



CONVERSATION STARTER KIT FOR SENIORS

SERIES 4: RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS



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PARTNERS AND SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

Anglican Senior Centre, Agency for Integrated Care, Guide Dogs Singapore Ltd, Orange Valley Senior Activity Centre (Woodlands Peak), SAGE Counselling Centre, Sengkang Community Hospital, St Andrew's Nursing Home, St Andrew's Senior Care

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ABOUT THE CONVERSATION STARTER KIT

The Conversation Starter Kit for Seniors is a resource kit developed by NHB. Each kit contains 20 images curated based on a theme, and each image is accompanied by a set of questions to facilitate meaningful conversations between seniors, family members, caregivers, and volunteers. The kits have been used in various community care settings since 2018, and serve as a good introductory tool for cultural engagement with senior audiences.

HOW TO USE THE KIT

Always prepare by reading through the content and themes of the kit before each session.

As a person-to-person activity

1. Introduce yourself and the purpose of the activity.
2. Start with the image facing the participant and the text facing you.
3. Use the questions as a guide to start or deepen conversations.
4. If time permits, access the online resources and videos by scanning the QR codes on each page.



As a group activity

1. Gather your participants around a table or space.
2. Ensure that each participant is able to see you.
3. Introduce yourself and purpose of the activity.
4. Hold up the image side of the kit at a clear angle.
5. Allow participants to take turns in sharing their thoughts about the image.
6. Encourage them to describe what they see and what they think the subject/focal point of the image is.
7. Use the questions as a guide and allow conversations to form naturally and between participants if they have stories to share.



LIST OF RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

1. Chingay Parade
2. Lunar New Year
3. Thaipusam
4. Guan Yin's Birthday
5. Easter
6. Qing Ming Festival*
7. Vesak Day
8. Hari Raya Puasa
9. Theemithi
10. Dragon Boat Festival
11. National Day
12. Hungry Ghost Festival
13. Mid-Autumn Festival
14. Deepavali
15. Kusu Island
16. Christmas
17. Birthdays
18. Birthing traditions
19. Funerals*
20. Weddings

*Kindly note that the following entries contain images related to the topic of death which may be sensitive to some participants. Please exercise discretion where necessary.

Roots

Visit [Roots.sg](https://www.roots.sg), NHB's heritage portal, for more videos, stories and resources.



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Performers at the Chingay Parade along Orchard Road, 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Performers at the Chingay Parade along Orchard Road, 1980s

1. Have you attended or participated in the Chingay Parade before?
2. What do you enjoy most about street parades?
3. Do you enjoy the atmosphere at such events?

Background:

A group of performers comprising stilt walkers, lion dance performers and big head dolls at the Chingay Parade along Orchard Road in the 1980s.

Chingay is an annual street parade in Singapore, usually held as part of the Lunar New Year celebrations. The name "Chingay" originates from the Hokkien Chinese term *zhuang yi* (the art of costume and masquerade), with the practice believed to have originated from Chinese immigrants in Penang during the 19th century. Early versions of the Chingay parade in the 1840s to 1900s were held in the form of grand processions, led by Chinese clans and associations in honour of Chinese religious deities.

Today, Singapore's modern Chingay parade has evolved into a multi-cultural event that celebrates and includes performers from diverse ethnicities and nationalities. The parade has been held across different locations in Singapore, including Orchard Road and along the Formula One Marina Bay circuit route.



Read about the Chingay Parade – on e-NLB

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-chingayparade>



A family visit during Lunar New Year, 1990s

Gift of Wu Sijing. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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A family visit during Lunar New Year, 1990s

1. Where do you think the activity shown in the photograph is taking place?
2. Have you given or received red packets before?
3. Do you have a favourite Lunar New Year dish or snack?

Background:

A family visit during Lunar New Year in the 1990s. Also known as Chinese New Year, the festival signifies family harmony and the securing of good fortune for Chinese families in the coming year. Celebrations last for 15 days and are typically a time for visiting and exchanging gifts of money or food with family and friends.

A popular myth on the origins of the festival is the legend of nian (meaning "year"), a mythical beast that was said to attack villagers and livestock on Lunar New Year's eve. Villagers then learnt that they could light candles and firecrackers, and wear bright red clothing to ward off the beast. The colour red has since become an auspicious colour signalling good fortune in the new year.

