

EMBARGOED TILL TUESDAY, 27 OCTOBER, 5.30PM

**CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE BY MR LAWRENCE WONG,
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, FOR THE 2020 INSPIRING
TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD**

1. Good afternoon. I am delighted to join you for this year's Inspiring Teacher of English Award celebrations, held virtually for the first time.
2. I recall attending previous ITEA ceremonies during my earlier stint in the Ministry of Education (MOE), and the fruitful conversations I had with the award recipients and other guests. Unfortunately, we can't have a face-to-face event this year due to Covid-19. But I'm glad we can still meet online and have this chance to recognise all our inspiring English teachers.
3. As a student, I always enjoyed my English lessons and I did well in the subject. But I never fully appreciated the skill that was required in effective communications, and the power and impact that language can have on people.
4. The turning point came when I started work. As a young officer back in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) then, I was asked to draft speeches for a few official events. I wrote the speeches like I would a written essay. Not surprisingly, the sentences ended up being dry, long-winded and tedious. And I recall my supervisors having to re-write the entire drafts.
5. Over the years, I've continued to work on my own language skills. And I've also come to appreciate the power of language by reading more about examples from around the

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world, where words have helped to lift and inspire, as well as to rally people around a common cause. Whether it's Martin Luther King who inspired a nation, or Winston Churchill who mobilised the English language for battle, words do matter. They impact lives and they change the course of history.

6. Not all of us will have the chance to engage in rhetoric at such a grand scale. But words matter too in our daily conversations. The way we communicate and speak is of vital importance – it enables us to connect better with one another, and to build empathy and trust with each other. In our multiracial and multicultural society, English as a common language helps to strengthen our social fabric, and to enlarge our common space amidst our growing diversity.
7. Today many of our students grow up in an English-speaking environment, and it has become such an integral part of our society and living experience that we may not always pay much attention to its significance. But this ability to communicate well with others cannot be taken for granted. It's not something that comes naturally or easy to most people. It's a skill that needs constant attention and nurturing to get better at it.
8. In recent times, many have highlighted the concerns about robots taking over human jobs. Robots can do many things. But they will never be able to replicate our full range of human strengths. And that includes the ability to express one's views effectively, to listen to those with differing opinions and to debate constructively, and ultimately, to be able to forge consensus on the way forward. And this is why the learning of English and the ability to communicate well is so important.

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9. Teachers of English, therefore, must continue to nurture our students' abilities to make sense of a complex world, and express well-considered thoughts eloquently in a range of different contexts, some of which we would not even have imagined less than a year ago. Just witness the range of words we have now become familiar with in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic – words like safe distancing, or circuit breaker – just to name a few.
10. So a language that is as dynamic and expressive as English requires teachers who are passionate about their work, and who go about teaching the language in innovative and effective ways. We see all of these traits in our recipients of this year's Inspiring Teacher of English Award.
11. They have piqued their students' interest by helping them to connect their classroom learning with the world they live in. For example, through the use of engaging learning materials like historical artefacts and newspaper articles in lessons, as well as learning journeys in the community. Our teachers have also effectively incorporated technological tools like Google Docs and Padlet – in home-based learning and in class – to enthuse students to share their ideas and critically think through issues.
12. Of course, such classroom innovations can only flourish if there is a supportive learning environment. So I also want to acknowledge our recipients of the Leadership Award – they have built an open and vibrant culture for the teaching and learning of the English language. As instructional leaders, they created the space for their teams to try and

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share different pedagogies, and they have mentored their teachers to continually hone their craft.

13. So once again, my heartiest congratulations to all recipients of this year's Inspiring Teacher of English Award and their schools. Of course, there are many other inspiring educators who have taken the teaching of English to a higher level. Congratulations also to all these nominees and their schools.
14. Finally, I would also like to express my appreciation to the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for working tirelessly every year to honour teachers who foster in students a love for the English language.
15. I wish our teachers of English a wonderful and fulfilling journey as you continue to inspire students to love the language, and just as importantly, to help them use it in responsible and uplifting ways to do good. Till the next time we meet, let us all continue to learn and grow as users of the English language, and delight in the new vistas the language brings to each of us. Thank you very much.