

Theme 4: Busking and Public Performances

Planned Response: Would you be willing to showcase your personal talents in public? Why/why not?

I do find this would be something that excites me. Personally, I enjoy singing tremendously and already visit karaoke lounges with my friends on a semi-regular basis, as well as volunteer for performances during events such as those organised by my school, or even youth groups at the church I attend. I feel showcasing my talents such as through busking would allow me to take my passion to the next level, as well as convey emotions to move others through the power of music.

However, this willingness also stems from some more practical aspects. This takes two forms; that of personal character growth and personal branding. Firstly, repeated performance like this help me gaining more self-confidence to navigate unfamiliar situations. On the personal branding front, this showcasing can serve to increase my own **prominence** and identity, which could potentially open doors to future opportunities if done right.

Overall, showcasing my personal talents through singing is something that is both **gratifying** and practical to me. I would certainly love to go ahead with it when time allows and the opportunity presents itself.

Convo 1: How can we get Singaporeans to appreciate the arts more?

Firstly, I think many Singaporeans think art is something that one has to go out of their way for. However, there are opportunities for the everyday resident to participate, through heartland outreach and competitions organised by businesses, organisations, and schools. However, these activities may not be so **publicised**, owing to limited budgets or marketing campaigns. For instance, I regularly see advertisements for art events at community centres – but how many of us actually go there often? The Singapore government has in recent times stepped up promotion of such events, even revealing an “SG Culture Pass”, which I feel is a step in the right direction.

Another way to get Singaporeans to appreciate the arts more is to actually address the age-old question of national identity. In my view, we do not appreciate the arts because we are unable to appreciate how it connects to our shared heritage. There are numerous instances however that show that we can and do appreciate the arts when we are able to draw this link. The first was a pressure washer’s art left on a pavement outside Mountbatten MRT station, a creative, unconventional use of a public space that was however erased as it was **ostensibly** done without a permit. Another instance was Singapore’s music scene, defined by the “**xinyao**” genre. Perhaps, reigniting arts appreciation here requires understanding exactly what it means to be Singaporean – and to support everyone’s individual interpretation of it, rather than to insist on a prescribed, fixed way.

Convo 2: “There should be no censorship of the arts in modern society.” How far do you agree with this statement?

I largely disagree with the statement. The arts are a reflection of how a society perceives itself and its history. Hiding a discussion purely because it causes discomfort does not mean it disappears for good;

it is merely being **swept under the carpet**. There was one example here involving a mural in Chinatown, which depicting a smoking *samsui* woman in Chinatown. Authorities had called for the cigarette to be removed and also stated that the art was done without approval. While the mural aimed to showcase a slice of Singapore's history, it is also factually accurate that many smoked as a pastime too. All censorship does is to **stifle** expression and free will, leaving behind excessively sanitised art stripped of character, which never challenges the **status quo**.

There is one specific situation in which some censorship may be warranted, which is when minors may be potentially exposed to objectional content like **radical** political or religious ideology. Yet, defining even this can be highly subjective and tenuous. Singapore as a society needs to establish what it deems harmful to minors, while simultaneously balancing this with the need to actually engage with diverse and potentially upsetting perspectives – minors included. Inevitably, the young will be exposed to these ideas as well. As a society, we need to introduce our youth to such ideas in a controlled manner with the relevant guardrails, guiding their maturation so that they are able to critically evaluate such ideas.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/samsui-woman-mural-smoking-chinatown-no-changes-building-owner-fined-4469331>

Vocabulary List

Word/Phrase	Meaning
Prominence	Being well known
Gratifying	Satisfying
Publicised	Being announced or made known widely
Ostensibly	“apparently”, on the surface
<i>xinyao</i>	Loanword from the Chinese term (新谣). A Mandarin pop vocal genre from Singapore, most prominent around 1980s and declining after the 90s

Theme 5: Fast Food

Planned Response: Do you think children and youth are consuming too much from the places shown? Why do you say so?

