

BY
THE NECESSARY STAGE

CO-PRODUCED WITH
ESPLANADE -
THEATRES ON THE BAY

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WED - FRI



PLAYWRIGHT'S MESSAGE

I wrote *History, Whose Story?* 25 years ago, at a time when 'National Education' was the buzzword in Singapore, and schools were interested in plays about Singapore's history. It was a fun-filled assembly play, and we toured many schools, delighting audiences with its irreverent and madcap humour.

But at the core of the play is a questioning of who we are as a society. Where did we come from and what do we value? What is fact and fiction, myth and reality? What is the point of history?

Over the years, the play has been staged by students for their school events and at the Singapore Youth Festival. It has also been published in the collection *Plays for Schools*.

When I had the opportunity to restage the play, I knew I wanted to develop it further. I decided to retain the humour and fast pace of the play. In this version, I increased the interactive elements of the play, making it more experiential and participatory for the audience. I also added a greater diversity of people in our history.

However, coming back to *History, Whose Story?* more than two decades later, I find myself asking the same questions. Who are we? Why is our history important to us? Whose stories are privileged and whose stories are suppressed? Whose voices do we not hear enough and why?

I hope that the play will entertain you and make you laugh out loud. I also hope that it will make you pause and ponder, to ask questions about your history and society. Be connected, be curious, be passionate. Speak up and participate. Make your voices heard because they matter.

Haresh Sharma

Playwright



CO-DIRECTORS' MESSAGE

History, Whose Story? forces you, the audience, to be on your toes at every moment. It requires you to switch on your critical mind and not just accept everything you are told at face value. In creating the work, we had to make the play come alive with larger-than-life props and wacky costumes. We also found moments to play around with the idea of what is true and what is false, what is fact and what is fiction.

The process of bringing this play to life has been riotous. We were blessed to have three talented and hilarious actors to 'play' with during rehearsal. Thank you, Hafidz, Rui Shan and Jamil, for giving 100% and more, and for totally immersing yourselves into the show.

An important aspect of the show is its interactive elements. We wanted those moments to be like a cross between a classroom and a gameshow, where it's light-hearted but you are also free to express yourselves and be silly. There's nothing more freeing than being able to laugh at ourselves and each other in a crowd.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and artistry to the show – the creative team, admin team and production team. A huge thank you to the Esplanade team, especially Edlyn, Rachel, Brenda, and Kai Lin, as well as all the venue technical crew working on *History, Whose Story?*. It's been an absolute joy to work with all of you.

Finally, thank you for being here and for reading this message. We hope that the show will entertain you and inspire you.

Deonn Yang & Haresh Sharma
Co-Directors

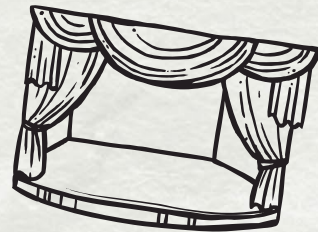


WHAT'LL YOU LEARN:

- **Gain exposure** to theatre as an art form through an interactive work
- **Examine and reflect** on issues related to Singapore's historical and socio-cultural contexts
- **Develop** a deeper sense of belonging as Singaporeans and greater understanding and empathy for all based on Singapore's shared values and heritage
- **Be empowered and motivated** to play a positive role in Singapore's future and be part of an active citizenry towards an inclusive Singapore society.

BEFORE THE SHOW...

To ensure a respectful and enjoyable experience for all:



Before the show

- Arrive on time and be seated before the performance begins.
- Switch off or silence all phones, smartwatches and other electronic devices.



During the show

- Watch and listen actively. Feel free to respond, react and reflect.
- Do not talk amongst yourselves or use your devices.
- Refrain from eating or drinking in the theatre.



For interactive segments

- If invited to engage with the performers, do so respectfully.
- Show support for your peers! Listen attentively and feel free to cheer and applaud when appropriate.



After the show

- Pick up your belongings and dispose of any litter responsibly.
- Feel free to share your thoughts with your friends and/or teacher and complete the student performance guide. Your reflection and opinions matter!

Hello!

Welcome to *History, Whose Story?* This play takes you through Singapore's past, but not the version from your textbooks! You'll meet familiar figures, forgotten heroes (like me!), and maybe even hear your own story reflected on stage.

