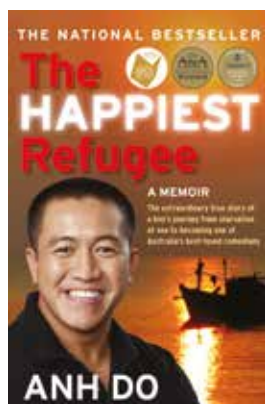


## *The Happiest Refugee*, by Anh Do



**TYPE OF TEXT:** NON-FICTION, MEMOIR

**ORIGIN:** AUSTRALIA

**PUBLICATION DETAILS:** ALLEN AND UNWIN, 2010

**UNIT WRITTEN BY:** JANE SHERLOCK

### Text synopsis

*The Happiest Refugee* is a memoir, written by Anh Do about his life and about his family. The story follows Do's life. It begins when he was a little boy who escaped Vietnam with his family and continues to talk about his current success as a law graduate, comedian and media celebrity.

The family's journey to Australia is full of dramatic and life-threatening events, including two horrifying attacks by pirates, as forty terrified Vietnamese adults and children struggle to survive on a nine-metre boat on the South China Sea. They were rescued by a German ship and taken to the safety of a refugee camp in Malaysia. After some time in the refugee camp, in 1980, the extended Do family arrived in Australia.

In Australia, their place of refuge, they still faced poverty, tragedy, family breakup, racism and cruelty, yet Do's story is not one of sorrow or pity. Their lives are now safe and they have hope. He tells his family's story with genuine humour and shows delightful scenes of fun and family life. The memoir shows the extraordinary courage and resilience of Do's family (and others like them) and is a success story about people who are thankful for the life they now have.

*The Happiest Refugee* helps you understand the challenges many migrants and refugees face. They have to leave the country of their birth, master a new language, earn a living, understand the new society and its culture, and overcome racism.

Sometimes Australians are not as warm and welcoming as you would hope. Reading texts like this one helps people to understand the different people living in Australia and see the migrants' point of view. Such texts help foster social inclusion by reducing ignorance.

*The Happiest Refugee* has been extraordinarily successful since its publication in 2010. It has won many awards, including the 2011 Australian Book of the Year, Biography of the Year and Newcomer of the Year, as well as the Non-Fiction Indie Book of the Year Award 2011. It was also shortlisted for the 2011 New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Community Relations Commission Award.

# Links to Australian Curriculum: English at Years 9/10

This unit covers the following strands and sub-strands of the Australian Curriculum: English.

The unit aims to enrich students' understanding of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and incorporates some of the general capabilities.

Language	Literature	Literacy
Language variation and change Language for interaction Text structure and organisation	Literature and context Responding to literature Examining literature Creating literature	Texts in context Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

Cross-curriculum priority links	General capability links
Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia	Literacy Critical and creative thinking Personal and social capability Ethical behaviour Intercultural understanding



## Features to consider

When you read or view a text, it is important to consider when and where the text was created (its background and context), and how the text is structured. These features help your understanding and analysis, and lead to a more informed evaluation and response.

### Background and context

When studying a memoir, it is valuable to know as much as you can about the person who wrote it. It is also valuable to gather more information about significant events that influenced the memoir—in this case, the Vietnam War, the subsequent exodus of people fleeing Vietnam, and Australia's migration policies.

#### Anh Do

[Anh Do] <http://www.anhdo.com.au/anh-do-inspirational-keynote.php> was born in 1977 in South Vietnam. He came to Australia as a refugee when he was two years old.

He won a part scholarship to attend St Aloysius at North Sydney and graduated with a combined business/law degree from the University of Technology in Sydney. He left his career as a lawyer to become a stand-up comedian. He is now a father of three young boys, a successful stand-up comedian, a film writer and producer, and a popular television personality who has appeared on shows like *The Footy Show*, *Thank God You're Here*, *Dancing with the Stars* and *Anh Does Vietnam*.

His brother, Khoa Do, is a film director, and Anh has acted in several of Khoa's films, including *Footy Legends*, which Anh co-wrote and produced. Do has also appeared in a number of other films, including the television series *Double the Fist* (2008), and the movie *Little Fish* (2005).

#### Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was the longest major conflict in which Australia was involved. Australian forces served in Vietnam from 1962 until 1973. It was also probably the most controversial as, towards the end of Australia's involvement in the conflict, opposition increased, resulting in large protest marches in major Australian cities.

