

N S M  
National Museum  
of Singapore



## INVESTIGATING HISTORY: SINGAPORE'S FIRST DECADE



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: **“What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?”**.

In order to support what students are learning in their classrooms, we have identified artefacts from the Singapore zone in the Singapore History Gallery (SHG) on Level 1, as well as the Growing Up gallery on Level 2, 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 after it gained independence in 1965. Several student resources to scaffold the learning experience are also provided.

We have also suggested a few thinking questions to help students engage with the sources in a more critical manner. A sample of the gallery text and artefact captions for the Singapore zone in the SHG is provided in **Annex A** of this resource.

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](mailto: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** and **B**.



# ABOUT SINGAPORE'S FIRST DECADE

What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?

The 1960s and 1970s was a period when Singapore was beset with many uncertainties as it sought an identity of its own. The country was facing massive unemployment and a declining entrepot trade at the time of independence, while grappling with a rapidly growing population. Yet, in spite of the larger political developments and economic challenges, children growing up in those years enjoyed happy childhood years, whether it was through their daily social experiences at play, school or enjoying popular forms of entertainment.

With this in mind, the curators decided to creatively complement the nation's coming-of-age story in the Singapore zone of the SHG with a parallel narrative of the experiences of a child in the Growing Up gallery.

## **The Singapore zone in the SHG (Level 1) features:**

- Markers of national sovereignty and identity such as the iconic red Singapore passport and a set of the national service uniform that was issued to one of the first batches of enlistees
- Showcases of some made-in-Singapore products which help to illustrate the growth of Singapore's economy from the 1960s through the 1970s
- Interviews with workers who underwent training with their companies and vocational institutes in the 1970s
- A space reminiscent of a HDB flat from the 1970s, where the kitchen takes centre stage



^ The HDB kitchen takes centre stage in "Building a Home" and reveals the lifestyle changes that families experienced in the 1970s as they moved from kampongs and shophouses to HDB flats



^ This space was designed to look like a factory floor from the 1960s

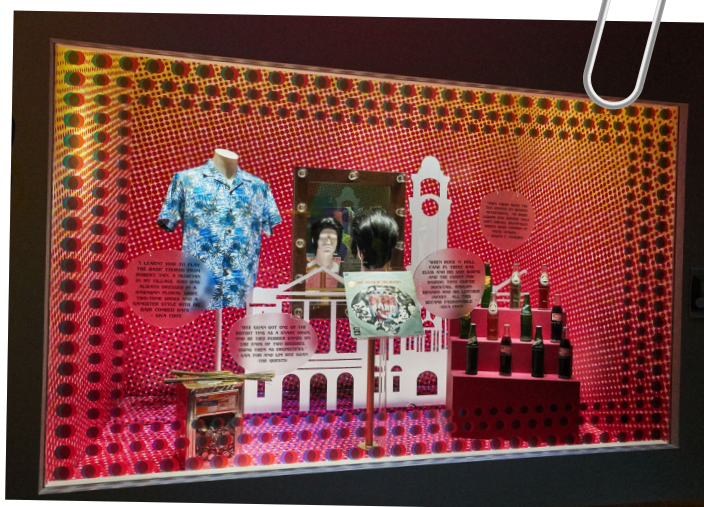


### The Growing Up gallery (Level 2) features:

- A kampong setting with life-size coconut trees at the entrance to create a light-hearted atmosphere within the gallery
- A selection of childhood memorabilia and toys that were sold at local provision shops
- Textbooks used in local schools
- Posters of iconic homegrown films that achieved great popularity in Singapore
- A backroom of window displays designed to offer different entry points into the lives and aspirations of young Singaporeans of that time



^ An overview of the Growing Up gallery



^ Window display inspired by the musical journey of The Quests



## Constructing a Narrative of the Past

When investigating and constructing a narrative of historical developments in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s, historians have to decide which events, people or places are significant enough to be included.

In this museum, the curatorial team decided that the political developments and economic challenges, as well as the story of children growing up in those years were important to tell.

What are the factors that shaped their decision? One of these is the belief that societal values (an adaptable and flexible people, self-made with a tenacious attitude; having a pioneering and creative spirit; cherishing their families; embracing community and diversity) contributed to the emergence of our national Singaporean identity in the post-independence years.

