Kelly

by Monique Thuy-Dung Truong

Dear Kelly,

I am writing to say you and I are still entwined in a childhood we would rather forget. A childhood we would rather let lie underneath the leaves of the white oaks that stand guard around Boiling Spring's town square.

It has been four years since I've written to remind you of our bond. Have you noticed that each of these letters has been written in the sweet and early days of spring? That's when the daffodils are in full bloom. They are yellow, blinding, and looking like artificial teacups and saucers in a fabled toy set given to girls with pretty hair all tied up in ribbons. They, the daffodils not the girls, are the same ones that lived ever so precariously on the patches of green grass that was my sidewalk along the one-lane road leading to school. I write to remind us of the fat girl and the freak who were so much of you and me in that place of learning about nothing but that both our tears were salty and that even together we couldn't cry a cupful of tears.

I'll tell our story from the beginning less we forget and let all that pain slip underneath the leaves of the white oaks.

You see, I was lost because my parents were lost in a place that they had never heard of and had never planned to be. The United States, you understand, is a place marked by New York City on the Atlantic side, with a middle filled in by Chicago and The Alamo, and then Los Angeles is on the Pacific closing it all in. The United States for those who have been educated by the flicker of Hollywood is a very short book. No one in Saigon bothered to read the footnotes; they were too busy looking at the pictures. Boiling Spring, North Carolina is a footnote that I wished to God my parents had read before setting forth to this place that had not changed since the Civil War.

Kelly, that town was named for a hole in the ground encased in a gazebo chipping off coats after coats of summer whites. There was something hot and still about that gazebo, and if we both stood dead silent we could hear a single bubble gurgling to the surface. I think we saw that damn spring boil once during my four years of paying homage to the South and to its fine and hospitable families.

We, my family not you and me, were driven into town sometime in the deep of summer in 1975. You don't know this but I keep telling you that the summer of 1975 was earth shattering. It wasn't the heat that had cracked and blistered the whole of the United States of which the South is a blood red caboose.

I am afraid it was me.

Kelly, remember how Mrs. Hammerick talked about Veteran's Day? How about the Day of Infamy when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor? Mrs. Hammerick, you know, the mayor's wife always had a sweet something surrounding her like she had spent too much time pulling taffy. She'd open her beautiful painted lips and talk all about the fighting and the glory of the good old Red, White and Blue, but Pearl Harbor stuck to her lower lip like nothing I've ever seen not even taffy. Mrs. Hammerick, with her curlicue's waxed to the side of her face, would never look at me when she said those two words, but I knew, Kelly, that she wanted to take me outside and whip my behind with that paddle with Boiling Spring Elementary School printed on it in black letters.

I don't think you ever knew the anger that lay underneath that beehive of Mrs. Hammerick. Kelly, you only knew that she liked the Beths and the Susans cause they wore pink and never bulged and buckled out of their shirt plackets. I was scared of her like no dark corners could ever scare me. You have to know that all the while she was teaching us history she was telling, with her language for the deaf, blind and dumb; she was telling all

the boys in our class that I was Pearl and my last name was Harbor. They understood her like she was speaking French and their names were all Claude and Pierre. I felt it in the lower half of my stomach, and it throbbed and throbbed until I thought even you sitting three rows away could hear it.

So it was me, Kelly.

It would be so many years after I said good-bye to you, with you talking all the while about someday skating in the Olympics, that I would understand that Pearl Harbor was not just in 1941 but in 1975. Mrs. Hammerick wanted to hit me for everything in between for all the changes in her husband's town and in her little schoolhouse. I wasn't a little black girl with twisted hair and silent reserve. Mrs. Hammerick knew what to do with them, and they knew what to do with her. You see, didn't you, that I was yellow with a wardrobe of matching outfits ordered from Sears Roebuck. Clothes that only a mother would order who had her head in books and her heart in a suitcase ready to go home. Sears Roebuck not even J.C. Penny, Kelly.

But I guess it was her books that brought you and me together. I think you and I would have had to find each other anyway, but I like to tell our story this way, you know, like it was destiny and not necessity. My mother was so beautiful when she wasn't crying or worrying. She didn't turn any heads, though, cause Gardner Webb was a true Southern Baptist college where women were white or they weren't at all. And my father, he was there hovering and running around like he was playing dodge ball with the entire campus. You and I were library kids, do you remember that? Sometimes, I feel like I'm the only one left talking and writing about us. Sometimes, I know you're wearing some pretty dark glasses hoping that I won't recognize that you were the fat girl and that I was your friend.

Reading, you know we were only looking at the pictures, from one explorer to the next, lots of Spaniards and Italians one after the other; we met at Amerigo Vespucci. You were scared, and your eyes showed it like a tv screen. I had only been in North Carolina for a summer, but I saw your brown eyes staring at me and I knew you thought I should be smelling up that place like I was trash on a ninety degree day. It would take me years to figure it all out. When people like you looked at me and my yellow skin, you didn't see color you saw dirt, and I was a walking pile of it confronting you between the library aisles. You know, I dropped my eyes and then pretended to look for them around my feet.

But like destiny, like it was written in a Grimm's fairy tale, your mamma and mine came to gather their daughters home. I forget, I'm always forgetting the joyous parts, how the words of greetings were exchanged. Your mamma had seen mine and extended a hand, and our friendship was sealed with a maternal handshake and a second glance.

Kelly, you were the fattest girl I had ever seen. I looked at you a third time not knowing how to stop myself. You smiled cause your mamma was smiling. And maybe you had taken a quick snuff and smelled nothing but a nose full of Johnson & Johnson Baby Shampoo. I wanted to laugh cause you looked like that teddy bear that some lady from the church had given me. She didn't think I saw her take it out of the trash bag along with all the kitchen utensils but I did, you know. I never let it lie in my bed, and I didn't give it a name.

I liked your name.

I still use it now when I write about nice girls with brown hair and a tendency to be ten pounds overweight. That summer before school started, I'd spend hours sitting in our trailer home thinking up conversations, like the ones on T.V., with my figment friends. I'd sit on the plastic-covered kitchen chair and feel that coolness of the vinyl disappear underneath me then I'd move to the next. There were only four chairs, and sometimes they didn't get cool again quick enough to keep my pursuit for relief from the July heat going. The couch that the married couple left for my mom and dad for a fee of twenty dollars was like an oven radiating heat. It was covered in a woolly, itchy fabric of furniture meant for a den with five kids to abuse it day in and day out. When our trailer burnt down, I don't think I ever told you about the fire, I was hoping that sweaty piece of furniture had gone up in flames emitting toxic waste for miles and for days, but the thing was flame-retardant like a dragon with an ungodly protective shield.

I hated our aluminum box. Who the hell thought it would be ideal to live in a heat collecting, linear space, conducive of nothing but the electrical flames that finally charred it? Thank god, living on wheels and dying on

wheels was just not written in my destiny nor yours?

I liked your house.

It had corners and hallways that turned left and right leading into spaces wide and rounded, filled with chintz and cotton-covered furniture nice and cool like indoor swimming pools. Did you know, your refrigerator was also a pool of plenty? There was the purple Kool Aid tasting like bubble gum and cream pies swirled high with Cool Whip. I'll tell you now that we are so far away no longer able to talk except through the stories of the past that we once shared. I'll tell you now that I entered your house and wanted you gone so I alone could wade freely in your concentric rings of luxury.

