



OVERVIEW

The story of Singapore's playgrounds is the story of how we got together – where we forged friendships old and new, played our favourite games and got to know our neighbours. Through this highly interactive exhibition, pupils will be able to explore how sharing common experiences and spaces unite us as people of Singapore.

INQUIRY FOCUS

How do playgrounds unite us as people of Singapore?

Vignette	Key Knowledge	Key Question
1	Singapore's Early Playgrounds (1920s – 1960s)	Why was there a need for playgrounds in the early 1900s?
2	Playing in the Neighbourhood: HDB Playgrounds (1970 – 1993)	Who created the playgrounds – such as the famous Dragon playground – and why?
3	Making Fun and Safe Playgrounds a Business: The Rise of Singapore's Proprietary Playgrounds	How do we make playgrounds fun and safe?
4	Our Playgrounds, Our Future	What do you want playgrounds to look like in the future?

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDINGS

Primary One:

Places are important to me because I interact with family and friends and have meaningful experiences there. I care for these places.

Primary Two:

We have shared experiences as a nation.

Primary Three:

We meet our needs by changing the physical environment we live in.

Primary Four:

Different people contribute to Singapore's development as a nation.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource package has been designed to help you plan a visit to the exhibition. It comprises notes for educators, and proposed activity sheets for the students. The activity sheets are recommended for Primary 3 and 4 students, but can be adapted to other levels.

K-W-L on Singapore's Playgrounds 1930 – 2030

INSTRUCTIONS

You will be going to the National Museum of Singapore to visit an exhibition entitled *The More We Get Together: Singapore's Playgrounds 1930 – 2030*. Use this K-W-L sheet to get the most learning out of the experience!

Think about what you already know about Singapore playgrounds and what you want to learn during the visit and fill in the first two columns. You may fill in the last column after your visit.

I Know...	I Want to Learn...	I Learnt...

Read more about Play in the 1920s

Read the text below to find out about the types of games that our first Prime Minister played while he was growing up in the 1920s. There were hardly any playgrounds in Singapore at the time and children had to be very resourceful!

I was born in Singapore on 16 September 1923 in a large two-story bungalow at 92 Kampong Java Road.

I grew up with my three brothers, one sister and seven cousins in the same house. But because they were all younger than I was, I often played with the children of the Chinese fishermen and of the Malays living in a nearby kampong, a cluster of some 20 or 30 attap- or zinc-roofed wooden huts in a lane opposite my grandfather's house. It was a simpler world altogether. We played with fighting kites, tops, marbles and even fighting fish. These games nurtured a fighting spirit and the will to win. As a young boy, I had no fancy clothes or shoes like those my grandchildren wear today.

We were not poor, but we had no great abundance of toys, and there was no television. So we had to be resourceful, to use our imagination.

*An excerpt from The Singapore Story by Lee Kuan Yew
Published by Times Editions, Singapore, 1998*

DISCUSSION

- Who did Mr Lee Kuan Yew play with when he was growing up?
- Who do you play with? Do you play with your neighbours? Why or why not?
- What were some games that Mr Lee and his friends played when they were young? Have you heard of these games or played them before?
- What did they learn from the games they played?
- Is play important to you? Why or why not?
- Where do you usually play?

INTRODUCTION

Gather at the Masthead (Title Wall) of the exhibition before you enter the exhibition gallery and get pupils to think about:

- The Title of the Exhibition
The exhibition title is based on a popular children's song that was recorded in 1926. It has since been translated into many languages. Get pupils to discuss the significance of using this as the title of the exhibition.

Note how the timeline in the title stretches from 1930 to 2030.

- The Masthead Design
Highlight how the title wall is meant to represent the playground in its past, present and future forms. Get pupils to identify the three different iterations.

RELATED IMAGE



Vertical Playground at Singpost Centre

Photo from Playpoint Singapore Pte Ltd

<http://playpoint.asia/projects/>

NOTE FROM OUR CURATORS

The title reflects how the exhibition is based on the idea of community, both in terms of content as well as how we built it. The exhibition was conceptualised through engagement sessions with the public; it features voices of the community; and it encourages visitors to contribute to the future of playgrounds while thinking about the playground as a shared social space.

This exhibition uses the past as a springboard to continue conversations about the future. The masthead represents the playground in its past, present and future iterations. The past is represented by the dragon (1970s), the present by modular playgrounds with rubber surfaces, and the future with imaginative and daring new designs such as the vertical playgrounds that builders are already starting to build.

Design Your Own Playground Exhibition Title Wall

INSTRUCTIONS

The title wall of this exhibition was designed with the past-present-future frame. Use the information from the exhibits that you see and your own observations and imagination to design your own title wall for a playgrounds exhibition.

Title of Exhibition: _____

Past playground ...

