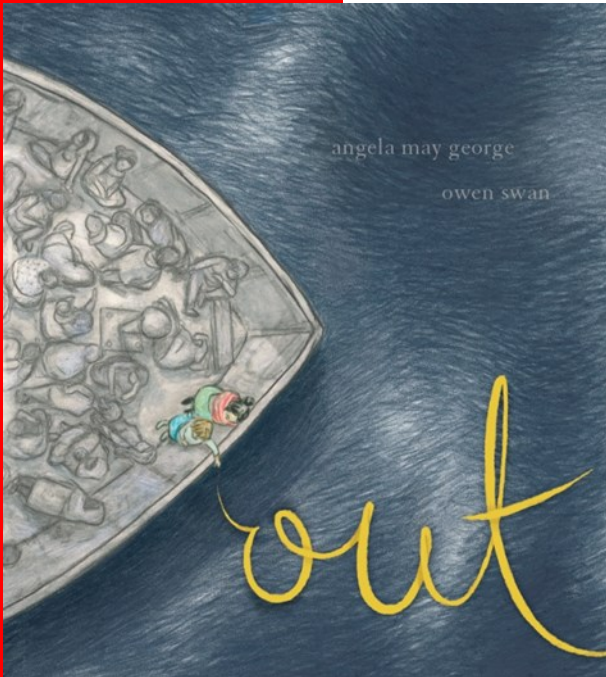


# OUT

ANGELA MAY GEORGE | OWEN SWAN (Illustrator)



ISBN: 9781743629000

RRP: \$24.99

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury

*I'm called an asylum seeker, but that's not my name.*

A little girl and her mother have fled their homeland, making the long and treacherous journey by boat to seek asylum. Timely, powerful and moving, **Out** celebrates the triumph of the human spirit in the darkest times, and the many paths people take to build a new life.

**From the author:** When I was a teenager my mum worked at a high school that taught numerous migrant and refugee adolescents. One particular story that she told stayed with me into adulthood. There was a boy whose age was unknown, as he had been living in a forest for many, many years after being separated from his family during a time of conflict in his home country. This boy survived in the forest and was fortunate to come to Australia as a refugee. His experience of life was so different from my own.

I wondered about him, and more broadly, I began to wonder about all the children and their parents who needed to flee their home countries. This remarkable young man returned to the school a few years after his final year to introduce his fiancée to his old teachers. Not only had he survived the journey OUT, he was now flourishing in this new country.

Some stories need to be told. I believe this is one of those stories.



SCHOLASTIC

**From the illustrator:** In the opening image the girl is alone in a somewhat unattractive, generic urban setting of shopfronts, advertising, graffiti & traffic - big cities anywhere can sometimes feel cold and indifferent, especially if you're new to them. I hoped to show her as still feeling lost out in the world & far from home, even though she's come to a safer place.

The string motif became central to the illustrations. I'd drawn a friend playing the string game while staying in Germany. She was having fun revisiting childhood with it and had been working with children of refugees and asylum seekers. It struck me in retrospect that children's games seem to be universal. An early drawing showed the mother & daughter playing this game on the boat, as it would be an easy distraction plus also hints at the boredom and long waiting. It's literally a visual 'thread' running through the story but to me it represents the girl's connection to her home and her missing father. Just as simply, it could be a type of security blanket or lucky charm.

There is also a recurring bird image. For the illustration 'I've seen terrible things', I was inspired by a scene in Hitchcock's **The Birds**, of children fleeing a schoolhouse in terror.

The pictures have a rough-around-the-edges look. I felt this was important to the story to keep it looking a bit rough and textured and thrown together – to reflect the roughness and uncertainty of their life on the run. Using a slapdash mix of texta and colour pencil, often on cheap newsprint paper, helped get this effect. It seemed important that things don't ever appear too neat or comfortable. I think it helps emphasise that a connection between family, people, can be the most comfort, most of all when you've become completely dispossessed.

**NOTE:** Educators are advised to be mindful of students' individual circumstances when commencing this unit of study. Students could also encounter distressing information and images in their research—educators should closely supervise any research and possibly curate image and video collections for students to study.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading **Out**, consider the cover design as a class. What do you think this book is going to be about? What gives you this idea? What does the title imply to you? What does the blurb suggest? Have you seen imagery like the cover illustration before? Where?
- Consider the words on the cover that are repeated on the first spread: 'I'm called an asylum seeker, but that's not my name'. We never learn the name of the girl in the story. Why do you think this is? Why does the author include this line but never give the name of the girl? What name would you give the girl?
- The world is currently in the middle of the worst refugee crisis since WWII. With high global levels of poverty and conflict, unprecedented numbers of people are fleeing from their homelands and seeking refuge elsewhere. Begin the unit with a look at refugee statistics. A good place to start is the UNHCR website: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11.html>.

