

Activity Sheet



The word 'utopia' originated from writer Thomas More, who used it to describe an island that represented the idea of a perfect place and society. The exhibition *After Utopia* asks where our utopia is, and how we have tried to recreate utopias we wish to live in.

Follow this route to discover different understandings of utopia and reflect upon what you might consider to be the perfect place.

Name: _____

School: _____



Who are they?

Thomas More (1478 – 1535) was remembered by Catholics as Saint Thomas More. He was an English lawyer, social philosopher, author and a statesman. He wrote *Utopia*, a novel about the political system of an ideal and imaginary island nation.

1. The word 'utopia' first appeared in Sir Thomas More's novel published in 1516. There, he named his fictional island 'Utopia' by combining two Greek words to form the word utopia:

utopia → ou (not) + topos (place) → no place
utopia → eu (good) + topos (place) → good place

Thus, utopia as imagined by Thomas More may be a good place but does not necessary exist. What is your utopia? Doodle or jot down your thoughts here:

2. Come up with 5 other synonyms for utopia:

abc What do they mean?

Synonym: A word or phrase that means nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language.

Head to Gallery One

You have just arrived at **Other Edens**.

3. Look for an artwork that has framed cushions with preserved butterflies.



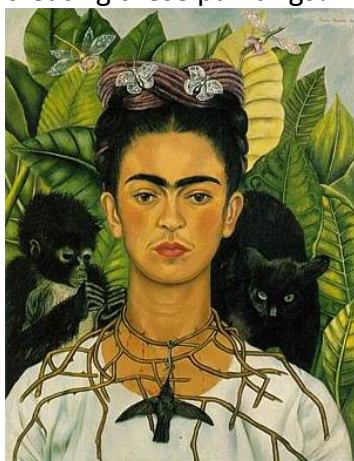
4. What is the title of the artwork?

5. Who is the person mentioned/referenced in the title?

Who are they?

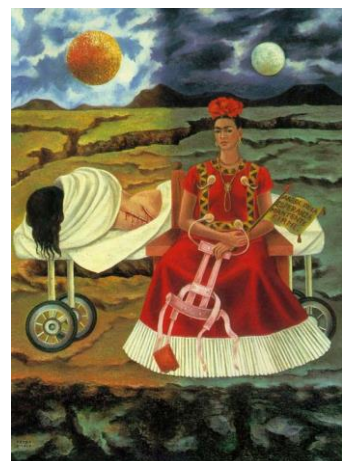
Frida Kahlo (1907 – 1954) was a Mexican painter best known for her self-portraits. Her self-portraits are often set against a detailed background and incorporate symbolic portrayals of her emotions.

6. What do you think might have been Kahlo’s emotional state of mind when she was creating these paintings?



Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940, Oil on canvas, 61.25 x 47 cm, Harry Ransom Center, Texas, U.S.A.

Frida Kahlo, *Tree of Hope, Remain Strong*, 1946, Oil on Masonite, 55.9 x 40.6 cm, Collection of Daniel Filipacchi Paris, France



7. Being acquainted with Frida Kahlo and her husband Diego Rivera, Juan Guzman, a German-born photographer, was responsible for a number of intimate portraits of Kahlo at work, painting.



Juan Guzman, *Frida Kahlo with pigeons*, ca. 1940s

Look closely at the photograph of Kahlo by Guzman and compare it with the Filipino artist, Geraldine Javier's painting of her. What similarities and differences do you notice?

8. Javier draws on Frida Kahlo's self-portraiture as well as art historical conventions of symbolism. What do you think gardens represent?

9. "When I consider everything that grows,
Holds in perfection but a little moment..." ~ Shakespeare, *Sonnet XV*

In Shakespeare's *Sonnet XV*, he talks about how every living thing is perfect only for a brief moment in time. The preserved butterflies in Javier's painting appear to be perfect forever. What do you think the preserved butterflies symbolize?



Did you know?

Butterflies, flowers and skulls are some symbols found in works of old Dutch painters. This genre of art is often referred to as *Vanitas*, where the artist uses these symbols to represent the transient nature of things. This style rose to prominence in the 16th and 17th century but its influence can be seen in modern artworks.



Maria van Oosterwijck, *Vanitas – Still Life*, 1668, Oil on canvas, 73 x 88.5 cm, Kunst Historisches Museum Wien, Holland



Gerrit Willemz Heda, *Still Life*, 1636, Oil on panel oak, 87.6 x 69.9 cm, California Palace Of the Legion of Honor – San Francisco, U.S.A

abc What do they mean?

Transient: Something that lasts only for a short time.