By the time school started, my family had moved into a brick duplex off of a gravel road so you never saw my aluminum box. It was a secret shared with you only when we became true sleep-over friends. You said only black people lived in trailer homes. I said I wasn't black as if your mamma and poppa would have let me in their house if they thought I was.

Boiling Spring, you know now don't you, is a place that had not changed since the Civil War. That means pre- not post-Civil War. The black families lived where the white families didn't. In school, Mrs. Hammerick never touched the black children not even the girls with their pretty braids sometimes three or four with ends clasped in bright plastic balls. Mrs. Hammerick hugged me once in front of my mother. Her red velveteen blazer with gold reindeer in mid-leap protruding from its lapel covered me and made me forget to breath for almost thirty seconds afterward. The antlers of that reindeer poked ever so menacingly into my right ear waiting for a squeeze to pierce through the cartilage. Kelly, I wanted to spit, you know, like your cat when she gets a throat full of hairballs. Mrs. Hammerick smelling like Oil of Olay and chalk said it was a pleasure to have me in her homeroom. My mother smiled and lead me away with me shaking and scared that Mrs. Hammerick was going to be my homeroom teacher again next year.

Do you remember that crazy little girl Michelle? Her name was Hammerick too, but she was too far from Mrs. Hammerick's relation that no one even through once about the idea.

Michelle lived across from me past a field bordered by patches of wood with honeysuckles and wild blackberries rambling in and out. You don't know this part yet so read carefully cause I may not write it again the next time around. Michelle with her brown hair, brown eyes and brown face was covered in a light layer of gravel, dirt and dust every day of the year. She smelled like a mattress left outside in the elements for far too long. Even you the fat girl and me the freak knew that Michelle was something that the good people of Boiling Spring didn't want to see. Her entire family, a sibling in almost every grade, disturbed an order that struck back by shunning and ignoring them into an oblivion not even you and I understood. Kelly, you think maybe the black girls knew?

Michelle had a mouth like no one I had ever heard. She said words that you knew were dirty even if you didn't know what they meant. It's all in the way she'd spit it out and them smile like we were all going down to hell with her just cause we had been in hearing reach. She'd crawl underneath the tables in reading class and scream dirty, bad, foul, absolutely bright and wonderful words at the rest of us. Mrs. Hammerick would never get down on her knees, but she's always call in our principal. What was his name, Kelly? That man would take off his jacket, roll-up his sleeves, and get down on his knees and drag Michelle out catching her hair in between his fists and her collar. You'd watch with fascination like he was catching a lion. I'd watch with horror thinking all the time about the Day of Infamy.

I liked her.

Michelle would walk through the field that separated our houses and invite me to play house with her siblings. She lived in a huge three-story house with rotting floorboards, mice, lots of ants, and no heat. If I had told you, Kelly, you would have said only black people lived in a house like that.

The most beautiful and fascinating thing in that house was the staircase and its gently curving banister. The wood was so shiny like someone had spilled cooking oil all over it. It was the softest thing in that house filled with children all crying and biting at one another. Michelle's voice was always so hoarse from trying to shut up the rest of the Hammericks. Whenever I came over for a visit, her brothers and sister would all look at me like I was going to explode but never like I would smell like garbage. They'd watch my every movement. Kelly, I think

they were watching my eyes to see if I could open them up any wider than they were already.

I don't remember when you stopped looking at me that way, but I'm sure you did. Maybe, it was at Jennifer's birthday party. You know, the one that her mamma made her invite all the girls in our homeroom to with the invitations with the balloons embossed on the cover. Jennifer must have cried so hard when she realized what that meant. Little Jennifer was going to have the fat girl and the freak at her blessed eighth birthday sleep-over eating her chocolate cake and drinking her strawberry punch. Why did our mammas let us go? None of the black girls in our homeroom came that should have been our sign.

I never felt as much longing, it hurts even more than the sight blooming of daffodils now, as when I saw her bed with its yellow and white lace. It was a bed that Sleeping Beauty or I Dream of Genie would have slept in every night until somebody would change the canopy to a sweet shade of pink. Kelly, remember her dressing room? Jennifer didn't have a closet but a whole room filled with dresses and shoes and a painted cedar chest to sit on when her mamma pulled up her knee socks. Jennifer and her mamma looked just like one another with hair like they were on a shampoo commercial on T.V. Lots of shine and bounce. Wasn't her mamma nice, Kelly? Remember how she sat in the kitchen and talked with us when Jennifer decided that we couldn't play in her tea party.

Kelly, that was when you stopped looking at my eyes waiting for them to do something they could never so.

Your friend,
Thuy Mai

"Kelly" Discussion Questions

1. Can you describe what life was like for Kelly and Thuy Mai while they were growing up in Boiling Spring, North Carolina?

2. Thuy Mai says that the United States is like a book. What do you think she means when she says that people from Vietnam or other countries only look at the pictures? What kinds of images do people try to capture in pictures or photographs? Do you think that life for new immigrants in the U.S. is really like what is in these kinds of pictures?

3. What similarities do the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the war in Vietnam have in common? What are the differences between these two historical events? Why do you think Mrs. Hammerick shows anger towards Thuy Mai for both events and "for everything in between?"

4. How were Kelly, Michelle and Thuy Mai alike? How did different people in Boiling Spring treat them? Which of the three girls was the richest (economically)? Which was the poorest? Did this level of wealth affect how the people of Boiling Spring treated them? How?

5. What was life like in the South before the Civil War? Why does Thuy Mai argue that Boiling Spring has not changed since then?

6. How does Thuy Mai envision Michelle? What qualities about Michelle fascinate her? What about Michelle or how she got treated scare Thuy Mai?

7. Why do you think Thuy Mai still writes to Kelly after all these years? Does it matter whether or not Kelly writes back? What does Thuy Mai gain from writing these letters, even if they never get mailed?

8. What changes can happen to a fat girl, a poor girl or an ethnic minority over time? Are some conditions more static than others?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monique Thuy-Dung Truong is a writer and attorney living in New York City. Her short fiction and essays have appeared in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (University of Cambridge Press, 1997); *Asian American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology* (Harper Collins College Publishers, 1996); The Asian American Experience CD-ROM (Primary Source Media and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1996), and journals such as *Amerasia* and *The Vietnam Forum*. Truong received her B.A. in Literature from Yale University and her J.D. from Columbia University School of Law. She is co-editor of *Watermark: Vietnamese American Poetry & Prose* (Asian American Writers' Workshop, New York, 1998). [This biography is extracted from *Watermark*.]

Family Ties

Exposing the Lighter Side of the Vietnamese American Experience

by Khoi T. Luu

At home this Christmas, I was seated across from my grandmother, eating one of her famous bowls of phσ.[1]

Like all chefs and all grandmothers (or both), she likes to see the glow in my face, to hear the sighs of my delight while I eat. We sat there talking about everything from my studies in college, to Boston weather, to my love life — a young man and his grandmother, decades apart but chatting and laughing like old friends from the same village. I remember noticing the smile lines around her eyes and mouth, like gentle wrinkles on silk. And that's when it struck me: my grandmother — a seventy-two-year-old woman who's witnessed the loss of her husband, her only son, her son-in-law and her country — has survived all these tragedies, and to this day, is strong enough still to laugh and enjoy life for what it is, for what she makes of it. She is irrepressibly, incorrigibly happy. How can I not admire someone like that?

