

The Gift

TheatreWorks' Theatre-in-Education Programme



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The Gift

Suan-tze lives in Singapore. Craig lives in England. They are both 10 years old, they have not met, but they have something in common: this is a difficult and troubled moment in both their lives. Suan-tze feels she does not live up to the "pretty little girl" image that her parents wish her to be. Craig similarly feels inadequate, not matching up to the "tough little boy" he is expected to be. The large, clumsy girl and the puny, bullied boy both feel there is no-one on their side, no-one they can confide in.

When their class-teachers announce that there is to be a letter-exchange between a school in England and a school in Singapore, both Craig and Suan-tze have strong reactions. Suan-tze begs to be able to correspond with a boy; Craig is mortified when he discovers that the interesting name he has chosen belongs to a girl.

Gradually, through the correspondence, the two children get to know each other – or they think they do; for both Suan-tze and Craig hide from each other their "unacceptable images". So, Craig sends a drawing of a big, strong, happy boy wearing a blue baseball cap. Suan-tze sends a drawing of a petite, happy, pretty girl. The correspondence becomes increasingly important.

What neither of them talk about are the feelings towards the adults in their lives – feelings they have buried: anger, resentment; shame and humiliation towards themselves.

Yet Suan-tze has been having a recurring dream. In it, she tunnels deep into the earth, finding herself at last in a strange, new place: a mysterious night-time garden at the centre of everything. Here it is dark and shadowy. On her first visit she can only make out dim shapes; later she sees withered plants and trees, which sometimes seem to sigh and cry; one time she sees an ancient gardener toiling away under the moon, on one visit, the gardener catches sight of her and chases her, so that she wakes in her own bed shaking with fear.

Suan-tze begins to describe some of this to Craig and his imagination is fired by the story. He too, in his dreams begins to tunnel his way towards the garden.

Eventually Craig and Suan-tze meet, in what they will learn is The Garden of Buried Feelings. Here also they will encounter The Gardener who rakes and hoes the land day and night, but who can make nothing grow healthily. Here is the adult who enables them to find and rescue their own buried feelings; and who also – through the children – rediscovers his own lost youth.

The encounters and adventures in the garden enable Craig and Suan-tze to express their buried feelings, understand their own present unhappiness and to move on in life.

Noel Greig

Sept 94

NCAPD

The Gift is **a new play** written by British playwright Noel

Greig, to be performed to Singaporean children of upper-primary age. The project developed out of the writer's question: "How do we find new ways of engaging with our age-group target when we are making theatre for them; ways which invite the children's own voices into the early creative process of developing a story?"

One answer has been a unique arts-educational initiative, involving two upper-primary schools: Bentinck School in Nottingham, England, and Bukit Panjang in Singapore. This "twinning" has taken the form of a long-distance correspondence between the children over a period of months: an exchange of letters, stories, drawings and poems, through which the children have shared thoughts, experiences and feelings.

The pupils were encouraged to not regard the work as any kind of 'test'; that there was no 'right or wrong' way of approaching it (beyond the attempt to express themselves clearly); that their own individual imaginations and curiosities were the most valuable things they could bring to it. In this sense the project did not include so much a "teaching" bias as an "initiating" one: inviting – within the framework of the correspondence – each child to explore as freely as she or he wished.

At the end of this process the writer, with director Rani Moorthy, spent two weeks with copies of all the exchanged material, to see what themes and narratives were inspired by it. The writer's task was then to create an original drama which reflected the spirit of the correspondence between Bentinck and Bukit Panjang.

This process, then, is about actively engaging with children from a particular age-group as the form of research, out of which a play for that age-group will emerge. However, for the teacher who wishes to capitalise on such a process, there are a wealth of possibilities. As the class teacher Bob Dunbar from Bentinck said, "Work that the pupils were producing related to many areas of the curriculum that I am responsible for – writing, reading, geography, history, etc., not to mention the social skills that group story-telling and drama games address".

Such a process can be one through which the interests of the class-teacher (the demands of the curriculum etc.) and the artist (the exercising of the imagination free from the constraints of testing) are united. And – most importantly – such a collaboration between two schools will have enabled two very separate groups of young people to make imaginative connections, both with each other and within their own individual selves.

The final play – *The Gift* – is about two children, one Singaporean, one English. They are fictional characters, distilled from the material from Bentinck and Bukit Panjang. However, the location of the two schools in the play are not specified – they are simply two city-schools, somewhere in England and in Singapore.

Acknowledgements

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Noel Greig

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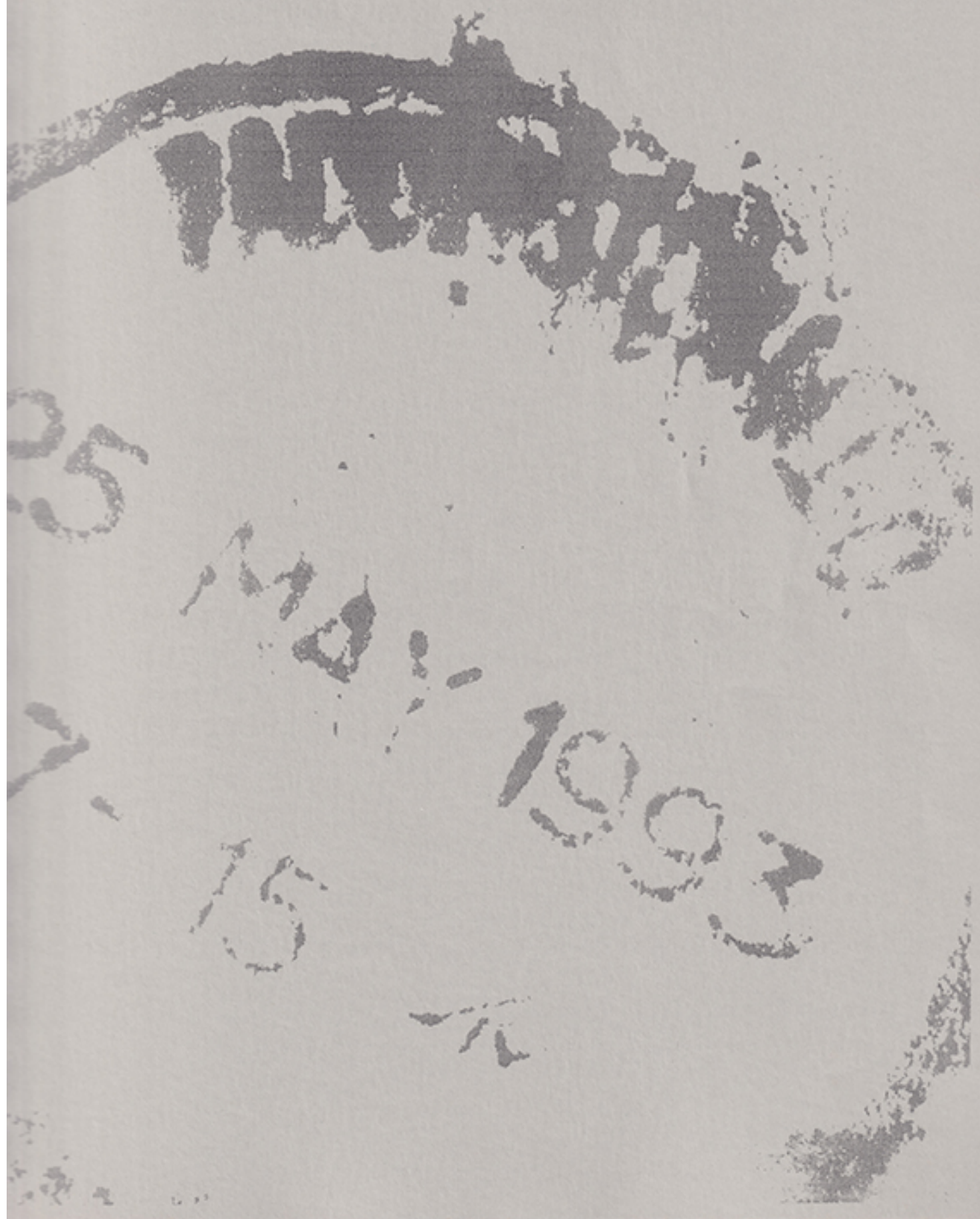
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Tips for Harassed Teachers

