



**Esplanade
Presents**

**Feed Your
Imagination**



International Friendship Day

An Esplanade Co-production
By The Necessary Stage (Singapore)
Written by Haresh Sharma
Directed by Lim Shien Hian

25 – 28 Jun 2024
Esplanade Recital Studio

Pre-show Educator's Guide

Recommended Level: Secondary – Tertiary

Dear Educators,

This *Feed Your Imagination (F.Y.I)* resource pack contains a pre-show information guide which you can share with your students.

In the guide you will find the following:

- Information about *International Friendship Day* and the performance
- Suggested pre-show resources and discussion questions

If you have any queries or feedback, please feel free to get in touch with the team – we hope you find the information useful and relevant.

Warmest Regards,

The Children & Youth Team

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ABOUT INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP DAY

It's International Friendship Day at MPSS but friendship seems to be the last thing on the students' minds.

While the foreign students Adi, Anton and Liqin are thinking about what to showcase at their booths and questioning why local students don't have to put up booths, the Drama Club boys are unhappy about them not putting any effort towards the much-anticipated Singapore Youth Festival (SYF).

Meanwhile, Carys is facing pressure at home for losing her spot as the school's top Maths student.

Will she lose her top spot to an international scholar?

Will the Drama Club boys get the foreigners to join in the chorus?

Will Adi get the booth of his choice?

Written by Cultural Medallion recipient Haresh Sharma and directed by TNS' Associate Artist Lim Shien Hian, *International Friendship Day* promises an invigorating and engaging interactive theatre experience for youths to explore and understand cross-cultural differences.

International Friendship Day was first commissioned by Singapore Kindness Movement in 2015 and was restaged as part of *Peer Pleasure 2016* and as an online interactive experience under Esplanade's *Feed Your Imagination 2021*.

It is supported by the National Arts Council as part of the NAC School Arts Excursion Programme.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the performance, students will be more empowered to:

- explore issues related to integration between Singaporean and non-Singaporean students
- develop a sense of empathy and compassion for others
- consider multiple perspectives in effective communication
- learn skills to effect changes in their lives

WHAT TO EXPECT

STUDENTS

What will I be watching?

- You will be watching an interactive performance of the play *International Friendship Day*.
- It is presented as a semi-realistic play experience.
- At several junctures in the play, the audience will be invited to interact and help the characters make important decisions.
- At the end of the play, a facilitator will invite selected audience members to take on a role of a character and be part of a discussion about what they have just seen.

What is a Playwright?

- A playwright writes the scripts of theatre plays. They decide what each character says, where each scene takes place, and how the story begins, develops and ends, amongst other things.
- Haresh Sharma is the playwright who wrote *International Friendship Day*.
- He creates plays collaboratively with the director and actors. This process is called 'devising'.
- To find out more about Haresh Sharma, refer to **page 7**.

What is a Director?

- A director is someone who oversees the creative vision of a theatre production. They work to bring out the best performance in the actors and to tell the story in the best way possible using the set, costumes, props, and more.
- Lim Shien Hian is directing this year's staging of *International Friendship Day*.
- To find out more about Lim Shien Hian, refer to **page 7**.

Who are the main characters?

- **Mrs. Irene Sitoh-Foo and Mrs Harrison** played by Masturah Oli
- **Adi, Haziq and Carys' Dad** played by Irsyad Dawood
- **Anton and Gerard** played by Tejas Hirah
- **Liqin, Carys and Mdm Kong** played by Cheryl Ho

What are some of the interactive elements I will encounter?

This play will include some interactive segments that will allow you to speak with and get to know the characters better. There will also be opportunities for you to take on the role of one of the characters to offer alternative ways of approaching difficult situations presented in the play. This is in line with the principles of Forum theatre.

What is Forum Theatre?

Have you ever watched a play and felt like you wanted to change how a character reacts to a situation? Have you ever wished you could change the outcome of a play? Forum theatre allows you to do just that. It is one of the many forms of theatre under **Theatre of the Oppressed**.

Theatre of the Oppressed was created by Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal. It comprises a variety of theatre forms and tools, with the aim of teaching and empowering people to change their world. The interactive theatrical experience that you will experience draws on techniques used in Forum theatre. You will be invited to change the choices that the characters in the story make.

How is Forum Theatre different from traditional theatre?

When you think about the experience of watching a play, you think about sitting quietly in your seat and enjoying the show that is presented in front of you. This is a very common experience for most of the plays you may have encountered. More ‘conventional’ plays may present a slice of life or a story onstage and invite the audience to watch it unfold; the experience of the audience is one that is passive.