And then I remembered what Huy Thanh Cao, editor-in-chief of *Horizons*, a national magazine based in Southern California dedicated to Vietnamese issues, said in a letter to me about his Vietnamese American experience. "Somewhere along the way, I realized that to be Vietnamese means to endure." Most Vietnamese people — my grandmother and myself included — would acknowledge that suffering and enduring are, indeed, dominant themes of our national experience and character. I myself have thought, written and cried about the tragedies of our people's recent past. My family and I have experienced our burden of that collective pain, more than we ever asked for.

But must endurance be coupled with perpetual sorrow? Life does go on. My grandmother, for one, has endured, but she is also stronger for it. As for me, I have lost my father, my homeland, my roots, my childhood innocence and parts of my sanity — all because of the war. But what I do have left — and I thank my family for teaching me this — are my dignity, an ironic sense of hope and, believe it or not, my sense of humor. This is where the other part of me emerges, the part that refuses to be trampled by tragedy, the part that knows that Vietnamese people are — surprisingly — capable of smiling and laughing all the same. Most of Hollywood — and therefore the American public — might not realize this fact; consider *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Casualties of War*, *From Hollywood to Hanoi*, etc. The list of heart-rending movies about the war is endless. But, must the history of our nation, the character of our people, everything that we think, breathe and feel, be unilaterally defined by suffering and sorrow, bombs and tanks, napalm and Agent Orange, re-education gulags and refugee camps, ideologies and politics, My Lai and the Tet Offensive, perilous seas and Thai pirates? Is this, solely, the Vietnamese American experience? Or is there a whole other dimension to us, one rarely reflected in the media, books or, most important, our own self-perceptions?

I am not undermining the anguish that many Vietnamese people still feel as a result of the war. Nor am I suggesting that all Vietnamese people must heal, immediately, from the wounds of the past and start laughing for no particular reason. Most of the time, I — having lived in Vietnam until the age of seven — still carry the memories of the war and its aftermath like a secret, invisible scar inside my heart. Many other people — especially from the elder generations — need more time to heal.

Nonetheless, I want the Vietnamese expatriate community to stop for a second and appreciate some of the light-hearted and less-solemn aspects of the Vietnamese American experience. I believe that we are not a cursed people, doomed to emotional pain. The way I see things, we, as an ethnic community — and, more importantly, as human beings in general — still have a great deal to appreciate from life's levities. And this ability to laugh — at ourselves, at each other — is, I think, what makes us truly human.

The twenty-something generation of Vietnamese Americans find ourselves straddling the cultural fence. Being culturally "mixed" can be heart-wrenching at times; we all have had disagreements with our parents because they think we are not "Vietnamese" enough, and we feel they are too "traditional," on the wrong continent or obscenely anachronistic. But straddling the fence does have its advantages. All of us, whether we are conscious of it or not, have come to embrace a heterogeneous cultural identity, and this hybridization distances us from the strict polarities of "Vietnamese" and "American" culture.

Occupying this unique middle position has allowed me, throughout the years, to be very self-aware of my Vietnamese-American experience and to garner an invaluable cross-cultural perspective. Sure, being an uprooted Vietnamese has been painful at times, but, over the years, I have found comfort and strength in my ability to collect memorable observations and to laugh from them. There are not tragedies or tears here; this is, for me, the most precious and charming aspect of the Vietnamese refugee experience.

What follows is a collection of reflections, observations and anecdotes I have either written down or stored in my mind over the years. They are not polished masterpieces of philosophical musings; they are just one man's memoirs — how I see things — edited/updated from old journal entries or recently transcribed from the depths of my memory.

FAMILY TIES

Bờ Ngoại[2]

My grandmother is an incredible woman, full of love, energy and life. I've seen pictures of her from the 1930s when she was a beautiful young woman, adorned with French makeup and elegant clothing. It is hard for every man to imagine his grandmother as a young belle, but sometimes it is quite easy for me. She has, in many ways, retained the youthful energy and joie de vivre of days past, a sense of radiance that seems to contradict her position as the sage matriarch of my clan.

Grandmother has been in the States only since 1986. Before coming to America, she lived with my uncle in Canada. At present, she is part of a rare breed: a seventy-something Vietnamese semi-actively learning English. In Vietnam she had already enrolled in classes, partly because she knew she would be emigrating soon, partly because she wanted to support the teacher, an old family friend, but — if I know my grandmother correctly — mostly because she wanted to do something for self-improvement, to learn another foreign language besides French. Of course, her English is not stellar. She can barely hold a conversation. But who cares? I find it inspiring that she is even making an effort.

Three years ago, my grandmother fell down the stairs and broke her hip in the middle of the night. I was the one who found her there lying almost motionless. She said she had been on the ground unable to move for almost an hour, but that she did not want to wake up anyone in the house. When the ambulance men lifted her onto the stretcher, I saw fear in her eyes. We were all scared for her, too, but then I heard her striking up a casual conversation with one of the ambulance workers: "Hello, how are you doing? ..." And then I knew that, somehow, no matter what, my grandmother would make it. Three months later, she was back on her feet again — cooking, cleaning, laughing, spreading joy and inspiration everywhere she went.

On December 15, 1992, Grandmother became a U.S. citizen. Supposedly, she was extremely nervous the last couple weeks before her citizenship exam. She would study out loud in her broken English: "There are three branches in the U.S. government: executive, legislative, judicial ..." Too bad I was not there to witness it. I would have been so proud. When all the grandchildren came home for Christmas, my mother announced that Grandmother had passed and that she was now an "American" on paper. Then my mother joked that "Ha Nguyen" is now "Helena Nguyen." I almost believed it.

COMPANY PICNIC — AUGUST 22, 1985

My aunt Nga is an electrical engineer. Every summer Motorola invites all their employees to a company picnic at a huge amusement park. This year, after heavy debating with my parents, I finally gave in and agreed to go. It was, rather surprisingly, fun. I observed one important cultural difference: I think American notion of inviting your family to a company picnic means nuclear family, but of course we brought out the whole clan: uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, grandparents, grandchildren — the whole family tree. We were the largest family there, hands down.

And yet I felt proud of the fact that we were all there, laughing, interacting with other families, enjoying American food. The Vietnamese familial bond/clan consciousness was definitely alive and well. I don't think, though, that this means a typical Vietnamese family is somehow, always closer and more loving than an American family. More accurately, I think the perception of what constitutes a "family" is different. In terms of affection, though, it's all the same: family love is family love.

SALTY SOUP — OCTOBER 14, 1990

I've been at Harvard for a couple weeks now, but already I miss my family. I went to a Vietnamese restaurant last week with my friend Chris, who has never had Vietnamese food. I needed to make a phone call, so I left her there waiting for our appetizers, fresh spring rolls. When I came back, she had a funny look on her face and was quickly gulping down water. "You okay?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. They brought out the soup, but it's really salty and pungent."

I looked at our table. There were only small bowls of nuoc mam fish sauce for dipping our spring rolls. I laughed the kind of boyish/impish laugh that I should probably outgrow now that I'm in college. It took me five minutes — I was still laughing so hard, relishing the moment — to explain to her that nuoc mam is really a condiment, like soy sauce, not soup. Now Chris refuses to let me take her out for Vietnamese food.

