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WILD
RICE

Learning Resource Pack

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ABOUT THE PLAY

Synopsis

As the Singapore Bicentennial is celebrated, six young people form a group called Raffles Must Fall to examine our country's colonial legacy. During their gatherings, they pore over forgotten texts and artefacts, re-enacting scenes from the past to better understand the nightmare of subjugation... and the dream of self-determination.

Drawing upon a wealth of historical documentation, including speeches, newspaper articles, petitions and songs, *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் confronts us with questions about our colonial past and how it still echoes through our present and into our future.

Why celebrate the beginning of colonialism rather than its end? Has Singapore gained independence without truly undergoing a process of decolonisation? And if Raffles must fall, what will he take down with him?

Written by the award-winning Alfian Sa'at in collaboration with up-and-coming playwright Neo Hai Bin, this provocative and moving new play examines how our history and humanity have been shaped – and shattered – by the forces of colonialism.

Creative & Production Team

Written by **Alfian Sa'at & Neo Hai Bin**
Directed by **Glen Goei & Jo Kukathas**
Set Designer **Wong Chee Wai**
Lighting Designer **James Wong**
Sound Designer **Paul Searles**
Multimedia Designer **Brian Gothong Tan**
Costume Designers **Leonard Augustine Choo**
Music Instructor **Riduan Zalani**
Vocal Coach **Elaine Chan**
Malay Dance Choreographer **Nizar Fauzi**
Javanese Movement Instructor **Muhammad Asri (Ari)**

Cast

Francis played by **Brendon Fernandez**
Jared played by **Chong Woon Yong**
Norman played by **Ghafir Akbar**
Anushka played by **Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai**
Liyana played by **Umi Kalthum Ismail**
Siew played by **Zee Wong**

Production History

10th October - 2nd November 2019
The Ngee Ann Kongsi Theatre @ WILD RICE
Directed by **Glen Goei & Jo Kukathas**
Starring **Brendon Fernandez, Chong Woon Yong, Ghafir Akbar, Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai, Umi Kalthum Ismail, Zee Wong**

30th July 2020 - 10th August 2020
Wild@Home On Demand on Vimeo
[This is a recording of the 2019 production.](#)
Directed by **Glen Goei & Jo Kukathas**
Starring **Brendon Fernandez, Chong Woon Yong, Ghafir Akbar, Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai, Umi Kalthum Ismail, Zee Wong**

Biographies

Cast



BRENDON FERNANDEZ as Francis

Brendon is delighted to be working with WILD RICE again, especially as part of their Grand Opening Season at Funan! His recent stage credits include *Displaced Persons' Welcome Dinner*, *Off Centre*, *Underclass*, *Tropicana the Musical* and *HOTEL*. Brendon is also a voiceover talent, documentary television presenter, emcee and corporate trainer.



CHONG WOON YONG as Jared

Woon Yong is somewhat of a contradiction. He revels in artistic creation and collaboration, as well as arts management and administration; he was even formerly an arts administrator. Credits as a performer include *Frago* (Checkpoint Theatre); *Prism* and *Grind* (Toy Factory Productions), *The Struggle: Years Later* (The Theatre Practice), *Almost Left Behind* (Singapore Arts Festival 2011) and *11 • Kuo Pao Kun Devised* (Kuo Pao Kun Festival 2012). He is a founding member of Emergency Stairs and produced *Offending The Audience*, which was commissioned by the 2017 Huayi Festival. Woon Yong graduated with a BA from NUS' Theatre Studies Programme in 2011.



GHAFIR AKBAR as Norman

Ghafir was last seen in The Necessary Stage's *Civilised*. Singapore credits include: *HOTEL*, *Another Country*, *Public Enemy* (WILD RICE); *Guards at the Taj* (Singapore Repertory Theatre), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare in the Park); *Rubber Girl on the Loose*, *Temple*, *Medea* (Cake Theatrical Productions); and *Those Who Can't, Teach* (The Necessary Stage). In Malaysia, Ghafir has performed in *Raj and the End of Tragedy*, *Gold Rain and Hailstones* and *The Baltimore Waltz* (Instant Cafe Theatre); *7-10* (Five Arts Centre); and *Hamlet* (Actors Studio). Ghafir holds an MFA in Acting (FSU-Asolo Conservatory) and a BA in Theatre Performance (Western Michigan University).



