

"Where is that thing?" whispered Ravi.

"I am so scared. Shall we leave now? It is so dim here," Huiling pleaded as she trembled with fear.



Where are Ravi and Huiling? What is the thing that Huiling is afraid of? What will happen to Ravi and Huiling? Will they be hurt? Join Ravi, Huiling and Faizal on their trip to the Singapore Botanic Gardens and their amazing encounters with Billie, a hornbill.

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XINGNAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

# Amazing Encounters



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# Amazing Encounters



By students of Xingnan Primary School

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It was decision time. Three children, Faizal, Ravi and Huiling had to decide on a place to work on their Inter-disciplinary Project Work.

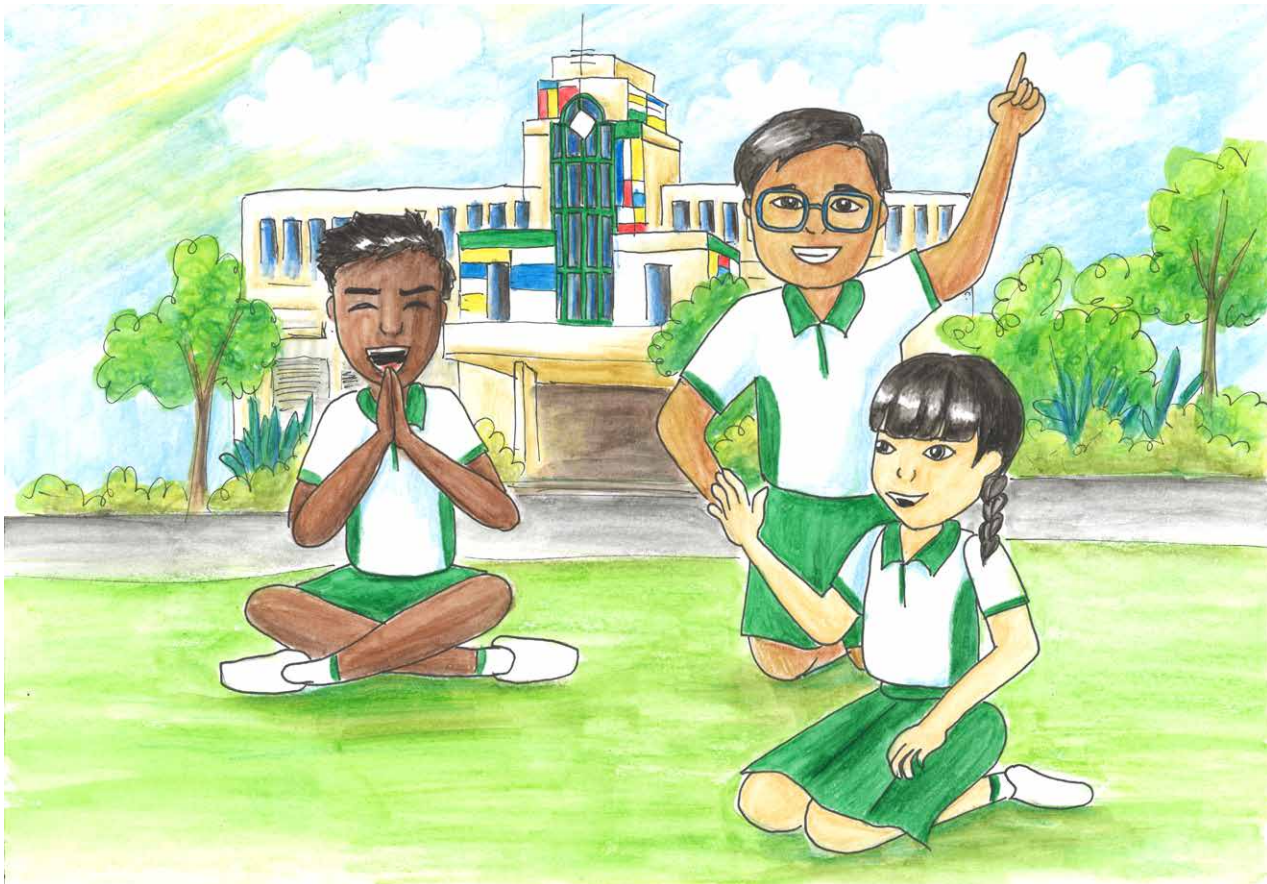
“Shall we go to Singapore Botanic Gardens?” asked Faizal.