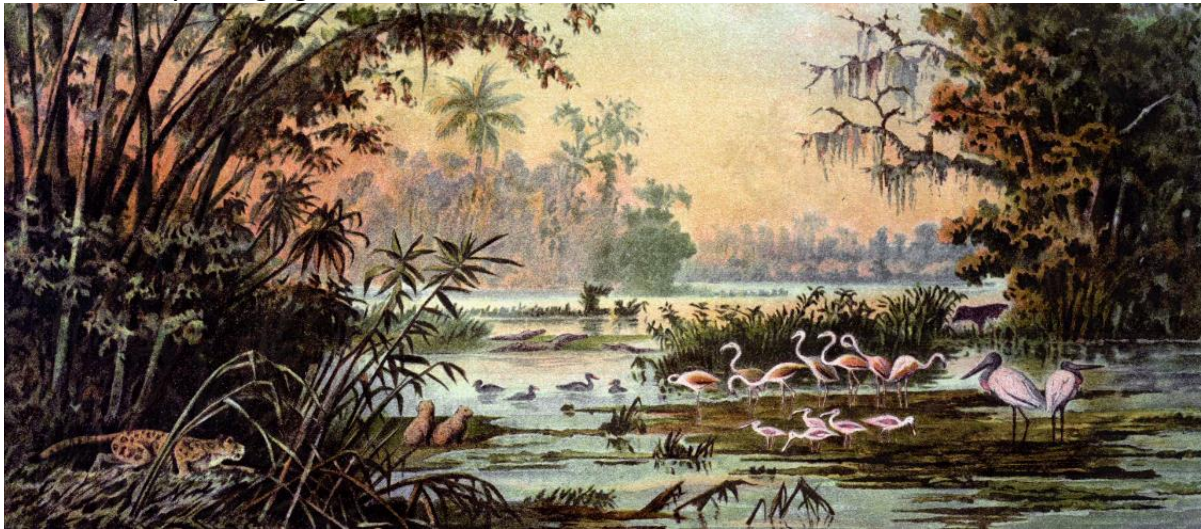
10. Geraldine Javier painted a portrait of an artist she identifies with. Who do you identify with? Why?

11. If you were to paint a portrait of a person you identify with, where would you place him/her? (Eg. A forest? A carpark?) Describe it here:

12. If you were to include mini-frames in your picture, what would be in them? Sketch or write them in the frames below:



13. Walk out from the garden. Find a work that shows a forest that looks like this and is constantly changing.



Still taken from **Donna Ong**, *The Forest Speaks Back (I)*, 2014, Single-channel video with sound, 8.00 mins (loop), Collection of the Artist

14. There are many different types of forests in the world. Identify them:

T _ _ P _ _ _ L forests are found near the equator. They have year-round high temperatures, abundant rainfall and the most diverse plant and animal life.

M _ D _ T _ _ _ _ N _ _ N forests are found along coasts. Almost all the trees have green leaves throughout the year.

T _ _ P _ R _ _ _ forests have well defined seasons with a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees.

C _ N _ F _ _ _ _ _ forests occupy cold, windy areas. The trees can withstand the drought-like conditions of long winters.

M _ _ T _ _ _ forests are known as cloud forests as they receive most of the water from mist or fog that comes up from low-lying ground.

 **Discussion Time**

15. What type of forest do you think the artwork features? What makes you say so?

16. Next, look for a box that contains the image of a tropical forest.



Part of **Donna Ong**, *Letters From The Forest (II)*, 2015, LED diorama from cut illustrations in wooden boxes, Dimensions variable, Singapore Art Museum collection

17. The Singaporean artist **Donna Ong** layered paper cut-outs of flora and fauna to create imaginary landscapes in a box. What is this type of art called?

 **Fun at Home**

Create your own artwork inspired by Donna Ong’s work. Cut out images of flora and fauna from magazines, mount them onto transparency or acrylic sheets and position them in different layers in a box. You can shine a light behind the scene.

18. “What is a garden for? For the soul, sir, for the soul of the poet! ***For visions of the invisible, for grasping the intangible, for hearing the inaudible***, for exaltations above the miserable dullness of common life into the splendid regions of imagination and romance.” ~ S. Reynolds Hole, 1899

Within the gallery themed **Other Edens**, the artworks featured have drawn on the symbolism of the garden to express different narratives and ideas. What do gardens mean to you?

➔ **Head to Gallery Two**

You have just arrived at **The City and its Discontents**.

19. Look for a video projection of a block of flats and notice the change of scene from day to night.



Still taken from *Chris Chong Chan Fui, Block B*, 2012-2014, Single-channel video with sound, 20:00 mins (loop), Collection of the Artist

20. What colours can you see in *Block B*?

21. Who do you think lives in *Block B*?

22. Block B shows a scene of urban life in the Brickfields neighbourhood of Kuala Lumpur. Have you seen anything similar? Where? Write it down below:



Let's try this

23. *Block B* presents the differences between the geometrical urban architecture and the colour of life in Southeast Asia. The entrance to each home reflects each occupant's culture. How would you express your cultural heritage at the entrance of your home? Write or draw it here:

If you enjoyed this activity, go to **The Learning Gallery – *Once Upon This Island*** and look for an interactive installation titled ***HDB Life*** by Shin Lin!

24. Explore the inner recesses of this gallery and find a work called *Sembawang*.



Tang Da Wu, *Sembawang*, 2013, Multimedia installation, Dimensions variable, Collection of the Artist



Did you know?

Sembawang is a neighbourhood located in the far north of Singapore. It is named after a tree locally known as Sembawang tree (Scientific name: *Kayea ferruginea* OR *Mesua ferruginea*).

