



YOUNG READERS AS AMBASSADORS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Engaging and empowering kids with information
to play a role in the coronavirus pandemic

PREMISE & WHAT WE DID

Background: There is a lot of information on the Covid-19 pandemic; all of it is relevant to children but most of it is not written with them in mind.

ST Schools curated the news and opinions of the day for children, making sure to retain the key details they need to understand what is happening in the world.



PREMISE & WHAT WE DID

From the start, we knew it was important to keep children in the loop of what was happening. Many a time, children are kept out of the loop. However, we realised after a while this was going to be a big global event with far-reaching consequences.

Children can also be powerful forces within a family. How can parents or grandparents turn a blind eye when their children are the ones setting good examples of handwashing and social distancing, among other things? So, we knew it was important to keep them informed and empowered.

However, we did not explicitly ask children to be "ambassadors".


In this crisis, where many young people are facing mental health issues and struggles from isolation, such a label might give them additional stress or add to their burden. Furthermore, we always feel that a light touch goes a longer way. We wanted to use subtle cues and nudges to encourage them to share positive thoughts and actions.



BUILDING 'SOCIAL RESILIENCE'

Our goal: To educate, reassure and rally young readers to act as “ambassadors”

so that they can:

- a) help curb the spread of the coronavirus, and
 - b) be part of the solution to Covid-19-related issues among their family, schoolmates and friends.
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BUILDING 'SOCIAL RESILIENCE'

1. We tailored news articles, quizzes and explainers about the pandemic for readers aged 10 to 12.

The content addressed their questions about the coronavirus and filled gaps in understanding that empowered them to help themselves and others.

2. We provided the content for free to all public school teachers to support Singapore's move to complete home-based learning that lasted for slightly over a month.

The teachers used our content as a basis for their lessons, giving students an up-to-date view of world affairs while also addressing their curricula needs.



Campaign timeline

Campaign timeline for
Little Red Dot: Consistent coverage from
January 2020 to the present

Concept

Content for readers 12 and under, educating
them about the coronavirus, while making
them “ambassadors” to promote good
practices to their families



A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT WE DID

Feb 11, 2020: Debunking fake news that was circulating about the coronavirus

Feb 25, 2020: We explained how a Covid-19-focused Budget helps young people and their families

March 24, 2020: Story about how under-12s could contribute to the coronavirus battle and government measures

March 31, 2020: Tackled positivity and mental health, as well as looked at a pioneer of infection control

April 7, 2020: Choose-your-own- adventure comic series to teach children how their actions have consequences

July 7, 2020: Explained the environmental effects of the world producing more trash due to the pandemic


July 14, 2020: Dealing with crisis fatigue: With global and local examples of pandemic fatigue

Links to all the stories mentioned in this slide deck [can be found here](#) under their respective dates.

News stories related to the coronavirus

The symptoms of the illness in Wuhan are mainly fever, and difficulty in breathing. The lung tissues of the patients seem to

ACTIVITY



Discuss with a partner three ways you can avoid sharing fake information with friends or family.



These include global stories about the start of the virus (Jan 14, 2020), and how schools are taking precautions against the virus (Feb 18, 2020). We wanted to raise children's awareness about this virus, even before it became a global pandemic.

EXAMPLES

Choose-your-own-adventure game



We also ran a “choose-your-own adventure” game where a reader picks a course of action and learns about the consequences of each choice. It emphasised how easily the virus spreads when one is socially irresponsible. We wanted to show how kids could be part of a solution with responsible choices.

EXAMPLES

Choose-your-own-adventure game



9
When you arrive at the restaurant entrance, you greet your relatives and other guests.

A waiter greets everyone at the door and asks each one if he is feeling well. Your throat hurts, but you have already travelled all the way. You...

● Say you are well, ignoring your burning throat. You probably just need a cold

drink, you think to yourself. Go to 15.
● You cannot tell a lie so blatantly. You admit you have a slight sore throat, but no fever. Go to 16.

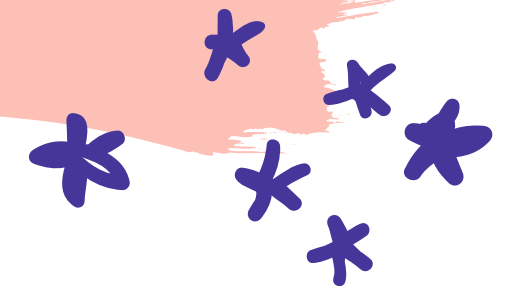
CONTINUED ON PAGES 6 AND 7



Readers end up with positive outcomes if they make responsible choices and negative outcomes if they act carelessly. This drives home the message of personal responsibility.

