

OPEN HOUSE ADVENTURES



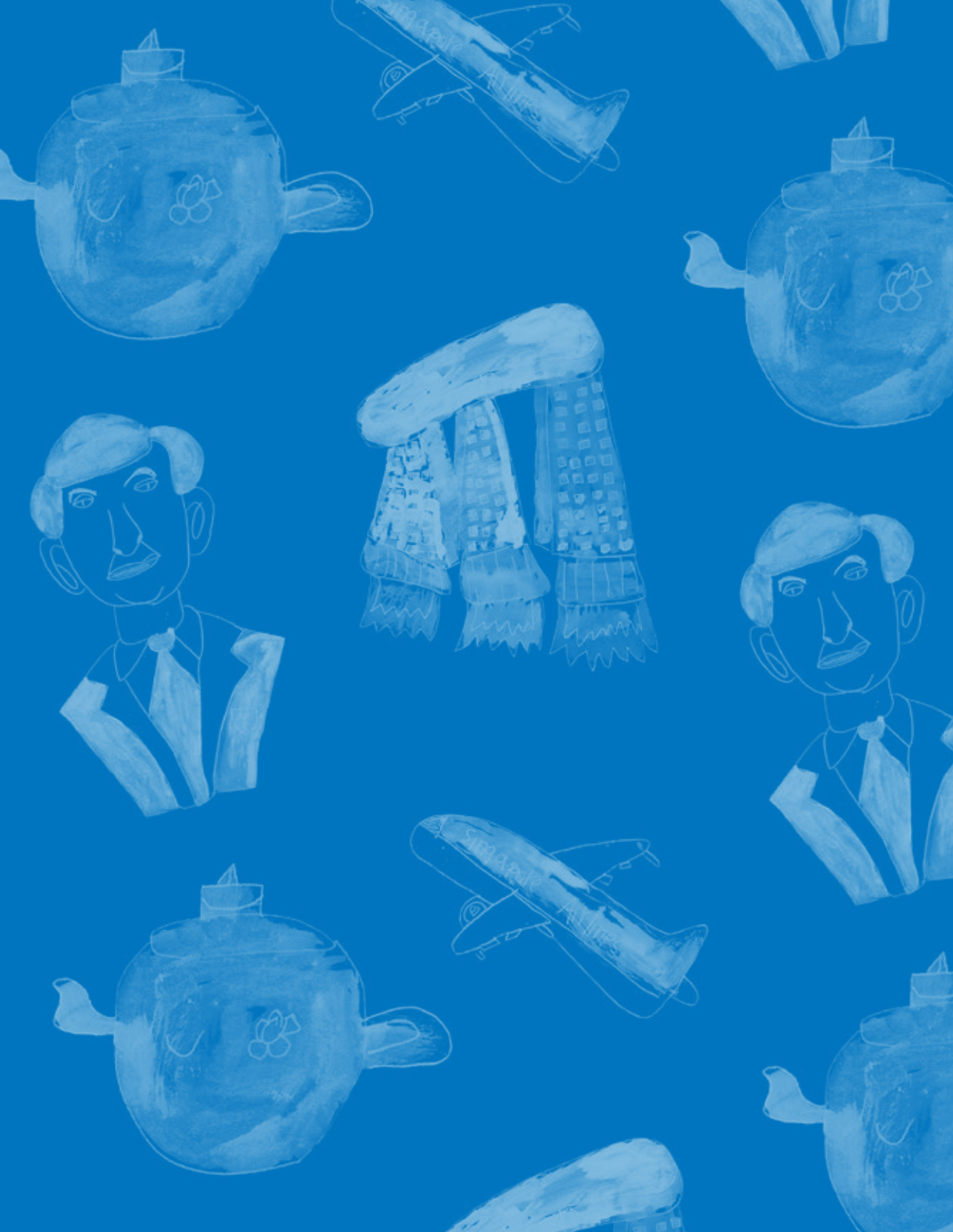
THE LIVING MEMORIES OF THE ISTANA



written by
NG MEI YAN

illustrated by
CHARMAINE ANG





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Since the Istana was built back in 1869, it has become an important part of the nation's history. Over the years, the Istana has played a major role not only as the official residence of the president but also as the consummate host to visiting foreign dignitaries. In recent times, Singaporeans from all walks of life have also been warmly welcomed to spend the day enjoying the rich heritage and lush greenery of the Istana grounds, by way of open houses, receptions and picnics throughout the year.

The Istana Open Houses naturally became the setting for *Open House Adventures*, a three-book series that has been specially commissioned to commemorate the Istana's 150th anniversary. I cannot think of a more wonderful way to bring forth the well of amazing stories that lies behind the Istana and its grounds than through the eyes of four intrepid young children—much like you—

who embark on some wildly unexpected adventures at the Istana.

