

FEEL-GOOD MONDAY

STORIES TO CHASE AWAY THE MONDAY BLUES

FRESH IDEAS THAT INSPIRE

Teacher turns school trip into heritage trail project

DEBBIE YONG

NATIONAL Education, most teachers may tell you, is not the easiest subject to teach.

“Most students brush it off as propaganda,” said private teacher Ms Melissa Eu, who spent five years teaching in government schools.

Frustrated with seeing children yawn as educators present important Singapore facts, the 31-year-old jumped at an opportunity to come up with an educational heritage trail last June.

Together with two other teachers, she was approached by an education centre to help Paya Lebar Methodist Girls Secondary School design a three-day Chinatown school trip for students last September.

After 2½ months of exhaustive research, they came up with Singalicious Trails, a three-hour Chinatown walking tour.

Conducted in an Amazing Race format, students who get the most facts right in the fastest time win “crazy money” to bid for snacks.

Actors dressed as coolies and samsui women entertain and educate them along the way, as the students pen their observations into cheerily-designed cardboard shophouse models, instead of staid worksheets.

The response from the students was so positive that it prompted Ms Eu and her partners to turn the one-off event into a sustainable project under the name Hopscotch.

Last October, they chanced upon the Creative Community Singapore (CCS) website when searching for grants for creative projects, and received approval for a grant in January.

They have since taken three more secondary schools out on prototype trails, and hope to officially market the trails in May.

“The support really helped to make the leap of faith easier,” said Ms Eu, who left a highly-paid teaching position to work on Hopscotch full-time.

“Working in this project made us realise that many young adults like us have lots of ideas, but are not confident enough to lead, and are not



UNIQUE: Ms Eu hopes her project can inspire kids to learn more about Singapore. (PHOTO: CAROLINE CHIA)

equipped with life skills like managing logistics and accounting.

“If I had this kind of support at 20, I would have come out to be an entrepreneur earlier.”

Still, she hopes that her project can inspire kids to learn more about Singapore.

She said: “I want the next generation to appreciate Singapore as much as I do. And what

better way than to come up with a creative product that is fun for us and educational for the students at the same time?”

With heritage trails around Little India and Kampong Glam, as well as sculpture, film and architecture-themed trails in the works, Hopscotch is indeed setting its unique trail in inspiring youngsters.

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HELPPDESK 我的字典

↗ **Yawn:** 打呵欠 dǎ hē qīn

↗ **Staid:** 沉闷 chén mèn

↗ **Prototype:**
样板 yàng bǎn

↗ **Sustainable:** 能支撑的
néng zhī chēng de

Retelling the Battle of S'pore in a board game

CHIA HAN KEONG

IN HIS school days, Mr Khoo Yik Lin used to play computer war games such as the Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

How nice it would be, he thought, if he could invent a similar turn-based game, but with Singapore as the backdrop.

The idea incubated in his mind, until December 2006, when he went to a spa resort in Bali.

Recalled the 33-year-old former National Computer Board scholar: “Amid the peaceful surroundings, I hit upon the idea of a board game about the 1942 Battle of Singapore.

“I decided that I want to be the first to come up with the product.”

Together with a few of his friends, he set up his gaming design company, WorldsForge Private Limited.

The team then went about researching and recreating the fateful 1942 World War II battle, in which Australian and British troops failed to stop Japan from invading and occupying Singapore.

All the members hold day jobs, and they have spent their spare time refining the gaming elements, checking for historical accuracy and coming up with appealing designs to sell the board game.

Said Mr Khoo: “We want to make this a commercially-viable product that is exciting to play with friends.

“But, at the same time, players should get a vivid impression of this important chapter in our country’s history.”

He also approached Creative Community Singapore (CCS) for financial help.

He said: “It is always gratifying to have a government initiative backing us. It gives us the confidence to carry on.



LABOUR OF LOVE: Mr Khoo Yik Lin (left), Mr Christopher Tong have spent their spare time designing the board game. (PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN)

“To outsiders, it also shows that our product has enough value to earn such support.”

Indeed, the team has already come up with several prototypes of the board game, and has tested its playability with great success.

The game is slated to hit the stores by August this year.

To Mr Khoo, it is truly a labour of love.

“I learnt that, to see through

a creative product from start to finish, you need to be passionate in your own idea,” he said.

“Without passion, it’s hard to make our product inspirational to others.”



CCS' aims

CREATIVE Community Singapore (CCS) is a key initiative by the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts.

Launched in July 2005, it seeks to support Singapore’s drive to develop the creative industries (arts and heritage, design and media sectors).

It aims to empower individuals, teams and organisations to initiate cutting-edge projects, nurture creative ideas and build demand for the creative industries.

It does so by providing various forms of support, including facilitation, marketing, and co-funding.

For more information on CCS, please e-mail mica_ccs@mica.gov.sg or visit www.creativecommunity.sg.