WHAT A COUNTRY! — DECEMBER 28, 1992

This Christmas my mother sponsored her half-brother to America. Uncle Tuan is a highly respected gentleman, having been a professor of pharmacy at the University of Saigon. For the time being, he will stay with my aunt Nga, who lives twenty minutes away from us. Auntie Nga is vacationing in "Cali" for the holidays, so he will be in charge of the house for a couple weeks, including gathering the mail. Last night at around two A.M., he called me with a hushed yet excited tone of voice. Having studied at the University of Florida in the mid-1960s, his English is superb.

"I'm sorry to wake you up, but I have something here for Auntie Nga. You wouldn't believe this, but she just won ten million dollars!"

I tried to explain to him about junk mail, how it was all a hoax, how some American companies will do anything to grab your attention through correspondence. But he insisted: "It says right here in big, black letters. Nga Ly is the recipient of ten million dollars." After several minutes of listening to me ramble, he finally gave in, somewhat peeved: "Okay, but if she really won that sum of money, you're the one who will be blamed for letting it slip away." And then he hung up.

ETHNICIZATION: PROCESS AND CONSEQUENCES

How to Become "More Vietnamese" — February 20, 1992

I have a lot in common with my friend Andy. Our fathers were both political officials who studied at the National Institute of Administration in Saigon. They did not know each other; his father knew only of my uncle, also a graduate. Still, the bond is there, as if we're long-lost brothers. Andy has been described as "1000 percent American"; I used to be the same way, but I'm on my way back. I'm far from the ethnic expert, but I'm trying to "ethnicize" Andy. For his benefit, and my own, I've drawn up this self-help life:

TOP TEN WAYS TO BECOME "MORE VIETNAMESE" FOR THE TWENTY-SOMETHING GENERATION:
10. Wear flip-flops (*dep*) around the dorm.

9. The day after an intense workout at the gym, and your back hurts, ask your roommate or loved one to "strike your back" (*dam lung*) or "step on your back" (*dap lung*) you. They'll think you're weird, but hey, you'll feel better. Afflicted with a severe New England flu? Ask your girlfriend/boyfriend to perform cạo gió [3] acupressure on you. (He/She doesn't have to be Vietnamese to do it right.)

8. Enroll (in order of parental preference) in: medical, law, engineering, dental, or pharmacy schools. Do not become a creative writer.

7. Take up ballroom dancing. Cha-cha-cha, be-bop, tango, boston, waltz, etc. Sweep all romantic prospects off their feet.

6. Watch "Paris By Night," every entertaining edition. Then reenact the songs through karaoke. Finally and forever, hold Linda Trang Dai and Trizzy Phuong Trinh as the ideal paragons of female beauty. Or, for a change of pace, watch all ten thousand phim chuong kung fu episodes ... and then cry afterwards.

5. Answer the phone in an unaspirated, "Allo?"

4. If you're dating someone Vietnamese, and it's time to get married, do it in June.

3. Condense polysyllabic geographic words, to make it easier on the tongue. For example, "Cali," "Los," "Phila," etc.

2. Use random French words and phrases to assert familiarity with and nostalgia for the old colonial elite way of life. For example, moi, toi, pate chaud, buche de Noel, gout, maquiller, demi-saison and contre soliel.

1. Make sweeping generalizations about everything and everyone — like I'm doing in this essay.

There you have it, an intimate and light-hearted account of what it means to be a twenty-something Vietnamese American (or should I say Americanized Vietnamese?) in the 1990s.

I wish I could have painted a more balanced portrait of our collective experience. It would be intriguing to read, conversely, the memoirs of a fifty-something Vietnamese person, weaving anecdotes from a "more Vietnamese" perspective.

But I can't change the way I am. I came to America when I was seven. I remember my initial difficulties adjusting to the "American" way of life, how I longed to be a true "native." Throughout my childhood, I waited with eager anticipation for my fifteenth birthday to arrive, because on that day, I knew that — arithmetically — I would be more "American" than "Vietnamese," having spent eight years in this country compared to only seven "back there." Now, ironically, painfully, I'm trying to return to my roots, and sometimes I wish I were a "real Vietnamese," whatever that means. The road remains long and arduous, and I'll need more than a silly Top Ten list as a guide. But I think as long as I keep my sense of humor, I should be okay. Laughter, they say, is the best medicine.

Family Ties

FOOTNOTES TO WRITING

1. Phơ is a popular noodle soup dish. See the Glossary Section for a more detailed description.
2. Translation of "Bờ Ngoại": maternal grandmother.
3. Cạo gió literally translates to "wind scratch," but is termed "coining" by Western health praticitioners. Cạo gió is a common, traditional Vietnamese practice of dipping a coin in mentholated oil and vigorously rubbing it across the skin, usually one's backside, causing a mild dermabrasion. This practice is believed to release the excess force or "wind" from the body and, hence, restore balance. Cảo gió is usually used to relieve flu symptoms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of films or movies have you seen about Vietnam? Do you believe those films give an accurate view of the Vietnamese people? Why or why not?

2. What might be some differences between a Vietnamese person and a Vietnamese American person?

3. What do you think is meant when a Vietnamese American is accused of being "too American" or "too Vietnamese?" What stereotypes make up each category?

4. What are the reasons why the author's grandmother might have changed her name form "Ha Nguyen" to "Helena Nguyen" after becoming a U.S. citizen? What are some reasons why she would not want to change it?

5. Does the author laugh at his friend Chris for supping the fish sauce because he thinks she is stupid or because he realizes she is unfamiliar with the Vietnamese culture and foods? Have you ever witnessed an immigrant being laughed at because he or she was not accustomed to some aspect of American culture? How was this immigrant perceived?

6. Do you think it is the same when a Vietnamese American jokes about his own cultural stereotypes as when a non-Vietnamese American is judged by others according to those same cultural stereotypes? How so or how not so?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Khoi Truong Luu was born in Saigon and currently lives in New York City. His stories and essays have appeared in *Not a War: American-Vietnamese Fiction, Poetry, and Essays* (Yale University Council on Southeast Asia Studies, 1997) and *Once Upon a Dream: The Vietnamese-American Experience* (Anderews and McMeel, 1995). He received his A.B. from Harvard and his M.A. in Creative Writing from Boston University. He is co-editor of *Watermark: Vietnamese American Poetry and Prose* (Asian American Writers' Workshop, New York, 1998). [This biography is extracted from *Watermark*.]

Untitled

by Mong Lan

Having no money, they fed on
shriveled stars
that had fallen billions of years ago
for curtains they gathered seaweed
from the ocean so that green light
would filter through

she had made a blanket from the wool
of suicide's soul
which kept them warm beyond belief

and with the house they had built
from hair and thighs and calves and shoulders
and smooth stomachs that longed to perspire
and bleeding eyes and savant foreheads
they sprinkled interstellar
dust they found under the whale shadows
lying there on the shore, bellowing, black
exhausted shapes left for dead
where the sun hadn't touched the sand

"Untitled" Discussion Questions

1. What do you know or what have you heard (if anything) about the experiences of the Vietnamese refugees that fled from Vietnam on small, overcrowded boats, also called the "Boat People?"

2. What do you think it was like on the boat while drifting at sea, hungry and cold, while others around you were dying or giving up?

3. Why do you think the speaker intersperses images of beauty and nature with images of hopelessness and despair?

4. How can the beached whales serve as a metaphor for the Boat People themselves? Use the descriptive images to help you.