“Why do you recommend Singapore Botanic Gardens?” Ravi questioned.

“I haven’t been there before. Is it popular?” Huiling asked.

“Of course! Being our country’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site, it not only attracts tourists but Singaporeans too. Do you know it is Singapore’s best-preserved historic landscape with a size of 153 football fields? Be fascinated by the beauty of 9,000 species of plants there!” answered Faizal excitedly.

“Wow, that sounds interesting! Let’s go on an exploration now!” Ravi exclaimed.





The three children sat on the lush lawn around the Shaw Foundation Symphony Stage to have their picnic. They had sandwiches, fruits, potato chips and orange juice.



"I am so full now," said Huiling, stretching her arms.

Ravi and Faizal lay down comfortably on a picnic mat and closed their eyes. Suddenly, Huiling broke the silence.

"Wake up! Wake up! Look at that building at the top of the hill over there!" exclaimed Huiling excitedly.

Ravi and Faizal rubbed their eyes and yawned loudly.

“What building?” Faizal mumbled.

“That building is so beautiful! Shall we explore it?” Huiling said.

“Aha! That building is called ‘Burkill Hall’,” Ravi said, pointing to a directional sign. “My research says that Burkill Hall is an Anglo-Malay style Plantation house which originally functioned without electricity. It has verandas on both ends of its second floor to create a wind tunnel effect for its occupants. Burkill Hall was also the residence of the Gardens’ first superintendent, Lawrence Niven. It was built by Chinese builders at a cost of \$4,000.”

On the way there, the different flora and fauna along the path fascinated them. Suddenly, Huiling stopped dead in her tracks and screamed, “Eek...! What’s that? It looks scary!”





Ravi comforted Huiling, "Do not be scared. It is only a harmless monitor lizard. It will not attack you unless you disturb it!"

Still unsure, Huiling walked extremely carefully and slowly around it, making sure the monitor lizard was at a distance from her.

"Look! Ravi and Faizal!" exclaimed Huiling excitedly!



Both boys turned their heads towards Huling.

“What happened again?” Faizal asked.

“Look at that beautiful orchid,” Huling replied.

“That is our national flower ‘Vanda Miss Joaquim’,” informed Ravi. “It is the first recorded orchid hybrid from Singapore. Miss Agnes Joaquim is credited with creating it in the early 1890s.”

They took photos of the beautiful orchid and continued their journey to Burkill Hall.





When they finally reached Burkill Hall, they found the door to the bungalow ajar. They peeked inside and saw a big dark shadow flying around.

“What’s that flying? Is it a bat?”

Numerous possible but not so favourable answers started to pop up in their heads.



"Let's investigate," Ravi suggested.

"No... It looks eerie inside," Huiling replied hesitantly.

"Do not be scared. We are with you," Faizal encouraged Huiling. Faizal and Ravi entered the building.

Gingerly, Huiling followed behind the boys.





"Where is that thing?" whispered Ravi.

"I am so scared. Shall we leave now? It is so dim here," Huiling pleaded as she trembled with fear.

"Look! Look at that shadow on that wall. It is getting bigger!" Faizal said as he pointed at the shadow.



## **“Monster! Monster!”**

Huiling screamed loudly in fear and covered her eyes.

“It is now flying in circles,” observed Faizal.

“It’s not a monster. It is a black and white bird with a yellow beak. Please stop yelling. You are frightening the bird,” Ravi explained while trying to calm Huiling down.

Huiling stopped and opened her eyes. Then, she screamed again.

## **“Be...be...be careful!”**

But, it was too late!





## Bang!

The children's mouths sagged open. Regaining their composure, Ravi and Faizal ran as fast as lightning to the bird. Huiling could not believe her eyes and stood rooted to the ground.



"Oh no! Look at the blood on the bird's wings," Ravi said.

"Are you okay, little bird?" Faizal asked.

"Let's take it to the vet now," Ravi suggested.

As gentle as a dove, Ravi placed the injured bird on his hand.

"It looks so pitiful," sobbed Huiling.