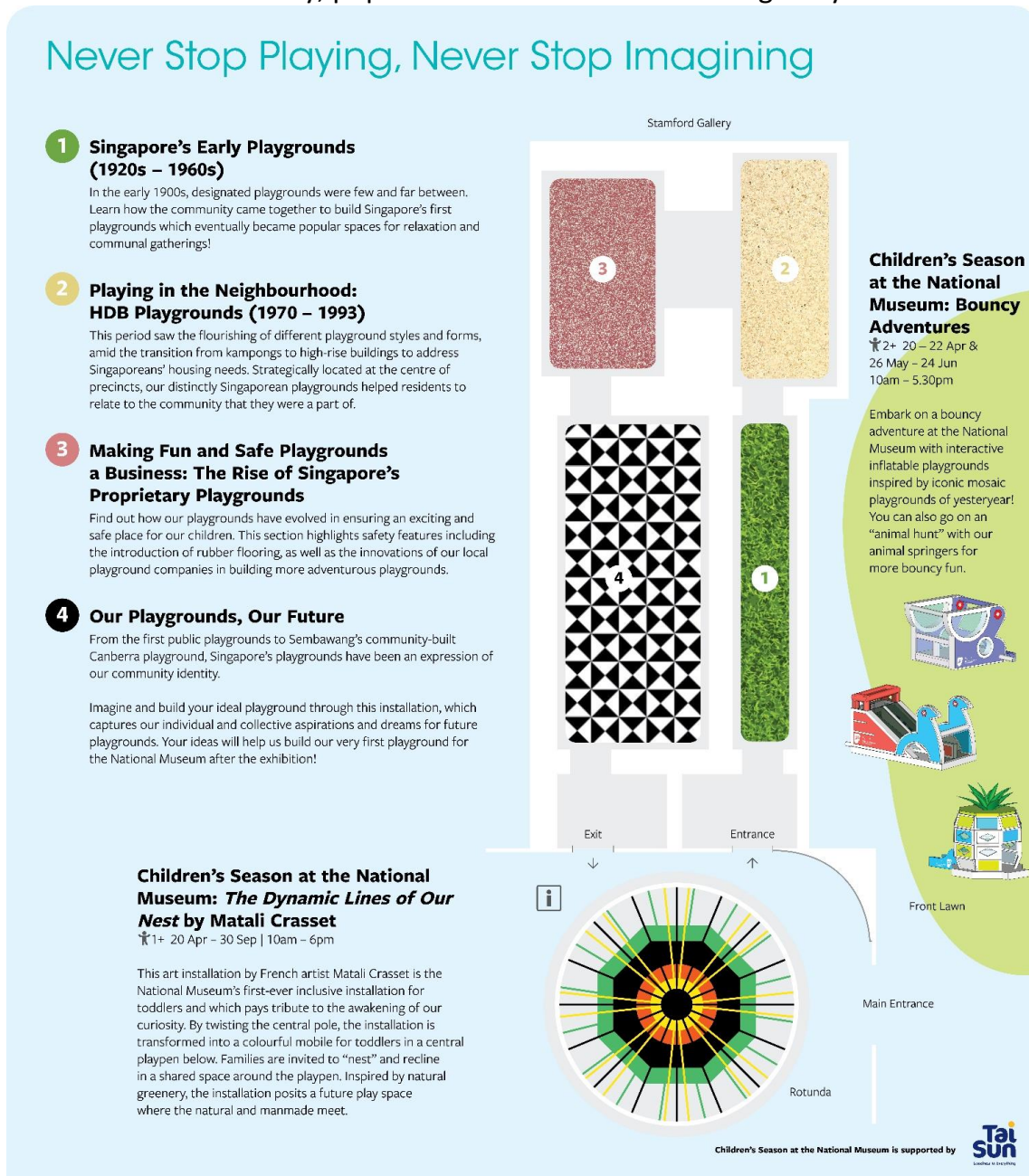
Present playground ...

Dream playground...

EXHIBITION LAYOUT

The exhibition traces the development of playgrounds through four vignettes. Explain to pupils that the word “vignette” refers to short descriptive scenes. As your pupils might get very excited in the exhibition (understandably so!), we suggest that you set aside some time for them to interact with the exhibits and to complete a meaningful writing task as part of their independent exploration.

* Please note that for their safety, pupils should never be left in the gallery on their own.



