

# The Candy Bomber and the Berlin Airlift

## Background

After World War II, Germany was divided among the countries that won the war against Germany. The Soviet Union (now known as Russia) took control of the eastern half of Germany and the western half was divided among the Allied Forces of the USA, Great Britain, and France.

Beginning June 1948, Russia built blockades and would not let food and supplies reach the city of Berlin, Germany. More than two million people were hungry. The United States and its allies sent pilots to help fly food and supplies into Berlin.

## The Candy Bomber

One day while he was in Berlin, Col. Halvorsen (who was an American pilot) saw a group of young children at the end of the runway. They were watching planes landing and taking off. The children were hungry, but they did not complain nor beg for anything. Uncle Wiggly Wings (Col Halvorsen) reached in his pocket and found he had two sticks of gum. "How do you share two sticks of gum with all these children?" he asked himself.

Col Halvorsen gave the two sticks of gum to the group of children. And, amazingly, the children tore the gum into enough pieces for every child to have a small taste or smell. There was no arguing or fighting. There were only smiles of joy at having even a small piece to enjoy. Seeing how thrilled the children were over the gum, Uncle Wiggly Wings promised to bring them candy the next time he came. He said he would drop it to them from his plane. There were many airplanes that passed over their city carrying supplies every day.

"How will we know your plane?" asked a young girl. "I will wiggle my wings," replied Uncle Wiggly Wings.

The next day as Col Halvorsen flew over Berlin, he wiggled the wings of his plane to let the children know that he was going to drop candy to them. Then, he dropped many small parachutes made from handkerchiefs, each bearing sweet treats. Soon letters addressed to "Uncle Wiggly Wings" began to arrive with children requesting candy drops in other areas of the city. "Operation Little Vittles" had begun.

By January 1949 some 250,000 parachutes had been dropped over Berlin, and the operation helped reassure citizens that the West would not abandon them. As one young Berliner later told Halvorsen, "It wasn't [just] chocolate. It was hope." In May of 1949, the blockade ended, and the airlift delivering supplies ended in September.

## Background information on the cartoonist (for activity 3)

Leslie Illingworth was a Welsh political cartoonist best known for his work for the *Daily Mail* and for becoming the chief cartoonist at the British satirical periodical *Punch*.

## Vocabulary

Allies

Little Vittles

Pilot

Blockade

Parachute

Operation

Runway

## Student instructions and Activities

### 1. Write a letter to Col. Halvorsen

Write a letter as if you were a child in East Berlin during the Berlin Airlift. How would you ask Col. Halvorsen to drop his candy parachutes in your neighborhood? Remember, the children of Berlin did not beg for anything, as their personal pride would not allow that. So, write your letter of request without begging, but with self-respect.

### 2. Make a candy bomber parachute

- Take a paper napkin and open it up completely.
- Take kite string and cut 4 pieces (each about 18 inches long).
- Take four stickers (or sticky dots) and attach one end of each string to a sticker.
- Place each sticker in a corner of the napkin.
- Gather the strings together and tape a miniature candy bar to them so that they all hang straight down.
- Toss the parachute and candy up in the air and watch what happens!

### Experiment with these ideas

- You made your parachute the same size but with a different material such as plastic, paper bag, tissue paper, etc.?
- You used a lighter weight than the candy bar to tape to the strings?
- You used longer strings?
- You used a larger piece of material or the parachute?

Choose one of these ideas or one of your own and test it to see what the difference is compared to your original parachute.

### 3. Analyzing political cartoons

a. Break students into five groups to analyze each cartoon separately

b. First have students observe the cartoons by asking three visual thinking questions

i. What do they notice in the cartoon?

ii. What else do they notice?

iii. What makes them say that?

c. Have each group use the cartoon analysis sheet from [docsteach.org](http://docsteach.org) (see below)

d. Have each group report back on their findings.

e. Have the students compare their findings and make a list of similarities and differences between the cartoons.

f. Extended activity – search online for political cartoons on the Berlin Blockade. How do those cartoons compare to those created by Leslie Illingworth?

g. Extended activity – write interview questions for the cartoonist. Make a list of questions for Leslie Illingworth asking him about his creative process, his point of view and any other relevant questions.