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE



A zoetrope inspired by the stories of Singapore's local female Olympians in the 1960s.

The zoetrope above is part of a display that looks at the personal stories of the pioneer batch of female Olympians in Singapore. Interviews were conducted with three of our local Olympians — Tang Pui Wah, Mary Klass and Janet Jesudason — and an interactive zoetrope featuring three-dimensional figures of Tang Pui Wah and Mary Klass was created. The zoetrope spins when activated, recreating the "passing of the torch" between the two figures and representing the spirit of perseverance exemplified by these female Olympians.



# Suggested Themes And Sources

In this section, we have highlighted several sources that have been grouped around different themes of post-independence Singapore. 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.

You may also view the sources online by going to <https://roots.sg> and keying in the Accession Number for those artefacts that have the number.

## I. CITIZENSHIP AND SENSE OF BELONGING

The story of how Singapore arrived at a national identity starts where the "Merger & Separation" section of the SHG ends. Having exited the somewhat sombre atmosphere of then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's press conference broadcast, visitors now enter "A Nation in the Making" – a room featuring an array of artefacts that symbolise a young Singapore.

Possible sources that can be explored in relation to the theme:



### < Source 1

Singapore Passport  
1960s  
Paper  
National Museum of Singapore  
Accession Number: 2011-00730

In May 1966, a national registration exercise was held in conjunction with the introduction of a new identity card. A new permanent Singapore passport was introduced the following month. One year later, a restricted passport for travel to West Malaysia was introduced.

After gaining self-government in 1959, Singapore unveiled its national symbols, comprising the anthem, flag and crest. When it became an independent country on 9 August 1965, it began to issue other markers of national sovereignty and identity.



**Source 2 >**

"Orchid" series of  
Singapore currency  
notes  
1967  
Paper  
National Museum  
of Singapore

Singapore issued  
its own currency,  
beginning with the  
first "orchid" series  
of notes, in 1967.



**^ Source 3**

William Oh's National Service Uniform  
1969  
Cotton  
National Museum of Singapore

William Oh was among the first 9,000 men called up for national service in 1967 when military conscription was made compulsory for 18-year-old Singaporean males. After a two-year deferment, he began his service in 1969. This was one of the sets of uniforms issued to him upon his enlistment.

Commonly known as "Temasek Green", this uniform was the first to be issued by the Singapore Armed Forces to replace the drill uniforms used by the British.





## Think:

1. Why was there a need to promote a common identity among the people after independence?
2. What were some of these markers or policies that were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s?
3. How effective were these markers or policies in promoting a common identity and a sense of belonging among Singaporeans?



## II. ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

With the initial excitement of independence behind them, Singaporeans literally got down to work in the 1960s and 1970s. The essence of Singapore's economic development, which characterised these two decades, is encapsulated in the "Building an Economy" section. Inspired by the numerous factories that were built during the period, the section was designed to resemble a 1960s factory floor.

Possible sources that can be explored in relation to the theme:

### v Source 1

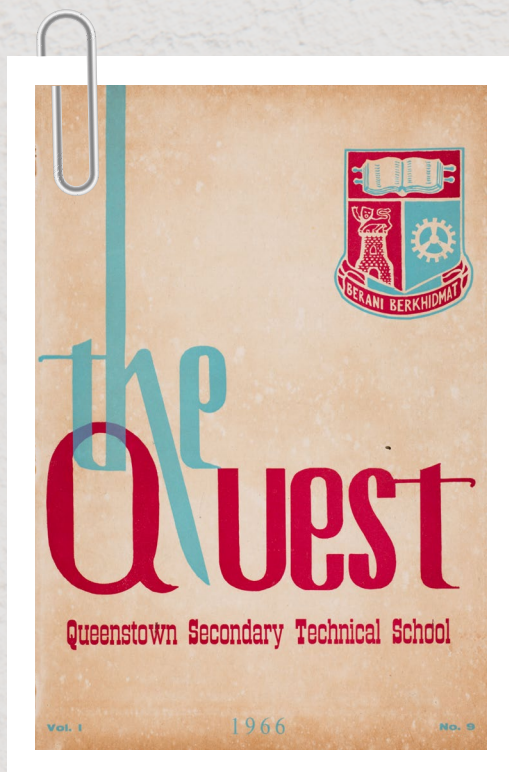
Star Lion Mosquito Coil Boxes  
1960s  
Paper  
National Museum of Singapore

During the early years of industrialisation, Singapore welcomed all types of industries in a bid to create jobs for the population. The government offered incentives to both local and foreign investors to set up new enterprises. Companies could also apply for pioneer status, which exempted them from taxes for five years.

