of Darwin and use these to facilitate discussion to find out what students already know about the bombing of Darwin.

   Newspaper clips available from:


   http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/46346969?searchTerm=Darwin%201939&searchLimits=fromyyyy=1940%7C%7C%7Ct0yyyy=1940.

   iii. Introduce the Character Cards and ask student to choose a character that interests them – (note that to meet the curriculum outcomes it is important to place some focus on Aboriginal people, migrants and women) - students then write a short story about what they imagine life would be like for that person during WWII. Students should then form groups of people who they think would know each other during the war in Darwin and share their stories.

   Students should identify what connections they think the people in their group would have with each other during the war.
At the end of Stage 1 each student will know the topic and some of the key characters.

2. Tuning in – Introducing the inquiry project and explaining the work ahead
   i. Students are introduced to the Activity (see Activity Cards towards the end of this resource).
   ii. Students are asked to revisit their character and decide whether to continue on that role or assume the role of an investigative journalist (the film clip and newspaper articles from previous session will provide insight into what that role is about).
   iii. The project and stages of the project are explained to students and the fact that while most of the research is independent the final product and presentation is a collaborative effort.
   iv. Facilitate group discussion to support student groups to select and commit to one activity card (allow time for group discussion and ideas to emerge).

At the end of Stage 2 each student will know about the project, their activity, their chosen character.

3. Organising – Deciding directions
   i. Students must decide what information they need from the excursion to help them find out more about their character or the characters they will be investigating as a journalist.
   ii. Brainstorm with class for suggestions of the types of questions or activities that will help students gain the information they need from the excursion (refer to Character Cards resources on the website for ideas where information about the characters can be found in the museum).

Questions for investigation could include the following (note that many others are possible and can be led by the direction that students and teacher would like to go in for the specific activity):

Collecting facts for individual characters
- Where does the character come from?
- What is the person’s job?
- What is the person’s story around how and why they travelled to Darwin?
- What do we know about the person’s culture, family, age and habits?
- Where was this person during the bombing of Darwin? What was their role?

Thinking about other aspects of the characters life
• Explain why the characters are likely to know each other and identify which ones would most likely be friends (think about why some of them would not be friends)
• What types of people are represented by the characters – do you think all the groups who were in Darwin at the time are fairly represented?
• How far is the person away from home and their family, think about the implications of this to how they feel and act?
• Explain how people in Darwin would communicate with the rest of the world during the war, what is the impact of this on keeping in touch with family and people in authority?
• How has life in Darwin changed since WWII?
• Whose views are represented in the information we are reading at the museum?

Special notes for investigative journalists
• What do the newspaper samples in the museum tell you about what journalists were writing about before and during WWll?
• What aspects of the museum would be most worth investigating? (Students may need guidance here to identify the difference between reporting on an obvious event (i.e. Japan bombed Darwin) and an event that required investigation (i.e. conditions aboard evacuation ships)?
• How did life change before the war and during?
• Whose views are represented in the information we are reading in the Museum?

At the end of Stage 3 students will be working in groups and will have prepared investigative questions for the Museum excursion. While no work sheet is attached it is important to ensure that students have note taking and drawing materials for the excursion as well as a list of the questions that they are seeking to investigate.

4. Researching

i. Excursion to the Defence of Darwin Experience

During their visit students collect information from exhibits to address questions; this might include Character Cards, detailed notes and drawings of exhibits.

ii. On return from the Museum a classroom session should be facilitated to support student decisions about whether they have enough information or need to seek out other sources. This is the ideal time to discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources of historical evidence. Brainstorm as a class to decide other potential sources of information for the project.

Potential resources are outline in Attachment 3.
5. Drawing Conclusions

i. Using the evidence collected from the excursion to the Defence of Darwin Experience and other sources, students must start to think critically about their findings and answer questions.

ii. To facilitate critical thinking it is a good idea to have students working in groups to discuss their ideas. This provides a good opportunity for peer tutoring as some students will be quite advanced in their research and thinking while other can use some extra support.

iii. This is the stage where students start to bring their information together for the final product - writing a short play, writing a drama production, writing a letter, journal or news article for TV or Wiki ‘squeaks’.

6. Action

i. Students apply their learning to the final product and deliver their chosen item.

ii. During this phase students are encouraged to focus on completing the project rather than continuing to collect information or analyse in light of their initial question or task. Where students realise they have not completed the initial steps to their satisfaction they are encouraged to reflect on how they would do things differently next time rather than focusing on trying to do it all this time.

7. Reflection and Evaluation

i. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning through this unit of work and some activities to focus their understandings and experience of the topic are encouraged.

ii. Suggested activities include

- Reflection statement – ask students to write a short one page summary of what they learned about themselves while completing the project. For example did they find that they became distracted easily while on the internet doing research? From this students should think about what they could do differently in the next inquiry research project.