EXAMPLES

Educational stories



Saving lives through handwashing

Discover the history behind the practice with Athena Tan

Washing your hands after going to the toilet or before performing a crucial medical service is common sense today – even more so in the midst of today's global coronavirus outbreak.

We have one man to thank for that: obstetrician Ignaz Semmelweis. An obstetrician is a doctor who specialises in pregnancy and childbirth.

Born in Hungary in 1818, he was working in Vienna General Hospital in Austria during the time when puerperal fever or "childbed fever" was common. Many new mothers died from infections of the reproductive organs after giving birth. However, one maternity ward had a higher death rate than the other.

Dr Semmelweis meticulously investigated puerperal fever by tracking the death rate of new mothers whose babies were delivered by doctors, against the death rate of new mothers whose babies were born in another ward, delivered by midwives.

He compared everything – from the wards' environment to the crowds present, trying to pinpoint factors that might cause a split in death rates. But the only obvious difference was the midwives.

What were the doctors doing to the women that midwives were not?

THE PIVOTAL POINT

Dr Semmelweis' breakthrough came when one of his colleagues died after he was cut by a scalpel used in a dissection from another hospital. The bacteria from those dissections had transferred from the medical instrument to Dr Jakob Kolletschka's body, leading to an infection he could not beat.

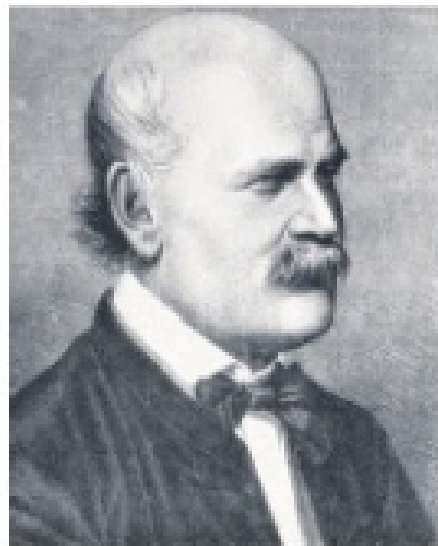
This prompted Dr Semmelweis to connect the dots between the deaths of mothers and the hands of the doctors who had attended to them.

These doctors had performed autopsies – examinations of the bodies of dead people – before heading to the maternity ward without washing their hands between operations.

They also unwittingly introduced germs from other operating rooms into their new mothers' bodies, resulting in the death of once-healthy women.

INTRODUCING A SOLUTION

On March 30, 1847, as chief resident of the maternity clinic in Vienna General Hospital,



Dr Ignaz Semmelweis was the first person to advocate for practice of handwashing in hospitals. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

With everyone spending more time washing their hands, I now have to queue longer for my turn, light!



Dr Semmelweis stated this practice: all physicians had to disinfect their hands with chlorinated lime solution before entering the maternity ward.

Prior to this, the death rate for new mothers was 18 per cent. After doctors were made to disinfect their hands, the death rate dropped to nearly 1 per cent.

For this, he would be later be called the "saviour of the mothers" by medical professionals.

REJECTION AND A TRAGIC END

However, his fellow doctors resented Dr Semmelweis' theory as they could not accept that these deaths were caused by doctors.

Dr Semmelweis was eventually isolated by a friend and was admitted to a mental asylum as his thoughts on hand hygiene were too advanced for medical institutions of his time.


In a horrific twist of fate, he died from gangrene, a kind of infection, which developed from an open wound on his hand that he was unable to infect. This

happened after just two weeks in the Viennese asylum.

He died on Aug 13, 1865. It was only in the late 1850s to 1870s that French biologist Louis Pasteur confirmed the presence of and impact of microscopic germs. Scottish surgeon Joseph Lister and German physician Robert Koch further developed Semmelweis' thesis that hand hygiene would prevent infection.

Sources: Britannica Encyclopedia, brought to Life Science, Forbes, The Guardian

ACTIVITY



You should scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds for it to be effective.

Think of a 20-second tune to wash your hands to. Send us your song suggestions and explain your choice at stdot@sph.com.sg.

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A general knowledge piece looking at the history of handwashing as an infection control measure, by profiling handwashing pioneer, the Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis (March 31, 2020). It was complemented by an activity for pupils.