- ◇ From which areas are most refugees coming from?
  - ◇ What is happening in these regions that is driving people to abandon their homes?
  - ◇ Where are the biggest refugee populations?
- What drives people to become refugees? The girl in the story does not explicitly tell the reader what she and her mother are running from, but it is nevertheless suggested in the illustrations and the text. Carefully reread the second, third and eighth spreads of **Out**, paying specific attention to the illustrations, then write a short paragraph speculating on the girl's history.
  - When they are camping in the forest, the girl listens to the river 'for the river knew the way out of the forest'. Why would this be a comfort in an otherwise frightening situation? Have you ever been afraid but taken comfort in a certain noise or item (eg a soft toy)? What did you find comforting about it?
  - Turn to the fourth spread of the book. How has Owen Swan dwarfed the vessel in the illustration? Why do you think the boat is on such a small scale in this image? How do the encroaching storm clouds add to the overall effect of the image?
  - Look at the three spreads that show the people on the boat. Although we can see the girl and her mother in full colour, everybody else on the boat is shown in silhouette and shades of grey. Why do you think this is? Look for some images of refugees in boats online. How do the sheer numbers of people render them almost faceless? Why is it so important to tell their individual



stories as the author does in **Out**?

- In what ways does the eleventh spread of **Out** mirror the seventh spread? Besides the fact that the girl has grown up in the later spread, how does this spread show the passage of time? Think about the composition of both spreads and the use of the yellow ribbon in both.
- Owen has used the same patterns and technique to illustrate Sahraya's car as he did to illustrate the boat earlier in the book. Why do you think this is?
- Look at the composition of the second-last spread. How is light used in this illustration to draw the eye to the doorway? Do you suspect who is on the other side of the doorway before you turn the page? How does the spread suggest what is about to happen even though there is no text?
- Describe the relationship between the girl and her mother. How do the text and illustrations work together to highlight their bond? **Extension exercise:** Rewrite **Out** from the perspective of the girl's mother. What would worry her, give her hope and occupy her mind as time passes? The girl knows her mother is being strong in order to protect her, first as they flee danger, then as they make the transition into their new life. In your new version of the story, try to capture this strength and resilience of the mother.
- Although the girl and her mother finally settle in their new home, they both still feel like something is missing because the girl's father is still not with them. Why is it important for the family to be



complete before they can feel safe and at home? How do you think this would affect a family that has permanently lost one of its members as they try to build a new life in a new home?

- What is the effect of the yellow ribbon motif that runs throughout the book and incorporated into the title text? What does the colour yellow signify? Does this add an extra dimension to the story?
- Follow the flying bird motif throughout the story. It appears on three spreads. Can you find all three appearances? What does this motif signify?
- According to the UNHCR, almost half of the displaced peoples around the world are children. Consider that the girl and her mother are separated from her father before the story even begins. This is a very common situation for refugees, as well as children who are orphaned by conflict or poverty. How are children at a greater risk of danger when they are in situations of homelessness, conflict or without their families?
- The UNCHR also states that children are more resilient in times of trauma than adults often are. How can children in these situations be rehabilitated? How are things like education, community support and playtime integral to helping refugee children overcome their traumatic histories? Using the girl in **Out** as your case study, talk as a class about the transformative and rehabilitative power of schooling, playtime and social support.
- Why is it so important for displaced peoples such as refugees to feel welcome in a new



homeland?

- What is a refugee camp? What are some of the challenges of living in a refugee camp for weeks or even years? Why is this not considered a sustainable solution for refugees? Many organisations such as Engineers without Borders and the Ikea Foundation work hard to bring sustainable resources to refugees who live in these camps, such as suitable housing (<http://www.bettershelter.org/product/>) and sanitation (<http://www.ewb.org.au/whatwedo/education-research>). Imagine you are on the design team of one of these organisations. First, identify one of the needs of refugees living in camps, such as a cooking stove that is safe to use in the cramped camp conditions. In teams of four or five, design a prototype to address this need. Present your design to the rest of the class, outlining the features that make it suitable for use in refugee camps.
- Consider the power of language, which works on two levels in **Out**.
  - ◇ First of all, the girl says 'I'm called an asylum seeker, but that's not my name.' What is the difference between the word 'refugee' and the terms 'asylum seeker', 'boat people' and 'illegal immigrant'? How does each term make you feel towards the subject? How are these words particularly loaded, especially when used in a political context? **Extension exercise:** What other terms can you think of that are used to describe certain groups of people but have different emotions attached to them? Some examples include 'victim' versus 'complainant', 'civilian casualty' versus 'collateral damage', and 'freedom fighter' versus 'guerrilla' or 'separatist'.



- ◇ One of the biggest challenges that new immigrants face is learning the language of a new country. How is language tied to the feeling of home? How do you see the girl's verbal expression changing as the story progresses (eg consider her use of 'my mother' versus 'Mum')? What does this suggest about her adoption of Australia as a new homeland?
- What is Australia's current position on refugees? As a class discuss Australia's refugee policy. Why do you think successive governments have adopted this policy in the face of domestic and international protest and condemnation? What do you think the legacy of this policy will be in years to come?
- What is being done in Australia to help refugees despite the federal policy? You might consider inviting someone from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre or the Refugee Council of Australia to come and speak to the class about the current situation and how they can contribute to existing NGO efforts.
- In pairs, put together a welcome pack for refugee children who have just come to Australia. What sorts of things do you think they will need to help them move past their bad experiences? What typically Australian items would you give them? What can you include that will help them transition into their new environment (eg something to bridge the language barrier)? Include in your pack a letter introducing yourselves and welcoming them to the country.

Copyright © Scholastic Australia, 2016.