

WILD  
RICE

# Supervision

LEARNING RESOURCE PACK

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# ABOUT THE PLAY

## Synopsis

71-year-old Teck, a grumpy retiree, has just suffered a stroke that leaves one side of his body paralysed. When he insists on moving back home, Jenny, his no-nonsense daughter, hires a young Indonesian domestic worker, Yanti, to look after him.

At first, Yanti dutifully follows the strict caregiving regime drawn up by Jenny. But Teck refuses to give up a few of his favourite vices. When Jenny is not around, Yanti gives in to Teck's demands for fatty, braised pork belly and the occasional cigarette. And yet, somehow, Jenny always knows exactly what is going on...

Thrilling, darkly funny and profoundly moving, Thomas Lim's *Supervision* holds up a mirror to our modern world with a rapidly ageing population. Would you give up the things you enjoy in exchange for a few more years? Does working in someone else's home mean giving up your right to privacy? And to what lengths would you go in order to watch over someone you love?

## Creative & Production Team

Written by **Thomas Lim**  
Directed by **Glen Goei**  
Set Designer **Wong Chee Wai**  
Lighting designer **Tai Zi Feng**  
Multimedia Designer **Andrew Ng**  
Multimedia Designer **Koo Chia Meng**

Sound Designer/ Engineer **Paul Searles**  
Hair Designer/ Stylist **Ashley Lim**  
Make-up Designer **The Make Up Room**  
Production Manager **Melissa Teoh**  
Stage Manager **Natasha May**  
Producer **Tony Trickett**

## Cast

Jenny played by **Janice Koh**  
Teck played by **Patrick Teoh**  
Yanti played by **Umi Kalthum Ismail**





## Production History

5th - 15th July 2018

Flexible Performance Space

LASALLE College of the Arts

Singapore

Directed by Glen Goei

Starring **Janice Koh, Patrick Teoh & Umi Kalthum Ismail**

8th - 18th August 2019

The Ngee Ann Kongsi Theatre @ WILD RICE

Singapore

Directed by Glen Goei

Starring **Janice Koh, Patrick Teoh & Umi Kalthum Ismail**

## Characters



**YANTI** *played by Umi Kalthum Ismail*

Yanti is a foreign domestic worker from Indonesia. She comes from a family of agricultural farmers. While her family was not struggling to put food on the table, she came to Singapore because she wanted the ability to afford little luxuries for her family.

Yanti, like most other foreign domestic workers, had to undergo training before she came to Singapore. She also had to pay her agent for making the arrangements for her. Jenny is Yanti's first employer in Singapore. On her days off, she mostly spends her time around Paya Lebar with other domestic workers from Indonesia.



**TECK** *played by Patrick Teoh*

Teck is a stroke survivor. He used to run a mid-sized import company but was forced to retire because of his stroke that resulted in partial paralysis. While he has retained his sharp mind and grouchy demeanour, he is no longer able to do certain things such as going to the toilet on his own.

He is in his early 70s and has a son, a daughter, Jenny, and two grandchildren. He was hospitalised following his stroke and later transferred to a nursing home. However, he did not like staying in a home and asked Jenny to make arrangements for him to move back to his own home. Previously, Jenny has offered for Teck to live with her, but Teck values his independence and privacy, so he insisted on moving back into his own home.



**JENNY** *played by Janice Koh*

Jenny is a businesswoman who has taken over Teck's company following his stroke. Besides work, Jenny also has to take care of her two sons, shuttling them from home to school to their swimming lessons. She is not an only child, but her only brother lives in another country, so the responsibility of caring for Teck has fallen upon her shoulders.

Jenny is an experienced employer. She has hired multiple foreign domestic workers before Yanti to take care of her children and do the household chores while she is at work. She generally does not trust her foreign domestic workers and keeps close tabs on them.

# INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

## Someone to Watch Over Me

Written by the playwright of *Supervision*, Thomas Lim

Edited by Shawne Wang

*A year ago, Thomas Lim's aunt installed cameras in her house to keep tabs on her foreign domestic helpers. He shares with us how that act of surveillance unnerved him, but also inspired him to write about privacy and trust in his new play, Supervision.*

The genesis of *Supervision* can be traced back to a Sunday afternoon from a few years ago. I was visiting my maternal grandparents. The helpers were out on their off day, so my aunts and uncles were around to stand in for them.

When I walked into the house, I was greeted by a strange sight. My aunt had had someone install cameras inside the house, and she and my mother were adjusting the angles of the cameras so that there would be no blind spots.