It is a common sight for me to witness students in uniform lining up at places like bubble tea outlets after school hours. These students are often carrying highly sugary drinks such as brown sugar milk tea, with added pearls in there that **drive** the sugar content **up** further. I myself have bought these drinks on more than a couple of occasions with my friends. I personally feel this is how students unwind after a long day at school; they usually buy the drinks and walk through the nearby shopping mall before heading home. However, when this becomes a daily routine, the calories from these drinks – as well as the cost – undoubtedly add up over time.

Many of these food places shown, like McDonalds, also frequently run promotional and collaborative campaigns featuring celebrities or brands that are highly appealing or relatable to children and youth. This further **compounds** the issue of children and youth eating fast food. Often, there is some form of limited-edition merchandising or some other promotional incentive involved. In the case of the places shown, it could be special merchandise of one's favourite Kpop celebrities. I personally have seen other tie-ins as well, like bubble tea stores selling special drinks that also come with redemption codes for online games children and youth play.

All in all, I find that children and youth are consuming too much from these fast food places, and it shows no signs of **fizzling out** anytime soon. This is due to a mix of their lifestyle habits, as well as well-targeted marketing efforts designed to further encourage said habits.

Convo 1: How do you keep fit and healthy?

Diet is for me, one of the most important aspects of keeping fit and healthy. Dining out, it is inevitable that we run into food that is higher in sodium, sugar, and saturated fats at every step of the way. When we are **patronising** restaurants or even ordering food from delivery apps, I seek out healthier options that incorporate more greens into the diet, while eating lesser of food dishes that contain the three items mentioned earlier. At the same time, many drinks from bubble tea stores are extremely high in sugar – both added, and hidden sugars. I have been trying to reduce my consumption on this front by drinking plain water. While fried foods and sugary drinks may be appealing, excessive consumption may contribute to chronic health conditions like heart disease and diabetes down the road.

Another way I keep fit is by regularly visiting the gym to get in some strenuous workouts. There is a wide variety of equipment that is well-maintained as well, allowing me to perform a range of exercises that target my full body. These exercises go beyond maximising visual appeal. After all, the adage goes, “use it or lose it”. As we grow, muscle mass becomes harder to hold on to; muscle loss may lead to issues down the road such as back pain or even an increased likelihood of falls. It is thus paramount to eat both a balanced diet and to get ample exercise, in order to maintain our fitness and enhance our overall well-being.

Convo 2: Going to the gym is an expensive waste of time. What do you think?

I disagree with this statement, given our rising obesity rates as well as overall rates for chronic, weight-related conditions. First of all, on the matter of cost, Singapore has numerous cheap alternatives for

gym memberships. The government itself operates neighbourhood gyms, managed by Sports Singapore. These gyms are well-maintained, and have a **nominal** entry fee of just \$2.50 per entry. It has also not seen any recent increases.¹ People from all walks of life, from students to the elderly, frequent the place. Gyms are therefore not confined to those with highly expensive memberships.

Additionally, a gym, regardless of **price bracket**, provides a place for people to access and perform numerous exercises. Owning a home gym is impractical for most households due to space and immediate cost constraints. In some cases, home gyms may even be limited or entirely disallowed, to prevent the sheer weight of the equipment from introducing structural issues. Falling weights may also lead to noise which inconveniences neighbours and damage floor tiles. Gyms thus provide a space to perform exercise routines without disturbing neighbours, while letting users maximise the area in their homes. With chronic health conditions already seeing an increase, we should do all we can to keep ourselves fit and healthy so that we can maximise our quality of life in the long-term.

Word/Phrase	Meaning
Drive up	Drastically increase
Compounds	“Worsens”
Fizzling out	Fading away; stopping
Patronising	Visiting
Nominal	Insignificant; very minor
Price bracket	Range of prices

¹ Don't quote me on this, but I believe it's been unchanged for at least **10** years.