The Vietnam War was the first war to be televised. Real footage from the battlefield was regularly shown on the evening television news, giving many Australians first-hand and often graphic insights into the war and warfare.

It was also a war where new weapons, especially chemical weapons, were used. The effect of these weapons on Vietnamese villages and people was devastating. More than 72 million litres of toxic chemicals were sprayed in Vietnam and over 50 per cent of the mangrove forests were destroyed. In just two years, 1968 and 1969, over 2 million tonnes of bombs were dropped by the American and Australian air and naval forces. Over the entire conflict, this total was over 14 million tonnes of bombs. Over 80 per cent of Vietnamese people were farmers, so the shelling and deforestation of farmland left many Vietnamese not only without a home but also without a livelihood.

Approximately 3.5 million people were killed in the Vietnam War. Approximately 60 000 Australians served in Vietnam, more than 3000 were wounded and 521 died as a result of the conflict.



A South Vietnamese mother struggles to escape across a flooded river with her four children.

### Vietnamese refugee crisis

The aftermath of the Vietnam War motivated many people in Vietnam to leave their country seeking safety and a better life.

Surprisingly, few people fled Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The enormous wave of refugees from Indochina started after the war, beginning in 1975 when totalitarian communist governments had control of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and forced millions to flee. *The Happiest Refugee* begins in 1976 in Saigon (current-day Ho Chi Minh City). The Vietnam War has ended and the country is in turmoil as the brutal communist government tries to impose its new regime.

Two million Vietnamese people became refugees. Many, like Do's family, fled their country in small, overcrowded, substandard boats. Some boats made it to the safety of neighbouring countries like Malaysia. Other boats made it as far as northern Australia. However, in trying to cross the South China Sea, many people died, the victims of unseaworthy boats and pirates. Some refugees spent years in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, before finally being allowed to resettle in other countries like Australia.

In the ten years from 1976, approximately 94 000 refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam settled in Australia. Only a very small number of these, about 2000 people, came to Australia by boat.

## Australia's migration policy

Australia has a long history of welcoming people who have lost their homes and livelihoods, especially through the devastation of war and harsh political regimes. People have had to flee their homes because they fear for their lives, often because they belong to a political, religious or cultural group that is being persecuted in their country of origin.

Australia's permanent migration program is divided into two main categories:

- 'migration', which is for skilled migrants, migrants joining family members already in Australia, and a small group of special eligibility migrants
- 'humanitarian', which is for refugees and others in humanitarian need.

One of the largest waves of migrants to Australia was immediately after World War II. Many people in Europe were displaced by the conflict and found themselves in temporary accommodation in displaced persons camps. The displaced included people freed from Nazi concentration camps and people who had fled the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Australia needed workers and actively encouraged migrants to come here, often by offering to pay the migrants' passage. Between 1947 and 1954, 170 000 displaced persons were resettled in Australia. Since World War II, Australia has welcomed more than 700 000 refugees and people in humanitarian need.

The huge number of refugees in the period immediately after World War II caused the international community to define refugees. The United Nations 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as a person who has a:

*well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.*

In Australia today, there are ongoing debates about our migration policies, including Australia's capacity and desire to accept refugees.

### The history of Vietnam, refugees and migration

Look online to learn more about the history of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese migrants and refugees in Australia:

- The [Department of Veterans' Affairs] <http://vietnam-war.commemoration.gov.au/vietnam-war/> and the [Australian War Memorial] <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam.asp> have informative websites that document Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.
- Melbourne's [Immigration Museum], <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/your-questions/refugees/> part of [Museum Victoria], <http://museumvictoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?pid=97> has an excellent site dedicated to immigration in Australia.
- A report by ABC News, ['The Luckiest Refugees'], <http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/the-luckiest-refugees/> tells the story of another group of Vietnamese refugees.
- The Refugee Council of Australia's [website] <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/myth-long.php> provides insights into the myths that surround the refugee debate in Australia today and detailed information about the numbers of refugees who have come to Australia.



## Text structure

### A memoir

*The Happiest Refugee* is a memoir. A memoir is a written account of a person's memories. It can share similarities with an autobiography and be primarily about the person's life and experiences, or it can be about a subject that is very familiar to the writer, where the writer can rely on their own memories of events. The main feature of a memoir is that it is told from memory and personal knowledge.

