National Museum of Singapore

INVESTIGATING HISTORY:

SINGAPURA BEFORE 1819

A Resource For Secondary School Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

This resource has been put together in collaboration with the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) for the Historical Investigation (HI) question **"Was Singapore a sleepy fishing village before 1819?"**.

In order to support what students are learning in their classrooms, we have identified artefacts from the Singapura zone in the Singapore History Gallery (SHG) that will stimulate their imagination and allow them to construct meaning of this time period for themselves. These resources are grouped according to different categories to give a sense of people's lives in Singapore before 1819. Several student resources are also provided to scaffold the learning experience.

A sample of the gallery text and captions for the Singapura zone are provided in **Annex A**, for your reference and to further aid you in planning for the HI.

We hope you find this resource packet useful in planning for your visit to the museum and look forward to welcoming you and your students to our galleries.

Please contact us at nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg if you have any questions or require further assistance in your planning.

You may also email us if you require the full gallery text and artefact captions for **Annex A**.

ABOUT "SINGAPURA BEFORE 1819"

What was Singapore like before the British arrived here in 1819 to establish an entrepot? Was it a sleepy backwater village as is commonly thought? This is the fundamental question that "Singapura", the first zone in the Singapore History Gallery, tries to answer.

The earliest records in which Singapore is mentioned describe it as a thriving port in the 14th century. It was known by different names then: The Chinese traders called it Danmaxi (Temasik or Temasek), while in the *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals), it was called Singapura. Following the known, general layout of the 14th-century settlement from these records and based on findings from the excavated sites, the curators decided to creatively condense the "Singapura" storyline into segments.

These sections are the "Seashore", the "Settlement" and the "Sacred Hill", referring to Longyaman (Dragon Tooth's Gate in Chinese, the former rock outcrop at the gateway to Keppel Harbour), the Singapore River, and Fort Canning Hill respectively. They were designed as contextual settings with representations of a seascape, a shoreline, an enclosed space for the "Sacred Hill", and a life-size screen featuring an extract of a filmic rendition of daily life in the settlement.

This zone features:

- Archaeological excavations in Singapore over the last two decades that have unveiled material culture remains from the 14th century such as China porcelain and locally-made pottery.

- Audio commentaries by Professors John Miksic and Derek Heng describing what Singapore was like in the 14th century.

- Textual sources such as the contemporary writer Wang Dayuan's description of Temasek, second British Resident John Crawfurd's description in 1822 of the ruins of the 14th-century settlement, and the 17th-century *Sejarah Melayu*.

^ *A filmic scene of daily life in 14th-century Temasek*

We invite you and your students to explore the evidence presented in the gallery and find out more about early Singapore's inhabitants and their ways of life, the probable existence of an elite ruling class who lived on what is now Fort Canning Hill, and how Singapore was connected by trade and politics to the Malay Archipelago, the rest of Southeast Asia, China and India.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST

Although there are only a few historical sources that address Singapore's pre-colonial past, archaeology has helped to fill some of the gaps. Since 1984, archaeologists have uncovered traces of pre-colonial Singapore in the Singapore River and Fort Canning areas.

How do these remarkable archaeological finds help in historical investigations about Singapore before 1819?

^ *Lock and key set from the 14th century found during an archaeological dig at the Old Parliament House*

Encourage students to construct their own knowledge of the past on their visit by using the worksheets in this resource.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

^ *Porcelain vase from the late Yuan dynasty (14th century). Courtesy of the Archaeology Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.*

The above vase depicting grape and vine motifs was excavated from the northern bank of the Singapore River in 2011. Produced in Jiangxi province, the centre of Chinese porcelain-making in the 14th century, it is part of the collection of Chinese porcelain dating from the period that was discovered along the river. The collection suggests that porcelain wares were traded in Singapore in the 14th century.

