



Romance, Hopes and Dreams is an exhibition that highlights the significance of some of the most important and commonly practised wedding customs and rituals in multi-ethnic Singapore.

< for Secondary School educators >



Education and
Community Outreach Division



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Much has been said about the different customs and traditions of the various communities in Singapore's multi-cultural society. However, have you ever wondered about the commonalities that are shared by the different cultures?

Values such as respect and filial piety are evident in wedding ceremonies. Customs such as offering tea to family elders in a Chinese wedding; the presence of the bride's father in the *akad nikah* ceremony in a Malay Muslim wedding; "giving away" the brides by their fathers in Indian and Eurasian weddings underscore the importance and respect that are accorded to them by the bridal couple.

Other marriage ideals such as the desire for prosperity and fertility; the need for community acceptance for the marrying couple; the importance of fidelity and unity in a marriage; and the sanctity of marriage and family life -feature strongly across cultures. Symbolism also comes in many forms, from food items, decorations, display of objects to the sitting and standing positions of the bride and groom.

Over time, local wedding customs and rituals have evolved to encompass other cultural influences. An example is the Hindu-influenced bersanding ceremony in a Malay wedding.

Wedding customs and rituals were closely followed in the past when marriages were mostly match-made. Today, the majority of marriages are love marriages and important customs and rituals are still being followed, though some aspects may be adapted. In most communities, couples have to go through the customary wedding ceremony to validate their marriages even if they have registered their marriage legally.

This exhibition highlights the significance of some of the most important and commonly practised wedding customs and rituals in multi-ethnic Singapore.

Some examples of stories as highlighted in the exhibition:

Chinese Wedding

Traditionally, pre-nuptial agreements for a Chinese wedding ceremony include the matching of the horoscopes (Ba Zi); gifts for the bride's family from the groom's family as a confirmation of the union after negotiation from families (Pinli), engagement (Dinghun); the exchanging of gifts (Na Cai) and the agreement of the wedding date and the customary rites to be adopted on that day.

Malay Wedding

A Malay wedding has three main ceremonies: the engagement ceremony, the akad nikah (solemnisation) and the bersanding. Although the bersanding is



highlighted here for its cross-cultural influence found only local and in the Malay archipelago, the most important aspect of a Malay-Muslim wedding is the akad nikah.

Eurasian Wedding

The Eurasian community has inherited a blend of customs and rituals from its East-West heritage. Matchmaking is not evident in this community, unlike the other ethnic communities. In the past, a suitor would officially ask for a girl's hand in marriage and this used to be done in the form of a letter of intent to the girl's father. Alternatively, the suitor and his parents will approach the bride's parents for their daughter's hand in marriage.

KEY CONCEPTS

You can connect *Romance, Hopes and Dreams* to your curriculum using these key concepts. They convey the main educational themes of the exhibition.

The exhibition provides a platform for students to appreciate the importance of traditions and appreciate the importance of memory in history.

The traditions featured this exhibition are relatable to the parents that lived through the past and present alike. These rituals are important for the nation's history and identity. Students will get an opportunity to appreciate various cultures, and glimpse at the values that made us all Singaporeans today.



Understanding traditions would allow a better understanding of the past and understand the differences versus the present.

Through the understanding of wedding traditions through *Romance, Hopes and Dreams*, students will be able to infer about the differences between traditions and modernity and across cultures and understand that the people who lived through the past had different context and should not be viewed as outdated.

These stories about traditions should encourage challenge students to talk to the older generation in earnest conversations.

These stories on traditions can also spur conversation topics between the old and the young. This will provide teachers with the opportunity to integrate knowledge sharing into the lesson to educate students on the importance of conversations with those who have lived through times different from us, to understand that they have a story to tell too! How about linking it with modern practices derived from the West such as gate-crashing too? Every generation will create its own memories! Talk about them!



PRE-EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

1. Come Prepared

Review this guide prior to your visit to the exhibition. You may research for more information about Singapore's traditional weddings to share with your students.

2. Class Discussion

Before you visit the exhibition, let your students know that they will be able to learn about life in Singapore's traditional weddings. Read aloud the write up that can be found in the "About the Exhibition" page to your students and discuss the Key Concepts with your students.

Ask them to write down their thoughts in the Pre-Exhibition Questions space!

If you wish to discuss more, consider using these questions!

What are some traditions that your parents have taught you through their own experiences?
 Do you know of other traditions that you can share with the class?
 Have you heard of any other interesting stories of past traditions from your parents? If yes, do share with the class!

DURING THE EXHIBITION

3. Touring the Exhibition

Remind the students to read carefully and fill in the answers for the crossword puzzle.

Answers for the Crossword Puzzle:

1 (A). Fidelity	4. Jewellery	8. Ganesha
1 (D). Fire	5. Piety	9. Church
2. Bersanding	6. Matchmade	10. Kadi
3. Prosperity	7. Sugee	11. Heaven

4. Encouraging Students to Think!



Romance, Hopes and Dreams (Sec Educators)

Do ask students to think about questions such as:

What wedding traditions did their parents/guardians go through in the past?
What are the values that they can learn through these stories from their parents/guardians?

POST-EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

5. Discuss These Questions with the Students!

Take some time in class to do either group discussions or as a mass class discussion to sum up the thinking concepts!

1. Why do you think these wedding rituals have withstood the test of time?
2. How have weddings today evolved from the past?
3. Why is it important to continue the rituals and practices in modern weddings?

6. Further Reading

In addition, you may wish to consider asking students to explore these websites to find out more about Singapore's past!

Do give students encouragement after they have completed the worksheet!

To read up about different traditions and festivals:

<http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/getlost/where-celebrations-are-not-quite-what-youd-expect.html>

To read up about other Singapore's traditions that Singaporeans will remember:

<http://www.iremember.sg/>

