

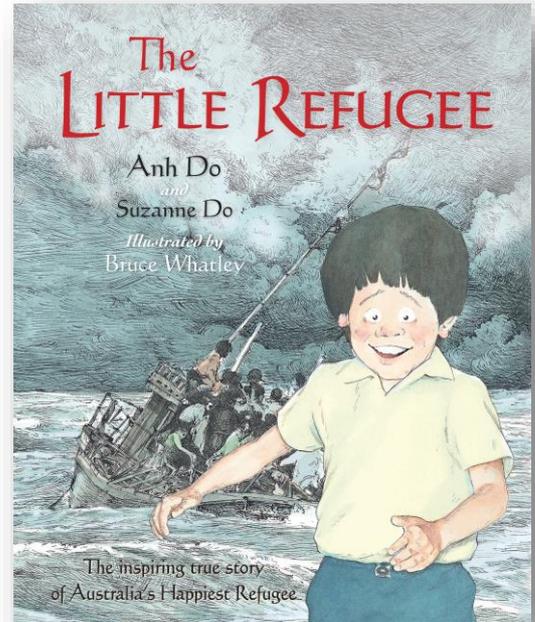
The Little Refugee

Author

Anh Do and Suzanne Do

Illustrator

Bruce Whatley



You must always have hope that things will be okay.

The Little Refugee tells Anh Do's story of his amazing journey. From a childhood of poverty in Vietnam, and the aftermath of the Vietnam War, he, his family and their friends fled from their country by fishing vessel. They battled heat, storms, hunger, thirst, attack, loneliness and fear before they found a safe haven in a new country, and a new life in Australia. But there they were forced to adapt and to learn new skills in order to survive.

Anh's early struggles were rewarded by both academic achievement and a highly successful career as a comedian. And then, when he wrote and published the memoir of his life, he achieved further acclaim.

This picture book is drawn from his memoir, and with Bruce Whatley's evocative drawings, tells Anh Do's inspiring story to children for the first time. It is a testimony to the power of hope, resilience, family, friends and good humour to carry us through even the darkest of times.

TEACHER NOTES

THEMES: Refugees, War and Dispossession, Vietnamese Culture and History, Racial and Ethnic Difference

VALUES: Compassion, Fear & Resilience, Hope

CURRICULUM TOPICS

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

- The first person memoir is a form of writing which requires the author to not only have a story to tell, but a style and voice in which to tell it. Discuss the various narrative devices used in this book to convey the feelings of Anh Do and his family as they forge a new life in Australia.
- Anh Do has used both humour and pathos to tell his story. Humour often stems from adversity. Which incidents did your students find funny, and why? Discuss.
- Compare this picture book to other first person accounts of similar experiences. E.g. *The Peasant Prince* by Li Cunxin and Anne Spudvilas; *The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong. Older students might like to read *Unpolished Gem* by Alice Pung, which details the experiences of a Chinese-Cambodian family in Australia through the eyes of a young woman.
- Encourage students to explore their own stories of their past, by engaging them in a memoir writing exercise. Use models of writing drawn from these and other pieces of autobiographical writing. See Donna Baker 'Memoir Writing' <http://www.theeducatorsnetwork.com/webpages/thewriteresource/TeachingMemoirWriting.pdf>
- This story employs a first person narrative voice suggesting that Anh Do is recalling the events of his childhood. Re-write one incident in third person and observe how that changes the story. Re-write it again in first person, from his brother Khoa's point of view.
- Test your students' comprehension after reading the story and doing some further research about the background to Anh's life, by answering simple questions.