Exercise	Suggested Areas of Application
<i>Mapping It Out</i>	English, Social Studies, Reading, Library Research
<i>Snow!</i>	English, Social Studies, Library Research, Science
<i>Hot! Hot! Hot!</i>	English, Social Studies, Library Research, Science
<i>Class Survey</i>	English, Mathematics
<i>Foreign Words</i>	English, Library Research, Second Language
<i>Do You Know What Your Name Means?</i>	English, Second Language
<i>Letter to an Alien</i>	English, Social Studies
<i>Teasing Tableaux</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>Teasing</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>Different Cultures</i>	English, Social Studies
<i>Parents</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>Self-esteem Map</i>	English, Art, Civics/Moral Education
<i>Boys Will Be Boys</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>Girls Should Be Girls?</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>The Right to Reply</i>	English, Civics/Moral Education
<i>My Hand</i>	English, Art
<i>Outside/Inside</i>	English, Art

Exercises



Exercise 1

Mapping It Out

Materials:
Mahjong paper
Crayons
Encyclopedias

Activities:

Group work: In groups of 5, draw a map of England and Singapore on separate sheets of paper, leaving some space below each for writing.

- Discuss and list all that you know about :

the geography – weather, seasons, does it have monsoons, what is the capital, where it is found on the world map, distance from the Equator, does it have mountains, lakes and valleys.;

the people – the clothes they wear, the food they like to eat, the music they like to listen to, what they look like, what jobs do they do, what are their favourite pastimes;

the language – what types of languages do they speak, how do they greet each other, how do they address their mother and father, what words do they use to show they are happy, sad, angry or excited.

- Write this information below the two maps.
- Check your information in the encyclopedia.
You may want to use the table below:

	Geography	Culture	Language
England			
Singapore			

Exercise 2

Snow!

Materials:
Pictures of snow
Paper
Pens
Crushed ice

Activities:

Individual work: Touch the crushed ice. Remember what it feels like just before it melts in your hands.

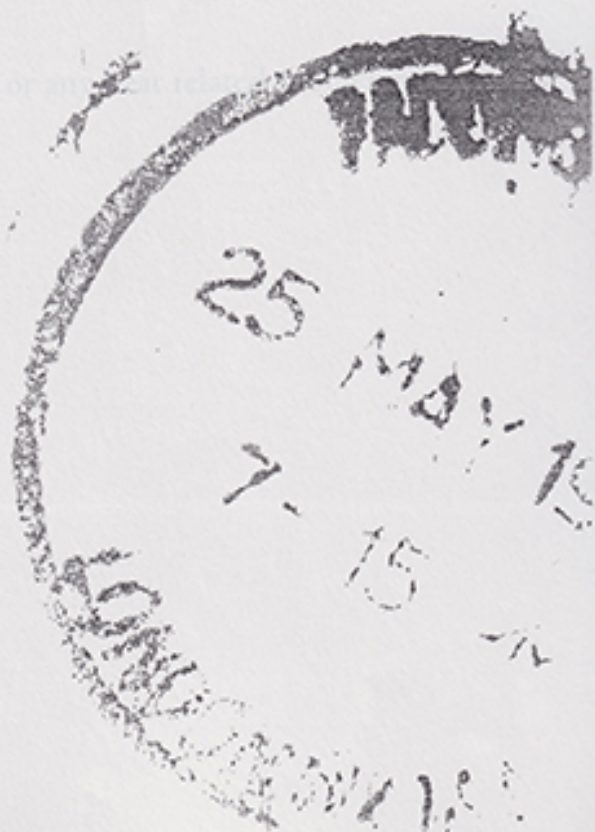
OR

Do what Suan Tze did, stick your hand in the freezer for a few seconds.

- Now close your eyes and remember how cold it feels. Is it comfortable? Imagine experiencing that cold, being exposed to snow for some time.
- Write down all that you have experienced, you may want to write a poem about it.

Things to discover:

- How is snow formed?
- What is a snow flake?
- Why is snow white?
- When does snow become sludge?
- What is a hailstorm and how does it happen?



Exercise 3

Hot! Hot! Hot!

Materials:
Paper
Pens

Activities:

Individual work: Many of you may have pen-pals who live in climates much cooler and less humid than ours. Write a letter to your friend, or an imaginary pen-pal about the climate in Singapore.

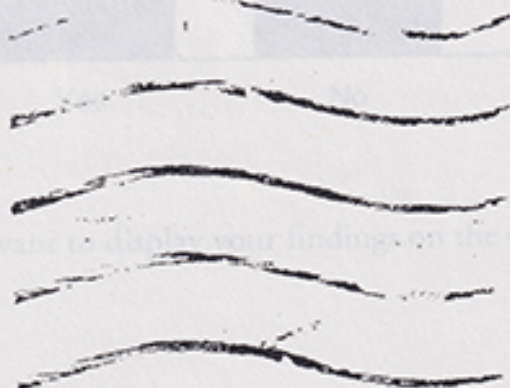
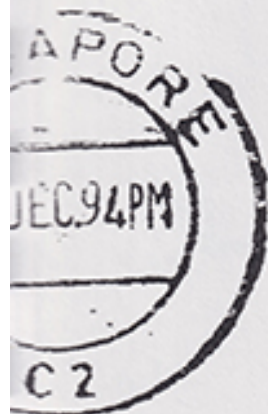
- Find out why it is so hot and humid here, why we do not have seasons and why certain types of plants grow here.
- Write down what advice you will give someone who is not used to our weather. Below are some points to consider.

What kind of clothes should they wear?

What to avoid doing when they get here?

What will help them feel more comfortable?

What can they do to prevent heat stroke, fainting or any heat related problems?



Exercise 4

Class survey

Materials:
Paper
Coloured Pens

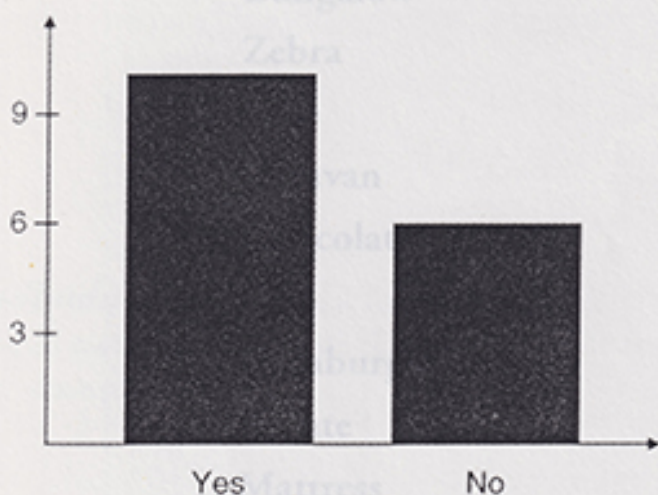
Activities:

These activities are to discover how much your school mates know about England.

Group work: In groups of 5, write down some questions that you would like to ask your friends in school to see how much they know about England.

- For easier collection of this information, try and ask yes/no questions, for example, Does England have four seasons?
- Your teacher will help you think of the questions and how to ask them.
- Decide how many students you want to answer these questions. Ask your questions during recess or after school. Present your findings like this:

If you asked 16 students, "Does England have 4 seasons?"