REBEKAH SANGEETHA DORAI as Anushkha

Sangeetha is an actor, singer and voiceover artist. Recent theatre credits include her solo show, *Building A Character*, at WILD RICE's 2018 Singapore Theatre Festival; *Discord of Discourse* at The Faversham Fringe (UK); Tan Kheng Hua's *Modest Travels*; Grace Kalaiselvi's *Goddesses of Words*; the Esplanade's *Miss British* and TheatreWorks' *Three Fat Virgins*. She also debuted her solo jazz concert, *Sangeetha Sings Sinatra*, at the Esplanade in early 2019. She is elated to be a part of *Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்*, and it is her hope that audiences walk away from this show with a newfound acknowledgement of our omitted, but important, histories.



UMI KALTHUM ISMAIL as Liyana

Umi graduated with a Diploma in Theatre Arts from LASALLE College of the Arts in 2006. She has acted for theatre, television and film. Her theatre credits include *Supervision* (WILD RICE), for which she was nominated for Best Actress at the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards; *Kampong Gelam Tales* and *5IVE* (Teater Ekamatra). Internationally, she has toured France with *The Reunification of the Two Koreas* (TheatreWorks). While she profoundly enjoys performing, teaching has always been Umi's first love - she has spent the last decade educating young theatre-makers in the disciplines of writing, directing and acting. In 2013, she co-founded The Videosmith, a video production company, and currently serves as its Content Producer.



ZEE WONG as Siew

Zee is an actor, playwright and dramaturg. Acting credits include *Private Parts* (Michael Chiang Playthings); *Framed, By Adolf* (The Finger Players); *Café* (The Twenty-Something Theatre Festival); and *Normal* (Checkpoint Theatre). She served as the dramaturg for *ATTEMPTS:SG*, a sold-out participatory theatre piece presented at the 2018 M1 Singapore Fringe Festival. Zee is a Centre 42 Boiler Room 2016 playwright. Her first play, *The Women Before Me*, is about art and sexual assault. The play had its first public reading to a full house as part of Late Night Texting in August 2019.

Creative Team



ALFIAN SA'AT Playwright

Alfian is the Resident Playwright of WILD RICE. He has been nominated at the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for Best Original Script 10 times, and has received the award thrice. He was the winner of the Golden Point Award for Poetry and the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature in 2001. His publications include *Collected Plays One and Two*; poetry collections *One Fierce Hour* and *A History of Amnesia*; and short-story collections *Corridor* and *Malay Sketches*.



NEO HAI BIN Playwright

A writer and theatre practitioner, Hai Bin's literary practice involves researching social issues and the human condition, which he then translates into different forms of literary expression: from scripts and poems to analytical critiques and novels. His plays include 招: *When The Cold Wind Blows* (Singapore Theatre Festival 2018) and *Cut Kafka!* (Esplanade Huayi Festival Commission 2018). He has published a volume of essays (房间絮语), and his literary works can be found at <http://thethoughtspavilion.wordpress.com>. He co-founded 微.We Collective with lighting designer Liu Yong Huay to create spatial experiences for audiences. Hai Bin is a founding and core member of the Nine Years Theatre Ensemble.

Creative Team



GLEN GOEI Director

Glen's substantial body of work encompasses a wide range of the performing arts, including theatre, film, parades and world expos. Highlights include his Olivier Award-nominated performance in the title role of *M. Butterfly* opposite Anthony Hopkins in London's West End; and his critically acclaimed feature films, *Forever Fever* and *The Blue Mansion*. Glen has also made significant contributions to Singapore's theatre scene. Since 2002, Glen has served as the Co-Artistic Director of WILD RICE, for which he has directed hits such as *Emily of Emerald Hill*, *Supervision*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *HOTEL*, *Public Enemy*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Cook a Pot of Curry*, *Family Outing*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Magic Fundoshi*, *Aladdin* and *Boeing Boeing*.