VISUAL LITERACY

- Discuss the layout and design of the book, and of the individual double page spreads within it.
- Encourage students to read for the 'sub-text' and observe how the pictures often add to or illuminate meaning, complementing and enriching the text.
- Discuss the artist's choice of medium and use of colours in terms of the themes in this work.
- The artist's images are deliberately executed in two contrasting styles. The cartoon-like coloured images are contemporary and childlike, and the sepia-coloured more realistic ones are historical i.e. they depict Anh Do's childhood in Vietnam and journey to Australia. Discuss this contrast with your students and then encourage them to draw two pictures in these contrasting styles, depicting the story about their own lives which they wrote in the exercise above and then to illustrate an incident in the present as well.
- How does Bruce Whatley convey emotions in his images?
- Discuss the format, and use of perspective and spatial relationship in this visual text, in individual double page spreads. For example, the page which depicts the pirate deliberately foregrounds him in a threatening way on the right hand page with the boat depicted on the left as a much smaller image. This layout denotes the threat he presents. Discuss the composition of such images with your students.
- Examine the cover, and discuss why the illustrator has depicted Anh Do in the foreground in colour, with the fishing vessel in a sepia tone behind him? Draw your own image of him.

CREATIVE ARTS

- This book could also be used to explore a range of other creative arts such as acting, improvisation, music and dance.
- Improvise the scene in the book where pirates capture Khoa.
- Choose two pieces of music which are suggestive of the feelings of the families aboard this vessel.
- Make a dragon puppet: *Make Your Own Dragon Puppet for Asian New Year*
<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/vietnamese/tet-puppet.htm>

Watch the Vietnam National Puppetry Theatre perform the dragon dance on:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFpkAg_Y0KA

SOSE (THEMES)**Refugees**

- This book demonstrates the hardships refugees often endure in order to reach a place of safety and refuge. Discuss the situations which are encountered by Anh Do's family on the journey to Australia. How might you have reacted to them?
- There are many sources which teachers might use to inform their reading of this book with their students. For example, the website accompanying the television series of the book My Place http://www.myplace.edu.au/aligned_resources.html
- These situations are still being experienced by people coming to Australia today. Read more about the government's policies towards refugees or asylum seekers. How should we treat such refugees? Do we treat them well?
- What is a refugee? What is an asylum seeker? Which countries are they escaping from today?
- Share the stories of people in your class. There may be people from a range of backgrounds who will tell stories you've not known about them. Some of them may even have been refugees.
- Despite the negative views presented in some media coverage of refugees, migrant people in successive decades have contributed to Australia's prosperity and growth through hard work, new skills, and commitment to their new lives here. Discuss.
- The term 'boat people' is often used to describe those refugees who arrive in Australia by boat, and is sometimes used in a dismissive fashion. Discuss with your students the various misconceptions about refugee boat arrivals in Australia. Teachers might prepare themselves for this discussion by referring to the facts listed at 'Debunking the Myths' BOAT-PEOPLE.ORG http://www.boat-people.org/?page_id=148
- Draw a fishing vessel like the one depicted in this book, and then create a collage image of the various faces on board by cutting pictures of 'boat people' from magazines and newspapers and pasting them on to the picture.
- Invite a member of your community who has experienced the events which Anh describes, to address the class about their journey to Australia.
- Visit websites about Vietnamese boat people and the journeys they undertook to arrive in Australia. For example, see 'Vietka: Archives of Vietnamese Boat People'

[http://www.vietka.com/Vietnamese Boat People/](http://www.vietka.com/Vietnamese_Boat_People/) Compare their stories to those of refugees today.

War and Dispossession

- Discuss with students why a family might leave a country after a war.
- Read other books about war. E.g. The fictional 'Survivors' series (Hodder Wayland) includes accounts of young people affected by conflicts. Clive Gifford's *The Water Puppets* tells thirteen-year-old Xuan's story of life after his small village in South Vietnam is destroyed when (with his mother and young sister), he makes his way to Saigon where he witnesses the terrible events of the Tet offensive; or *Grandfather's Dream* by Holly Keller in which the birds disappear from a Vietnamese village due to war; or *Water Buffalo Days: Growing up in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong.
- See 'Children's Story Books: Vietnam and Vietnamese Culture' <http://www.adoptvietnam.org/books/books-children-fiction.htm> for further titles. You might also source relevant books by a subject search on <http://www.amazon.com> which will direct you to similar titles
- This book shows that people can survive war and find new opportunities. Discuss. Vietnamese Culture and History
- Research the culture, religious and ethnic mix of the population of Vietnam and its history including the impact of the French Colonial era, and later the Vietnam War. Then create a classroom display including students' responses and findings. To elicit responses, ask students questions about what they have read. For example: How many official religions does Vietnam have? Answer: Six: Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, the Hoa Hao faith and the Cao Dai faith. Invite them to include some of the activities created in response to these notes.
- Vietnamese food and cuisine is often very delicate in flavour and preparation. Encourage students to locate a simple Vietnamese recipe and share Vietnamese food in class. Rice (Gao) is the staple food and many varieties are grown there and made into delicious dishes both savoury and sweet, such as Gao nep, a sweet glutinous rice used in making rice cakes. Water spinach (Rau muong) is considered to be Vietnam's national vegetable. Other popular dishes include, for example, Cha gio or spring rolls made from minced pork and other ingredients wrapped in rice paper; Pho is a beef noodle soup flavoured with onion, ginger and other herbs and spices.