EXAMPLES

Educational stories

6 THE STRAITS TIMES TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2020 bigideas

The problem with crisis fatigue

As countries around the world start to lift or loosen social distancing measures, experts are also worried that crisis fatigue over the coronavirus will contribute to a rise in the number of cases again. Ang Yiying explains what the term means and why it matters.

WHAT IS CRISIS FATIGUE?
In a nutshell, it is when a crisis is prolonged and people are tired of dealing with the situation.
In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, which has put much of the world into months of lockdowns or restrictions, this refers to the state when people get tired of the control measures – even though the disease is still spreading.

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?
The World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last month: "The world is in a new and dangerous phase. Many people are understandably fed up with being at home. Countries are understandably eager to open up their societies and economies."
"But the virus is still spreading fast, it's still deadly and most people are still susceptible."
The fact remains that there is still no vaccine against the coronavirus and the virus is still circulating among the populations of many countries.
So far, lockdowns and social distancing measures have helped to slow the virus' spread.
However, once people suffering from crisis fatigue become too eager to resume their lives and go out mingling and socialising again, they could facilitate the spread of the virus, resulting in what experts warn may be a second wave of cases.

WHAT IS A 'SECOND WAVE'?
This refers to an expected surge or spike in cases after the initial period of decline in cases.
As of the end of last month, cases have soared worldwide, with more than 10 million cases of Covid-19.
Many countries are also facing the challenge of the number of cases rising as measures are loosened.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF A SECOND WAVE IN OTHER COUNTRIES?
Australia's second most-populated state Victoria is facing a renewed Covid-19 outbreak after it relaxed rules from early June.
The relaxed rules had allowed for home

and outdoor gatherings of up to 20 people. But after seeing consecutive days of a double-digit increase in the number of cases, it announced on June 20 that it would reinstate tighter restrictions on home and public gatherings.
The state reimposed a limit of five people visiting households and 10 people at public gatherings.
From 11.59pm on July 8, residents of Melbourne were placed into a lockdown again, this time lasting six weeks.
As of July 10, Australia has registered more than 9,000 coronavirus cases and just over 100 deaths in a population of 25 million.

Sources: The Straits Times, Agence France-Presse, Bloomberg

FAB VOCABULARY
Enter these words into your vocabulary diary.
● **Vaccine:** A substance that trains your body to fight a disease it has not met with before.
● **Facilitate:** To make an action or process easier.
● **Reinstate:** To restore something to its original state.

From top: Visitors at the Singapore Zoo on July 8, its first day of reopening after a temporary closure due to the coronavirus. Firefighters dressed in personal protective equipment preparing to distribute food to residents of a public housing tower under lockdown in Melbourne, Australia, on July 7. Police in Beijing, China, clashing with protesters who blocked the parliamentary building on July 8 after the announcement of a lockdown over the weekend. Photos: AP, Reuters, Reuters

I know that I should wear a mask when I am out and stay home as much as possible. I'm not letting my guard down!

Savvy

We explained the emotions children and their families might be experiencing, and how their actions could lead to a second wave of infections. (July 14, 2020)

At this point, the six-week lockdown in Singapore had just ended and the government was gradually easing lockdown restrictions. We wanted to encourage the pupils to continue observing safe distancing measures in their everyday lives, and not behave like life had returned to normal.

HOW WE DID IT

The content was incorporated in a sustained manner in our weekly editions of Little Red Dot, which is a subscription-based publication for primary school children aged 10 to 12 years old. The existing editorial team of seven includes a former teacher with more than 14 years teaching experience.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Besides the usual subscriber base of at least 109 primary schools (60 per cent penetration rate in Singapore), we further gave all primary schools free content to use with pupils during Singapore's lockdown period from April to end-May 2020. When we gave out free content, we managed to engage an additional 10,000 pupils from another 66 schools. This meant that at its peak, Little Red Dot, reached at least **48,000 pupils from 175 primary schools (98 per cent penetration)**. We also managed to engage an additional **118 teachers** this way.





WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

- We will continue to engage young readers about Covid-19 for as long as the pandemic continues and as long as there are spillover effects.
- The key is to be able to modulate the tone of one's copy to speak to the young reader, explain things at their level, and engage them.
- The idea is to make young audiences part of the solution, instead of writing them off as too young to make a difference or to be overprotective by keeping them in the dark.
- Such an approach can be applied to any other major crisis or development, from climate change to Disease X on the horizon.

