

# Only one Singapore, so let's share it

It is a little bit like musical harmony, but racial harmony needs you to be more open to different ways of living.

As Singaporeans, we say we want to live in "harmony". We even have a Racial Harmony Day. Last month, we explained why harmony is not enough. While everything appears nice on the outside, people could be quietly suffering discrimination. So, we need to be able to spot when people are being treated unfairly even when things look harmonious.

The word "harmony" confuses some people. It comes from a Greek word meaning "join". The word is commonly used in music. It is about how different sounds join together in a way that is pleasing to the ear. If you listen to a good choir or your favourite pop group, you can hear harmony. Some sing high, some sing low, some seem to be following a slightly different tune, and yet they all blend together beautifully. When you add different instrumental sounds — everything from strumming guitars to drum beats — the music becomes even more magical.

## The magic of difference

So, the first thing to note about harmony is that it does not mean everyone must sound the same, or have the same talents. In fact, if everyone in the group sounded identical, there would be no harmony. The music would be boring.

There is another misunderstanding about harmony that we need to

avoid. We must not imagine that the way a choir or a pop group creates harmonious music is how a country should build racial harmony.

You may have experienced this problem before: sometimes, when someone starts singing a song, you find it tough to join in because the pitch is too high or too low for you. Or, maybe you only know hip-hop, so you struggle to fit into the school choir. You want to cooperate, but you cannot. If that keeps happening, you may have to try joining another music group.

But, we have only one Singapore. It is not fair to tell someone who is different to try another country! This road to harmony would lead us to more discrimination, not less.

If we really want to fight discrimination, we must think about how our decisions could hurt people around us. In this series, we gave many examples of such unfairness.

## Caring for others

We started by showing how groups sometimes hold silly and hurtful **prejudices** about minorities. Like, thinking that someone who looks or sounds different is not Singaporean even though he is. Or, believing that someone must be good at something and bad at something else, just because he is of a certain race.

We showed you how careless words and racial jokes can be cruel, making our classmates feel small and

excluded. We asked you to be part of the solution to racial discrimination: do not stay silent if you spot someone helpless being mistreated. Shutting up will not create "harmony".

## What adults are doing

You can help create a school community that is fair and caring. Many adults will be on your side if you do this. In 2017, the Singapore Government made a pledge to fight racial discrimination. It signed an agreement called ICERD, which stands for the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. We told you about ICERD in the first part of this series. It is basically an agreement among countries that they will work hard to make their societies fair for all races.

Do not be shy to admit that you find race a complicated issue. Even grown-ups know that they have a lot to learn about racial discrimination. Some Singaporean adults have been taking part in workshops to share their experiences and feelings about this topic. With experts guiding them, these open and honest conversations can help clear up misunderstandings about different races.

Singapore's artists are also doing their part. Theatre groups such as The Necessary Stage use drama to encourage young and old to think more deeply about racial discrimination. Last year, a group of

artists, including *What's Up* writer Ng Yi-Sheng, put up a lecture and performance titled *Ayer Hitam: A Black History Of Singapore*. They did this because they realised that Singaporeans know so little about Africans here.

Adults overseas are also taking racial discrimination more seriously. Many now understand that even things that are supposed to be fun can add to racism — like shows with heroes in white, and bad guys in black, as if it is worse to be dark. Nowadays, thanks to greater awareness about racial discrimination, it is easier to find superheroes and pretty dolls of different colours.

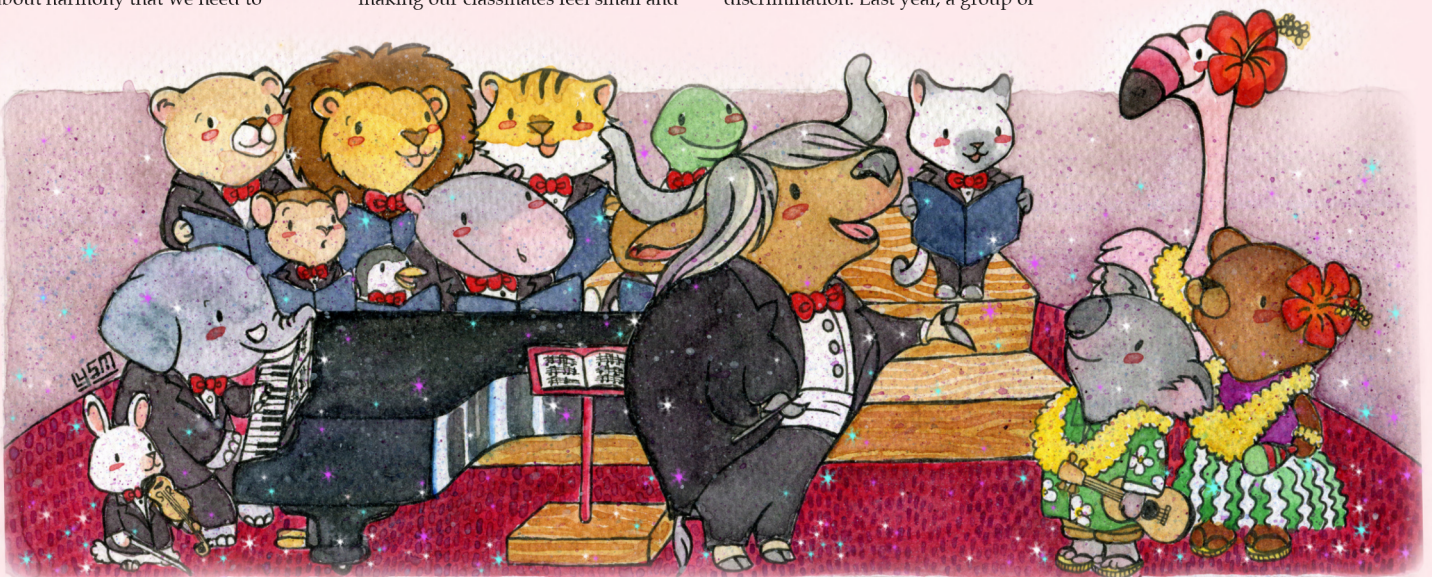
## Respecting others as equals

Just like in real life, colour does not say anything about a person's character or ability. Race must not affect how we treat someone. When you can look at people, appreciate their different races and cultures, and respect them as equals — that is when you know you can beat racial discrimination.

— By CHERIAN GEORGE

## VOCAB BUILDER

**prejudices** (say "preh-je-diss-us"; noun) = opinions about people that are not based on getting to know them.



This series is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Singapore. For earlier articles, visit our website, [www.more.whatsup.sg](http://www.more.whatsup.sg).