

# What about Thao?

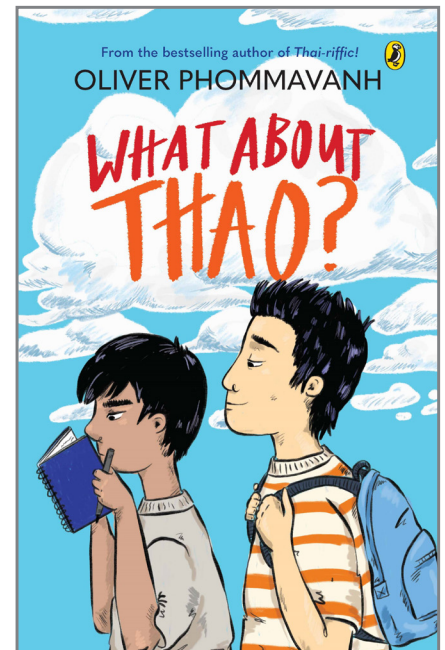
AUTHOR

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

*What About Thao?* is about the beginnings of an enduring friendship between the two new kids, Thao and Kadir, in a small country town, Megulla.

This tiny community is turned upside down when two new families move in. One Australian-Vietnamese family escaping the busy city lifestyle, and a Syrian family, escaping their war-torn country. Both families are looking for a peaceful and quiet life, and trying to fit into new surroundings, even more so for the Syrian boy Kadir who struggles to find peace in his heart.

Thao and Kadir are both yearning to fit in. Thao is a city kid looking to belong in a rural town, who wonders why Kadir has chosen him to be his only friend. Thao helps his new friend find his voice through his love of words and poetry, realising in the process that his own migrant experience is not so different from Kadir's.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver is a young Thai-Australian writer for children. He has featured in school sessions and on panels at the Sydney Writers' Festival among many other appearances at festivals and writing events, plus in blogs. He has worked as a primary school teacher and a stand-up comedian, and now spends his time writing and sharing his writing passion with kids and engaging them with humour.

Oliver's first book, *Thai-riffic!*, drew much from his own life growing up as a Thai-Australian, and he has continued to focus on kids from different cultural backgrounds, dealing with the everyday fun and worries of school and family in his books *Con-nerd*, *Super Con-nerd*, *Punchlines*, *Thai-no-mite*, *The Other Christy*, *Natural Born Loser*, *Don't Follow Vee*, Ethan in the *Stuff Happens* series, and in his short story collection, *Brain Freeze*.

## STUDY NOTES

- How many cultures/nationalities do you have in your class? At your school?
- Thao often thinks people are saying he's different because he's Asian, but it's more that he's a 'city slicker'. What other kinds of identities can you have? eg. a city or country person, a cat or dog person, a footy supporter, etc
- Thao just wants Kadir to fit in at school and in town. What would it take for you to belong to your own school or area if you were new?
- Thao experiences a little hostility about his own cultural background. What would you do if you had a similar

- experience?
- Thao's mum says sometimes people say mean things because they don't understand. How could you make someone who is being racist or unkind better understand about another person's culture?
  - Kadir says that he reached out to Thao because he's different like him. What are the similarities between Kadir and Thao? What are the differences?
    - Create a venn diagram showing these similarities and differences between Thao and Kadir.
  - Food is a big thing when it comes to introducing people to different new cultures. List the foods mentioned in the book, in particular the Vietnamese and Syrian foods. What kind of food could you bring to a multicultural feast/ Harmony Day or an event to show your own culture?
  - Discuss how might you feel (or did feel) as a new kid at school? What would you be worried or scared about?
  - Isaac and Jess welcome Thao to the school with a tour. Describe how you would do a tour of your own school. What kind of secrets or quirks would you show them? How would you make a new kid feel welcome at school?
  - Imagine if you were the new kid to a different country or even a different planet. What kind of things would you need to get used to in a new place?
  - Compare living in the city and rural areas by creating a list of pros and cons.
  - Thao's family wanted to move to the country. After reading the book, create an argument/persuasive piece trying to convince someone else to do the same thing. You could also make a counter-argument about why living in the city is better than rural life.
  - Van thinks living in a rural town is boring, do you agree/disagree? Why?
  - Megulla school only has twenty-three kids in their whole school. What similarities/differences does this school have with your own? How would you feel if you went to a school like Megulla? Or if you're from a small school, how would you feel going to school like the city school Thao has come from?
  - Create a brochure of a made-up small town like Megulla. What would you include to attract people to come to the town? Is it the food, the attractions (such as a big statue or art silo) or an event like a festival?
  - Look up images of 'big' things in Australia (or the world), what is the most amusing 'big' thing you've seen?
    - Choose a town in Australia (without a big thing) and find an attraction or something the town is known for that could be featured as a big thing.
  - The Mafi family have come from a war-torn country to live in Australia. Create a mood board on how you think the Mafi family might be feeling when they arrive in Australia. How would Kadir feel in particular?
  - Thao has to ask his parents about how his family came to Australia. Who would you have to ask/where would you get information about how your own family came to Australia?
  - If possible, interview someone not born in Australia about what it was like to first move to Australia. Where did they live? What did they first do? How did they settle into Australia?
  - The Mafi family represent part of the current wave of refugees coming to re-settle in Australia. What are some of the previous nationalities/cultures of refugees who have come to Australia?
  - How does Kadir use poetry to express himself? Analyse one of Kadir's poems to see what he's trying to say/how he feels.
  - Re-read the 'What About Thao?' poem on pp 205–206. What is Thao trying to say about his experience with Kadir?
  - Re-read 'The Quiet' poem on p 207–208. What does Kadir like about The Quiet?
  - Re-read Chapter 18 (pp 127–134), then do the poetry activity described on p 130 where you find an image around the school (or on the internet) to match your colour/mood as inspiration for a poem.
  - Either using some of the poems in *What About Thao?* or poems written in the above activity, have your own poetry slam performance in class or for a school assembly.
  - Find a jingle on YouTube and re-write the lyrics to make it a different and sillier song. Let your imagination go wild!
  - Do you have a hidden talent like making up silly songs or maybe dances that you're afraid to tell others? Why?
  - Make a web diagram between all the Year 6 kids we're introduced to in Megulla school, what common interests do they have? What makes them friends?
  - Why does Thao feel like he's getting a second chance at making friends, being in Megulla School?

- What are some of Thao's concerns about making friends in a small rural town like Megulla?
- Isaac says that in a small town, you don't get to choose your friends, you have no choice but to get along. Would you agree with him? Do you think it would be easier or harder to be friends with kids in a smaller school/town?