Singapore has changed greatly in the last 35 years. Over this span of time, the scenario has changed from that of being a poor British colony to one of an independent country; from a situation of high unemployment to one that attracts investment and workers from other countries. With this progress and affluence, the perception of job and work has also changed. The statement “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” is often heard. While “workholics” may not be admired, a person who considers a job to be a hindrance to his/her fun and leisure is not to be admired either. In any case, one of the useful values to inculcate in our students is that of honest hard work. Young people need to know that survival and prosperity are not guaranteed to any person in any society. Field trips where students can see and talk to “survivors”, that is, people who have had to struggle all their lives to earn a living, can help to inculcate the value of hard work. Here, in a prosperous country like Singapore, there are still occupations/businesses where the working hours are long and the people concerned do not have the benefits of an air-conditioned office, 13-month bonus, paid medical leave and vacation leave, and so on.

Examples of such occupations/businesses include the following:

- Blacksmith
- Charcoal shop
- Tinsmith
- Chinese laundry
- Roadside barber
- Roadside cobbler
- Shop-in-the-wall
- Tombstone mason

Two easily accessible areas where several of the above occupations/businesses can be found in close proximity are Arab Street and Serangoon Road. The road locations of these businesses are given below to facilitate the planning of the field trips to these outdoors classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation/Business</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>Two adjacent shops at Sultan Gate Street, between Baghdad Street and Beach Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation/Business</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charcoal shop</td>
<td>Facing Mustafa Shopping Centre in Syed Alwi Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsmith</td>
<td>Next to the Charcoal Shop in Syed Alwi Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese laundry</td>
<td>One in Serangoon Road between Desker Road and Syed Alwi Road. Another in Balestier Road near Tessensohn Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadside barber</td>
<td>One barber at Jalan Pinang. Several others in the backlane at Aliwal Street off North Bridge Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadside cobbler</td>
<td>At Lorong Liput in Holland Village. At the People’s Park concourse near the “garden-over-the-road” in New Bridge Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop-in-the-wall</td>
<td>Several such shops in Little India. There is one at Syed Alwi Road near Serangoon Road; another at Verdun Road near Desker Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tombstone mason</td>
<td>At the junction of Baghdad and Sultan Gate Street.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to visiting the locations of these occupations/businesses, students will learn much more if they have some questions in mind. Questions that the students may wish to ask (politely, of course) can be as follows.
ABOUT THE OCCUPATION/BUSINESS

What service is provided?
What are the raw materials used?
Where do these materials come from?
Have the sources of materials changed over time? Why?
Have you ever visited the places where your materials come from?
Who are your customers?
What is the demand like at present?
What is the future demand likely to be? Why?

ABOUT THE PERSON

How did you get into this line of work? Why?
How long have you been in this occupation?
Have you ever considered changing occupation/business? Why?
What are your working hours like?
Do you have any holidays?
Do your family members help you in your work?
Who will take over from you? Why/why not?

ABOUT THE LOCATION

Why was this particular business located here?
Is the location likely to be affected by redevelopment?
If affected by redevelopment, where will you move to?
Are there other people in this kind of occupation/business?
Is there any contact/cooperation among people in this line of work?

After seeing and talking to the “survivors” in these occupations/businesses, it would be useful for the students to write down their feelings and perceptions. By seeing for themselves how hard other people have to work in order to make a living, the students are less likely to take their own home and school life for granted. The sharing of these perceptions with each other and their teachers could thus be channelled towards achieving general education objectives bearing on the need to be hardworking, patient, thrifty, customer-oriented, and future-oriented.

Consider again the question in the title of this article: “What can the blacksmith teach us?” The famous 19th-century American poet,
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, has provided a good answer in the following lines which are excerpted from his poem, *The Village Blacksmith*:

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow.

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whatever he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Toiling, — rejoicing, — sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