Other Lunar New Year practices include spring cleaning, the wearing of new clothing and reunion dinner with family members on Lunar New Year's eve. Hong baos (meaning "red packets") are also filled with money and given out as symbols of luck and happiness. In Singapore, local Chinese families also practice lo hei and the tossing of yu sheng, an auspicious dish typically eaten during Lunar New Year. Lunar New Year is marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Chinese New Year
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-chinesenewyear>



Read about *lo hei* and the tossing of *yu sheng*
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-lohei>



A man carrying a kavadi during Thaipusam, 1970s – 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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A man carrying a kavadi during Thaipusam, 1970s – 1980s

1. What is the man carrying?
2. Have you participated in Thaipusam festivities before?
3. Have you visited a Hindu temple before?

Background:

A Hindu devotee carrying a kavadi during Thaipusam in the 1970s to 1980s. Thaipusam is a Hindu festival held over three days during the month of Thai in the Tamil calendar. The festival is observed by Hindus in an expression of devotion to Lord Murugan, the son of Lord Shiva. It marks a celebration of Parvati, the mother of Murugan, giving him the sakti vel (cosmic spear) and blessing him with victory in his battle against the demon Surapadman.

Thaipusam requires extensive preparation by devotees and their families each year. It includes acts of devotion such as carrying the kavadi (a semi-circular structure decorated with flowers) and pal kudam (milk pot) or body piercings. Great care is also taken by family members to provide food, drinks and encouragement to kavadi bearers.

In Singapore, roads are closed every year to allow kavadi bearers and devotees to walk barefoot along the traditional route, starting at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple on Serangoon Road and ending at Sri Thendayuthapani Temple on Tank Road. Other non-Hindu Singaporeans and tourists often join in the festivities by observing the processions along the route.



Photograph of a kavadi:
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-kavadi>



Read about Thaipusam
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-thaipusam>



Devotees praying at a temple on Guan Yin's Birthday, 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Devotees praying at a temple on Guan Yin's Birthday, 1980s

1. What do you know about the goddess Guan Yin?
2. How do people pray at a Chinese temple?
3. Do you follow any religious beliefs or practices?

Background:

A view of devotees praying at a temple on Guan Yin's Birthday in the 1980s. Also known as the Bodhisattva of Compassion or Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin's Birthday is celebrated on the 19th day of the second month in the lunar calendar.

The name Guan Yin translates to "observing the sounds or cries of the world". The goddess is popularly known for her great compassion and for helping those in need. Some statues of Guan Yin may also depict her with a child. In this form, she is known as Song Zi Guan Yin (meaning "giver of children") and worshipped for her fertility-bestowing powers.

In Singapore, Guan Yin's Birthday is one of the largest festivals commemorated at the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, also known as Simlalu Guan Yin Temple at Waterloo Street. The temple was built in 1884 in dedication to Guan Yin and is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Singapore. Thousands of devotees flock to the temple on Guan Yin's birthday to make offerings and light joss sticks, as part of prayers for protection and good health.



Photograph of a ceramic figure of Guan Yin with a child
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-guanymwithchild>



Read about Guan Yin's Birthday - on e-NLB
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-kwanimthonghoodcho>



A choir singing hymns during an Easter service, 2018

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

A choir singing hymns during an Easter service, 2018

1. Have you visited a church before?
2. What do you know about Easter?
3. Which public holiday is your favourite?

Background:

A choir singing hymns during an Easter service at St. Andrew's Cathedral in 2018. Easter is a festival observed by Christians worldwide and it focuses on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Most Christians observe Lent, a 40-day period of prayers and fasting, in the lead-up to Easter. The days in the week before Easter also serve as a period of reflection and remembrance for many Christians. The Friday before Easter or Good Friday, for example, is the day when Christians gather to remember Jesus' death and sacrifice on the cross.

On Easter itself or the day of celebration, Christians of all denominations typically attend a special service in church to mark the occasion. Bright floral arrangements, decorations, and altar vestments in gold and white are used by celebrants as symbols of joy and purity.

In Singapore, most Christians gather in their respective churches for Easter service on Sundays. Services are usually led by a priest or church leader, with some congregants being assigned roles such as reading the Bible, leading prayer, or singing in the choir. Good Friday is marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Easter

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-easter>



Sweeping of tomb during Qing Ming Festival, 2008

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

Sweeping of tomb during Qing Ming Festival, 2008

1. *Where do you think this is taking place?*
2. *What do you think the festival is about?*
3. *Are you familiar with the term sao mu?*

Background:

A group of individuals making offerings and sweeping a Chinese tomb during Qing Ming Festival in 2008.