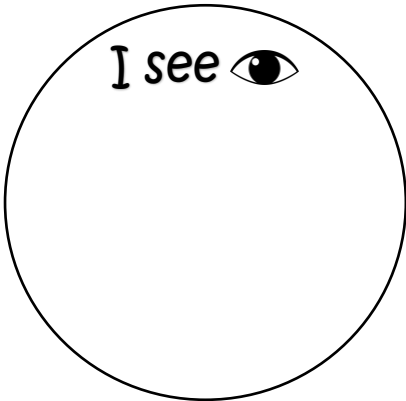

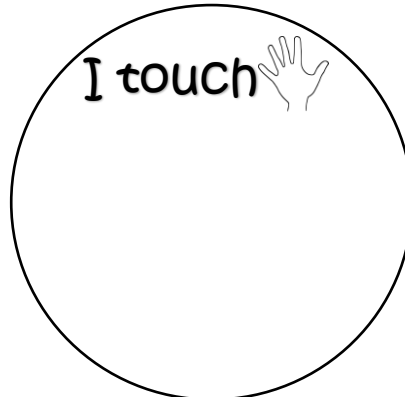
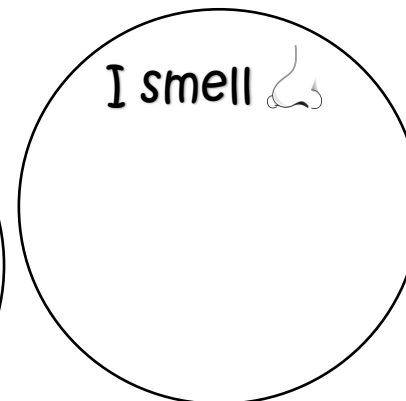
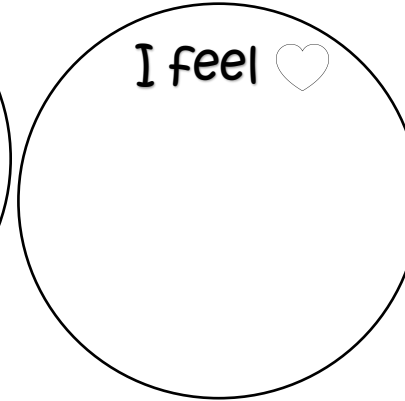
My Senses at Play

INSTRUCTIONS

Playgrounds are important places because they allow you to spend time with your friends and create happy memories. What do you see when you are at the playground? Do you hear loud sounds or soft ones? Are there certain equipment at the playground that feel smooth and others that feel rough? What smells are there around the playground? Does being at the playground make you excited?

Choose your favourite playground space in this exhibition – is it the open fields of the 1920s, the sandpits of the 1970s and 80s, the ones you see in your estate today, or even one that has not been built yet? Explore, imagine and write all about it!

My favourite playground is: _____. It is one where:

				
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Vignette 1: Singapore's Early Playgrounds (1920s – 1960s)	Vignette 2: Playing in the Neighbourhood: HDB Playgrounds (1970 – 1993)	Vignette 3: Making Fun and Safe Playgrounds a Business: The Rise of Singapore's Proprietary Playgrounds	Vignette 4: Our Playgrounds, Our Future
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Why was there a need for playgrounds in the early 1900s?

There were hardly any playgrounds in Singapore in the early 1900s. Children living in the outer belt – which comprised the suburbs, swamps and plantations – could play on open fields and empty compounds. However, in the overcrowded city, children had to use their imagination to create play spaces in whatever open spaces they could find, such as open drains, alleyways and five-foot ways.

In the face of worsening congestion in the cities, and the rise of the international playground movement which started in the United States of America in the late 19th century, members of the public began to write in to newspapers to recommend playgrounds and open fields as ways to improve public health.

Businesses and individuals – Huat Hin Oil Company, Singapore Traction Company, Siong Lim Sawmill Company, Aw Boon Haw and David Elias, among others – financed the first few playgrounds in Singapore.

The British government increasingly recognised the importance of playgrounds and playing fields. When Queenstown, Singapore's first satellite town, was planned by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) in 1953, play equipment was included as part of the town's amenities.

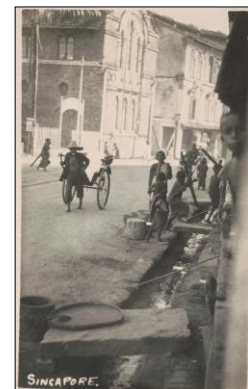
USEFUL IMAGES



Photograph of the "Outer Belt":
Children at play in Seletar,
c.1900s – 1930s

Collection of NMS

<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/collections/listing/1157701>



Photograph of the city: A street
scene along Prinsep Street,
c.1920s

Collection of NMS

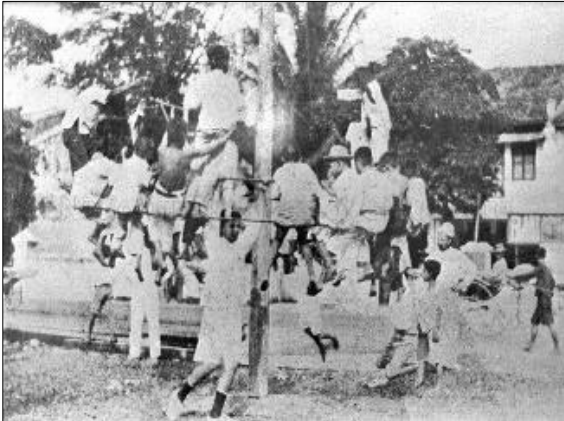
<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/collections/listing/1140483>

Visit our *Growing Up* gallery to
find out more about the
games that children played in
the kampongs!

