



## Inquire to Learn!

There are many ways in which *Merlion Magic/Singapore – Lion City* can be used as a base for Inquiry Learning. This is just one suggestion.

## Session 1

Using the Big Book, share-read *Merlion Magic*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of Southeast Asia, folk tales, islands and coastal environments, mythical creatures, lions, and friendship.

### Possible Starter Questions for Discussion

**Southeast Asia:** *Where is Southeast Asia? What countries does it include?* Locate Southeast Asia on a map and tell the students that it is made up of eleven countries, five of which are part of mainland Asia: Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam; and six island countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei, and East Timor. Tell the students that Southeast Asia has important connections with New Zealand and Australia and the folk tale *Merlion Magic* comes from Singapore.

**Folk Tales:** *Are folk tales based on fact or fiction?* Discuss with the students that folk tales are fictional stories. Sometimes they are based on an event or person from history, sometimes they are designed to teach information or encourage or discourage certain behaviours, some folk tales seek to explain how something came to be, and others were told simply to entertain. Make sure that the students understand that different versions of the same folk tales exist as stories change from teller to teller and over time.

**Islands and Coastal Environments:** *What do people who live on islands or by the coast have*

*in common?* Brainstorm shared characteristics, such as an affinity with the ocean, a love of seafood, skills at swimming, fishing, boating, and navigating at sea, and a sense of adventure.

**Mythical Creatures:** *Have you ever heard of a merlion before? What does it remind you of?* Share with the students that the prefix *mer* means *sea* and is used to describe mythical beings that are partly sea creatures, such as mermaids and mermen. Brainstorm a list of mythical creatures associated with the sea or another body of water, such as mermaids, mermen, laras, morgen; selkies; taniwha; marids; water nymphs; sea monsters; Loch Ness Monster/Nessie; bunyips.

**Lions:** *What do lions symbolize? Where are lions found?* Discuss that lions have been a symbol of majesty, strength, and courage around the world for tens of thousands of years. Lions used to be found across much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Today they are found mainly in the southern regions of Africa and in a protected area in India. Lions were never native to Southeast Asia, but they were highly regarded there and elsewhere as the “king of beasts”.

**Friendship:** *What does it mean to be a friend?* Discuss friendship and what it means to be a friend. Talk about characteristics such as kindness, empathy, honesty, loyalty, generosity, forgiveness, trust, compassion, understanding, and lack of judgement.

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## Teacher's Notes continued

### Text and Illustration Based Inquiry Questions

Cover: Look at the cover and read the title. Ask, *What do you think this story will be about? What do you think will happen?* Ask, *What does the word magic mean?* If necessary, describe magic as the power to influence events by using mysterious or supernatural forces. Look at the cameo illustration on the title page and ask, *Who do you think this crown belongs to?*

PP. 2–3: Revisit the text and point out the word *sultan* in the first paragraph. Describe a sultan as a king or ruler, especially in the past, of a Muslim country. Ask, *What kind of life do you think Prince Sang Nila Utama has?* Discuss that although he seems to have a life of luxury with plenty of free time to play, it also seems that he doesn't have many friends. Continue reading and ask, *What would you do if you met a huge sea creature with the head of a lion and the body of a fish? Would you be scared as well as interested in it? Would you tell anyone about it? Why/why not?*

PP. 4–5: Revisit the text and discuss the illustration on P. 4. Ask, *What does this scene remind you of?* (A person throwing a ball for a dog to catch in its mouth.) Remind the students that a dog is often called a *man's (human's) best friend*. Compare and contrast the boy's expression in the illustrations on P. 4 and P. 5. Ask, *How is the prince feeling? Why? How would you feel if you lost your only friend?*

PP. 6–7: Revisit the text and point out the word *expeditions* in the first paragraph. Brainstorm a list of synonyms that could have been used instead, such as journeys, voyages, missions, trips, excursions, adventures.