Also known as Qing Ming Jie, the traditional Chinese festival usually takes place on the third month of the lunar calendar and is observed and practised by the Chinese community.

The name Qing Ming translates to "clear" and "bright", referencing the coming of spring. During the festival, Chinese families would visit the graves and niches of honour deceased family members as an expression of filial piety. Known as sao mu (meaning "to sweep the graves"), the practice involves the cleaning and maintenance of the grave or the niche housing the urn. Families may also bring the deceased's favourite food and other offerings.

In Singapore, most ancestral worship takes place in columbaria and temples, with visits to cemeteries becoming less common over time. The changes are largely due to land scarcity and evolving preferences for alternative funerary practices, such as sea burial, where a physical space is no longer required.



Read about Qing Ming Festival
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-qingmingfestival>



Watch The Rites and Rituals of Bukit Brown Cemetery
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-bukitbrownceemetery>



Devotees pouring water over a statue of Buddha on Vesak Day, 2008

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

Devotees pouring water over a statue of Buddha on Vesak Day, 2008

1. What do you think the people are doing?
2. Have you visited a Buddhist temple before?
3. What are some of your favourite places of worship in Singapore?

Background:

Devotees pouring water over a statue of Buddha on Vesak Day, 2008. Also known as Buddha's Birthday, Vesak Day is an annual religious event celebrated on the first full-moon day of the Vaisakha month in the lunar calendar.

The festival is marks the birth, enlightenment and passing of Gautama Buddha. Devotees congregate at temples for prayer ceremonies on this day, with each temple having their own special ritual or tradition.

A common practice is the bathing of Buddha statues, where water is poured over a statue of Buddha as a re-enactment of the consecration of Buddha by mythical dragons. Other practices include the consumption of vegetarian meals, lighting of oil lamps and performing of charitable deeds. Some temples may also organise religious talks by venerable monks.

In Singapore, Vesak Day celebrations are open to all Buddhists, which creates opportunity for cultural exchange among Buddhists of different denominations, for a more holistic understanding of Buddhism. Vesak Day is marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Vesak Day

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-vesakday>



Exchanging greetings during Hari Raya Puasa, 1962

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Exchanging greetings during Hari Raya Puasa, 1962

1. What do you think the people are doing?
2. Do you celebrate Hari Raya Puasa?
3. What festivals or events do you enjoy celebrating?

Background:

A group of people exchanging greetings as part of Hari Raya Puasa celebrations in 1962.

Also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri or day of Eid-Al-Fitr, the festival is celebrated on the first day of Syawal and marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting and prayer. The day is celebrated in recognition of an individual's triumph in exercising self-control and command over his desires.

An important tradition of Hari Raya Puasa is the seeking of forgiveness and strengthening of bonds amongst relatives and friends. Muslims would decorate their houses, dress up in new clothing and prepare Malay dishes such as kuih (sweets), ketupat (rice cakes wrapped in coconut leaves) and rendang (a spicy stew) for visiting guests. Children may also receive gifts of money in small green packets.

In Singapore, the Hari Raya light-up at Geylang Serai is one of the biggest highlights of the festival, with colourful lights stretching over miles of food and baju kurong (Malay traditional outfit) stalls at the Ramadan bazaar. Hari Raya Puasa is marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Hari Raya Puasa
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-harirayapuasa>



Read about the practice of weaving *ketupat*
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-ketupat>



A fire-walking ceremony during Theemithi, 2018

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

A fire-walking ceremony during Theemithi, 2018

1. What do you think the men are doing?
2. How do you think it feels to walk on fire?
3. Have you visited a Hindu temple before?

Background:

A fire-walking ceremony during Theemithi in 2018. The Hindu festival of Theemithi begins on the new moon day of the Tamil month of Aadi and comprises a series of rituals and ceremonies held over a three-month period, ending with a fire-walking ceremony held in the month of October.

Theemithi is based on the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata and honours the heroine of the story, Draupadi, who proved her purity by walking barefoot across fire and emerging unharmed. Likewise, devotees believe that if they remain steadfast to the Hindu principles of righteousness and morality, they would similarly be able to walk across the burning coal unharmed.

In Singapore, the fire-walking ceremony is a strictly males-only affair and is mostly performed by South Indians. The ceremony is held annually at the Sri Mariamman Temple. A large fire pit is dug by volunteers then filled with burning wood or coal, and the ceremony begins with the pandaram (priest) as the first to walk across the pit, followed by devotees. At the end of the pit is a smaller pit filled with milk in which devotees can cool their feet after the fire-walk.