A memoir can be similar to an autobiography, but it is usually less formal and more anecdotal, and does not rely so much on formally documented records as it does on memory. One thing common to most memoirs and autobiographies is the use of the first-person narrative, which Do uses in *The Happiest Refugee*.

Like a novel, a memoir can be structured and organised in many different ways. The writer can choose to reveal memories chronologically, to move backwards in time by including flashbacks, or to randomly scatter memories and anecdotes. A memoir differs from fiction in that a memoir is based on the actual events of a person's life and the real social and historical events he or she experiences.

*The Happiest Refugee* is a memoir of the best kind. Do's recount is both interesting and entertaining, and sometimes heart-wrenching. He shares insights about himself and the factors that shaped him, such as the challenges his mother faced when her husband left. Do's mother worked as a seamstress in harsh conditions, and her experiences inspired a young Do to seek ways of making extra money to help his family.

Do's memoir also gives you valuable insights into the effects of the Vietnam War, the plight of refugees and the resilience of families like Do, as they try to make a new life for themselves in an unfamiliar country.

Memoirs are growing in popularity as their informality and personal stories suit many readers. You might have read other memoirs and enjoyed getting to know more about the writer and the times they lived in.

### Structure of the memoir

*The Happiest Refugee* is made up of a prologue and twelve chapters, which tell the story of Do and his family until 2010, when the book was published. At the end of the book, Do is enjoying a family outing on a small boat. Do has come a long way from the day his mother tried desperately to stop a two-year-old Do crying as the family secretly escaped Vietnam. His words act as an epilogue for his family's journey:

*I look across the water and am mesmerised by the beauty of this magnificent setting. My parents set off on a boat trip many years ago to provide their children and grandchildren a better life. And here we are, thanks to them, enjoying this perfect day. (p. 229).*

The prologue, which opens the book, starts well into the story when Do is twenty-one. He is racing to Melbourne to visit his estranged father, who he had not seen in nine years. As the story unravels in later chapters, you learn the reasons for the tensions between Do and his father. At the same time, Do also shares his heartfelt love and gratitude for his father.

Chapter 1 establishes the historical context—it is 1976 and the Vietnam War is over, but South Vietnam and its capital city, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), are in turmoil. After the war, the communists are in power, people are being forced into communist re-education camps or just disappearing, and corruption is widespread. It is in this time of chaos that Do's parents meet and marry.

In the early chapters, Do talks about his father's bravery and foolhardy courage, and his mother's devotion and resilience. A few years after their marriage, in 1980, with relatives imprisoned in re-education camps, the family decides to flee this awful regime. The Do family members pool their money to gain passage on a tiny boat with forty other desperately frightened but determined people.

The recount of the huge storm, which amazingly does not destroy their boat, is powerful:

*A deafening darkness. Mum felt like a blind woman groping wildly amidst flailing arms and knees and hair, all the sounds intensified by her loss of sight. She could hear her babies screaming with terror; others were moaning, praying, shouting; wood was cracking under the full force of the sea smashing against our little wooden boat. (p. 16)*

When you think the family cannot endure any more after the storm, pirates attack. Pirates make two violent attacks, which are extraordinary both for the courage shown by the refugees and for the callous cruelty of the pirates:

*Suddenly guns were lifted and machetes raised. The robbery now turned into a full-blown standoff: nine men with weapons against thirty-seven starving refugees, a baby dangling over the ocean, and a naked woman awaiting hell. (p. 23)*

Do makes a point of telling you that as the pirates leave them for dead, one of the younger pirates throws a gallon of water to the frightened people: 'That water saved our lives ... That second pirate attack saved our lives' (p. 24).

You then follow the Do family to the refugee camp in Malaysia and their arrival in Sydney in August 1980. The chapters that follow recount the many acts of kindness the family receive from organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, and the homes the Do family moves to in and around Sydney. Do's parents establish a sewing business, working long hours in difficult circumstances for meagre pay. The boys gain part-scholarships to attend high school at St Aloysius, but the family always faces financial challenges. You are often in awe of the family's resilience.