Are you ready to go on an adventure through time? Rewind! Fast forward! Let's go!



ACTIVITY 1: TIMELINE CHALLENGE

We did a lot of jumping through time during the play. Now, let's see if you can recall key moments and arrange them in the order in which they unfolded on stage. Sequence each of these moments from **1 to 6**.

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

Ans: a. 5, b. 1, c. 4, d. 2, e. 3, f. 6

Which moment made you laugh or think the most? Why?

Were there any other moments in the play that you found striking? List them below.

ACTIVITY 2: QUOTABLE QUOTES

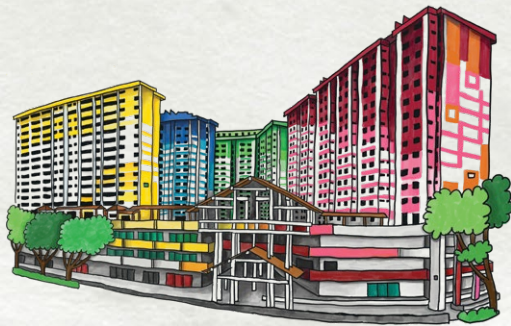
Quote	What do you think it means in the context of the play?
a. "History is HIS story. And HER story. And THEIR story. And OUR story."	
b. "Why are we still obsessed with Raffles?! Move on people! We are more than Raffles!"	
c. "Every day we would carry heavy loads of sand and debris, in large buckets slung over our shoulders. It was back-breaking work, and we only earned a few cents a day."	
d. "Then how do we know what is real and what is not?"	
e. "Eh! This island has always been an island! You don't bluff people!"	
f. "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."	

ACTIVITY 3: MISSING MONUMENT MAP

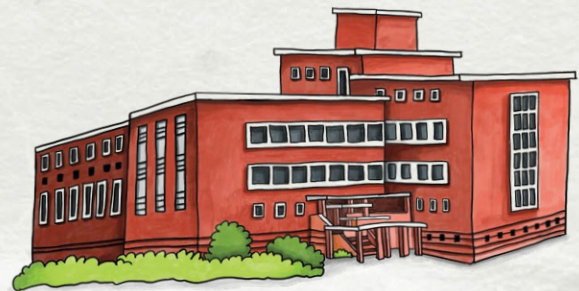
Singapore has changed a lot. Some buildings have been around for a long time. Others disappear. But every place holds a story. Look at the map below. It shows buildings and places that have been demolished. These sites may not exist anymore, but they were once full of life and meaning.

Reflect:

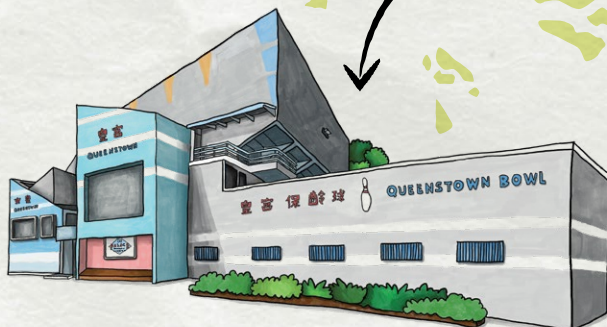
- Have you heard of these places? What do you know about them?
- What were these sites used for?
- What stories do you think they might hold?
- Are there any demolished buildings that your family or community still talks about?



Rochor Centre



Old National Library



Queenstown Cinema and Bowling Alley



Big Splash

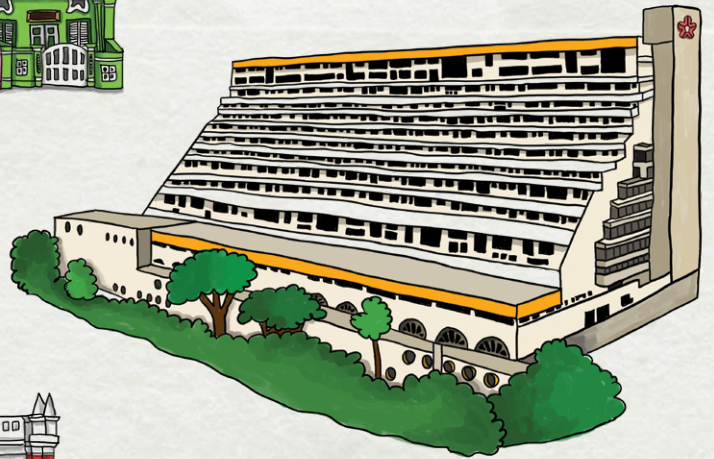
While some places are lost to time, others are protected through conservation efforts. These are sites that are officially recognised as important because of their design, history or cultural significance. Some examples include:



Peranakan shophouses along Koon Seng Road



Central Fire Station



Golden Mile Complex

Reflect:

- What / Whose stories do you think conserved places help us remember?
- Which place(s) in Singapore today do you think should still be on the map 100 years from now? Why? Feel free to draw it on the map (on the) previous page!