You may want to display your findings on the class notice-board.

Exercise 5

Foreign Words

Materials:
Paper
Pens

Activities :

Individual/Pair work: Most of us speak more than one language. Most British (English) children speak only English. There are many words in English which are borrowed from other languages. People borrow these words when they want a new word for something. In the list given on the next page, match the words to the languages. Check your answers with a dictionary.

Individual/Pair work: Many of us speak more than one language. Are there borrowed words in the other languages that you speak? Ask your second language teacher.

- Make a similar list, giving the languages these other words come from.

Match the word with the language

Anorak

Balcony

Bamboo

Bungalow

Zebra

Cafe

Caravan

Chocolate

Cot

Hamburger

Karate

Mattress

Pyjamas

Sugar

Tea

Yogurt

Arabic

Chinese

Bantu

Eskimo

German

Hindi

Italian

Japanese

Malay

Mexican

Persian

Turkish

French



Exercise 6

Do You Know What Your Name Means?

Materials:

Paper
Pens

Activities:

Here are three lists. In the first list are the first names of some people in England. The second list shows which language the name comes from and the third list shows the meaning of each name.

In your groups, draw up a similar list using all the names in your class. It would look very impressive on your class notice board.

Name	Language	Meaning
Amanda	Latin	Lovable
Wayne	Old English	Wagon-maker
Sadeque	Bengali	Friend
Luna	Bengali	Moon
Angela	Greek	Messenger
Donna	Italian	Lady
Neil	Gaelic	Champion

Individual work: What first names are there in your family? Do they have a special meaning? Where do these names come from? Draw up lists like those above. For example :

Name	Language	Meaning
Lay Mui	Hokkien	Beautiful Plum
Jian Qiang	Mandarin	Healthy and Strong
Nurulhuda	Malay	Guiding Light

Exercise 7

Letter to an Alien

Materials:
Pens
Writing paper
Crayons
Mahjong paper

Activities:

You have a pen-pal from somewhere in the solar system. Although he or she has some knowledge about life on Earth, you need to tell your new pen-pal what life is like in Singapore.

- Make a list of the things that you consider are important for this pen-pal to know about Singapore, for example, you might want to tell him or her about places they can visit, the type of schools we have, the languages we speak, the activities we enjoy and the forms of transportation we have.
- Use this list and write a letter to this pen-pal. You might want to draw some pictures as well. The letters and drawings can be placed on the class notice board.



Exercise 8

Teasing Tableaux

Materials:
Vanguard sheets
Markerpens
String

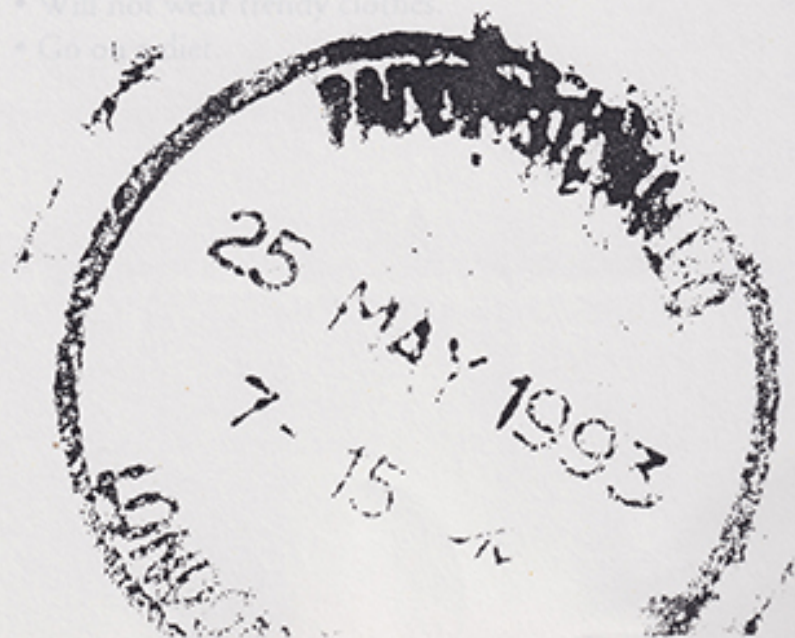
Activities :

Group work: All of us have been teased at some point in our lives. Most teasing is harmless and fun but some kinds of teasing can hurt our friends. In groups of 3, make a list of words that might be hurtful to the person you are teasing.

- Using the words you have listed, make labels which you can hang around your neck.
- When you wear the label, you become the 'victim', and the others in your group will surround you. They will use their bodies and gestures to show you how they feel about you.
- Continue this exercise with everyone taking turns to be the 'victim' until you have finished using all the words on the list.

Discuss how you felt being the victim and how you felt being the teaser. How would you deal with teasing in future?

- Consequences**
- Self-conscious about body.
 - Thinks he or she is ugly.
 - Will not wear trendy clothes.
 - Goes to school.



Exercise 9

Teasing

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

*Craig, Craig, he writes to girls
Put him in a dress and pretty little curls*

*Suan Tze, Suan Tze, big and wide
Throw her in the sea and in comes the tide.*

Group work: In groups of 5, use the lines from the play above, take a look at how teasing can affect how a person sees himself or herself.

- Write down a list of common words and phrases that are used to tease people.
- From your own and the experiences of your friends, what do you think are the possible results of the teasing on the victim.

eg. **Tease word**
Fatty

Consequences

- Self-conscious about body.
- Thinks he or she is ugly.
- Will not wear trendy clothes.
- Go on a diet.





Exercise 10

Different Cultures

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

Group work: Make a list of all the different aspects in Suan Tze's life in Singapore like school, clothing, food, festivals, hobbies and types of housing. How do you think it may differ from Craig's life in England.

- Discuss and write down whatever similarities and differences that you might see in each category.

When Craig and Suan Tze were 21 years old, they travelled to each other's country – Suan Tze to England and Craig to Singapore.

- Discuss and write down all they might have experienced. Base your discussion on whatever information you have about Singapore and Nottingham.

Individual/Pair work: If Craig and Suan Tze were to write a letter to each other as 21 year olds about their impressions of each other's country, what would the letter be about?

- With a partner, imagine one of you is Suan Tze and the other Craig, write a letter to each other giving your account of your stay in either Singapore (for Craig) or England (for Suan Tze).

• What do you feel when you hear these remarks?

• Why do you think they make these remarks?

• How do you think you should act and react when you hear these remarks?

Exercise 11

Parenthood

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

Father: *Craig, why aren't you out playing football?
You should be playing with the boys, Craig.*

Mother: *I really don't know what we're to do with you.
Why can't you be more like your sisters, Suan Tze?*

Individual work: What do you think Suan Tze and Craig think and feel when their parents say things like this to them? Write down their thoughts and feelings.

Group work: Discuss your ideas about Craig's relationship with his father and Suan Tze's relationship with her mother. What do you think are the reasons for Craig's father and Suan Tze's mother's attitudes? What would be Craig's and Suan Tze's responses to their father and mother respectively?

- Write down their possible replies. Could their replies help their parents understand them better?

Group work: Choose someone to be the father, the mother, Suan Tze and Craig. Say the father's and the mother's lines as above, and reply with the lines that you've come up with.

Follow-up Discussion Topics :

- Do your parents and other adults such as teachers and relatives make similar remarks about you?
- What do you feel when you hear these remarks?
- Why do you think they make these remarks?
- How do you think you should act and react when you hear these remarks?