JO KUKATHAS Director

Jo is a writer/director/actor and director of The Instant Café Theatre Company, Malaysia, which is best known for its political satire and new writing. In Singapore, she has directed *Nadirah*, *Parah*, *Cooling-Off Day* and *Another Country* by Alfian Sa'at, as well as *Guards at the Taj* for SRT. She has co-created several intercultural collaborations in Japan, including *The Island in Between*, *Hotel Grand Asia* and *Beautiful Water*, which will tour in 2020. Other directorial work includes *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare) and *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (Dario Fo). She has worked with Glen Goei, Alfian Sa'at and Ivan Heng for some years now.

WONG CHEE WAI Set Designer

Chee Wai is a full-time freelance set designer. He has designed and worked with various performing arts companies in Singapore. Some of his recent works include WILD RICE's *HOTEL*, *Monkey Goes West*, *Public Enemy* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*; as well as The Necessary Stage's *Those Who Can't, Teach* and Sight Lines Productions' *Lord of the Flies*.

Creative Team

JAMES TAN Lighting Designer

James was conferred the Young Artist Award and the Arts Professional Scholarship by the National Arts Council of Singapore. He graduated with a Master of Fine Arts in Lighting Design from the University of California in San Diego. Selected credits: *Press Gang*, *Public Enemy* (WILD RICE); *God of Carnage*, *Hello Goodbye* (SRT); *Urinetown*, *Dragonflies*, *Next To Normal* (Pangdemonium), *Red* (Blank Space Theatre in collaboration with Esplanade) and *Lord of the Flies* (Blank Space Theatre with Sight Line Productions); *From Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience* (Singapore Bicentennial Office) and Nathan Sawaya's *The Art of the Brick*® Exhibition (MBS ArtScience Museum).

PAUL SEARLES Sound Designer

Paul is a composer and sound designer from The Gunnery, one of Asia's finest music houses. He has composed music and designed sound for many WILD RICE productions, including *HOTEL* and *Romeo & Juliet*. He studied architecture and composition in Australia, and has earned a Gold Record with his band, Skunkhour. He is also an award-winning screenwriter. Paul recently composed a Bernard Herrmann-inspired score for Glen Goei's *Revenge of the Pontianak* and will soon be releasing a solo album under the name Kazr.

BRIAN GOTHONG TAN Multimedia Designer

Brian is best known for his cutting-edge and highly engaging works in theatre, film and installation art. His work has been featured in numerous theatrical productions with companies such as WILD RICE, The Necessary Stage, Cake Theatrical Productions and Pangdemonium. Since 2005, he has won Best Multimedia Design at the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards four times. He has worked on films like *Pleasure Factory* (Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2007), *Lucky 7*, *Invisible Children*, *In the Room* and *Ramen Teh*. He was also the Director of Film and Visual Effects for Singapore's National Day Parade (2009, 2011, 2016), the 2010 Youth Olympic Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and the 2015 SEA Games. He was awarded the Young Artist Award in 2012 and Singapore Youth Award in 2015.

LEONARD AUGUSTINE CHOO Costume Designer

Leonard is an international costume designer currently based in Singapore. He designs costumes for dance, opera, theatre and film, and has worked in New York, Boston, Suzhou and Arkansas. Leonard was the principal fabric shopper for the New York City Ballet's costume department for three years. Design credits include: *This is What Happens to Pretty Girls*, *Late Company* (Pangdemonium); *Guards at the Taj*, *Gretel & Hansel*, *The Truth* (SRT); *iSing International Opera Festival* (Suzhou); *American Ballet Theatre Fall 2018* (ABT); *Forest Boy* (NY); and *Don Giovanni* (Boston). Leonard has draped and tailored for the Juilliard School, *Gotham* (FOX) and *Crashing* (HBO), among others.

INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

History - Narrative or Argument?