The failure of the duck farm is a turning point for the family: 'It all went downhill after that' (p. 61). It had been going well, but Do's father and uncle buy contaminated feed, which causes several thousand ducks to die. The death of the ducks, combined with the economic climate of the time, forces them to sell the farm at a loss. The failure of their farm strains the uncles' relationship, and you see Do's father struggling to cope with guilt.

In spite of the family's hardships, the memoir includes many warm and moving anecdotes about the family's life. You laugh with Do as he recounts his youthful business ventures, and you sense the genuine love and admiration he has for his mother when he is able to buy her first house. You rejoice at the happiness Do finds in his marriage to Suzie Fletcher and the birth of their three sons.

In the final chapters, Do, with characteristic humour and self-deprecation, tells of some of his current media success.

Be sure to take time to look at the informative photographs and captions in the book.

## Interpret, analyse, evaluate

During your reading of *The Happiest Refugee*, consider the language Do uses to keep your interest. He uses humorous anecdotes and a conversational style as he openly shares his life. How he has written his story shapes your response, encouraging you to admire his family's courage, strength and determination.

Like other memoirs and autobiographies, *The Happiest Refugee* is written from the first-person perspective of Do. Do writes in an informal and conversational style, which conveys a strong sense of his voice and is as if he is talking to a friend. Writing as a first-person narrator allows Do to draw you in, as though you are his close confidant and he is speaking directly and only to you. It gives the memoir its warmth and intimacy, and makes readers feel a personal connection with Do.

He is open and honest, such as when he describes his love of drama lessons at school:

*For that brief double period of make-believe you got to float away on an intoxicating bubble of imagination. (p. 77)*

You feel privileged to share his ideas and emotions, especially when he candidly writes about moments of his life that must have been particularly difficult, such as when his father reappears unannounced:

*It's hard to describe how strange it feels when you cross that line. When you break through having a fear of your father and decide that you're ready and willing to hurt him. (p. 72)*

The most engaging language feature of *The Happiest Refugee* is Do's use of humour to convey observations about growing up Asian in Australia. His humour is often at his own expense, and this self-deprecating humour—his ability to laugh at himself—is a quality that Australians admire in others.

His understated humour is effective, particularly when recalling sad and moving experiences. As a young boy, he is determined to help his mother with her sewing business. Somehow, Do manages to turn even a childhood injury into humour.

*The machine roared into action, sucked up three feet of material and my little seven-year-old left hand with it, neatly cross-stitching that soft bit of skin between the thumb and index finger to the cuff of a sky-blue business shirt. In seconds I had become a huge, kid-sized cufflink accessory, one that made a howling noise and bled everywhere. (p. 36)*

Do's recollection of his mother's speech at his engagement party is delightful in its ability to convey his mother's poor, accented English, her pride in her son and her determination to speak eloquently in the elegant house of Do's future in-laws. The party guests were brought to tears by her speech:



*'My son lup your dotter berry much. Anh tek care of Suzie like he tek care of us. He will lup her like he lup his family.'* (p. 157)

His attention to detail allows him to share descriptions of events that are all the more moving because they are true. When the boatload of refugees is attacked by pirates, an angry pirate plans to use his machete to cut off the arm of an old lady, Bao, so he can steal her bracelet:

*My Auntie Huong stepped in and greased the old lady's wrist with a handful of day-old vomit, a makeshift lubricant. The bracelet slipped off reluctantly ... Then they [the pirates] were gone.* (p. 21)

Do's effectiveness at re-creating simple family events and describing colourful family members adds to the memoir's charm and heart-warming quality. When he writes about the family being dressed by St Vincent de Paul, you enjoy images of his little brother Khoa wearing pretty, girly dresses; Uncle Huy in women's jeans; and Uncle Dung buying a fur jacket for fifty cents for a girlfriend he does not yet have:

*Uncle Dung was especially thrilled as one day he would meet a beautiful woman and he'd be ready for her, with his generous fifty-cent gift.* (p. 30)

The descriptions of his much-loved grandmother are delightful. Do tells how she converts every backyard they have into a 'Saigon paddy with eggplants, snakebeans, basil, Vietnamese mint, melons and limes' (p. 63). The descriptions of his diminutive grandmother—playing his Nintendo while sitting on a stack of Yellow Pages telephone directories, and singing karaoke with a can of VB—are gems. Also hilarious is the description of his grandmother, unable to read English, inadvertently wrapping three snapper heads in his Australian citizenship certificate: 'I'd left the certificate lying among some Kmart pamphlets, which she thought were perfect for wrapping up fish heads' (p. 65).

