Singapore School Crests
The Stories Behind the Symbols
**INTRODUCTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION A</th>
<th>SCHOOLS OF ART</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) COLONIAL HERALDRY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) CHINESE PATRIOTISM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) SEEING THE LIGHT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) FROM SHIELDS TO SHAPES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) MANY WAYS OF SEEING THE FUTURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION B</th>
<th>MY SCHOOL CREST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION C</th>
<th>CRESTS OF MEMORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION D</th>
<th>THE SCIENCE OF MEMORY-MAKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

This work was exclusively created for the Singapore Memory Project
www.SingaporeMemory.sg
Every school in Singapore has one. The school crest is the graphical symbol that represents an educational institution and the values it aims to inculcate in its students. All things related to the school are branded with the crest, from its building down to its stationery, and even its students, who wear it as a badge that is part of their school uniform.

The Ministry of Education oversees over 350 primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions in Singapore today, making sure they adhere to a standard curriculum and are provided with facilities like school buildings as well as staff. Schools are left to determine how they represent themselves — giving rise to the myriad designs that make up the Singapore school crest landscape.

This book examines a selection of crest designs from both defunct and existing schools in Singapore, as well as the iconic Young Scientist badges, looking at the stories behind how they were created, their place in the nation’s education history, and the memories that principals, teachers and students have of them.
Some school crest designs are guided by the schools’ origins and history, others towards their imagined future, and while many conform to societal conventions of the times, there are those that express their designers’ personal tastes and beliefs.

Despite these different approaches and philosophies, school crests all share one intention, which is to project a particular image of an institution’s values and beliefs. Behind each crest is a unique response from the people setting up the school — their answer to the question of what does a school represent.

No matter how much time and effort is put into it, school crest designs are never truly complete. They evolve with time, changing societal conditions, and most importantly, how students take home their memories of what their school crest means to them.
Classify the school crests into five main categories. You may have more than one crest per category. This question is worth 5 marks. Not all crests have to be included.
The oldest school in Singapore, Raffles Institution, was set up in 1823 as the Singapore Institution. The school’s crest was based on the coat of arms of its founder, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, who established Singapore as a modern trading port in 1819. The crest is shaped in the form of a shield with a gryphon at the top and a motto scroll below. A double-headed eagle and gold medallions constitute the central elements.

(Facing page) Raffles Institution (1966) by Wong Suan Shea and Lee Suan Hiang.
Such a school crest, derived from a coat of arms, originates from the European tradition of heraldry. This practice of graphic representation emerged out of Europe in the mid-12th century as a way to identify feudal lords and knights, and it was later adopted by citizens and schools to establish connections with age-old traditions.

This was also the case for many of Singapore’s earliest schools, which were set up by Christian missions and the colonial government. The crests of these schools either adopted heraldic elements from their original institutions in Europe or were inspired by one.

An example of the former is the crest of St. Nicholas Girls’ (1933), a Catholic school by the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ), while the latter includes Beatty Secondary (1954), whose crest is based on the coat of arms of its namesake Admiral David Richard Beatty, a distinguished naval officer from Britain.

These forms of school crests were typically made up of a shield and included objects and symbols that told a school’s history, background and affiliations. On the crest of St. Gabriel’s Primary (1953-2006) are trappings of Christianity including the letters D+S (Dieu Seul) surmounted by a cross, which means “God Alone”, the French motto of its founder St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Monfort. Another example is the Anglo-Chinese School (1930) crest, which has a mythical animal made up of a lion head, eagle wings and a dragon body with claws — inspired by the school’s founding during China’s Manchu Dynasty in the then British colony of Singapore by the American Methodist Mission.

“These forms of school crests were typically made up of a shield and included objects and symbols that told a school’s history.”

Particularly in the context of Singapore, heraldic crests became a way of identifying institutions in an education scene that was divided along language lines during a time when schools taught in the respective languages of the different immigrant communities that founded them — the Chinese, Malay, Indians and Europeans. A heraldic crest was a badge for those who attended English schools, the language of the ruling colonial power then.
Crest Test

Jackson Tan

Designer and Artist at PHUNK
School: St. Joseph’s Institution (SJI)
Graduation Year: 1990

1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 8/10

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 2/10

I don’t know what the individual objects stand for but the three rings reminded me of Led Zeppelin! I know the motto means “Pray and Work”, but I remember we used to say “Play and Play” instead!

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks)

I had to design the hockey and class T-shirts so I used to trace the crest a lot as I was part of the art team. Everybody will pay like $8 or something, and we’ll go to Queensway to make T-shirts. There was no computer then, so we had to draw the crest by hand, and the printers would use it to make our T-shirts and jerseys.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

I remember the Raffles Institution, Anglo-Chinese School and St. Andrew’s crests because they were our rivals in hockey and soccer. When you play for the teams, you were always trying to see which school team had more cool jerseys. Ours was quite cool: our home jersey was green with white stripes and the away version was white with green stripes.

Correct answer:

Crown: Symbolises victory of faith over evil. It is a reminder of the school’s founding when Singapore was part of the British colony.
Five-pointed star: Sign of faith and logo of the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle.
White cross: Symbol of the Christian faith.

Objects in crest:
- Three interlocking circles: Games and the sporting spirit.
- Lion: Courage and determination, and the founding of the school in Singapura (Singapore), the Lion City.
- SJI monogram of the school

Motto: Ora et Labora, Latin for “Pray and Work”.