In *The Living Memories of the Istana*, four curious friends, Priya, Zulkifli, Jing Kai and Julailah, stumble upon an old photo album that teleports them to the distant—and not-too-distant—past. Here they encounter and interact with some fascinating individuals who have previously walked through the hallowed halls of the Istana.

Through these fun, imaginative stories proudly told and illustrated by our fellow Singaporeans, it is my wish that you, the future of Singapore, can share in the magic of the Istana. I hope you will enjoy reading *Open House Adventures*!

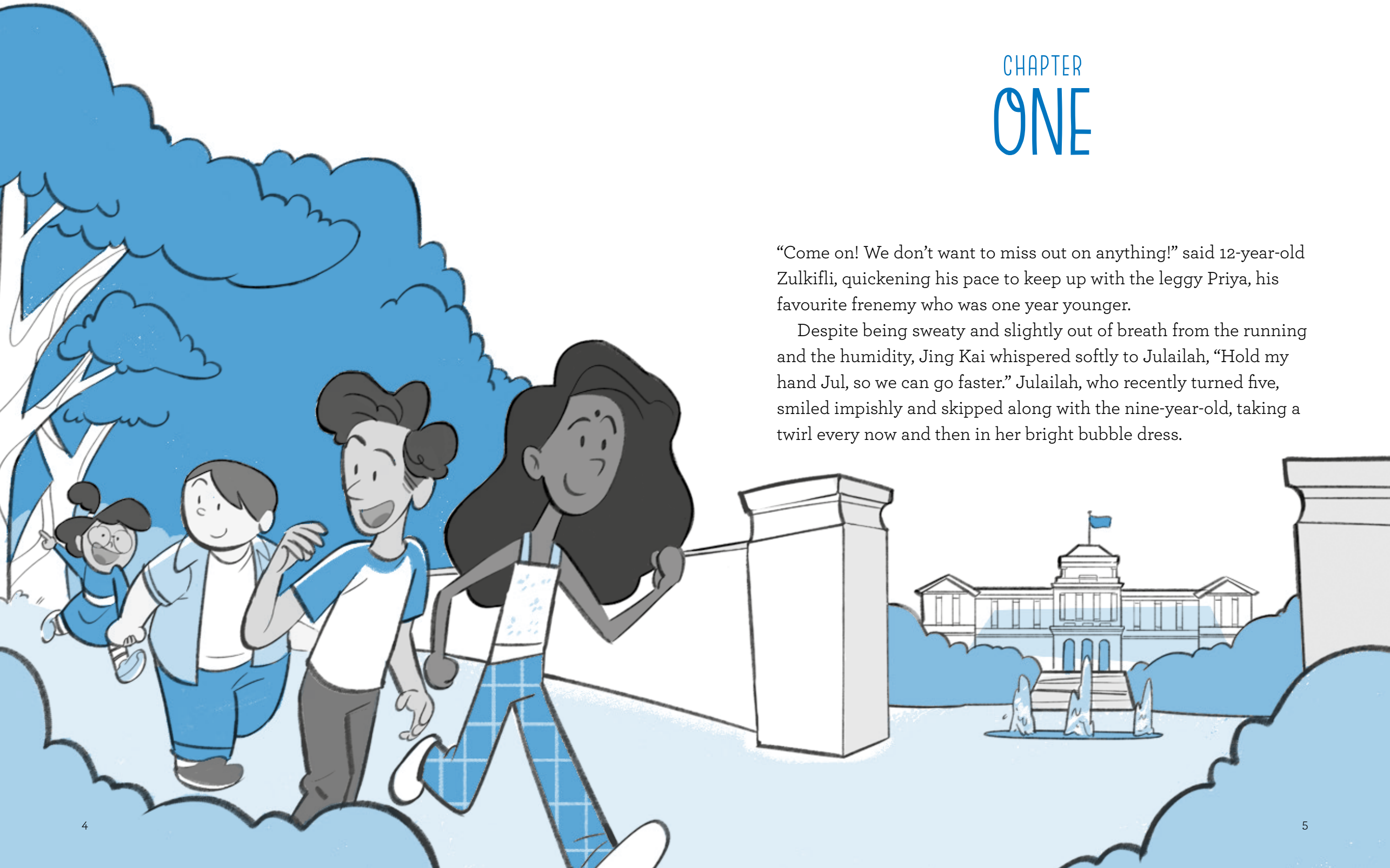
Mdm Halimah Yacob

President of the Republic of Singapore

CHAPTER ONE

“Come on! We don’t want to miss out on anything!” said 12-year-old Zulkifli, quickening his pace to keep up with the leggy Priya, his favourite frenemy who was one year younger.