Highlight

Draw pupils' attention to the handling collection items on display. These items come from the museum's collection – we have a spinning top (*gasing*), *capteh* and rattan balls. How many of these games do pupils still play today?

Find out about Singapore's Early Playgrounds (1920s – 1960s)



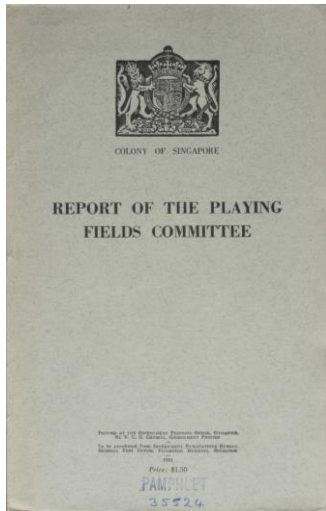
The first children's playground in Singapore was built in 1928. Do you know where it was built and who it was funded by?



This photograph of writer Wu Sijing, who is now in her 80s, was taken in Singapore in the 1950s. Where was this photograph taken? Who donated the play equipment? What else could children do at this place besides playing at the playground?

You may choose to respond by writing or drawing or both!

Making Space to Play (1920s – 1960s)



Report of the Playing Fields Committee and maps, 1951
Collection of NMS

In 1950, the British government set up a Playing Fields Committee to look after Singapore's present and future recreational needs. The Committee's report found that there were fewer than 190 football fields of space for the population of 700,000 people to play and do sports. To improve public health, the Committee recommended a total of around 2,385 football fields of space! Can you calculate how many more football fields of space people in Singapore needed?

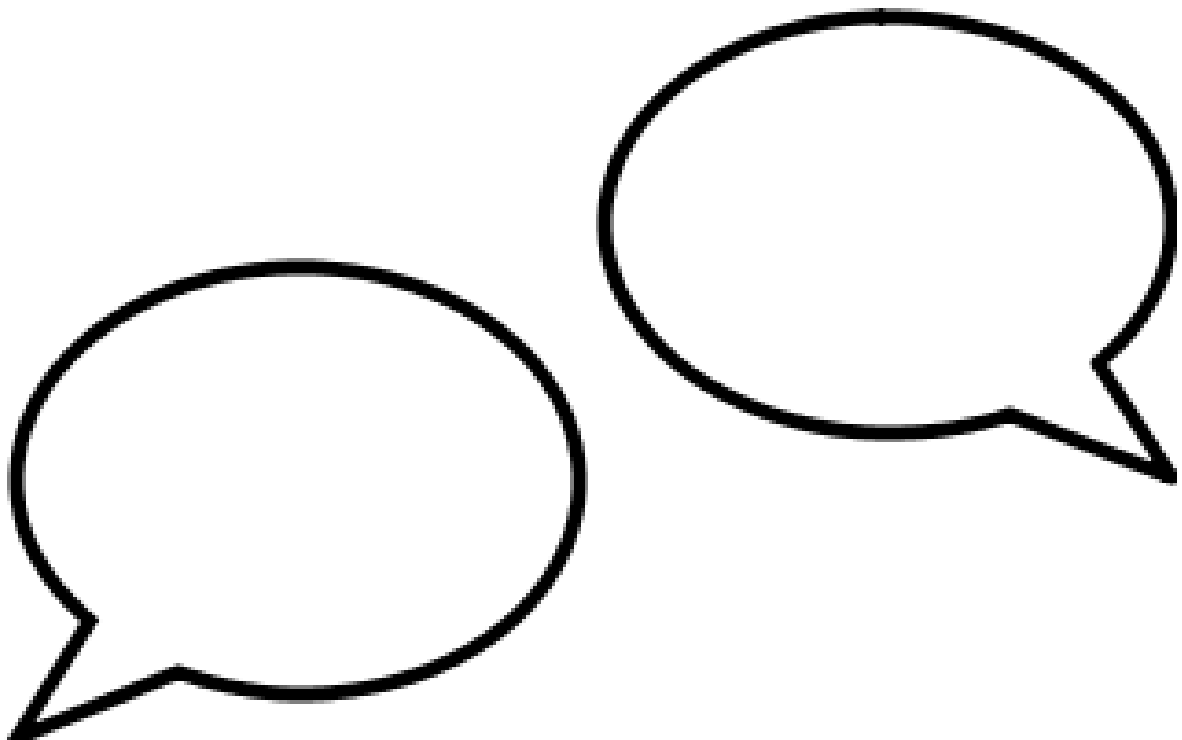
$$2,385 - 190 = ?$$

(Look for the maps drawn up by the Committee which marked out the possible spaces in Singapore that could cater for parks, playing fields and playgrounds.)

