



## 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. However, as people over different generations identify and relate to playgrounds in different ways, the meanings that they attach to playgrounds might also be different. Through this highly interactive exhibition, students will be able to explore the role that playgrounds as communal spaces have impacted the lives and memories of Singaporeans in the past and present, as well as how future playgrounds can continue to meet the diverse needs of the population, including the elderly.

## INQUIRY FOCUS

What makes the neighbourhood playground special to Singaporeans?

Knowledge and Understanding	Place as a Geographical Concept
Students will appreciate the importance of planning amenities such as playgrounds for public housing in Singapore, and understand how these amenities can have an impact on communities and their quality of life.	Students should be aware of how people develop attachment to and form different mental images of different places. They should also appreciate how these mental images affect human behaviour.  <i>(MOE Lower Secondary Geography Syllabus, 2014)</i>

### NOTE FROM OUR CURATORS

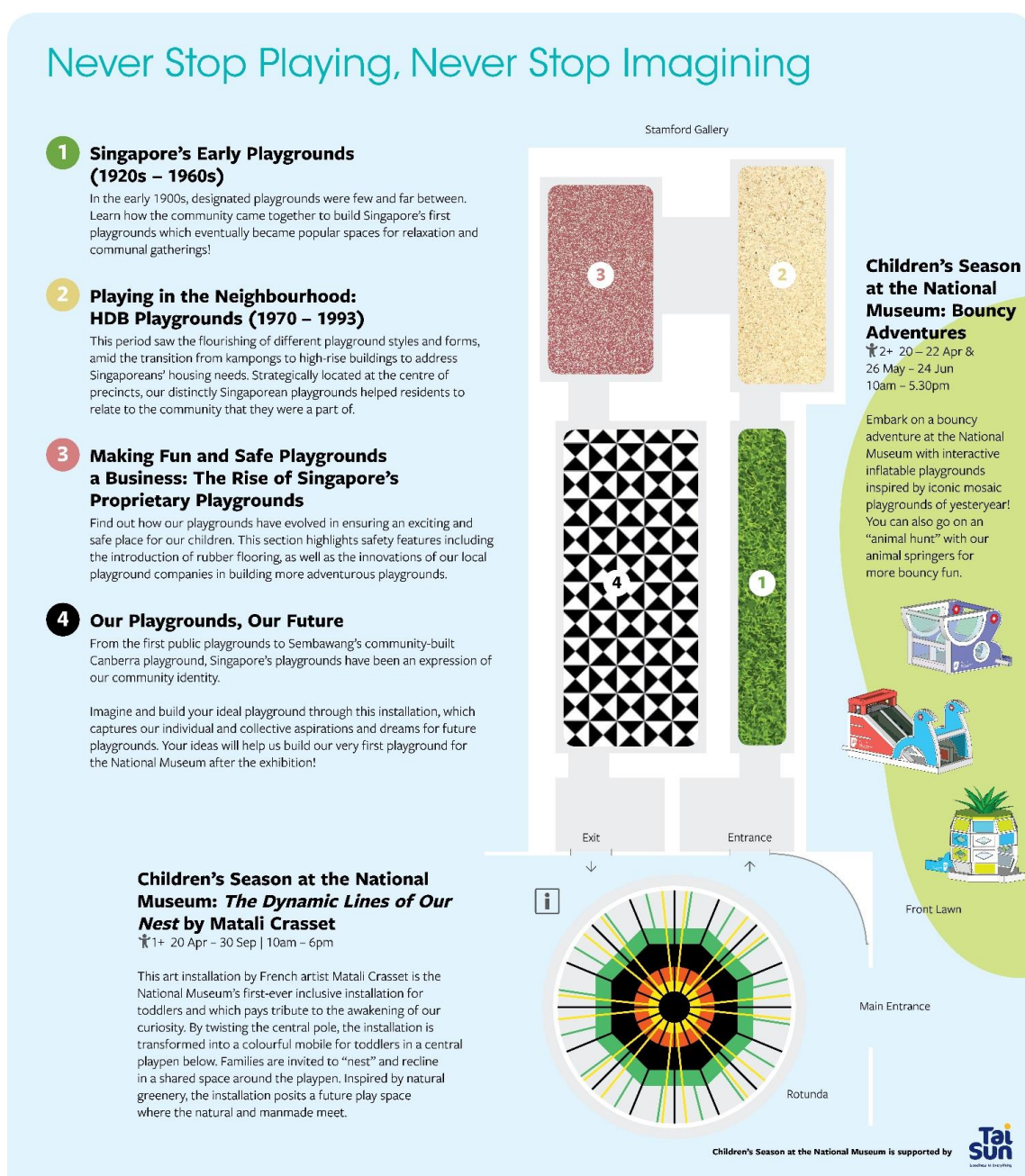
The title of the exhibition, which is based on a popular children's song, reflects how the exhibition is centred on the idea of community, both in terms of content as well as how we built it. The exhibition was conceptualised through engagement sessions with the public; it features voices of the community;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

The exhibition is not about nostalgia, even though it features and remembers old playgrounds: it is about using the past as a springboard to continue conversations about the future. The masthead is meant to represent 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.