Correct answer: Crown: Symbolises victory of faith over evil. It is a reminder of the school’s founding when Singapore was part of the British colony. Five-pointed star: Sign of faith and logo of the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle. White cross: Symbol of the Christian faith. Objects in crest:
- Three interlocking circles: Games and the sporting spirit.
- Lion: Courage and determination, and the founding of the school in Singapura (Singapore), the Lion City.
- SJI monogram of the school

Motto: Ora et Labora, Latin for “Pray and Work”.
1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 7/10

Jack

Rai

Correct answers

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 4/10

Jack: There is a phoenix or some creature but I don’t know what it represents. I assume the shield serves to remind the students to defend their school! But any hardcore ACJC-ian will remember the motto is “The Best Is Yet To Be”.

Rai: The two-headed eagle has something to do with British tradition. The school motto means “Hope for a Better Age”.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks) 25/25

Jack: Being in the rugby team, I always remember the flag flying high during major tournaments. It reminds me of the camaraderie we had in JC, definitely one of the schools where I had fun and made good friends.

Rai: The crest was always a point of pride for me. It was always an honour to wear the sports crest when I was in the athletics team.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

Jack: St. Joseph’s Institution. It was my secondary school and it taught me a lot about humility. I would always forget to wear the badge, so I was punished countless times by having to buy one from the bookshop!

Rai: I would like to think I remember the CHIJ crest because IJ girls were eye candy for us, but I don’t! I remember my primary school crest, Qifa. I never knew what it meant, but it was easy to remember because it was simple.
In contrast to the heraldic crests of English schools were those of the Chinese schools that made up the other majority of Singapore’s education scene in the early 20th century. Chinese schools had relatively simpler crests, often just the school name written in Chinese calligraphy inside a particular shape, for example, The Chinese High School’s first crest in 1919. As its founder Tan Kah Kee, a prominent businessman in Singapore, was very active in the politics of his homeland China like many of his contemporaries, this particular crest was inspired by the state and army flag of the short-lived Republic of China (1912-1949). It bore the colours red, yellow, blue, white, as well as black, and had 18 stars encircling the Chinese characters of the school name. Before the civil war in China between the government and the communists, the school’s crest was even changed to match the “Blue Sky, White Sun and a Wholly Red Earth” flag that the Republic’s first president Sun Yat-Sen would later declare as its new national flag.

Subsequent schools set up by the Chinese immigrants in Singapore also adopted similar elements in their crests — particularly the star, as well as the colours, red, white and blue — although they did not make explicit connections to such political symbolism like Chinese High.
“...used the triangle to symbolise the moral, physical and intellectual development of its students.”

In 1930, Chinese High had a new crest. The new triangular-shaped crest reflected another distinct trait of the crests from Chinese schools, which typically contain elements that represent the harmonious relationship between values and people. While the crest’s shape signified the three-way link between the school’s board members, teachers and students of Chinese High, school crests from Nan Hua High and Chung Cheng High used the triangle to symbolise the moral, physical and intellectual development of their students. Another Chinese school, Nan Chiau High, also sought to express this, but with three interlocking rings instead.
Illustrator
School: The Chinese High School
Graduation Year: 1996

1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 10/10

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 0/10

“学” is the Chinese word for “learn”. It also looks like a torch with a flame.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks) 25/25

I remember drawing it on school T-shirts I designed for my class and a Secondary 3 camp T-shirt. It was quite an easy crest to draw, plus it was single coloured and had a distinctive form, so it was quite easy to remember.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

The old crest of The Chinese High School. I had to pin the badge onto the breast pocket of my school uniform everyday, so after a while, you subconsciously remember the design, although I think I actually remember the colours (yellow, blue, red) more than the details on it.

Correct answer:
The logo draws inspiration from the Chinese character “华”, which reflects the school’s mission of promoting Chinese language and culture.
1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 6/10

Correct answer:

The arrows represent the four aims of the school: the moral, intellectual, physical, and social development of a student.

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 9/10

The arrows represent the four aims of the school: the moral, intellectual, physical, and social development of a student.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks) 25/25

I’m less of a graphics person, so symbols don’t mean as much to me as words. I think mottos are easy to remember and abide by, and these are philosophies that anchor people, such as Victoria Junior College’s Nil Sine Labore (Latin for “Nothing Without Labour”). Another way people remember a school and form an association with it is through its physical premises. I studied in Beijing University, where the campus is over a hundred years old and the room where writer Lu Xun worked as a librarian is still there! When you walk into the campus, it feels different — you know generations have passed through it.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

My secondary school, The Chinese High School. It was where I learnt about a “win-win” philosophy, which is if you want to benefit yourself, you should benefit others too. It is the idea of finding a way for both parties to advance. Whenever I meet people who ascribe to such a philosophy, it turns out they were from Chinese High too.
Singapore’s education system was transformed with the 1957 Education Ordinance. This act established the basis for equality in education by giving attention and equal treatment to the major ethnic groups in Singapore. All schools, including language medium schools, had to be registered with the government and have syllabuses of similar content.

Leading the transformation was the Ministry of Education (MOE), which was set up in 1955. MOE’s logo was designed by Mr Kwan Sai Kheong, who was the ministry’s permanent secretary cum Director of Education from 1964 to 1975. MOE’s logo is a red shield made up of two lions holding an open book, with a flaming torch sitting atop the book and a blue scroll beneath it. These elements are also found on Singapore’s National Coat of Arms (1959) and that of the University of Singapore (1962), one of the country’s two institutions of higher education then.
That the logo of the state’s highest education order was associated with a visual language inherited from its former colonial masters reflected the trend then. An alternative would have been to take inspiration from the crest of the country’s other university, the then Nanyang University whose crest consisted of a star and three interlocking rings that established its lineage with other Chinese-language schools then.

