

**SPEECH BY MRS MARY SEAH
PRINCIPAL, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
SOTA AWARDS 2022
19 MAY 2022, THURSDAY, 8.00PM**

Good evening!

Thank you for joining us virtually as we celebrate the achievements of our students!

To the Class of 2021 – Greetings! As I reflected on your cohort, I realised that your IB journey was almost entirely overshadowed by the pandemic. However, you displayed remarkable resilience, and as a cohort born out of this uncertainty, you have shone through! Congratulations on attaining the sterling achievements we celebrate today!

The pandemic has changed the way we work, play, and live. Since the start of the pandemic, in-person showcases and events were limited to only the school community. In April this year, for the first time in two years, we welcomed members of the public to attend our Dance showcase *Rapport* and Music Showcase “Electrifying Evening”. Living in such unprecedented times encourages us to cherish the freedom to communicate and engage with one another.

Even as we cheered at the recent relaxation of COVID measures, we are cautious. We have restarted morning assemblies and soon, we will be resuming other school-wide activities. I look forward to the resumption of many more school activities, so that we may recapture the spirit of SOTA once again!

The big question we have been asking one another these days is “why do we create?”

Create for Collaboration

First, we create, so that it opens up possibilities and invites others into the same space for collaboration! Here in SOTA, opportunities for collaboration among students and teachers are plentiful. It is a total community, an almost unique kind of ‘kampung spirit’ when it comes to creative collaboration!

Early last year, our students and staff took part in a school-wide initiative for the Housing Development Board (HDB)'s nationwide community art project.

Led by Celestine Ng, Emberlynn Loo, Dahlia Rusli, Jolene Khoo, Samantha Ting, Rebekah Chew and Nicole Chew from the Class of 2021, the SOTA community created almost 900 pieces of art including giant totems, large canvases, art cards and pieces of digital art for the HDB Community Week. All artworks were then curated into a digital art installation by architect-turned-installation artist Mr Sun Yu-li.

In today's concert programme, you will watch two interdisciplinary works created by our students from different faculties under the guidance of Mr Sean Tobin, our Theatre teacher.

The first is a performance interpretation of a poem written by our Year 5 Film student Misha Ghosh, titled “Pulang Ke Rumah, Pulankah Ke Bahawa?”, which, in English, translates to “Returning Home, Do I Return to Language?” The poem is about our sometimes complicated relationship with our Mother Tongue languages, and is brought to life by our IBCP Theatre and Music students.

The second performance is our students' transdisciplinary take on the closing monologue of *The Glass Menagerie*, a play by Tennessee Williams, which centres around a brother's love for his sister, and his struggles to reconcile his own needs with his family's. The performance combines digital art, dance, music and theatre.

Through the performances, I hope you will catch a glimpse of life, and appreciate how the arts are absolutely centre to its expression.

Create for Passion

Next, we create because we are so full of Passion. The SOTA community is characterised by much energy, excitement and joy as students and teachers engage with the diverse talents, skills and experiences that each one brings!

Guided by our Visual Arts teacher Mr Yap Kheng Kin, five of our then Year 3 students in Visual Arts, Theatre and Literary Arts competed in the 30th National High School Manga Championship organised by Kochi Prefecture, Japan. The team, consisting of Maleriado Asher Limos, Sofia Genato Gabrielle Gonzales, Luis Matthew Tan, Tey Kayenne and Celeste Tay Minyi, displayed incredible teamwork as they co-created a manga piece under the pressure of a live broadcast competition. They competed against 178 schools across Asia, and were the only Singaporean team to make the semi-finals. Well done, students!

In the "Xin Kong Xia" National Schools Chinese Singing and Songwriting Competition, Kellianne Ng from the Class of 2021 clinched second place in the Songwriting (Open) category, and Year 6 student Dawn Yap was awarded third in the Singing (Solo) category. Raine Chiew, also a Year 6 student, was placed first in both categories. Our 2018 alumnus Koh Horn Ray also clinched third in the Songwriting (Creative) category. Raine previously only wrote songs in English, but she tried her hand in writing Chinese songs after encouragement from her Mother Tongue teacher, Mr Allan Ho.

Our Dance students continued to make their mark in the International Ballet Grand Prix Singapore Competition. Last year, then Year 3 Dance students Melissa Koivuaho and Chloe Chee achieved 2nd and 3rd respectively in the Youth 2 Category, and Lisa Kei Yamada placed 3rd in the Senior 1 Category. Melissa was also awarded a place in Singapore Dance Theatre's Scholar's Associates Programme. Our thanks to the mentorship provided by the Dance teachers, Ms Cheah Mei Sing and Mr Ng Teck Voon!

Our Music students also clinched several awards in the 2021's Rave Harps International Prestige Award Competition (Chamber). Chloe Lam and Adele Wee from Year 5, Kaitlyn Tan from Year 2, and Timothy Cher from the Class of 2021 were awarded Distinction with Honours in the Young Artist category. Year 4 Music student Renee Yadav was awarded Distinction with Honours in the Artistic category, and she also performed at the Rave Harps Prestige Chamber Winner's Concert held at the Esplanade Recital Studio.

Our Literary Arts students embarked on the Future Problem Solving Programme (Scenario Writing), where research into the scientific world and social trends sparked imagination for what the future holds. They dived into topics such as Personalised Medicine, Wearable Technology and Human Environmental Impact. In recognition of their effort, our then Year 4 student Carmen Leong was placed 6th, Isabelle Lim 4th and Khoo Yi Xuan, 2nd in the 2021 Scenario Writing Competition (Senior Division). Isabelle was also part of the team that was awarded 'Best Team' for the On-Site Scenario Writing Competition (Senior Division).

