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Grace Chua  
Reporter

## A history museum for all ages

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Grace Chua argues why money should be spent on three dinosaur skeletons for Singapore's educational sake

Lately, there has been some debate over whether the upcoming Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum ought to buy three dinosaur skeletons for \$12 million.

Some, like my colleague Ong Sor Fern ([http://www.straitstimes.com/PrimeNews/Story/STIStory\\_691107.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/PrimeNews/Story/STIStory_691107.html)), argue that they would be a waste of money.

I'm going to argue that they represent some of the best value for Singapore, that money can buy.

By definition, a natural history museum is a story about the world's life and evolution. So it must go beyond Singapore's own natural history, rich as that itself is.

It would be parochial and somewhat myopic to say, oh, these dinosaurs weren't even found in the region.

Would our art museums turn down the chance to show off a Da Vinci or a Rembrandt just because they weren't Singaporean painters?

I hardly think so - or at least, they would think long and hard before turning one of the Old Masters down.

So it is with dinosaur fossils - specifically the diplodocid sauropods, the long-necked, plodding favourites of children's movies like Land Before Time.

As my colleague Ignatius Low put it ([http://www.straitstimes.com/Lifestyle/Reflect/Story/STIStory\\_691416.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Lifestyle/Reflect/Story/STIStory_691416.html)), they would give Singapore a sense of its own place in geology and time - putting the ambitious little city-state in its place while at the same time, teaching its children to dream big.

"We live in a fast-paced global city of commerce where the next transaction, event, project or career move is often all that we have on the horizon. Few things in this world would give us a more instant perspective on life than standing there, all tiny, next to some of the biggest creatures that once roamed the earth but were suddenly extinguished by Nature," he wrote.

### NOT JUST MONEY-SPINNING

You see, it's not about a blockbuster show. It's not about fossils being money-spinners. It's about children.

A museum gallery dedicated to the social and cultural history of fashion is appreciated by only a handful of adults.

But the natural history museum is for the Singaporean children - of all ages - who will tramp through it on school excursions, to surround the towering fossils and gape.

Do we or don't we want our children to grow up with that sense of wonder? Don't we want them to think beyond the local, to grow into citizens not only of Singapore, but of the earth?

That's why \$12 million, not even of taxpayer money but charitable donations, is a bargain.

In Singapore education-spending terms, a \$12 million price-tag is a drop in the bucket.

This year alone, the Ministry of Education budget for primary and secondary schools, special schools and junior colleges, is more than \$5 billion. And dinosaurs are in themselves, an education.

Of course, it is necessary to also train curators and scholars, the experts who can explain the significance of these dinosaurs and put them - and Singapore - in their context in geologic and biological time.

But that will come when we see the value of having dino fossils in the first place.

Tags: dinosaur, history, musuem