The Malaysia Mosquito Spiral Manufacturing Company Limited was one of the companies that received pioneer status from the Singapore government and opened in Jurong industrial estate in 1965. The factory produced mosquito coils for both local consumption and export.







### < Source 2

*The Quest*, publication of Queenstown Secondary Technical School Vol 1, No.9  
1966

Paper

National Museum of Singapore

Accession Number: 2014-00809

Improving the technical skills of the workforce was vital to Singapore's economic development during these foundational decades. Singaporean workers needed to become equipped with up-to-date skills and knowledge. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government set up technical schools and vocational institutes. Students could opt for either the technical stream or pre-university at Secondary 3.

These school yearbooks documented the activities and experiences of students who studied in Queenstown Technical Secondary School (now known as Queenstown Secondary School). It was established in 1956 as an all-boys' technical school, before becoming co-educational in 1971. It offered pre-university technical courses from 1965.

### Source 3 >

Setron Television Set

Late 1960s to early 1970s

Wood, plastic, glass

National Museum of Singapore

Accession Number: 2015-00054

In the 1970s, Singapore began to shift from a labour-intensive economy to one that was skills- and capital-intensive. There was a focus on precision engineering and electronics, where workers assembled complex components for more sophisticated equipment.

Setron was a household name in Singapore during the 1960s and 1970s. When Setron began manufacturing television sets and radios at its factory at Tanglin Halt in late 1964, it was the first television assembly plant in Southeast Asia.







## Think:

1. Why was there a need to introduce new policies to promote economic development after independence?
2. What were some of these economic policies that were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s?
3. How did these economic policies affect the lives of Singaporeans?
4. How different was Singapore's economy in 1975 from its pre-independence days?

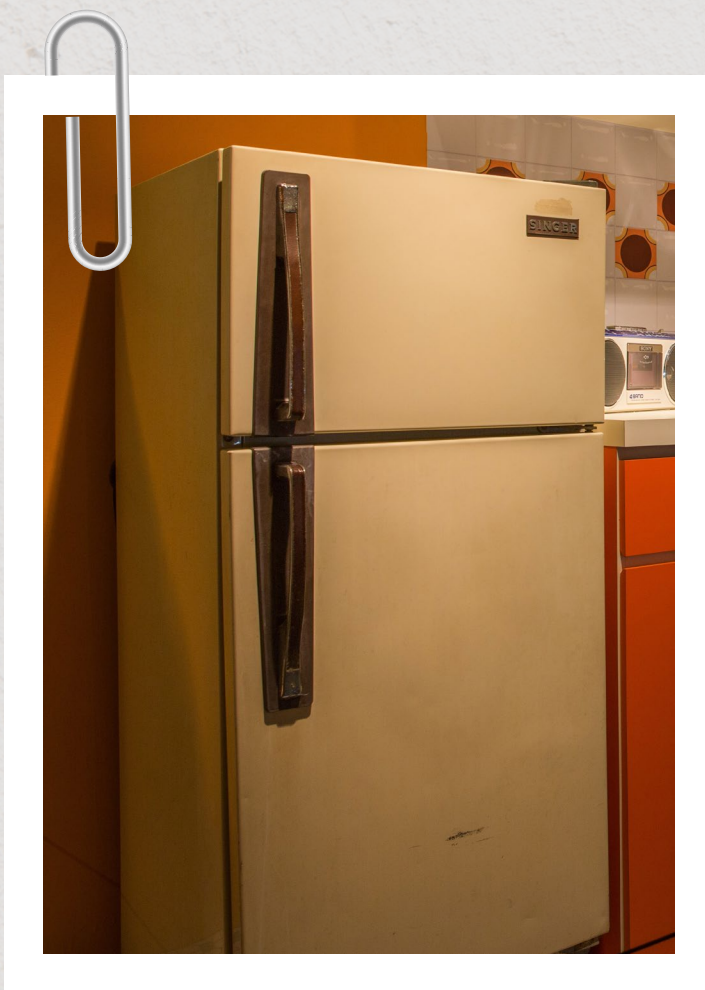


### III. DEVELOPMENTS IN HOUSING AND FAMILY PLANNING

Singapore entered the 1970s with a stronger economy, rising average incomes and improved housing conditions. A large proportion of Singapore's population was moving from kampongs and shop houses into high-rise HDB (Housing & Development Board) flats.

