



Children at My First Skool at Blk 245 Bishan play with shadow puppets of marine animals against an underwater image projected onto a wall

IGNITING THE CREATIVE SPARK

The arts offer myriad ways to open children's minds to new possibilities.

Activities revolving around music, dance and drama are part of the curriculum in preschools, and they contribute significantly to children's holistic development. These arts activities foster a rich tapestry of skills, ranging from physical dexterity to problem-solving and collaboration with others. More importantly, they cultivate children's imagination and creativity and teach them to be flexible and inventive thinkers.

"Hands-on arts experiences provide opportunities for play and experimentation," says Mr Darren Sim from the National Arts Council (NAC). "When children are given autonomy and encouraged to experiment in the creative process, they gain confidence in expressing themselves. Early exposure to the arts enables children to be confident, articulate and creative individuals."

It is also important to introduce young children to different art forms such as literary arts, performing arts and visual arts. "Exposure to different art forms nurtures different aesthetic sensibilities and a unique 'language', so children learn at an early age to express themselves in various ways and develop communication skills. Dance, for instance, can help children understand that expression and communication can be through movements and gestures, not just words and writing," says Mr Sim.



Children at M.Y World @ Hougang DewCourt use props like Chinese fans to create a fusion dance

"Through the arts, they learn there are myriad ways to communicate ideas and feelings about themselves and the world around them and get creative."

ARTS TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

In collaboration with ECDA, NAC provides professional development (PD) programmes for preschool teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the different art forms and Singapore's unique cultural identity as well as to enhance the quality of arts learning experiences for children.

In 2022, NAC partnered with performing arts company Sri Warisan to conduct a series of PD programmes on shadow puppetry (*wayang kulit*). Preschool teachers were trained to incorporate shadow puppetry techniques into their curriculum, including musical elements like rhythm and tempo as well as the sounds of different characters.

For teachers at My First Skool at Blk 245 Bishan, attending the PD course inspired them to get creative with storytelling using *wayang kulit* instead of the usual stick or hand puppets. It gave children the opportunity to learn about the traditional theatre form while role-playing their favourite stories such as 'The Very Busy Spider' and 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' with shadow puppets. "Children were inspired to invent by changing some parts of the story," says teacher Ms Nur Binti Onan.

Teachers showed children how to reuse cardboard boxes and food packaging to create the stage, and how to make puppets from cereal boxes. There were opportunities for children to engage in discussions and problem-solve. For instance, the children used a projector to cast shadows on the screen after they found that torchlights did not show the shadows clearly enough.

Parents were also enthusiastic about the project and got involved by making puppets with their children and doing the shadow play activity at home. "My favourite part of the project was when I got to create and play with the

shadow puppets with my family," says K1 student Daryl Yew. "My daddy and mummy helped move the puppets while I told the story. It is fun to play with light and shadows."

A NOVEL APPROACH

Sri Warisan also conducted virtual dance training sessions for M.Y World @ Hougang DewCourt teachers. It was a novel approach to learning about cultures, notes senior educator Ms Rajeswari d/o Shanmugam. "The project focused on the diverse cultural dances in Singapore, unlike the typical lessons on festivals or music and movement," she says.

Teachers stepped out of their comfort zone to guide children in learning about the different cultural dances, a topic which most of them were unfamiliar with. As they acquired new strategies to facilitate children's learning and curiosity in this area, the teachers became more confident.

Dance props and costumes were provided at the preschool's cultural learning centre for children's use. Children worked in small groups to choreograph their own dance moves. "When we introduced fusion dance to the children, we asked them to come up with their own dance steps in groups. They were given the autonomy to incorporate props and instruments into their final dance. This was a boost to their confidence and an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills," says Ms Rajeswari.

As part of the project, children also carried out dance-related home activities with their parents. They made musical instruments out of recycled materials (e.g., maracas from plastic spoons) and learned a cultural dance together (e.g., from watching a YouTube video). Mr Chua Yong Quan enjoyed the novel bonding experience with his son, K1 student Amrich Chua. "Participating in this cultural dance activity helps children understand that it is fun and exciting to learn about a different culture," he says.