Investigate:



Why do you think there was a need to set aside so much space for play in the 1940s and 1950s?



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Who created Singapore's famous playgrounds and why?

By the time Singapore gained independence and estates were being built by SIT's successor, the Housing Development Board (HDB), playgrounds had become an important part of estate planning. HDB wanted to not only provide Singaporeans with homes, but also to create neighbourhoods where people could feel like they belonged.

Playgrounds were the focal points of neighbourhoods and thus designed around local and regional heritage. The first generation of HDB playgrounds were designed by Mr Khor Ean Ghee, who joined HDB as a designer in 1969. Together with Mr Liu Thai Kher, the then Head of the Design and Research Section of HDB, he decided to build a playground based on a dragon, an important mythical creature in Chinese culture. Mr Khor went on to design more than 30 diverse playgrounds, including one based on the Malay folktale "The Intelligent Mousedeer". These were compiled into a catalogue of playground designs that architects could choose for their towns.

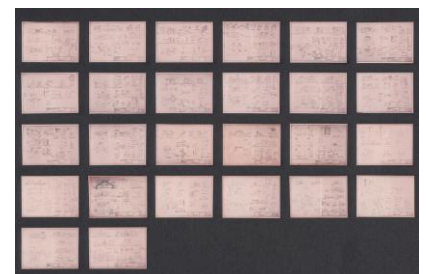
After Mr Khor left HDB in 1984, a new playground designer, Ms Chew Chek Peng, took over. This generation of playgrounds in the 1980s had themes of identity or storytelling. For instance, Tampines – which used to be an orchard – had playgrounds based on fruits, while Sengkang – which was a fishing village – had marine-themed playgrounds. Like Mr Khor, Ms Chew also used tales that children could relate to and learn from such as "Humpty Dumpty" and "Alice in Wonderland".

USEFUL IMAGES



Toa Payoh Dragon Playground, 1980

Photograph courtesy of HDB.



HDB playground prototype drawings, 1970s – 1980s

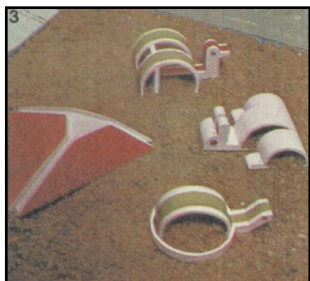
Collection of NMS

<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/collections/listing/1277345>

Highlight

Draw pupils' attention to the blueprint showcase. Explain to them that blueprints are design plans used by architects, engineers and draftsmen to guide contractors in their building. Help them to understand that playgrounds, like a nation, are built by many different people. Pupils might want to pick up a card on the pelican counter and contribute to our "mosaic wall" by writing down a memory they have of playgrounds.

Singapore's Playgrounds (1970s – 1980s): Dig Deeper



**Rabbit and Tortoise
Playground models, 1975**
Photograph courtesy of HDB

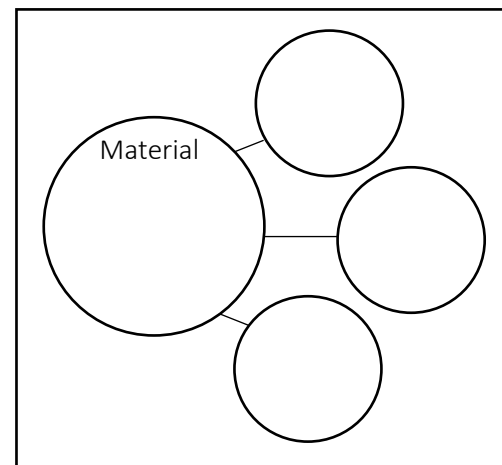
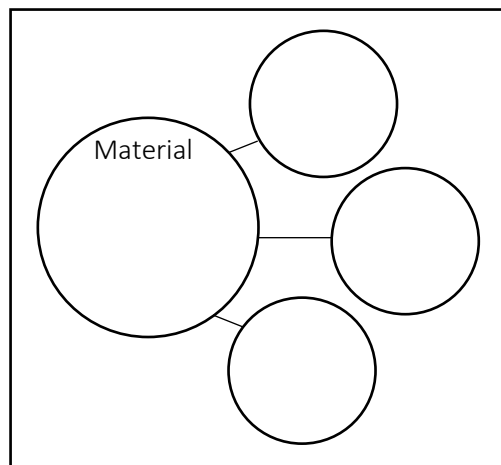
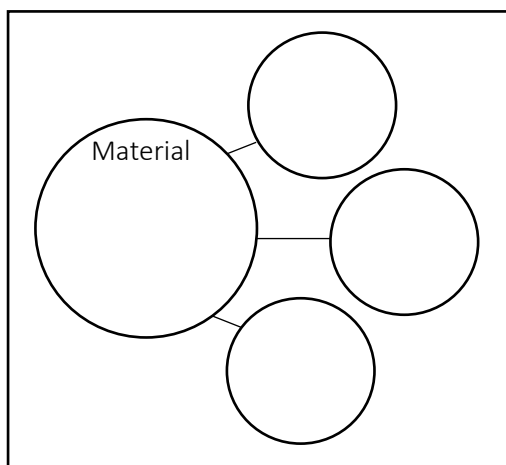
Did you know that the Rabbit and Tortoise playgrounds were built using painted concrete pipes? These pipes were made for smaller children to crawl under. A sandpit under the tortoise's shell enabled children to play with sand while being shaded from the sun.

