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**Singapore**

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**STUDENT GUIDE**

**Civic Engagement and  
Community Building**

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# 1. Welcome & Purpose of This Case

## Welcome to a Case About Connection, Trust, and Belonging

In a world where divisions seem to grow deeper—between cultures, faiths, generations, and neighbourhoods—this case tells a different story. It shows how Singapore, once deeply fragmented by race and religion, **chose to build community—deliberately, patiently, and creatively.**

This is not a story of perfection. It's a story of **purposeful public design**: how food, festivals, housing, youth, and conversation became tools for stitching a nation together.

## Why This Case Matters to You

Wherever you live, you are part of a community—whether you feel included in it or not.

**This case helps you explore:**

- What makes people feel like they **belong**
- How governments and citizens build or break **social trust**
- What it means to design **spaces, symbols, and rituals** that unite people
- What role you can play in shaping the spirit of your school, city, or country

**You'll Explore:**

- How Singapore transformed conflict into connection through urban and social design
- The role of **People's Association centres, youth leadership, and inclusive rituals**
- The hidden power of shared spaces, food, and festivals
- The challenge of sustaining harmony without silencing difference
- Your own story of inclusion—and how you might become a **community-builder**

## A Thought to Begin With

**"Community is built in small moments: a shared meal, a neighbour's hello, a space that feels like yours."**

This case invites you to look closely—not just at Singapore, but at the people and systems around you.

## 2. Case Background

### Singapore's Social Fractures – And Its Civic Response

In the 1960s, Singapore was not the tight-knit society we know today. It was a **deeply divided country**, with frequent racial tension, language barriers, and little trust between communities. The 1964 race riots exposed how fragile civic life really was.

Instead of responding with fear, Singapore's leaders chose **deliberate, creative unity-building**. They invested in **community infrastructure, shared symbols, and inclusive rituals** to connect people across ethnicity, language, and faith.

### Key Tools of Community-Building

Tool	Purpose
People's Association (PA)	Neutral, welcoming centres in every neighbourhood for play, services, learning, and events
HDB Housing Integration	Housing quotas ensured no ethnic group lived in isolation
Youth Panels and Civic Clubs	Built early ownership of shared responsibility among young people
Interfaith Leadership	Encouraged dialogue and prevented conflict between religious groups
Shared Celebrations & Food	Public rituals (e.g., Harmony Day) helped foster connection through joy, not just dialogue

These tools were not accidental—they were designed as part of a national strategy to prevent division from becoming destiny.

### Why It Works: Proximity, Participation, and Purpose

Singapore's strategy worked because it combined:

- **Physical proximity:** Diverse people lived, learned, and played side by side
- **Civic participation:** Youth, elders, and faith groups all had a seat at the table
- **Shared identity:** Without erasing differences, Singapore emphasized "One people, many cultures."

## Tensions in the Model

**While Singapore's model has inspired many, it also raises important questions:**

- Does “harmony” sometimes pressure people to be silent about real struggles?
- Are all groups equally represented in rituals and leadership?
- Can unity be **genuine** if it's also **guided** by the state?

These are questions you'll explore—not with easy answers, but with courage and creativity.

## Why This Story Matters for You

Whether your community is multicultural or not, trust and belonging aren't automatic.

They must be:

- **Designed intentionally**
- **Practiced daily**
- **Led by all of us—especially youth**

This is a case about how people **show up for each other, across difference.**

### 3. Learning Objectives

This case is designed to help you understand that **community is not a given—it's a process**. You'll explore how trust is built, lost, and rebuilt, and what it takes to design systems that support **shared identity, voice, and dignity** across differences.

