

Education Resource

(Recommended for ages 15 and above)



THE MAKINGS OF
MULTICULTURAL SINGAPORE

Presented by the Founders' Memorial

The Founders' Memorial honours independent Singapore's founding values and nation-building journey. It will open at Bay East Garden in end-2028 as an integrated garden and gallery experience.

Since 2015, Singaporeans have contributed to the Memorial's concept, design, visitor experience and content through public engagements, pilot exhibitions and programmes.

Not Mere Spectators is the Memorial's second pilot exhibition, focusing on Multiculturalism.



Artist's impression of the Founders' Memorial

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Finding your way around

Use the map below to explore different sections of the exhibition. Engage with many stories and interactives in each section!



1. Introduction

Dear Explorer,

How did a people of different race, language, and religion come together to shape the Singapore we know today? As an explorer, you'll be diving deep into the stories of how our multicultural identity came to be and continues to evolve over time.

Step into the *Not Mere Spectators: The Makings of Multicultural Singapore* exhibition, where you will discover:

1 How the value of multiculturalism became foundational during our early nation-building years (1950s–1970s),

2 How multiculturalism continues to be a work in progress in Singapore, and

3 How you can be an active participant in multicultural Singapore's ongoing story.

This is not just about the past, it's about the multicultural Singapore we want to shape for our future.

Central task

As you explore the exhibition, consider these questions and answer the reflection questions in each section.

- What does it mean to be “not mere spectators” in the makings of a multicultural Singapore?
- Why is multiculturalism important for us today and for Singapore's future?

Tips for Exploration



Examine the objects in the exhibition carefully.

Look closely at the artefact or artwork, using the questions in this guide.



Limit food and beverages to outside the exhibition.

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



Take photographs without flash.

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

Most importantly, start your journey with a curious mind!
Let's begin!

2. Gather: *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat*

Singapore's new Ministry of Culture launched the *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* (People's Cultural Concerts) in 1959, with the first concert at the Botanic Gardens drawing 22,000 people. These free outdoor concerts featured cultural expressions of different ethnic groups alongside Western influences.

It was more than entertainment. The concerts intentionally brought together different cultures to share a stage, fostering better understanding and appreciation of the arts and culture of each group.



Silat performance during the *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* at City Hall Steps, 5 June 1960.

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Chinese Ribbon Dance performance in *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* at City Hall steps, 4 June 1962.

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Grab a mat and enjoy the animated short film that reimagines the spirit of *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat*!



What was one thing that surprised you about what you saw in the *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* film? Why?

3. Imagine: “A Nation in the Making”

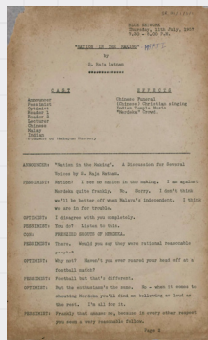
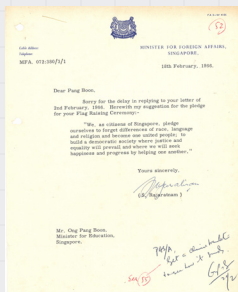
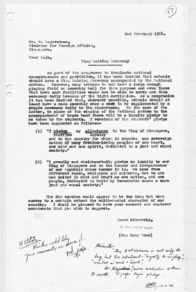
What makes a nation? S. Rajaratnam was a key leader whose ideas shaped the new self-government's direction for the nation. He imagined a “Malayan consciousness”—a sense of belonging to Malaya that went beyond racial identities.



Have a closer look at the letters exchanged between Ong Pang Boon and S. Rajaratnam on the pledge. Learn how our pledge came to be!



Then look at the original typescripts of S. Rajaratnam's radio play in the digital kiosk too.



Original typescripts of S. Rajaratnam's radio play, *A Nation in the Making* 1957

S. Rajaratnam Private Papers Collection, “A discussion for several voices by S. Rajaratnam”, SR.091

Courtesy of ISEAS Library, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Letters between Ong Pang Boon and S. Rajaratnam regarding the drafting of the National Pledge
February 1966

Ministry of Education Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

What were some of S. Rajaratnam's thoughts on nation-building, expressed through the typescripts?

