



An Esplanade Co-Production

History, Whose Story

By The Necessary Stage (Singapore)

2 – 4 Jul 2025

Esplanade Theatre Studio

Post-show Educator's Guide

Recommended Level: Secondary

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to deepen students' reflection and critical thinking after watching ***History, Whose Story?*** You may conduct one, some, or all of the activities depending on your students' learning needs, time available, and areas of interest. Activities are designed to build on those found in the Student Performance Guide.

Activity 1: Timeline Challenge

Objective	To support students in recalling, interpreting, and analysing lines and moments from the play
Duration	10-15 minutes

Teachers can remind students that the play does not follow a straight timeline, much like history. This activity encourages students to think critically about how stories are told, what gets included (or left out), and how reordering events can possibly change meaning / focus.

From the Student Guide, these are the events mentioned:

- Important women in Singapore's history are acknowledged
- The characters argue about what history really means
- We learn about Naraina Pillai
- The Orang Laut reclaim their place in Singapore's story
- A big debate erupts: was Raffles a hero or a thief?
- The characters realise that history isn't just about the past. It is also about choices we make in the present.

To facilitate further engagement, teachers can:

- 1) Ask students to include additional moments that they consider pivotal in the existing timeline.
- 2) Ask students to sequence the events in a different way from the play, and explain their rationale.
- 3) Ask students to write a short, compelling caption for each of these moments.

Activity 2: Quotable Quotes

Objective	To support students in recalling, interpreting, and analysing lines and moments from the play
Duration	10-15 minutes

Teachers can analyse each quote with students and ask for different interpretations of each one. Possible points of discussion:

Quote	What do you think it means in the context of the play?
“History is HIS story. And HER story. And THEIR story. And OUR story.”	• Reframing “history” as something collective and inclusive, not just the dominant or official version. • Emphasising the importance of personal, community, and collective histories.
“Why are we still obsessed with Raffles?! Move on people! We are more than Raffles!”	• Challenging overemphasis on colonial figures. • Questioning why some legacies are celebrated while others are ignored. • Decolonising the national narrative.
“Every day we would carry heavy loads of sand and debris, in large buckets slung over our shoulders. It was back-breaking work, and we only earned a few cents a day.”	• Emphasising physical labour and economic hardship faced by early female migrant workers. • Humanising history and visualising the contributions of these workers.
“Then how do we know what is real and what is not?”	• Encouraging critical thinking about sources of history and whose version of events we accept. • Emphasising the importance of fact-checking, understanding “the full picture”.
“Eh! This island has always been an island! You don't bluff people!”	• Asserting indigenous presence and identity. • Challenging myths of “discovery”. • Reclaiming historical belonging.
“When a school is demolished, or a national library, or a reservoir, or a forest...We lose a sense of belonging... a sense of community.”	• Reinforcing the relationship between place, memory, and history. • Mourning how development often comes at the cost of collective memory and social identity.

Activity 3: Missing Monument Map

Objective	To help students reflect on the role of physical spaces in shaping memory, community, and national narratives
Duration	10-15 minutes

Teachers may need to provide additional contextual information as students may not be familiar with the places listed on the map. Here are some additional resources teachers may use to facilitate conversations about these sites:

1) Big Splash

<https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1109395>

2) Old National Library

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR6Sj3a0BLE> (Little Red Bricks, an animated short film made as a tribute to the Old National Library at Stamford Road, emphasises how these landmarks contain personal significance and memories)

3) Rochor Centre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yFSadYWTVA> (Goodbye Rochor Centre: At The End Of The Rainbow)

4) Queenstown Cinema and Bowling Alley

<https://remembersingapore.org/queenway-cinema/>

Additional discussion questions:

- Why do certain places stay on the map and others do not?
- What stories do everyday places hold?
- Are there any places in Singapore that hold personal significance for you and/or your family? Draw it on the map!

Activity 4a: If History Had WIFI . . .

Objective	To develop students' ability to empathise with historical figures and reframe their legacies in contemporary contexts
Duration	10-15 minutes

Teachers can begin by giving students a definition of a monologue:

A short speech delivered by one person in the voice of a character from the play.

Teachers can offer the following tips to students attempting the activity:

- a. Keep the monologue short and sharp
- b. Hook your audience with an arresting first line

- c. Decide on a tone for your monologue (Cheeky? Sassy? Solemn?)
- d. Focus on one clear message so that your audience can follow your thought process
- e. Be bold, but respectful. Remember that your character is speaking to a public audience on Tik Tok.

Teachers can also use the following strategies to help students develop a distinct voice for each of their characters.

1) Think about background and time period

A Samsui woman in the 1930s won't speak the same way as a Gen Z student today.

Eg. The Samsui woman might say, "We worked every single day, rain or shine. No time to rest. Every cent mattered" but a modern teen might say "Omg imagine doing all that for like 20 cents?"

2) Give characters different concerns or worldviews

A colonial-era figure might worry about trade and empire, but a young person today might care about climate change and censorship. Eg. a colonial-era trader might say "If the spice ships don't arrive by monsoon season, we lose everything" but a modern teen might say "The weather is so hot I feel like a melting ice cap!"

Additional elements to consider:

- How much education a character likely had
- What slang or phrases were common in their era

Finally, teachers can encourage students to present their monologue to the class or even create a mock social media post.

Activity 4b: Conversations Across Time

Objective	To encourage students to explore connections and contrasts between historical characters and their values.
Duration	20-30 minutes

Teachers can remind students that just like in real life, good conversations come from curiosity, connection and even conflict. Students should focus on authenticity over perfection, and try to gain a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives.

This activity can be done in pairs or small groups.

Possible discussion prompts:

- Would both characters know each other? Or are they meeting for the first time?
- What would each character be curious about?

- Are there certain things about modern Singapore they might find interesting?
- What might they agree/disagree on?

Students can then perform their short dialogues to the class.

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