5. Stars often symbolize life and hope. How might the "interstellar dust" be compared to the Vietnamese refugees (also sometimes referred to as the "dust of life") as they float at sea under moonlit and starlit skies? Do the images of the stars or feelings of hope and hopelessness vacillate within this poem? Why?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mong Lan is a writer and visual artist. Her poetry is included in the anthologies *Once Upon a Dream: The Vietnamese American Experience* (Andrews and McMeel, 1995) and *Making More Waves: New Writing By Asian American Women* (Beacon Press, 1997), as well as literary journals.

Placing the Accents

by Truong Tran

left undisturbed on the piano's mantel
ashes of incense in a cup of sand
ikebana flowers leaning towards morning
left to die on a converted shrine
a deserted home lived in only
by the presence of your portrait

lao gia — old man come sit down and drink some tea[1]
I've brewed oolong your favorite
as a child I watched you unraveling
tea leaves still wet and warm
in your palm we found butterflies frogs
and elephant with two ears a trunk a tail
imagine finding an elephant
in the belly of a teapot

she left not long ago
with suitcase car keys a fold-up mattress
to act a stranger in a stranger's home
some white rice in a bowl
a few slivers of bitter melon
pickled and placed in a saucer of fish sauce
this is all that she will have
she says eating bitter is what she does best

it was the first real conversation
we had in months

hoa fuchsias cụa Bừ
õá chét chưa[2]
not yet Ma,
dying but not dead.
when are you coming ...

Shh...

she helped me write this poem
with eyeglasses tilted on this bridge of her nose
pen in hand as if holding a needle
she embroidered the accents onto this paper cloth
as you would have done with chisel hammer
your voice demanding *It's time you learn*

Placing the Accents

FOOTNOTES TO POEM

1. As part of a traditional mourning ritual, Vietnamese families often invite their deceased ancestors home to dine and to drink tea on the anniversary of their deaths.

2. Translation: Are dad's fuchsia flowers dead yet?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe at least two possible meanings for the poem's title.

2. In what different ways does the mother assist the narrator in preserving cultural traditions?

3. Can you describe the differences in character and behavior between the mother and the deceased father? Use the images in the last stanza to help you. The pen and the needle versus the chisel and hammer as the instruments of choice for each parent suggests what about their relationships with their child?

4. How does the second stanza, together with the final stanza, offer a more complex and multi-dimensional image of the father?

5. Can you speculate about the reasons behind the mother's choice to leave and her bitterness?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Truong Tran is a graduate of the M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University, where he was selected as the 1995 Graduate Hood Recipient. He is also the recipient of the Browning Society Prize for The Dramatic Monologue, the Ina Coolbrith Prize for Poetry and the Arts Council of Santa Clara Fellowship in Poetry. His poems have been published in such journals as *The American Voice*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Crazyhorse*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *ACM* (Another Chicago Magazine), *ONTHEBUS*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, Bakunin and *ZYZZYVA*, among many others. [This biography is extracted from *Watermark*.]

Vietnamese Americans

LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 1

The Boat People: Separation and Loss

SUBJECTS

World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVE

Develop students' understanding of separation and loss in the context of the Vietnamese "Boat People" experience.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand IV: Individual Identity and Development; Strand VI: Power, Authority and Governance, and Strand IX: Global Connections

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

1 class period
Background on the Boat People:

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, thousands of Vietnamese began fleeing their country fearing persecution by the Communists. The phrase "boat people" came into common use as a result of the flood of refugees casting off from Vietnam in over-crowded, leaky boats at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Between 1978 and 1981, over one million Vietnamese ventured across the South China Sea for freedom and safety, and it is estimated that half of those who attempted the trip died due to hunger, thirst, disease, and at the hands of pirates. These boat people gave up their homes, friends, and essentially their lives for a better life abroad.

HOW TO DO IT

Students will participate in an activity that will enhance their understanding of the word "separation" in the context of the refugee experience. Remind them that America has a long history as a destination point for refugees. Give students the example of the Mayflower pilgrims as the most famous "boat people." [It is important to note that the arrival of such earlier European groups to America resulted in the displacement of Native Americans, who also experienced "loss" and "separation" as a result of war, persecution and forced removal from indigenous lands.]

Ask the students to name other refugee groups, or countries of origin where refugees have emigrated and permanently resettled in the United States. For example, the twelve largest source countries for refugees (comprising 98 percent of 1999 arrivals) who permanently settle in the United States are: Yugoslavia (former), Cuba, Soviet Union (former), Vietnam, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Iran, Haiti and Sierra Leone.

• Write the word "separation" on the board and ask students to brainstorm what the word means to them. Write all their ideas on the board and briefly discuss. Words should reflect wide interpretations of separation.

• Ask students to take out a piece of paper and write down the ten most important things in their lives in no particular order. The list could include people, pets, objects – anything.

• Now tell them to eliminate two items on their list. Tell them to choose carefully because they will never see or touch these things again. Give them a few seconds to do this.

• Now have them eliminate two more items. Again, tell them that they will never be able to see the items again. Some students might protest but encourage them to continue.

• Eliminate two more items and continue until there are only two items left. Now have them cross those out also. This activity will be difficult because students will have to choose among siblings, parents, and other important aspects in their lives. Some may refuse to go on.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE

Ask students how they felt during the process. Remind them that this, of course, was not real. Tell them that these are decisions that the Vietnamese Boat People and nearly all refugees have made in order to survive.

Remind them that separation for refugees is often among the harshest kind — parents separated from their children, siblings separated from each other, and people separated from their homes and country.

Conclude by having students write about their feelings regarding this activity and whether or not they have developed new insight into the plight of the Boat People.

SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM A LESSON BY THE ORANGE COUNTY HUMAN RELATIONS COUNCIL

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 2

Immigrants and Refugees

SUBJECTS
World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES
1. To learn the differences between the terms "refugee" and "immigrant."
2. To develop a basic understanding of the politics behind refugee and immigration policies.
3. To understand the refugee mindset upon arriving at a destination country.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED
This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand IX: Global Connections.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED
1-2 class periods
Copies of Handout: Background
Copies of Handout: Arguments & Options

HOW TO DO IT

STEP 1
Start with a brainstorm to find out what students think about refugees.
- Write the word "refugee" on the wall and ask the class to say their immediate thoughts about the word.
- Now write the word "immigrant" and brainstorm ideas and concepts.
- Next, write the word "citizen" and do the same.

See if the class can come to a consensus regarding the definitions of these words. Make sure that the class understands that refugees are people who escape from their home country for reasons of survival (e.g. war, famine, persecution), and immigrants generally emigrate to seek better opportunities, usually economic.

STEP 2
Tell the class that they are to role-play a situation involving refugees. Let students read the "Background Handout."

Then read the following scenario aloud:
On a dark, cold, and rainy night in the Pacific Ocean, 30 Vietnamese Boat People have been picked up by a merchant ship. The ship has dropped them off at a refugee detention center that will determine what to do with them. They are hungry, tired and cold; they have no money or documents. The immigration officials from the

United States have opposing viewpoints — some want to allow the refugees to enter America; others do not. The refugees are desperate and use several arguments to try and persuade the immigration officials.

STEP 3
Divide the students into three groups.