They heaved a sigh of relief when the vet checked and told them that it was not a severe injury. However, it would take about a week to recover. Huiling volunteered to bring the bird home to take good care of it.



A week later, the bird had fully recovered.

"Thank you for taking care of me. My name is Billie," squawked the bird one morning. Shocked, the three children stepped back when they heard the bird introducing himself.

"Why are you afraid of me? I will not harm you," Billie assured them.

"You can talk? You really can talk?" Huiling could not believe what she had heard.

"Yes, I can talk. Can we be friends?" Billie squawked.

"Sure," the three children replied in unison.

The children started introducing themselves and chatted about their families and friends. Suddenly, Billie looked sad.





Ravi noticed the tears in Billie's eyes.

"Why do you look so sad?" Ravi asked.

Billie replied sadly, "I miss my family and friends. I want to go home..."

Huiling stroked Billie and comforted him, "Don't worry, we will bring you back to your family soon."

"Shall we bring you to Burkill Hall now?" asked Faizal.

"My family lives near Holttum Hall," Billie replied.

Puzzled, Huiling asked, "Why were you at Burkill Hall that day?"



"I was playing hide-and-  
seek with my sister. Before  
she could find me, all of you  
came...," Billie sobbed as he  
recalled what had happened.

"Don't cry! We will bring you  
back to Holtum Hall now,"  
Ravi said.





Billie and his friends were on their way to Holttum Hall. They passed many interesting buildings. They took many funny photos with Billie at the famous Swan Lake<sup>1</sup>.

Suddenly, Huiling shouted, "Where is Billie?"

They stopped taking photos and shouted, "Billie! Billie! Where are you?"



<sup>1</sup>Swan Lake: The Swan Lake is home to numerous species of aquatic plants and fishes, and is named as such because of a pair of beautiful mute swans from Amsterdam that glided gracefully across the lake.

Source: <https://www.visitsingapore.com/see-do-singapore/nature-wildlife/parks-gardens/singapore-botanic-gardens/>



As they were searching, they passed by a symmetrical building with a unique porch where they saw a feather that looked identical to Billie's on the ground.

"Look, could this feather belong to Billie?" asked Ravi.

"Could Billie be inside this building?" suggested Faizal.

"Holtum Hall," said Huiling as she read off a panel on the wall next to the door.

"This door is locked. Shall we try getting in through that open gate over there?" suggested Ravi.

The open gate led to a hidden rainforest trail. The children's eyes bulged when they saw what was at the end of the hidden rainforest trail.





A bright light sucked them into a new world... many hornbills were flying around.

Huiling thought, "Maybe Billie is here too."

There were too many identical birds flying around and they lost hope of finding Billie.

"I just hope that Billie is safe and is already back with his family," Huiling said.

As they were about to leave, Billie squawked, "Hi guys, over here! This is my family!"

They turned around and saw Billie and his family.

"I am Billie's sister, Betsy. Thank you for taking good care of him," Betsy thanked them.

They started chatting happily. After a while, Billie's father squawked, "Mr Ridley is here!"





"Hello... I see we have some guests," said Mr Ridley.

Billie explained to Mr Ridley of his misadventure, and how Huling, Ravi and Faizal had taken care of him. Mr Ridley thanked the children and introduced himself, "I am the Director of Singapore Botanic Gardens and this is my pet, a tapir. I am conducting a special research and am getting the help of these hornbills to pick<sup>2</sup> the high hanging fruits on the rubber trees in this rainforest." Mr Ridley rewarded the hornbills with their favourite fruits for every rubber fruit they brought to him.

The three children then realised that they had travelled back to the period of time, probably between 1888 to 1912, when Sir H N Ridley was the Director of Singapore Botanic Gardens.

"Mr Ridley, shall we send the three children back to 2019? We can put up a special performance at the Bandstand to thank them for taking care of Billie," said Billie's father.

<sup>2</sup>pick the high hanging fruits: In nature, rubber fruit splits open when ripe and the seeds fall onto the ground



The Bandstand is a flat area on a small hill that stands 33m above sea level. It has an eight-sided gazebo, built in 1930, on it. It is surrounded by rain trees with yellow leaves. Perched on the roof and sides of the gazebo, each hornbill was holding a musical instrument. Billie waved the baton in his wing and the Hornbill band started playing.