PP. 8–9: Previously on P. 6, the prince was described as *adventurous*. Challenge the students to find evidence in the text on P. 8 that supports this description (*The prince was eager to explore. He raced back to his ship and set sail.*) Continue reading then check the students' understanding by asking, *Why did the crew throw heavy items into the sea?* (Because the ship was at risk of sinking in the storm and they wanted to make it lighter.)

PP. 10–11: Revisit the text and ask, *What dilemma did the prince face?* (Whether or not to throw his precious crown into the sea in order to make the ship lighter.) *Why do you think the sea calmed and the winds dropped as soon as the prince threw his crown into the sea?* Discuss with the students that throwing the crown into the sea was a symbolic act. The prince chose to save his life and that of his crew as well as saving his ship by sacrificing his crown and symbol of royal power. Direct the students to the illustration on P. 11 and ask, *What do you think the prince was feeling and thinking before hurling his crown into the sea?*

PP. 12–13: Revisit the text and discuss that although it has been many years since the prince spent seven days playing with the merlion, he recognises his friend despite his changed appearance. Ask, *What does this tell us about the importance of this friendship to the prince?*

PP. 14–15: Review the first two paragraphs and ask, *Why did the prince not follow his adviser's command to run?* (Because the prince recognised that the lion was his friend, the merlion, and he knew he wouldn't hurt him.) *Do you think the prince was brave? Why/why not? What do you think is meant by: A moment of understanding passed between them? Do you think that when the prince threw his crown into the sea his actions caused the merlion to be transformed into the "king of beasts"? Why/why not? Would you rather have the wealth represented by a crown or one loyal friend? Explain your answer.*

P. 16: Finish reading and ask, *Why did it not matter that the prince never saw his friend again? Do you think that people would have believed him if he had told them about seeing the merlion or the lion? Why/why not? Why did the prince rename the island? What was the magic in Merlion Magic?*

### Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Share-read or watch other stories from Singapore, such as: *The Legend of Pulau Ubin* (YouTube), *Badang and the Singapore Stone* (YouTube), *The Legend of the*



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## Teacher's Notes continued

*Sisters' Islands* (YouTube), *The Legend of Kusu Island* (YouTube).

Research to learn more about mythical water creatures and share-read other folk tales on the topic, such as: *The Little Mermaid*, *The Entangled Mermaid*, *The Girl-Fish*, *The Selkie Child*, *The Seal Children*, *The Taniwha of Wellington Harbour*, *Tarakura of the Rangitāiki Plains*, *Nessie the Loch Ness Monster*, *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek*.

Invite the students to imagine that they have discovered a new, uninhabited island. What will they call it? Ask them to design a poster about their island, including a description of the island's geographical features and climate.

Challenge the students to write their own story about a mythical sea creature. What creature will they choose? Will it be kind or cruel? Ask the students to include an illustration of their creature.

Invite the students to write their own story from the perspective of the merlion. Questions to consider could include: Why did the merlion go away after seven days of playing with the prince? Where did it go? How did the merlion feel about its friendship with the prince? How did it get to the island of Temasek? How and why did it transform into a lion? Once a lion, why did it never see the prince again? Where did it go?

Research the meaning behind local placenames. Was your city or town named after a geographical feature, person, or event? Did it ever have a different name? Write a paragraph about how your home city/town got its name?

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## Session 2

Using the Big Book, share-read **Singapore – Lion City**, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of Singapore and Southeast Asian culture, natural resources and sustainability, street food, and national pride.

### Possible Starter Questions for Discussion and Inquiry

**Greetings in Singapore:** *Singapore has four official languages: Malay, Mandarin, English, and Tamil. Nearly everyone speaks English so you can say hello, but depending on who you are talking to you could also say ni hao (Mandarin), vanakkam (Tamil), selamat pagi (Malay for good morning), selamat tengah hari (Malay for good afternoon), or selamat malam (Malay for good night).*

**Cover and Contents Page:** Look at the cover of **Singapore – Lion City** and ask, *What is this a statue of? Can anyone tell me where this statue is?* (merlion, Merlion Park, Singapore) Tell the

students that the merlion statue is a symbol of Singapore and a well-known tourist attraction. The statue is 8.6 metres tall. There is also a 2-metre statue of a merlion cub at the park. Ask, *What can you tell about Singapore from this photo?* (There are many high-rise buildings and lots of people.)