Ask one group to imagine that they are the immigration officers from the United States and to consider the following options:
• Will you let all of the refugees into the United States?
• Will you let some into the United States?
• Will you split them up by age, profession, wealth...?
• Will you do something else instead?

Ask the second group to pretend that they are refugees. Have them think about the following options:
• Will you split up if the immigration officers ask you to?
• Will you go home if they try to send you back?

Ask the remaining third of the class to act as observers. (Half can monitor the "immigration officers" and half can monitor the "refugees.")

STEP 4
After a few minutes, give the immigration officer and refugee groups copies of Handout 2(b): Arguments & Options.

Give the "refugees" and the "immigration officers" a few minutes before the role-play to read through their arguments and options, and to decide on tactics. Tell the players that they can use the arguments on their handouts and any other relevant arguments they can think of. If it helps, draw a line on the floor to symbolize the border. Tell them that when the role-play begins, they have ten minutes to reach some sort of conclusion.

STEP 5
It is up to you and the class to decide whether the "refugees" and the "immigration officers" will argue as a group, or whether they will individually take a position and give individual arguments.

Start the role-play. Use your own judgment about when to stop. If there is time, have the students role-play again but have them trade roles — for example, students who were immigration officers must now be refugees.

STEP 6
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for protecting the rights of refugees. Ask the class in groups to role-play as an official team sent by the UNHCR to help the refugees from Vietnam. Ask the students to write an official report including the following issues:
• What arguments could you use to persuade the immigration officers to let the refugees in?
• Are the immigration officers doing anything wrong?
•What could be done with this report to make the U.S. protect the rights of the refugees?

STEP 7
After the role-play, discuss it using the following questions:
• How did the situation work out? What happened?
• How did it feel to be a refugee? How did it feel to be an immigration officer?

• Refugees have a right to protection under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Were these refugees given their right to protection? Why or why not?
• Do you think that a country should have the right to turn away refugees?
• Would you do this yourself? What if you knew they faced death or persecution in their own country?

STEP 8

Ask students to write an imaginative account of the scene at the border. The account could be from the point-of-view of a refugee child.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE

Have students write a diary entry reflecting either the refugee viewpoint or the immigration official viewpoint. Make sure they attempt to address the complexity of the issue and ultimately take a stand.

SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM A LESSON BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Lesson 2: Imigrants and Refugees
Handout 2(a)

Background Information

Every year, thousands of people leave their homes and often their countries because of war, persecution, or human rights abuse. Unlike immigrants who choose to leave their country for opportunity, refugees have no other choice but to leave in order to survive.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) says there are 27 million people in the world who are "of concern" to them. Of these, at least 15 million people are entitled to international protection because they are refugees. Most refugees are women and children.

They nearly always have to move abruptly, leaving their possessions behind and sometimes tearing families apart. Many are never able to return to their homes. Most refugees seek safety in a neighboring country; others have to travel great distances to find safety. Refugees often arrive at airports and seaports far from their native land asking for entry.

In 1951, the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which protects refugees by restricting countries from forcing refugees to return to their country of origin. Article 33 of the Convention states:

No Contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

The Convention also applies if a government wants to send a refugee to another country from which the refugee might be sent home. Governments must also hear the claim of a refugee who wants to find safety or seek asylum in their country. This principle applies to all states, whether or not they were party to the 1951 Convention. Furthermore, the Convention says that refugees should be free from discrimination and should receive full rights in the country where they go to be safe.

In addition, many articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 protect refugees. However, countries disagree about who is a "genuine" refugee. To justify restrictions on refugees, more developed countries often assert that refugees are not victims of oppression but are rather "economic migrants" who simply want a better standard of living.

In recent years, the governments of many of the world's richest countries have become victim to "compassion fatigue," or a growing wariness to allow refugees into their borders. These countries claim that large influxes of refugees create additional stresses on their existing populations, including more competition for housing and jobs, a financial impact on welfare systems, and higher racial tension.

To protect the rights of refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, based in Geneva, Switzerland, was established by the United Nations General Assembly on December 14, 1950. Governments often argue that refugees' fears are exaggerated or untrue. However, to protect the welfare of refugees, many humanitarian organizations document human rights violations in the refugee's country and use such evidence to persuade governments to allow refugees to apply for asylum.

Lesson 2: Imigrants and Refugees
Handout 2(b)

Arguments & Options

IMMIGRATION OFFICERS' ARGUMENTS AND OPTIONS

You can use the following arguments and any others you can think of:

- They are desperate; we can't send them back.
- If we send them back, we will be responsible if they are arrested, tortured, or killed.
- We have a legal obligation to accept refugees.
- Maybe they have skills, which our country needs or can use.
- They have no money and will need state support. Our country cannot afford that.
- Can they prove that they are genuine refugees? Maybe they are just here to look for a better standard of living.
- There are enough refugees in our country; we need to take care of our own people. They should go to the other countries.
- If we let them in, others will also demand entry.
- They don't speak our language, they have a different religion, and they eat different foods. They won't integrate in our society.
- They will bring political trouble.

REFUGEES' ARGUMENTS AND OPTIONS

You can use these arguments and any others you can think of.

- It is our right to receive asylum.
- Our children are hungry and you have a moral responsibility to help us.
- We will be killed if we go back.
- We will be jailed if we go back.
- We have no money.
- We don't have anywhere else to go.
- I was a doctor in my hometown.
- We only want shelter until it is safe to return.
- Other refugees have been allowed into your country.

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 3

Voice and Identity

SUBJECTS

History, Language Arts, Creative Arts, Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand that identity is not simply self-constructed, but is also imposed upon by others, such as one's family, friends, classmates, society and other social settings.
2. To understand that self-identity is affected by one's social characteristics (age, race, gender, etc.), where one lives, and the conditions one lives in (socioeconomic status, etc).
3. To understand that self-identity affects the way one views him/herself and others.
4. To explore and express one's own personal processes with identity formation.
5. To examine a poem pertaining to Vietnamese American identity and experiences, and relate to issues of self-expression through dialectical journals.
6. To express one's own identity and others' perception of one's identity through art.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand IV: Individual Development & Identity.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

2-3 class periods
Copies of Handout: "Silence" by Tu-Uyen Nguyen

HOW TO DO IT

Explain to the class the purpose of the lesson. Write the word "identity" on the board. Ask the students, "What is identity?" or "What is your definition of identity?" Have students brainstorm definitions. Dictionaries have defined identity as "the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognized or known," or as "the set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group."

Engage the students in a class discussion about the issue of identity. By doing so, students will have the ability to craft and express their self-identities as well as to deal with external factors that affect their identities in a healthy and productive manner. Ask students the following questions:

- How do you see yourself?
- How do others see you?
- What are some of the characteristics of your identity?
- Are you unsure of any of the characteristics of your identity? If yes, what are they, and why are you unsure?

• How do you express your self-identity and why?
• Why do we need to express our self-identities?
• How does our self-expression affect how others see us?

Remind the students that there are no right answers to these questions.

Bring out the idea that an individual's identity can be affected and shaped by:
• Social characteristics (age, race, gender, etc.);
• Where he/she lives;
• The conditions he/she lives in (socioeconomic status, etc.);
• His/her religious beliefs; and/or
• His/her positions on social issues.

Students should see how such beliefs, characteristics and conditions can affect how the individual identifies himself/herself and how others perceive him/her. Students should also come to understand that one's identity is not simply self-constructed, but is also shaped or imposed upon by others, including families, friends, classmates, society and other social influences.