In designing this section of the gallery, the curatorial team took inspiration from the home setting of the 1970s to showcase the pride of new home owners and the changes in their lifestyles as they moved into their new homes.

Possible sources that can be explored in relation to the theme:



#### < Source 1

Singer Refrigerator

1970s

Metal, plastic

National Museum of Singapore

The HDB kitchen of the 1970s and 1980s was a modern space, both in actual homes and as depicted in advertisements and magazines. The kitchen design, layout and equipment reflected the modern conveniences and lifestyles desired by families.

Home appliances such as this Singer Refrigerator were once the prized possessions of Singapore families, purchased only when the family could afford it.





### < Source 2

Moulinex Mixer  
1974  
Metal, plastic  
National Museum of  
Singapore  
Accession Number:  
2014-00974

With more women entering the workforce, "time-savers" such as rice cookers and this Moulinex mixer also became popular with families.



### Source 3 >

After the Honeymoon —  
the story of Ah Toon and  
Ah Seck  
1960s-70s  
Paper  
National Museum of  
Singapore  
Accession Number:  
2014-00619

From the late 1960s, the government began to encourage households to practise family planning in order to manage population growth. However, family planning was a new concept to most families. Hence, brochures, booklets and posters were produced to educate the public about family planning.

This illustrated booklet, produced by the Ministry of Culture, tells of the unhappy marriage between the fictional characters Ah Toon and Ah Seck. Told in Singapore's four official languages, the story shows the negative effects of having "unplanned" children and the problems associated with having a large family.





## Think:

1. Why was there a need to develop public housing in Singapore?
2. What were some of the policies that were introduced in the area of housing?
3. How did these housing policies affect the lives of Singaporeans?
4. Why did the government implement the two-child policy in the 1970s?



#### IV. POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT AND YOUTHFUL ASPIRATIONS

The Growing Up gallery presents the daily lives of Singaporeans in the 1950s-1960s and how the world of entertainment shaped the aspirations and outlook of that generation. The three amusement parks – New World, Great World and Happy World – for example, appealed to both young and old with its eclectic mix of performances and attractions. Films were also popular with the various communities in post-war Singapore. This era was known as the “golden period” of Singapore’s film history, where a growing pool of films were shot and produced locally.

All in all, popular entertainment provided an insight into the lives of children and youth growing up in the era – their self-expressions, individual preferences, and search for identity.

Possible sources that can be explored in relation to the theme:



##### ^ Source 1

Universe Explorer

1960s

Tin, glass

National Museum of Singapore

Accession Number: 2007-51251

The Universe Explorer was produced in the 1960s when space exploration was popularised as a result of successful American space expeditions.



