



*Trading Stories: Conversations With Six Pioneering Tradesmen* is an exhibition featuring the old trades in Singapore and how these tradesmen have coped with the challenges since Singapore achieved nationhood. The exhibition will shed light on some of Singapore's old trades through their personal stories.

< for Secondary School educators >



Education and  
Community Outreach Division



## About the Exhibition

This exhibition is a tribute to six pioneer generation Singaporeans who have worked through the early days of Singapore and laid down the foundation for the nation's prosperity today.

Different types of trades were once common in Singapore. Before education revolutionised the masses, most Singaporeans worked in various businesses over the island. These professions were shared experiences of many of those who are less educated, regardless of race and religion.

Six individual tradesmen, including a traditional goldsmith, a movie poster painter, a tukang urut or Malay confinement lady, a Samsui woman, a poultry farmer and a letter writer were specially chosen to be showcased.

In conceptualising this exhibition, NHB dug into "memory bank" on the memories of the six people in their various trades, to draw out the working memories that people remembered – for the exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore.

Through their stories from their own perspective, we hope that this exhibition brings back fond memories for those that remember these occupations vividly.

To the younger visitors, who will find these professions totally unfamiliar, we hope this will be a journey of discovery to the different lives that the previous generations have experienced.

Some of these professions do not exist anymore due to technological advancements and the younger generation unwilling to take them on. However, the spirit of innovation will always remain crucial to Singapore's continued progress as we strive to overcome our present challenges and attain greater achievements.

Some examples of old professions as highlighted in the exhibition:

### **Ng Moey Chye – Samsui Woman**

*She worked as a manual labourer in construction sites, doing work that machines now perform. It has been a hard life, but she remains thankful for the young volunteers who are helping her in her old age.*

### **Murugaian s/o Ratnaswami Asari – Goldsmith**

*Of the Achari craftsman caste, he left the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu in the 1950s when he was 16 years old to find work in Singapore. Then, there were hundreds of goldsmiths working in Little India.*



**Runtik Binti Murtono – Urut Lady**

*She has been massaging and “wrapping” new mothers back to health and shapeliness for more than 35 years. A third generation keeper of the secrets of traditional Malay confinement practices and medicine, she counts mothers of many races amongst her clients.*

**Key Concepts**

You can connect *Trading Stories* 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 past when many jobs for the less well educated were dependent on skill and energy, to understand the changing aspects of time and appreciate the importance of memory in history.**

These professions featured this exhibition are relatable to the people that lived through the past and present alike. Some of these activities have disappeared through the annals of history. Students will get an opportunity to appreciate Singapore’s early way of life, and provide a glimpse of the values of determination that was valued, that everyone looked after each other like one big family.



**Understanding our history would allow a better understanding of the past and treasure the fruits enjoyed in the present.**

Through the understanding of past professions through *Trading Stories*, students will be able to infer about the differences in the times past and present and understand that the previous generation, such as the Pioneer Generation, had different life experiences.

**These stories challenge students to talk to the older generation about the past.**

These anecdotes on past professions 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 the elderly, to understand that many of them had very interesting lives too! How about linking it with the



present too? There has been a greater emphasis in the past few years to preserve old professions! 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 past professions and stories 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 professions in the past. 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 values from the older generation that your parents have taught you?  
Do you know of other past Singapore professions that you can share with the class?  
Have you heard of any other stories of working life from your parents? Do they have unique jobs? 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. Five	4. Immigrants	8. Network
2 (A). Game	5. Labour	9. Baskets
2 (D). Goldsmith	6. Reinvention	10. Production
3. Singlehood	7. Healer	11. Industrialisation



#### 4. Encouraging Students to Think!

Do ask students to think about questions such as:

What is the profession that left them with the strongest impression that they would like to learn more?

What are the values that they can learn through games and kampong life?

#### **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 older people like to talk about the past?
2. How similar or different is life today from the past?
3. Do you think the memories of older professions remain important in the lives of many Singaporeans?

#### 6. Further Reading

In addition, you may wish to consider asking students to explore these websites to find out more!

Do give students encouragement after they have completed the worksheet!

To read up about memories from other Singaporeans about life in the past:

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

To read up about other Singapore's well remembered places that Singaporeans will enjoy:

<http://www.roots.gov.sg/>