Given the family's hardships, Do's tale must also include recounts of less humorous experiences, including some encounters with racism. Until the arrival of Vietnamese people, Asian families living in Australia had not been common. Unfortunately, many of the Vietnamese arrivals were the victims of the xenophobia of some Australians, who were racist, prejudiced and abusive. (Xenophobia is ignorant and poorly educated people's fear or dislike of people who are from a different country or culture.) In *The Happiest Refugee*, Do does not dwell on such experiences, but he does provide brief glimpses, such as when he explains the racism of his Year 9 history teacher (p. 104) and the racist comments from the opposing football team: 'I'm going to smash the gook' (p. 105). Do also tells about almost not being allowed into a venue where he had been booked to do a stand-up comedy routine; the security guard did not want to allow him into the club, announcing, 'We don't really like your types in here' (p. 179).

Memoirs like *The Happiest Refugee* help you to better understand other people and their lives. Reading about Do's family—their sense of connection and support, their determination and hard work, and their heartfelt gratitude for the lives they now have—helps you to appreciate and recognise what is really important in your own life.

In this memoir, you particularly learn about the adversity faced by migrants and refugees. You realise that Australia has been enriched by the people we have welcomed here and feel proud of contemporary Australia's cultural diversity.

## Text extract

Considering a selected extract of a text in more detail can assist you to better understand the text as a whole.

I played basketball for a while at school. The best way to describe my teammates was by their shoes: three Reebok Pumps, four Air Jordans, and a Nike Max Lite. My shoes were called 'Kind Lion'—someone at the Chinese factory must have stuffed up the translation. My mother bought them from an Asian grocery store in Bankstown for \$15. They featured a lion running across the sides and were made of plastic and vinyl.

The vinyl didn't breathe and the shoes made my feet smell like three-day-old road kill that had been hit while eating parmesan cheese. However, I soon learned that if you played well enough, the other kids would lay off your badly named shoes, and so I decided to practise every day.

We bought a second-hand basketball ring and I bolted it onto the side of the house and shot hoops with Khoa. I'd never put so much practice into a sport, but I had a very good incentive. The school had an endorsement deal with the local sports shop: if any kid reached thirty points in a game, they won a new pair of shoes.

Throughout a whole season there might be only two or three kids who got there. At our level, the whole team together would usually reach only thirty or forty points in total. I was an A's player in the Under 13s, playing with hotshots who were really good. While I was scoring the occasional basket, I was never going to get anywhere near thirty. So at the start of the Under 14s I deliberately played as bad as possible, skipped training sessions, ate pizza just before games, shot poorly, and played lazy in defence. Within a couple of weeks, I had successfully been promoted (at least in my mind) into the Ds.

*Whoo-hoo! Let my season begin!*

I soon learned that it was even harder to score thirty in the Ds than the As because the guys around you were freakin' hopeless. It took me all season to get even close, but my big chance came in the last game of the season against Barker College. With seven minutes to go, I was on twenty-four points.

'This guy is everywhere', my Irish coach shouted out to his bench. 'He deserves a rest. Anh, take a break!' he called to me. I was shattered. He had no idea about the score I was going for. I sat down for about thirty seconds then jumped up again.

'Sir, sir, can I go back on for the last five minutes?'

'Nah, we've got the game won. Relax son—you've earned it.' Luckily, Phil piped up.

'No, sir, you don't understand. Anh's on twenty-four and he only needs six more to win a pair of High Top Reebok Pumps.'

'Jaysus! Why didn't you tell me earlier you daft eediot! Anh, next time-out you're on.'

*New shoes here I come baby!* I leapt on to the court. My teammates knew exactly what was going on.

'Give Anh the shot!'

I had three minutes to score six points, the entire team conspiring to get me there, and a killer hook-shot that no opposition D's player could stop. All I needed was for my shoes to hold up.

The entire season I had punished my kings of the jungle, and they were turning into tired, pissed-off lions that had had a gutful of my stinky feet running them ragged. I'd played the last three games with virtually zero grip left on them, so at every break I ran to the side of the court, poured some lemonade on the ground and then walked around in the puddle to sticky up my soles. On this fateful day, I'd run out of lemonade.