Next, explain how to create and use a dialectical journal. A dialectical journal is a way for students to get involved with and to find meaning in a text. They do this by asking questions, making observations, forming associations, seeing patterns and creating hypotheses about situations and events.

As students read a text, they keep two-sided or split-page journals. On the left side, they write down particular words, passages, lines, quotes or anything they find interesting. On the right side of the page, students react to each passage by writing down an emotional response, question, insight, personal connection or intellectual reaction.

Distribute the Handout, and read the poem out loud.

Ask students to begin marking the poem. Allow time for them to copy important lines or phrases into their journals and to make comments. Ask students to consider the issues of identity and self-expression addressed in the earlier class discussion.

Divide students into groups of three or four to share their journals entries. After each student has shared, the group should choose a passage they feel is enlightening or provocative.

Groups share and then discuss insights with the entire class. The teacher ensures that the discussion does not wander away from interpretations that can be justified from the text.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS
An Exploration of "Silence"
Ask students to paraphrase the poem — to express, in their own words, the poem's plain prose meaning. Students should consider how the author sees herself.

• Did her self-perception change by the end of the poem?
• How did her personal experiences shape her identity?
• How do these experiences affect with whom or with which group(s) she identified?
• How did others see her? What external factors impacted the author's identity?

Also, ask students to explore the author's use of imagery. How do the images relate to the theme of identity? How does the imagery enhance the poem? Does it add emotional color or associations to the plain sense? Is the poet's use of imagery consistent? Why is the consistent or inconsistent use of imagery important?

AN IDENTITY COLLAGE

Students will create pieces of art to express, as best as possible, how they see themselves and how others see them. This assignment allows students the opportunity for self-analysis and self-expression.

Using newspapers, magazines, paint, pen markers or other materials, for example, a student can create a collage that visually expresses his or her identity. These materials could convey the student's clothing style or brands of choice, pop culture items or favorite bands, in addition to items relating to families, friends, ethnic communities, etc. Materials could also express a student's concerns or interests in contemporary social issues, such as religion, economics, politics and the environment.

Remind the students that their artwork should also reflect how others perceive them.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE

Students can present their finished projects to the class and discuss them. Each student should share an evaluation of his or her own artwork. Is the idea she wanted to show easy to see or understand? Did he show enough details to express what he had in mind? What moods does the finished product express? Could she make some part(s) more interesting or more expressive? Is he satisfied with his artwork? Did she enjoy making her artwork?
By this point, students have worked individually, in small groups and with the entire class. Give students time to reflect on their notes and homework. This reflection time is necessary for them to develop points of interests, a point of revelation or insight, a pattern or something they would like to explore further.

Silence by Tu-Uyen Nguyen

When I was a little girl,
I never said,
I want to grow up and be
Silent ...

What?! Speak up!
I can't hear a word
Of what you're saying
Speak up!

For some,
Speaking comes so easily
Just open their mouths
And words come streaming out

For me,
Voice is like a lonely wanderer
Who rarely ever comes by
You see, to come, my wanderer
Must come through many miles

Miles of silent longing
Miles of silent struggling
Miles of silent tears
Miles of silent years ...

So you tell me to speak up
Speak up! You say
You, not knowing the miles
I must trod everyday

How do I speak up?
When I don't even know how to speak down
Speak left or speak right
Speak even a sound

I've known only silent travels
All kinds of silent fears
I am so very tired
Of silence all these years

I don't mean the silence
Of dew drops, fragile
In the glistening dawn
Nor of a slowly falling leaf
Cradled as a boat
By gentle waves of wind
For these things speak of what they are
In their graceful natural beauty

No, I mean the silence
Of a child being told
Not to say how she feels
Why do you always talk so much?
Be quiet! Silence!

The silence of asking for a glass
And not getting one
Because the waitress didn't hear you
And telling yourself it's O.K.
Drinking your soda from the can

The silence of being invisible
In the eyes of those
Who only want to see
Their ready-made image of the Other

The silence of having others name you
Internalizing the wrong pronunciation
Of what you want your name
To be.
Nujen? Ne gyen?
The silence of feeling trapped
In darkness
Between two worlds
Vietnamese hyphen American
American hyphen Vietnamese
Opposite ends of the alphabet
Outer edges of two cultures

The silence of emptiness
A hollow more vast than nothing
A void within history
Of the voices of women unheard

The silence of Lotus Blossoms
And Dragon Ladies
Of virgins and whores
Of battered women

I mean the silence
Of my own voice
Of the stories that are locked
In unspoken words

Of the pains and triumphs of women warriors
My mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother and her mothers
Yes, I mean the silence of
Not Existing

I've known only silent travels
All kinds of silent fears
My mind angry, disgusted
Of silence all these years

So you tell me to speak up
Speak up! You say
You think I haven't tried?
Day after aching day?

Breaking my silence,
Can't you see?
Not like you break an egg
It's not that easy

Takes more than dew drops
And falling leaves
Takes lots of heartache
With no reprieve

Takes many dreams
And remembering too
Takes my whole being
Takes also you

So open your ears
And listen, take heed
You can begin to hear my voices emerge
In chorus, with others no longer silent
Saying, we will be heard, we will be heard!

Tu-Uyen Nguyen is a doctoral student in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 4

Hate Crimes

SUBJECTS
World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES
1. To understand and differentiate between prejudice and discrimination.
2. To see how multiple forms of discrimination work often together against people.
3. To understand institutionalized discrimination, as opposed to acts based on personal or individual prejudices and experiences.
4. To understand the nature of hate crimes and hate-motivated behavior.
5. To examine a case study of a hate crime victim, Thien Minh Ly.
6. To make a commitment to stop racism and hate crimes.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED
This lesson supports nation social studies standards, Strand X: Civil Ideals and Principles.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED
3-4 class periods
Copies of Handout: Working Definitions of Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents
Copies of Handout: The Murder of Thien Minh Ly
Copies of Handout: Personal Action Plan

HOW TO DO IT
Activity One: Class Discussion on Prejudice, Discrimination and Hate Crimes
Have students brainstorm definitions of prejudice and discrimination. Ask them how they would differentiate one from the other.

• Prejudice is usually described as an individual or group's belief, view or judgment of another group or certain characteristics of that group. For instance, Individual/Group A can be prejudiced against Individual/Group B's religious practice of burning incense in public, viewing them in a negative light.

• Discrimination is usually described as an action or actions based on existing prejudice. For instance, if Individual/Group A acts upon its prejudice of Individual/Group B's religious practice, then the action(s) would be considered a form of discrimination. Individual/Group A could discriminate against Individual/Group B by attempting to pass a local ordinance to prohibit the public burning of incense.

• One can be prejudiced and not be discriminatory. But one who is engaged in discrimination cannot deny having prejudice.

Ask the students to give examples of prejudice and discrimination, such as those on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, class (socioeconomic status), or sexuality.

After the class discussion on various forms of prejudice and discrimination, ask the students if a particular individual or group of people can be discriminated against because of multiple social traits or characteristics. For instance, can a person or group be discriminated for both socioeconomic status and racial background?

Provide this example:
In the early 1990s, some Vietnamese American community members accused local police in Southern California of the "racial profiling" of Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. Civic groups charged the police of stopping young Asian American and Pacific Islander motorists, searching their vehicles, and taking their photographs without probable cause.

