


The Writing of Singapore History for Schools: Accessing Memories and Archival Records

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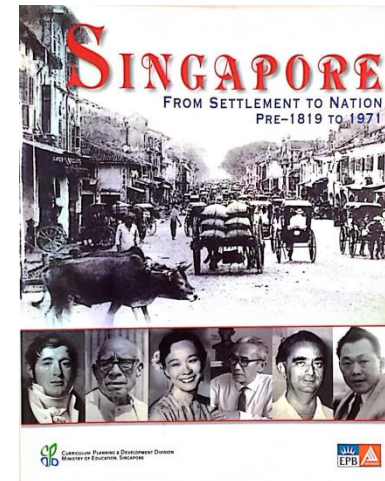
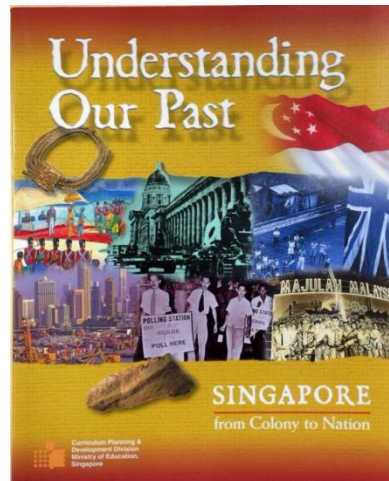
“The turn to archival records as evidence in the writing of history is a fairly recent development”

Kwa Chong Guan

Development of History Textbooks

History textbook development by:

- Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (1980 to 1996)
- Curriculum Planning and Development Division (1997 to date)



Building Blocks of History

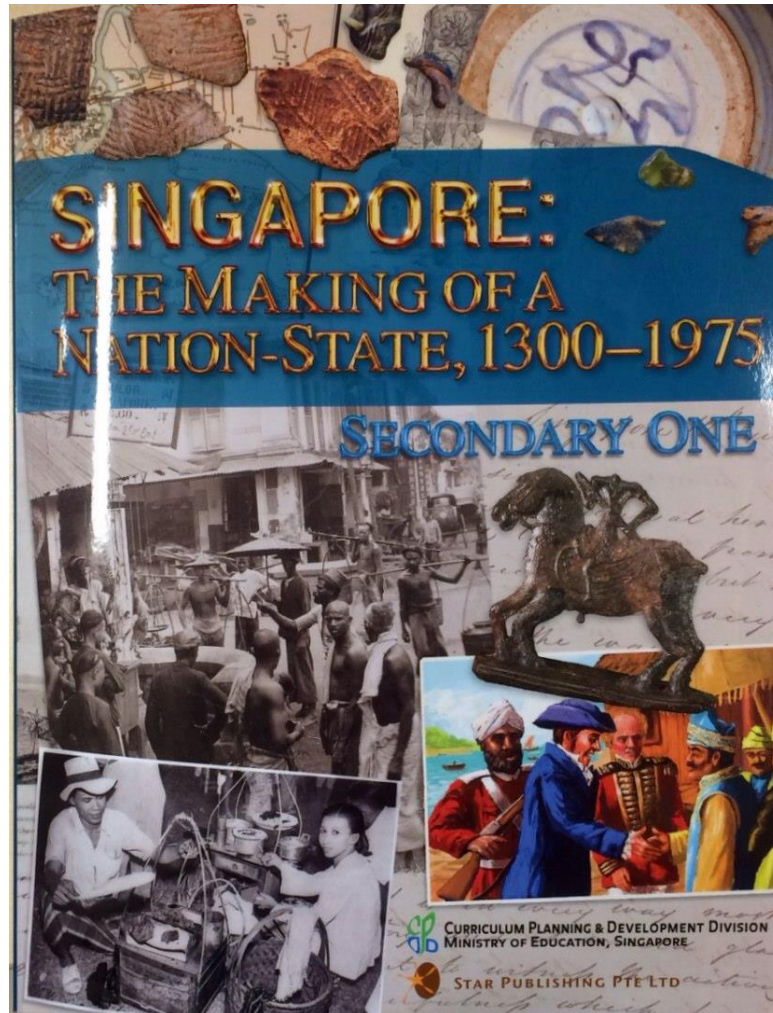
- Source of information/evidence
- Historical Content
- Historical Concepts