What you are going to experience in *International Friendship Day* requires an active participation from you – borrowing concepts from Forum theatre in action. The Necessary Stage invites you to empathise, take perspectives, and even change the outcomes of different scenarios. You will need to put on your thinking hat, and get your hearts and minds involved.

What is Hot Seating?

Have you ever wondered why a character said what they said or what they *really* want? Have you ever wished that you could ask them a question? Hot seating allows you to do just that. It is a drama convention that puts a character in the “**hot seat**” and allows you to ask them questions. It allows you to explore the deeper thoughts, emotions and motivations of a character that are not expressed in the play.

This video shows you how Hot Seating works: <https://tinyurl.com/hotseatingdemo>

At one of the interaction sections, you may be invited by facilitators to discuss the conflict that plagues the play. In this segment, there might be an opportunity for you to invite characters into the “hot seat” where you can ask them (the characters, not the actors) questions about their thoughts, emotions, backstories, or motives.

Key Terms in *International Friendship Day*

Here are some terms that will be used in this interactive version of *International Friendship Day*. Some will be used during the scenes from the play, and others during the interactive segments. The explanations and video links below provide some context.

1. **Microaggression** – Something offensive said or done by someone – intentionally or unintentionally – that is based on an unfounded bias.
2. **Harassment** – Offensive behaviour that is intentionally targeted at someone to threaten, humiliate, or demean.
3. **Racism** – Prejudice or discrimination against an individual or community based on perceived differences.
4. **Bullying** – A form of repeated aggressive behaviour that aims to intentionally cause harm and/or discomfort to someone.
5. **Xenophobia / Xenophobic Racism** – Fear of prejudice against people from other countries, who are perceived as foreign or strange.
6. **Empathy** – The ability to understand and feel what another person is experiencing.
7. **Multiculturalism** – An ideology that supports and embraces the presence of different cultural and/or ethnic groups within a society.
8. **Assimilation vs Integration** – Assimilation is the process of one cultural group gradually taking on the behaviours and practices of another (usually dominant) cultural group within the society. Integration is the practice of bringing together different groups of people to form a whole, while recognising and giving equal rights to all groups.
9. **Naturalised Citizen** – A foreigner who has been granted citizenship in the country after being a lawful permanent resident after a stipulated number of years.
10. **Second Generation** – Children whose parents have immigrated to a particular country.
11. **Anti-play** – An anti-play is a play with a negative or unsatisfactory ending for the characters. This is a feature of forum theatre plays.
12. **Intervene** – When an audience member actively participates and steps into the role of a character to offer solutions or alternatives to the character's reactions.
13. **Spect-actor** – A member of the audience who intervenes. This person changes their role from being the 'spectator' to an 'actor' responsible for changing how a character reacts. However, one does not need to be an actor with acting skills to be a 'spect-actor' taking action.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT – HARESH SHARMA

Haresh has been the Resident Playwright of The Necessary Stage since 1990. He was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2015. To date, he has written more than 120 plays which have been staged in over 20 cities. His play, *Off Centre*, was selected by the Ministry of Education as a Literature text for 'N' and 'O' Levels.

Haresh has 13 publications of his plays, including *Trilogy*, *Shorts 1*, *Shorts 2* and *Don't Forget to Remember Me*. His works have been translated into Malay, Mandarin, Greek and Italian. He was awarded Best Original Script for *Fundamentally Happy*, *Good People* and *Gemuk Girls* at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards respectively. Haresh also had the honour of having a selection of his works featured at Esplanade's first playwright-centred season at *The Studios* in 2017.

Haresh is the first non-American to be awarded the prestigious Goldberg Master Playwright by New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 2011. In 2014, he was conferred the Southeast Asian Writers (or S.E.A. Write) Award (Singapore), which recognises and honours literary excellence in the ASEAN region.

Find out what other theatre practitioners and observers say about Haresh Sharma on *Esplanade Offstage*:

www.esplanade.com/offstage/arts/theres-something-about-sharma

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR – LIM SHIEN HIAN

Shien Hian is a theatre practitioner, director, writer, and actor most interested in real, lived stories that Singaporeans can intimately relate to. Primarily a director, he has most recently worked as an Assistant Director on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Wild Rice), *Old Gaze* (The Necessary Stage), *Recalling Mother* and *The Fourth Trimester* (both Checkpoint Theatre), the latter being The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards' Production of the Year for 2022. Coming into his own, Shien spearheaded a production of Jean Tay's *Boom* under pop-up pub theatre A Mirage.