Later, I was asked by my relatives to download the accompanying app on my phone. I think it was called 'Eagle Eyes'. It allows you to look at any camera in the house through an internet connection. With the app, I could watch the helper cooking, my grandfather sleeping and my grandmother looking out of the window, all at the same time. It was uncomfortable, and it felt like I was waiting for something bad to happen.



There are more than 200,000 foreign domestic workers currently in Singapore. A recent survey by HOME showed that about 1 in 5 report that they have cameras installed inside their rooms. This means that there are people who are watching their helpers sleep, change and pray. Many of these foreign domestic workers keep quiet about the cameras in their rooms for fear of losing their jobs.



When we went to talk to a few Indonesian domestic workers on their off day, they shared that it is not as simple as getting a job, saving their salaries and then returning home. Most, if not all, have to use months of their salaries to pay off their agent fees. It makes sense, then, that they would not do or say anything that would risk their jobs.

But the most interesting part of my research was talking to employers. Over the past couple of months, when people asked me what I was working on, I told them about *Supervision* and watched their reactions within the first few seconds.

The responses were quite polarised. Some frowned on the practice. Others unconsciously took on a defensive position and justified their use of cameras based on the various stories of abuse and theft that they had read about in the news or heard from friends of friends.

I've never lived with a foreign domestic worker before, but I've always found it strange to observe my grandmother's helpers. Their relationship is not simply that of employer and employee. In the absence of her children, they take care of my grandmother – they feed her, bathe her, answer to all her requests. Our home is the 'office' they work in and their 'office' is where they live, eat, rest, pray.

The more I think about a single place being - at the same time - home to the employer and workplace to the foreign domestic worker, the more it confuses me. If the justification for the cameras is that the employers are simply watching their employees at work, then when exactly are they 'off work'? Shouldn't they have a separate place of accommodation away from their 'office' to rest? Are the measures we are taking proportionate to the perceived fears and threats?

Now, whenever I visit my grandparents, their helpers seem to have taken the whole situation in their stride. Even my grandparents appear unaffected by the cameras, which, incidentally, are watching them too.

They look like they have accepted the constant presence of several watchful eyes as a part of their daily life, in return for some sense of security.

Now *that* is scary.

## Maid In Singapore

A conversation with actor, Umi Kalthum Ismail

Written by Shawne Wang



***Umi Kalthum Ismail plays Yanti - a domestic helper in Supervision. She chats with us about putting herself in her character's shoes and how this play hits close to home.***

Joining the cast of *Supervision* has been an eye-opening experience for Umi Kalthum Ismail.

In Thomas Lim's new play, she takes on the role of Yanti - an Indonesian domestic helper employed by Jenny (Janice Koh) to take care of the latter's father, Teck (Patrick Teoh), who has recently suffered a stroke.

"This is Yanti's first time away from her home. It's also her first job, and she's never had to speak in English until now," explains Umi. "So it's a brand-new environment and very overwhelming for her. She's stressed, as she struggles to cope with the demands of her job. But she's also homesick."

These are all problems you might associate with working overseas.

But there are other unsettling challenges to being a domestic helper, as Umi has discovered during the course of rehearsals.

Not only is she a stranger in a new land, Yanti is a stranger in someone else's home. And yet, she has to cook and clean for Teck, and even bathe him.

"Yanti is always out of place," Umi says. "She doesn't belong in Jenny and Teck's home, yet she has to work – to do her best, to take care of someone who's ill. So even if she feels uncomfortable, she has to put that aside."

"In a way, she's not allowed to have feelings about her situation. She cannot be sad, or angry – she has to do her job."

The tensions within the household escalate when Yanti discovers that she's being watched. There are cameras everywhere – even in the toilet.

"Yanti is stripped of a lot of things – she has no power, no say, within the household," Umi observes. "And she's not even allowed privacy in the bathroom. Imagine having to change your clothes and shower when you know that there's a camera watching you!"

"That's actually illegal!" she adds, shaking her head in bewilderment. "Our stage manager checked, and she discovered that you can legally place cameras in your home... but not in your toilet."

## Home Truths

Working on *Supervision* has hit unexpectedly close to home for Umi.

"I've never had a helper, so *that* aspect of *Supervision* is a new and interesting experience for me," she shares.

"But my father did have a stroke two years ago, and I'm one of his primary caretakers. I cook for him every day, I clean the house. My main priority over the past couple of years has been taking care of a sick person."