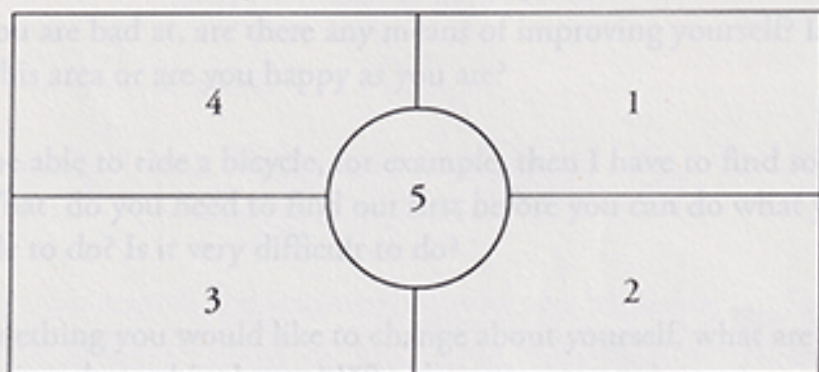
Exercise 12

Self-esteem Map

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

Pair work: With a partner, draw a chart like the one below on a large sheet of paper. Draw one chart for Suan Tze and one for Craig based on the categories below:



- 1) What he or she thinks is positive about himself or herself?
- 2) What he or she thinks is negative about himself or herself?
- 3) What others think is positive about him or her?
- 4) What others think is negative about him or her?
- 5) What does he or she want to change about himself or herself?

Individual/Pair Work: Draw a similar chart for yourself. Do simple drawings in each of the sections:

- 1) Something I am good at.
- 2) Something I am bad at.
- 3) Something you would like to be able to do.
- 4) Something about yourself you would like to change.
- 5) Something that says something about your character.



Exercise 13

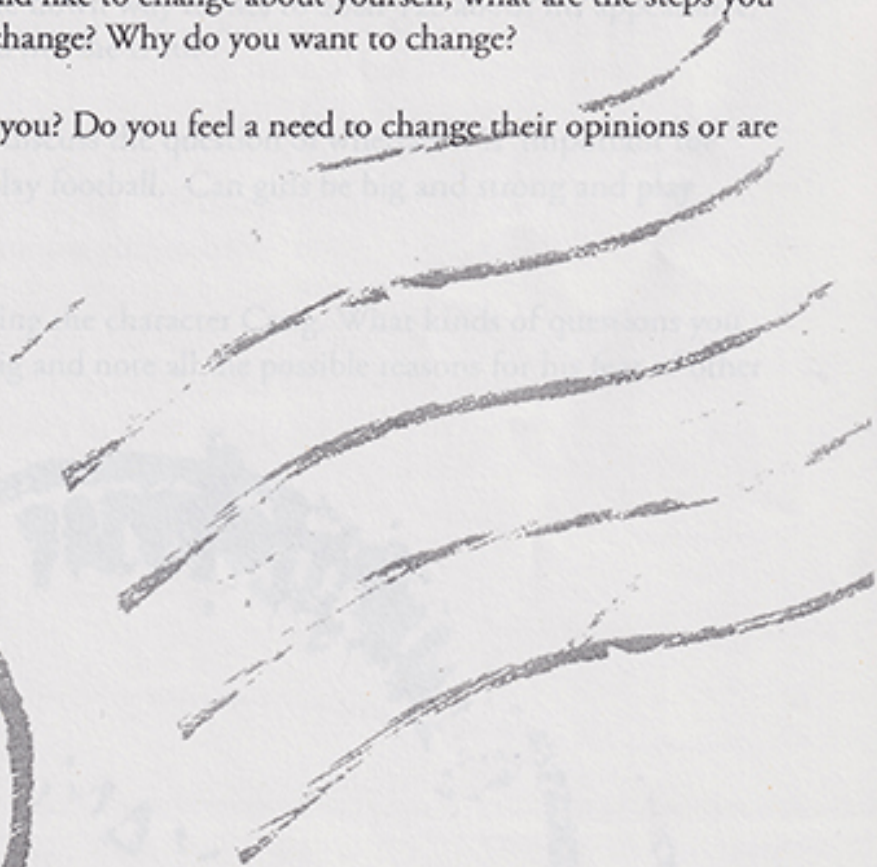
Goal Setting

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Follow-up Discussion Topics

Activities:

- If you are good at swimming, for example, you can aim for proficiency badges or learn how to dive. What are some of the ways to improve the area you are good at?
- In the area you are bad at, are there any means of improving yourself? Is it necessary to improve this area or are you happy as you are?
- If I want to be able to ride a bicycle, for example, then I have to find someone to teach me. What do you need to find out first before you can do what you would like to be able to do? Is it very difficult to do?
- If there is something you would like to change about yourself, what are the steps you can take to bring about this change? Why do you want to change?
- How do you think others see you? Do you feel a need to change their opinions or are you happy with yourself?



Exercise 13

Boys Will Be Boys

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

Craig: *How I wanted to be like boys should be.
To bulge, to stomp and to stamp.
But I never was, never would be.*

In his letter to Suan Tze, he writes :

Craig: *P.S. I'm big and I am strong and
I'm very good at football.*

Pair work: Craig is a small and sensitive boy who gets bullied by his father and his friends. With your partner, write down why he lies to Suan Tze about his appearance. What would she think if he told her the truth?

Group work: In groups of 5, discuss the question of whether it is important for boys to be big and strong and play football. Can girls be big and strong and play football?

Group work: Take turns playing the character Craig. What kinds of questions you want to ask him? Hot-seat* Craig and note all the possible reasons for his fear of other people's opinions of him.

* Hot-seating is a method of questioning someone who is role-playing a character in order to find out more about them. There are no wrong answers, but answers should be believable.

Exercise 14

Girls Should Be Girls?

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

Suan Tze: *So what would he think if I said:
"Dear Craig, this is me. I'm as big as a house.
You could fit three other girls into my one school blouse."*

The letter Suan Tze eventually writes to Craig is this:

Suan Tze: *"Dear Craig, I'm very petite and my dress has frills.
And I'm much, much slimmer than all the other girls.
I look like a princess."*

Pair work: Suan Tze is a big girl who is in the Trim and Fit (TAF) programme. With your partner, write down the reasons for the lies she writes about her appearance to Craig. What would he think if she told Craig the truth about her appearance?

Group work: In your group, discuss why it is considered by many people that it is important for girls to look like "princesses". Is it important? What are some of the things that you consider important for girls to be?

Group work: Take turns playing the character Suan Tze. What kind of questions would you want to ask her? Hot-seat* Suan Tze and write down all the possible reasons for her fears about other people's opinion of her.

* Hot-seating is a method of questioning someone who is role-playing a character in order to find out more about them. There are no wrong answers, but answers should be believable.

Exercise 15

The Right to Reply

Materials:
Paper
Pen

Activities:

In *The Gift*, both Suan Tze and Craig are sometimes faced with unfair comments made by adults in their lives. Here are some examples:

Suan Tze

- *Whatever shall we do with you?*
- *I really don't know what to do with you.*
- *Why can't you be more like your sisters?*

Craig

- *Why aren't you out playing with boys?*
- *I've got a son who is a sneak.*
- *I'm buying you a football
I'm going to have a proper son.*

Individual work: Imagine someone telling you any of the above statements. Write down how you would feel and act.

Group work: Discuss how Suan Tze and Craig would feel. For each statement, discuss how you would advise Suan Tze and Craig to reply.

- Write down a reply based on your discussion next to each statement like the example given below:

Statement

Whatever shall we do with you?

Reply

I am very happy with myself.
Please tell me how I can help you
understand me better.

- When you have completed the table start a role-play game based on the table of statements and replies. When you role-play, concentrate on the following
 - a) the attitude of the person making the statement (angry, sarcastic, cruel etc.)
 - b) the attitude of the person replying (strong, firm, full of courage...)
 - c) control over voice (loud, aggressive, meek etc.)