**Source 2 >**

*Haji's Book of Malayan Nursery Rhymes*

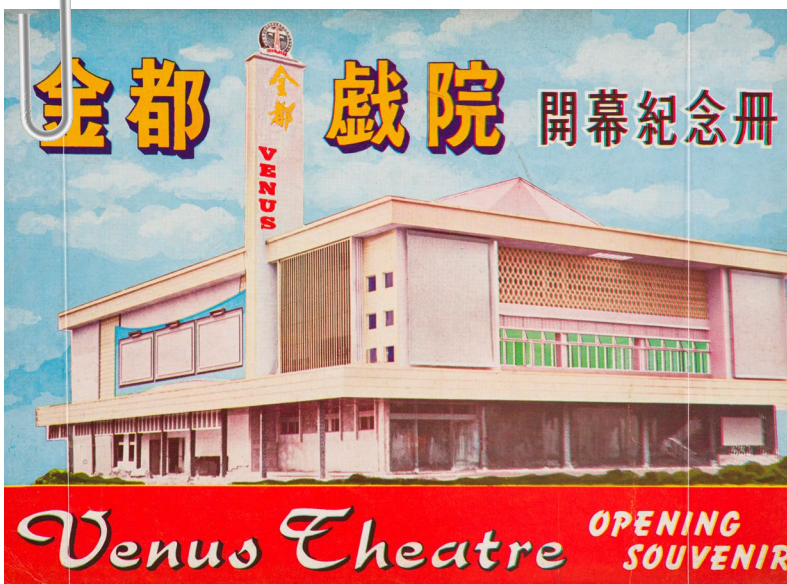
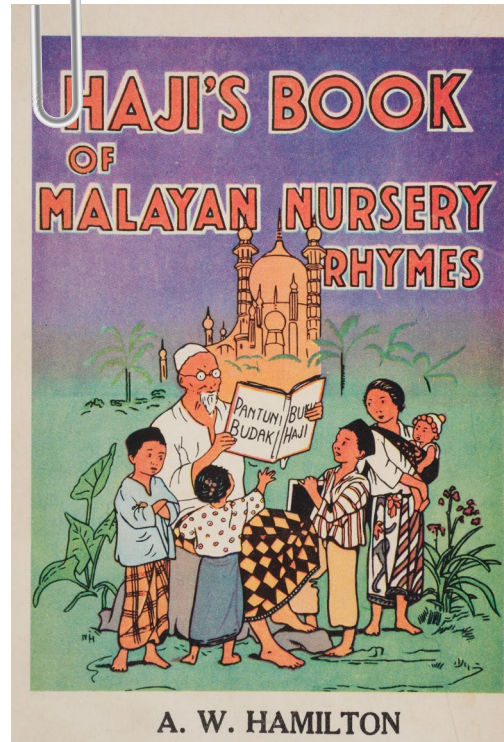
1956

Paper

National Museum of Singapore

Accession Number: 2010-02070

The nursery rhymes in this book are presented in English and Malay to encourage children to pick up both languages. The illustrations accompanying the nursery rhymes depict local people in their ethnic costumes.



**< Source 3**

Souvenir Magazine

Commemorating the

Opening of Venus Theatre

1965

Paper

National Museum of

Singapore

The Venus Theatre was officially opened in 1965 and owned by the Kong Ngee Film Company. The Venus Theatre and Golden City Theatre were the first two movie theatres in the Queenstown district.





#### < Source 4

Chinese Vinyl Record by  
Wong Ching Yian  
1967  
Paper  
National Museum of  
Singapore  
Accession Number:  
2008-03009

Wong Ching Yian was a popular singer who shot to fame after winning a singing competition organised by the Ministry of Development in 1965. Known as the Elvis Presley of Singapore, Wong was known for hits such as "Manli" and "Serenade of Green Island".

#### Source 5 >

Malay Vinyl Record by Parlophone  
Malay Records  
1950s — 60s  
Paper  
National Museum of Singapore  
Accession Number: 2000-01095

This was a Malay recording of Tiong Hwa Rumba, or Chinese Rumba. It was common in the 1950s and 1960s for Malay music to be infused with different styles that also included Indian and Western genres, thus allowing Malay music to develop a new identity and its own cultural substance.

In addition, folk songs (and some traditional songs) were increasingly modernised and popularised during this period to go along with this new identity. These Malay singers and their songs became very popular, especially in the urban areas.







## Think:

1. What were the forms of entertainment available for children and youth growing up in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?
2. How did popular entertainment shape the aspirations of young Singaporeans?
3. How is popular entertainment an important aspect of the study of Singapore's nation-building process?



# RESOURCES

## National Museum of Singapore Publications

1. Chung May Khuen et al. *Vintage Singapore: Souvenirs from the Recent Past*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet and National Museum of Singapore, 2006.
2. Yeo, Stephanie, editor. *(Re)presenting Histories: Experiences and Perspectives from the National Museum of Singapore*. National Museum of Singapore, 2017.
3. Murthy, Vidya. *Entertainment: Forms of Leisure in Singapore, 1920s – 1970s*. National Museum of Singapore, 2017.