*"Yanti is stripped of a lot of things – she has no power, no say, within the household and she's not even allowed privacy in the bathroom. Imagine having to change your clothes and shower when you know that there's a camera watching you!"*



It's why she understands the decisions made by Jenny in the play – even if she would not make the same ones herself.

"I completely get what Jenny is going through as Teck's daughter," says Umi. "She's very busy and has to work, just like I do. So she brings Yanti in, which solves some immediate problems... but creates others that are just as difficult to handle."

Beyond looking at issues like the rights of domestic helpers, *Supervision* also examines a growing phenomenon in Singapore: the ways in which we take care of our elderly relatives.

"I've come to realise that what any sick person needs is just a lot of love and a listening ear," Umi elaborates.

"You can get so focused on taking care of their basic needs – eat this, take your medicine – which is actually the easy part. The most difficult and important thing to do is to be there for them: to *really* talk to your parents, heart to heart, and to make them feel loved."



# DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

## General Discussion Points

1. Why do you think the playwright chose the title, 'Supervision'?

*The motif of vision reoccurs throughout the play. The plot revolves around how Yanti is being supervised by Jenny in the way she carries out her duties. Jenny does this by installing cameras, which gives her 'super vision' of the house without having to be there. While we think Jenny is the only one in the play who is watching, she too, feels watched and judged for the way she performs her duties as a daughter.*

2. Which part of the play were you most engaged in? Why?
3. What do you think are the main themes of the play?
4. Do you think the reasons Jenny gave for installing the cameras are justified?
5. What did you think about Teck's unhealthy requests? Should he be allowed to have them?
6. Who should Yanti listen to - the person who pays her salary or the person she is taking care of?
7. Did you feel for any of the characters in the play?
8. Think about how this play was staged - the set, props, lighting, sound, costumes and multimedia. What effect did these elements have on your experience?

## Extension Activity: Points Of View

This activity is a follow-up to the general discussion points. The statements listed below highlights the key issues in the play and invites your students to voice their opinions and think critically about their positions on the statements. While this can be done as a sit down discussion, we highly recommend some movement to create a visual division. One way you can do this is to ask those who agree with the statement to stand up. If you have more space, you can ask those who agree to move to one side of the room and those who disagree to move to the opposite side.

Prompts:

- As Yanti's employer, Jenny has every right to install surveillance cameras in the house.
- Teck should not be allowed to have unhealthy food given his medical condition.
- Yanti should only take instructions from Jenny because Jenny is the one who pays her salary.
- It is acceptable for Jenny to inspect Yanti's personal belongings.
- Just like what Jenny did in the play, all employers should 'maid-proof' their homes.
- Yanti should not have shifted the cameras in the house.
- Yanti should not impose her religious beliefs on Teck.
- Jenny is a good and filial daughter.
- Teck should be able to decide how he wants to live his life.

# Themes and Issues: Ageing Population

## Discussion Prompts

1. In the play, *Supervision*, Jenny is in charge of making decisions about Teck's care arrangements. Do you think it was right for her to impose certain restrictions on Teck's diet and lifestyle? Why or why not?
2. Should children be responsible for making medical decisions for their elderly parents?
3. Consider the view that quality of life is more important than longevity.

### Key Ideas

#### **Ageing**

The process of growing old.

#### **Healthy Ageing**

The World Health Organization defines healthy ageing "as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age".

#### **Functional Disability**

Deficit(s) in a person's ability to perform tasks or take part in activities that they value, such as being able to feed, bath, groom and move around without assistance.

#### **Quality of Life**

The standard of health, comfort, and happiness experienced by an individual or group.

#### **Mental Capacity**

Ability to make one's own decisions, including medical decisions. Individuals assessed by doctors to not have mental capacity are reliant on others to make decisions for them.

#### **Life Expectancy**

The average length of time a person is expected to live.

#### **Retirement Age**

The age at which one is expected to stop working. In Singapore, the retirement age is currently at 62. Companies are not allowed to ask their employees to retire before that age.

**Dependency Ratio**

Within a country, the ratio of the population that is not in the labour force (typically the young and old) and those in the labour force. A high dependency ratio usually means there is more stress on the working population to support the dependent population.

**Baby Boomers**

The generation of people born after World War II, born between 1944 and 1964. They form a large proportion of the population of many countries, including Singapore.

**Maintenance of Parents Act**

Legal statute for Singapore residents aged 60 and above who are unable to support themselves. Under this act, parents can sue their children for lack of maintenance.

