

the
Singapore

WAY

**TEACHER
GUIDE**

**The Role of Culture and the
Arts**

Table of Contents

Chapter 14: Painting a Nation's Spirit with Culture and Creativity

1. Introduction to the Case.....	3
Culture as a design tool for cohesion, identity, and expression	
Singapore's arts ecosystem: from soft power to social infrastructure	
2. Pre-Class Preparation.....	5
Readings, visual media, and personal cultural reflection prompts	
3. Session Plan.....	7
Options for 60-, 90-, and 120-minute sessions	
Cultural map analysis, arts policy lab, and identity storytelling circle	
4. Case Facilitation Tools.....	9
Singapore's cultural timeline	
Arts ecosystem framework (people, place, policy, platform)	
Identity spectrum matrix: autonomy vs. shared narrative	
5. Group Activities & Teaching Tactics.....	11
Design a cultural policy for unity	
"Story of Us" exhibit simulation	
National mural or music concepting challenge	
6. Assignments and Post-Class Engagement.....	13
Cultural audit essays	
Design-your-festival project	
Arts-for-unity storytelling workshop or journal	
7. Assessment and Feedback Tools.....	15
Creativity + systems scoring rubrics	
Cultural lens analysis rubric	
Self-assessment for voice, identity, and inclusion	
8. Instructor Notes and Commentary.....	17
Managing emotional depth and cultural sensitivity	
Encouraging authenticity and risk in creative reflection	
9. Additional Resources.....	19
Films, plays, museums, and multicultural programming case studies	
National arts strategies and global arts policy resources	

1. Introduction to the Case

Why This Case Matters

As nations evolve, **creativity and culture become as important as infrastructure and policy**. In Singapore, the arts have never been “just entertainment.” They’ve been used to:

- **Tell a shared story** in a multilingual, multiethnic society
- **Celebrate cultural roots** while forging national unity
- **Express identity**, emotion, and resilience through shared festivals, spaces, and symbols
- Build a collective memory that includes **street artists and symphony players alike**

This case explores how Singapore **designed a cultural ecosystem**—with the same intention and care as it built housing, tech, and finance.

What Students Will Learn

Students will discover how:

- **Culture and creativity can be state-supported** without being state-owned
- Storytelling and art drive **social trust, youth identity, and national belonging**
- Public space, funding, and education can amplify inclusive narratives
- **Multicultural expression is curated—not left to chance**
- Nations can balance **freedom of voice with shared values**

Global Relevance Many countries face rising cultural fragmentation, distrust, or apathy. This case shows how:

- Creative policy can support **cohesion without censorship**
- The arts can **heal, unify, and empower—if given structure and space**
- Even pragmatically led nations can embrace **beauty, messiness, and voice**

Framing Questions to Use in Class

- Can creativity be guided—or should it always be free?
- What role should governments play in supporting the arts?
- Can national identity emerge without shared cultural reference points?
- Who decides which stories are elevated, preserved, or ignored?
- What does your country’s public art or festival calendar say about its values?

Key Case Elements

Element	What It Teaches
The Esplanade	How architecture and access create a national stage
Heritage Trails & Kampong Glam	Using physical space to tell cultural history
National Arts Council	Policy as platform: funding and curating without overreach
Arts Education	Talent pipelines that serve both excellence and identity
Multicultural Festivals	Traditions reframed as shared national rituals

This case helps students see that culture isn't a luxury—it's a **strategic tool for building meaning, trust, and unity in the modern state.**

2. Pre-Class Preparation

This session benefits from a blend of **intellectual reflection and emotional readiness**. Students should arrive open to discussing **identity, belonging, and the creative ways societies define themselves**.

Required Reading

- **Chapter 14 of *The Singapore Way*** by Maher Kaddoura
Students should focus on:
 - How the government supported the arts while respecting expression
 - The evolution of institutions like the **National Arts Council, The Esplanade**, and community-based programming
 - The connection between **multicultural identity** and cultural storytelling
 - The use of **festivals, murals, music, and museums** to shape civic unity

Optional Visual/Media Content

Title	Why It's Useful
<i>The Esplanade: Singapore's National Stage</i>	Shows how public arts space reflects collective identity
<i>Singapore's Heritage Festivals (Deepavali, Hari Raya, Chinese New Year)</i>	Reveals how shared celebration builds empathy and pride
<i>Public Art in HDB Estates</i>	Demonstrates how everyday spaces host creative inclusion
<i>Voices of Young Singaporean Artists - CNA</i>	Explores generational shifts in identity, style, and national themes