The MOE logo and the crests of most schools in the 1950s and 1960s adopted some form of heraldry, essentially shields supported by a scroll emblazoned with the school name or motto. These include Bartley Secondary (1952), Singapore Polytechnic (1960), and even the nation’s first Malay-medium secondary school, Sang Nila Utama Secondary (1961-1988).
Commonly found inside these crests were the open book and flaming torch — such as Elling North Primary (1958-1993), Corporation Primary (1975), and Eunos Primary (1984) — two stereotypical elements used to represent schools. Also popularly used in school crests were the colours blue, red and white, which symbolise “knowledge”, “passion” and “purity” respectively. Together, these design elements form the archetypal school crest in the early years of independent Singapore.

That Singapore schools were largely represented by heraldic crests was perhaps an early indication of the future of education here. While equal treatment for all language streams was established at first, English gradually became the working language of Singapore over the decades, and many parents started sending their children to English-stream schools instead. While the Primary One cohort was equally divided between English-stream and Chinese-stream schools in 1959, over 90 percent were enrolled in the former some two decades later. In December 1983, it was announced that all pupils in Singapore schools would be taught English as their first language by 1987. A progressive conversion to English medium began in 1984.

(From left to right) Elling North Primary (1958-1993), Corporation Primary (1975) by Fong Kim Chong, Eunos Primary (1984); Sembawang Secondary (1999), Playfair Morning School (1949), Changkat Primary; Pioneer Secondary (1994) by Tay Kay Sui, Joo Avenue School (1964), Heng A Khe Bong (1970s); Jin Tai Secondary, MacRitchie Primary (1970s), Bukit Merah North Secondary.
1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 6/10

Correct answer:

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 0/10

Have a burning passion to learn.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks) 25/25

I remember it was on my PE T-shirt. I also drew the school crest when I could not concentrate in class, and on the last day of primary school when I had to fill up autograph books. It was not a very memorable crest.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

Commonwealth Secondary. It was my secondary school and the crest looked more symbolic. Its initials CSS translate into tiny flames on the crest.
Over the years, school crests moved away from the shield as a frame, favouring simple shapes instead. However, the idea of picking elements to create meaningful crests remained at the heart of many designs. Good examples are Bukit Panjang Government High (1960) and Chestnut Drive Secondary (1960s), which have crests filled with illustrations of their students’ expected abilities upon graduation.

From the 1970s, crests formed from the schools’ initials started gaining popularity as seen in that of Bedok Town Secondary (1984–2012). Some schools also used their initials to create distinct and abstract shapes such as Shuqun High (1985). Others created familiar graphical symbols instead. For instance, the initials of Peirce Secondary (1994) were transformed into the typical flame and torch, while Bishan Park Secondary (1993) had its initials designed to resemble a leaf.

(From left to right)
Deyi Secondary (1980), Damai Primary (1984);
Beng Wan Primary, Fajar Secondary.

(From left to right)
Yuhua Secondary (1985) by Leong Chye Chye,
East Payoh Secondary (1975-1998);
“Some schools used their initials to create distinct and abstract shapes while others created familiar graphical symbols instead.”

As MOE began naming schools after the areas they were located in, schools also sought inspiration from the surroundings for their crests. This is why Bukit Merah Secondary (1967) has a red hill-like crest that reflects its Malay name, which means “Red Hill” in English, and its Chinese name, “红山”. The school’s initials “bm” in white, stand out against the red background. Similarly for Seng Kang Secondary (1999), the history of its location as a harbour led to the school using its initials to create a crest that includes an anchor.

The movement from traditional shields towards abstract crests matched the rising popularity of corporate identities among businesses and organisations around the world, who wanted to represent themselves graphically with logos. Nowadays, some schools even have crests that are inspired by the logos of major brands. These include the crests of the National University of Singapore’s High School of Mathematics and Science (2004) and the Singapore Sports School (2004). While most schools have their logos designed by their art teacher, the sports school crest was designed by Ukelele, a commercial brand consultancy.

1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 8/10

Correct answer:

The two Ps represent Pandan Primary and the head is “S”, which stands for School. The crest is actually an anchor.

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks) 8/10

It actually stands for Pandan Primary, with two Ps, one a reflection of the other.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks) 25/25

It looks like a face to me as there is a pair of eyes and a smile at the bottom. Before the badge was sewn onto the uniform, it was to be pinned on and I would always forget to do so. So I always got scolded or punished by having to stand in class.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks) 5/5

My secondary school, Bukit View. I remember drawing it for some school project when we had to put the crest on the cover. It’s very easy to draw, just three triangles and another inverted one below.
MANY WAYS OF SEEING THE FUTURE

The school as an institution for knowledge and learning has remained at the core of its existence. This is why the open book and flame remain evergreen symbols on Singapore’s school crests, although over the years, the latter has been updated to more modern interpretations. In place of the flame, Rulang Primary has a rising sun, Admiralty Secondary (2001) has a lighthouse, while Yuhua Primary (2002) uses a lightbulb. Another approach used to represent the important role of schools in nurturing young minds is through symbols of nature, such as animals and plants. Farrer Park Primary (2002) has a plant growing out of a book, while Westwood Secondary and Zhonghua Secondary use a plant and leaf respectively to show how hardy their students are.