By the end of this case, you will be able to:

#### Understand:

- How Singapore's People's Association and housing integration fostered proximity and belonging
- The role of youth panels, faith councils, and celebrations in **building civic unity**
- Why **trust, empathy, and access to shared space** are essential ingredients for community cohesion
- How design decisions (urban, linguistic, symbolic) shape daily experiences of inclusion or exclusion

#### Analyse:

- What strategies worked in Singapore's community-building model—and what tensions remain
- How government-led unity efforts balance **representation and regulation**
- How faith, food, language, and storytelling influence identity and participation
- How your own community supports or suppresses belonging

#### Apply:

- Assess your school, campus, or city using a **Cohesion Lens**
- Redesign a shared space, ritual, or system to promote inclusion
- Build a celebration, campaign, or dialogue tool to connect people across differences
- Reflect on your own story of **trust, belonging, or exclusion—and what it teaches you**

## You'll Be Ready to Discuss:

- Can governments build trust—or only citizens?
- What does a truly inclusive neighbourhood look like?
- How do we make sure “multiculturalism” includes real visibility and voice—not just tolerance?
- What does belonging mean to you—and how is it created in public life?

This case is about more than Singapore. It's about **your power to shape connection—on your street, in your school, or across your nation.**

## 4. Pre-Class Preparation

This case blends **policy and emotion, design and dialogue**. To fully engage, come prepared not just to analyse—but to reflect on your own experience with community, difference, and trust.

### Required Reading

- **Chapter 16 of The Singapore Way**
- Focus on:
  - How Singapore's community centres, housing policies, and shared rituals were designed
  - What roles youth and interfaith leaders played in building trust
  - Why inclusion required **space, story, and proximity**
  - Where tensions still exist in “harmony-building” models



## Optional Videos for Context (Highly Recommended)

Title	Why it Matters
<i>Singapore's Community Centres: A History of Unity</i> – CNA	Shows how civic spaces create cohesion across race, age, and class
Interfaith Youth Dialogue in Action – YouTube	Highlights empathy and trust-building from youth in multicultural settings
<i>Voices of Belonging: Harmony Day Stories</i> – Student Project	Offers real narratives from Singaporean youth about diversity and pride
<i>HDB: Housing as Social Design</i> – Gov.sg	Demonstrates how urban planning supports civic trust

## Reflection Prompts – Complete Before Class

Choose at least 2 of the following and write ~150 words or voice-record your thoughts:

1. What does **belonging** feel like to you—and when have you felt it most strongly?
2. What divides do you see in your community (faith, language, age, culture, class)?
3. Is there a **space, meal, or celebration** that makes people in your community feel seen?
4. Do you think governments should be responsible for creating unity? Why or why not?
5. What role can you play in making your environment more inclusive?

## Optional Activity: “Map Your Community”

Sketch your school, campus, neighbourhood, or city and label:

- Where connection happens
- Where people feel safe or seen
- What voices are visible—and what voices are missing
- One space or system you'd redesign for deeper unity

Bring your map to class for sharing or comparison with Singapore's model.

## Checklist Before Class

	Task
	Read Chapter 16 with attention to physical space, civic rituals, and trust system
	Complete 2+ reflection prompts
	(Optional) Sketch a community map to share
	Watch 1 short video or listen to 1 story if time allows

Come ready to **listen, share, design, and challenge assumptions**—about community, identity, and what belonging really means.

## 5. In-Class Participation

This session invites you to **think, feel, and design as a community builder**. You'll explore how Singapore fostered trust through deliberate policy and symbolic action—and you'll imagine how to do the same in your own context.

Come ready to engage with systems, emotions, stories, and strategies.

### What to Expect in Class

Activity	Purpose
Case Walkthrough	Understand Singapore's community-building model
Cohesion Mapping	Analyse your own school or city using design lenses
Redesign Lab	Redesign Lab Create a space, celebration, or system to foster inclusion
Interfaith / Identity Dialogue Simulation	Practice trust-building across difference
Reflection & Share-Out	Surface personal insights and actions to carry forward

### How to Participate Meaningfully

- Be ready to connect **personal stories** with public systems
- Use your **pre-class reflections** to spark group discussion
- Collaborate with curiosity—not just with critique
- Ask yourself: What role do I play in the civic fabric around me?
- Speak from your own truth—but also listen to others' truths

## Discussion Questions to Explore

- Can trust be designed? Or does it only grow naturally?
- What's the difference between **shared space** and **shared identity**?
- When does unity become silence? When does celebration become connection?
- How do we elevate **youth voices** in civic decisions?
- What stories or symbols shape your country's idea of "us"?