Nooooooooo!

'No worries,' said Phil. 'I'll go buy some from the vending machine.' Phil came back quick smart ... with a can of Diet Coke.

'What?' Where's the lemonade?' I asked.

'You're only going to use a bit of it, I thought I could drink the rest; and my mum wants me to stick to Diet Coke.'

*Whatever*, I thought. *A soft drink is a soft drink*. I poured the Diet Coke onto the ground and gave lion one and lion two a much-needed sip. I handed the can back to Phil, who started guzzling like a thirsty refugee.

'Whoa. Save some for me, Phil. Don't drink it all.'

I rushed back onto the court and in about five seconds I realised something wasn't right. The Diet Coke had absolutely zero effect on my grip. In fact, it seemed to make my shoes glide across the court's surface. I slipped, slid, fell over and played the worst three minutes of my basketball career. My twenty-four points remained just that and I never got those High Top Reebok Pumps with the little orange inflator device. The whistle went at the end of the game and I walked off the court. Everyone was stunned.

'What happened?' says Phil.

'I had no grip whatsoever.'

He looked down at the Diet Coke.

'The stickyness must come from the sugar.' (pp. 86–8)

## Features to consider in this extract

This extract demonstrates a number of the language features that Do uses so effectively: humour, a strong narrative voice and interesting anecdotes. In this extract, you also see how he draws readers into his story. His conversational style makes you feel as if you are there with him as he talks to you.

This anecdote from Chapter 7 is an endearing reflection on Do's family's poverty and his determination to fit in at the elite school to which he won a scholarship. It is a humorous episode, and, yet again, the laughs are at Do's expense. He is in one of the school's basketball teams, and he describes his teammates by the expensive designer shoes they wear: 'three Reebok Pumps, four Air Jordans, and Nike Max Lite' (p. 86). His use of detail—the brand of the boys' shoes—creates a clear image of wealthy, privileged boys. In contrast, his shoes are 'Kind Lion', explaining that 'someone at the Chinese factory must have stuffed up the translation' (p. 86). In his typically self-deprecating style, Anh tells us, 'My mother bought them from an Asian grocery store in Bankstown for \$15. They featured a lion running across the sides and were made of plastic and vinyl' (p. 86).

The humour continues at Do's expense with a description of his cheap Chinese shoes that relies on readers' sense of smell: 'The vinyl didn't breathe and the shoes made my feet smell like three-day-old road kill that had been hit while eating parmesan cheese' (p. 86).

Do quickly works out that the quality of your shoes could be overlooked if you played well enough, so he and his brother practise basketball at home using their second-hand hoop, with the motivation that any student who wins thirty points in a game will have a new pair of shoes from the local sports shop, which sponsors the school's team.

Do seems to accept his family's financial situation, even though it so clearly differs from the extravagance of the rest of the team. In this recount, Do does not judge his school or fellow teammates, nor does he ask for your sympathy. Instead, he makes you recognise the challenges any adolescent boy, regardless of his background, would feel when trying to achieve a longed-for goal—in this case the prize of a new pair of shoes. You laugh with Do rather than at him as you sense his determination to have the shoes that could help him be more like the other boys.

Do tells you about the basketball season that culminates in one final game against another elite school, Barker College. He includes the vernacular of the Irish coach when the coach realises the High Top Reebok Pumps are at stake: 'Jaysus! Why didn't you tell me earlier you daft idiot! Anh, next time-out you're on' (p. 87). The coach and his teammates are on his side, but the punch line is yet to come.

Carried along by the pace of the story of the basketball game, you, like Do, fear that his shoes will not hold up. Trying to give his shoes traction, he pours Diet Coke on the floor and 'gave lion one and lion two a much-needed sip' (p. 88). This cute personification of his Kind Lion shoes adds to the warmth of the story. He also presents a clear visual image through his choice of verbs: 'I *slipped, slid, fell* over and *played* the worst three minutes of my basketball career' (p. 88). The High Top Reebok Pumps remained elusively out of reach because of the lack of sugar in the soft drink.

This story probably features in Do's stand-up comic routine. It offers a light-hearted insight to the challenges the family faced trying to fit in financially, socially and culturally.