Look at the contents page and tell the students that the photo is of Supertree Grove in Singapore's Gardens by the Bay. Supertree Grove contains 18 tree-like structures that are 25-50 metres tall. The supertrees are designed to benefit the environment. They provide shade during the day for the many ferns, vines, orchids, and bromeliads that grow in and on them. They collect rainwater that is used to water the plants and run the fountains in the park. They also collect solar energy, which is used to power a stunning light and music display at night. Point out the Skyway path that runs between some of the trees. Share with the students that Singapore is known for innovative, environmentally sound design, which they will see more of inside **Singapore – Lion City**.



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### Teacher's Notes continued

**Location of Singapore/Geography:** Look at the map on P. 1 of *Singapore – Lion City* and note the location of Singapore in Southeast Asia and in relation to Australia and New Zealand. Ask, *What do you think the climate in Singapore might be like?* Share with the students that Singapore has a tropical climate with high temperatures all year and a lot of rain, particularly in November and December. Ask, *Can anyone tell me why Singapore has a tropical climate?* Share with the students that Singapore is near the equator and, if necessary, define the equator as an imaginary line going around the middle of Earth. The area above the equator is in the Northern Hemisphere and the area below the equator is in the Southern Hemisphere. Countries near the equator typically have a warm tropical climate as they are furthest away from either the North Pole or the South Pole.

**Singapore and Southeast Asian Culture:** *What is culture?* Discuss with the students that the word *culture* refers to the ideas, customs, and way of life of a people. Turn to P. 1 of *Singapore – Lion City* and revisit the text: *Singapore has grown rapidly and become a major financial centre.* Share with the students that Singapore is a highly developed country. It has both Asian and European influences and has developed its own distinct culture where harmony, achievement, and sustainability are highly valued and there is respect for different religious and personal beliefs.

**Natural Resources and Sustainability:** Turn to P. 2 of *Singapore – Lion City* and reread the opening paragraph. Ask, *What are natural resources?* If necessary, define natural resources as things that are found in nature and can be used by people, such as: light, air, water, land, plants, animals, soil, stone, minerals, and fossil fuels. Ask, *How has Singapore solved the challenge of a lack of land, fresh water, and other natural resources?* (Through the use of innovative, sustainable solutions.) Brainstorm the concept of sustainability: meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Remind the students that there are limited amounts of some resources, such as fossil fuels. Ask, *Why is sustainability important?*

**Street Food:** Turn to P. 6 of *Singapore – Lion City*. Ask, *Has anyone tried any of these dishes from Singapore? Which would you most like to try?*

**National Pride:** Turn to P. 8 of *Singapore – Lion City* and review. Ask, *What is national pride? How do national events and symbols help build pride in a nation?*

### Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Research to find out more about Singapore's park Gardens by the Bay. What are its special features?

Singapore has a motto (P. 1), but New Zealand and Australia currently don't. Challenge the students to come up with a motto for their home country.

Using PP. 2–5 of *Singapore – Lion City* as a springboard, consider whether any of the challenges faced in Singapore are also faced in Aotearoa and/or Australia. Could we learn from Singapore's solutions? Encourage the students to write letters to their local council, member of parliament, or other local official outlining what they have learned e.g. a letter to the Auckland Council suggesting that a shortage of fresh water in Auckland could be solved by recycling water.

Look into ways in which we can use resources in our classrooms and schools more sustainably. Could we recycle more? Are there areas of the school that could be planted with trees for the benefit of future students? Could solar panels be included in future building projects? Could more sustainable building supplies be used? Present your findings to the Student Council, Principal, or Board of Trustees.

Research to learn about how New Zealand and/or Australia are working to become more sustainable.

Challenge the students to research some of the festivals celebrated in Singapore, such as: Chinese New Year, Thaipusam, Hari Raya Puasa, Dragon Boat Festival, Hungry Ghost Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Deepavali (Diwali).