Reflection Prompts to Explore in Advance

Ask students to write, draw, or think about 2–3 of these:

1. **What story does your country tell through its public art or festivals?**
2. **What's one tradition from your culture you'd want everyone to understand—and why?**
3. **Where have you felt emotionally moved by a piece of art, music, or performance? What did it teach you about belonging?**
4. **Who tells your country's story today—and who's left out of it?**
5. **Should governments fund the arts? Why or why not? What's the line between support and censorship?**

Optional Prep Activity: Cultural Ecosystem Sketch

Ask students to diagram Singapore's (or their own country's) cultural ecosystem. Include:

- Institutions (arts councils, schools, museums)
- Creators (musicians, dancers, digital artists, filmmakers)
- Platforms (festivals, social media, public art)
- Audience and funding structures

Prompt:

"What holds this system together? What's missing?"

Instructor Checklist

	Task
	Queue up 1-2 short videos or festival visuals to open with inspiration
	Prepare a cultural timeline or map of Singapore's arts evolution
	Bring post-it notes or cards for identity/voice mapping
	Choose a warm-up question like: "What's one sound or symbol that says 'home' to you?"

Pre-class preparation ensures students arrive **ready to blend policy with poetry—and systems thinking with soul.**

3. Session Plan

This session blends **systemic analysis and emotional storytelling**. It invites students to examine how culture can be structured for cohesion, while still protecting voice, memory, and beauty.

You'll guide students through **policy, creativity, identity, and public life**, using Singapore's case as both model and mirror.

Session Duration Options

Length	Structure
60 min	Case discussion + storytelling circle or visual analysis
90 min	Full case + ecosystem mapping + cultural policy lab
120 min	Full immersion: analysis + storytelling + national mural/festival co-design

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Analyse how governments use the arts for unity and identity
- Identify the **systems and symbols** of Singapore's cultural ecosystem
- Reflect on their own **relationship to creativity and national expression**
- Design inclusive, authentic cultural policies or programs
- Understand how arts and culture build trust and shared narrative

Sample 90-Minute Session Plan

Time	Segment	Purpose
0-10 min	Warm-Up: "Sound of Home" or "Symbol of Belonging" share-around	Emotional grounding
10-30 min	Case Overview + Singapore Timeline	Anchor in facts and strategy
30-50 min	Cultural Ecosystem Map (Singapore or own country)	Compare systems and players
50-70 min	Design a Festival for National Belonging	Apply lessons creatively
70-85 min	Reflection Dialogue or "Story of Us" Circle	Connect identity to expression
85-90 min	Exit Prompt: "What kind of nation does your art build?"	Wrap with personal insight

Suggested Discussion Questions

- Can art be used to unify without becoming propaganda?
- What's the role of tradition in modern identity?
- Who decides what is "national culture"?
- How do we protect voice while still building shared stories?
- Is beauty a civic right?

Optional Engagement Tools

Tool	Use For...
"Mural of Us" Poster Board	Students draw symbols that represent unity in diversity
"If My Identity Were a Poem..." prompt	Low-risk reflective storytelling
Festival Collage	Redesign a national festival to reflect modern identity
Identity Compass	Chart voice vs. visibility, belonging vs. shame

This session invites students to **feel, question, and create**—so they leave not only informed, but inspired.

4. Case Facilitation Tools

These tools help students **visualize, decode, and design** cultural ecosystems, drawing inspiration from Singapore's structured but expressive model.

Use these to scaffold analysis, spark dialogue, and support creativity during class.

A. Singapore Cultural Timeline

Create or project a visual timeline highlighting key cultural milestones:

Year	Milestone
1985	National Arts Council founded
1992	Launch of the Renaissance City Plan
2002	The Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay opens
2011	National Heritage Board expands public trails and museum programming
2015	SG50 cultural exhibitions celebrate shared memory
2020s	Youth-led creative movements in film, muralism, and digital storytelling gain state attention

Discussion Prompt:

“What does this timeline suggest about Singapore's evolving national identity?”

B. Cultural Ecosystem Framework (The 4Ps)

Element	Description	Singapore Example
People	Artists, educators, tradition-bearers	Malay dancers, Tamil playwrights, digital storytellers
Place	Stages, studios, neighbourhoods	The Esplanade, HDB murals, Kampong Glam heritage trail
Policy	Funding, regulation, programming	NAC grants, festival subsidies, language preservation laws
Platform	Festivals, galleries, social media	Singapore Art Week, Night Festival, Our SG Stories portal

Use in Group Mapping:

“What does your country's 4P map look like? Where are the gaps?”