WANT TO EXPLORE MORE CONSERVED PLACES?



URA SPACE: Centralised map portal of areas gazetted for conservation



NHB Preservation of Sites and Monuments website

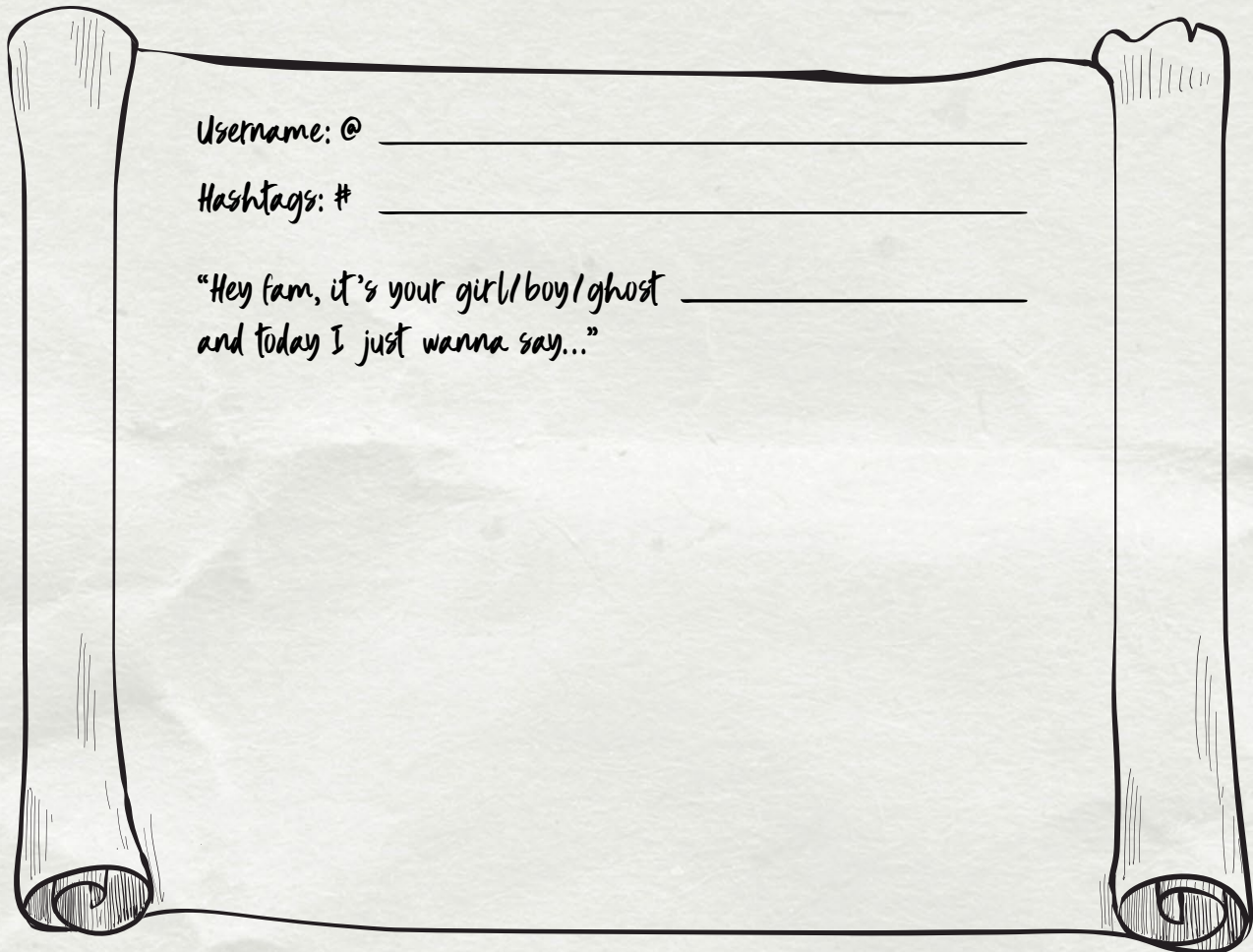
ACTIVITY 4A: IF HISTORY HAD WIFI . . .