Ever seeking to expand his repertoire, Shien most recently wrote *The Battle of Waterloo Street* under Centre 42 for the Singapore Night Festival, and has moved into producing too – he will be bringing the shows *Psychobitch* (Wild Rice) and *Forked* (Jo Tan) to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2024.

With his rich experience in the different aspects of creating theatre, he hopes to now incorporate more focus on the community in his research and creation processes as an Associate Artist with The Necessary Stage.

IG: [@shienofhian](https://www.instagram.com/shienofhian)

ABOUT THE NECESSARY STAGE (TNS)

1. If you are still a student in secondary school, TNS is older than you are! It was formed in 1987 and will be 37 in 2024.
2. TNS was officially formed by Alvin Tan and a few friends — they were bitten by the theatre bug after taking part in a drama competition as students in National University of Singapore.
3. TNS has a history of nurturing and working with local talents. Some of these include practitioners such as Kok Heng Leun, Chong Tze Chien, Natalie Henedige, Jeff Chen, and Siti Khalijah Zainal, who themselves have gone on to make a name for themselves in the Singapore theatre scene.
4. Both Alvin Tan and Haresh Sharma are recipients of the Cultural Medallion award, which is the highest honour an arts practitioner in Singapore can receive.

For more information, visit www.necessary.org and tnsarchives.com.

Follow TNS on:

Facebook at www.facebook.com/thenecessarystage

Twitter at www.twitter.com/tns_sg

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EDUCATORS

International Friendship Day covers themes that revolve around xenophobia, bullying and name-calling in Singapore.

The following resources will help better prepare your students for the interactive theatre experience. The experience will be more meaningful for them if you assign some of the following suggested resources as pre-show reading or viewing material and facilitate a discussion on the suggested questions provided on **pages 10 to 11**.

READ, WATCH and DISCUSS BEFORE THE SHOW

Here are some articles, videos, questions, and information that will give you and your students a better understanding of *International Friendship Day*. Some are related to the history and context of the play while others are about the themes covered in the play.

On Commemorating International Friendship Day

International Friendship Day was launched as part of Singapore's National Education Curriculum in 1987. You can find out more about its purpose here:

- <https://tinyurl.com/sg-ne-nlb>.
- <https://www.sg101.gov.sg/resources/connexionsg/internationalfriendshipday/>

With Singapore becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, it is important to note that the nurturing of friendships and understanding have gone and will go beyond just our South-east Asian neighbours.

On Xenophobia & Microaggressions

[Watch](#) a video to understand what xenophobia and xenophobic racism are and their origins. [<https://tinyurl.com/xenophobiaracism-bbc-ifd>]

[Watch](#) a video that explains microaggressions using mosquitoes as a metaphor. [<https://tinyurl.com/microaggression-mosquito-ifd>]

[Watch](#) a video for a deeper understanding of microaggressions and how we can create conversation through those moments. [<https://tinyurl.com/alittlelessononmicroaggression>]

[Watch](#) a video of migrant workers responding to comments made by Singaporeans. [<https://tinyurl.com/migrantworkersrespond>]

[Watch](#) a social experiment where foreigners in Singapore discuss xenophobia. [<https://tinyurl.com/sgkindness-xenophobia>]

[Read](#) a news article about the recent discussions on xenophobic behaviours in Singapore. [<https://tinyurl.com/st-xenophobia-2021>]

[Read](#) an Instagram post on the xenophobic racism surrounding CECA in Singapore. [<https://tinyurl.com/kopico-ceca>]

On Perspective Taking and Empathy

[Watch](#) a little story about perspective taking and empathy.

[<https://tinyurl.com/sometimesyoureacaterpillar-afd>]

[Watch](#) an animated video where Dr. Brené Brown, notable writer and researcher, talks about what empathy is and is not.

[<https://tinyurl.com/brenebrown-empathy-afd>]

Pre-Show Discussion Triggers to Activate Schema and Discussion

The following eight quotes from various sources serve as prompts for pre-show discussions that you can have with your students. Here are some questions that can serve as starters for the conversation:

1. What are your feelings and views on having/being foreigners within the community that you live in?
2. How do you feel towards some of the thoughts expressed below? Talk us through why you feel that way.
3. a. What would be your response(s) to some of the thoughts expressed below?
b. For thoughts that are not phrased in a very tactful manner, how would you respond to them respectfully?
4. What are some questions you might have for the individuals who expressed the following thoughts?