Note to teachers:

- Role playing does not demand too much linguistic or acting skill. It is an exercise to elicit points of view.
- Do not encourage the performative aspect of role-play, i.e. it is not important that the students are good actors or are able to understand the characters Suan Tze and Craig totally.

Exercise 16

My Hand

Materials:
Mahjong Paper
Crayons
Markers

Activities:

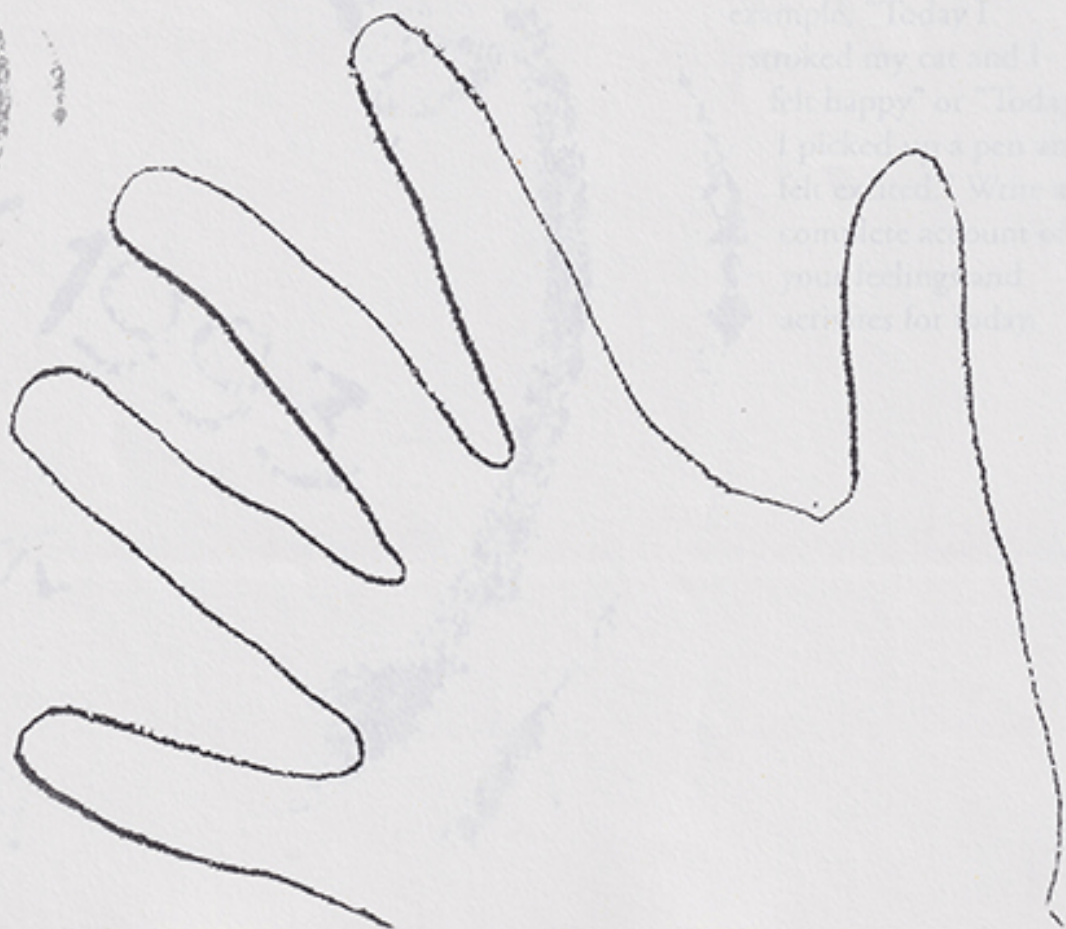
Individual work: Draw an outline of your hand on the mahjong paper. Write or draw 5 things your hand did today on each of the fingers. You may if you wish, colour the fingers using the colour closest to the feelings you had when you were doing those 5 things. Share what you have written with the class.

- Using the 5 lines you have written, turn them into a simple poem with "Today my hand..."

For e.g., Today my hand stroked my cat.
Today my hand scratched my nose.
Today my hand held a cold drink.

You may want to draw a picture to accompany the poem.

Group work: In groups of 3, discuss what happened to you in the course of the day between the 5 things you have described. Using this new information, you can write a longer poem or write an essay or a diary entry of what your life was like today.



Exercise 17

Outside/Inside

Materials:
Drawing paper
Markers

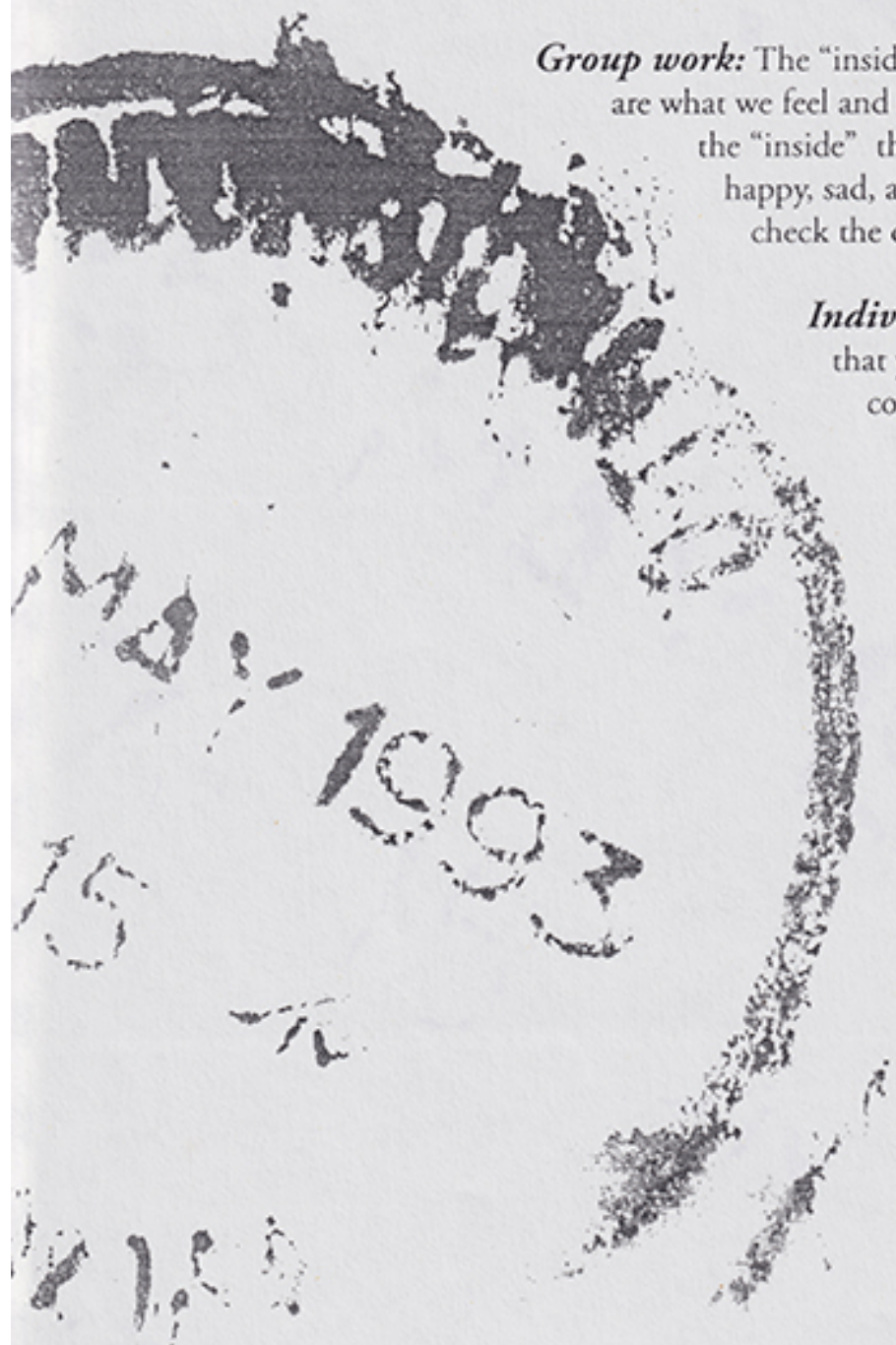
Activities:

Individual work: Imagine a stranger has to meet you at the MRT station. Describe yourself to this person. Use all your 5 senses, for example, what do you smell like and what do you taste like.