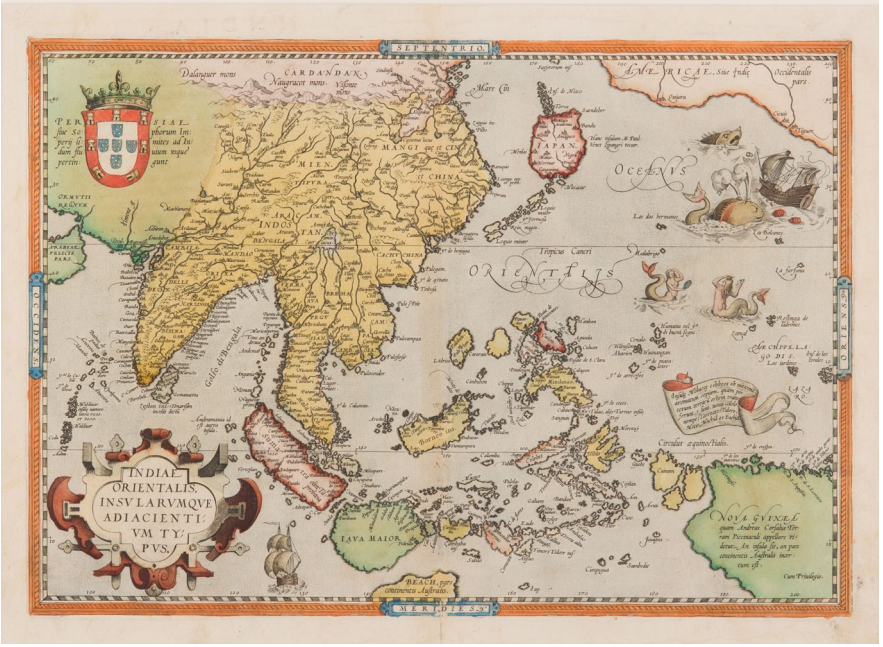
SUGGESTED THEMES AND SOURCES

In this section, we have highlighted several sources that have been grouped around different themes related to Singapore before 1819. We have also provided several thinking questions that you may use to help your students to engage with the sources in a more critical manner.

I. POLITICAL CONNECTIONS

When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found relics dating back to the 14th century. Singapura, as it was called at the time, was connected by trade and politics to not only the Malay Archipelago, but also Siam (Thailand), China and India. The *Sejarah Melayu* and other histories say that Singapura was attacked by foreign invaders in the late 14th century. After that, it was inhabited primarily by the Orang Laut ("sea people" in Malay).

POSSIBLE SOURCES THAT CAN BE EXPLORED IN RELATION TO THE THEME:



< Source 1
Abraham Ortelius's map of Southeast Asia
1570
Paper

Abraham Ortelius (1527 – 1598) was a Flemish cartographer. In his 1570 map, the Malay Peninsula appears as an elongated extension of mainland Southeast Asia, and Singapore as an appendix, marked "Cincapura", with a cluster of islets. As was common practice for the time, the map also has illustrations of mermaids and imaginary sea creatures.

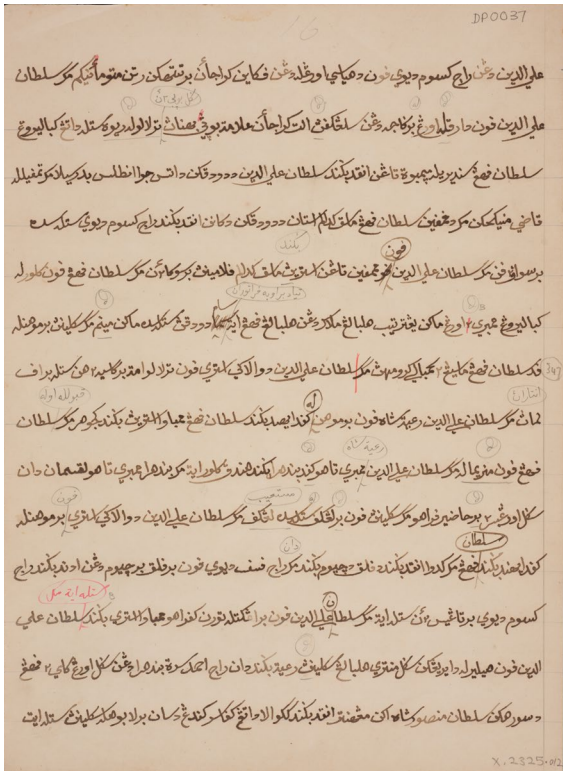
An animated version of Ortelius's map welcomes visitors to the Singapore History Gallery.