Read more about Theemithi
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-theemithi>



Read about the Sri Mariamman Temple
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-srimariammantemple>



Dragon Boat Race at the Esplanade waterfront during Dragon Boat Festival, 1978

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Dragon boat race at the Esplanade waterfront during Dragon Boat Festival, 1978

1. What do you think the men are doing?
2. What do you like most about the Dumpling Festival?
3. Do you like the taste of zongzi (Chinese glutinous rice dumplings)?

Background:

A dragon boat race at the Esplanade waterfront in 1978, as part of commemorations for the Dragon Boat Festival. Also known as Duan Wu Jie or Dumpling Festival, this Chinese festival is celebrated every year on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month to venerate the River Dragon in Chinese mythology, and in remembrance of the Chinese official, Qu Yuan.

According to Chinese folklore, Qu Yuan was banished from court for speaking out against corrupt officials and decided to end his life by jumping into a river. As the fishermen nearby were unable to save him, they decided to scatter rice stuffed in bamboo stems into the water to prevent fishes from eating his body. Another version of the folklore involves the fishermen rowing out on dragon boats to save Qu Yuan. Dragon boat races have hence become a ceremonial representation of the fishermen's efforts.

In Singapore, the festival is synonymous with the eating of glutinous rice dumplings and dragon boat racing, with the first regatta-style dragon boat race organised in 1978 by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board.



Read about the Dragon Boat Festival

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-dragonboatfestival>



A marching contingent at the National Day Parade, 1982

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore. National Heritage Board
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A marching contingent at the National Day Parade, 1982

1. What are the women holding?
2. Have you attended the National Day Parade before?
3. How do you celebrate National Day?

Background:

A marching contingent at the National Day Parade in 1982.

National Day is celebrated on 9 August every year in commemoration of Singapore's independence, and serves as a platform for Singaporeans from all walks of life to celebrate the nation's milestones and achievements.

The first National Day Parade was held at the Padang in 1966, a year after Singapore separated from Malaysia. The parade was later broadcasted 'live' on national television and in colour for the first time in 1974. National Day songs also made their debut in the 1980s, with catchy and popular titles such as Stand up for Singapore (1984) and Home (1998).

The traditional fly-past of the state flag, exciting parachuting performances by the red lions, the march past of military and parade contingents, and fireworks displays have since become key highlights of annual National Day celebrations. National Day is also marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about National Day
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-nationalday>



Read about the history of
the National Day Parade
<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-ndp50ycars>



Burning joss sticks and offerings during Hungry Ghost Festival, 2018

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

Burning joss sticks and offerings during Hungry Ghost Festival, 2018

1. Have you heard of the Hungry Ghost Festival before?
2. Have you watched a getai performance before?
3. What other kinds of performances do you enjoy watching?

Background:

A view of joss sticks and offerings being burnt during Hungry Ghost Festival in 2018. Also known as Zhong Yuan Jie, the festival takes place on the seventh month of the lunar calendar. The festival is largely observed by Chinese, Buddhists and Taoists who believe that the gates of Hell are opened during the seventh month, with the name of the festival originating from the belief that the spirits from Hell are "hungry" as they do not have descendants to make offerings for them.

Most practices during this period are hence associated with the act of entertaining and appeasing spirits. This includes the burning of paper effigies (in the likeness of houses, cars, and phones), paper money and the making of food offerings. Getai (meaning "song stage") performances are also staged regularly as entertainment for both the spirits and the living.

In Singapore, offerings are usually made in homes or temples. In addition, offerings for wandering spirits are also made along roadsides and the empty fields of public housing estates. The forms of entertainment provided have also evolved, from traditional Chinese opera and puppetry shows to modern getai stages today.



Read about the Hungry Ghost Festival
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-hungryghostfestival>



Read about *getai*
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-getai>



Many hundreds of years ago, as a result of a misunderstanding between lovers, a woman was transported to the moon. Now, during the Moon Cake Festival, lanterns are lit and moon cakes are served in sympathy for the lonely lady in the moon.

Children playing with lanterns during Mid-Autumn Festival, 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Children playing with lanterns during Mid-Autumn Festival, 1980s

1. What are the children holding?
2. What type of lanterns do you like best?
3. Do you enjoy eating mooncakes?

Background:

Two children playing with lanterns during Mid-Autumn Festival in the 1980s. Also known as Zhong Qiu Jie or Lantern or Mooncake Festival, this Chinese festival is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, where the moon is believed to be at its fullest.