Drawing Indian rangoli patterns

BRINGING THE ARTS TO PRESCHOOLS

The National Arts Council-Arts Education Programme (NAC-AEP) provides hands-on arts learning experiences in literary arts, theatre, dance, music and visual arts to support children's holistic development and foster a greater appreciation of other cultures. The AEP will offer more than 190 preschool programmes this year. "These artist-led experiences provide opportunities for young children to learn about diverse cultures and heritage, as well as develop life skills that are essential to fostering social and emotional well-being," says Mr Sim.

The performing arts can nurture "seeds of wisdom" in children, says Sri Warisan founder and Cultural Medallion recipient, Mdm Som Said. "This wisdom also applies to building creativity and innovation in children. Children are generally good at picking things up quite fast. Once they understand something, they tend to get creative and go beyond what they learnt. That's the beauty of the performing arts. For example, we showed children a certain dance movement such as the *ronggeng*, and how to use a dance prop such as a bamboo stick. It didn't take long for them to create a new dance move and use the prop in a different way from what was taught."

FAMILY FUN

Dabble in the arts with NAC's free community partner programmes.

→ Garden of Joy Workshop:

Creating Insects

Where: Bukit Canberra

When: 4 & 11 February, 10.30am–12.30pm or 2.30pm–4.30pm



→ Garden of Joy Workshop: Creating Bunnies

Where: Bukit Canberra

When: 18 & 25 February, 10.30am–12.30pm or 2.30pm–4.30pm

Sign-up link: go.gov.sg/gardenofjoy2023

→ Traditional Chinese Opera Music with

Siong Leng Musical Association

Where: Siglap South CC

When: 12 March



Find out about other upcoming family-friendly programmes in your neighbourhood at www.nac.gov.sg/singapore-arts-scene/community-engagement-and-social-sector/arts-in-your-neighbourhood.

THE STAGE IS YOURS

Put on a *wayang kulit* performance with these tips from Mdm Som Said.

1. Use things you can find around you.

- A table lamp or handphone torchlight can be the light source.
- Make puppets from recycled materials or use toys as puppets.
- Hang up a white bedsheet or use a wall as the screen.

2. Adapt a story from a book you have read.

- Tweak the plot by creating new scenarios.
- Revise the script or develop new characters.
- Change the ending.

3. Move the light closer or further from the puppets to create big or small shadows for effect.



learn

win



→ Three lucky readers will each receive a pair of wayang kulit puppets representing the characters Princess Sinta and Prince Rama from the ancient Ramayana story.

Simply answer this question:

Name one object you can find at home to construct your own shadow puppet theatre.

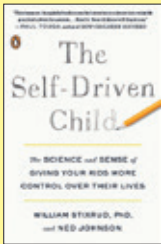
Submit your answer online at go.gov.sg/beanstalk-thrive-contest or scan this QR code.

Closing date: **24 February 2023**



Put Your Mind To Work

Teach children the power of resilience and quick thinking.



> The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives

By William Stixrud, PhD, and Ned Johnson
OverDrive link: nlb.overdrive.com/media/3309310

Written by a clinical neuropsychologist and a motivational coach, this book reveals how parents can actively help children sculpt a brain that is resilient, imaginative and ready to take on new challenges. The book puts together the latest discoveries in behavioural therapy and brain science, as well as various case studies, to help parents set children on the real road to success.

Contributed by *Chen Wanying, Librarian, National Library Board*



> Big Truck, Little Island

By Chris Van Dusen

Based on a real incident that occurred in the island town of Vinalhaven in Maine, United States, this rhyming story recounts what happens when a big flatbed truck carrying a mysterious, covered load across a small island gets stuck on a tight curve and blocks traffic in both directions. See how a traffic mishap brings an entire community together to come up with an ingenious solution!

Contributed by *Khirti Belani, Associate Librarian, National Library Board*

NLB eReads



Spark children's imagination and curiosity with these online resources.



Playlist: The World of Picture Books

A collection of short videos to help parents understand more about the different types of picture books. learning.nlb.gov.sg/reading/preschoolers/content



Early Literacy Practice: Play

A new learning package for parents with recommended books, props and games to help children develop early literacy skills and learn about the world around them through play. childrenandteens.nlb.gov.sg/diy-resources/preschool-resources/i-can-read/#lp-play

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