Back to Basic

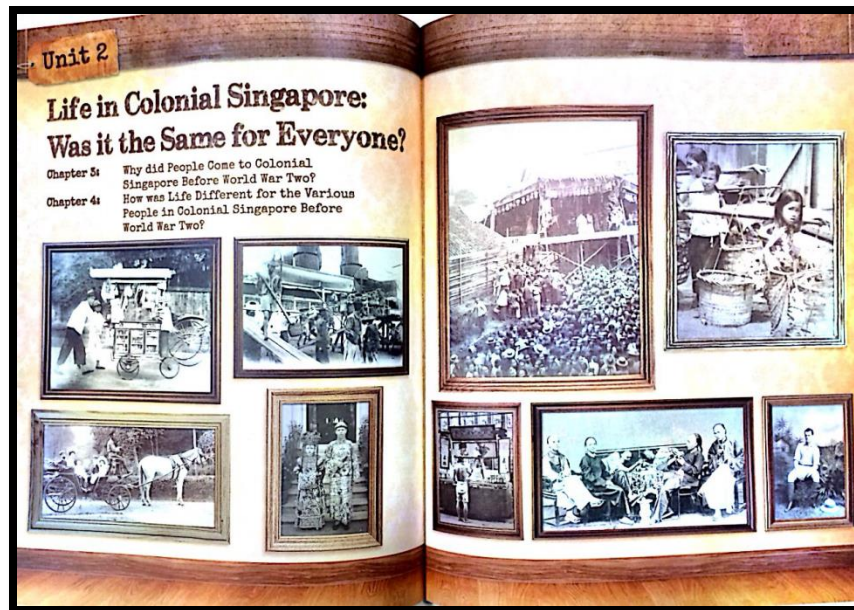
- Review of history curriculum
 - Content
 - Pedagogy
 - Assessment
- Relevance of History

New Instructional Materials



New Instructional Materials

- Each unit is framed by an overarching inquiry question which acts as a focal point for students to gather and examine sources, and extract relevant information to support their conclusions about the issue raised in the question.
- Each chapter of the textbook has been framed by a chapter inquiry question that further supports the overarching inquiry.



Understanding the Inquiry Question

Singapore had become a prosperous and busy port city by the 1900s. This attracted many immigrants to come to Singapore in search of a better life. Did they achieve their goals in colonial Singapore? What was life like for these immigrants?

A number of immigrants remained poor even though they worked very hard in Singapore. Most of these immigrants hoped to return home richer. Not everyone was able to achieve their goals.



Understanding the Inquiry Question

What do you think life was like in colonial Singapore? What did people do for a living? What did people do in their free time when there was no Internet, no television and no computer games?

Bearing in mind that life was not the same for everyone in the past, we will try to uncover the answers to these questions as we pursue the following inquiry question:

How was life different for the various people in colonial Singapore before World War Two?

Let us examine the inquiry question below carefully. Certain words or phrases will tell you what you need to do in order to form a response to the question.

You will need to compare aspects of the life of various communities to find the similarities and differences in the way people lived.

You should be looking into various aspects of life, such as living conditions and occupations.

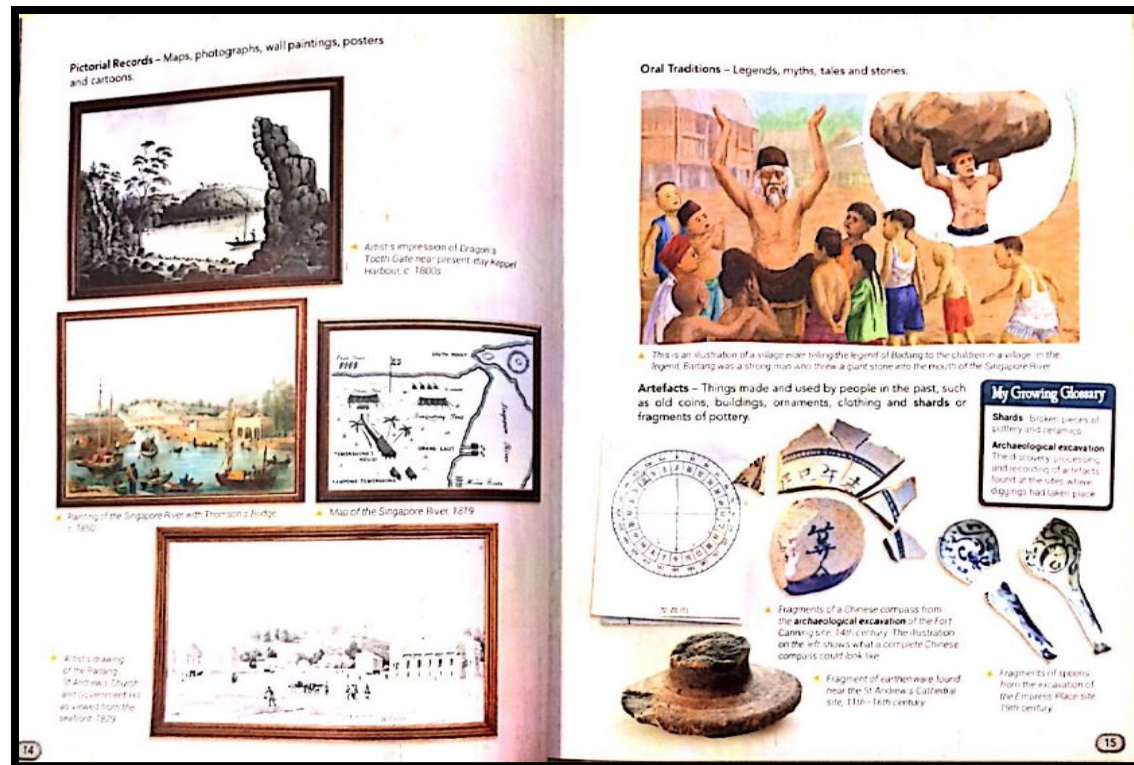
How was life different for the various people in colonial Singapore before World War Two?