The origin of the festival is linked to many stories in Chinese folklore. A popular story is that of Chang E, the wife of Hou Yi, an archer who had an elixir of immortality in his possession. Chang E was said to have drunk the elixir and ascended to the moon. On realising what had happened, Hou Yi shouted Chang E's name to the sky, where he spotted a figure of his wife on the moon. He then prepared the food that she liked at an altar as an offering. Since then, many Chinese households have continued to make offerings to Chang E as the Moon Goddess, and to pray for peace and good fortune.

In Singapore, Mid-Autumn Festival is usually a time for families to bond over mooncakes, pomelos and tea. Many organisations also lead community festivities, where seniors, children and adults alike are invited to carry lanterns and go for evening walks around the neighbourhood.



Read about the Mid-Autumn Festival
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-midautumnfestival>



Photograph of a street stall selling mooncakes in the 1970s
<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-sellingmooncakes>



Deepavali light-up along Little India, 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Deepavali light-up along Little India, 1980s

1. What do you think this festival is about?
2. Have you visited Little India during Deepavali before?
3. How do your family and friends celebrate Deepavali?

Background:

A night view of Deepavali light-up along Little India in the 1980s. Also known as Diwali or Festival of Lights, the Hindu festival is celebrated every year between October and November, and in the Tamil month of Aipasi. Though the myths and origins of the festival differ among North and South Indians, Deepavali is generally regarded as the celebration of good over evil, or light over darkness.

Preparations for Deepavali start weeks in advance with cleaning and decorating the house, buying new clothes, and preparing sweet and savoury snacks. Homes would also be decorated with lighted diyas (small clay oil lamps) and rangoli (also known as kolam; patterns made from coloured rice powder or grains). Another customary practice is the taking of oil baths on the morning of Deepavali.

In Singapore, the Little India light-up along Serangoon Road is also an annual event that adds to the festive celebrations. Many would flock to shops and bazaars in Little India in search of new ethnic wear, decorations and snacks as part of the preparations for the festival. Deepavali is also marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Deepavali

<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-deepavali>



Read about the traditional Indian art form *rangoli*

<https://go.gov.sg/ck4-rangoliartform>



Pilgrimage to Kusu Island, 1970s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Pilgrimage to Kusu Island, 1970s

1. Do you know where this photo was taken?
2. Have you been to Kusu Island?
3. Which other islands have you visited in Singapore?

Background:

A family walking towards the Tua Pek Kong Temple during a pilgrimage to Kusu Island in the 1970s. Both Chinese and Malay devotees make their annual pilgrimages to the temple during the ninth month of the lunar calendar to pray for peace, prosperity and health. Devotees then climb 152 steps up a hill to pray for similar blessings at three keramats (Malay shrines) located behind the temple.

Built in 1923, the Tua Pek Kong Temple is dedicated to the Chinese deity Tua Peh Kong, known as the God of Prosperity and protector of seafarers. According to local folklore, a giant turtle once saved the lives of two Malay and Chinese fishermen caught in a storm by rescuing them from their boat and bringing them onshore. To show their gratitude, the fishermen decided to build shrines on the island as places of pilgrimage.

Another common tale is the story of how a large turtle saved a group of sailors from drowning by turning itself into an island, hence giving it the name Kusu Island (meaning "turtle island").



Read about the pilgrimage to Kusu Island

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-kusuisland>



Light-Up along Orchard Road during Christmas, 1980s

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board
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Light-Up along Orchard Road during Christmas, 1980s

1. Have you ever seen the Christmas Light-Up at Orchard Road?
2. How do you celebrate Christmas?
3. What do you like most about Christmas?

Background:

A night-time view of Christmas decorations along Orchard Road in the 1980s. Christmas marks the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ and is celebrated on 25 December every year.

Christians in general celebrate the religious aspects of Christmas by attending church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Some families may also decorate their houses with festive decorations such as a Christmas tree.

The Christmas season continues for 12 days, during which the festive spirit of Christmas and the customary practices of visiting, communal meals and exchanging gifts continue.

In Singapore, the Christmas Light-Up along Orchard Road is a highly anticipated event enjoyed by both locals and tourists, drawing thousands of visitors. In addition to the light-up, shopping malls and churches regularly invite carolling groups to perform Christmas carols. Christmas Day is also marked as a public holiday in Singapore.