An excerpt from *The Singapore Narrative(s): Old and New*
by Dr. Thum Ping Tjin

Many people have asked me this question about Singapore's bicentennial: why is Singapore celebrating our own colonisation?

To understand that, we need to understand the use of history in Singapore and, more to the point, the political economy of the use of history in Singapore. The turning point is Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965. Prior to that point, the Singapore government's opponent was colonialism. This was a popularly elected and popularly responsible government.

In seeking independence, we understood that Singaporeans saw themselves as Malayan – and, by Malaya, I mean, of course, the historical and geographic Malaya, which stretches from Perlis to Singapore – and wanted reunification with the rest of Malaya. Accordingly, the elected government of Singapore conceived our national identity in those terms, and emphasised that Malayan identity as part of its reunification campaign. But, after the separation, for political reasons, it needed to justify the sudden stealth separation of Singapore from the rest of Malaya and Malaysia. So here's the problem: you've spent over a decade fighting for Singapore to be Malayan by emphasising Singapore's Malayan identity. Now you are out. Any

reasonable reading of Singapore history and all recent government rhetoric says we are Malayan.

Now, you need to build a separate identity. What do you do? How do you tell Singapore history without reference to the fact that historically, culturally, geographically, we are part of the Malay world?

You do that by emphasising our colonial past. A new arc of history that connects Raffles' late enlightenment reforms, the laissez-faire liberalism of the Victorians, the post-war imperialism of the colonial welfare state, and PAP authoritarianism. So the first textbooks were issued to Singaporean students in 1984, which not only framed Singapore from 1819 to 1965, but had a photo of the Raffles Statue on the cover. That same year, we had our first National Exhibition celebrating Singapore, celebrating 25 years since independence.

Now, if you're paying attention, you'll realise that they dated Singapore's independence to 1959, when we achieved self-government, rather than our actual independence from Britain in 1963 or our separation from Malaysia in 1965. Today, we have forgotten about 1959. And this emphasises how flexible the framing is and how it is manipulated to serve the purpose of the narrative.

In this reading of history, colonialism is seen as a fundamentally good thing. This is, frankly, obscene. The idea that you can go over to someone else's territory and take it over and subjugate them and force on them your conceptions of culture and civilisation, and this is good for them – this is really offensive. And yet, Singapore perpetuates that, and this insidious sense of cultural superiority infects us in a number of ways.

The most insidious is perhaps a sense of racial and cultural hierarchy, in which we instinctively set ourselves below white people and above other Asians and Africans. It legitimates discrimination and how we treat people of different races and nationalities. It legitimates how we Singaporeans treat our foreign workers – in particular, our domestic workers and construction workers.

As Franz Fanon observed, colonialism has serious ramifications for the psyche of the colonised, who are stunted by a deeply implanted sense of degradation and inferiority. The narrative that colonialism is a good thing has the impact of teaching and moulding the colonised and the coloniser into their respective roles as slave and master. Thus, the myths help establish a social order in which the colonised collaborate in their own subordination.

Not for nothing have I argued that Singapore continues to be governed as a colonial state. We use a colonial constitution, from 1954. We use colonial laws of subjugation from the Malayan Emergency, from 1948. We use colonial

institutions, like our parliament and laws. And we use a colonial mindset to convince our citizens that we must be subjugated for our own good.

History is not a narrative. History is an argument. There is no one version, no objective version, no authoritative version of history. We can only learn from the past by arguing over it, time and time again, reinterpreting it for a new generation to meet new challenges and face new problems. By restricting ourselves to one narrow view of history, we privilege a certain perspective, and we thus absorb all the pitfalls of that perspective.

A monopoly on history allows the people who control that monopoly to define who we are, our national identity, and then to use it, to weaponise it in pursuit of their own aims. We end up with groupthink, with conformity, with appeals to a misguided sense of "unity" when they really mean obedience. And we end up with justification for discrimination, exclusion, xenophobia, and even genocide.