> Source 2
The Singapore Stone
10th — 14th centuries
Singapore River Mouth
Inscribed Sandstone

When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found relics dating back to the 14th century. One of these was a sandstone boulder at the mouth of the Singapore River. It was split into nearly equal parts, which faced each other at an angle of about forty degrees.

According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the boulder had been hurled from nearby Fort Canning Hill by a strongman known as Badang, a warrior of the Raja of Singapura in the 1300s.

The Stone has been dated from the 10th to 14th centuries. The inscription is written in Kawi script and contains some Sanskrit words, but it has never been fully deciphered.



< Source 3
Sejarah Melayu (The Malay Annals)
19th century
Paper

The *Sejarah Melayu* is a chronicle of the Malay courts of Singapore and Melaka from the 14th to 16th centuries and it remains a fundamental text of Malay history today.

The oldest known version was compiled in 1612 by Tun Sri Lanang, a court official at the capital of the Johor sultanate. Most existing manuscripts of the *Sejarah Melayu* date from the 19th century. On display is the original manuscript in Jawi from which the 1896 edition in the collection of Reverend Dr W. S. Shellabear was printed.

> Source 4
Ring or earring
13th – 15th centuries
East Java

This piece of jewellery was found on Fort Canning Hill and worn between the 13th to 15th centuries. The emblems on this jewellery (a conch on one side and discus on the other) are both emblems of Vishnu and kingship.

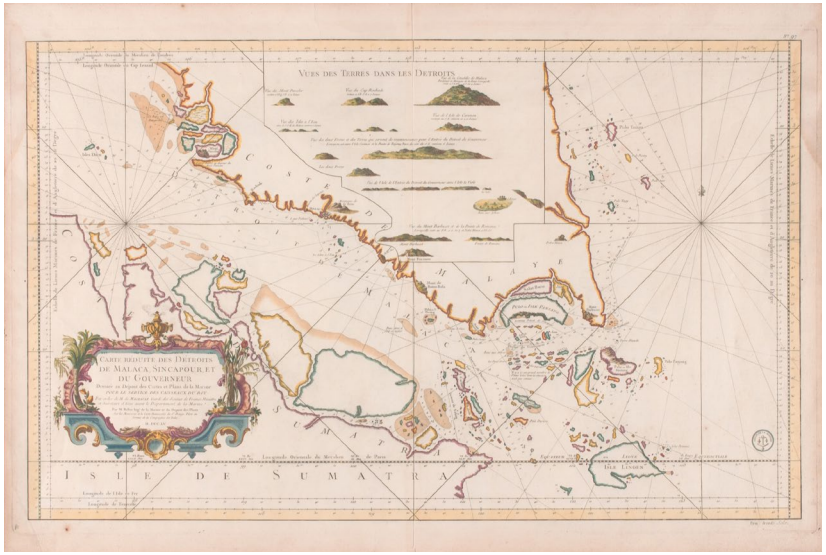
< Source 5
The Sultan of Aceh in procession
1600s

From the mid-16th century, Aceh grew to be a formidable power, and was a rival to the Portuguese and the other Malay states in the region.

In January 1557, a naval battle took place near the Straits of Singapore between Acehnese and Portuguese fleets, where Acehnese noblemen fought to the death.

> Source 6
Map of Portuguese-Dutch battle off Changi coast
19th century
Paper

On 25 February 1603, after a fierce battle that lasted for most of the day off the eastern coast of Singapore, a Portuguese ship, the *Santa Catarina*, was seized by the Dutch admiral Jakob van Heemskerk and three vessels under his command. The *Santa Catarina* was carrying a valuable cargo of silks and porcelain.