## You May Be Evaluated On...

	Participation Indicator
	Engaging with peers in empathy-driven group activities
	Bringing case insights into redesign or simulation exercises
	Sharing from your lived experience or cultural lens
	Asking thoughtful questions and responding with respect
	Contributing to creative, inclusive design proposals

This is not just a class about Singapore. It's a lab for **rethinking your own role in building a community that feels like home—for everyone.**

## 6. Assignments

These assignments help you take what you've learned from Singapore's experience and **apply it to your own community, school, or national context.**

Whether you prefer storytelling, strategy, or design, you'll find a format here that lets you express how **trust, belonging, and inclusion** can be built through your voice and vision.

### Option 1: Design a Shared Space

**Format:** Map + short write-up or digital presentation

**Prompt:**

Choose a space you know (neighbourhood, school, park, dorm, street) and redesign it to foster trust and connection across cultures, identities, or faiths.

**Include:**

- Who uses the space today—and who doesn't?
- What elements will foster belonging (layout, symbols, signage, events, accessibility)?
- What rituals or shared experiences will bring people together?
- What's inspired by Singapore's model?

### Option 2: "My Story of Belonging" Narrative

**Format:** Written story, podcast clip, or short video

**Prompt:**

Tell a story about a time you felt deeply included—or painfully excluded. Explore:

- Who made you feel seen, or unseen?
- What space, ritual, or interaction shaped that moment?
- How has it influenced your understanding of trust or unity?
- What might your story teach others about community?

### Option 3: Youth Campaign for Civic Belonging

**Format:** Poster series, slide deck, or campaign plan

**Prompt:**

Design a youth-led campaign that builds connection and pride across communities. It could target your school, city, or country.

**Should include:**

- Campaign title, goal, and slogan
- What group(s) you aim to connect
- How food, story, celebration, or civic action are involved
- Visuals and engagement strategies
- How it reflects lessons from Singapore's youth panels or PA model

### Option 4: Community Trust Audit

**Format:** Short report or presentation

**Prompt:**

Assess a real-world space or system (school, transit, social media, housing, etc.) through the “Cohesion Lens.” Explore:

Element	Strengths	Gaps
Representation		
Shared Space Design		
Youth Inclusions		
Rituals / Celebrations		
Intercultural Dialogue		

Wrap up with 2–3 action recommendations. Use Singapore's tools for inspiration.

These assignments are about **seeing trust as a system—and yourself as a builder of it.**

You don't need to be a politician or planner to shape civic life. You just need the courage to design for connection.

## 7. Reflective Practice

This case isn't just about analysing what Singapore did—it's about **reflecting on who you are**, how you experience community, and what you might choose to build next.

Take time to sit with these questions and listen to what they bring up.

### Personal Reflection Prompts

Choose 2–3 to respond to in your journal, notes app, or creative format (poem, drawing, collage, podcast clip, etc.):

1. **"The moment I felt most seen by my community was..."**
  - a. What made you feel safe, valued, or welcome?
2. **"When I think about who's left out of my school or neighbourhood, I think of..."**
  - a. Why do you think this exclusion exists—and how might it change?
3. **"I used to think community was about similarity. Now I think it's about..."**
  - a. What has shifted in your thinking?
4. **"If I could redesign one thing to help people connect, it would be..."**
  - a. What would it look like? Feel like?
5. **"I believe unity looks like \_\_\_\_, sounds like \_\_\_\_, and feels like \_\_\_\_."**
  - a. Complete the sentence using your own senses and imagination.

## Belonging Self-Check

Rate the following statements from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree):

Statement	Score
I feel like I belong in most public spaces I visit	
I understand what helps people from different backgrounds connect	
I notice when someone is left out—and try to act	
I believe governments can help design social unity	
I am ready to help build more inclusive communities	

### Follow-Up Prompt:

What score do you wish was higher? What would help that grow?

