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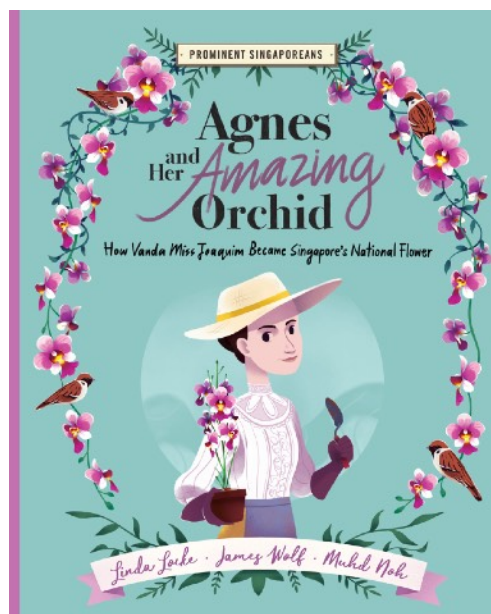
Epigram Books celebrates 125th anniversary of Singapore's national flower with a new book

SINGAPORE — April marks the 125th anniversary of the creation of the Vanda Miss Joaquim, Singapore's national flower, and to commemorate the occasion, Epigram Books will be publishing *Agnes and Her Amazing Orchid: How Vanda Miss Joaquim Became Singapore's National Flower*.

The book will be available from Epigram's online store (www.epigrambooks.sg) as well as LocalBooks (www.localbooks.sg). It will also be available at all major bookstores.

Why Is This Book Important?

Written by Linda Locke, James Wolf and illustrated by Muhd Noh, this picture book tells the story of how one woman's ingenuity and determination created a flower that not only became Singapore's national flower in 1981 but also set off a global commercial orchid industry.



The book also sets the record straight about Agnes Joaquim and her creation of the hybrid orchid (for many years, people didn't believe a woman could be so invested in horticulture and disputed that she could have crossed two orchid breeds successfully). Linda Locke talked to orchid experts and dug through years of research and archives to update official records and give Agnes due credit. That official recognition came in 2016 when the National Parks Board and the National Heritage Board acknowledged Agnes' role in the creation of the orchid.

The book is an inspirational tale of one of Singapore's most extraordinary women, who made a difference in an era where women taking charge were not highly recognised.

A Brief History Of Vanda Miss Joaquim

The first record of Vanda Miss Joaquim appeared in an 1893 issue of *The Gardeners' Chronicle* journal in a section titled "New or Noteworthy Plants", when it was registered as a new plant by Henry Nicholas Ridley, then-director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

He wrote of Agnes, whom he described as "well-known for her success as a horticulturist", and her success in breeding this new hybrid. He also sent cuttings of the flower to Europe.



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There, Vanda Miss Joaquim was successfully flowered by Trevor Lawrence in the UK, after his gardener W. H. White, nurtured the flower from a cutting sent by Ridley. The flower was displayed publicly for the first time at the Royal Horticultural Show in London in June 1897.

The RHS awarded the First Class Certificate to Lawrence (which is akin to winning an Oscar, or a gold medal at the Olympics). The following year, the orchid also garnered the Cultural Commendation Certificate for Lawrence.

Back in Singapore, the flower made its appearance at the annual Flower Show in April 1899, where Joaquim won the first prize for “rarest orchid”.

The Controversy Of Vanda Miss Joaquim

However, the origin of Vanda Miss Joaquim soon became a source of controversy, with the debate revolving around whether or not the plant was a natural or artificial hybrid.

The authors of the book, *Biology of Vanda Miss Joaquim* insisted that the orchid hybrid had been the result of chance pollination because, in their view, Joaquim could not have been equipped with the requisite knowledge of orchid crossing and seed germination. They also dismissed Ridley’s 1893 account as “likely to be more allegorical than factual”.

In Agnes’ defense, Nadia H. Wright published a number of articles and a book that refuted the idea of Vanda Miss Joaquim being a natural hybrid, highlighting Joaquim’s personal achievements as a horticulturist and the strength of Ridley’s account as he was an experienced botanist and “a foremost expert on orchids”. It would take decades before the debate was settled in Agnes’ favour.

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About the author

Linda Locke is a great-grandniece of Agnes Joaquim, and the story of Agnes and the creation of the Vanda Miss Joaquim is also a family story. She was previously a chief executive and creative director of Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising, and chairman and regional creative director of Leo Burnett Advertising, and has more than 300 creative awards to her name. She later started her own consultancy, Godmother Pte Ltd, and held several key positions at Club21, a luxury fashion distributor. She now serves on the board of two companies. This is her first children’s book.

James Wolf has researched Singapore history for many years. He was thrilled to help prepare this book about one of the nation state’s greatest icons.

About the illustrator

Muhammad Noh Arjuna (also known as Muhd Noh) is an illustrator with a Diploma in Animation from Nanyang Polytechnic. *Agnes and Her Amazing Orchid* is his second children’s picture book. He illustrated *Dewi: The Day the Earth Shook*, part of the Asia’s Lost Legends series, in 2017. He currently



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works in an animation and post production studio. Muhd Noh is keenly interested in art and animation to visualise his imagination and curiosity. He enjoys watching cartoons and collecting picture books. He loves animals, in particular, cats.

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About Epigram Books

Epigram Books is Singapore's largest independent publisher. It was formed in 2011 to champion Singaporean literature, and publishes all manner of fiction — novels, short stories, plays, graphic novels, chapter books and picture books. It is best known for publishing award-winning books such as *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* and *Ministry of Moral Panic*, and popular series such as *The Diary of Amos Lee* and *Sherlock Sam*.

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For media enquiries

Callie Chong
Head of Sales & Marketing | Epigram
Tel: (+65) 6292 4456
Email: callie@epigram.sg

Christopher Toh
Assistant Marketing Manager | Epigram
Tel: (+65) 6292 4456
Email: chris@epigram.sg