< Source 7
Jacques-Nicolas Bellin's map of the Straits of Malacca, Singapore and Governor's Straits
1755
Paper

Jacques-Nicolas Bellin (1703 – 1772) was appointed head of the French Hydrographical Office in 1741. This map shows landmarks along the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, including one marked as "Malaca". The "new" Singapore Strait is indicated as lying south of an island named Pulo ou Isle Panjang ("Long Island"), which is probably Singapore.

THINK

1. How different are the various maps depicting Southeast Asia before 1819? What might account for the differences?

2. How was Singapore governed in the 14th century?

3. Why were there so many political rivalries in the Malay Archipelago between the 14th to 19th centuries?

II. ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS

Singapore lies at the confluence of the seasonal monsoons, which ships relied on to travel. It was efficient in many instances, for example, for travellers from the Indian Ocean to travel only as far as Singapore, deposit their goods at the port, acquire products from Southeast Asia and China, then turn around and return to the west with the changing monsoon.

POSSIBLE SOURCES THAT CAN BE EXPLORED IN RELATION TO THE THEME:

< Source 1
Jars for purifying gold or mercury
14th century
Stoneware

These jars were common storage vessels for liquids. Chinese archaeologists refer to them as *xiaokouping* (small-mouthed bottles). Jars made in China may have been used to store and transport mercury, which was an important trade good in the pre-colonial period. It was used in medicine and to separate gold from impurities. These jars were later reused in Singapura, for example, to store lime for chewing with betel.

> Source 2
Interior of a celadon bowl
14th century
North bank of the Singapore River

Green was the most common colour of Chinese porcelain found in early Singapore. The best such porcelain came from the Longquan area of Zhejiang; in Singapore, the greenware would have been imported from several sources, including Fujian and Guangdong.

Greenware was very common in that time period. Most people in 14th-century Singapore would have been able to afford one or two pieces of such wares.

< Source 3
Hornbill casques
On loan from Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

In the 13th and 14th centuries, Chinese merchants sought hornbill casques in Temasek or Palembang, Sumatra. Chinese traveller Wang Dayuan noted in the 14th century that there were "very fine hornbill casques" among the indigenous products of Banzu, as the area around Fort Canning Hill was known to him.

In one species found in the Malay Peninsula, the large bony casques between the hornbills' eyes are solid enough to be carved, like ivory. These were made into rings, ear plugs and potions in Southeast Asia, or exported to China where they were used to make brooches or snuff boxes.

On display are hornbill casques from Sumatra, Indonesia and Terutau island in the Strait of Malacca, Thailand.

< Source 4
Chinese Coins
North bank of the Singapore River

These coins date to the Tang (618 – 907) and Northern Song (960 – 1127) dynasties, but were in circulation in Singapura in the 14th to 15th centuries.

They were used for payment, and some may have been melted down at metal workshops to make other objects.

> Source 5
Vietnamese and Thai ceramics
15th century
North bank of the Singapore River

Towards the end of the 14th century, Vietnamese and Thai ceramics entered the trade market in Singapore.

Temasek or Singapura was attacked in the late 14th century and the hill settlement was abandoned after 1400. The dates of these ceramics discovered near the mouth of the Singapore River suggests that settlements here had outlasted the royal abode at Fort Canning Hill.

THINK

1. What was being traded in early Singapore?

2. What were some factors that might have led to the growth of Singapore's role as a port in the 14th century?

3. Why might Singapore have been attacked and abandoned after 1400?

III. CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

From the archaeological finds, we know that goods were being traded in early Singapore. In addition, such exchanges of goods often also led to exchanges of culture.

POSSIBLE SOURCES THAT CAN BE EXPLORED IN RELATION TO THE THEME:

< Source 1
Metal artefacts and solidified residue from metalworking
14th – 15th centuries
North bank of the Singapore River

In the 14th century, people did metalworking near the present-day Parliament House. Using copper and possibly bronze, they made fishing implements such as fish hooks and wire leaders.

> Source 2
Gold earrings and armlet
14th century
Fort Canning Hill (Bukit Larangan)

These objects were discovered in 1928 by some Chinese women workers who were excavating the area as part of plans to build a new reservoir at Fort Canning. The press reported that the discovery was "interesting" and that Fort Canning was a "treasure trove". Fort Canning is the only site in Singapore where ancient gold ornaments have been discovered.