## 1 Cover story

A book's front cover is vital to its promotion and is often used on posters, flyers and websites. The cover needs to quickly attract customers' attention and communicate the book's genre and type.

- a** Book covers use both visual and written language. For example, the front cover of *The Happiest Refugee* has a colour scheme that conveys a mood of optimism and enthusiasm, which is reinforced by the smiling photograph of Do.
- i Identify four other visual language features on the cover. Working in small groups, discuss the techniques used in each and how each affects readers.
  - ii Identify the three key words on the front cover that would encourage you to read the book.
- b** The back-cover blurb contains a combination of informative and persuasive language.
- i Print the blurb (reproduced below) and underline three words or phrases that inform you about the book and three that persuade you to read the book.
  - ii Working in groups, discuss what is left out. What would you add or remove from the back cover blurb if the main audience for the memoir was your age group?
  - iii Look at Allen and Unwin's [website] <http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=94&book=9781742372389> and read some of the testimonials from enthusiastic readers of *The Happiest Refugee*. Choose two to include in a revised blurb aimed at an audience your age.
  - iv Write a new blurb better suited to people your age. You can reuse parts of the existing blurb, but add at least three new sentences aimed specifically at your age group.
  - v Would you use the same image on the back cover for an audience your age? (Do is very photogenic and you will find more photographs of him on his [website].) <http://www.anhdo.com.au/>

Anh Do nearly didn't make it to Australia.

*His entire family came close to losing their lives on the seas as they escaped from war-torn Vietnam in an overcrowded boat. But nothing—not murderous pirates, nor the imminent threat of death by hunger, disease or dehydration as they drifted for days—could quench their desire to make a better life in the country they had dreamed about.*

*Life in Australia was hard; an endless succession of back-breaking work, crowded rooms, ruthless landlords and make-do everything. But there was a loving extended family, and always friends and play and something to laugh about for Anh and his brother and sister. Things got harder when their father left home when Anh was 13—they felt his loss very deeply and their mother struggled to support the family on her own.*

*His mother's sacrifice was an inspiration to Anh and he worked hard during his teenage years to help her make ends meet, also managing to graduate from high school and then university. Another inspiration was the comedian Anh met when he was about to sign on for a 60-hour-a-week corporate job. Anh asked how many hours he worked. 'Four,' the answer came back, and that was it. He was going to be a comedian!*

*The Happiest Refugee tells the incredible, uplifting and inspiring life story of one of our favourite personalities. Tragedy, humour, heartache and unswerving determination—a big life with big dreams. Anh's story will move and amuse all who read it.*

## 2 Award winner

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has a program to foster cultural diversity, increase understanding and share inspirational human stories.

Imagine *The Happiest Refugee* has been nominated for the UNESCO Award for Multicultural Understanding.

In an email to the UNESCO judging panel, outline the reasons why *The Happiest Refugee* should win the award. Consider how the memoir provides insight into Do's life and the challenges refugees face. In your email, refer to events and experiences from the text to support your argument.

### 3 Interview the author

When *The Happiest Refugee* was first published, it won a number of prestigious awards. Many television and radio broadcasters courted Do to be interviewed.

Leigh Sales interviewed Do for ABC Television's 7.30 on 26 July 2011. Watch the interview and read the transcript on the ABC's [website]. <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2011/s3278641.htm> Then, working in groups, write three more questions and Do's likely responses. Base Do's responses on what you have learnt about him from reading *The Happiest Refugee*.

### 4 Multimodal presentation

Working in small groups, research and create a multimodal presentation on one of the following topics. Think of an interesting title for your presentation and include relevant images.

#### a An insight into Vietnam

This topic is intentionally broad so you can focus on *one* aspect that interests you in your research. Your presentation could include information and images of Vietnamese landscapes, people, food, cultures or customs. It could also be interesting to look at the poetry, art or literature of Vietnam, both traditional and contemporary. Include facts about the country, its people, its government, its geography, its history and how it is now emerging as a successful economic entity.

#### b The plight of refugees in Australia

Many people find the issue of refugees confusing or alarming because of myths and misinformation. Sort through the misinformation to find the real facts. The following questions will help guide your research.

- i How has the media represented the issue of refugees in Australia? Research recent media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees, including newspaper editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor.
- ii Find information and statistics about the numbers of refugees who come to Australia and where they come from. What is happening in their home countries to cause them to flee? What happens to some of these families months or years after they have settled in Australia?