(From left to right)
Guangyang Secondary, Yuhua Primary (2002), Admiralty Secondary (2001);
Rulang Primary (1955) by Yar Wee Har, Chong Shan Primary (1982), Westwood Secondary;
As for animals, birds like the eagle have been used by Anglican High (1959) and Concord Primary (2000) to symbolise how their students “soar to new heights”.

The importance of the student in the school has also led to crests with abstract human figures such as Bukit View Primary (1986) and Xinmin Secondary. Another way to represent this is through stars, as how Hong Kah Secondary (1994) has done.
In the schools’ quests to create unique crests and project themselves as having moved with the times, some have even made use of contemporary objects. When manufacturing was seen as an important part of Singapore’s industrialisation, the gear wheels in the crests of Yuan Ching Secondary (1978–2007) and Yumin Primary (1985) made them look ready for the future. However, as Singapore’s shifted towards a service economy, their crests became dated. A similar case is Evergreen Primary, the only school to have a CD-ROM on its crest. This made sense because when it was founded in 1999, multimedia was touted as the next big thing, but who would have thought that just over a decade later, the CD-ROM is hardly in use?

The one element introduced in crest designs post-millennium that has stayed relevant is the globe. The crests of Zhenghua Secondary (2000) and Anderson Primary (2000) have incorporated the globe, promising to mould students with a global outlook. This has become ever more important in today’s globalised world.
CREST TEST

SHEERE NG

Food Writer
School: Qifa Primary School
Graduation Year: 1998

1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks) 10/10

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks)
I always wondered... It looks like a tree, maybe growth?

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks)
I thought it looked very distinctive. The symbol inside the crest is not your usual shape such as a triangle, or an object like a leaf. I think Qifa is the only school with a symbol like that.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks)
The Chinese High School’s crest. I was a prefect at Jurongville Secondary and as we were in the same cluster as Nanyang Girls’ High, we often had activities there. From Nanyang, we could see The Chinese High School’s crest, and I’ve always remembered it as I used to wonder what life was like in such good schools.
IT Consultant, Founder of The Gyanada Foundation
School: Fairfield Methodist Primary School
Graduation Year: 1997

1. Please draw us your school crest. (10 marks)
   6/10
   Correct answer:
   ![Crest](image)
   The heart represents the highest of all emotions, love — the love of God for man and the love of man for his neighbour. When the heart is pure and honest, the Holy Spirit can dwell within and transform the nature of the individual, ennobling and refining it.

   The torch of knowledge and wisdom illuminates the mind and broadens the vision of all who seek its light. Emblazoned in a band of gold across the heart are the initials of the school, representing loyalty for the alma mater. The two stars reflect the school motto, “Pure & Honest.”

2. What does your school crest stand for? (10 marks)
   0/10
   I only remember the motto, “Pure & Honest” because it always made me giggle. Purity is such a Christian school thing. I remember the badge colours were yellow and blue, and so was the school uniform.

3. What memories do you have of your school crest? (25 marks)
   0/25
   I had to wear my school badge, name tag and tie to school everyday, so I remember putting them on in a set of three: the badge first, the name tag and then the tie. I also remember playing football and sepak takraw in the volleyball court during PE lessons. We had to be in our PE attire, but when the boys did not wear theirs, they would remove their school badge and name tag, and play wearing only their uniform.

4. What are some other school crests you remember? Why? (5 Marks)
   0/5
   My secondary school, Singapore Chinese Girls’. Compared to Fairfield, the crest was more symbolic of what the school stood for. The yin and yang crest and kim gek (Hokkien for gold and jade) colours represent well-rounded students, who are good in English and Chinese, as well as intellectual women who have no problems getting married!
The crest designs of Singapore schools have changed little over the span of the last five decades since a unified education system was established. Most changes have been updates to keep up with the times, although sometimes this has led to unexpected results such as when their choice of elements became obsolete. One reason for the lack of innovation in crest design is that most crests are put together by art teachers in schools rather than professional graphic designers. Often, crest designs have to be approved by a committee whose members may have differing views on the design.

Over the years, some schools have had their crests changed because of mergers with other schools or simply to keep up with the times. While the crests of some schools may be lacking aesthetically, they remain a source of pride for present and former students of the schools.

In 2012, Catholic Junior College unsuccessfully proposed to refresh its 37-year-old crest that bears a dove. The school wanted to replace the dove with a flame that is already worn by students as collar pins on their uniform as the flame has "a more modern feel and universal appeal". Similarly, Dunman Secondary wanted to update its more than 30-year-old crest in 2008 to "better reflect the Dunman of the 21st century". However, both decisions caused an uproar with their alumni, who started online petitions to protect their school's identity.

One former Dunman student, who opposed to the change, wrote in to the newspaper forum saying: "My point is, symbols that build an identity hold meaning for their uses and create continuity of culture and sense of belonging. To Dunman's principal — try the idea of changing the national flag and the school will understand why changing the school badge is not about evolution."

Dunman's school crest did change eventually, but such sentiment shows how the crest is an important graphical symbol for students to identify themselves with the school. It is one of the few items all students, regardless of when they enrolled, how well they performed, or who they become, remember their school. A school's building may change, principal and teachers may leave, students will graduate, but as long as the crest remains, the school exists — even if it's just as a fragment of a memory.
Crest designs are exercises for the principal and teachers to visually translate what they hope to achieve as a school. Starting from a school name assigned by the Ministry of Education, most principals conceptualise what the school’s mission and values are before working with their art teachers or professional graphic design studios to express these in visual form. Here are some stories behind the designs of school crests from over the decades, which show the different inspirations and intentions, and how designs sometime get lost in translation!
The torch has always been associated with education. When Commonwealth Secondary’s art teacher Miss Ruth Ng Lee Gek discovered that the school’s initials could be designed to resemble flames, she created the crest of a torch emitting flames.