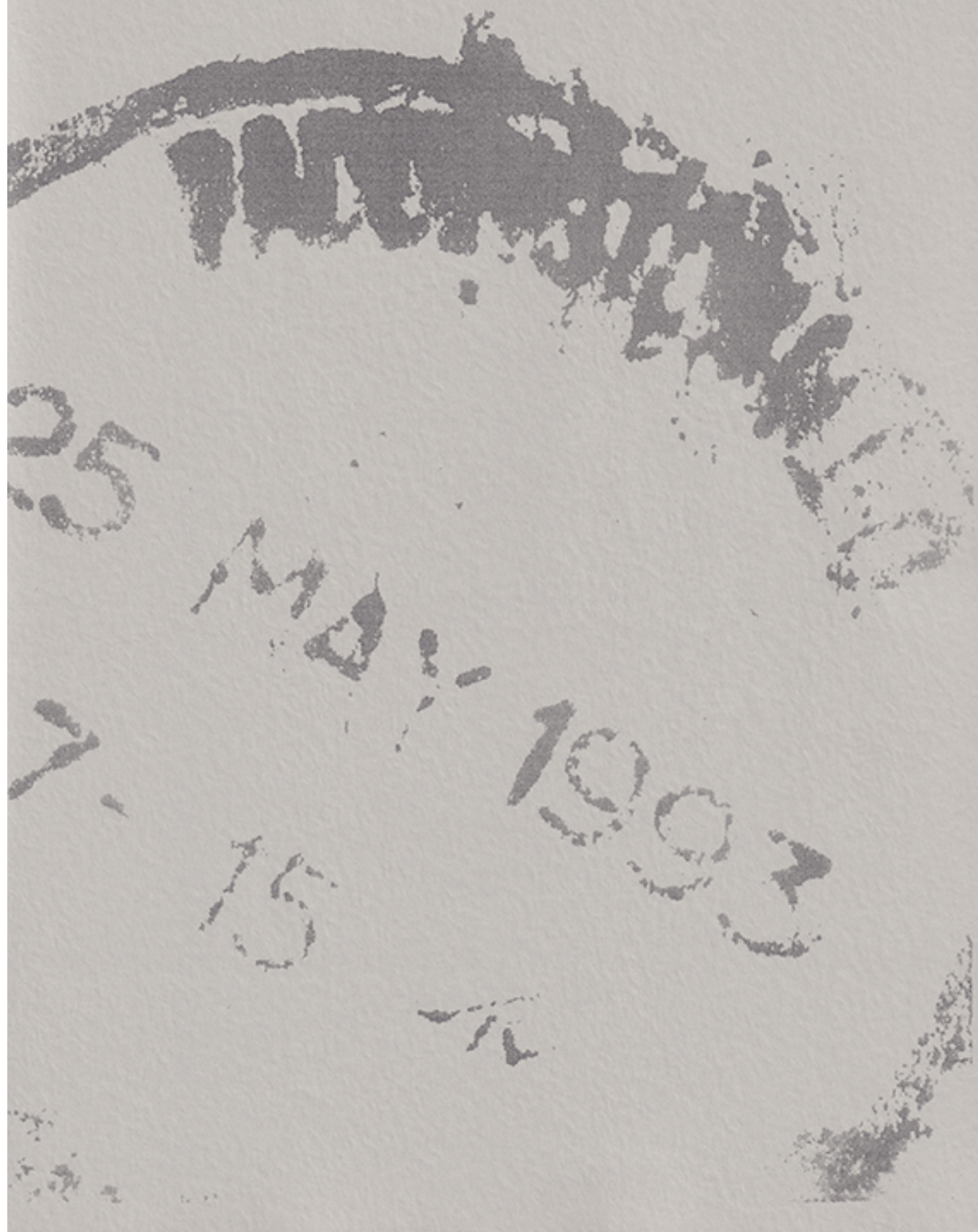
- Make a drawing of yourself and colour the drawing in the colours that reflect your personality. Write the "outside" descriptions you have listed above on the drawing. Share the drawing with the class.

Group work: The "inside" things are important as they are what we feel and think. Write a list of what are the "inside" things that you feel, for example, happy, sad, anger and joy. You might want to check the dictionary for more words.

Individual work: Using the 5 lines that you have written in Exercise 16, combine them with what you have written for this exercise, for example, "Today I stroked my cat and I felt happy" or "Today I picked up a pen and felt excited." Write a complete account of your feelings and activities for today.



Articles



9/3/95

Hot, hard work adjusting to one year-long season

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

JEFF PARTRIDGE

BEFORE I moved here from Minnesota, USA, more than two years ago, I thought that the most significant adjustment in store for me would be the climate.

I was right. Summer in Minnesota is like Singapore's climate.

However, when I boarded the plane with my family, it was winter - blizzards and temperatures below zero.

To understand the enormity of this climatic adjustment, a contrast between Minnesota in the winter and tropical Singapore will help.

In Minnesota, the weather report on the evening news is 10 to 15 minutes long, with a commercial break in the middle. Here, the weather report is flashed on TV as the credits begin to roll.

In Minnesota, a person can buy ice-cream, frozen veggies, frozen anything, put them in the car boot and go to the cinema for two hours. Nothing will melt.

Here, one has to gulp an ice-cream before sticky dreams run down the arm.

Having lived abroad before, I was confident I could adjust to the many cultural differences between the US and Singapore. But the difference in weather frightened me.

Thankfully, I have found Singapore to be a wonderful home despite my concern about the climate.

I had expected it to be a furnace, but I found that evenings and early mornings are often cool and that the long rainy season provides respite from the hot weather.

I counted my blessings because some people are unable to make the adjustment to a radically different climate. For them the change is a physical impossibility, like that of a person with sensitive tastebuds trying to eat laksa.

Some people say it is easier to adjust to heat than to cold. That a person from Minnesota's climate can adjust to tropical Singapore more easily than a Singaporean can adapt to wintry Minnesota.

They have a point. At least in a hot climate, a person will not die, normally, of too much exposure to the elements.

But I still prefer cold weather. The way I see it, you can always put clothes on, but there is a limit to how much you can take off.

When I see a person here wearing a turtle-neck shirt or a jacket, I wonder if the heat is affecting my vision.

Am I the only one who is melting?

Psychologically, it is tough to buck old patterns.

When I first moved to Singapore, some colleagues suggested having a picnic at the zoo. One person asked if the end of November would be all right.

I thought the person was out of his mind.

"The end of November?" I thought. "What if it snows?"

Then I realised that I was out of my mind.

The craziest psychological adjustment comes in the Christmas season.

Mentally, I associate Christmas with cold weather and snow. Riding an air-conditioned bus down Orchard Road and singing I'm Dreaming Of A White Christmas is no substitute for a real white Christmas.

The lack of seasons is another sticky problem. I find the reality of endless summer to be confusing, mentally and linguistically.

My mind has relied on the changing seasons to mark the passage of time.

Winter gives away to spring; one segment of the year has passed. Summer changes into fall; another segment gone by.

Here, the only physical time-marker I see are the wrinkles and sun-spots on my face when I look in the mirror.

