

**SPEECH BY MR CHRISTIAN LIU XI-LE  
PRIME MINISTER'S VALEDICTORIAN AWARDEE  
SOTA AWARDS 2020  
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Good afternoon.

They say that birds of a feather flock together; that's precisely what happened in January 2014, when several starry-eyed twelve-year olds took reins of their fate and enrolled into the School of the Arts - myself included. So just as pigeons gather en masse on the sepia parapets of the SOTA building, I soon found that I'd cast myself into a ragtag bunch of dreamers, all searching for something off the beaten path. Together, we built a community from the ground up with nothing but a love for the arts. Together, we were the Class of 2019.

Funnily enough, of every feathered friend there is, the one that represents our cohort's spirit to a tee is the pigeon. We were down-to-earth, never too extravagant, at times a little underappreciated; we were also absolutely bizarre, as I recall something along the lines of a cohort pigeon-catching competition once. In any case, I'm sure our teachers, alongside several questionable Instagram pages, can attest to this outlandish humour of ours.

But more significantly, I'd like to highlight the sheer persistence of our cohort - reminiscent of the peskiest pigeons - our persistence to be heard, to make a change, and to leave a mark. My cohort would always stand up for what we felt was right, and were never afraid to express those sentiments. Sometimes, this would manifest as offhanded fussing and grumbling, but we also knew that making change required action. And so many of us cast ourselves into leadership positions in various student projects in a bid to enhance student life, advocate for environmental changes, amongst other worthy causes. Even now, this spirit runs strong within us: allow me to bring to your attention Boliao, an online magazine available for purchase recently initiated by Joanne, Sabrina and Alexa from our cohort. Its proceeds contribute to the COVID-19 Migrant Support Coalition, to meet the needs of our migrant friends who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Evidently, it is this burning indignation to address the injustices of this world that allows my cohort to rise to any occasion, even after SOTA. This is the power to make a difference.

While we can certainly pretend that these idiosyncrasies have been adopted over extended and careful study of SOTA's local pigeon population, in reality, we owe it all to the unique arts environment that exists within this institution. In these six years, we have been forged in the crucible of unrelenting training, critique, and even failure, all in the name of honing our craft. The fruits of that labour is a state of being unique to the artist. We are disciplined, yet malleable; critical, yet open-minded. And our sense of community is unparalleled. This is the reason why creativity permeates our

daily lives, why the quirky and the bizarre are so dearly cherished, and why every student bears a penchant for social change.

You see, art's greatest gift to us all is empathy. In these six years, I've witnessed how SOTA students harness their talents to tell a story about identity, about culture, about family, about society, love, hate... And I've witnessed how time and time again these talents have made a palpable difference in the community at large. Even closer to my heart, I've also witnessed how, within our own community, we'd build each other up when we were shattered from the vulnerability of making art together. It's in this way that the cosmos of their artistic minds have illuminated for me art's purpose - that art is about people.

The day is 10 July 2020 - exactly 189 days since we collected our IB certificates and stepped out of the gantry for the last time, forever leaving the shelter of these comfortable school walls. Little did we know that in these 189 days, waves of change would sweep this entire world, an upheaval creating bends in the road ahead when we've only just taken off our training wheels. So all we can do is to creatively adapt to this new reality, and carve out a path of our own - if anyone can, it's us, the Class of 2019 - we who've been thrown countless curveballs in our six years together. In fact, the world needs more people like us - people who will use their gifts to fight passionately for causes that we believe in, and who are unabashed, innovative makers of change.

So to the Class of 2019, thank you all for being such an inspiration, and for teaching me what the arts is all about. I miss you all, and I miss our unique brand of community spirit, and I can't wait to see all of you take flight. Remember to keep listening to those around you, and keep your moral compass firmly people-centred. And never be afraid to be the first to speak out, the first to stand up, or the first to raise your hand, because we all know that change rarely happens any other way.

Thank you.