The armlet bears details depicting the Javanese *kala*. The *kala* motif is a protective symbol found at the entrance of Javanese temples dating from the 8th to 14th centuries.

< Source 3
Lead figurine
14th century
North bank of the Singapore River

This Javanese lead figurine is the only one of its kind excavated in Singapore. Unfortunately, the head of the rider has not been found. The rider, wearing very elaborate jewellery, is seated upon a saddle on a winged horse, and wears a *sarong* around his waist.

This image has been suggested by scholars to represent Surya, the sun god, who was often depicted riding a horse. Such carvings of Surya can be found in 14th-century temples in Java.

THINK

1. How might early Singapore's growth as a port have led to changes in people's way of life?

2. Who would have owned the jewellery that was excavated on Fort Canning?

3. What can we infer about people's religious beliefs in Singapore in the 14th century?

RESOURCES

National Museum of Singapore Publications

1. Miksic, John N. *Singapore & The Silk Road of the Sea, 1300 — 1800*. National Museum of Singapore, 2013.

2. Miksic, John N. and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek. *Early Singapore, 1300s — 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*. National Museum of Singapore, 2004.

3. Yeo, Stephanie, editor. *(Re)presenting Histories: Experiences and Perspectives from the National Museum of Singapore*. National Museum of Singapore, 2017.

Roots.sg

4. Heritage Hero: Digging Up History. (May 2017). National Heritage Board [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://roots.sg/~/media/Roots/Images/Stories/heritage-heroes/wu140heritagehero04johnmiksicnys.pdf

5. National Heritage Board. "History+Archaeology: Archaeology in Singapore." 2015. https://roots.sg/learn/resources/Videos/history-and-archaeology-archaeology-in-singapore

6. National Heritage Board. "History+Archaeology: Telling the Singapore Story." 2015. https://roots.sg/learn/resources/Videos/history-and-archaeology-telling-the-singapore-story

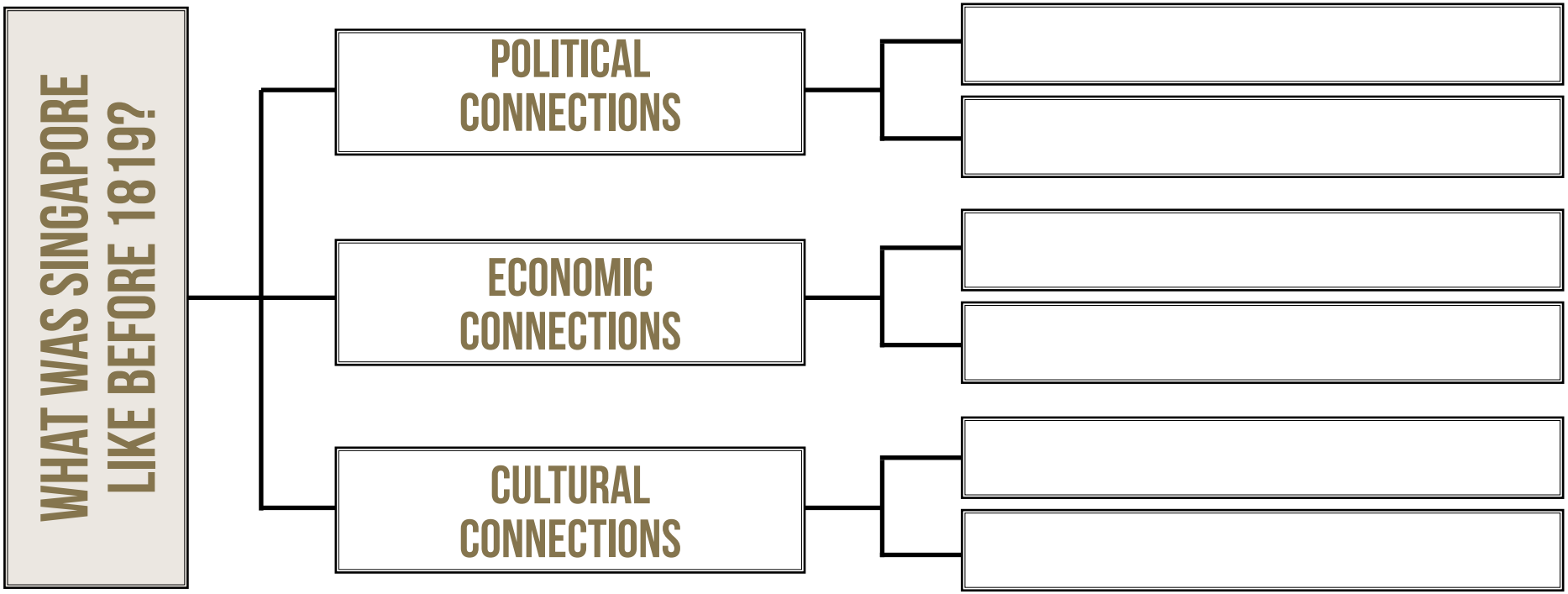
7. National Heritage Board. "Roots.sg Presents: The Mythical Origins of Singapore." October 2016. https://roots.sg/learn/resources/Videos/rootssg-presents-the-mythical-origins-of-singapura