Theme 6 – Traditional and Dying Trades

Planned Response: Do you think the activities shown in the video still hold value in our modern society? Why/why not?

I feel these activities are still valuable even today, for they represent a slice of our national identity and therefore are what makes us unique, particularly from a tourism standpoint. In our highly **cosmopolitan** and developed society, the traditional bakeries and coffee factories serve as a **radically** different experience for tourists; that of tradition coexisting with modernity.

Another more personal reason why I feel these activities still hold value is that ultimately, these local businesses are run by fellow Singaporeans like you and I. More than likely, these businesses span generations. These traditional businesses are a **testament** to the principles of honest hard work that our modern society was founded on. I do find that over time, we seem to have prioritised efficiency and **pragmatism** at any cost, which may have turned us into a more individualistic society, rather than the historical one marked more by **collectivism**.

Thus, I feel these traditional trades should be valued, rather than allowed to be lost in the pursuit of “cheaper and better”. We lose more than just a business when this happens; it may very well mark the total loss of our community spirit as well.

Conversation 1: How have people’s behaviours and attitudes towards traditional businesses changed?

Over the years, technology and modernisation, both local and globally, have made products and services easier to access and navigate. Meanwhile, we as customers have also become used to the efficiency and economy brought by these chains. The rise of online shopping demonstrates precisely this – we prefer to click and have something delivered to our doorsteps now. Traditional businesses lack the infrastructure to provide the same level of customer experience; there is also the question of whether they will “lose” their traditional identity and therefore their unique selling point if they choose to modernise.

Many also tend to not look past price, an aspect which traditional businesses lose out on. Large global chains, with their greater customer volume, can **slash** production costs and pass the savings to their customers. Some of them even engage in price wars, intentionally incurring losses in the short term in order to build customer bases. Ironically, our “traditional” taxi operators like SMRT and Comfort were the clearest example of this; they saw steep drops in revenue owing to the **advent** of ride-hailing services Uber and then Grab, who were undercutting existing fares and even poaching drivers to gain a foothold in the market.

For many customers, convenience and cost remain key deciding factors. Technology has only **entrenched** this attitude further as it improves and evolves.

Conversation 2: To protect local businesses, some people think that the government should stop international brands from expanding. What is your opinion?

Protectionism may seem to be sabotaging our own growth, but I deem some level of this important. Local businesses are a reflection of our culture and heritage, both past and present. Recent closures of restaurants, even those with **storied** histories dating back over a hundred years, should be a cause for concern. Economic growth should not come at the expense of losing our own national identity, leaving us an empty and soulless husk known only for money-making. This means a loss of what makes Singapore unique; if we are entirely dominated by international brands, we lose what connects us to this city-state for good.

I would also argue that entrepreneurship itself is a sign of a healthy society. It is an avenue where people challenge norms and pursue radical opportunities to drive not only profit, but progress as well. Local businesses offer all of the people involved in its creation and operation alternative avenues for success so they can move up the societal and economic ladder. International chains, as successful as they are, have **finite** employment placements and opportunities. A society where its people are being displaced from economical opportunities will only stagnate in the long term. Some talents may emigrate for greener pastures; while those who are unable to will simply do the bare minimum to get by.

Protecting local businesses thus is more than just safeguarding our national identity. It is also about valuing Singapore’s most valuable resource – her people – before it is too late to reverse the damage.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/singapore-food-beverage-eateries-closing-heritage-brands-rent-manpower-5357526>

Word/Phrase	Meaning
Cosmopolitan	Having a population consisting of people from many parts of the world
Radically	Drastically
Testament	“Proof”
Pragmatism	Dealing with problems in a highly logical and practical manner
Collectivism	An emphasis on the collective/working together, rather than individual action or identity
Slash	Reduce significantly
Advent	The appearance/coming into being
Entrenched	To establish solidly/deeply
Protectionism	The act of safeguarding local/domestic producers and businesses by restricting the growth of foreign competitors
Storied	Having an interesting history
Finite	Limited; having a maximum