### **"God save our gracious Queen... God save the Queen!"<sup>3</sup>**

The three children watched the performance by the Hornbill Band in awe. The performance attracted a crowd of audience. After the performance, the audience responded with thunderous applause. Huiling, Faizal and Ravi took many photos with the hornbills and Sir H N Ridley.



<sup>3</sup>"God save our gracious Queen...God save the Queen!" : Lyrics of the British national anthem 'God save the Queen'. Singapore was a British Crown colony from 1946 to 1963.

## Singapore Botanic Gardens and the Rubber Industry

(reference: <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/sbg/about/our-history/1888-ridley-and-the-malayan-rubber-industry-from-1896>; <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/a8ceea4c-1c8b-4c9a-885c-b85038b39e4c>; The 'mad' man and his rubber seeds..The Straits Times, 9 April 1973, Page 20

By 1920, Malaya was producing over half of the world's rubber. How did this happen?

This goes back to the year 1877 when 22 rubber seedlings from the Kew Gardens in England were sent to the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Out of the 22 seedlings, 11 were sown in the Botanic Gardens of Singapore.

The rubber industry grew out of these trees propagated in Singapore Botanic Gardens. From 1870s to 1890s, experiments were carried out to make rubber planting commercially viable. The Gardens' first scientific Director, Sir Henry Nicholas Ridley researched on the most suitable place for planting, the ideal density per acre, the best method of raising seedlings, the most effective processing techniques, and the best means of packing and shipping processed rubber. Mr Ridley also invented the herring-bone method of rubber tapping technique that resulted in maximising the quantities of latex without harming the tree.

By 1890s, Mr Ridley was walking around with bags of rubber seeds persuading coffee planters to switch to rubber cultivation. Often, he also visited Straits Settlements plantation owners with his jacket pockets filled with rubber seeds from the 1000 mature trees growing in the gardens. By 1912, when Ridley retired, nearly 600,000 acres of land were planted with rubber.



Sir Henry Nicholas Ridley with an original para rubber tree in the Economic Garden.

Courtesy of Singapore Botanic Gardens Archives, National Parks Board



# Interesting Architecture Facts

## Holttum Hall



Holttum Hall was formerly used as an office and orchid breeding laboratory by the Director of Singapore Botanic Gardens, Eric Holttum, during his tenure (1925-1949). It is a symmetrical building with a unique porch that is sometimes seen at the entrance of English church compounds. It has roof vents and louvred vents over the windows to cope with the topical climate. Holttum Hall houses the Singapore Botanic Gardens Heritage Museum, which opened in December 2013.

## The Garage



The Garage (completed between 1924 and 1928) at Singapore Botanic Gardens used to house cars of professors in the Horticulture Department. It is built in a distinctly Art Deco style. Today, this colonial building houses two Food & Beverage establishments.

## E J H Corner House



The Corner House is a two-storey black and white bungalow built in 1910 to house officials and administrators during the colonial period. It was named after Eldred John Henry Corner, the Assistant Director of the Gardens from 1929 to 1942. Today, the Corner House is a Michelin star restaurant.

## Ridley Hall



Ridley Hall was built in 1881. It is named in honour of Sir Henry Nicholas Ridley, the first Director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens from 1888 to 1912. It was first used to house the Gardens' Herbarium and Library's collections. It later became Mr Ridley's office. It is a one-storey building with generous overhanging roof eaves to protect the walls and interiors from the tropical sun and rain.

## Burkill Hall



Burkill Hall was built in 1886. It served as the residence of the Gardens' superintendents and directors for more than a hundred years. It was named in honour of the Gardens' two former Directors, Isaac Henry Burkill, and his son Humphrey Morrison Burkill. It is the last known surviving two-storey Anglo-Malay plantation style bungalow. Today, it is used to exhibit VIP orchids.