WAS SINGAPORE A SLEEPY FISHING VILLAGE BEFORE 1819?

YOUR TASK:

You will be going to the National Museum of Singapore to conduct your Historical Investigation on Singapore before 1819. Your task is to explore the evidence presented in the gallery and find out more about the inhabitants of early Singapore and their ways of life, the system of rule in early Singapore, and early Singapore's connections to the rest of the world.

Use the organiser below to generate questions about these aspects of early Singapore that you hope to find answers to in this museum visit.



WHY GATHER EVIDENCE AT THE MUSEUM?

YOUR TASK:

At the National Museum of Singapore, we present Singapore's past in the form of a narrative that will generate historical understanding. To enable our visitors to feel that they have been transported back in time, the curatorial team takes special care to consider a richer selection of artefacts and interactive multimedia, as well as ambient sounds and contextualised displays that provide a more realistic setting. Replicas and props are also added to create an immersive set. In this activity, observe how the museum has tried to make the "Singapura" zone in the Singapore History Gallery (SHG) come alive for visitors. Write your observations in the spaces below.

SINGAPURA ZONE IN SHG

SOUND	SIGHT
Describe the sounds you can hear.	**Describe what you see. E.g. colours, shapes, patterns, size**

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR THE SOUNDS AND SEE THE DESIGN OF THE SPACE?