C. Identity Spectrum Matrix

Helps students analyse the tension between **individual expression** and **collective belonging**:

Dimension	Singapore Model	Student's Country
State funding of art	Structured & selective	?
Creative freedom	Encouraged but curated	?
National symbols	Multicultural, evolving	?
Artistic risk-taking	Supported in emerging forms	?

Prompt:

“Where is the balance in your context: too much curation or too little support?”

D. “The Story of Us” Gallery Cards

Use printed cards with prompts to spark storytelling and visual thinking.
Examples:

- A festival I’d design for my city would include...
- One image I’d put on my country’s wall is...
- A song that represents my identity is...
- My culture feels seen when...

These make great exit cards, warm-ups, or part of a mural-building activity.

E. Cultural Vocabulary Board

Build a shared language by defining and visually posting key terms:

Term	Definition
National narrative	A story shared by a country about who it is and what it stands for
Cultural curation	The act of selecting which creative works get attention and support
Shared memory	Events, symbols, or stories remembered across generations
Multicultural platform	A stage or policy that includes and elevates diverse expressions

These tools help turn abstract concepts like “culture” and “identity” into **living systems that students can map, question, and redesign**.

5. Group Activities & Teaching Tactics

These activities are designed to let students explore the **creative side of public systems**. They will analyse, design, and express how **culture can shape unity, memory, and civic pride**—using Singapore’s structured model as both inspiration and contrast.

Activity 1: Design a Festival for National Belonging

Task: In groups, design a **new annual national festival** that promotes social unity in a diverse society.

Each team must define:

- The name, theme, and symbols
- Featured art forms (music, dance, storytelling, food)
- How it includes different cultural voices
- What emotions or values it’s meant to evoke
- How it’s funded and made accessible to all

Presentation: Each team pitches it as if to a Ministry of Culture or city council.

Activity 2: “The Story of Us” Wall

Setup: Create a visual storytelling wall in the room or online.

Each student adds:

- A personal photo, object, symbol, or sentence that reflects their identity
- A short caption: *“This is my voice. It matters because...”*

Group Reflection:

What patterns emerge? What stories are still missing from national narratives?

Activity 3: Cultural Ecosystem Rebuild

Scenario: Your country is rewriting its national arts strategy after years of neglect or fragmentation.

Each team designs:

- 1 flagship arts policy (e.g., a national grant, platform, or education initiative)
- 1 public platform (e.g., gallery, festival, archive, or stage)
- 1 visibility strategy to reach marginalized or underrepresented communities
- 1 campaign slogan or symbol

Goal: Show how your strategy makes identity both **visible and shared**.

Activity 4: Cultural Roleplay – The Public Arts Panel

Roles:

- Government arts director
- Young artist
- Community elder
- Historian
- Critic or activist

Scenario: A mural is rejected for being “too political.” Hold a panel to debate:

- Should governments approve or censor national art?
- What’s the line between representation and controversy?

Debrief:

How do different values shape national narratives?

Activity 5: National Song Reimagined

Prompt: Reimagine your national anthem or pledge as a **modern creative work** (e.g., remix, spoken word, short video, installation).

Small groups brainstorm:

- What’s the core message?
- Who should be represented that isn’t?
- What format would speak to today’s generation?

Optional: Share drafts or titles with the class.

These group activities make arts and identity systems **tangible, inclusive, and emotionally resonant**, turning cultural policy into **shared civic imagination**.

6. Assignments and Post-Class Engagement

These assignments encourage students to move from analysis to **creative contribution**, using Singapore's cultural ecosystem as inspiration. They challenge students to design festivals, reflect on identity, and build systems that include, elevate, and unify.

Assignment 1: Cultural Ecosystem Audit Essay

Length: 1,200–1,500 words

Prompt:

Analyse your country's cultural ecosystem using Singapore's as a reference. What systems support identity, expression, and shared narrative? What's missing?

Include:

- Core elements (people, place, policy, platform)
- Strengths and silences in your cultural landscape
- A design proposal (e.g. grant, festival, arts space, archive)
- Reflection on the cultural narrative your proposal helps shift

Assignment 2: Design Your Own Festival or Platform

Format: Poster, deck, brochure, or storyboard

Prompt:

Create a festival, exhibit, digital platform, or national arts program that promotes **unity through diversity** in your country or city.

Include:

- Name, slogan, logo or visual language
- Artistic disciplines and cultural expressions represented
- Access and inclusion plan
- Impact metrics (e.g. reach, representation, engagement)

Optional: Present as a pitch to a Ministry of Culture or nonprofit.

