

SPEECH FOR MRS MARY SEAH, PRINCIPAL, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, AT THE SOTA AWARDS DAY 2025 ON 9 MAY 2025

Mr Edwin Tong, Minister

Ms Liew Wei Li, Director-General of Education,

Dr Lee Boon Yang, Patron of the SOTA Endowment Fund,

Mr Loh Lik Peng, Chairman and members of the SOTA Board,

Staff, Parents, Students, guests

1. Good morning! Thank you for joining us today!
2. To the Class of 2024 – a warm welcome back, and our heartiest congratulations on your many accomplishments! Beyond the IB, you have given much of yourselves to our school! As young adults, you are now ready to take your contributions into the world.
3. The world that our students will enter today is a very different one from what it was 17 years ago when SOTA first came into being. One key thrust in our new strategic directions is to refocus our attention on learning, for our students, our staff and the organization. In this regard, we outlined two learner dispositions of SOTA graduates (1) to be an Artistic and Creative Learner, and (2) an emerging Cultural Leader.

Nurturing Artistic and Creative Learners

4. The Artistic and Creative Learner is one who approaches learning and creating as intertwined endeavours. Motivated by the pleasure of discovery and expression, the SOTA graduate is eager to add value to the world.
5. We remember alumna Koh Cheng Jin who composed *Luciola singapura* for

SG56. The inspiration for this composition was the 2021 discovery of a new species of firefly in Singapore. According to the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, this is a kind of discovery not made since 1909! Cheng Jin had wanted her composition to serve as a timely reminder for the preservation of endangered species in the face of modernization and climate change. An evocative award-winning piece combining Western and Eastern mediums, *Luciola singapura* was chosen by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra to be performed in their Australian tour earlier this year.

6. Artistic and creative learning would typically bring SOTA students to experiment in the intersections of diverse disciplines. Leveraging the nascent arts integration experiences in SOTA's first decade, we worked on codifying these practices, leading to the development of an Integrative Learning Model. This Model, completed in 2024, comprises 3 Frames - a Conceptual, a Teaching, and a Learning Frame. The Integrative Learning Model (or ILM in short) serves to define and ground our understanding of multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary learning. The ILM will deepen the way we prepare our students to engage with and respond to the complexities of this century.
7. In the spirit of continuous inquiry, we will be sharing the ILM at the 47th Association of Interdisciplinary Studies Conference next month. Locally, we have also shared the ILM with MOE's Curriculum Planning and Development Division. We remain open to refining this Model with educators both at home and abroad.

Cultural Leadership

8. We encourage our students to think of leading through the arts, as a means of inspiring others to think, feel, and encounter the world with deeper insight and greater empathy. Who can they learn from but the cultural leaders who have come before us?
9. The *Impact* series was started to draw our students into a deep inquiry of our cultural past. Inspired by their research, students then create original

multidisciplinary works in response. The 2024 Impact show honoured the life and works of the late Mrs Santha Bhaskar, a doyen in Bharatanatyam, whose curious disposition had led her to explore many other cultures. Literary Arts student Mithran, one of the creative minds behind the show's written works shared that he has learnt a lot about what it means to be an artist in multi-cultural Singapore. Inspired by cultural leaders who have come before them, it is our fervent hope that our students will grow to be future stewards of Singapore's unique identity.

10. Cultural Leadership also involves holding space for diversity and dissonance, to challenge preconceptions and explore a wider range of solutions. SOTA students enjoy examining ethical issues in many ways- through their artworks, in reflective projects, and class discussions just to name a few. For example, through ARThink, we invite secondary school students to join our students in philosophical dialogue. Similarly, our annual Gotong Royong Festival brings together change-makers from within and beyond SOTA. We also created the Young Cultural Leaders Symposium, to inspire secondary school CCA leaders to make an impact on their communities, through the latent power of the arts, culture and heritage.

A tribute to the Class of 2024

11. What makes a cohort special? The Class of 2024 is special in many ways. To those of you who are the trailblazers in being the first to offer Literary Arts as an IB subject anywhere in this world, you have set the bar very high for all budding writers after you. Congratulations on the publication of an anthology of your manuscripts, interestingly titled 'Lost and Found'!! (If you are staying around after this ceremony, please sign my copy!)

