



**Esplanade
Presents**

**Feed Your
Imagination**

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP DAY

An Esplanade Co-production
By The Necessary Stage (Singapore)
25 – 28 Jun 2024, Tue – Fri

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Thank you for being here and spending this time with us.

International Friendship Day is a fun and interactive play about serious issues such as integration, education and bullying.

I wrote this play to highlight some of the conflicts students face in school. As part of my research, I interviewed teachers and students. They were open about their daily struggles. Some of the students shared how they were bullied, and even how they overcame bullying.

Writing this play made me realise how we often see the difference in others more than the similarities. Why is that so? Don't we all have so much more in common? Why do we then pick on things that divide us?

Our differences should be celebrated; the way we look, where we come from, our beliefs, the languages we speak, our cultures, and backgrounds. That's because each of us is rich in our own way; we have our own experiences and stories.

I would like to share an excerpt from an interview I conducted with a secondary school student who was new to Singapore:

"I tried to be cheerful. Like, 'Hi! I'm so and so...' Then I sat down, but it didn't seem like anyone really noticed our presence or cared. I had to be the first one to ask the name of the person sitting next to me. I was the one to initiate. Then I thought oh we're still in class. Probably when we have our break, then people will start to get to know each other. But break came and it didn't happen. Everyone minded their own business. I didn't get to know everyone's names until I don't know when. For two years, I had no Singapore [sic] friends. I had classmates and acquaintances but no close friends."

Conflict is inevitable in life, even with family and friends. Uncertainty and fear can also be barriers. But sometimes we just need to take a moment to listen and to empathise. We never know what someone is going through until we talk to them. When we connect with someone, we open ourselves to a beautiful and lifelong friendship.

Enjoy the show.

Haresh Sharma
Playwright

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I remember the very first show by The Necessary Stage (TNS) that I watched, way back in 2010 when I was still a student. I remember being mesmerised by the different languages used and the clever use of the set. I remember the brilliant acting by the cast of just three and the fierce arguments between the characters.

Throughout the years, I have attended many other theatre shows, performances, art exhibitions, and events. But that first show was the one that stayed with me. Over the years, I looked forward to going to TNS shows, hoping that one day, I would be able to direct one.

With *International Friendship Day*, I have the chance to do just that—and funnily enough, with a show for students as well. It is my hope that in this performance, you will laugh and learn together with the characters, and embark on your own journey in the world of stories, just as I did before.

International Friendship Day is as relevant today as it was when it was first written in 2015. The discourse about immigrants, the worries about foreign talent taking our spots, the differences between locals and non-locals... and these have only intensified in recent years.

Yet in between news reports of the economy and TikTok reels of content creators putting on different accents, there must be space for us to discuss issues. In this interactive theatre piece that you are about to watch, what is different is that the discussion takes place through you, the audience. You have the power to change the story, to embody the characters themselves, and to solve the issues from their point of view—or to witness firsthand how difficult it is to find resolutions.

While we normally take a backseat and engage in discussions from the safety of our classrooms or comment on posts behind our mobile phone screens, in this show, you will be given an active role. It might be something entirely new and perhaps intimidating at first but it is precisely these challenging experiences that we will remember and learn most from.

So don't sit back and don't relax, but still enjoy the show!

Lim Shien Hian
Director

THE STORY

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 be displaced by an international scholar? Will the Drama Club boys get the foreigners to join in the chorus? Will Adi get the booth of his choice?

WHAT TO EXPECT

INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS

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.

BUT WAIT, 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 that 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 within a series of community-based frameworks known as **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.

This theatrical experience draws on techniques used in Forum theatre. You will be invited to intervene and change the choices that the characters in the story make. You will have the power to do it differently.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO INTERVENE?

Fret not! All throughout this entire experience, there will be facilitators who will be guiding you. They will ask questions to spark your thinking, lead and navigate discussions about what was presented on stage, and encourage you to explore different ways of approaching the scenarios presented.

HOW DO I INTERVENE?