## EXHIBITION LAYOUT

The exhibition traces the development of playgrounds through four vignettes or sections. Taking into consideration time constraints and limited gallery space, teachers might want to consider giving students a broad overview of all four vignettes and then grouping them into groups of four (or eight), with each student (or pair) in a group covering one vignette for further in-depth investigation. Students can then share their findings back in class via a gallery walk or jigsaw activity.

In addition to the exhibition, teachers are also strongly encouraged to include the “Building a Home” (1970s – 1980s) section of the Singapore History Gallery as part of the fieldtrip to the museum.



<b>Singapore's Early Playgrounds (1920s – 1960s)</b>	Playing in the Neighbourhood: HDB Playgrounds (1970 – 1993)	Making Fun and Safe Playgrounds a Business: The Rise of Singapore's Proprietary Playgrounds	Our Playgrounds, Our Future
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### Singapore's Early Playgrounds (1920s – 1960s)

There were hardly any playgrounds in Singapore in the early 1900s. This would not been an issue in the outer belt, which comprised the suburbs, swamps and plantations, where children could play on open fields and empty compounds. But 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, 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.

#### Suggested 5Ws 1H questions

1. Whose idea was it to build playgrounds in Singapore?
2. Where was the first playground in Singapore built? Why was it built?
3. What did the earliest playgrounds look like?

#### **Highlight**

Draw your students' attention to the 1943 map from the Survey Department during the Japanese Occupation (01-02 Early Playgrounds). The map indicates "police division A", and interestingly enough, all of the children's playgrounds. What could be some possible reasons for children's playgrounds to be marked out in this way?

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### HDB Playgrounds (1970 – 1993)

By the time Singapore became independent 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.

Because playgrounds were the focal points of neighbourhoods, HDB specially designed their playgrounds around local and regional heritage. The first generation of playgrounds were designed by Mr Khor Ean Ghee, who joined HDB as a designer in 1969. Together with Mr Liu Thai Ker, the then Head of Design and Research Section of HDB, Mr Khor 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.

Mr Khor left HDB in 1984 and a new playground designer, Ms Chew Chek Peng, took over. This generation of playgrounds in the 1980s featured themes of identity or storytelling. For instance, Tampines – which used to be an orchard – had playgrounds based on fruits, and 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".

#### Suggested 5Ws 1H questions

1. Which is the most iconic neighbourhood playground in Singapore? Who was it built by?
2. How many first-generation playgrounds were there? How many are familiar to you today?
3. Why did HDB build playgrounds as the focal points of neighbourhoods?
4. What considerations went into the building of these playgrounds?

(Together with your students, you may want to take time to watch the audio-visual interviews of four personalities who were involved in the building of playgrounds in Singapore. This rich source of information was put together specially for this exhibition.)

#### **Highlight**

Draw your students' attention to the models of the Second-Generation playgrounds (pullouts from 02-03B). These playgrounds were part of a more concerted effort to create a sense of identity, and accordingly, had themes and storytelling. Many of these playgrounds also brought out aspects of local heritage and were designed based on the bumboat, rickshaw and *kelong* to reflect the identities of different communities.

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## The Rise of Singapore's Proprietary Playgrounds

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.

The 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.

### Suggested 5Ws 1H questions

1. Why have the sandpits in our playgrounds been replaced by rubber flooring? What other changes to the materials used in playgrounds have been made since the 1990s?
2. Which is the oldest playground building company in Singapore? What did the company's original business deal with?
3. How can we educate the public about the safe use of playgrounds?
4. What other forms of education do you think is needed where playgrounds are concerned, besides safety issues?

### **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! The space net was designed by German architect Conrad Roland in 1970, and based on his theory that humans evolved from apes and would hence like to climb.

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## Our Playgrounds, Our 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 to give them a say in what Singapore should look like.

SUTD reimaged some of iconic pieces of play equipment – a swing, see-saw and monkey bar. This was an exercise in showing how familiar things can be thought of in different ways – the playground is a space that is always changing and adapting to the community's needs.

The input stations in this vignette will allow you and your students 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.

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.

### Suggested 5Ws 1H questions

1. This exhibition is entitled *Singapore's Playgrounds 1930 – 2030*. What will the playground space look like in 12 years' time, given the changing concerns and demographic of Singapore?
2. What, to you, are the most essential equipment in a playground? How would you re-imagine them to allow them to be used in a more inclusive manner?