Investigate:



What are concrete pipes typically used for? Why were they used for playgrounds?

What other construction materials were used in the playgrounds of the 1970s and 80s? Dig inside the sandbox to find out! Examine and feel the materials you uncover. Consider the positive, negative and interesting points of using these materials and fill them in the smaller circles below. Share your findings with your classmates!



Designing Our Own Playgrounds (1970s – 1980s)

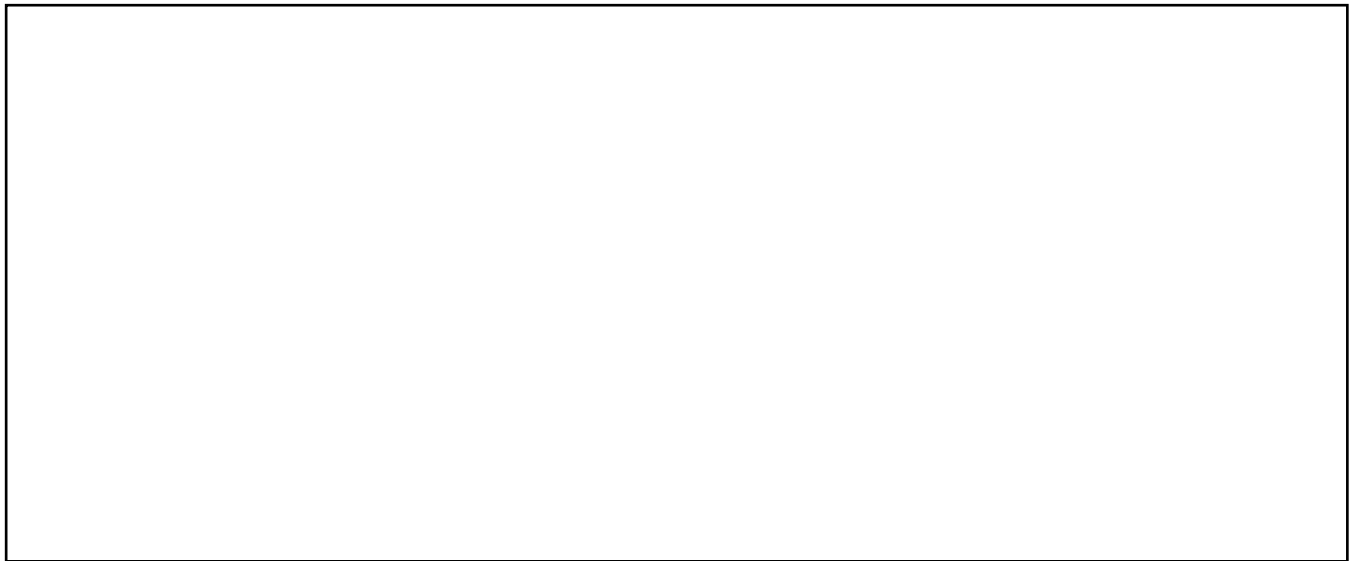
The Dragon playground is one of the most famous playgrounds in Singapore. Built in 1979, this playground was designed by Mr Khor Ean Ghee, who joined the Housing Development Board (HDB) as a designer in 1969. The playground design was based on a dragon, an important mythical creature in Chinese culture.



Toa Payoh Dragon Playground

Many of the playgrounds designed in the 1970s and 80s were inspired by familiar objects, stories or themes. For example, playgrounds built in Tampines were based on fruits as the area used to be an orchard. Explore this exhibition area with a partner and see what other familiar objects or stories you can spot!

You can also find out more about the history of your neighbourhood, and design your own playground with a heritage theme below!



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How do we make playgrounds fun and safe?

Children in the 1990s were more likely to be watching television and on the computer than playing at playgrounds. As such, playgrounds had to offer enough adventure to challenge the rising screen culture.

While there was a need for excitement at the playground, the space also had to be safe enough for a child to play unsupervised. In 1999, Spring Singapore wrote the first national playground safety standards (SS457). Meant to reduce the chances of injury, SS457 had specifications such as the materials used to build playgrounds and even a formula to limit a merry-go-round's maximum speed.

These safety standards resulted in more playgrounds that matched the standards being imported from western countries, as well as the development of a home-grown playground industry. As there were now specifications that could be followed, builders were able to come up with new ideas within the stipulated guidelines.