At certain parts during the experience, a facilitator will invite you to think about the scenes you have just witnessed. As a **spect-actor** (a combination of the words "spectator" and "actor"), you will be given a choice to change the outcome of the scene in one of the following ways:

- suggesting a different approach for the character to try out
- replacing the actor and attempting your approach as the character

To help you prepare to do the above, here are some questions to consider:

(a) EMPATHISE

- Which character do I feel for the most?
- Whose point of view do I agree with the most?
- Why did they approach this conflict/situation the way they did?
 - Take a moment to consider what it is like being in their shoes. What are they feeling? What makes them feel that way? How do these feelings affect how they respond to the situation?

(b) OFFERING A DIFFERENT APPROACH

- What about their approach can be changed in this scene?
- How would I do it differently?
- What are some things that I (as the character) would need to overcome to successfully take on this new approach?
- What outcome am I trying to achieve with this different strategy?

FACT VS OPINION

"This is fake news!" How often do you see this stated in the comment section of a TikTok video, or even exclaimed amongst your friends when someone utters something that is not true? In a time where there is so much information out there, how do we discern what is truly a fact, and what is merely someone's opinion?

In *International Friendship Day*, you will encounter characters who hold certain perspectives that may not have been clarified. How can we help them discern what is a fact and what is an opinion?

Here's a little checklist to help us out:

	Fact	Opinion
<p>(a) A statement that can be proven and verified with evidence.</p> <p><i>"The Earth orbits around the sun once every 365.25 days."</i></p>		
<p>(b) A statement that can be justified by dates, numbers, history, science.</p> <p><i>"As of 2022, the population of Singapore is approximately 5.7 million people."</i></p>		
<p>(c) A statement that represents how someone thinks or feels.</p> <p><i>"Raspberry ripple is the best ice-cream flavour."</i></p>		
<p>(d) A statement that contains words that places a value or judgement (e.g. good, bad, delicious, disgusting).</p> <p><i>"Soccer is the most boring sport ever."</i></p>		
<p>(e) A statement that can be disputed upon.</p> <p><i>"Taylor Swift is the most talented singer-songwriter of all time."</i></p>		

ACTIVITY 1: LET'S WARM UP!

Imagine this:

It is the end of a long day, you are finally on the MRT back home. As you are reaching into your bag for your earphones, you are thinking about the dinner that is waiting for you.

"Seriously." You mutter to yourself. You left your earphones charging at your desk and forgot to take them with you as you rushed out of school. *"Never mind. At least there's a seat where I can take a little rest."*

At the next station, someone takes the empty seat beside you. They pull out their phone, open TikTok, and start scrolling through it at full volume. The language used in the video is vulgar and offensive, and you're jolted by it. People around you become visibly uncomfortable, staring and whispering amongst themselves.

- How are you feeling at this moment?
- Would you do something about it? Why or why not?

Let us utilise the framework introduced earlier:

(a) Empathise	
1. Whose point of view/action do you agree with the most?	
2. Why do you think the passenger is doing what they are doing?	
3. Why do you think the other passengers are reacting in the way(s) they did?	

(b) Offering A Different Approach	
1. What outcome am I trying to achieve?	
2. What approach(es) would you try to achieve the outcome? (i) What would you say to them? (ii) How would you say it to them?	
3. What are some things that I would need to overcome to successfully take on this new approach?	

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why do you think your approach taken during the demo worked/did not work?

What might you have done differently?

What do you think usually prevents people from doing something when faced with a tense and uncomfortable situation?

WHAT CAN HELP DURING A MOMENT OF CONFLICT?

1. Do your best to stay calm. Take deep breaths to regulate your emotional state.
2. Use a calm voice and lower your tone. This will send a signal to the other person that you are not here to attack them.
3. Use non-confrontational, relaxed body language: palm-up gestures, keeping a comfortable distance.
4. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying: what words do they use, what do they repeat?
5. Listen carefully to what the other person is not saying: what tone is the person using, how is their body language, what would these suggest about their emotional state in that moment?
6. Be curious and ask open-ended questions: show genuine interest in their experiences and perspectives, allow them to be heard.
7. Be mindful of the language you use. Express your point of view without putting down the other person's. You can use phrases like: "The story I am telling myself is..." and "I hear your point of view.," and "I can see why you might be feeling that way. Would you allow me to share what I think/feel?"