**Care Arrangements**

In Singapore, there are numerous care arrangement options available for the elderly. These include, but are not limited to: nursing homes, hospices, retirement villages, specialised HDB apartments, day care centres and care within the elderly's home.



## Articles and Videos

We have compiled several articles and videos related to the themes and issues of Ageing Population that could contribute to the conversation around this topic.

- Growing old: Should you be worried? – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/growing-old-should-you-be-worried>
- 'I'd rather die than go to a home' – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/id-rather-die-than-go-to-a-home>
- First retirement village opens in Singapore in December – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/first-retirement-village-opens-in-singapore-in-december>
- St Joseph's Home opens childcare centre, intergenerational playground in nursing home – Channel News Asia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/st-joseph-s-home-opens-childcare-centre-intergenerational-9163172>
- Kids learn to see seniors in different light – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/kids-learn-to-see-seniors-in-different-light>
- Sharp rise in number of people living alone – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sharp-rise-in-number-of-people-living-alone>
- First senior care centres, active ageing hubs operating 7 days a week in Ghim Moh and Telok Blangah – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/two-senior-care-centres-and-active-ageing-hubs-operating-in-ghim-moh-and-telok-blangah>
- The art of ageing well- Seniors who look vibrant and feel young – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/the-art-of-ageing-well?loggedout=true>
- Parliament- Amy Khor pledges more help and initiatives for seniors to age in place, stay healthy – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-amy-khor-pledges-more-help-and-initiatives-for-seniors-to-age-in-place-stay>
- Hiring untrained maids to take care of frail, sick elderly may not be safe or sustainable: Experts – Channel News Asia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/hiring-untrained-maids-to-take-care-of-frail-sick-elderly-risks-11415562>

- Elderly health costs to rise tenfold by 2030 – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/elderly-health-costs-to-rise-tenfold-by-2030-report>
- Bridging age-old generation gap in the workplace – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/bridging-age-old-generation-gap-in-the-workplace>
- Seniors at work- The new norm for ageing in Singapore – ASEAN Today: <https://www.aseantoday.com/2019/02/seniors-at-work-the-new-norm-for-ageing-in-singapore/>
- Talking Point 2016 - Episode 24: Inside Nursing Homes (from 5:46mins): <https://video.toggle.sg/en/series/talking-point-2016/ep24/458260>
- Channel News Asia Insider Youtube Channel: A series of videos exploring 'Elderly Poverty in Asia': [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkMf14VQEvTbyGFOw\\_OWwvElk6OH61lsx](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkMf14VQEvTbyGFOw_OWwvElk6OH61lsx)

## Suggested Activities

### **Read: Nursing Homes, Retirement Villages, Living Alone at Home**

There have been many conversations about retirement living arrangements for the elderly in Singapore. These include:

- Living alone
- Living with family
- Nursing Homes
- Retirement Village
- Elderly folks living together

We have selected several articles about these retirement living arrangements that might be useful in your classroom.

Please refer to the Articles and Videos section for the links to these articles.

### **Activity: How old is 'old'?**

On the white board, write out the following categories: new-born, toddler, child, teenager, adult, middle age and elderly.

Discuss as a class and come to a consensus on the age range for each category. Is age the only determiner of whether someone is considered 'old' or 'elderly'?

### **Activity: Redesigning The Golden Years**

Ask the students to imagine themselves 50, 60, even 70 years in the future, when they retire and their children (if any), have started their own families and moved out of the house.

What would a typical day in their retirement look like? What activities might they fill it with? Would they stay at home or move somewhere?

If they could design specialised accommodation and programmes for themselves, what would these look like?

## Discussion: Elder Issues

### Housing

Some people think that the elderly should not live alone for their safety.

**Fact:** There are efforts from the government to make more housing available. There are also features in place including more accessible and barrier free, such as the lift upgrading programme, building ramps that lead to outdoor recreational facilities. In the houses itself, features such as grabbers in the toilet, non-slip floor tiles are being installed. There are at-home care services available for those that would need it. These factors make it possible for the elderly to live by themselves if they choose to do so.

### Health & Illness

Old age is very often associated with sickness.

**Fact:** Studies have shown that Singaporeans are living healthier long lives. The average number of years lived in good health has increased from 65.8 years in 1990 to 72.3 last year for men. For women, it has improved from 69 years to 75. It is important to note that the elderly still face health concerns, as each person has different needs and health conditions.

### Social Isolation

People believe that older adults are socially isolated and lonely.

**Fact:** The elderly are at risk of being socially isolated, those who live alone, or with poor health and disabilities are at an even higher risk to be isolated. Activities at the Senior Activity Centres, charities, welfare groups and volunteer befriender programmes have helped create a supportive network for the elderly, especially those living alone.