25. How many objects can you spot in this installation? List them here:

26. What do you think the artist is trying to depict?



Who are they?

Tang Da Wu (b. 1943) is often referred to as the ‘father’ of performance art in Singapore. His practice crosses different disciplines and is characterised by concerns for social and environmental issues. In 1988, he founded an artist collective The Artists Village (TAV) in Sembawang, where artists were encouraged to explore experimental art practices.

27. Why do you think the artist wishes to depict Sembawang?

28. The artist Tang Da Wu ‘resurrected’ four mongrel dogs which he owned. They are represented as skeletal frames and stand upright like human beings. Why do you think Tang Da Wu presented the dogs in monumental proportions?

abc What do they mean?

Resurrect: Restore to life, revive or revitalise.

Monumental: Great in importance or size.

➔ Go up to Gallery Three

You have just arrived at the gallery titled **Legacies Left**.

29. Have you noticed the colours of the galleries in *After Utopia*? Here, walk through the red room, take a quick look and proceed to a room that is white.

How do you feel when you are in these rooms? Write your feelings in the boxes below:

RED

WHITE

30. Stay in the white room for a while and watch the *Television Commercial for Communism* by **The Propeller Group**.



Still taken from **The Propeller Group**, *Television Commercial for Communism*, 2011-2012, Single-channel video (1:00 min), Singapore Art Museum Collection

31. What activities are the people in the video engaged in? List them here:

32. What do you understand by the word 'communism'?



Discussion Time

33. The commercial ends with the tagline: 'This is the new communism. Everyone's welcome.'
Why do you think this is called the new communism?

*Hint: Historically, communism has always been associated with the colour red.

34. Walk back to the red room. What do you see in the room?

35. What does it remind you of?



Did you know?

Both artworks are based on the ideas of communism.

Communism is also known as Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. The names originate from the German philosopher Karl Marx, Russian revolutionary and later Soviet premier Vladimir Lenin and Chinese political leader Mao Zedong respectively.

Marxism began as a critique and analysis of capitalism.

Leninism is built upon revolutionary ideas, and believes that the working class should be in control of the political system.

Maoism suggests that stages of development are needed to facilitate the transition to communism and advocated an army formed by the people.

All of them expound different variations of communism in their own countries.

 **Let's try this**

36. The artwork **Summit** imagines a conference between the communist leaders of the world. The title of the artwork makes reference to the G8 summit, an annual meeting between leaders from eight countries in the world, namely Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, United States, Canada and Russia.

What are some important issues you think that world leaders should be discussing now?

- a) Make a list of these issues.
- b) Which issue is most important to you?
- c) Draw up an agenda for a meeting where world leaders could discuss this issue.
- d) Draft a formal letter to invite them for this meeting.

They can range from leading figures of technology to experts in gardening!

Date:

Address:

Dear _____,

..... <subject header>

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

➔ **Head to Gallery Four**

You are now in the gallery titled **The Way Within**.

37. Notice the large metal sphere in the gallery. Watch the video installation next to it.



Svay Sareth, *Mon Boulet*, 2011, Single-channel video installation with metal sphere, Dimensions variable, Singapore Art Museum Collection

38. Where did the artist journey through over 6 days?

39. The artwork is titled **Mon Boulet**, which means “My Ball” in French. The term is also used colloquially to mean “My Burden”. Look closely at the metal sphere. What can you see on its surface? How do you think this happened?

40. What do you think the metal sphere signifies?

Food for thought: The metal sphere is 2 metres wide and 80 kilograms in weight.

41. Walk into the adjoining room and sit down with your legs crossed for 1 minute. Do not talk or move.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *Sitting*, 2004, Installation with 366 carved wooden sculptures, Dimensions variable, Singapore Art Museum Collection

42. How did you **feel** after sitting still and silent in that posture for 1 minute?

43. What were you **thinking** about during that minute of silence? Draw or write it here:



Discussion Time

44. The artwork *Sitting* calls to mind meditation and the attempt to transcend the material world. Why do you think people turn away from the external world and look within themselves for inner peace? Will you do it? How will you do it?



Let's try this

45. Having taken a walk through **Other Edens, The City and its Discontents, Legacies Left** and **The Way Within**, you should have encountered different forms of 'Utopia', and even its flip side – dystopia. Now, it's time to re-imagine your own utopian society.

Design your own logo:

*Hint: Good logos capture the essence of what they're supposed to represent.

Possible Places: Global \ Nation \ City \ Eco-village \ Others: _____

Goals & Values:

What policies would you draft for:

Economics, work & leisure:

The Arts:

Science & Technology:

Diversity issues:

Others:

My day at SAM...

Complete this page and pass it to your teacher to deposit at the SAM Front Desk

Name	School	Age	Exhibition title

I found the activity sheet...

- Very easy Quite easy Okay A little difficult Very difficult

I found the activities in the worksheet...

- Very interesting Quite interesting Okay Not so interesting Not interesting at all

I would like future activity sheets to have...



3 things I have learnt...



2 things I would like to find out more about...



The thing I enjoyed the most at SAM...

***For Teachers to note:**

Please collect all the pages as a single bundle and deposit them at the SAM Front Desk.