Today, there are around nine playground builders in Singapore, most of whom grew up in the 1970s and 80s and would have all played on Mr Khor's playgrounds.

USEFUL ARTICLES

"Good time for the kids", *New Nation*, 2 December 1980
<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Page/newnation19801202-1.1.1>

"Playground that kids rejected", *The Straits Times*, 16 August 1985
<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19850816-1.2.29.3>

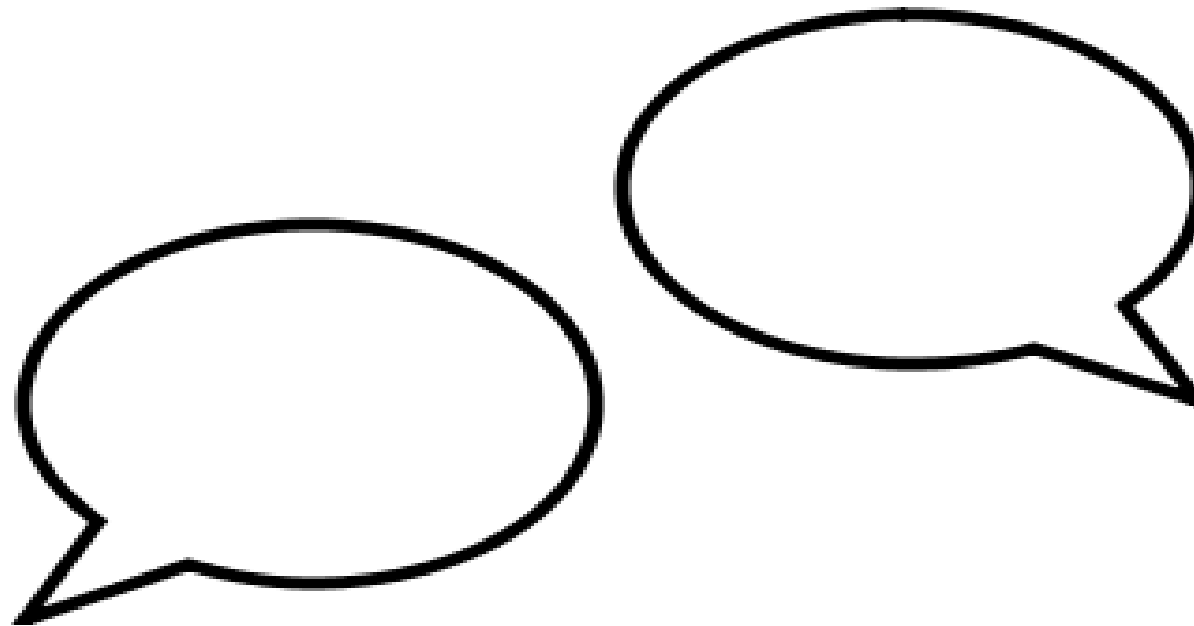
Highlight

The miniature space net equipment (2.5m) in the centre of the vignette was donated by playground company CT-Arts Creation. CT-Arts was the same company that built the rope play pyramid in West Coast Park in the 1990s. At that point, the 9.3m structure was one of the tallest play structures in the world!

Playgrounds of Today

A playground today has to compete with television programmes, computer games and YouTube channels for your attention. It has to help you socialise, challenge you to find creative ways of doing things and offer the thrill of adventure. At the same time, it needs to be safe enough for you to play at! Do you think playgrounds have a harder job today than they did in the past?

Choose one playground from Vignette Two and one from Vignette Three. Draw them below. Imagine these two playgrounds having a conversation – what do you think they would say to each other? Are they completely different or are there similarities between the two?



Making Playgrounds Safe

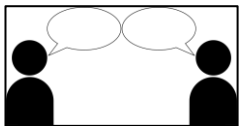
Safety at playgrounds does not only depend on whether the equipment is safe to use – it also depends on how we use it. As users, we have to take responsibility for our actions. These audio-visual illustrations look at six ways you might hurt yourself at the playground. Pick one of the scenes to investigate below.

Investigate: 

What is happening in this scene?

Why is this scene unsafe?

How could the accident have been prevented?



1. Look for a friend and take turns to share your observations with each other.
2. Agree on a playground safety rule that you would like to share with the rest of your class.
3. Share the rule with your classmates when you get back to school.

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What do you want playgrounds to look like in the future?

Singapore's public playgrounds have always been an expression of our community identity. As shared common spaces, playgrounds were built to address the needs of children, parents and caregivers. Today, Singapore faces a horizon of new changes in technology, global cultures and a greying population. How can our playgrounds keep evolving to meet the challenges of these changes? What dreams do we have of our future playgrounds?

In tracing the history and development of playgrounds, this exhibition is meant to encourage audiences to reflect on the future of playgrounds. Because the playgrounds of the future belong to the young people of the present, this vignette was designed together with youth such as SUTD students and programmers to give them a say in what they want Singapore to look like.