## Other Publications

4. *Heart Work*. Singapore: Singapore Economic Development Board and EDB Society, 2002.
5. Ho Chee Kong and Jun, Pow-Zubillaga, editor. *Singapore Soundscape: Musical Renaissance of a Global City*. Singapore: National Library Board, 2014.
6. Huff, W. G. *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
7. *Industrial Infrastructure: Growing in Tandem with the Economy*. Singapore: Cengage Learning Asia Pte Ltd, 2013.
8. Kong, Lily and Brenda Yeoh. *The Politics of Landscapes in Singapore: Constructions of "Nation"*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.
9. Lee Kuan Yew. *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965 – 2000*. Singapore: Times Editions, Singapore Press Holdings, 2000.
10. Lee, Soo Ann. *Singapore, From Place to Nation*. Singapore: Pearson Education South Asia Pte Ltd, 2007.

## Roots.sg

11. National Heritage Board. "Traditional Malay Games."  
<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/stories/traditional-malay-games/story>
12. National Heritage Board. "P Ramlee."  
<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/stories/p-ramlee/story>
13. National Museum of Singapore. "Building Memories" People, Architecture, Independence." *Lecture by Dr Lai Chee Kien, Singapore University of Technology and Design*. 29 July 2017.  
<https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/resources/Videos/Historiasg-Building-Memories-People-Architecture-Independence>



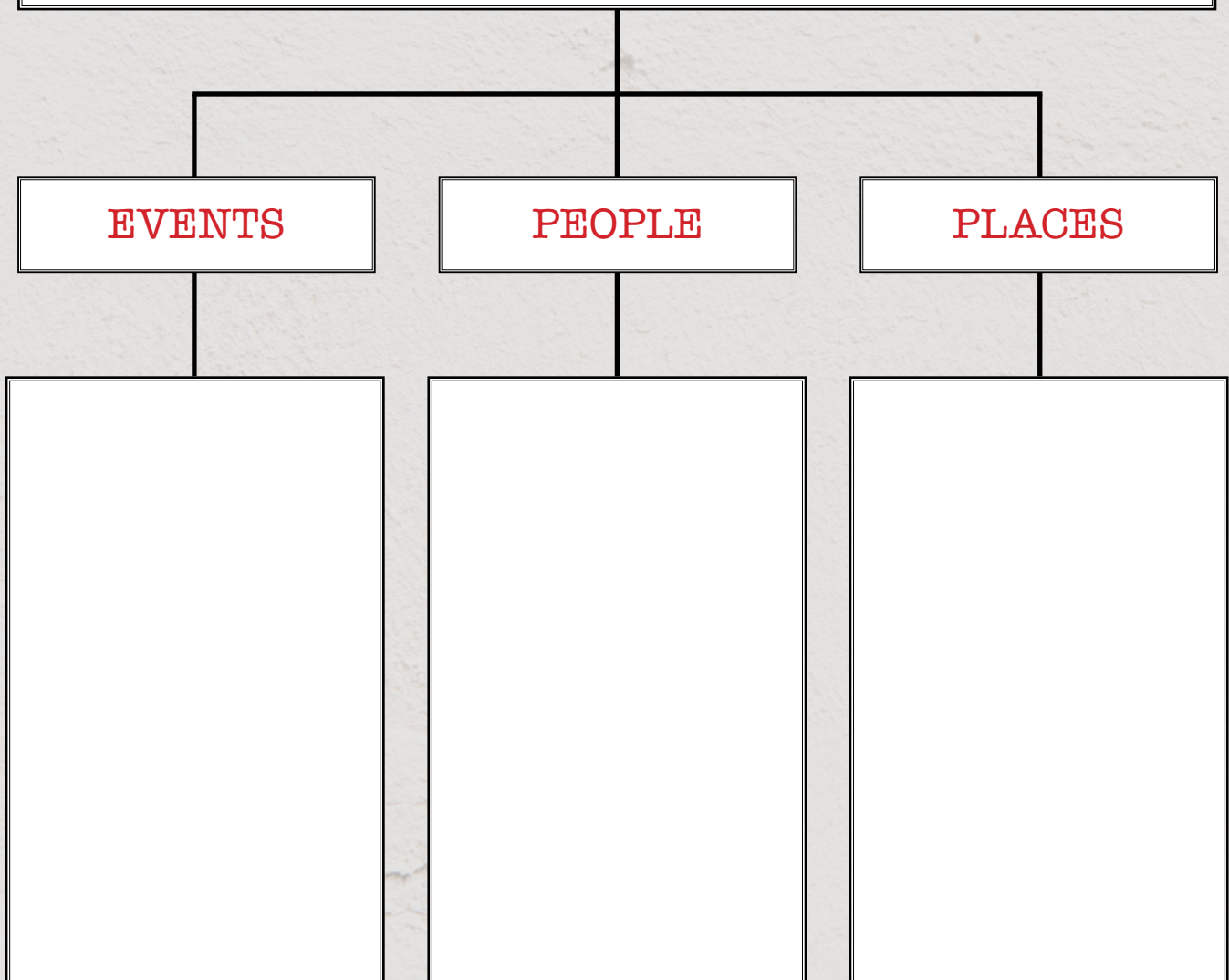
## What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?