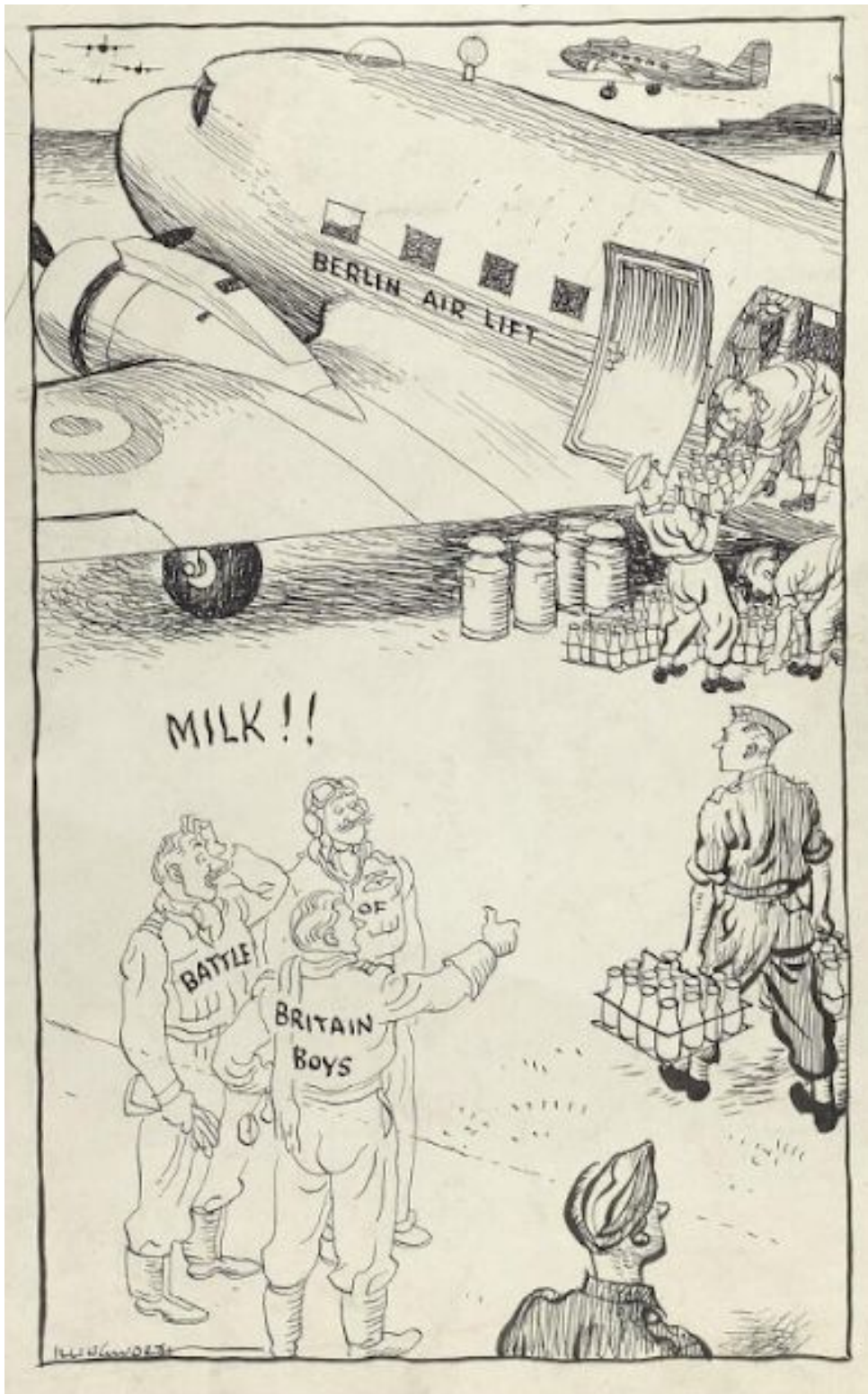
Cartoon 1



Numerous Stalin-like demons, labelled 'scares', 'lies' and 'rumors' flying from 'Berlin'. Aircraft collectively reading 'increased air lift' are flying in the opposite direction.

Leslie Illingworth, April 20, 1949 (National Library of Wales)

Cartoon 2



Ghostly figures of the "Battle of Britain" boys watch as milk is loaded onto an aeroplane marked "Berlin Air Lift".

Leslie Illingworth, May 5, 1948 (National Library of Wales)



Cartoon 3



Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin, dressed in military uniform are fighting a duel with toothpick over Berlin. Truman has a grenade marked "Atom" attached to his belt.

Leslie Illingworth, April 5, 1948 (National Library of Wales)

Cartoon 4



Vyshinsky and Molotov are standing on Stalin's shoulders blocking access to West Berlin. They are holding signs saying "Rail closed" and "Road closed" and holding a net marked "Demand for air control" as planes fly overhead.

Leslie Illingworth, September 27, 1948 (National Library of Wales)



Stalin and Truman playing chess.

Leslie Illingworth, February 14, 1949 (National Library of Wales)



## Analyze a Cartoon

### Meet the cartoon.

Quickly scan the cartoon. What do you notice first?

What is the title or caption?

### Observe its parts.

#### WORDS

*Are there labels, descriptions, thoughts, or dialogue?*

#### VISUALS

*List the people, objects, and places in the cartoon.*

*List the actions or activities.*

### Try to make sense of it.

#### WORDS

*Which words or phrases are the most significant?*

*List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed.*

#### VISUALS

*Which of the visuals are symbols?*

*What do they stand for?*

Who drew this cartoon?

When is it from?

What was happening at the time in history it was created?

What is the message? List evidence from the cartoon or your knowledge about the cartoonist that led you to your conclusion.

### Use it as historical evidence.

What did you find out from this cartoon that you might not learn anywhere else?

What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?

