

**SPEECH BY MR MARCUS YEE YOK WAN, PRIME
MINISTER'S VALEDICTORIAN AWARD RECIPIENT, AT
THE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AWARDS DAY 2015,
FRIDAY, 15 MAY 2015, 1.00PM AT THE SOTA
CONCERT HALL**

Mr Lawrence Wong
Minister for Culture, Community and Youth

Mrs Ouyang

SOTA Board Members

Teachers

Parents

Fellow friends

Distinguished guests

Good afternoon.

2 I am very honoured to stand before you today and to represent the class of 2014 to deliver the Valedictorian Speech. The class of 2014, my fellow schoolmates, look how far we have come. It has been a turbulent ride with

plenty of ping-pong matches but today, we can finally reap the fruit of our labour.

3 For me, the SOTA community has always possessed this strange magnetism, one that holds the students and staff together, one that has alumni flocked together long after graduation. This “strange magnetism” goes by many names: the SOTA spirit, school identity or Gotong Royong—but they all point to the same sense of familiarity within the community.

4 Today, my valedictory is to highlight this magnetism that draws us together. With that, I will map out four significant places in this school, places that best reflect the experiences shared between my peers and me. It is a tour of the long and winding paths in SOTA, complete with all the shortcuts and detours.

I. Goodman Campus

5 Firstly, the place where it all began—the Goodman Campus. Since I joined SOTA in Year Three, I have never experienced the school's early days in the Goodman Campus. But for those in my cohort, those were the carefree, pastoral days of their schooling experience. When one visits Goodman today, it is easy to see why. At the heart of the campus is block B, a curved building that looks like long outstretched arms, as though holding the community in their warm embrace.

6 While we have moved from SOTA's Goodman days, I believe my cohort took with them that unmistakeable spirit of Gotong Royong, or the spirit of coming together as a community. And it was in our toughest of times, our IB years, when this truly shone. In moments of desperation, there were no more walls that came between us. HL

Literature students would willingly dispense notes to SL students. We came up with many ways to relieve stress, from communal knitting to playing Dance Central in our classrooms. Like concerned mothers, we would also nag at our friends who needed the extra push. Though we spent long hours in school working late into the night, being together made the process much more tolerable. This sense of camaraderie forged between us was truly precious.

7 Therefore, in a strange way, it gives me great pleasure to say that I was from the last Goodman batch. I could not have asked for a greater bunch of friends to have shared these memories with.

II. The Fire Escape

8 The second place, probably also the least glamorous, is the fire escape. No one frequents the fire escape

because it is claustrophobic and badly ventilated. Yet, fire escapes in SOTA are unlike any other.

During our time in SOTA, the fire escapes had played host to a theatre performance, a blank canvas that was open for interaction and a walking tour set to the soundtrack of heavy metal music. Certainly, the arts has provided different lenses to understand a marginal, unglamorous space like the fire escape. SOTA embraces the unconventional, such that our ideas and aspirations could be fully realised.

9 With that said, the fire escape is also a space of safety. It is where trying, doing and failing are within the bounds of learning, to let us gain experience for better things to come. So, to our juniors, the space that SOTA provides is truly a privilege and be as unruly as you can be (but, of course, keep within your studios). Know that failing is much better than not doing at all.

III. The Roundabout

10 The third place is the school's roundabout. Every morning, this has been the place where our parents would routinely let us alight . It is one of many ways our parents show their love to us.

11 Once, for the set-up of an art installation, I had to transport a three-metre long pole from SOTA to an exhibition space. Having no backup transport, I called my father out of desperation. No questions asked, he sacrificed his lunch break and drove down to school to ferry the pole. But of course, the three-metre pole could not fit into the car. We ended up being a complete traffic hazard—we winded down the windows and had part of the pole sticking out. I sat in the car wondering why he even bothered with my strange request.

12 By and large, each and every SOTA student would have their own pillars of support, be they your friends, teachers or parents. They keep you afloat with the everyday act of kindness or the simple word of encouragement, enabling you to go on day after day. In your desperate moments of need, their unwavering sincerity is a source of surprise and comfort. For myself and many of my peers, it has been our parents who have been the constant pillars of support. To my own parents, thank you for all the trust.

IV. The Big Old Tree

13 The fourth and final place is the big old tree at the SOTA school steps. Recently, I had the pleasure to hear about the history of this tree from the former principal, Mrs Rebecca Chew. Since there was not much greenery in the city, Mrs Chew and the architects spared the tree for the

construction of this campus. The building was therefore, designed for and around this tree.

14 I chose to bring up the big old tree because it stands as the pioneering team's legacy for this school. Since SOTA's inception, the school has sought to sow the seeds for future patrons and supporters of the arts. It is task that demands SOTA to situate itself within the larger artistic ecosystem: keenly aware of what has come before us and ready for what is to come. So, I would like to thank the pioneering team of policymakers, teachers and school leaders, for SOTA would not be what it is today had it not been for your unwavering support.

15 That being said, the big old tree never stops growing. So I would also like to end by thanking the current team of management, teachers and staff for their dedication towards the school, enabling us to reach new heights.

Indeed, what an incredible journey it has been. Certainly, these places would not have been complete without you, those who call SOTA home. For the current Year 6s, remember to hunt as a pack and leave no one behind. Continue to keep on shining. And for the class of 2014, I am excited to what new heights each and every one would soar towards. Don't be strangers, and never stop flying in the V- formation.

16 Thank you.