Assignment 3: “The Story of Us” Personal Narrative

Format: Reflective essay (700–900 words), podcast clip, spoken word, or short video

Prompt:

Tell the story of your identity as it relates to national culture.

Suggested angles:

- A cultural symbol that feels like home
- A time you felt unseen or misrepresented in public storytelling
- What a national mural, poem, or festival would look like if you designed it
- How your generation redefines “patriotism” through creativity

Assignment 4: Policy Brief – Arts as Nation-Building Infrastructure

Format: 1–2 page policy memo

Prompt:

Propose a new national policy to support creative unity in a divided or diverse society.

Must include:

- Problem it addresses (e.g. marginalization, apathy, polarization)
- Policy goal and key mechanism (grant, partnership, public space, media, etc.)
- How it balances identity, freedom, and cohesion
- Metrics for success (visibility, inclusion, civic trust)

Post-Class Engagement Ideas

Activity	Purpose
“Voices of Us” Circle	Invite students to share cultural memories, songs, or objects in a storytelling circle
Mini Mural or Collage Exhibit	Create a collective visual of national values as seen through student eyes
Create a Cultural Hashtag Campaign	Use social media to amplify real stories that reframe national identity
Public Space Walkabout	Visit or document how local spaces reflect (or ignore) multicultural creativity
Heritage Box Project	Fill a box with objects, poems, songs, or foods that represent your personal or cultural identity—then write or share why

These assignments help students translate the case into their own **creative citizenship**, where policy and art are tools for shaping shared belonging.

7. Assessment and Feedback Tools

This section provides rubrics and reflection prompts to evaluate **creativity, system design, identity-awareness**, and cultural insight—ensuring student work is meaningful, rigorous, and inclusive.

A. Essay Rubric – Cultural Ecosystem Audit

Criteria	Excellent (5 pts)	Good (3–4 pts)	Needs Work (1–2 pts)
System Analysis	Deep, structured evaluation of cultural layers (policy, people, platform)	Some clarity, but missing one or two key layers	Shallow or vague ecosystem breakdown
Case Comparison	Strong use of Singapore’s approach for insight or contrast	Case mentioned but not fully applied	No meaningful link to case or model
Creativity & Relevance	Bold and context-sensitive recommendations	Good idea but needs refinement	Unoriginal or unrealistic proposal
Cultural Awareness	Acknowledges inclusion, voice, and gaps	Some mention of equity or heritage	Ignores cultural nuance or identity
Writing & Structure	Clear, coherent, and well-organized	Mostly readable, some gaps	Disorganized or hard to follow

Total: ____ / 25

B. Visual or Design Project Rubric – Festival/Platform Proposal

Criteria	Excellent (5 pts)	Good (3–4 pts)	Needs Work (1–2 pts)
Concept Originality	Compelling, creative, rooted in identity	Interesting, needs stronger cohesion	Vague or derivative idea
Representation & Inclusion	Reflects diverse audiences or cultural groups	Some effort toward inclusion	Limited or one-dimensional audience view
Policy or Platform Fit	Clear structure, delivery, and impact logic	Partially developed or unclear audience fit	Unclear or unrealistic implementation
Visual Communication	Effective, engaging, and professional	Adequate visual choices	Basic or missing visual clarity

Total: ____ / 20

C. Narrative Rubric – “Story of Us” Reflection

Criteria	Excellent (5 pts)	Good (3-4 pts)	Needs Work (1-2 pts)
Voice & Authenticity	Deep, moving, and uniquely personal	Honest but somewhat general	Flat or disconnected voice
Identity Clarity	Clear exploration of self, culture, and belonging	Some insight but lacks specificity	Generic or impersonal
Creative Format	Format enhances emotional impact	Format functional, could be expanded	Format limits expression
Cultural Insight	Reflects on larger systems or national narratives	Touches on cultural themes	Lacks depth or cultural connection

Total: ____ / 20

Quick Feedback Prompts for Peer Review or Exit Slips

Use these to facilitate peer feedback or self-reflection:

- “The part of your project that made me think was...”
- “A story you told that felt powerful was...”
- “This idea could grow if...”
- “You helped me see culture as a system when you...”
- “If I could add one piece of my story to your festival, it would be...”

8. Instructor Notes and Commentary

This section offers guidance to help you **balance deep dialogue with inclusive structure**. Cultural topics can be personal, joyful, emotional, or even painful. Your job as facilitator is to hold a space that is both **brave and compassionate**.