The input stations in this vignette will allow you and your pupils to choose from a variety of elements to create your own playground. The playground projected on the global screen captures our collective aspirations for our future playgrounds.

USEFUL ARTICLES

"First playground designed and built by residents opens in Sembawang Close", *The Straits Times*, 7 January 2018

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/first-playground-designed-and-built-by-residents-opens-in-semawang-close>

"HDB playgrounds undergo makeover", *Channel NewsAsia*, 15 April 2018

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/hdb-playgrounds-undergo-makeover-10140750>

NOTE FROM OUR CURATOR

Your feedback is important for the actual building of playgrounds of the future: we will share some of the collected data with HDB and NParks, who will take this into account when building their next playgrounds. We will also use the data as a reference when we build our permanent playground here at the museum – in some ways coming full circle to how the very first playground in Singapore was at Dhoby Ghaut.

The Future of Playgrounds

What equipment do you think are the most important and should be included in every playground?



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Label the grey boxes below with different playground equipment that you can think of.
2. Ask your friends what they think is the most important equipment in the playground.
3. Shade one box above an equipment each time someone names it as the most important.
4. What can you conclude with the information you have gathered?

Most Important Playground Equipment

10									
9									
8									
7									
6									
5									
4									
3									
2									
1									

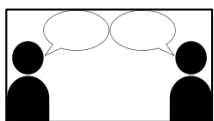
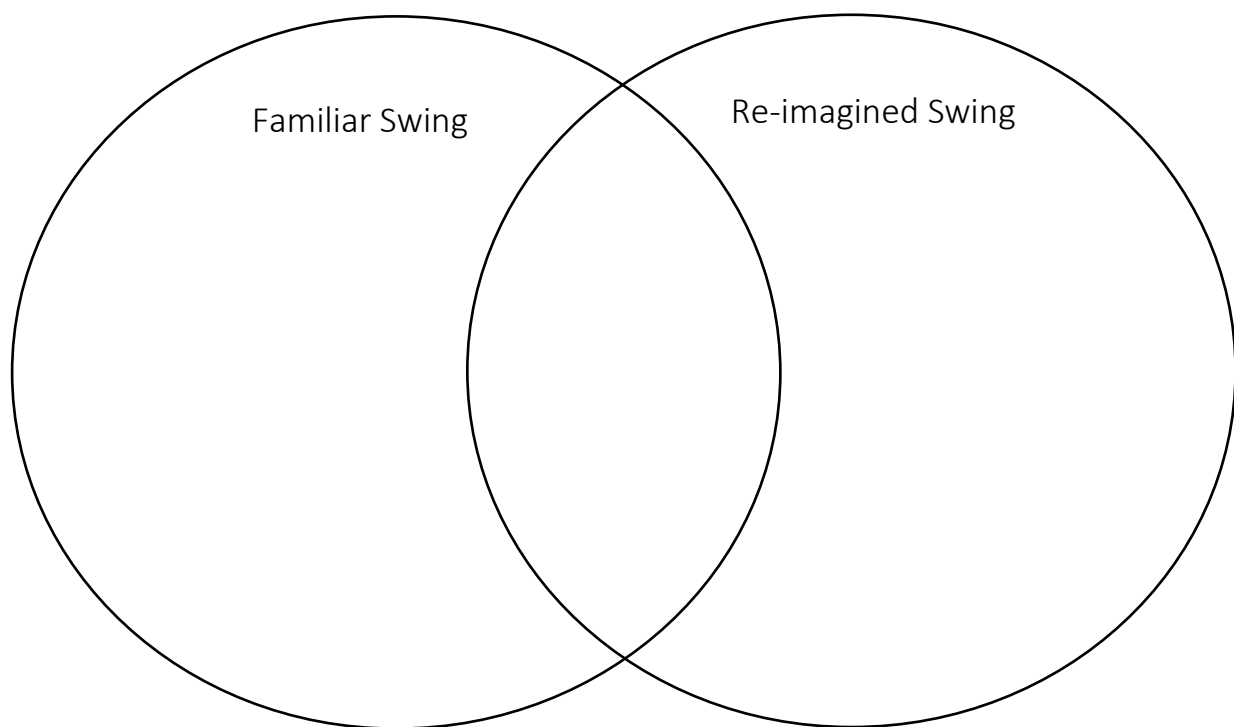
I can conclude that _____.

The Future of Playgrounds

This last vignette in the exhibition has been designed by our museum curators, designers and students from the Singapore University of Technology (SUTD). The students from SUTD took some familiar pieces of play equipment such as the swing, see-saw and monkey bar and re-imagined them.

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete the Venn diagram below to compare the similarities and differences between the swing you are familiar with and the swing designed by the SUTD students.



Which swing do you prefer – the familiar or re-imagined one? Why? What might the SUTD students have had in mind when they came up with this design?