### Mental Decline

A common stereotype is that mental abilities begin to decline from middle age onward, especially the abilities to learn and remember, and that cognitive impairment (i.e., memory loss, disorientation, or confusion) is an inevitable part of the ageing process.

**Facts:** The majority of people aged 65 or over do not have defective memories. 10% of older adults aged 60 years and above in Singapore have dementia. While those who have been diagnosed with a stroke have a higher risk of dementia, though the majority of older adults are without mental impairment.



## Discussion: Caring for Our Elderly with Dignity

Consider the following scene from the play. As we age, we sometimes lose control over our bodily functions, such as the ability to hold our bladder. This may result in embarrassing situations, just like the one Teck had experienced in the play.

Many caregivers implement measures such as making the elderly in their care wear diapers, or sleep on plastic bedsheets which can be very uncomfortable. If and when we find ourselves in situations having to care for someone like Teck, what else can we do? How can we respond in a way that also takes care of the person's dignity?

TECK: I can't control my bladder.

YANTI: Accident, sir.

TECK: The nurses call it an accident too. Then one accident becomes two, two becomes three then it becomes too frequent you cannot call them accidents anymore. My bladder goes first, then I'll start drooling and shitting all over the place. I'll have to sleep on a plastic covered mattress and wear a diaper and I'll just be sitting in a pool of my own urine and shit.

YANTI: Sir, it's only one time accident. Don't think bad things.

TECK: Those people wearing diapers back there... They told me it was soggy. Soggy all over. They only change the diaper once every four hours. And sometimes when they forget to change it, the skin starts to rot and it's painful and -

YANTI: You cannot think like this. Sir healthy. Still can walk, still can talk... This one is one time. Accident.

TECK: I don't want to end up like that. I don't want to be in a diaper, I don't want to sleep on plastic, I don't want to rot, I don't want. I don't want.

YANTI: No diaper. No plastic mattress. Accident one time, I clean. Ten times, I clean. One hundred times, I also clean. No diaper, okay?

TECK: You promise?

YANTI: I promise.

TECK: I don't want her to know about this.

YANTI: Okay. Our secret.

# Themes and Issues: Foreign Workers in Singapore

## Discussion Prompts

1. As an employer, Jenny conducts very stringent checks and monitoring of Yanti's movements, behaviours and personal belongings. What are your views on Jenny's actions?
2. Should the local government play a more significant role in preventing the exploitation of foreign workers?
3. "Foreign domestic workers should be given separate accommodation apart from their employers". What are your views?

### Key Ideas

#### **Migrant**

Someone who moves from one country to another, to find work or better living conditions.

#### **Immigrant**

Someone who moves from one country to another to live permanently.

#### **Recruitment Fees**

The fees that a foreigner pays to the employment agent or agency in their country of origin and/or the receiving country in order to get placed for a job. This may also include any training fees in the home country. A large portion of these fees are paid through deductions in the worker's salary and can range from anywhere between two to eight months. This often means the worker will work without receiving their wages until their debts have been paid.

#### **Kickbacks**

Any monetary incentive that the employer receives from the employee as a guarantee of continued employment. This practice is prohibited under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.

#### **Repatriation**

The process of sending someone back to their own country.

**Work Permit**

A legal document issued by the Ministry of Manpower that allows semi-skilled foreigners from approved source countries to work in specific sectors in Singapore. It is illegal for foreigners to work without a work permit.

**Sponsor**

A person that is responsible for another person or organisation. With regard to foreign workers, Singapore adopts an employer-sponsored framework, in which employers are held accountable for their foreign employees. Employers may also terminate their foreign employees at any time, resulting in the immediate repatriation of foreign employees.

**Security Bond**

At the time of writing, the security bond for each non-Malaysian foreign workers is \$5000. This bond is between the employer and the Government of Singapore and is forfeited under certain conditions in which the employer, employee or both violate the terms of the work permit.

**Exploitation**

The action of taking advantage of someone. Examples of exploitation of foreign workers include making them work beyond what they were employed to do, such as making foreign domestic workers work in multiple households.

**Employment Act**

Singapore's main labour law that specifies the basic working conditions for employees, such as limits on working hours (no more than 12 hours a day), overtime, rest day, public holiday payment, leave and medical leave. This does not cover certain groups of workers in Singapore, such as foreign workers.