Dr. Thum's full essay can be found at newnaratif.com/podcast/the-singapore-narratives-old-and-new/

Independence Day

An interview with the actors of Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்
by Shawne Wang



What have you been doing in the rehearsal room (or outside of it!) to get ready for Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்?

Brendon Fernandez: We all went to the Bicentennial Experience (*macam* field trip!). It was quite surreal for me, because I did some of the voiceover for the exhibition. At the time of recording, I didn't question the official narrative regarding Singapore's founding - I just accepted it as fact. But, having to listen to the official narrative played back to me in my own voice, after having read Alfian and Hai Bin's script - I felt quite implicated!

Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai: Visiting the Bicentennial Experience and experiencing the sense of erasure that occurred within that exhibition was very

uncomfortable for me. Granted, we can't put everything in. But we should have been given a truthful and fair account of our past. Not being able to see that felt like someone had carved a hole in my lineage and history.

Ghafir Akbar: I've been talking to random people I meet - other foreigners, taxi drivers, *kopitiam* uncles, 7-11 staff - to find out what they think about what is happening around them. We've talked about the haze, the Singapore River, other foreign workers - just to get a sense of how much of our own lives are reflected in the stories we are telling in *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்.

Umi Kalthum Ismail: I've been reading *The Myth of the Lazy Native* by Syed Hussein Alatas to get more insight into the roles I play in *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்.

Chong Woon Yong: Rehearsals have been challenging. Technically, it involves going in and out of different roles all the time. Artistically, it's about finding the truth and authenticity in the circumstances of these characters - the sacrifices they made are deeply human, but most of their stories have been lost to history.

Zee Wong: The entire cast and stage management team have been furiously researching, sharing articles, videos and other information with one another during rehearsals and in our WhatsApp chat. We are determined to do justice to these people and their stories.

Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் examines colonialism and its legacy in Singapore. How have you found these themes resonating with you personally?

Brendon: It's fascinating, and also quite painful, to see how decisions made hundreds of years ago still impact our lives today. Things like policies based on racial prejudice, and the myth of colonialism being a civilising force.

Sangeetha: We can never know who we could've been without our colonial legacy. Most argue that we would've been set on a course for the worst - but I beg to differ. That we still prop up masters of colonialism (like Stamford Raffles) year after year, instead of upholding the local men and women who toiled to build the country from scratch, leaves me deeply despondent. But there is much we can do - and that begins with dismantling our old ideas of who Raffles was and what he means to us.



*Field Trip to the Past
On an expedition to the Bicentennial Experience!
(Clockwise from top left: Sangeetha, Brendon, Zee & Woon Yong)*



Ghafir: Diving deeper into the texts in *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் has given us a new context for looking at colonialism and important historical figures in our past. Raffles is more than just an icon of modernism. He was known in the region to be a more ambitious man. The character I play encourages others to seek answers from non-western sources: to view history through the eyes of the oppressed, rather than the oppressors. Immediately, your point of view changes.

Umi: While trying to find my character, I felt like I was excavating a lot of pain and heartache. Because so much of Malay history has been buried. And if they take away our history, what do we have left? Poverty among the indigenous people all over the world is still prevalent today, and that's a holdover from colonialism, when most - if not all - our land was taken away from our ancestors.

Woon Yong: Working on this play has really driven home how the legend of Raffles lives on to this day. He's in our history textbooks. He's standing next to the Singapore River. He's still here, every day, when so many other stories and personalities are not.

Zee: I'm excited that we are telling a version of history that centres marginalised indigenous voices. This is so needed! I've been conflicted about what to do with what we've learnt through *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம். As my character Siew says, "We have all this material. What do we do with it?" I'm still unsure. How do we, as a society, truly move forward together unless we address the inaccuracies and atrocities in our past? And how much is enough?

What have you learnt as an actor from your experience of working on Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்? What has surprised or challenged you most?

Brendon: This is the first play I've done on a thrust stage. Learning to keep three angles alive at the same time is definitely a new challenge! Also, I have little to no musical talent. This is not a new discovery for me, but attempting to play very simple percussion while also singing is really shining a light on my ineptitude!