Now that you have read the letters and the typescripts, imagine yourself as a leader like S. Rajaratnam: **How would you help people develop a sense of national identity in Singapore today?**



NOT HERE
SPECTATORS

4. Connect: Beyond a Common Language

The government's bilingual policy was never simply a matter of facilitating communication. It had to adapt and balance other factors like cultural preservation and staying relevant to the world. Each measure came with difficult accommodations and adjustments.

To this day, language remains central to both personal and collective identity. Do we need to speak the same language to have a common identity?



Browse through the display of textbooks in various languages.

Imagine learning in schools using these textbooks!



Facsimiles of learning materials: *Pelajaran Bahasa Kebangsaan di-Sekolah Rendah* (1960), 《好公民》 六上 (1991), *General Mathematics for Malayan Schools, Volume 1* (1962), *The Malay School Series No. 1* (1957)

Courtesy of National Library Singapore and Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board



Find a partner and role play this!

Imagine you are living in the 1970–1980s. There is a shift to focus on English as the main medium of instruction, hence textbooks are starting to be published in English. How would you plan to overcome these challenges?

Choose one of the characters below:

- A teacher in a vernacular school
- A vernacular-medium student learning Science in English
- A parent who only speaks English
- A textbook publisher

Hint: Express the concerns of each character and collaborate to find possible solutions.



Did you manage to work together and find a solution?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Based on the statements below, identify the emotions and concerns expressed. You may use the helping words provided.

What are they feeling?

anxious	proud
worried	determined
excited	frustrated

What is the issue they are referring to?

Adapting to change	Balancing tradition and progress
Communicating with others	Defining identity
Expressing identity	Fostering mutual understanding

“I must learn English quickly and well if I want to secure a good job in the future.”

Feeling(s):



Issue(s):

“Oh dear! In addition to learning in my mother tongue, I have to learn English as well?! It’s a totally different and difficult language!

Feeling(s):



Issue(s):

“My grandparents worry that the language policies are systematically erasing our mother tongue and cultural diversity, since I can’t speak dialect to them.”

Feeling(s):



Issue(s):

“I still practise my culture and traditions with my family and friends even though we speak English more often.”

Feeling(s):



Issue(s):

In a city of many mother tongues, how could Singaporeans come together to forge a shared identity?



Study the artwork ***Eating on Banana Leaves (1979)*** by Chua Mia Tee.

Eating on Banana Leaves
1979
Chua Mia Tee

Gift of Times Publishing Limited
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Imagine you are at the scene. **What do you think the people might be saying and in which language(s)? Write down your thoughts below.**

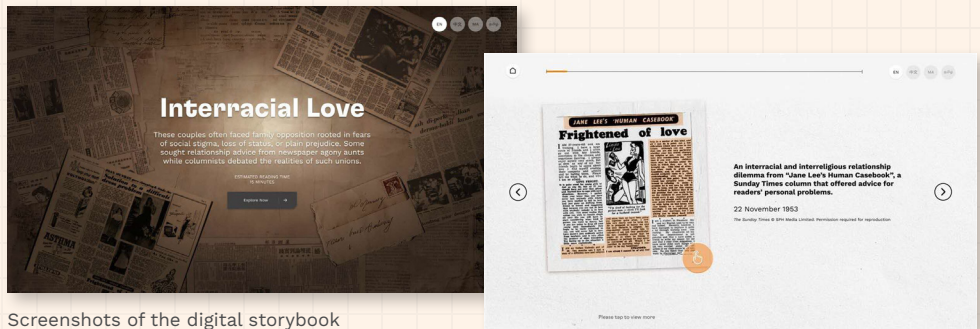
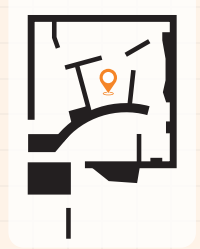
Think about your own experiences of eating together with friends. **How might language be a bridge and/or barrier to interacting with other people in our everyday lives?**

Based on the activity and your close reading of the artwork, let's think!
Is language still important in defining what it means to be Singaporean today?