**Employment of Foreign Manpower Act**

Foreign workers are covered under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA). This governs the working conditions for migrant workers. The protections in this act differ from the Employment Act in many ways. For instance, there are no legal limits to working hours of foreign domestic workers specified in the EMFA. There are also many conditions and restrictions imposed upon employers and foreign workers.

## Articles & Videos

We have compiled several articles and videos related to the theme of Foreign Workers in Singapore that could contribute to the conversation around this topic.

- Indonesia plans to stop sending new live-in maids abroad – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-plans-to-stop-sending-new-live-in-maids-abroad>
- Live-out maids 'will lead to more costs, issues' – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/live-out-maids-will-lead-to-more-costs-issues>
- Domestic workers are the slaves of modern Asia. Are Hongkongers, Singaporeans and Malaysians ever going to change? – South China Morning Post on Yahoo News: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/domestic-workers-slaves-modern-asia-141322656.html>
- Overwork, verbal abuse most common grievances of maids, say Home and HK NGO in report on forced labour – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/overwork-and-verbal-abuse-are-most-common-grievances-of-domestic-workers-home>
- Commentary: Don't hold our treatment of foreign domestic workers to countries with lower standards – Channel News Asia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/treatment-of-foreign-domestic-workers-needs-higher-standards-10128416>
- Commentary: Improve welfare of foreign domestic workers to prevent 'care drain' – Channel News Asia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/protecting-foreign-domestic-workers-maids-prevent-care-drain-10189326>
- Gap in Law to Protect Workers – Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/gap-in-law-to-protect-workers>
- Treat migrant workers as more than foreign bodies and people might stop rejecting them – #opinionoftheday, Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/opinionoftheday-treat-migrant-workers-as-more-than-foreign-bodies-and-people-might-stop>
- Singapore can lead the way in foreign workers' rights – Your Letters, Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/singapore-can-lead-the-way-in-foreign-workers-rights>



- Singaporean scolds worker from China for not speaking English  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygm-SoTU6aQ>
- Singaporeans Read Mean Tweets to Migrant Workers (Part 1):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRVOtl4Ci3M>
- Singaporeans Read Mean Tweets to Migrant Workers (Part 2):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMgLxBtbQkU>
- Talking Point 2018 - Episode 22: Is My Employer Watching Me?:  
<https://video.toggle.sg/en/series/talking-point-2018/ep22/639889>

## Suggested Activities

### Watch: Singaporeans Read Mean Tweets to Migrant Workers

In 2016, SGAG produced two videos of Singaporeans reading tweets that have been posted about migrant workers in Singapore. This was witnessed by migrant workers of various nationalities.

The two videos are:

Singaporeans Read Mean Tweets to Migrant Workers (Part 1)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRVOtl4Ci3M>

Singaporeans Read Mean Tweets to Migrant Workers (Part 2)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMgLxBtbQkU>

After watching the videos, ask the class to share their responses to the video.

### Discussion: Perception of Foreign Workers in Singapore

Not all foreigners are perceived in the same way by Singaporeans. Stereotypes exist for foreign workers of every nationality, skin colour and industry. In particular, there is a vast difference in the perception of low wage foreign workers (mainly in the construction and domestic help industries) and the professionals. We even have different ways of referring to them, such as 'foreign workers', usually associated with the low-wage workers and 'expats', usually associated with professionals.

What are some of these stereotypes that are associated with the different segments of our foreigners in our workforce?

### Debate: What qualifies someone as a Singaporean?

For most young Singaporeans, we are descendants of immigrants. Many of our parents, grandparents or even great-grandparents come from a different country and made a decision to plant their roots and start their families here. One could say that most Singaporean families are in fact, immigrant families. Yet, at some point in time in our family's history, we started to think of ourselves as Singaporeans.

What 'qualifies' someone as a Singaporean? Is it the number of generations? Is it the length of time that someone has lived or worked in Singapore? Is it how well they have integrated into Singaporean culture?

## Discussion: Employers in Singapore

In the opening scene of the play, Jenny, who has prior experience employing foreign domestic workers, warns Teck of the possible dangers of not keeping a close eye on Yanti. In addition, Jenny withholds Yanti's passport from her. This is a common practice among employers, even though the Ministry of Manpower has stated that employers should not do so.

During a discussion with the actors, some have commented that it is common for employment agencies to tell employers of the precautionary measures they should take with their foreign domestic workers.

Consider the following extract of the play. Jenny takes a 'guilty until proven innocent' approach with Yanti. How should employers develop a healthy working relationship with their foreign domestic workers?