Despite being sweaty and slightly out of breath from the running and the humidity, Jing Kai whispered softly to Julailah, “Hold my hand Jul, so we can go faster.” Julailah, who recently turned five, smiled impishly and skipped along with the nine-year-old, taking a twirl every now and then in her bright bubble dress.




It wasn't every day that Julailah got to dress up. But today was special because they were headed to the National Day Istana Open House, and they had agreed that they would go in their best clothes.

There was another reason to be especially chirpy about the visit. The four pals, who were neighbours from Yishun, lived in the very same block where Singapore's eighth president, Madam Halimah Yacob, had resided, and often shared this fact to anyone who would listen. They had high hopes of catching a glimpse of Madam President today.

The gang made their way down the tree-lined path towards the ornate, cast-iron Centre Gate, taking every chance to overtake eager photophiles.

"Ahem!" Zulkifli, ever the punster, cleared his throat. "Did you guys know that these gates up ahead are almost 90 years old? But they definitely *donut* look their age!" Unfortunately, Priya, Jing Kai and Julailah couldn't hear him above the chatter of the other visitors.



The Centre Gate divides the Istana's upper and lower grounds. In the past, visitors wrote their names in a log book placed in a sheltered alcove beside the gate.

Zulkifli's shoulders slumped in disappointment. He had taken the effort to read—scratch that, memorise—every page of the Istana website the night before, and was hoping to impress everyone, including his sister Julailah, with his newfound knowledge.

Never mind, he thought, I'll try again later.

They trudged along with the crowd, and made their way across the picturesque garden. Before long, the pristine, white Main Building came into view.

“Look! We're almost there!” squealed Julailah in delight. Jing Kai gently squeezed her hand in response. By now, he was sporting sweat patches on his dark red button-up.



“All right, everyone, let’s go over the rules,” Priya started, placing her hands on her hips.

“Yes, ma’am, we know them already,” Zulkifli droned.

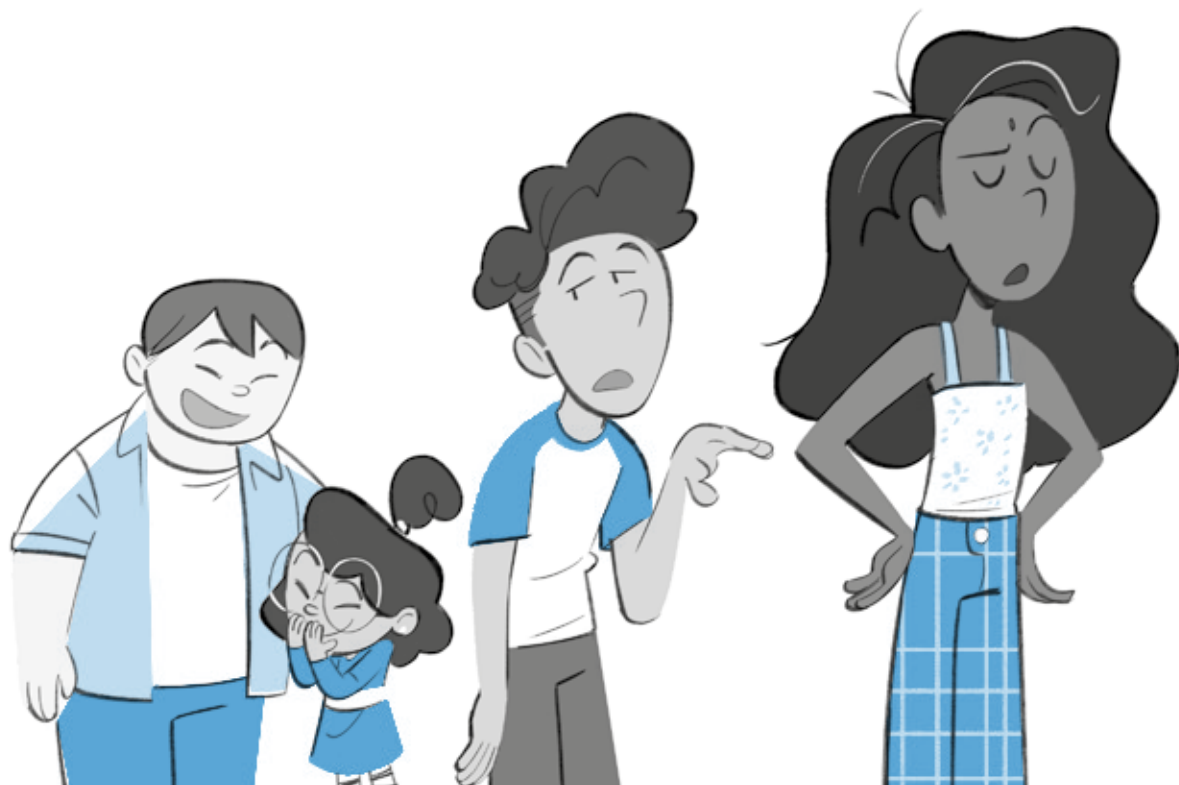
“We need to stick together as a group, always. And as the leader because I’m tallest, I get to call the shots,” Priya finished. Her star-speckled top glistened in the sun.