Sangeetha: Stories! I love the stories featured within this show. The difference between a history textbook and a play like this is that a textbook shows you what happened in history at a particular point in time. The play, however, shows you the people affected by history. We feel for the characters. We cry with them. We laugh with them. We want the villains

to fall and heroes to rise. It is challenging moving through all these stories and emotions, but I'm so happy and glad to be able to do it as an actor.

Ghafir: It was challenging to juggle all the characters and the skills required to play them! It has also been exciting to work in the new WILD RICE space. Everyone is learning the intricacies of the theatre. It is a marvellous space for a show like this: grand ideas, in an intimate space.

Umi: I have learnt to channel my anger into my storytelling and work as a drama educator. As a person, I have overlooked a lot of the injustice done to the natives in Singapore and the region during the colonial era. But, in playing Liyana in *Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்*, I'm helping to reclaim our history by bringing these people and these stories back to life.



Woon Yong: Many of the stories and personalities in *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் are obscure or buried, as they don't fit our national narrative, and were unknown to me. It was challenging to research these historical figures and events, because information and accounts about them are often not readily available or are in languages I can't access. At the same time, because little is known about them, it was exhilarating to be able to take some artistic license in presenting these people on stage with truth and conviction. To me, theatre is always about stories that present and confront difficult truths. As an artist, I am happy to be a part of the team to present an alternative perspective on our history.

Zee: It has been both a joy and an insane challenge to flow fluidly from character to historical character! We basically never leave the stage throughout the show. It is an intense show to perform, but I really look forward to meeting an audience with it.

Why do you think people should watch this show?

Brendon: If you've ever suspected that the story of the sleepy fishing village that was suddenly discovered by a band of benevolent colonialists who just happened to be sailing by was just a little too convenient to be true, this is the show for you!

Sangeetha: Come la! When will you ever see a history that's not in any museum or Bicentennial Experience? It's time we learnt *real* history. This might be your first time, and hopefully it won't be your last. ????

Ghafir: At its core, the play allows you to experience a more colourful, less sterile history of Singapore. It perhaps also asks you to swallow something rather bitter about our past. But, as we're told when taking medicine: "If it's bitter, then it must be good for you!"

Umi: Everyone should watch this show to experience another perspective of Singapore's history. To watch us argue and reclaim our history. To understand our roots so that we can move into the future with a better self identity.

Woon Yong: Just like the motley group in *Raffles Must Fall*, I hope that watching *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் can be the start of many conversations. I found the Bicentennial Exhibition rather nauseating: the Raffles myth is the foundation of much political power in Singapore. If we want to change the system in Singapore some day, perhaps we need to first start with challenging these conventional official narratives that are force-fed to us.

Zee: It's a rollicking rollercoaster ride through Singaporean history that the government doesn't want you to see!

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

General Discussion Prompts

1. Think about the title of the play, *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம். What does it mean? What do you notice about the languages represented in the title?

Notice also, the absence of the English language in the title of the play.

2. Which part(s) of the play were you most engaged in? What made these part(s) engaging for you?
3. This play was staged in 2019, which was 200 years since Sir Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore, alongside many other programmes and initiatives of the Singapore Bicentennial. What are some of these programmes you have encountered? How does *Merdeka* / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம் fit into your understanding of Singapore's history?
4. Think about how this play was staged - the set, props, lighting, sound, costumes and multimedia. What effect did these elements have on your experience?
5. This performance was recorded with a live audience in the theatre. How do you think the experience of watching this differs from watching it live? Which do you prefer and why?

Themes and Issues: Colonialism in Singapore

Discussion Prompts

1. In the Message from the Playwrights, Alfian Sa'at and Neo Hai Bin shared that the seed of the play began with the question, 'Why are we commemorating the beginning, rather than the end, of colonialism?' What are your thoughts on this issue?
2. Singapore has kept much of the British parliamentary system, legal system, educational system, civil service and even adopted the English language as our official working language. How do you think this has shaped your identity?
3. "Even though political imperialism in Singapore is over, other forms of imperialism, such as economic and cultural imperialism, continues to exist." What are your thoughts on this statement?

