

# PAINTING THE TIGER

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## CHARACTERS:

- Ah Leong is the protagonist of this short story.
  - ↳ The story focuses on his concerns & hopes for Singapore.
- David is Ah Leong's son.
  - ↳ He represents Singapore's potential future.
- The two Indonesians are passers-by whom Ah Leong overhears whilst at the zoo.
  - ↳ Their conversation depresses him when he realises that others are following Singapore's path.

## SYMBOLISM: THE TIGER

- The tiger symbolises the wild, natural and free spirit of Singapore.
- Alas, in the pursuit of progress, this spirit is captured & trapped; it is put on display in an artificial environment.
- He also realises that there is no space in SG for wild tigers to live freely.
  - ↳ What does this mean for Singapore and her people?

## HOW WE LIVE NOW:

Self-Study: Use the following quotes to explain how we live now (with Literary Devices).

- "He munched while the macaques chattered, swallowed as the sun bears yawned and dragged his feet as the orang utans slumbered. He was no more interested in his surroundings than when one or the other of his grandmothers placed him in front of the television with a packet of cream crackers [...] marathon sessions of animated combat that left him in a belly-up, eyes-glazed stupor..."
- "Do they know what they are doing, he suddenly thought, those Indonesians and Malaysians, happily following our lead in the taming of swamp and jungle, eliminating untidiness in the name of progress? Do they understand the loss of spirit that follows the destruction of wildness?"
- "Once there is no predator out there, we puff up with pride, believing ourselves invulnerable. But worse than that, our minds narrow. A country with neither wolf nor lion or tiger is a country that will always think tame thoughts, that sinks softly into comfy sofas at the end of the day, hooked on soaps from Hong Kong or action from Hollywood."
- "But there was nothing in the newspaper about an escaped tiger. Just the usual stories celebrating top scorers in examinations, tutting over new liaisons between celebrities or landing upgrading projects in heartlander districts."
- "One has not the time to grasp the simple silliness of it all, the impossibility of such a beast ever being able to pounce, to catch anything, on land or water. [...] the image is only an idea, something for the mind, not the heart and soul."

## SUMMARY:

The text revolves around Ah Leong & his hopes and concerns for Singapore. Especially her future. His concerns are fuelled by his son, whom he perceives as a symbol of Singapore. His concerns also stem from the loss of nature, and its being replaced by artificial alternatives. However, the change in attitude in his son towards nature gives him hope that all might not yet be lost.

## SYMBOLISM: THE MERLION

- Historical Background:
  - The merlion is an artificial construct. It was designed in 1964 for use as a mascot by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board.
  - ↳ Fish-body symbolises Singapore's origins as a fishing village.
  - ↳ Lion head representing the country's name ('Singapura' = lion city).
- BUT we've never had lions roaming wild in Singapore!

## REFLECT: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE NEXT?

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