5. Relate: A Life Unbothered by Race?

In 1959, Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam spoke of a people who does not judge others “by the colour of his skin, by the shape of his nose, or the texture of his hair.” However, people’s real-life experiences showed that dealing with racial differences was not so simple. Race might be irrelevant to some, yet it deeply matters to others.

Today, there are discussions about becoming a society that goes beyond our Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) race model. What would that look like?



Screenshots of the digital storybook



Explore **the digital storybook** showing a compilation of letters and commentaries on interracial and interreligious love from the 1950s till the present.

These couples often faced family opposition rooted in fears of social stigma, loss of status, or plain prejudice. Some sought relationship advice from newspaper columns while others debated the realities of such unions.

Why do you think people have differing views to having personal relationships with people of different cultures?





Find the **Lovers on a Train artwork** and take a closer look!

Lovers on a Train

2021

Yeo Tze Yang

On loan from Nic Lim

FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

1

Before reading the caption, take a moment with the painting.

What catches your attention first? What details stand out for you?

2

Now read the caption.

What thoughts crossed your mind when you first saw the painting?

What made you think that way?

REFLECT

What does your initial reaction to this painting tell you about yourself and how you see others?



Take a look at the rest of the digital storybooks and the artworks in this section.



Search and read up some of these articles online too!

Singaporeans more accepting of all races in personal relationships: Study

- The Straits Times, 03 February 2025

Ex-Ngee Ann Poly lecturer gets jail for making racist remarks against interracial couple

- Channel News Asia, 29 December 2022

Having gone through this section and reflecting on your own personal relationships, **are we unbothered by race, and should we be?**



6. Live: National Consciousness Through Common Spaces



After Singapore's independence in 1965, Singapore's leaders and people worked to build a sense of national consciousness. Through policies and ground-up community efforts, they stepped up to create common spaces to interact and appreciate diversity.



Study the two photographs from **Singapore Idols** collection by Jing Quek.



Singapore Idols – Army Boys
2006
Jing Quek

On loan from Singapore Art Museum



Singapore Idols – Aunties & Uncles
2009
Jing Quek

On loan from Singapore Art Museum

What memories do you think these two groups created with one another in these common spaces?

Army Boys

Aunties & Uncles





Explore the common spaces with your friends in this photobooth!

Why are these spaces important to you?



How do these spaces reflect the ideas in the quote (below) from the audio play *National Consciousness: A Place to Dream*?



“ ... a diverse population who have little connection to each other to suddenly feel united... ”
~ Rohani

Other than these nine spaces, **what other common spaces do you identify with and why?**

Common space	Reasons





Common spaces are designed intentionally to help nurture our national identity and unity. These also extend to the online common spaces that you may share. Search for these articles online!

Should online “safe spaces” that discuss race be more open or more closed?

- *The Straits Times*, 25 June 2021

HDB void decks – social bonding spaces or pain points for residents?

- *Todayonline*, 12 January 2024

Refer to your response on the previous page about what you consider common spaces in our community. **Now, what does a common space mean to you?**



Do we simply occupy these spaces or are we truly living together in them?
How can we connect more deeply and meaningfully?



7. Move: Our Multiculturalism Moves

Multiculturalism remains a work in progress in Singapore. When the National Pledge was written in 1966, it envisioned for us what a united Singapore could be. These words are for us to live up to today. They remind us that building a united society is a responsibility that continues with each generation.



Take the Stage—don't be a mere spectator!



Attempt the reflection card and walk away with limited edition stickers!

Multiculturalism is a journey—**how will you be an active participant on this journey moving ahead?**



8. Conclusion

Beyond this exhibition lies the real stage—the Singapore we call home, shaped by each of our hopes, aspirations and daily choices. What will you make of it?



Come to the Project Citizens wall. Listen to eight members of our founding generation share their experiences of embracing citizenship in multicultural Singapore.

So Explorer, now that you have completed your exploration of the exhibition, **what is one thing you learnt about the makings of multiculturalism in Singapore from this exhibition?**

What does it mean to be “not mere spectators” in the makings of a multicultural Singapore?

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Find out more on
our webpage!

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All information is correct at the time of print. The National Heritage Board reserves the right to make changes and modifications to the exhibition without prior notice.

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