She was tasked by the principal to work on the design in 1972. Without any brief, Miss Ng decided to depart from the traditional shield and focus on a single object instead. “I wanted something that could be with the school forever, and nothing can beat the flame. This idea of lighting up the students’ passion was almost natural,” she says.

The art teacher was so passionate about her design that she even wrote a poem to explain its significance:

Behold our school crest
With our motto “Ever with the Best”
See the flame burning with zest
It proudly stands for CSS
Blue for infinite resourcefulness
Gold for faith and fruitfulness
Ever-glowing is our flame
Ever-growing is our name

School tie of alumnus Ang Song Nian.
STUDENT POWER

To mark Yio Chu Kang Secondary’s relocation to bigger premises in 1982, then principal Mdm So Bie Leng decided to revamp its shield-like crest to something more modern. At the same time, she wanted a crest that better reflected the school’s original motto, “Pursuit, Knowledge, Service”, which was written by its founding principal.

Mdm So worked with two art teachers and they came up with the idea of using a generator. Its core is the letter ‘Y’ to stand for the school’s name, with three blades representing the values in the original motto. The ‘Y’ and three blades are bound by a circle that represent the staff and students.

Says Mdm So, “We wanted a crest that involved all three ideas, to say they combined as one and powered our students.”
As its school name suggests, the principal of Horizon Primary, Mrs Janet Ang, looked beyond existing crest designs when conceptualising this crest. Mrs Ang worked with Graphic Masters & Advertising, a design studio she had previously worked with, to come up with the crest.

“I did not want the standard kind of school logo, i.e. a crest with a torch or a book,” she explained. “We are entering the 21st century and I think we should think out of the box and the school logo should really reflect what Horizon is.”

The result is a crest made up of the sun, a horizon line and a soaring bird. When seen together, the sun and horizon line also resemble a human form, which Mrs Ang says represents everyone in the school helping each of its students soar like a bird. The crest also has no boundaries so as to not restrict the soaring bird.
When East Coast Primary was formed from the amalgamation of three schools in the 2000s, it asked its uniform supplier, United Uniforms, to design a new school crest. Then company director, Mr Brian Leong Kuen, volunteered to create this crest, which articulates the school’s hope for its students to pursue excellence.

“The principal didn’t want an old-style badge with colonial influences. By the same token, she didn’t want a human form, which was used in many logos of that era... one dot and a shape that together represent a human form. This idea that students are all important,” he says.

Instead, Mr Leong took inspiration from the school’s location in the east to come up with the background of a rising sun, and introduced the idea of movement in the form of sails, which were shaped after the school’s initials.
CLASSICAL INSPIRATION

Tanjong Katong Secondary started as a technical school for students until 1993 when it assumed its current name and offered mainstream curriculum subjects. Its first principal, Mr N. Vaithinathan, strongly believed in his students’ potential and he expressed this belief by putting the image of Leonardo da Vinci on his school’s crest.

“I was looking for things to inspire, and I saw this picture in a book about famous engineers,” he says. “I thought this was the right thing because not only was da Vinci a great engineer, he was also a multi-talented personality, a philosopher, an artist, an inventor...”

An art teacher from the neighbouring Haig Boys’ School, Mr S. Arulampalm, helped draw and colour the original black-and-white image. Completing the crest is the school’s motto, “Diligence · Ingenuity · Dexterity”, which is written in Latin because this was the language of great classics, and was regarded as an important language of learning then.
Baharuddin Vocational Institute’s lecturers were shocked when they saw his school crest design, recalls Mr Wee Chwee Beng, one of the school’s pioneer teachers. For Singapore’s first design school, now known as Temasek Polytechnic School of Design, Mr Wee proposed using the school initials “BVI” to create a modern crest that departed from the norm then of using shields with tigers and lions.

Instead, he created an easily recognisable crest that looked identical regardless which side of the flag one saw it. Up against other more traditional-looking proposals by his colleagues, Mr Wee’s design eventually won the most votes and was chosen to be the school’s crest.

“I felt strongly at that point in time that we should break away from the norm of what is expected. I am designing for the future, not for the present or the past,” he says. “Mine was the most popular probably because I was a very good politician!”
“I am designing for the future, not for the present or the past.”

— Mr Wee Chwee Beng, Baharuddin Vocational Institute
In line with Singapore’s vision to be a world-class education hub in the early 2000s, the first principal of Balestier Hill Primary School, Dr Ho Seng Tuck and art teacher Mr Hamzah bin Mahmid, came up with the idea of using a globe on the school’s crest.

Said Mr Hamzah, “The global vision was in line with the ministry’s vision of making Singapore an education hub... When the school started, our pupils made up of about 30 nationalities, so that also inspired us.”

While the school was forward-looking in this aspect, Dr Ho suggested the crest take on a traditional form of the shield. According to Mr Hamzah, the shield was believed to be an evergreen symbol and best suited the school’s traditionally designed uniform.
A revamp of Singapore’s education system began with the enactment of the 1957 Education Ordinance. Since then, the education landscape has evolved with the nation’s development — even as more schools were built with more diverse offerings, others have closed or merged with other schools. The crest is often the only reminder of a school that has closed, a doorway into the memories of Singapore’s educational development over the last 50 years.
Education in early Singapore was divided along language lines — Chinese, Malay, English and Tamil — as many schools were founded by the country’s immigrant communities. In anticipation of self-governance from British colonial rule, the 1957 Education Ordinance unified the education landscape, stipulating that all schools be registered and have similar syllabuses across the different languages.