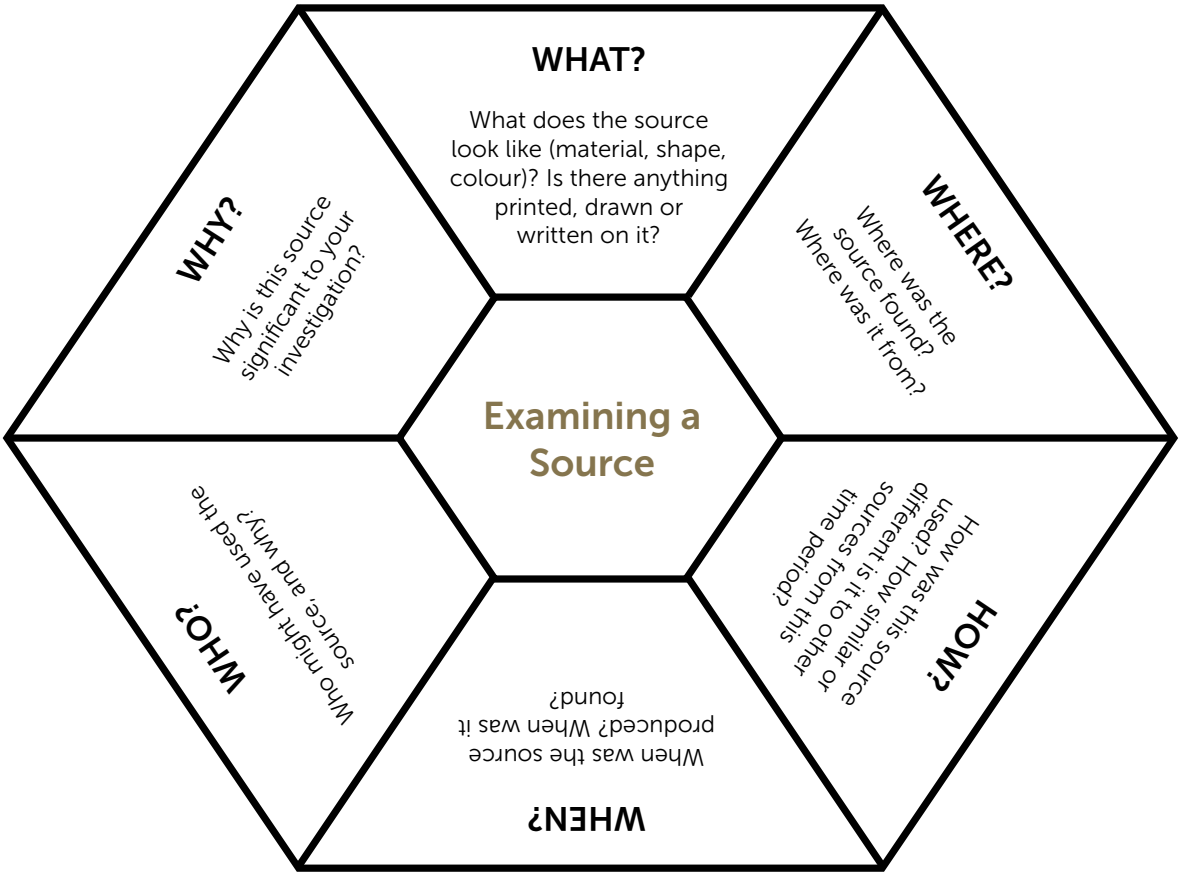
Draw or write your thoughts in the space below.

WAS SINGAPORE A SLEEPY FISHING VILLAGE BEFORE 1819?

YOUR TASK:

Most of your activities for this trip will be conducted in "Singapura", the first zone of the Singapore History Gallery. This zone features pieces of objects from the 14th century such as China porcelain and locally-made pottery. Many of these artefacts were found in archaeological excavations conducted in Singapore over the last twenty years. In this zone, you will also find textual sources from contemporary writers like Chinese traveller Wang Dayuan and the second British Resident John Crawfurd. Using these and other carefully selected sources, our curators have put together a storyline to represent Singapore's history before 1819.

In the same way, you as a young historian can use sources to construct your own knowledge of the past: First, select a few sources in the gallery that interest you. Then use the questions below to guide you to extract relevant information from each selected source. Lastly, based on the details from the source and other relevant background information, what inferences can you make about the connections Singapore had with the world before 1819?



Making Inferences: What can you infer from the source about the political/economic/cultural aspects of Singapore before 1819?

WAS SINGAPORE A SLEEPY FISHING VILLAGE BEFORE 1819?

YOUR TASK:

Consolidate the information you have gathered at the museum. Which sources have provided you with the most relevant information on the connections Singapore had with the world before 1819?

Examine these sources in greater detail and using the table below, record your responses.

NAME OF SOURCE	DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE	ASPECT OF LIFE	WHAT CAN YOU INFER ABOUT THIS ASPECT OF LIFE IN SINGAPORE BEFORE 1819?	WHAT EVIDENCE DOES THE SOURCE PROVIDE TO SUPPORT YOUR INFERENCE?

ANNEX A:
GALLERY TEXT FOR SINGAPURA ZONE IN SHG

You and your students may also view the content of our galleries digitally by using the National Museum of Singapore app.

Step 1:
Go to the Apple Store or Google Play Store to download the National Museum of Singapore app.

Step 2:
Find the "Look Up" icon at the bottom of the screen.