### 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-sembarang-close>

**"HDB playgrounds undergo makeover", *Channel NewsAsia*, 15 April 2018**  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/hdb-playgrounds-undergo-makeover-10140750>

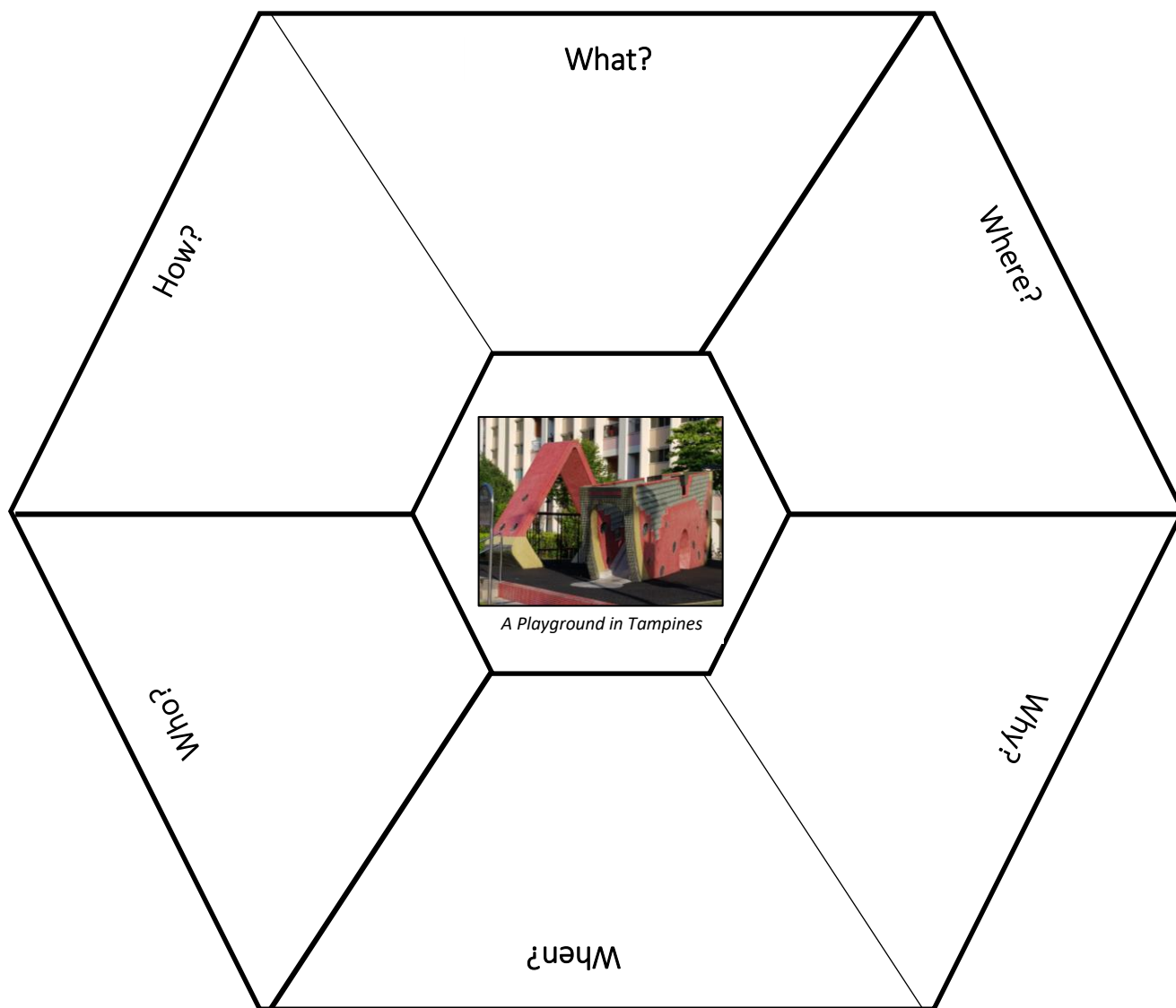


## What makes the neighbourhood playground special to Singaporeans?

### Your Task:

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*. This exhibition looks at how playgrounds have changed over the years, in terms of where they were/are found, what materials were/are used to build them, and how people's views of them have changed over time. As people identify and relate to playgrounds in different ways, the meanings they attach to playgrounds would also be different. *The More We Get Together* gives you an opportunity to understand some of these perspectives.

Use the 5W 1H organiser below to generate some questions about playgrounds that you hope to find answers to in this exhibition. Discuss these questions with your class.



## What makes the neighbourhood playground special to Singaporeans?

### Instructions:

Choose two questions from the pre-trip planning sheet that you consider most interesting to your understanding of why the neighbourhood playground is special to Singaporeans. Look out for relevant data during your visit to the exhibition that may answer your questions.

### Question 1:

*Data:*

### Question 2:

*Data:*

Choose one of the four sections in the gallery. Was there a particular map or photograph that you felt was particularly useful in answering your questions? Were any of the playgrounds presented in the exhibition more special to you than others? Speak to a fellow exhibition visitor and find out why playgrounds are special to him/her.

*Sketch a playground from the exhibition that was most special to you and elaborate why, or identify a map or photograph that was useful in answering your questions.*

*Playgrounds are special to \_\_\_\_\_ (name) because ...*