Linguistically, I find it difficult to talk about future and past events. Sentences like "What did you do last winter?" or "I will teach that course during the spring semester" are meaningless here.

The transfer from a place with four seasons to a place with only one season is tough.

Speaking linguistically, it is even more challenging to travel to a place that has seasons in the time-frame different from that one is used to. Like what happens when one travels from the US to Australia.

My aunt and uncle were visiting us here before they took a short trip to Perth.

My aunt could hardly believe she had the opportunity to travel to Australia for the second time in just 12 months.

"This time, though, we'll experience another season," she told me. "Last fall we went to Australia in the spring."

The problem was, I understood her perfectly.

This is the last in a series of articles by Jeff Partridge, who lectures in Language and Communication at Temasek Polytechnic. He also teaches in the Language and Literature degree at the Open University. This article reflects solely his views and not those of Temasek Polytechnic or the Open University.

Outlook for children looks grim

The State of the World's Children Report 1995 paints a grim overall picture of the situation facing children today, writes ALINA RANEE. Yet the report also lauds the successes achieved by many developing countries since the landmark 1990 World Summit for Children.

OVER the past decade, according to the United Nations children's organisation Unicef, wars have claimed the lives of two million children, disabled between four million and five million others, forced five million into refugee camps and rendered 12 million homeless.

And, says the *State of the World's Children Report 1995*, nowhere is the plight of children more dire than in Rwanda, where mass madness has slaughtered hundreds of thousands and left thousands of children orphaned and abandoned.

These huddled masses, and their counterparts in the slums from Sao Paulo to Sarajevo, in the streets of Grozny and open sewers of the Gaza Strip demand more than just "band-aid" solutions.

Fortunately, ensuring a better future for children will be high on the agenda when world leaders meet in Copenhagen in March at the World Summit for Social Development to hammer out solutions to global problems in a gathering which also marks the 50th birthday of the United Nations.

The report calls on world leaders to act on the new threats to human security, arguing that rising poverty, and the social disintegration it spawns, will threaten global peace.

Armed conflict is not the only force affecting the normal development of millions of children in the 1990s, says the report.

More quietly, the continued economic and social marginalisation of the poorest nations, and the poorest communities within nations, is depriving far larger numbers of children of the



WAR VICTIMS: A Bosnian child and his mother in their destroyed home in Sarajevo

kind of childhood which would enable them to become part of tomorrow's solutions rather than tomorrow's problems.

Mass migration, collapsing States and pollution push problems beyond national boundaries. The Copenhagen summit hopes to find a response.

The task is immense and it calls for nothing less than a new vision of development.

This vision has to some extent been realised, says the report, because incorporating the child-centred approach into development planning has shown tangible results.

The World Summit for Children in 1990 had set several targets for achievement by the turn of the century, among them, cutbacks in child deaths by one-third, halving malnutrition, total eradication of polio, control of measles and diarrhoea, and complete primary education for 80 per cent of children.

On the bright side, according to the report, half way

through the decade, the majority of countries are well on their way to meeting these targets.

And where does Malaysia stand in this year's list?

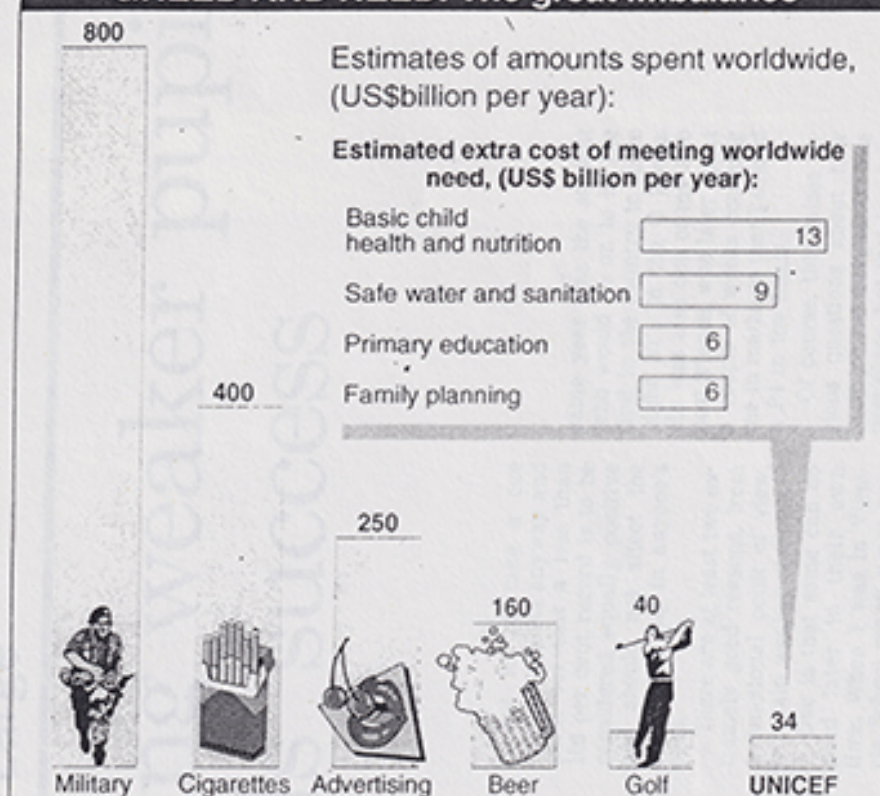
We have improved, although we have a long way to go before we can achieve the standards of the top five countries as defined in the report.

Arranged according to descending order of countries' under-five mortality rate (USMR), Malaysia ranks a passable 113 with a USMR of 17. Among Asean countries only Singapore is better in this respect, ranking 143 with under-five mortality rate of six per 1,000 live births.

Finland, ranked 145, has the lowest USMR (five), and Niger, with 320 under-five deaths per 1,000 live births, has the highest.

With nine out of 10 of its population having access to adequate sanitation and more than 80 per cent immunisation of children against polio, measles and tuberculosis, Malaysia has met almost all the summit

GREED AND NEED. The great imbalance



PATHETIC: The rural poor who move to the cities end up living on the streets

targets.

What countries like Malaysia have done forms only a drop in the ocean. We cannot keep adding drops of fresh water when total desalination is called for. The world requires nothing less than wholehearted commitment — and, if need be, sustained pressure on lackadaisical countries to conform.

As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has stated, the UN has seen a shift in international strategy whereby security is being achieved through development, instead of arms. This strategy will be the touchstone of Copenhagen.

And, says the executive director of Unicef, James Grant, in the *State of the World's Children Report 1995*, broad aims must be broken down into "doable" propositions to ensure social development targets are met in the time given:

"The task of breaking down the broader challenges of today's development consensus into specific and doable propositions is clearly very much more difficult than anything that has been attempted in the past."

The effort demands financial sacrifice and reduction in wastage.

Various UN agencies have estimated that the cost of providing basic social services in the developing countries, and of achieving all the other basic social goals agreed on at the World Summit for Children would be about US\$30 billion (RM75 billion) to US\$40 billion per year, but "the world spends more than this on playing golf."

The time has come to restore some sense of balance.

A world that spends on armaments more than 20 times what Unicef needs for social development can only be described as inhuman, if not insane.

Life at Large

Helping, not shedding weaker pupils, is measure of schools' success

Ravi Veloo On Thursday

LET ME explain why the schools I am proudest of are the three who failed to match their own performance last year of 100 per cent success in producing students with five credits or more for the O-levels.

For this shows that Rafles Girls', Cedar Girls' and Victoria School are keeping their weaker students within the fold, instead of kicking them out to make their overall results look better.

Madam Tan Chen Choo of Cedar Girls' said her school has a godmother scheme. Weaker students are taken under the wing of a senior teacher or the principal herself to encourage them to do better.

