Retro playgrounds show simpler side of S'pore

Recently, debate arose over the preservation or removal of the historic Bukit Brown Cemetery, while Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, another historical landmark, closed for good yesterday. Youthink writers list the places of historical value in Singapore they want to see preserved or demolished.

TO ME, the playgrounds of the 1970s and 1980s have great historical value. There is no sophisticated flooring to keep children safe, and their slides and swings are not made of expensive materials. They are made of concrete slabs, braided ropes, old tyres and pieces of wood. They represent a younger, humbler Singapore.

To make up for the lack of technology and funds, creativity abounds and each playground sports its own design. Some are designed around a rabbit theme, while others evoke tortoises, pelicans or dragons. These designs remained in the minds of children who played in them as they grew up. Even after they became parents, many still remember the playground they once played in.

Unfortunately, design flaws resulted in many accidents, leading to a change in playground design in the 1990s. New playgrounds are nearly indistinguishable from one another, with similar slides, plastic see-saws and rubber mats for added safety.

Most of the old playgrounds in Singapore have been replaced by these new designs. Only a few remain: the playground opposite Block 35 Dover Road, a dragon-themed one at Block 28 Toa Payoh Lorong 6, and a train-themed playground in Tiong Bahru Park.

These remaining playgrounds should be conserved for the older generation of Singaporeans who once spent their carefree childhoods there. It would also let the younger generation know how their parents played.

Lee Shun, 16, is a Secondary 4 student from St Margaret’s Secondary School.

Status updates

"I feel the railway tracks should be preserved after the closure of Tanjong Pagar Railway Station as they could help keep alive memories of rail travel and the history of the relationship between Singapore and Malaysia."

"The tracks could be preserved by constructing cycling and pedestrian paths alongside or turning the place into an outdoor museum."

Kenil Hilary Tan, 18, is a second-year arts student at Millennia Institute.

Precious pockets of nature

"I think our offshore islands, like Pulau Ubin, Kusu Island and St John’s Island, should be preserved, so Singaporeans and tourists alike may admire their natural beauty and marine life."

"We could set up more marine conservation centres there, displaying pictures from the past and present and showing how little enclaves of nature exist alongside the mainland’s rapid development and industrialisation."

Glenn Lim, 24, is a fourth-year economics student at Singapore Management University.

Spiritual windows

"Old places of worship should be preserved as windows into the spiritual lives of early immigrants, giving today’s young people a glimpse of the faiths of their forefathers and allowing them to connect a sense of history and tradition."

"Such temples, churches and mosques possess not only aesthetic merits, but also historical significance. For instance, many old Chinese temples provided spiritual solace to the early Chinese immigrants."

"Young people would benefit from learning about their ancestors, who often relied on the support of such places of worship during their struggle to survive in a foreign land."

Ou Young Wei, 22, is a second-year English Literature major at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Restore these landmarks

"As a military history buff, I feel many young people do not think much about the Japanese Occupation."

"To make this period alive for them, places like the old Alexandra Hospital, the beachside near Jurong and Bedok, the Battlebox bunkers and pillboxes at Bukit Panjang should be preserved and restored to wartime glory."

"An ordnance museum could be set up at the Battlebox to showcase some of the tanks, planes and artillery used by the Allied forces and the Japanese."

Jonathan Liestrahl, 25, has a place to read arts and social sciences at NUS.