12. The Class of 2024 rose to the challenge of organizing SOTA's inaugural Sports Fiesta! Despite a full schedule of graduation showcases and IB submissions, you pulled together and demonstrated incredible organizational abilities. You proved that you could plan games, render First Aid, umpire the "nail-biting" Staff and Parent games, and much, much more. Most impressively, you staged,

rehearsed and delivered signature opening and closing acts. In these, you involved your juniors in parade pageantry, and rose to officiate the event with deCORum and grace. In a school without uniform groups like the NPCC and NCC, how did you manage that? And is there anything you can't do?

13. Each year, SOTA puts up no fewer than 70 showcases and perform to thousands in the audience! In 2024, we also celebrated the 10th anniversary of the IB Career-related Programme with some of you collaborating with the alumni and volunteering as technical crew, right up to your final exams.

14. Even though you are done with your time here at SOTA, many of you continue to serve with your talents. In conjunction with SG60, a team of Film students Leandre, Sofia and Tiara produced a video to raise \$60,000 in 60 days for the SOTA Endowment Fund. The SOTA Endowment Fund supports students who need financial help to pursue an arts education. So, can we achieve this target? We can, if there are just 60 people who would donate a \$1000 each. Are you in?

15. Later this year, the 22nd World Aquatics Championships will be held in Singapore, making it the first time this prestigious event will take place in Southeast Asia. Singapore will welcome 2,500 athletes to compete across six aquatic disciplines. And the best part is that, SOTA will be involved! How so? Well, our Dance and Music alumni have been invited to choreograph, compose and perform at the Opening Ceremony; our Year 4 Visual Arts students have designed several pieces of merchandise; and our Literary Arts students' poems and prose will be projected at competition venues!

Staff

16. To my colleagues (seated up there), today is as much a celebration of the students' achievements as it is of your dedication! Thank you creating the conditions for our students to thrive while also aspiring to grow in your roles.

17. At SOTA, the culture of learning is much alive for staff and leaders! Over the past year, we have marked several milestones that reflect this. We revamped our school schedule to create dedicated time and space to meet for professional conversations, curriculum design and incubation of ideas. We are making a concerted effort to grow our leadership pipeline through the Aspiring Leaders Programme. We support staff's learning and rejuvenation through the Personal-Professional Development Leave, Artistic Development Leave, sponsorships and scholarships. To bring in new knowledge and expertise from the arts industry and higher educational sectors, we also invited notable SOTA Board members to form a Curriculum and Pathway Advisory Panel. All in all, we want to be an organization that will be valued for its insights and innovations in teaching, learning and service to the community.

Appreciation for donors, partners and parents

18. I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all our partners. We are honoured to have with us Mr Ng Boon Heong, CEO of Temasek Foundation which has been a long-term partner and a valued neighbour in this district!

19. We would also like to honour our donors from Goh Soon Tioe Centenary Fund, AM Family Capital Foundation and Ngee Ann Kongsi, represented by Mr Chia Mia Chiang, Chairman of its Education Sub-committee. Your belief in SOTA's mission has empowered our students to dream big and reach further. We also look forward to working with the National Arts Council in supporting our students through the new NAC-SOTA Creative Arts Scholarship.

20. To our parents, a special note of thanks goes to you for your care, love, partnership and trust over the past years. Your belief in an arts-integrated education is what drives our sense of mission. My colleagues and I thank you for being so much an important part of the SOTA community and I hope it has been a life-giving journey!

Closing

21. In closing, I would like to say that there isn't really anything that our SOTA graduates can't aspire to. But the question is what **will**, and **do you** create for? As artistic and creative learners who are stewards of culture, and leaders in their own right, I am confident that you will make unique contributions no matter where the road ahead takes you. Some of you are headed to top institutions in the big, wide world, others will start equally interesting adventures here in Singapore. May you take the SOTA DNA with you wherever you go and do keep in touch! Your teachers and I wish you the very best!

22. Thank you!