

**SPEECH BY MRS MARY SEAH  
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SOTA AWARDS 2020  
RECORDED ON 16 JULY 2020, THURSDAY**

Students, teachers, parents, and friends, we are celebrating Racial Harmony Day today which explains why I am dressed in this Punjabi costume. This speech I am going to make, however, is a speech for Awards Day 2020, recorded from my office here at our beloved school.

The SOTA Awards Day is a significant occasion where we bring together the SOTA community to celebrate the achievements of our students. Despite the fact that we cannot physically come together this year, we rejoice with our students, their families and all who have contributed to their success through this online awards celebration.

**Creative action for the community**

Extraordinary times these are and they call for exceptional empathy and action. I am heartened to see our students and staff rise above the uncertainties of COVID-19, and step out in service of the community.

Just before the circuit breaker, a group of Year 6 students gathered donations from their cohort mates and teachers for our canteen vendors, knowing that their earnings will be affected as we close school.

To lift the spirits of those working on the frontline to fight this pandemic, our 2019 Music graduate Natasha Da Costa, together with several alumni, presented a beautiful online song collaboration with friends from the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Singapore, with whom we have been working with for some time now.

When COVID numbers in the migrant worker community soared, a team of former SOTA students led by 2018 alumnus Russell Chong started Project Postcard, which raised more than \$15,000 from the sale of original artworks printed on postcards.

Knowing that the children from underprivileged families are going to be the hardest hit by this crisis, Year 6 students Izz Muhammad Bin Ahmad, Nur Izad Hamzah Bin Azman, Kavya Danani, and Jessica Jade Nobleza got together with their schoolmates to organise the One Hope fundraising concert through the Rice Company Ltd, raising awareness and rallying others in support of these children.

We have always exhorted our students to be H.I.P.P. I am especially proud that our students are guided by the values of Humility, Integrity, People-centredness, and Passion, values from within, to channel their artistic talents and vision to uplift others beyond our immediate community. Great effort, SOTA!

## **Arts matters more than ever**

In these extraordinary times, the value of the Arts has been called into question, and it is easy to doubt what we have always stood for as a community, and as a school. The question we asked ourselves was “How do we play a role in helping students discover and develop the spirit within themselves, to have the courage and resilience to continue being creative despite the uncertainties?”

While we stand in solidarity with the artists around the world on the possible long-lasting impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, we also celebrate the many new innovations arising out of this situation. Artists around the world are adapting to the “new normal”, with many breaking down barriers to share their works, swapping physical performance spaces for virtual ones, and exploring new ways of engagement with their audiences. Our students and SOTA alumni too, have been tapping into their artistic training and experimenting with technology, in order to share their work with the community.

Among the number of Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) projects were two Visual Arts CAS projects that I would like to mention here:

- Students in the Curatorial CAS designed a website curating a selection of virtual arts events from all over the world, including their favourites.
- Students from the Wonder CAS developed a series of video tutorials targeted at Primary School pupils, giving them art-making ideas supported by step-by-step visual teaching.

SOTA alumna Iswarya Jayakumar from the Class of 2013, initiated a dance relay which featured 22 artistes from around the world 'dancing alone, but together'.

The above examples show how our students are rising above adversity to encourage others to continue practising the arts. Their resolve and their desire to connect with others truly exemplify the SOTA spirit.

## **Never too small to dream**

We tell our students that they are never too small to dream. On this special occasion, we celebrate the academic, artistic, and affective achievements of our students. Through the holistic arts-anchored education here, they have found purpose and a reason to nurture their creative energies.

The Class of 2019 achieved a 100% pass rate, and will go down in history with the 2<sup>nd</sup> best showing in the IB exams in the last five years. Dawn Lim, a Theatre student in this cohort, distinguished herself in her sustained and committed community service to the elderly to win the Harvard Book Prize. Christian Liu, a music student

and the Valedictorian of this cohort, is no less special, having distinguished himself with all-round excellence in the academic and artistic domains.

I am also delighted to highlight the achievements of students in the other cohorts. Deborah Loh, presently a Year 5 Dance student has won the top award in the International Ballet Grand Prix Singapore 2019. I was told she almost wanted to give up ballet after a faulted performance in the 2017 Asian Grand Prix, but persevered because of her dream to be a dancer.

Year 2 Music student Evan De Silva was judged the overall winner and the best performer at the 8th Thailand International Ukulele Contest 2020. And of course, we are delighted to have produced a second President Scholar in Allison Tan, Class of 2018. Allison has made history to be the first SOTA student to be awarded the Singapore Armed Forces scholarship.

### **Supporters and mentors who inspire**

Our students' achievements are a culmination of the guidance and support from many people.

Our teachers are a powerful source of inspiration through their own achievements. Ms Michelle Tan from the Theatre faculty tapped into her experience as an artist-educator to write the monologue "*Miss Aruna Nair Teaches Plato's Cave via Home-Based Learning in the Pandemic of 2020*". Her monologue, which was performed online by Singapore Repertory Theatre, is a fitting representation of the tenacity, imagination, and adaptiveness of our teachers in embracing a steep technological learning curve, to teach and care for our students. Ms Tan, though new to the school, is certainly not alone in honing her artistic visions while educating the next generation of creative citizens.

Another key member of the SOTA community is the SOTA Parent Support Group. In a typical year, our parent volunteers would be heavily involved in the many events we have in school, such as Racial Harmony Day (RHD) today. While they could not join our students in school today, they have creatively put together a video, sharing cultural experiences, touching on unique ethnic languages, dance, culinary traditions and treasured family heirlooms for RHD 2020. In these uncertain times, parents have also provided valuable insights which have shaped the many key decisions made in our fight against COVID-19. As a school, we truly value your input and partnership.

Our donors are also our important stakeholders, for they are indispensable in supporting our work in the larger socio-cultural context. We thank Temasek Foundation for supporting many of our programmes including the Refreshing Traditions programme, which seeks to expose our students to local and traditional

Asian art forms. These will go a long way in helping to anchor our students in their heritage and help them find their voice among the different cultures of this region.

We are thankful to Temasek Foundation and the Ngee Ann Kongsi for their support in ensuring that an education in SOTA remains accessible to deserving students. This year, we are especially grateful to Temasek Foundation in launching the David Marshall Study Award which provides additional help to students in financial need. Plans are underway to build on the SOTA Endowment Fund, as you will hear about in Board Chairman Mr Loh Lik Peng's speech. We are building to ensure the long-term sustainability of our Bursary and Scholarship schemes, so that an arts education remains viable for the young people of this country.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all award recipients and your families. To have come through the portals of SOTA means that you are special. Know that you are never too small to dream and make a difference. Just remember to do this for others, not for yourselves, upholding the values of people-centredness alongside humility, integrity and passion. Wishing you all the very best!