She added: "We have never told a single student to leave to improve our grade. There is no such thing as the school losing face or the school being affected if we do not hit 100 per cent."

The vice-principal of Victoria School, Miss Anne Koh, noted that teachers there identify weaker pupils at mid-year exams and spend more time with them on personal remedial lessons.

She added: "Even if we do not score 100 per cent, the school board is very supportive. They are happy as long as we are within the top 10."

There is much merit in such an attitude, which I will discuss later.

But first let me make it clear I am not saying that the six schools which did achieve 100 per cent success may have thrown out weaker students to accomplish the perfect score.

Yet, Singapore is statistics-conscious and 100 per cent means a lot. Failure is a bitter indictment. So there is tension.

It is good that Education Minister Lee Yock Suan has said that if anyone knew of such cases, they should report them.

But human nature being what it is, parents who have resisted pressure to move their children are not likely to risk making things more difficult for their children by reporting the principal.

So what can be done to make sure principals maintain the right attitude in the first place?

In the banks, so I am told, loan officers who acquire a 100 per cent no-default record are not considered all that good. It means they are being too conservative, and not taking any risks.

Of course, this situation is not comparable to education. Certainly a 100 per cent record should not be considered negative in schools.

But let us take a cue from the banks anyway and point out that a less than 100 per cent record is to be considered equally positive and should not affect the staff's standing in anyone's eyes.

There are at least two extremely good reasons, from a functional point of view, to retain weaker students.

One is that some can do good later in their own time. When I was in Victoria School many years ago, I scored only one pass during the mid-year Secondary Four exams and the principal came looking for me.

He took me at my word when I reassured him in an amiable meeting that I would pass the O-levels, even though among other subjects, I had failed maths four years running. It was never on his mind to tell me to leave.

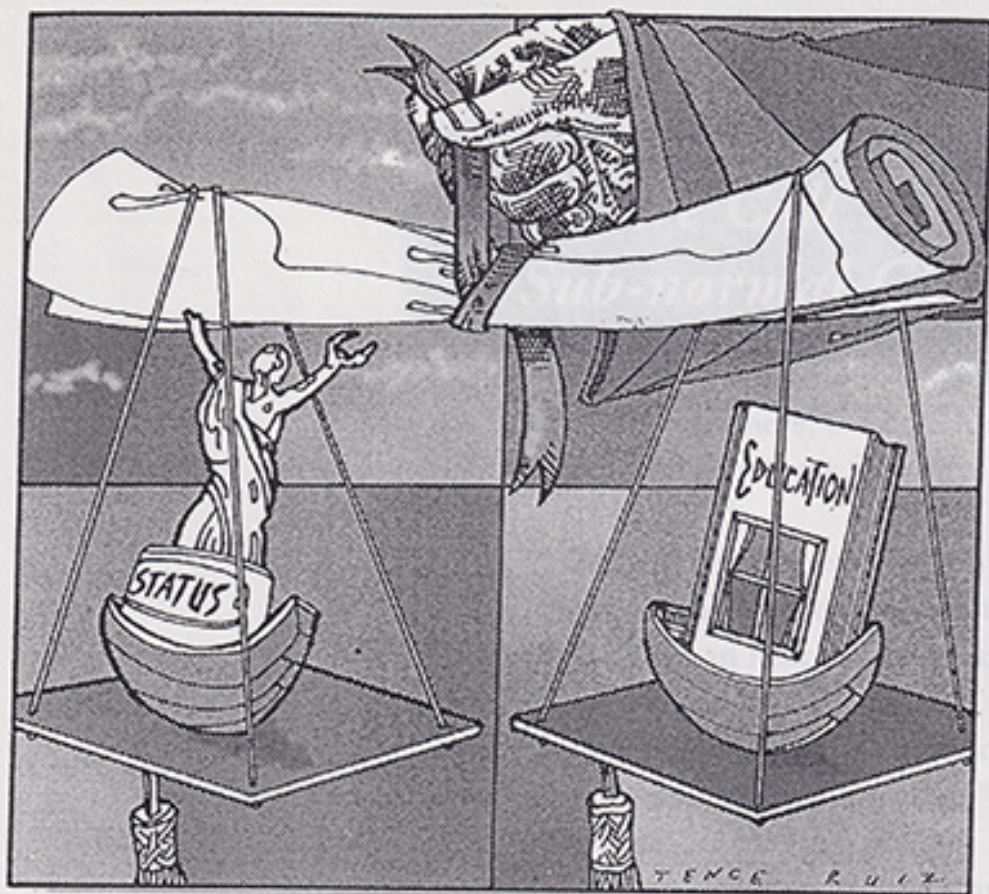
In the same school in the

same year was the student who would go on to be the first in the country to score eight A's in the O levels. He was also one of my two best friends, who later spent a couple of weeks coaching me in maths so that I scored a P4 in the finals.

Of course, this raises serious questions about how maths was taught in the first place, but that is a subject for another day.

I scraped through the finals with the five necessary credits and later did better in pre-university than anybody expected, topping the class and also the school in two subjects, and qualifying for the university here. So no one suffered for cutting me some slack.

My story was replicated, with variations, by others in Victoria School, putting the



lie to the convenient line from the occasional school head that promoting marginal students to the next level would only demoralise them.

It does not mean that students cannot buck up later. After all, it is important to remember that they would usually have scored a good average to enter that secondary school in the first place.

What would have been my fate under a kiasu principal in the present climate, I wonder?

The Education Ministry says only 45 students, fewer than 0.1 per cent of the 46,000 students in lower secondary school, had to be transferred to another school last year.

In most cases, it was because these students did not

do well enough to remain on the fast track and their own schools did not run Normal Stream classes.

Such a school was Methodist Girls', which asked five girls to leave last year when they did not do well enough to move up to Secondary 3 in the Express stream-only school. MGS, by the way, was one of the six schools that made the perfect grade last year.

Such schools are assured of high ratings in the O-levels simply by passing the buck. Their policy: if you do not do well enough to stay in my school, get out. No great scholastic achievement, this.

It is no good to hide behind the system and say we have no Normal Stream, so slower students have to be "transferred" to a school

with such a stream.

Not when one of the MGS girls had to leave when she failed to make the grade by a mere 0.8 of a percentage point!

The whole point of giving principals more say in running their schools is for them to use their discretion. And in my view, discretion should have been exercised in favour of the student being kept in the school in this case.

My own school principal did so in the years before there were such things as autonomous or independent schools.

Note also that the small figure of 45 transfers reflects only those who had given in to pressure to move, or had no choice because of the system. It gives no indication of how many marginal cases may have faced pressure to move.

Please retain the marginal cases. If they are promoted through the ranks, they will be closer to success when they finally buck up.

Later in life, mature-age folk may want to rectify their past mistakes and go back to school. At this point, it is harder for someone who dropped out at Secondary Two to get back into the loop than someone who faltered only at the O-levels.

It is not fair to other school principals to say they should take in the weaker students that top schools do not want.

And if not in school, where will they go? Society will pay a high price for every student who drops out, that much is clear. It is cheaper in eventual social cost to keep weaker students in school, even against the odds.

Be as elitist as you like, but it would be useful to remember why schools exist: to provide an education, not just to look good.

Handy References

We Call Them Sub-normal Children

They are here, they are here
they are very far away

Perhaps they see exciting visions
in the hollows of their hands
Perhaps they can hear music we are deaf to

but I think their hearts trudge
and their days trudge

for the way they sort of stand
the way they sort of speak

laboriously expresses one word only
wounded wounded wounded

We are taking a deep breath before the long show
dire through space to Mars
And have not yet explored these island people
They are here

They will not go away.

Adrian Mitchell
from *For Beauty Douglas*



Handy References

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