JENNY: Watch her carefully. Don't let her bring anyone into the house. Otherwise, if something goes wrong, you'll get implicated. Also, don't let her talk to the neighbours' maids. They have an entire network.

TECK: You are really thinking too much.

JENNY: You never had a maid before, so you don't know. First they bump into each other in the lift, then they will start to hang out at the void deck with all the other maids in the estate, and before you know it, she's connected to every single maid there is in Singapore. They'll start to sync up their off days, go out together, share information about employers, do drugs, get pregnant, share boyfriends...

TECK: Share boyfriends?

JENNY: It has happened before.

## **Read: Considering Alternative Arrangements for Foreign Domestic Workers**

In 2016, the Indonesian Manpower Ministry proposed an alternative arrangement for Indonesian domestic workers who work abroad. They suggested having live-out arrangements for Indonesian domestic workers.

We have selected two articles related to this proposal that might be useful in your classroom.

Please refer to the Articles and Videos section for the links to these articles:

- Indonesia plans to stop sending new live-in maids abroad - Straits Times
- Live-out maids 'will lead to more costs, issues' - Straits Times

You could also consider screening the documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen*, which examines the lives of foreign domestic workers living in Hong Kong. Some of the domestic workers featured have live-out arrangements.

## For Drama Clubs

This section focuses on plot device that was used in the *Supervision* that would be useful to those in the Drama Club to read about, learn, discuss and utilise in their own practice with their drama CCA groups.

### Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is a literary tool used by writers to create situations in which the audience knows something is going on in a situation but the characters are unaware of what is going on. With this, the words, actions and decisions made by the characters in the play, take on a different meaning for the audience.

Writers utilise dramatic irony as it can create humour or suspense in the moment, allowing tension to develop between what the audience and characters know is happening.

There are many examples of this in *Supervision*, such as when Yanti, together with the audience, had found out about the cameras, but Teck was still in the dark. Teck's actions and decisions were made on the basis that he was unaware that he was being watched.

By using dramatic irony as a tool when writing a story, a writer is able to pique the readers or audiences curiosity, including their hopes and fears concerning when and if the character will find out the truth of the situation in the story.

This enables an active involvement and expectation of the readers and audiences, which heighten the intensity of the play, and propels the story forward.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What other examples of shows that you have watched, included the use of dramatic irony?
  - Examples:
    - Romeo and Juliet: In the final scene, Romeo believes that Juliet is dead. As the audience, we know that Juliet is not actually dead but has taken a potion that makes it seem she is dead. Romeo then proceeds to poison himself because he cannot live without her. After he dies from the poison, Juliet wakes up to discover Romeo is dead, and then ends her life to be with him in death.
    - Superhero Movies: Many superheroes keep their identity a secret. For example, when he is out of his suit, Batman is known as Bruce Wayne. There have been many instances when Bruce Wayne interacts with the villains of Gotham. While we the audience are privy to Bruce Wayne's secret identity, these villains may not know.
2. What kind of effect do you think dramatic irony has on the audience?

## Performing the Scene

In the following extract from the play, Yanti is aware of the cameras that Jenny has placed all around the house. Unaware, Teck keeps reaching out for a cigarette.

Try playing this scene out with a friend in different ways. Here are some suggestions:

1. Only Yanti knows about the cameras
2. Both Yanti and Teck know about the cameras, but they assume the other person does not know
3. Only Teck knows about the cameras
4. Neither Yanti nor Teck know about the cameras

*(YANTI and TECK return home from a checkup. YANTI brings out TECK's medicine.)*

TECK: What's this?

YANTI: This one new one. Just now doctor give.

TECK: What's this for?

YANTI: Blood pressure.

TECK: Then what happened to the old one?

YANTI: He say don't take. Throw away.

TECK: Throw away? Got refund?

YANTI: No. But he say this one stronger.

TECK: Stronger? Why do I need stronger? I don't want it. What if I get low blood pressure? What if I die?

YANTI: He say everyday eat one only, okay.

TECK: Give me the old one.

YANTI: But he say -

TECK: Ya I know what he said, you're like his parrot.

YANTI: Every time see doctor so angry.

TECK: That's because he never has anything good to say.

YANTI: Wait, I take water for you.



*(YANTI goes to the kitchen change the pill to the previous prescription. She makes a call to JENNY. Meanwhile, in the living room, TECK looks through YANTI's bag, takes out a cigarette and is about to light it.)*

YANTI: Hello, m'am? Finished. Come home already. Same same. Blood pressure... cholesterol... But he also say sir blood sugar very high. No, m'am, I put a little bit sugar only. If don't put, sir don't drink. He also give sir new medicine but sir don't want to take.