Step 3:
Enter the Look Up code. The Look Up codes are the four digits at the start of each panel, for example, enter **1001** for the section on "Singapura".

Step 4:
To read another panel, just exit and press the "Look Up" icon.

Singapura

1001

Abraham Ortelius (1527 — 1598) was a Flemish cartographer whose *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the World) was regarded as the first modern atlas. In this 1570 map, the Malay Peninsula appears as an elongated extension of mainland Southeast Asia, and Singapore as an appendix, marked "Cincapura", with a cluster of islets. As was common practice for the time, the map also has illustrations of mermaids and imaginary sea creatures.

1002

Although there are only a few historical sources that address Singapore's pre-colonial past, archaeology has helped to fill some of the gaps. Since 1984, archaeologists in Singapore have uncovered traces of pre-colonial Singapura or Temasek in the Singapore River and Fort Canning areas. This settlement flourished for about a hundred years between the 14th and 15th centuries. This was followed by a hiatus in the 16th century, before a brief revival in the 17th century.

Over the years, archaeological excavations have revealed many remarkable finds. Some highlights which were recovered from 2011 to 2015 are displayed here.

All objects in this showcase are courtesy of the Archaeology Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

01	Blue & white Chunping porcelain vase Late Yuan dynasty (14th century) Victoria Concert Hall site beneath Old Parliament Lane This is an extremely rare vase depicting grape and vine motifs. It was produced at Jingdezhen, the centre of Chinese porcelain-making, in Jiangxi province, China.
02	Dehua Whiteware dish c1300s Empress Place site This flat-bottomed dish from the Dehua kilns in Fujian province, China comes in a variety of sizes. Such dishes are very common throughout island Southeast Asia and can be found in the Philipphines and Indonesia.
03	Blue & white porcelain Mid-Ming Dynasty (15th – 16th centuries) Siloso tidal flats, Sentosa These sherds were recovered near the waterways of present-day Keppel Harbour. The sherds may have been discarded by passing ships. This adds further credence to the fact that the Singapore Strait was a well-navigated passage during the 1600s.
04	Green celadon dish with double fish motif c1300s Empress Place site The two excavations at Empress Place in 1998 and 2015 revealed substantial quantities of objects with such double fish motifs. Interestingly, only a handful were found next door at the Parliament House Complex, and none at Fort Canning.

Contact us at nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg if you require the full gallery text and artefact captions for **Annex A**.

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National Museum of Singapore

ARTEFACTUALLY SPEAKING:

Conversations With Museum Educators

This new museum-based learning experience is designed for:

- *Historical Investigation – to complement and strengthen Historical Investigation at the Museum
- CCE and National Education – to allow students to explore issues of home and identity.

*Teachers can also download the new and free Historical Investigation resources that can be found at https://bit.ly/2GAhPo5.

Special extension for pilot programme – the first 20 schools to sign up will experience it for free!

> **The Educators' narratives were excellent. The takeaway artefacts were great too. Well done!**
>
> Teacher

> **The Museum trip was meaningful and interesting. I learnt more things compared to my previous museum trips. The museum educators were engaging as well.**
>
> Secondary 2 student

PROGRAMME FEATURES

- Able to accommodate an **entire level of students** at any one time
- **A student-directed learning experience** where students can choose from a list of artefacts to explore and interact with our Museum Educators
- **Museum Educators** who will engage students in conversations as they share fascinating stories about the artefacts
- A **passport** to guide students' exploration of the galleries
- Opportunity to collect **tokens** that are based on historical documents and objects, which can serve as sources for history learning
- **Pre- and post-visit resources** that teachers can use to facilitate students' learning before and after the programme

Recommended level:
Secondary 1 to 3

Curriculum relevance:
National Education,
Character and Citizenship Education (CCE),
Lower Secondary History,
Upper Secondary Social Studies

Capacity:
Minimum 120, maximum 300 students

Duration: 2.5 hours

Fees: Free of charge for first 20 schools to sign up, on a first come, first served basis.

Contact us at nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg to find out more or to book this programme. Secure your desired slots early!