ACTIVITY 2: OLIVIA'S PARTY – LIQIN & MRS. SITOH-FOO

We have just witnessed Mrs. Sitoh-Foo trying to convince Liqin to attend Olivia's birthday party, and Liqin feeling like she would rather go swimming than attend the party. Let us take a moment to look at what is going on for each of the characters.

Liqin

Empathise	1. What might be causing Liqin to not want to go to the party?	
	2. How do you think Liqin is feeling about explaining her reluctance to Mrs. Sitoh-Foo?	
Offering a Different Approach	3. How do you think Liqin could better approach the situation with Mrs. Sitoh-Foo?	
	4. What would you say to Mrs. Sitoh-Foo if you were Liqin in this situation?	

Mrs. Sitoh-Foo

Empathise	1. What might Mrs. Sitoh-Foo's intentions be for wanting Liqin to go to the party?	
	2. How do you think she's feeling about Liqin not wanting to go to the party?	
Offering a Different Approach	3. How do you think Mrs. Sitoh-Foo could better approach the topic with Liqin?	
	4. What would you say to Liqin if you were Mrs. Sitoh-Foo in this situation?	

ACTIVITY 3: INTERVENTION BUFFET

There are multiple moments of conflict in the show that could inspire you to intervene. Here are some to help you recall:

A) CARYS & HER FATHER

Carys' father shared that yet another of his colleagues was fired. He comes to the conclusion that foreigners are here to "take our jobs", and are "kiasu" for "sending their young child to another country all alone". Carys reveals that she is no longer top in Maths, Anton is the top Maths student now. Her father expresses that he does not want her to study or be friends with Anton.

B) ANTON AT HIS BOOTH

Anton receives hostile and unkind comments such as "*Go back to where you come from!*" and "*This is not your country.*" when he is at his booth for International Friendship Day. He expresses "*Why are you telling me to get lost? I'm like you. Aren't we the same?*"

Which of these moments/conflicts inspires you to intervene the most? Why?



From the conflict that you have highlighted, take a moment to pen down how you might like to intervene for each character.

To Ponder		Character 1:	Character 2:
Empathise	(a) What are they feeling?		
	(b) What makes them feel that way?		
	(c) How do these feelings affect how they respond to the situation?		
Offering a Different Approach	(d) What about their approach can be changed in this scene?		
	(e) What outcomes are the characters trying to achieve with this different strategy?		
	(f) What are some things that the characters would need to overcome to successfully take on this new approach?		
	(g) How would I do it differently? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would each character say to the other? • How would they do it? 		

POST-INTERVENTION THOUGHTS

1. What was an intervention done by a peer (or yourself) that you really enjoyed?

2. What did the spect-actor do well in?

3. How could the spect-actor's alternative approach be improved?

ACTIVITY 4: MY REFLECTIONS

What was the biggest takeaway for you from the play?

What are some questions that have arisen for you?

How has this play inspired you to think or act differently?

ACTIVITY 5: UNSPOKEN BIASES

Let us look back at two specific moments in the play where characters made comments and had strong reactions. Take a moment to reflect and fill in the table below.

Questions To Ponder Upon	Moments in The Play	
	Focus: Carys When Haziq and Gerard suggested that Liqin might have won the Math Book Prize	Focus: Haziq When Haziq made a comment about how the foreign students chose to spend time on their booths instead of SYF
(a) How did the characters react?		
(b) How do their reactions reflect how they view the people they are talking about?		
(c) How do you think they got this perspective?		
(d) What would be the consequence of perpetuating this thinking?		
(e) What are some assumptions that were made? Where do these assumptions come from?		

(c) What do you think Carys and Anton would say to each other? Refer to your points in the previous page and craft the conversation that they would have.

CARYS	Hey..erm...can we talk?
ANTON	Er...yeah, ok.

MY THOUGHT DOODLES & SCRIBBLES

I felt.....

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