## The Bandstand

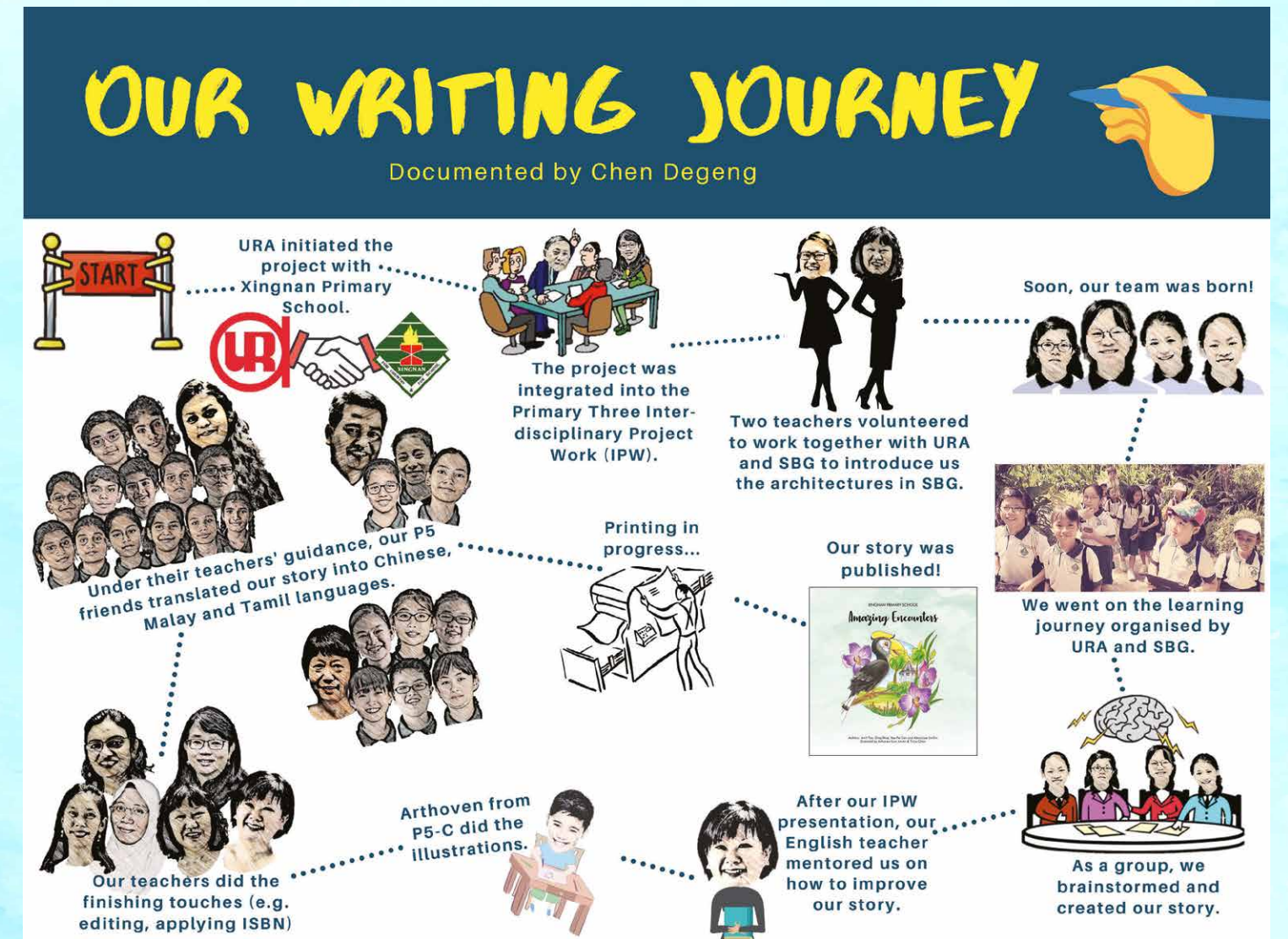


The Bandstand refers to the small hill where the octagonal gazebo, built in 1930, sits on. In the olden days, bands used to play at the bandstand twice a week to entertain people. Today, it is a favourite place for people to take their wedding photos.



This story is written by a group of 4 nine-year-old students as part of their submission for their Inter-disciplinary Project Work to promote Singapore Botanic Gardens. While the events and characters in this story are fictitious, these writers have tapped on their learning experiences at Singapore Botanic Gardens and worked together to bring you "Amazing Encounters". An eleven-year-old student in the school did the illustrations under the guidance of his mother.

Supported by :



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