Read about Christmas

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-christmas>



Objects relating to Birthday celebrations, 1960s to 1980s

Gift of Mr Wong Shian Hoe (left) and Gift of Mr. Tan See Fang (right)

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

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Objects relating to Birthday celebrations, 1960s to 1980s

1. What and who do you think this card or cake is for?
2. How do you usually celebrate your birthday?
3. What would you wish for on your next birthday?

Background:

A Chinese birthday invitation card in 1982 (left) and a heart-shaped birthday cake made by Red House Bakery in the 1960s to 1980s (right). The cake has the words "Happy Birthday Darling Brian" written on top and was likely ordered from the bakery as part of the recipient's birthday celebrations.

The birthday of an individual refers to the date when the person was born. Individuals celebrate their birthdays differently, depending on customs, and their preferences.

Some traditional Chinese families, for instance, would send invitations with the word *shou* (meaning "longevity"), and organise large banquets for senior members of the family in celebration of their milestones. Auspicious dishes, such as noodles and peach-shaped buns, are also served as symbols of longevity.



Photograph of a family portrait during a birthday dinner

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-familyportrait>



A baby being blessed during prayer ceremony, 2018

Courtesy of the National Heritage Board

A baby being blessed during prayer ceremony, 2018

1. What do you think this occasion is about?
2. What are some of the customs or practices that a new mother should follow?
3. Do you know any mothers who still follow such customs?

Background:

A baby being blessed during a prayer ceremony in 2018. This Indian birthing ritual (as shown in the image) is held when the baby is either 16 days or 30 days old and is attended only by women. Part of the ceremony involves holding the baby in front of a padayal (food offering) and making prayers to Sri Perivachi Amman, a deity believed to be the protector of infants. Other practices include 40 to 44 days of confinement for the new mother and the taking of warm herbal showers.

While some birthing traditions such as the preparation and consumption of recommended foods during pregnancy and confinement have been passed from one generation to another, not all traditional birthing practices are adhered to today. The transfer of knowledge on birthing traditions also depends heavily on the social beliefs and the exchange of knowledge between members of the family.

Nevertheless, while Chinese, Indian and Malay communities each have their own distinct practices, most share the common objective of helping the mother to stay healthy before and after childbirth.



Read about birthing traditions

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-birthingtraditions>



Mourners with a hearse during a Chinese funeral procession, 1964

Gift of Ms. Evelyn Ng. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Mourners with a hearse during a Chinese funeral procession, 1964

1. What do you think this occasion is about?
2. Have you attended a funeral or wake before?
3. What are some of the customs or practices to follow when attending a funeral?

Background:

A group of mourners with a hearse during a Chinese funeral procession in 1964. A funeral procession marks the last phase in a traditional Chinese funeral ritual, where the hearse makes its way from the deceased's home to a graveyard or crematorium. The hearse is usually accompanied by the family as a sign of filial piety and respect. The procession is often led by a band of musicians at the front, whose music is meant to ward off evil spirits around the hearse.

Funerary practices often reflect the customs and social life of the respective community. Many Chinese in Singapore, for example, continue to follow the traditional rituals and customs of their respective dialect groups. A wake is usually held at void deck of public housing flats or in the home of the deceased, for a period between three to seven days before the funeral procession. Relatives and friends are invited to pay their final respects at the wake, and it is customary for visitors to contribute small sum of money known as bai jin (meaning "white gold") to the family of the deceased.



Read about Chinese death rituals – on e-NLB

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-chinesedeathrituals>



Read about Malay-Muslim funerals – on e-NLB

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-malaymuslimfunerals>



Photograph of a Hindu funeral procession

<https://go.gov.sg/csk4-hindufuneralprocession>



Chinese couple in Western wedding attire, 1935

Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Chinese couple in Western wedding attire, 1935

1. Have you attended a traditional or modern wedding ceremony before?
2. What do you enjoy most about weddings?
3. Do you know about any wedding customs?

Background:

A Chinese couple in Western wedding attire in 1935.

The bride and bridegroom are dressed in Western wedding attire, consisting of a long white dress and wedding veil, and a shirt and suit for the bridegroom. Both the bride and bridegroom are accompanied by page girls.

Although traditional wedding ceremonies were common, many Eurasians, Chinese and Indians in Singapore began to adopt Western wedding customs and attire from the early 20th century. The initial change was largely attributed to the conversion to Christian beliefs. Other possible factors for the continued popularity of Western-style weddings include the desire to be modern, influence from Western education and the mass media.



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