### YOUR TASK:

You will be going to the National Museum of Singapore to conduct your Historical Investigation on developments in Singapore after it gained independence in 1965. Your task is to explore the evidence presented in the gallery and find out more about events, people or places that were significant in the 1960s and 1970s.

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

### What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?





## Why gather evidence at the museum?

### YOUR TASK:

In the National Museum of Singapore, what we have done is to present Singapore's past in the form of a narrative that will generate historical understanding. In order to allow 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 Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s come alive for visitors.

## Growing Up Gallery

SOUND	SIGHT
Describe the sounds you can hear.	Describe what you see. <i>E.g. Artefacts, contextualised displays, replicas, props</i>
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.	



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## Singapore Zone in SHG

SOUND	SIGHT
Describe the sounds you can hear.	Describe what you see. <i>E.g. Artefacts, contextualised displays, replicas, props</i>
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.	

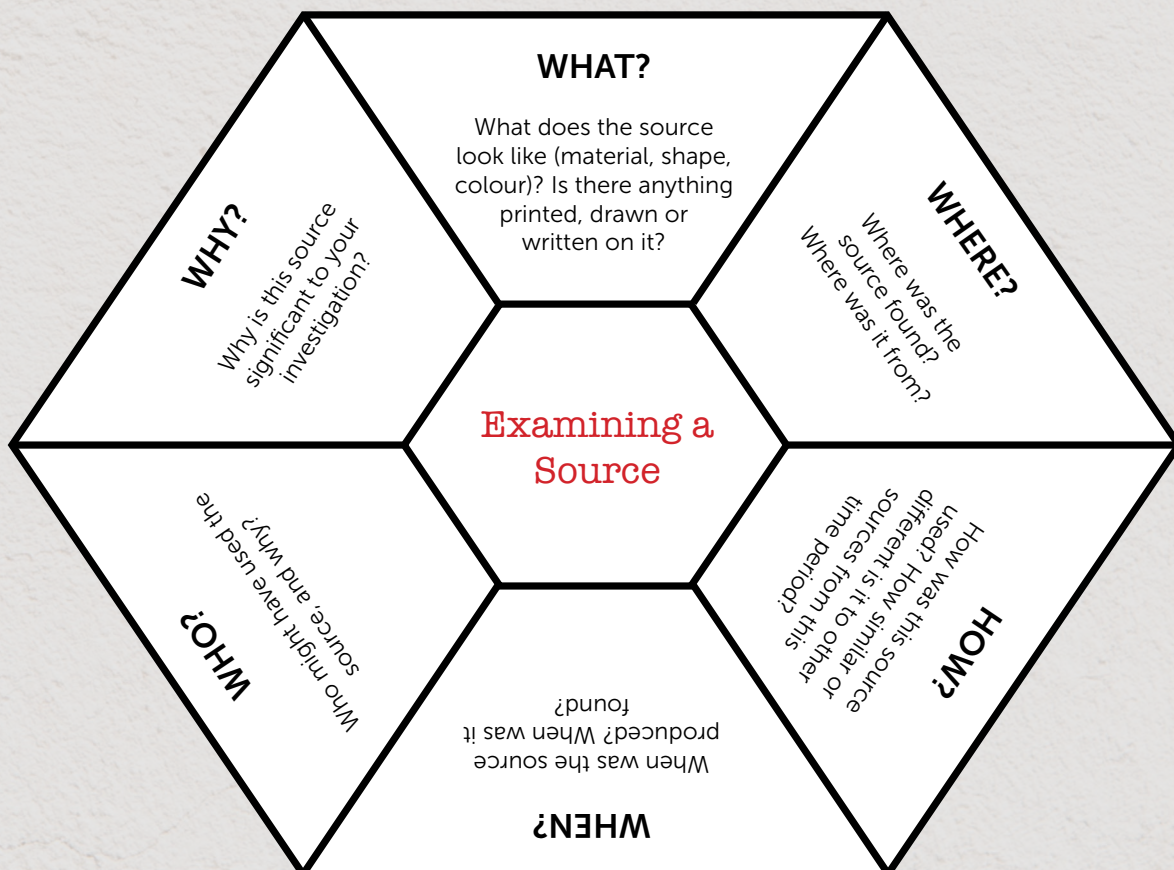


## What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?

### YOUR TASK:

The 1960s and 1970s was a period when Singapore was beset with many uncertainties as it sought an identity of its own. The country was facing massive unemployment and a declining entrepot trade at the time of independence, while grappling with a rapidly growing population. Yet, in spite of the larger political developments and economic challenges, children growing up in those years enjoyed happy childhood years, whether it was through their daily social experiences at play, school or enjoying popular forms of entertainment. With this in mind, the curators decided to creatively complement the nation's coming-of-age story in the Singapore zone of the SHG with a parallel narrative of the experiences of a child in the Growing Up gallery.

In the same way, you as a young historian can construct your own narrative of the past: First, select a few sources in the galleries 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 object and other relevant background information, what inferences can you make about how life was like in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?



**Making Inferences: What can you infer from the sources about life in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?**



## What should be remembered about Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s?

### YOUR TASK:

Consolidate the information you have gathered at the museum. Which sources have provided you with the most relevant information on the aspects of life in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s that you are investigating?

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 in the 1960s and 1970s?	What evidence does the source provide to support your inference?



# Annex A:

## Gallery Text for Singapore 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 **1162** for the section on "A Nation in the Making".

### **Step 4:**

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