- Now and then – students work in groups to discuss key things they have learned about people and Darwin during World War II that they did not know before. Each group should then present key ideas to the class for large group discussion.
Activity cards

Card 1

Choose a character card
Investigate the life and experiences of that character in the time surrounding World War II
Get into the character role
With your group, write a short play involving all characters in context of their experiences and actions in Darwin during World War II.
Perform the play to class or year level

Card 2

Choose a character card
Investigate the life and experiences of that character in the time surrounding World War II
Get into the character role
With your group, write a short drama involving all characters in context of their experiences and actions in Darwin during World War II.
Record your drama production and upload into moviemaker for editing and viewing

Card 3

Choose a character card
Investigate the life and experiences of that character in the time surrounding World War II
Get into the character role
Write to relatives in other states or territories of Australia or overseas telling them of your experiences
With your group, participate in a recorded interview telling the audience about your experiences
Card 4

Choose a character card
Investigate the life and experiences of that character in the time surrounding World War II
Get into the character role
Write a journal about your experience in Darwin during World War II
With your group, participate in a recorded interview telling the audience about your experiences

Card 5

Choose a set of characters or an event
Investigate the characters or event
Get into character as an investigative journalist of the time
With your group, write a newspaper article, interview characters for the TV news or create a Wiki ‘squeaks’ page based on characters or events during WWII in Darwin (note: this group can be made up of characters and a journalist if the characters are used in the news story)
Darwin’s Wartime Evacuees

Following the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, the War Cabinet determined that women and children should be evacuated from Darwin and surrounding areas. A preliminary census conducted in 1941 had shown that there were 1,066 women and 969 children. The National Archives Darwin Office holds a list of census returns completed at the time, in the form of handwritten notes, compiled on a street by street basis. The returns, held as series F77, record names, nationality and age.

An evacuation program involving ships and aircraft began soon after. The last vessel left Darwin on 15 February 1942, while the last aircraft left on 18 February 1942. The evacuation experience, described in Dickinson’s 1995 study, Refugees in Our Own Country: A Story of Darwin’s Wartime Evacuees, was harrowing for the evacuated families and the men left behind. Some returned to Darwin after the war, but others never came back.

Source: National Archives of Australia

In addition to visiting the Defence of Darwin Experience if you are able, you may wish to review:

The National Archives of Australia ‘Evacuation of women and children from Darwin 1941-42 has a large number of accessible records about the Darwin wartime evacuations:

And, review The Stolen Generations website about ‘The bombing of Darwin and the evacuation of the Aborigines’ at:
http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=167&Itemid=137

And, you may wish to listen to the ABC Guest Room Podcast with Janet Dickinson. You may wish to download the MP3 in advance and just listen to the story component (unless you also wish to hear Janet’s music selection) at:
http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2012/04/30/3499140.htm

- Students are encouraged to work in groups to represent a ‘family’ for an evacuation. Each ‘family’ is allowed one suitcase and within their groups, students have to negotiate with their peers to ensure space for important and essential possessions.

  Each group will be encouraged to think practically as well as ‘sentimentally’.

  Critical and creative thinking can be encouraged through the following questions:

  o What items would you need to take with you to aid survival?

  o What items would you find it hard to live without?

  o What items could you share with other ‘families’ – could you work with classmates to share some suitcase space and essential items?
When groups have completed this challenge, ask them to remove any items that would not have existed in 1942. What could they take instead?

- Through 2 or 3 dimensional art forms, students represent the packed suitcase
- A short presentation to the class explaining why different things are packed would support student learning and confidence in presentation skills.
- **Students could also relate the evacuation of Darwin to current world events, including refugees and ‘boat people’**. Encourage students to think about what people from other countries would bring to Australia in one suitcase when they know that they will not be able to return to their homes again. They could write a letter to a refugee family explaining what they think a refugee family should bring in one suitcase and what things they could get when they arrive in Australia.

- **Wartime journalist for a day:**

Students work in pairs with one student taking the role of an interviewer for an online media service while the other takes the role of a fictional evacuee from Darwin in World War II. Obviously the person evacuated will be quite old when the interview takes place in the 21st Century and this should be reflected in the interview. The interview could be audio or video recorded and published online in the school environment for other students to access.

A sample media interview with a survivor can be accessed at:

Podcasts from the ABC’s Bombing of Darwin Walking Tour can be accessed here, the Doctor’s Gully site tells an evacuee’s story:

And, you may wish to listen to the ABC Guest Room Podcast with Janet Dickinson. You may wish to download the MP3 in advance and just listen to the story component (unless you also wish to hear Janet’s music selection) at:
- [http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2012/04/30/3499140.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2012/04/30/3499140.htm)

The Herald Sun on February 18th 2012 published an article:

‘**Allen Heckenberg was a 19-year-old ammunition loader on a three-inch anti-aircraft gun overlooking Darwin Harbour when the port was attacked by dozens of Japanese aircraft just before 10 am on February 19, 1942…..**’


> [www.nt.gov.au/defenceofdarwin] 1 Upper Primary
You could also enquire about listening to some Oral history interviews from the Northern Territory Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport: