



**SPEECH BY MR GOH ECK KHENG, CHAIRMAN OF SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH MOVEMENT AT THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD 2011 CEREMONY AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY BUILDING ON TUESDAY, 11 OCT 2011, 7:00PM**

<b>Mr Lawrence Wong,</b>	<b>Minister of State, Ministry of Education</b>
<b>Ms Yeoh Chee Yan,</b>	<b>Second Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Chairman, National Library Board</b>
<b>Mrs Elaine Ng,</b>	<b>Chief Executive Officer, National Library Board</b>
<b>Ms Ho Peng,</b>	<b>Director-General of Education, Ministry of Education</b>

Principals, Teachers, and Students

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I was talking to friend just yesterday about schools and teachers. In the course of our conversation, she told me that she comes from a Chinese dialect-speaking home. Her mother is illiterate. However my friend's mom, being a wise woman, insisted that her children learn English to get a head start in life.

2. So, my friend went to Tanglin Primary School. She told me that she knew her English language teachers were more than just interested in teaching what they needed to. They were dedicated, creative and inspiring. They helped her wrap her Teochew tongue around foreign words. She said tongue twisters, and acquired the structure of English through learning grammar, writing compositions and speaking like her teachers did.

3. However, she did not own a book of her own till she was in Secondary One; all through primary school she was a regular visitor to our public libraries. She was a voracious reader.

4. On Friday, I am publishing the fifth collection of poems by this friend entitled *Mixing Tongues*. Let me read you a sonnet from the book:

#### A Seashell Sonnet

'She sells seashells on the seashore' is her English lesson tongue-twister, being Asian.

'She sells fishes in the wet market' is her mother's fate twisting to meet life's ration.

Hissing 'S's on her tongue while counting  
*Ikan* - seashells, equally burdensome,  
she morphs into a mermaid with scaly  
*bei ker* carved on, twisting to a ransom.

Shaping shells to sonnets, she learnt how to  
shelf words in sentences, being sentenced  
within her sonic silences, howling  
*ma* to mer, trading tongues as existence.

A sea in her shell, she sees selves in seas,  
shoring up presences, letting self be.

5. My poet friend is Heng Siok Tian. She is a teacher and HOD of Literature at Hwa Chong Junior College. Siok's story shows that dedicated and inspiring teachers not only make a difference to how effectively our children learn English, but also make a difference to our children's lives.

6. If not for Siok's English language teachers, we will have one less poet in Singapore, and also one less teacher.
7. The Speak Good English Movement reaches out to every Singaporean in the same spirit.
8. I have been scolded for wanting to reach hawkers, the aged and "others who don't need English". We cannot make such distinctions. Who are we to decide who should or should not be encouraged to speak English well? It is like asking you not to teach some students in your class.
9. Like you, the Speak Good English Movement realizes that we are addressing people with different levels of English proficiency. Like you, we use different strategies to reach them.
10. Every year, we find a common denominator and use it to speak to everyone in Singapore. This year, we are focusing on our children – and I am sure the message resonates with you.
11. However, we do more than organize one event a year. This Inspiring Teachers of English Award is an example of what we do to reach different sectors of society throughout the year. Besides a representative from your Ministry, our committee has members from the Retailers' Association, Workforce Development Agency, People's Association, the Professional & Adult Continuing Education Academy and the media, among others. We support each other in our efforts to promote English in Singapore.
12. It is significant that we are not a campaign. We are a movement that builds upon what we have done and gathers partners to snowball our efforts. We know that we cannot achieve our goals alone. The ITEA alumni form an important resource for us. We welcome schools, classes and individual teachers who wish to be our partners.

13. We also recognize that what you are doing with your class and school is vital because you are teaching and influencing the next generation of English speakers in Singapore.

14. So, each of you is a key partner of the Speak Good English Movement, and for that I thank you.