You will need to find out about the various communities in Singapore at that time.

You should be looking at the years from 1819 to 1939.

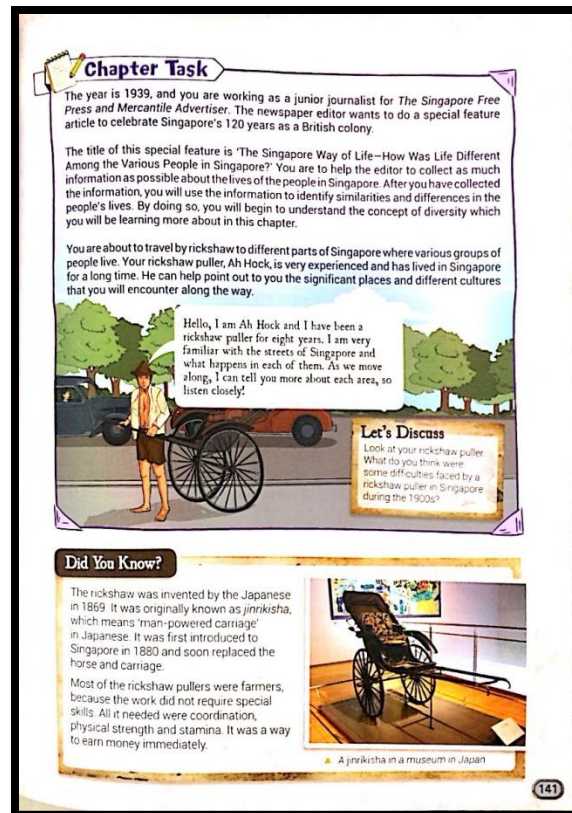
New Instructional Materials

- Sources and information provided in the coursebook can be used by students to construct their conclusions and form their response to the inquiry questions.



New Instructional Materials

- **Chapter Tasks** requires students to apply their understanding through an activity that will assess their application of the knowledge and skills learnt.



Historical Concepts

- Sources
- Evidence
- Chronology
- Causation
- Diversity
- Change and Continuity
- Historical Significance

Think Like a Historian: Sources

We should take note of some key ideas about sources to understand how historians use sources to answer questions about the past.

1. **Historians use sources to tell us about the past.**
 - Sources provide historians with information on the past.
2. **Historians use more than one source when investigating the past.**
 - There is no one source in History that can tell the whole story. As the information obtained from one source may be limited, historians will gather more than one source to study and examine.
3. **There are many different types of sources that historians use to construct knowledge of the past.**
 - There are many different types of sources. Not all sources provide the relevant information to answer the questions that historians ask. For example, a historian who wants to find out how an event in the past occurred might not be able to get the information by looking at an artefact. The historian would thus need to look for other types of sources, such as a written account, to provide him or her with more information. Historians thus gather different types of sources to obtain relevant information. This will help them to form well-supported conclusions about the past.

Let us find out more about how the information from sources can help us form a response to the inquiry question.

Sources can be either primary or secondary, depending on the time the source was created and whether it had a direct or an indirect connection with the event.

- A primary source is a source that was produced close to or at the time of the event and, in most cases, by people who experienced the event.
- A secondary source is a source that has been constructed from other sources of information, including primary sources, and may not be directly linked to the people who experienced the event.

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Challenge - Time

- Limited time for development of Instructional Materials
 - One year for research
 - One year for production
- Officers are not full time writers



- A number of sources are in vernacular
- Difficult to get good translators



Challenge – Copyright and Cost

- Many sources
- Funding for copyright clearance
- Unable to locate copyright owner



Challenge – Limited Option for Replacement

- Rare pieces
- Limited in perspectives

Learning Points

- Communicating with partners
- Right time, right place



Thank
You!



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