Even as the government introduced secondary education, it kept the tradition of different language-medium schools. Sang Nila Utama Secondary was the nation’s first Malay-medium secondary school established after Singapore attained self-government in 1959. It was named after Sang Nila Utama, a Palembang prince who called this island “Singapura” (Sanskrit for “Lion City”) after supposedly spotting a lion upon landing here. This is why its crest had a lion accompanied by an open book, an object schools commonly used to represent themselves then.
When the People’s Action Party (PAP) formed the government in 1959, it implemented the recommendations of the 1956 report by the All-Party Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Chinese Education. One of them was a bilingual education policy, which emphasised equal treatment of the four language streams of education — English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

With an eye on a future merger with Malaya, the government made Malay the national language, and this led to primary schools offering a bilingual education, while secondary schools became trilingual. Students finishing secondary school were expected to have a working knowledge of Chinese, Malay and English.

Buona Vista Secondary’s crest reflects this with its name written in English, Chinese and Malay (in Jawi script). Together, they represent Singapore’s multicultural society, and this is bounded by a wheel symbolising how the different groups built Singapore into a progressive nation.

As the young nation industrialised, technical and vocational education were developed to address Singapore’s manpower needs. To overcome the prejudice against blue-collar jobs, seen by many as lower in status and less rewarding, the government built workshop facilities for metalwork and woodwork in new schools, breaking down the traditional separation amongst the academic, technical and vocational units.

An example is the million-dollar Kim Seng Technical School, one of six first built by the government. Kim Seng’s school crest was designed by artist Loh Khee Yew, and it consisted of a wheel that symbolised its industrial nature, while the individual pictorial symbols within it represented a school that prepared students for the academic, manufacturing and shipping sectors.
In the early years of Singapore’s education system, students who struggled academically had few choices but to drop out of school. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) saw an opportunity to instil discipline in these “wayward youths” and grow the young nation’s defence by starting a school for them.

The SAF Boys’ School offered military, technical and academic training to students between the ages of 14 and 16. During their two-year residential programme, students were given a monthly allowance, and upon graduation, served six years in the military as tradesmen or combat non-commissioned officers.

However, the school closed in 1984 — “a victim of our improved national education system”, explained then Defence Minister Goh Chok Tong. By then, less academically inclined students could study in the many technical and vocational institutions instead.

In 1978, then Education Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee revolutionised Singapore’s education system by introducing streaming based on students’ academic abilities to avoid “educational wastage”.

The bilingual education policy led to more parents sending their children to English medium schools, causing many vernacular schools to close. The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) Programme was started in 1979 for selected Chinese medium secondary schools so as to enhance students’ learning of Chinese language and culture, and upgrade the teaching of English to develop effectively bilingual students. Non-SAP Chinese schools became less popular as parents increasingly sent their children to either SAP or English medium schools to secure a better future.

To address the falling enrolment in Chinese schools, a government Chinese school, Whampoa Secondary, became an integrated institution in 1980, and redesigned its crest in 1987 to reflect its bilingual status. However, the school still closed in 1994 due to low enrolment.
After decades of debate, the government announced in December 1983 that Singapore schools would be run on a single national stream with English as the first language and mother tongue as the second by 1987.

Prior to this, there was a major shake-up of the education system when the National University of Singapore was formed in 1980. This came about from the merger of the English-medium University of Singapore and the Chinese-medium Nanyang University.

Nanyang University’s closure was a disappointment for the Chinese community here, as it was the first Chinese-language university outside China. Affectionately known as Nantah, the university was a bastion of Chinese culture and tradition, as portrayed in its crest’s three rings — symbolising it as a place for cultural exchange, pride and unity for the community.
As Singapore prospered economically in the 1980s, the government invested more money to improve the education system. Schools were upgraded with air-conditioned classrooms, language laboratories and audio-visual aid equipment. To allow students to participate in more activities besides studying and have more interaction time with teachers, schools were also encouraged to switch to single-sessions from the existing two-sessions a day.

As the government built new Housing Development Board (HDB) public housing estates across Singapore, it also pledged to ensure there were schools conveniently located near homes. Clementi Town Primary was one such example built in 1980. Its crest had an illustration of a public housing block near its location at Clementi Avenue 3, which indicated that it was a “New Generation School in a New Town”.
1990s: ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

To help students who were unable to continue with their education at junior colleges, centralised institutes (CI) were set up in 1986. They replaced pre-university courses offered in secondary schools then, which had a high attrition rate. Unlike existing junior colleges, which offered a two-year programme towards a GCE Advanced-Level certificate in arts and science subjects, students in CIs spent three years in school and also had the option of taking commerce courses.

Seletar Institute was one of the four CIs established, and it opened in 1988. However, it barely lasted a decade and closed in 1997 due to decreasing enrolment. Only one CI still stands today, Millennia Institute, which was formed by the merger of Jurong Institute and Outram Institute in 2004.

1990s: GLOBAL EDUCATION AT HOME

In 1992, a fourth polytechnic was established to boost Singapore’s technical education system. Nanyang Polytechnic and its school of engineering was formed from the merger of three existing training institutes the Economic Development Board (EDB) had set up separately with the German, Japanese and French governments in the 1980s.