Key Ideas

Colonialism

The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically

Imperialism

The policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonisation, use of military force, or other means.

Decolonization

The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent.

Subaltern

The lower or colonised classes who have little access to their own means of expression and are thus dependent upon the language and methods of the ruling class to express themselves.

Other

The social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalises another group.

Eurocentrism

A worldview that favours Western civilisation over non-Western ones.

Westernisation

The adoption of Western culture and ways of organising society in aspects such as industry, politics, economics, law, norms, customs, traditions, etc.

Westminster system

A parliamentary system that was developed in England. The Singapore Government is modelled after this system, with three separate branches - the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.

Suggested Activities

Fill in the Gaps

Independence was not just one single point in history on 9th August 1965. There were other events that led to the eventual formation of the Republic of Singapore as we know it today. Find out more about significance of the key events and milestones such as attaining self-government in 1959, the Merger in 1963, and the Separation in 1965.

Colonialism in Southeast Asia

Singapore was not the only country in Southeast Asia with a colonial past. While our colonial masters were the British, this is not the case for all the countries in the region. Find out more about the colonial history of Southeast Asia and the foreign powers that occupied the region in the past. Interesting fact - there is one country in Southeast Asia that was never colonised by a European power!

Themes and Issues: History and Power

Discussion Prompts

1. "History is written by the victors." Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
2. Should countries be allowed to downplay or omit past incidents in their history, especially with regard to their role in wars and genocides?
3. George Santayana famously said, "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it." Do you agree?

Key Ideas

History

The study of past events, particularly in human affairs.

Political History

The study of political matters of the past, such as analysis of political leaders, ideas, systems, movements, etc.

Cultural History

The branch of history that looks at the traditions and cultures of the past through literature, sport, entertainment, etc.

Social History

The branch of history that focuses on the norms in societies - customs, disciplines, class, hierarchies, ways of living, etc.

Economic History

The branch of history that studies the economies of the past.

Intellectual History

The branch of history concerned with understanding the ideology and philosophy of the past in the political, cultural, social and economic contexts of the past.

Bias

The inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something. Different sources of information may have different biases.

Reliability

In analysing historical sources, reliability is the evaluation of how trustworthy a source is.

Cross-Reference

Making direct connections between two or more historical sources by examining areas of agreement and disagreement

Propaganda

Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.

Hindsight

Understanding of a situation or event only after it has happened or developed.

Distortion

The action of giving a misleading account or impression.

Suggested Activities

Compare and Contrast: History as it is Written

In the study of history, we look a lot at different sources of information. Let us consider the play and your textbook as two different sources of information.

Look back at the chapters in your textbooks that depict key events in Singapore history. For instance, you may wish to look at what was written about Raffles' founding of Singapore.

- What are your impressions reading about the event?
- What images or illustrations accompany the event?
- How does this contrast with what you have watched in the play?
- Why do you think the historical event has been portrayed as such in the textbook/ play?

Personal Histories

Apart from learning about history through our museums and textbooks, another way of learning about what happened in the past is through personal histories. Ask your parents or grandparents about their experiences living in Singapore in the past. If you'd like to read about the experiences of someone who has sang four different National Anthems throughout his life, consider reading Professor Tommy Koh's *Nationality, Identity and Culture: A Personal Reflection*.