#### c How songwriters and poets have captured the Vietnam War and Australia's involvement

As a starting point, read or listen to these poems and songs:

- 'Homecoming' by Bruce Dawe
- 'Weapons Training' by Bruce Dawe
- 'Vietnam Postscript, 1975' by Bruce Dawe
- 'I Was Only 19' by Redgum (and covered by The Herd)
- 'Khe Sahn' by Cold Chisel.

Find images to represent and reinforce the ideas, images and issues in the songs and poems.

### 5 Dr Charlie Teo



Watch the 2012 Australia Day speech by well-known neurosurgeon Dr Charlie Teo, whose Singaporean-Chinese parents immigrated to Australia, or read the transcript [online]. <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/australia-day-2012-address-full-speech-20120123-1qdh9.html>

In his speech, Teo describes his life and the challenges of growing up Asian in Australia. He is concerned that there is still some racism in Australia, but even so he thinks Australian people are wonderful and Australia is 'the greatest place on Earth to live'.

- a** Why do you think he was chosen to present this speech on Australia Day?
- b** Print a copy of the transcript of his speech and underline the five arguments he makes about Australia and his experiences. Identify five language choices he makes to present his ideas and attitudes.
- c** Write an 800-word analysis of his speech, discussing its purpose, audience and language choices. Alternatively, write a 150–200 word letter to the editor of a major broadsheet newspaper. In your letter share your response to his speech. Before writing your letter, study similar letters to the editor in a variety of newspapers to see their tone and style.



PAGE PROOFS

## Texts to take you further: Asia

*The Happiest Refugee* takes you into the world of a family that overcomes extreme adversity to come to Australia. Their difficulties are not over when they arrive, but their optimism, humour, resilience and gratitude are endearing and inspiring.

Other texts explore the interesting intersection between cultures—such as Camilla Gibb’s modern novel of Vietnam, *The Beauty of Humanity Movement: A Novel*, and Li Cunxin’s compelling autobiography, *Mao’s Last Dancer*, which follows Cunxin’s early life in China and later ballet career in the United States of America and Australia. Kathryn Lomer’s novel *The Spare Room* explores some similar territory, as Akira comes to Hobart from Japan to stay with a host family while he learns English.

Different cultures can also be a stimulus for fantasy writers, such as Lian Hearn, who wrote the Japanese-inspired Tales of the Otori series, and Alison Goodman, who wrote *Eon and Eona*, set in a mythical China.

Alice Pung’s collection of migrant experiences in *Growing up Asian in Australia* allows readers to walk in the shoes of others—not always a comfortable experience, but one that builds empathy and understanding. Participants in and viewers of the television series *Go Back to Where You Came From* also discover this.

Film often effectively captures different cultural experiences. *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Monsoon Wedding* give you the colour, sounds and flavours of India, and a look at that country’s rich traditions and beliefs.

The first episode of the online digital novel, *Inanimate Alice*, provides a brief multimodal taste of China.

### Fiction

- Brian Caswell and David Phu An Chiem, *Only the Heart*
- Camilla Gibb, *The Beauty of Humanity Movement: A Novel*
- Alison Goodman, *Eon and Eona*
- Lian Hearn, Tales of the Otori series
- Kathryn Lomer, *The Spare Room*
- Sally Rippin, *Chenxi and the Foreigner*

### Non-fiction

- Peter Carey, *Wrong about Japan*
- Li Cunxin, *Mao’s Last Dancer*
- Alice Pung (ed.), *Growing up Asian in Australia*

### Picture books

- Dianne Wolfer and Brian Harrison-Lever, *Photographs in the Mud*

### Film

- *Bend It Like Beckham*, directed by Gurinder Chadha
- *Footy Legends*, directed by Khoa Do
- *House of Flying Daggers*, directed by Zhang Yimou
- *Mao's Last Dancer*, directed by Bruce Beresford
- *Monsoon Wedding*, directed by Mira Nair
- *Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan

### Television series

- [Go Back to Where You Came From], <http://www.sbs.com.au/goback/> (SBS documentary) directed by Ivan O'Mahoney

### Digital

- [Inanimate Alice] <http://www.inanimatealice.co> 'Episode 1: China'
- [Making Multicultural Australia] <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au>

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