- The traditional dress of Vietnamese people is very distinctive. Women often wear the traditional tunic known as the Áo dài. Create your own costumes using crêpe paper or some form of malleable and yet durable material. Make a nón lá or non bai tho – the conical hats worn in Vietnam by men and women.
- The geography of Vietnam is very much influenced by the Mekong River which runs from north to south and which generates many occupations such as fishing, agriculture, and tourism. Draw a map of Vietnam featuring the Mekong River. Research other natural features which are considered tourist attractions in Vietnam e.g. Halong Bay.
- Research major figures in the history of Vietnam such as Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) OR Bui Xuan Pha (1920-1988) who is considered the ‘father of modern Vietnamese art’ OR the Trung Sisters (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi) who led the first revolt in Southeast Asia against China and are regarded as national heroines. They died in 43AD.
- Agriculture is very important to Vietnamese people many of whom make their living from growing rice, watercress, etc. They still use traditional farming methods and rely on animals such as the water buffalo for assistance in ploughing and carting loads. Research this topic as well.
- The rich history of the country has left a legacy of architectural treasures, and museums full of art and antiquities. Choose a Vietnamese building or structure which is remarkable, and after researching it give a presentation to the class about it. E.g. The Thai Hoa Palace (The Palace of Supreme Peace) in Hue.
- Tet is the Vietnamese New Year celebration. It falls between the period when crops are harvested and when farmers sow new crops. So it is both practically and symbolically a time of celebrating new hopes. ‘In the ancient times, it was once a custom to provide a carp to the Gods on which they can travel. The carp basically symbolizes the second last stage of the process through which the animals were slowly and gradually transformed into dragons.’ Tet Vietnamese New Year <http://www.123newyear.com/vietnamese-new-year/> Discuss such customs with students. How do we celebrate New Year in Australia?

Racial and Ethnic Difference

- ‘I had different food to the other kids and some of them laughed at me.’ Why would students laugh at someone just because they are different? Discuss sharing different cultural experiences and what students learn from them.

- What differences might students have observed in Anh? For example, his food, and his uniform are mentioned. What else might students have noticed about him?
- Read more about Vietnamese life and culture. What might have seemed strange to Anh and his family about life in Australia?

SOSE (VALUES)

Compassion

- Encourage students to think about how they would feel in someone like Anh's position, in the various situations detailed in this book. E.g. How would you make a new student at school feel welcome?
- Write a fictional story as if you were a person arriving at a new school where you know no one. Create a situation in which you are both helped and hindered in your efforts to fit in, by the reactions of classmates.

Fear and Resilience

- Invite students to discuss how they might have felt if a pirate attacked the ship they were travelling in? What might be the best reaction when you are confronted by an aggressor? What might be the worst?
- What gives people in such dangerous situations the strength to go on? Does the book give you any indication of how Anh's family overcame their fear?

Hope

- Mum said, 'We are so lucky to be alive and living in this beautiful country. There are many people much worse off than us.' This is a wonderful philosophy for life. Whenever you have a problem, think about those who are suffering in war, famine, floods, tsunamis etc. Discuss.
- Discuss the word 'hope' with your students. Ask them what gives them hope? What do they hope for?