1162

### A Nation in the Making

#### Becoming Singaporean

While Singapore became an independent nation in 1965, several events took place in 1959 that were crucial to the formation of a national identity. In June that year, Singapore's first fully-elected government was sworn in. National Loyalty Week was held in December to introduce the new state flag, crest and anthem, and to install Yusof bin Ishak as Singapore's Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State). Two years earlier, a series of plays on Radio Malaya had invited listeners to imagine what a Malayan nation would look like. Entitled *A Nation in the Making*, the plays were written by Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, who was a journalist and founding member of the PAP. In June 1959, Mr Rajaratnam became Singapore's first minister of culture. He set out to "create in our people an awareness that they belong to Singapore and that Singapore belongs to them". Among his many contributions in this area, arguably the most significant was writing the national pledge in 1966, which students still recite daily in school.

Timeline:

1959

The state flag, crest and anthem were unveiled at City Hall

1163

#### Mace of the City of Singapore

1953

Silver-gilt

2003-00230

Prominent Chinese philanthropist Loke Wan Tho presented this Mace to the City of Singapore. The occasion was the granting of City status to Singapore by King George VI in 1951. The Mace was made by Messrs Hamilton & Inches, Goldsmiths of Edinburgh, and designed by British sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson.

The design motifs were proposed by a committee comprising Loke, university professors and staff from the Raffles Museum. The silver figures of a Chinese, Malay, Indian and European, linked by a garland of flowers, symbolise Singapore's multi-ethnic population. They stand atop a castle bearing the City's Arms. Other motifs reference Singapore's ecology, culture and trade.

1164

After gaining self-government in 1959, Singapore unveiled its national symbols, comprising the anthem, flag and crest. When it became an independent country on 9 August 1965, it began to issue other markers of national sovereignty and identity.

In May 1966, a national registration exercise was held in conjunction with the introduction of a new identity card. A new permanent Singapore passport was introduced the following month. One year later, a restricted passport for travel to West Malaysia was introduced.

Singapore also issued its own currency, beginning with the first "orchid" series of notes in 1967.

Contact us at [nhb\\_nm\\_schools@nhb.gov.sg](mailto:nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg) if you require the full gallery text and artefact captions for Annex A and Annex B.

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# 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!

## 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

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

**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](mailto:nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg) to find out more or to book this programme.  
Secure your desired slots early!