In the play, some characters speak in Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang (think “it’s giving coloniser.”) These moments are not just for laughs. They urge us to think about how historical figures are remembered, and how they might react if they saw the world today. Would they be proud? Embarrassed? Confused?

This activity invites you to imagine how one of these figures might express themselves in the age of TikTok and hashtags. What message would they want to go viral? What truths would they spill in a 30-second video? Now it’s your turn to give a historical figure a modern voice!

Imagine you’re one of the characters from the play. (e.g. Tan Tock Seng, the Orang Laut, Che Zahara, or Munshi Abdullah). What are you saying to your followers?

Use the space below to craft your post.



Username: @ _____

Hashtags: # _____

“Hey fam, it’s your girl/boy/ghost _____
and today I just wanna say...”

Tips

- Pick a clear point of view! Who are you and what do you care about?
- Write a meaningful message! What do you want people to understand or remember about you?
- Use what you know about the character from the play or do your own research if you need to fill in any gaps in knowledge!

ACTIVITY 4B: CONVERSATIONS ACROSS TIME

Building on the previous activity where you gave a historical figure a modern voice, let's now imagine what happens if two such figures happen to meet. What might they say to each other if they could talk? Would they disagree? Would they share advice with each other?

Write a short dialogue between two historical figures. Challenge yourself by picking lesser-known or unconventional choices!

Character A: _____ Character B: _____

Character A	
Character B	

Tips for writing good dialogue:

- Make sure both characters have a distinct voice.
- Your characters can ask questions, share experiences, make jokes!
- Try to sum up the conversation with a moment of insight, connection or surprise.

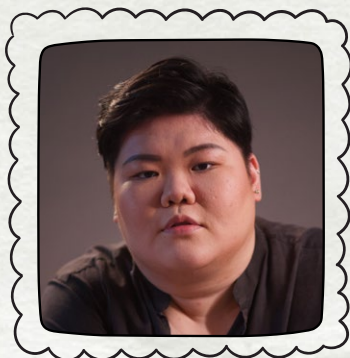
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT AND CO-DIRECTORS



HARESH SHARMA

PLAYWRIGHT & CO-DIRECTOR

Haresh is the Resident Playwright of The Necessary Stage (TNS) since 1990, having written over 100 plays staged in more than 20 cities. His play *Off Centre* was the first Singaporean work selected by the Ministry of Education for GCE N-and O-Levels. He received the S.E.A. Write Award (2014) and the Cultural Medallion (2015). With 13 publications, his works have been translated into Malay, Mandarin, Greek, and Italian. In 2021, he published *Reading the Room: A Playwright's Devising Journey*, detailing his creative process. Haresh has won Best Original Script thrice at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards and showcased works at Esplanade's first playwright-centred season in 2017.



DEONN YANG

CO-DIRECTOR

Deonn is an actor, theatre-maker and teacher who has expanded her craft from acting to writing and directing for the stage. Her recent directing credits include *The Bird Who Was Afraid of Heights*, (Esplanade's *PLAYtime!* Series), *White, All White* (The Necessary Stage) and *Survivor Singapore* (Esplanade's *Feed Your Imagination* series). Currently, she is an Associate Artist at The Necessary Stage. With a keen interest in people and their stories, Deonn strives to bring authentic narratives to life while ensuring a good laugh along the way. Her diverse talents contribute to a rich and engaging theatrical experience.



About The Necessary Stage

Established in 1987, The Necessary Stage (TNS) is a non-profit theatre company with charity status. Our mission is to create challenging, indigenous and innovative theatre that touches the heart and mind. TNS has the honour of being the only arts company in Singapore helmed by two Cultural Medallion recipients: Artistic Director and Founder Alvin Tan and Resident Playwright Haresh Sharma. The company is also the organiser and curator of the annual Singapore Fringe Festival. TNS is supported by the National Arts Council (NAC) under the Major Company Scheme for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026.

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