Such institutes were first created to train the necessary manpower to serve in industries that EDB had attracted to set up shop in Singapore, including the petrochemical, automotive and aerospace industries. While the French and Japanese schools specialised in electronics and software technology respectively, the German-Singapore Institute of Production Technology offered a two-year diploma course based on the German system of technical training. Its graduates worked as skilled craftsmen in the precision and engineering industries.
To prepare its citizens for the 21st century, Singapore articulated a new vision of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" for its education system in 1997. This was followed by the launch of the $4.46-billion "Programme for Rebuilding and Improving Existing Schools" (PRIME) to create an environment where students could think and learn creatively through the use of information technology.

Schools were upgraded or completely rebuilt to accommodate new computer laboratories, media resource libraries, health and fitness rooms, as well as bigger classrooms. One example was Yung An Primary, which merged with two others to form Lakeside Primary in 2003. While the school crest no longer exists, it symbolised Yung An's desire to "progress forever", as represented by the kite formed from its initials 'Y' and 'A'.

2000s: PROGRESS FOREVER

Yung An Primary
Three decades on, primary school students in Singapore continue to discover the wonders of science through the Young Scientist Badge Scheme.
Dr Loh Yuin-Han is recognised as one of Singapore’s top young scientists today. He has won accolades both locally and overseas for his work in the field of stem cell research, including the inaugural Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Technology Review 35 Award (2012), which recognises top innovators in the Asia-Pacific region under the age of 35.

But over two decades ago, Dr Loh was already winning “Young Scientist” awards as a student in the now-defunct Pandan Primary School. In fact, he received not just one, but a series of 12 badges across the science disciplines of botany, geology, astronomy, mathematics, ecology, environmentalism, chemistry, ornithology, zoology, physics, meteorology, and entomology. These were given by the Primary Science Activities Club, a national scheme started to get primary school students interested in science. Students who completed a series of science projects listed on activity cards were rewarded with these badges.

Dr Loh was introduced to the scheme when his science teacher asked the class for volunteers to maintain the school’s garden. The then Primary 5 student already had a budding interest in science, so he signed up for what became his first activity towards earning the Young Botanist badge. Learning science through activities turned out to be so much more fun than attending lessons in class. In his quest to become a young botanist, the 11-year-old not only maintained the school garden, but also carried out other activities, including writing a story about plants and creating a collection of seeds from 20 different plant species.

“I got a lot of satisfaction in completing some of these projects. It gave us something we did not get in the classroom,” recalls the scientist with the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology (IMCB).

After earning his first Young Scientist badge in 1989, he set out to earn the remaining 11 badges in his final year of primary school. While many of his classmates were working hard for their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and worrying which secondary school they would be posted to, Dr Loh and three of his classmates spent their time after school pursuing activities to earn the badges instead.

“I got a lot of satisfaction in completing some of these projects. It gave us something we did not get in the classroom.”
This group of young scientists frequently visited the Jurong East Public Library and the Singapore Science Centre to conduct research, as both were near Dr Loh’s school and home. They also went on several outings by themselves because their parents were busy at work. For an astronomy card activity, Dr Loh and his friends stayed up late at night to observe the stars at Pandan Reservoir, and for their zoology badge, they travelled all the way to the zoo to photograph the animals and record their characteristics.
"It was challenging then because we were all young kids and couldn’t even reach the bus bell! Back then, you had to reach up to the top of the TIBS (Trans-Island Bus Services) bus because there was no bell on the side," he says.

Moreover, only one of them had a film camera, so the boys shared the photographs they had taken to complete the activity. Their teacher, who had to verify the work, noticed this, but the students convinced her they carried out the activity as a group and could not afford to take many pictures because it was expensive.

In his obsession to earn all 12 Young Scientist badges, Dr Loh confesses that he had neglected his studies, especially in subjects he was less interested in. Though his PSLE results were less than stellar, achieving all the available badges nudged him towards his eventual success as a scientist today. He says, “The badges were definitely fun and got me interested in science. It propelled me to want to carry on doing science in secondary school, and eventually taking up biotechnology in polytechnic.”
LETTING STUDENTS EXPERIMENT

Of the over one million students in Singapore who have earned Young Scientist badges since the programme started in 1982, not everyone became a scientist like Dr Loh, and less than 20 percent have earned all the badges like him. However, many will share the fond memories of going on outings and carrying out activities by themselves in the name of science. This was why Dr Ang Wai Hoong, then chairman of the Science Teachers Association of Singapore (STAS), designed the programme. She felt there was a lack of ad-hoc science activities in school as science education was new to Singapore in the 1980s. Setting up science clubs could address this, and she wanted students to take the initiative in learning, rather than depend on their teachers.

“Like many parents, my children and I played together: collecting seeds and sea shells, measuring shadows, reading interesting science books, etc. The STAS members and I thought other children would enjoy the same activities too,” recalls Dr Ang. “In the 1980s, many primary school teachers were not confident of establishing science clubs in their schools. Some STAS members and I decided to design the activity cards to facilitate such club activities.”

Working with experts in the field, four basic principles were laid out for the cards: the activities had to be interesting and based on science; there should be a range of difficulties so pupils of different ages could select activities within their ability to complete; pupils would be rewarded with a badge after completing a number of activities on each

(Right) A Young Astronomer Record Card in the 1990s. COURTESY OF ZHENG TIANYU
card; and finally, the activities would evolve to remain relevant with the times.