Framing Insight: Culture Is Infrastructure

Many students come in thinking of “culture” as festivals, food, or fun. But this case shows that culture is also:

- A **public system** that shapes identity and trust
- A **strategic space** for inclusion, visibility, and healing
- A **design challenge** that requires structure, equity, and creativity

Use the Singapore model to show how nations **don’t just manage culture—they co-create it with citizens**.

Anticipated Student Responses & Strategies

Student Response	Instructor Move
“Culture should be free, not controlled.”	Ask: <i>Can policy support without restricting?</i> Use NAC grants as a nuanced example.
“My country doesn’t care about artists.”	Validate. Then ask: <i>What ecosystem shift would make your work matter more?</i>
“Only dominant cultures get represented.”	Bring in tools to analyse visibility (e.g., ecosystem map, mural design). Ask: <i>Who’s missing—and how do we invite them in?</i>
“I’m not creative—I don’t know what to say.”	Normalize it. Try “The Story of Us” card or audio storytelling prompt to open reflection gently.

Tips for Teaching Creatively and Safely

Tactic	Use When...
“Sound of Belonging” activity	You need to warm up a quiet class emotionally
Mini-mural / symbol drawing	Students are more visual than verbal
Case + Canvas combo (4Ps of Culture)	You want structure before open discussion
Identity Circle (story prompts)	You're fostering empathy and shared voice
“Design Your National Festival” lab	You want bold creative energy with system design logic

Suggested Anchor Quote

“Art tells the truth when politics cannot.”

– Ai Weiwei (artist and dissident)

Use this to prompt a discussion on how **expression, memory, and resistance** play roles in nation-building—even in pragmatic or structured states like Singapore.

Suggested Chapter Pairings

Chapter	Why Pair It
Chapter 11 – Multiculturalism & Identity	Deepens discussion on unity through diversity
Chapter 10 – Governance & Trust	Explores how public systems earn emotional allegiance
Chapter 13 – Innovation Ecosystems	Connects creativity to national infrastructure
Chapter 7 – Human Capital & Education	Explores how culture is taught, inherited, and reimagined

9. Additional Resources

These curated resources support deeper exploration of **Singapore's cultural infrastructure, creative policy, and identity formation**, as well as comparative models from around the world.

Recommended Readings & Reports

Title	Source	Why It's Useful
<i>Arts and Culture Strategic Review</i>	Ministry of Culture, Singapore	Outlines the goals and public impact of Singapore's arts ecosystem
<i>National Arts Council (NAC) Annual Reports</i>	NAC Singapore	Provides grant data, programming reach, and funding priorities
<i>Renaissance City Plan Documents (I, II, III)</i>	National Heritage Board	Strategic cultural blueprints that built long-term policy around identity
<i>Designing Cultural Policy</i>	UNESCO	Frameworks for inclusive, sustainable, and creative cultural governance
<i>How Nations Remember</i>	Comparative cultural studies	Explores public memory, monuments, and storytelling across countries

Videos & Documentaries

Title	Platform	Focus
<i>The Esplanade: Where Art Meets Nation</i>	CNA / National Gallery	How design, access, and architecture shape national identity
<i>Singapore Heritage Festivals Series</i>	Gov.sg	Short videos on multicultural festivals, rituals, and stories
<i>Voices of Young Singapore Artists</i>	YouTube	Artist reflections on culture, identity, and representation
<i>Cultural Planning in Cities</i>	UN-Habitat / TEDx	City-level approaches to using the arts for cohesion and visibility
<i>Painting a Nation: Art & Public Life</i>	National Museum of Singapore	Curated walk-through of art as storytelling in Singaporean history

Online Platforms & Resources

- <https://www.nac.gov.sg> – National Arts Council Singapore: grants, resources, artist profiles
- <https://www.roots.gov.sg> – Heritage portal: digital archives, trails, festivals, and oral histories
- <https://www.esplanade.com> – National performing arts hub showcasing diverse programs and community events
- <https://www.unesco.org/culture> – Cultural policy frameworks and global convention documents
- <https://ourstory.gov.sg> – National storytelling platform integrating community voices and narratives

Countries and Models to Compare

Place	Why Compare It
Canada	Multiculturalism and state-supported storytelling through film, museums, and festivals
Rwanda	National memory and unity-building through community theatre and cultural days
South Korea	Export of culture (Hallyu/K-culture) tied to national pride and global influence
Brazil	Community-driven festivals (e.g. Carnival) as platforms for identity, protest, and inclusion
New Zealand	Bicultural narrative blending Maori and settler history through official arts and education platforms