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# More go for tuition in humanities subjects

## Enrolment has gone up as students seek to pick up critical thinking skills

### MORE PRACTICE

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**MS ARIEL CHEW**, director of Inspire Education Centre, who teaches literature.

### TUITION HELPED

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**NG WENG FAI**, a second-year Temasek Junior College student, who had social studies and history tuition in secondary school. He said source-based questions that tested skills in inference and critical analysis were new to him.

### Amelia Teng

These days, tuition is not just about solving that difficult maths question. Students can also get help to craft a literature essay or an answer to an open-ended history question.

At least five tuition centres specialising in the humanities have sprung up in the last three years.

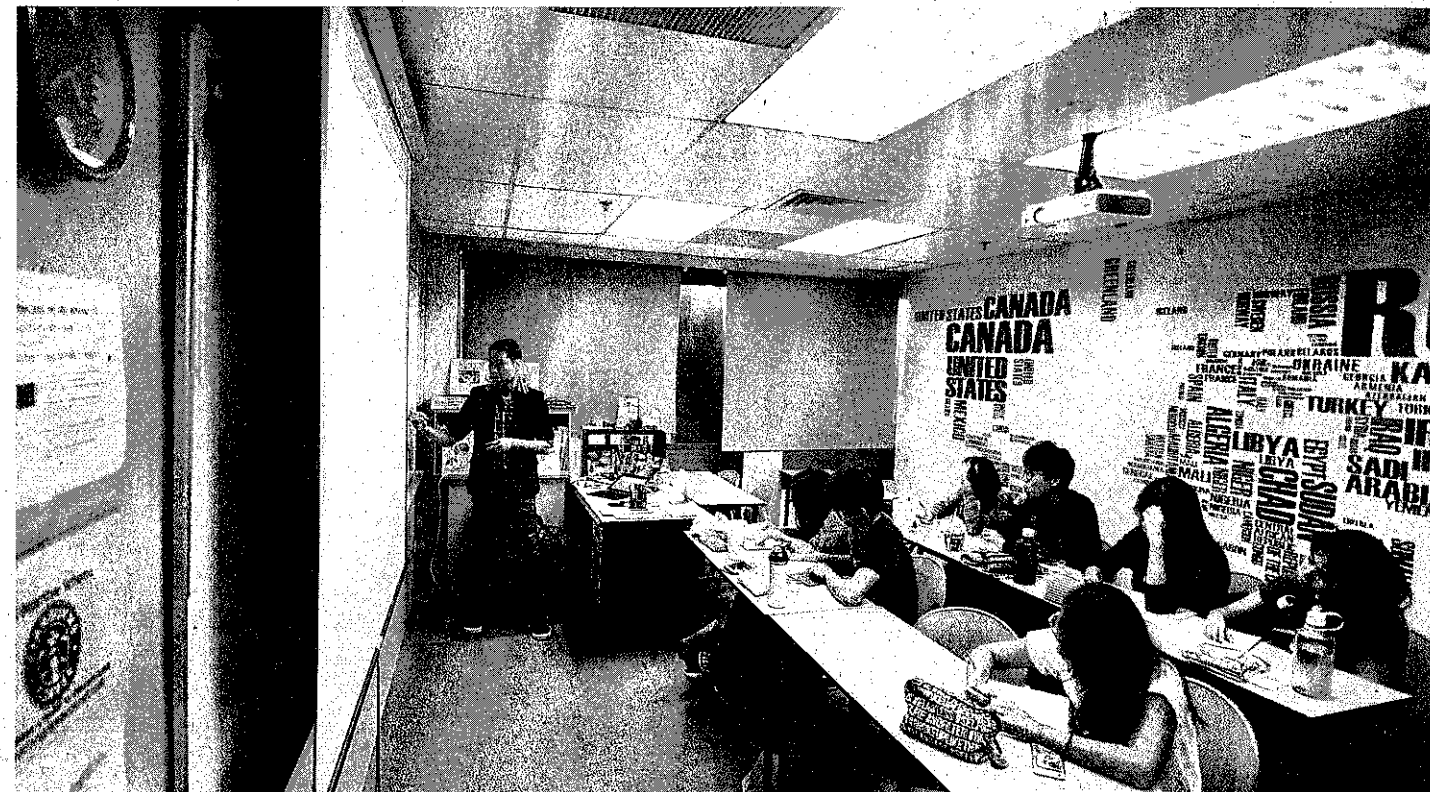
The growing demand is partly prompted by syllabus changes that require greater analytical skills, said Ms Kristin Looi, founder of Wordsmiths Learning Centre.

Students also want to do well in the humanities to secure places in schools of their choice. A good grade in humanities subjects is needed to qualify for popular polytechnic courses, and those entering junior college need to use the grade of at least one humanities subject.

Ms Mabel Ng, director of Humanities Hub, said its enrolment since 2012 has doubled to about 300 O- and A-level students today.

Wordsmiths Learning Centre started in 2013 with 30 students in its humanities classes. This has grown to 80 to 100 students now.

"Not many centres specialise in teaching humanities, a field that is quite unique and different from other subjects," said Ms Looi. "Singaporean students are quite used to rote learning but education has evolved and it's no longer about memorising dates and facts and regurgitating



Humanities Hub tutor Chris Ho, 38, conducting an economics class. More students are seeking tuition in subjects that require critical analysis of sources and high-order thinking skills. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

during exams." She said humanities subjects require critical analysis of sources and high-order thinking skills. "And in school classes of 30 to 40 students, it's quite impossible for a teacher to teach these skills effectively. They may not have enough time to coach students individually."

Ms Ariel Chew, director of Inspire Education Centre, who teaches literature, said: "In school, it's quite touch-and-go. There isn't enough time to go through literary devices and skills in depth as they tend to spend more time on texts and con-

tent. We try to give students more practice – we could spend eight to 10 lessons on poetry analysis, for instance."

Ms Phoebe Ye, founder of tuition centre Brain Matter, said it started offering humanities tuition in 2013 because of demand from its students. It now has about 15 students in these classes, up from five to seven three years ago.

"Students expect to be spoonfed, so they struggle when they have to think independently and they need a bit more guidance." For instance,

social studies, which is a compulsory O-level subject, requires students to answer questions based on case studies that may not be covered in the syllabus, Ms Ye added.

Second-year Temasek Junior College student Ng Weng Fai said he had social studies and history tuition at Humanities Hub when he was in secondary school as these were his weaker subjects.

"My mind is more wired towards sciences and I find essay writing quite challenging," he said, adding that source-based questions that

tested skills in inference and critical analysis were new to him.

"Tuition helped and it got easier to tackle those sort of questions once I got the hang of it," said the 17-year-old who obtained As for social studies and history.

He now has economics tuition. "People say economics is like science, but it isn't really – you still need the analytical skills, and the hardest part is applying the relevant content to questions."

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