The programme was kickstarted with initial funding from the Singapore National Academy of Sciences and the Singapore Association for the Advancement of Science. The Singapore Science Centre helped to administer and sell the cards at $1 each. Unsure how popular the cards would be, STAS produced only six at first for the fields of astronomy, botany, entomology, geology, meteorology and zoology. After the programme saw over a thousand badges awarded in just its first year, STAS began adding more cards and by 1986, the collection had doubled in size. Two years later, the number of badges awarded annually crossed the 10,000 mark and has continued growing since. In 1989, the scheme was even adopted by the Brunei Association for Science Education to implement in its schools.
Each badge is a recognition by significant others and pupils were proud to show the badges to their parents.”

As a sign of its popularity, the badges have shrunk from chest to collar pins over the years to accommodate the larger collection and to save on production costs. Regardless of this change in form, the badges continue to be awarded by a guest-of-honour at a ceremony, which is accompanied by an exhibition of selected students’ projects. This is a regular gathering of Singapore’s young scientists, and the emphasis on rewarding pupils with badges has played a crucial role in making the scheme popular, even up till today, says Dr Ang.

“Each badge demonstrates the pupils’ success in completing a series of tasks in a scientific field. It is a recognition by significant others and pupils were proud to show the badges to their parents,” she says.
BONDING THROUGH SCIENCE

Testimonials of how the badges moulded young scientists out of pupils came in the form of “complaints” the Science Centre received in the programme’s early years. Mrs Anne Dhanaraj, Senior Director of the Science Centre’s Education Programmes Division, who was involved in the implementation of the scheme from the very beginning, has heard many stories of how enthusiastic students were in the pursuit of the badges.

One memorable incident arose from an activity in the Young Botanist card which requires students to collect 10 different kinds of leaves. Says Mrs Dhanaraj, “Once in the early years, the director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens called in a huff and a puff, and said, ‘Do you know your cards are such a problem? At certain times during the holidays, we have hordes of families coming to pluck leaves off our plants. They are not respecting the trees and plants!’”

The director later ended up working with the Science Centre because he was impressed with how the cards got students involved in science. He was not the only one. Mrs Dhanaraj also remembers how amazed the chief scientist of the Meteorology Service Singapore was after a Primary 5 student called to speak with him to fulfil an activity for the Young Meteorologist card.

“The whole idea of the scheme was for self-directed investigations, and some of the students took this part to a whole new level,” she says.

For Mrs Dhanaraj, an unexpected outcome was also how the programme helped families in Singapore to bond. The mother remembers helping her son, Ian, to earn his first Young Botanist badge. Once, they were walking around their housing estate when Ian asked about the difference between weeds and plants, to which she remarked the former were simply unwanted plants. Ian said he felt weeds were pretty anyway, and later used them to make a bottle garden to fulfil one of the card’s activities. Recalls Mrs Dhanaraj, “When I met his teacher, she told me she did not recognise the plants Ian used to prepare his bottle garden and had asked him about them. He told her they were actually weeds, unwanted but still so pretty.”

The story of parents working with their children on the badge is something Mrs Dhanaraj hears quite often today. She says it marks the scheme as an enduring legacy for Singapore and the Science Centre, and its success has gone beyond anybody’s imagination.

“It’s been something I’ve been able to talk to people who left school a long time ago, and this is one thing they seem to remember doing,” she says. “No one has ever told me it was such a drag. Everyone has had positive memories taking part in the scheme.”
A founding principle of the Primary Science Activities Club is it has to stay relevant with the times, and this is reflected in both the Young Scientist badges and its activity cards.

Over the years, the original deep blue activity cards have adopted new covers, and in 2013, its contents underwent a revamp. The new cards, with highly illustrated covers, are less demanding and students can earn a badge by completing fewer activities. To help children develop technological and processing skills for the information age, some of the tasks now involve getting students to search for information on the Internet. While only teachers could verify activities in the past, parents can now do so for some activities, allowing them to be more involved in their children’s education.

The scheme started with just six badges and doubled by 1986, and since the 2000s, five new badges have been added to reflect Singapore’s new science interests. In 2003, there were new badges for genetics, information technology and food science, and this was followed two years later by the Young Water Ambassador, created in partnership with the Public Utilities Board. Most recently, a Young Energy Saver was launched together with the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in 2012.

The badge designs, however, have stayed true to the original concept drawn out by the Science Centre’s in-house graphic artists at the beginning. Each science discipline is represented with a simple icon, often of local significance. The Young Botanist badge has Singapore’s national flower, Vanda Miss Joaquim, while the Young Meteorologist badge depicts the country’s tropical climate with a thunderstorm. With the exception of the Young Environmentalist badge, which was simplified from a row of trees to a single leaf, all the badge designs have remained unchanged up till today.

(Left) One of the new Young Scientist record cards launched in 2013.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the assistance of the staff of the Ministry of Education Heritage Centre, who helped us get in touch with over 100 schools in Singapore. Thank you Sarin and especially Shyh Jie for assisting with our countless requests.

Our gratitude also goes to all the schools who participated in this publication, especially the principals, teachers and admin managers who took time off from their busy schedules to find what we needed.

Similarly, we are very grateful to Dr Ang Wai Hoong, Mrs Anne Dhanaraj and Dr Loh Yuin-Han for sharing their memories of the Young Scientist Badge Scheme.

A huge thank you also to all the interviewees who took time to participate in our crest test. Hope you had fun!

Our gratitude also goes to Yong and his design studio, Somewhere Else, who did a fine job of creating a cohesive publication with so many different school crests. Thanks also goes to photographer Jovian Lim for the wonderful pictures on such a tight schedule.

Finally, a thank you to the Singapore Memory Project for the opportunity to work on another exciting subject on our nation’s history.

Contribute your memories at www.SingaporeMemory.sg