Tea and harmony: Cultural sips for kids

Initiative by Yale-NUS College students aims to expose schoolkids to world around them

Amelia Tong

Colombo has spent many Saturday afternoons this year “traveling” the world, and has been to nearly 10 countries so far. She has written her name in Sinhalese, learnt about Viking history, made dumplings and acted as a Bharati, one of the ethnic groups in Monocia, a country in North Africa.

This is all part of an enrichment program organized by the group of Yale-NUS College students known as KidsAccomplish, which aims to expose upper primary school pupils to the world around them, and help them discover issues.

About 12 pupils, aged eight to 12, have attended 10 sessions held at the college campus since February. Each Saturday, they spent 2½ hours uncovering snippets about different countries, exploring their culture, language and history, as well as engaging in activities such as paper cutting, art and craft.

Ms Sircia Fernando, 20, a second-year student and the group’s president, was inspired to start a children’s programme after four months as a volunteer nurse at a Tamugaska Family Service Centre last year after her Alresford.

The group has three other co-founders – Ms Lim Chia Han, 20, its vice president, and two of Ms Fernando’s former junior college classmates, Ms Keala, 21, and Ms Danielle Tan, 20.

The programme taps into the diverse mix at Yale-NUS, which has students from 39 countries. Ms Lim said that international students are invited every week to talk with the children about their home countries.

Mr Tulsi, who is entering Yale-NUS next year, said the sessions “give kids space to consider and correspond with ideas.”

“We try not make it prescriptive (but) more discussion-based.”

For instance, after learning about tea cultures of racial groups, students brought up the questions of how people dine differently.

Similarly, topics are chosen – from the modern Japanese electronic inventions to the chai (tea) movement, an organized resistance to forced division as taken in the FTAs.

KidsAccomplish, which has 20 volunteers, was registered as a student interest group in August last year, and receives funding from the college trust fund.

Parents who signed their children up for the programme say their children have a new appreciation for different cultures.

Ms Vinodhini, a parent of 10-year-old twin sisters, said her daughter was always on the lookout for ways to highlight global issues and social responsibility to children.

She added that her daughter enjoyed learning about different cultures. For instance, she liked making Indonesian food as well as making and dressing up in traditional costumes.

Ms Law Ho Ching, a mother of two, said that her daughter was looking for non-academic activities for her 10-year-old twin.

“Her focus is to understand and learn that the world is not just school and home, and involves more than television and computer games,” she said.

The group hopes to reach out to nurseries and children from lower-income families who may not have the resources to go abroad, and to begin a second run of events.

Ms Tulsi said: “Good grades are really not enough; you need to be knowledgeable about the world around us and be imaginative.”

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