We are also happy to share with you, 'Lallang', our Literary Arts Online Anthology. Launched last November, it showcases a variety of original works, including short stories, poetry, novels, comics, scriptwriting, and creative non-fiction. Do check it out on our website!

In the academic domain, I am also proud to see our students apply their learning to real-world experiences. At last year's National Library Board Historical Scene Investigation (HSI) Challenge, Year 3 students Celestine Sixuan Groleau, Khin Sandi Tun, Khoo Sze Min Sophia and Terrell James Ng applied the research and inquiry techniques they learnt and created a video to present their investigation findings, along with a written submission on Mr Seah Eu Chin, one of Singapore's early merchants and his influence on local flora and fauna. Their efforts garnered them the Gold Level Award. We are proud of you!

Create for Community

Thirdly, we create for Community. Community partnerships and collaborations provide opportunities for our students to create art that responds to a particular need. Their artistic response is contextual and always attempts to illuminate, educate and uplift.

Last year, a group of our Visual Arts students participated in a logo design project for the Break The Silence campaign by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). The campaign aims to raise awareness on family violence and the "Signal for Help" that victims can use to seek help. The design by Andrea Cheah from the Class of 2021 was eventually selected as the campaign logo, and Andrea was also invited to appear in the campaign video, sharing her logo design process.

If you've visited the newly renovated Pasir Ris Bus Interchange, you'd probably have spotted this adorable dinosaur comic work. This is an artwork by Project Help a Commuter, a Year 4 Service-Learning project that aims to encourage everyone to show care to others while on public transport. The students brainstormed different ways of showing kindness on public transport and incorporated them into colourful drawings to capture people's attention.

Last October, our then Year 3 students, Evan Joel De Silva from Music, and Lauren Chen and Sofia Genato from Literary Arts worked together and composed a song for 'Sunburst', a joint virtual concert that raised funds for SOTA Endowment as well as the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Singapore (MDAS). This beautiful song, 'Step Into The Future', speaks about a hopeful future as we strive onwards together to find our light and shine like the stars. It was performed by our Music Alumna, Syakirah Noble, and the MDAS members during the virtual concert. A big thank you to Evan, Lauren and Sofia, who spent some time during the school holidays to contribute to this meaningful cause!

Such experiences provide our young artists with valuable insights into issues in the community and mark their first steps to becoming leaders who will draw on their creativity and empathy to be a positive influence.

Create for Tomorrow

The SOTA community always creates for a better Tomorrow! For SOTA to continue our pursuit of nurturing creative and artistic learners for the future, we are privileged to receive the support from many partners and supporters.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank them.

Teachers, my colleagues, thank you for your love and belief in the potential of every student, and your dedication in nurturing them. I am more than aware that for every performance we successfully stage, be it in the academic, arts, and social domain, there is a significant amount of work that goes on behind the scenes. It is the arts, academic and corporate pillars of SOTA that have come together to make this work. My sincere appreciation goes to each one of you for braving the last 2 incredibly challenging years with fortitude and imagination. With your work, we also saw the school through its first MOE Validation exercise in 2021 and will see the school through the completion of the IB Validation this year. It is now time to dream again! I look forward to working with you in hosting our Arts in Education Forum later this month, where we will not only showcase your pedagogical work, but also continue to experiment and seek new areas of knowledge in our professional learning. We will endeavour to draw others in, so that we could brave the uncertain future, as one learning community.

To our parents who work closely with the school, especially the SOTA Parent Support Group, thank you for your generous support of the SOTA Endowment Fund through initiatives such as SOTA Got Talent and the SOTA Family Cook-Off. In your endeavour to help one another to navigate the complexities of mental health of our youths, the PSG, yes you, equipped yourselves with new knowledge gleaned from sessions run by MOE, and in turn, contributed to the writing of a guide book for parents! We also greatly appreciate the time and effort you put into initiating PSG activities within SOTA, such as the Parent Conversations, Family Bonding events, and for contributing to Racial Harmony Day. Thank you for working hard to build the parents' community and for all the many heart-warming gestures you have shown us! With the relaxation of Safe Management Measures, we look forward to engaging with you more.

To our donors including the Ngee Ann Kongsi, Temasek Foundation, Dr Lee Boon Yang, CapitaLand Hope Foundation, Standard Chartered Bank, OCBC Bank and many more - thank you for your generous contributions and your belief in SOTA. Your efforts will ensure that arts education remains accessible for students from all backgrounds.

To our industry and educational partners, we thank you for your support and partnership that allow our students to receive a diversity of authentic learning opportunities. They get to showcase their work, learn from accomplished arts practitioners to refine and improve their craft, as well as experience and understand the workings of the arts industry.

To members of the SOTA Board, you have been a strong pillar of support, and a wise source of guidance for the school. Together we have stewarded the school and its community through storms. I believe we have emerged stronger. Thank you for your continued dedication and belief in the educational work that we do for each child and through each teacher and staff. Thank you!

Create for Hope

In summary, we create for Hope! To everyone who has played a part in SOTA's journey, your contribution has shaped a vibrant learning environment for our youths to develop their artistic interests and talents. They are the hope for a flourishing arts and cultural landscape in Singapore, and the world, in the present and the future.

To the award recipients, my heartiest congratulations once again! As you leave this safe haven and join the larger world, I hope you will continue to shine through because of your anchor in the SOTA H.I.P.P values- Humility, Integrity, People-centredness and Passion.

I wish all of you all the very best in your future endeavours!