The article is published in *Cultural Connections, Volume IV, 2019*. It can be accessed for free here <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/-/media/Mccy-Ca/Feature/Resources/Journals/Cultural-Connections-Vol-4/1-Professor-Tommy-Koh.pdf>

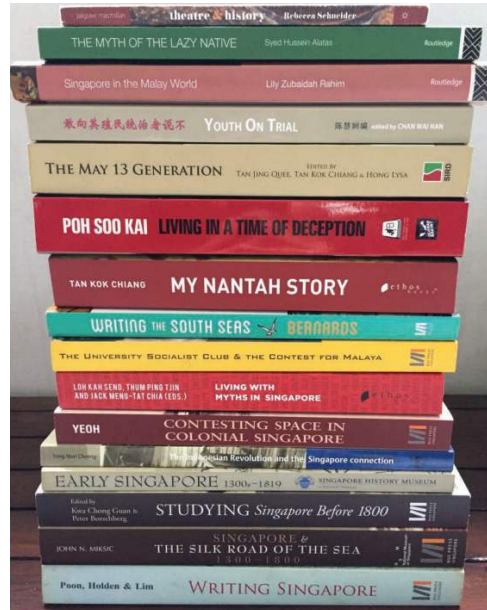
FURTHER RESOURCES

This section contains links and information to additional resources that you may use to supplement the students learning.

Alfian Sa'at's Reading List

As part of his research for the play, Alfian combed through the following books:

- **Theatre & History** by Rebecca Schneider
- **The Myth of the Lazy Native** by Syed Hussein Alatas
- **Singapore in the Malay World** by Lily Zubaidah Rahim
- **Youth on Trial** edited by Chan Wai Han
- **The May 13 Generation** edited by Tan Jing Quee, Tan Kok Chiang and Hong Lysa
- **Living in a Time of Deception** by Poh Soo Kai
- **My Nantah Story** by Tan Kok Chiang
- **Writing the South Seas** by Brian Bernards
- **The University Socialist Club & The Contest for Malaya** by Loh Kah Seng, Edgar Liao, Lim Cheng Tju and Seng Guo-Quan
- **Living with Myths in Singapore** edited by Loh Kah Seng, Thum Ping Tjin and Jack Meng-Tat Chia
- **Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore** by Brenda S.A. Yeoh
- **The Indonesian Revolution and the Singapore Connection** by Yong Mun Cheong
- **Early Singapore 1300s - 1819** edited by John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek
- **Studying Singapore Before 1800** by Kwa Chong Guan and Peter Borschberg
- **Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300 - 1800** by John N. Miksic
- **Writing Singapore: An Historical Anthology of Singapore Literature** edited by Shirley Lim Geok-Lin, Philip Holden and Angelia Poon



Reviews

- **Theatre Review: Merdeka points to historical gaps which need to be explored for a fuller Singapore story** by Ong Sor Fern, Straits Times
<https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/theatre-review-merdeka-explores-the-historical-gaps-which-need-to-be-explored-for-a>
- **Drama of disruption** by Helmi Yusof, Business Times
<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/lifestyle/arts/drama-of-disruption%C2%A0>
- **Podcast 68: Critics Live! Wild Rice's Merdeka** by Corrie Tan, Nabilah Said, Carolyn Oei and Kathy Roland, ArtsEquator
<https://artsequator.com/podcast-68-critics-live-wild-rices-merdeka/>
- **Review: Merdeka / 獨立 / சுதந்திரம்** by Derek Lim, Flying Inkpot
<http://www.flyinginkpot.com/2019/10/review-merdeka/>
- **Wild Rice's Merdeka: Singapore's History Through Asian Accounts** by Teo Dawn, Popspoken
<http://popspoken.com/arts/2019/10/merdeka-wild-rice>
- **"How is it possible to be disinterested in colonialism?"**, Idelle Yee, Citizen Reviewer, Centre42
<https://centre42.sg/merdeka-%E7%8D%A8%E7%AB%8B-%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%81%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%A8%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%B0%E0%AE%AE%E0%AF%8D-by-wld-rice/>

Articles

- **The Singapore Narrative(s): Old and New** by Dr. Thum Ping Tjin, New Naratif
<https://newnaratif.com/podcast/the-singapore-narratives-old-and-new/>
- **Nationality, Identity and Culture: A Personal Reflection** by Professor Tommy Koh, Cultural Connections, Volume IV, 2019
<https://www.mccy.gov.sg/-/media/Mccy-Ca/Feature/Resources/Journals/Cultural-Connections-Vol-4/1-Professor-Tommy-Koh.pdf>