“Having to share common spaces with people of different perspectives and cultural habits can take us out of our comfort zone. Foreigners are sometimes perceived as competition for jobs and places in our top schools. We need to address these issues openly and work actively to maintain social cohesion.”

—Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of National Development and
Ministry of Education, 2010

“Upon detecting a harmful message, Empathy [a Singlish profanity filter] will alert the user – via a pop-up text box – of how it could be inappropriate, such as how the recipient might feel upon receiving it. But it does not block the message – the user still has the discretion to send it.”

- Profanity Filter made in Singapore for
slurs in Dialect, Singlish
The Straits Times

“I really don’t understand why there are so many Chinese students competing with us. The bell-curve is making it impossible for any Singaporeans to score As.”

—Singapore student from NUS

*“Which other country can you find a ‘scholar’ calling his sponsors ‘dogs’, and still have one of the MPs backing him up and the rest of the ruling party keeping quiet? Too bad I am a Singaporean, else I will also get myself a scholarship here! *sarcasm*”*

—Anonymous

“Fostering inter-cultural skills and a global perspective must begin in school, where students from all walks of life can share common experiences, learn to relate to one another, and form life-long friendships.”

—Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of National Development and
Ministry of Education, 2010

“I read about these external incidents where there was a case that one guy did not wear a mask and he happened to be an Indian so one guy reported him. Another guy kept a bag on a nearby seat on MRT and did not let other people sit. So, they kind of bashed that guy up. It is very common in Singapore—the social policing—and if it happens to be a minority race, I think, it [gets] escalated very fast.”

— Jayshree, Permanent Resident in
Singapore. Moved to Singapore as a
university student
[quoted from academic.sg, article by
Laavanya Kathiravelu]

“The other thing is, if you read any online forum or post, for example, Facebook posts of CNA or the Straits Times, and if you see the comment section, there will be lots of bad comments on Indians particularly.... More than that, you can see a lot of comments against Indians about giving us jobs, offering the models to India, and allowing Indians to come to Singapore, etc. In our friend circle, we decided that we are not going to read any comments and we stopped [doing that] actually.... this experience actually hurts you. You feel that we do not belong to this place.

- Gaurav, an Indian immigrant who has lived in Singapore since 2017
[quoted from academic.sg, article by
Laavanya Kathiravelu]

“Singaporeans must remain confident and open and welcome those who will strengthen our team and help us and our children do better. For their part, new immigrants must make the effort to integrate into our community. They must acquire our social values, our cultural values, adopt our social norms and commit their loyalty and love to Singapore.”

—PM Lee Hsien Loong, National Day
Message 2012

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS: FOUR MORE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using some of the resources above, facilitate a discussion with your students after they have had a chance to go through some of the resources provided.

1. What are some words or phrases that come to mind when you hear ‘xenophobia’?
2. Are you or do you know someone who is a foreigner living in Singapore? What is the experience like for you/them?
3. Reflect on your experience in school: how often do the local and foreign students hang out together?
4. How do you think your school environment intentionally assimilates or integrates foreign students, if at all? Discuss your thoughts in relation to specific moments.

FIVE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHILE WATCHING

Here are a few questions you can get your students to ask themselves as they are watching the show.

1. How are the characters feeling?
2. What does each character want?
3. What is preventing the characters from getting what they want?
4. What would I do if I were in his/her shoes?
5. How would I change the outcome of the conflict(s) present?

On Student Guide

1. The Student Guide will be distributed to all students on the day of performance.
2. The Student Guide is designed to help you carry out post-show reflection and discussions and to further the conversation. We urge you to take some time and carry out some of the activities given in the guide to extend the learning into the classroom, after the show has ended.

Theatre Etiquette

Minding our manners helps everyone enjoy the show. Here are some things to note:

- Upon the lights dimming in the theatre, turn your attention to the stage as the show is about to begin.
- During the performance, keep an open mind, watch and listen carefully. Talking during the performance will disturb others around you.
- Refrain from using or checking your smart devices (i.e. mobiles phones, watches, PLDs). The bright lights not only distract the people around you, but also the performers.
- Do not eat or drink in the theatre.
- There will be moments where the facilitators will ask for your participation, those are great times to share your thoughts. Remember to do it in a respectful manner: raise your hand, wait to be called upon, share your name, and then proceed to share your thoughts.
- When your peers are sharing their thoughts or bravely taking on a role on stage, show your support by listening to them.
- When the show has ended, pick up after yourselves: take all your belongings and any trash with you.

Interested to learn more about the arts? Check out www.esplanade.com/schools for more resources and content!