“No way! Nobody here made you commander-in-chief,” Zulkifli protested, and stood on tiptoes to look at Priya in the eyes. Is that girl a giant or what? he thought morosely. He also wondered why he chose sandals today instead of shoes with thicker soles.

Jing Kai and Julailah giggled as the headstrong pair continued squabbling even as they stepped into the building. Thankfully, the grandeur of the entrance soon quieted the pair.



There are many chandeliers in the Istana but the Maria Theresa chandelier between the East and West Drawing Rooms is the largest one.



Greeting them near the door was a majestic flight of red-carpeted steps leading to the second floor. “Wow,” Jing Kai mouthed silently.

The gang quickly trailed behind a tour group that came up next to them. As they reached the top of the stairs, they instinctively turned their heads up to admire the gleaming crystals on the most gorgeous chandelier in the whole of the Istana.

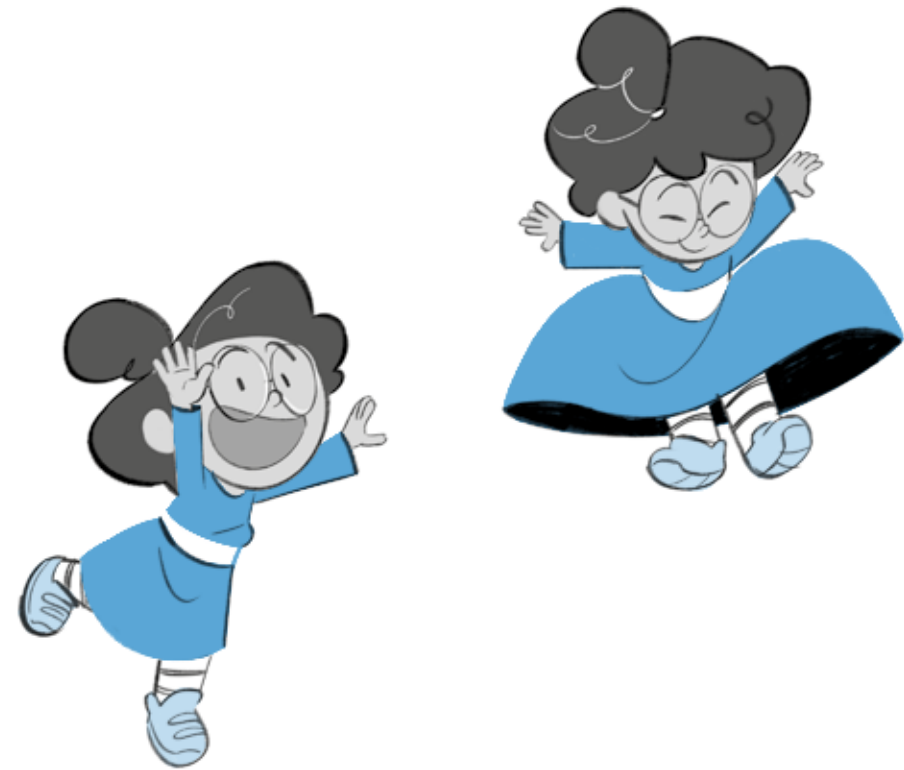
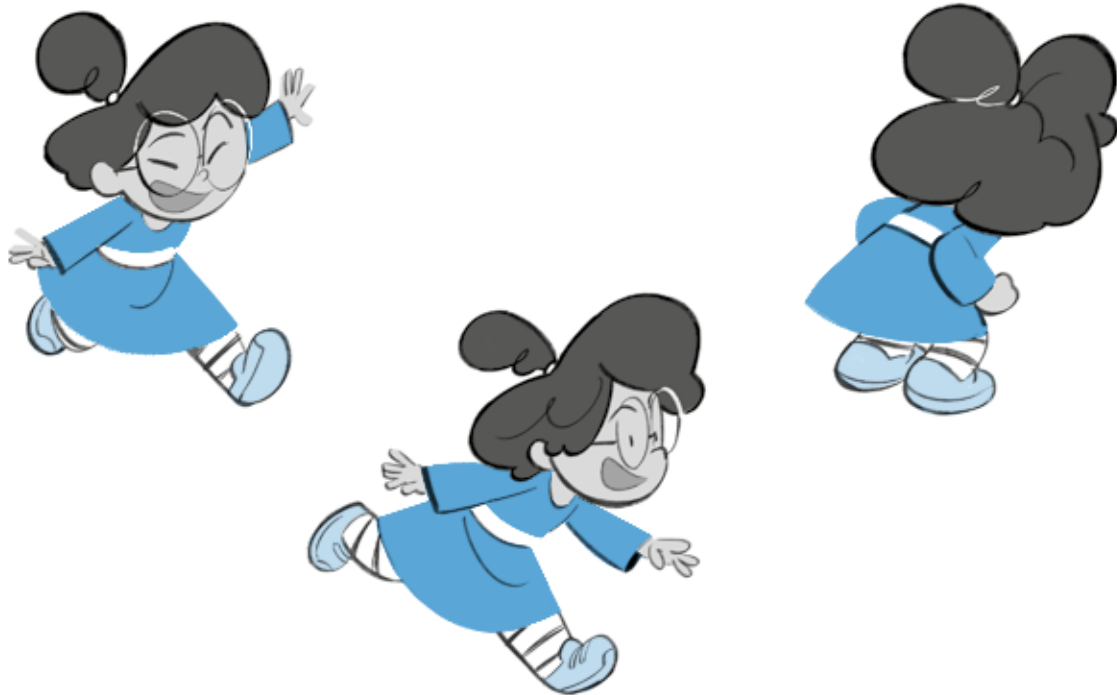
“This is a Maria Theresa chandelier! It weighs 350kg—this light is definitely a heavyweight!” Zulkifli guffawed at his bad pun.