### Final Thought to Carry With You

**“Belonging doesn’t start with policies.**

**It starts with people who choose to build bridges—every day.”**

What kind of bridge could you begin building this week?



## 8. Glossary of Key Terms

These key terms will help you speak clearly and think critically about the **systems, symbols, and strategies** that build community and civic trust—especially in diverse, multicultural societies.

Term	Definition
<b>People's Association (PA)</b>	A government-backed organization that runs community centres and programs to foster social cohesion and civic participation in Singapore
<b>Community Centre (CC)</b>	A neutral public space offering programs, events, and services for residents of all backgrounds and age
<b>HDB Integration Policy</b>	Singapore's public housing model that sets ethnic quotas per building to prevent ethnic enclaves and ensure daily diversity
<b>Civic Ritual</b>	A shared public tradition, holiday, or act of participation that strengthens collective identity and belonging
<b>Interfaith Dialogue</b>	A structured conversation or collaboration between people of different religions or beliefs to build mutual understanding and reduce conflict
<b>Social Cohesion</b>	The willingness of members of a society to cooperate and live together peacefully, with respect across lines of difference
<b>Youth Panel / Council</b>	A platform that allows young people to voice opinions, propose solutions, and co-create programs within public institutions
<b>Cohesion Lens</b>	A tool for evaluating whether a policy, space, or system helps build connection and inclusion across difference
<b>Inclusive Design</b>	The process of creating systems, spaces, and events that are accessible, respectful, and welcoming to all, regardless of background
<b>Belonging Infrastructure</b>	Physical and emotional systems (spaces, rituals, policies) that make people feel seen, safe, and valued in public life

**Tip:** Use these terms in your reflections, assignments, and dialogue to help connect **Singapore's model to your own world**—and speak with clarity about inclusion and community.

## 9. Additional Resources

These resources will help you dive deeper into civic **engagement**, **interfaith dialogue**, **social trust**, and **inclusive community-building**—both in Singapore and around the world.

They offer case studies, tools, and stories to inspire your assignments and expand your perspective.

### Recommended Readings

Title	Why It's Useful
People's Association Website & Annual Reports	Real-world examples of community programs and public space design in Singapore
The Art of Building Community by Charles Vogl	A practical guide to belonging, rituals, and trust-building in everyday life
Faith in Peace: Interfaith Dialogue in Southeast Asia	Showcases youth and community partnerships across religions
Design for Belonging by Susie Wise	Explains how space, identity, and emotion influence civic connection
Urban Planning for Social Cohesion – UN Habitat	Offers global perspectives on how cities create (or fail to create) inclusion

## Videos & Documentaries

Title	Platform	What It Covers
Singapore's Community Centres: Harmony in Action	CNA / Gov.sg	Profiles real stories of connection, inclusion, and neighbourhood design
Voices of Youth: What Belonging Means to Me	YouTube	Young people across Singapore reflect on culture, trust, and identity
TEDx: The Power of Interfaith Dialogue	TEDx / YouTube	Shows how shared stories reduce fear and foster understanding
Can You Build Trust With Architecture?	BBC or Vox	Explores how design influences public trust and inclusion
Harmony Day Short Films	Student Projects	Powerful narratives on being seen, heard, or invisible in diverse communities

## Web Resources & Tools

- <https://www.pa.gov.sg> – Singapore's People's Association
- <https://www.roots.gov.sg> – Singapore's cultural heritage portal
- <https://interfaithyouthcore.org> – Youth tools for interfaith and cross-cultural leadership
- <https://globalcommunitybuilders.org> – Training resources and community projects around the world
- <https://storycorps.org> – Personal storytelling archive that builds empathy and civic understanding

## Places to Compare or Learn From

Country / City	What to Explore
New Zealand	Bicultural rituals and indigenous design in public space
Canada (Toronto)	Multicultural urban planning and inclusive youth councils
Rwanda	Post-conflict healing through shared story and community dialogue
Indonesia	Pancasila-based community centers across religious lines
Norway	Youth-led civic rituals to fight exclusion and polarization

Use these to spark ideas, deepen your reflections, or add global comparisons to your assignments.