*(When YANTI returns, she pulls the cigarette out of TECK's mouth)*

TECK: Oi! What do you think you're doing?

*(YANTI passes the phone to TECK.)*

YANTI: M'am want to talk to you.

TECK: What does she want? *(On the phone)* Hello? It's the same thing he always says what, 'Your blood pressure is high, your blood cholesterol is high, watch what you eat.' That's because it's the 'in' thing to say now. I've never had a problem with blood sugar. Now, the PM says we are fighting a war on diabetes and everywhere people are switching to brown rice and reduced sugar. I know what I am doing la, okay. *(To YANTI)* Stop it. I'm losing my patience. *(To the phone)* Nothing. I can handle it. Okay. Okay. Bye.

*(TECK puts down the phone.)*

TECK: Give it to me.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

This section contains links and information to additional resources that you may use to supplement the students learning related to the themes and topics of the play, *Supervision*.

### Films

- ***ILO ILO*** directed by Anthony Chen (Singapore), released in May 2013

Set in 1997 during the Asian Financial Crisis, *Ilo Ilo* is an award-winning film about the relationship between a middle-class Singaporean Chinese couple, their mischievous son, Jiale and their new Filipino domestic worker, Teresa.

- ***Sunday Beauty Queen*** directed by Baby Ruth Villarama (Philippines), released in 2016

A Filipino documentary film about a community of foreign domestic workers who work in Hong Kong for very low wages. In the film, these domestic workers share about their working conditions and their lives in a foreign land as they prepare to take part in an annual beauty pageant for Filipino domestic workers.

### Photography / Visual Art

- ***This is Where*** by Sean Cham (Singapore) : <https://www.seancham.com/this-is-where>

A photo exhibition on the status, living conditions and challenges faced by migrant workers in Singapore. *This Is Where* is a series of satirical posters displayed at bus stops islandwide featuring foreign domestic workers and construction workers in Singapore.

### Books & Literature

- ***Maid in Singapore: The Serious, Quirky and Sometimes Absurd Life of a Domestic Worker*** by Crisanta Sampang (Philippines), 2005

An autobiographical account of a Filipino domestic worker's life in Singapore. In this book, Crisanta talks about the aspirations, dreams, hopes and circumstances that bring young women to foreign lands to work as nannies, cooks, cleaners and sometimes, mistress.

- **Stranger to Myself: Diary of a Bangladeshi in Singapore** by MD Sharif Uddin (Bangladesh)

A volume of diary entries that chronicle the life of a Bangladeshi construction worker in Singapore. This volume records the years MD Sharif Uddin had spent in Singapore and tells of the pain, sacrifice and oppression that many construction workers face.

### Websites

- **Ministry of Manpower's Employer's Guide for Foreign Domestic Workers**  
<https://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-domestic-worker/employers-guide>

- **Transient Workers Count Too**  
<http://twc2.org.sg>

A non-profit organisation in Singapore dedicated to improving conditions for low-wage migrant workers.

- **Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME)**  
<https://www.home.org.sg>

A Singapore-based charity founded in 2004 dedicated to empowering and supporting migrant workers who find themselves victims of human rights violations and suffer abuse and exploitation.

### Reports

- **Behind Closed Doors: Forced Labour in the Domestic Work Sector in Singapore** by Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics & Liberty Shared, Published January 2019.

This report examines the issue of forced labour (FL) among Singapore's migrant domestic worker (MDW). Engaged in essential care and household work, live-in domestic workers are recognized as particularly vulnerable to labour and human rights violations. As a community, domestic workers are highly susceptible to forced labour due to the isolated nature of their work and workplaces (private homes), the lack of legal protections in Singapore, as well as the difficulties of—and reluctance associated with—regulating domestic work, even when policies aimed at so doing already exist.

# POST-SHOW TALK IN YOUR SCHOOL



As a follow-up to your students' trip to the theatre, we can organise a free post-show talk in your school for your students. These talks are an opportunity for students to respond and learn more about the play and the theatre industry in Singapore. The talk can be a general discussion of the show or go deeper into one of the themes or issues of the play.

For *Supervision*, we will be organising special post-show talks with the playwright, Thomas Lim. If you would like to arrange a talk for your students, get in touch with Ezzat at [ezzatalcaff@wildrice.com.sg](mailto:ezzatalcaff@wildrice.com.sg)

Talks are subject to availability.