His voice attracted a few stares from the adults in the group. “Keep it down, Zul!” Priya shushed. Zulkifli turned red and looked away. Jing Kai gave a sympathetic smile.

While the three took a moment to soak in the atmosphere, Julailah’s attention was drawn to a peculiar spot down the corridor between the East and West wings. A door was left slightly ajar. It felt out of place, and certainly didn’t appear as welcoming as the rest of the building.

Julailah started creeping away from her group. I’ll just take a peek, won’t take more than a minute, the preschooler thought.

It wasn’t long before Jing Kai felt something was amiss. He turned around and saw Julailah wandering down the corridor. “Jul!” he hissed, but she took no heed. He ran after her.



“Kai, where are you going?” Priya asked. When she saw what was happening, she pulled Zulkifli along and gave chase.

Julailah pushed the heavy door wide open and stepped in, much to the chagrin of the older children. Jing Kai, Priya and Zulkifli followed right behind her. “I thought we were supposed to stay as a group! Zul, please keep a closer watch on your baby sister! Now, can we please head out again?” Priya said with exasperation.

But the group stayed rooted, even Priya. While the commotion carried on in the corridor, this room felt oddly still. It was as if a heavy curtain now separated them and the rest of the Istana.

Shell is proud to partner with the President's Office to bring you this special trilogy of children's books. Did you know that this is the first time that the President's Office has commissioned books on the Istana specially for young people like you? This is because the national monument is celebrating its 150th birthday. Through these three books, you will follow four young adventurers as they discover the history, people and nature of the Istana.

Like the Istana, Shell's history in Singapore also goes back to the 19th century, specifically to the year 1891. That was when Shell started Singapore's first kerosene storage depot on Pulau Bukom, an island five kilometres south of Singapore. In 1961, we built Singapore's first oil refinery and we have not looked back since.

Over the years, Shell has grown with the country, investing in our assets here, investing in the people who worked to grow our business and investing in the community that we are a part of. Shell is proud to call Singapore home, and we want to continue to provide you and your families with more and cleaner energy solutions for a sustainable future. Let's continue to power progress together.



Aw Kah Peng

Chairman, Shell Companies in Singapore

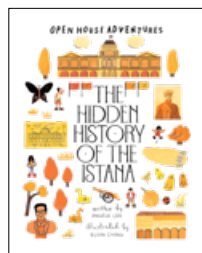
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Zulkifli, Priya, Jing Kai and
Julailah are enjoying the
Istana Open House when their
jaunt takes a *magical* turn.
The gang is blitzed into a world
where they rub shoulders with
VIPs and see history come alive.

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