The Polaroid photographs were allegedly used as part of a mug shot book to identify local Asian American youth gang members. Many youth, without prior criminal records, complained of police misconduct and expressed discomfort with having their picture included in a criminal identification book.

Asian American and Pacific Islander youth accused law enforcement of discriminating against them because of their race, age, and preference in clothing. In other words, the police officers were discriminating against Asian American and Pacific Islander youth by stopping innocent youth and taking their pictures based on the prejudicial assumption that most Asian American and Pacific Islander youth who look and dress in certain ways are potential gang members.

Ask the students to give other cases or examples that involve multiple forms of discrimination.

Next, ask the students if they can differentiate between certain acts of discrimination. Imagine a white father who doesn't support his daughter's marriage to her Asian American boyfriend. What is the difference between the father's stance and U.S. anti-miscegenation laws (prohibiting marriage between whites and people of color) that lasted until the 1950s?

The anti-miscegenation laws are "institutionalized" forms of discrimination, supported by the power of society. Institutionalized discrimination can be both formal and informal. For example, a company's tradition of promoting only male employees to upper management, despite laws prohibiting such discrimination against women, is informal discrimination. Anti-miscegenation laws, on the other hand, were formal discrimination.

Ask the students to give examples of contemporary institutionalized discrimination, formal or informal.

Next, have the students brainstorm a definition of a hate crime. Hate crimes and behaviors are clearly forms of discrimination. What prejudices are some hate crimes based upon? Can hate crimes be institutionalized? (Some would argue that the deliberate introduction of foreign diseases by the U.S. government into certain Native American tribes in America's early quest for expansion and the racial lynchings committed by the Ku Klux Kan are clear examples of institutionalized hate crimes.)

Hand out copies of the working definition of hate-motivated crimes and behaviors (see attachment to this lesson.) Ask the class for input in refining definitions.

Next, read the handout about the murder of Thien Minh Ly.

After the class has read the handout, have students respond in a journal to two prompts.
• First: Do you agree that the murder of Thien Minh Ly was a hate crime? Why?
• Second: Is there is a difference between a hate-motivated murder and an "ordinary" robbery-motivated murder? Should society deem one more "heinous" than the other? Why?

ACTIVITY TWO: SHOULD IT BE CLASSIFIED AS A HATE CRIME?
After students have written a few thoughts, open the class up for discussion. Bring the discussion to a close by reminding them that Thien Minh Ly's murder was, in fact, tried as a hate crime and that the perpetrator, Gunner J. Lindberg, was sentenced to death. His accomplice, Domenic Christopher, who helped trap Ly, then cheered on the attack and kicked Ly during his final breaths, was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

Additional information for teachers:
In most crimes, the victim and perpetrator are likely to know one another. Hate crimes are overwhelmingly committed by strangers, however, and most hate crime perpetrators are under the age of 20.

Hate crime statutes, which usually cover race, religion and ethnicity, and, in some states disability, gender and sexual orientation, allow judges to stiffen sentences against already-convicted defendants, given that someone who seeks to harm a large group of people poses an arguably greater threat than one targeting a specific individual. Hate crimes also have an exponentially greater power to spread fear.

In 1997, the Federal Bureau of Investigation tallied 8,049 incidents. From 1991 to 1997, 40 percent of hate crimes were committed against African Americans and 15 to 20 percent involved religion. Anti-Asian crimes accounted for almost 10 percent of the total.

Advocates at the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium say those figures are only the tip of the iceberg. In 1997 alone, it says, at least five Asian Americans have lost their lives to hate: Kanu Patel and Mukesh Patek of Maryland; Won-Joon Yoon of Indiana; Naoki Kamijimi of Illinois; and Joseph Ileto of California.

For more information on the underreporting of hate crimes, visit www.tolerance.org/evc

ACTIVITY THREE: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
Ask the students to respond individually to the following prompts on a piece of paper:
• What I want others to know about my group
• What I never want to see, hear or experience again as a member of this group

Give students about 5 minutes to complete their thoughts. Pair up students, and have them share their writings. After sharing in pairs, have the entire class come back together so each individual or volunteer can share their writings. Sharing should be voluntary.

First, review the following guidelines:
• Remember that individuals are speaking from their own experiences and do not represent all members of their ethnic group. The personal lists represent realities for the group and should not be doubted or challenged.
• This is an opportunity to learn from each other. Listen carefully and with respect.
• When each group has finished reading and explaining their list, there will be an opportunity for questions.

Questions should be asked to clarify, not to challenge.

When the pairs have shared their lists, create a discussion about the presentation. Here are some suggested questions:
• What are your initial reactions to the activity?
• Which group(s) did you feel you learned the most about?
• Did any of the statements surprise you?
• Did you notice any similarities between the groups?

SOURCE: ACTIVITY ADAPTED FROM AN ORIGINAL LESSON PLAN BY THE TODOS INSTITUTE.

ACTIVITY FOUR: AWARENESS TO ACTION

Remind participants that each of us is responsible for eliminating the discrimination around us. To do this, we each need to set up an action plan.

Pass out copies of the Personal Action Plan Handout. Students should have about 10 minutes to answer the questions. Then they will be asked to share their answers with a partner. When sheets are completed, ask participants to pair up and discuss their action plans with their partners.

When pairs have completed their discussion, bring the whole group back together. Take time to remind the group of the importance of taking responsibility for our own knowledge and actions. Finally, encourage them to work to accomplish every item on their worksheet.

Variations:
• Instead of asking participants to share plans with a partner, ask for volunteers to share with the whole group.
• Create your own version of the worksheet that is more specific to your school, organization, or community.
• Rewrite the worksheet to include other forms of diversity.

SOURCE: ACTIVITY ADAPTED FROM AN ORIGINAL LESSON PLAN BY SHERI LYN SCHMIDT.

Lesson 4: Hate Crimes
Handout 4(a)

Working Definitions of Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents

What is a hate crime?
A hate crime must meet two criteria:
• A crime must happen, such as physical assault, intimidation, arson or vandalism; and
• The crime must be motivated by bias.

The list of biases included in state hate crime statutes varies. Most states include race, ethnicity and religion. Some also include sexual orientation, gender and/or disability. In some cases, these statutes apply only to specific situations, such as housing discrimination.

Bias can be actual or perceived, as when an attack is directed at someone perceived to be gay.

Hate crimes, when prosecuted, typically carry enhanced penalties such as longer sentences.

What's a Bias Incident?
A bias incident is conduct, speech or expression that is motivated by bias or prejudice but doesn't involve a criminal act. Bias incidents may, however, violate school codes or policies. Check with your district office to see what anti-harassment policies exist.

What's the Difference?
Hate crimes, if charged and prosecuted, will be dealt with in the court system.

Bias incidents may occur with no clear path or procedure for recourse, because no law has been broken.

Because perpetrators frequently aren't identified, both hate crimes and bias incidents often go undocumented and unpunished. Both, however, demand unified and unflinching denouncement from the community.

SOURCE: 10 WAYS TO FIGHT HATE ON CAMPUS, TOLERANCE.ORG, A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER, WWW.TOLERANCE.ORG/CAMPUS

Lesson 4: Hate Crimes
Handout 4(b)

The Murder of Thien Minh Ly

On Super Bowl Sunday in 1996, Thien Minh Ly followed his usual exercise routine, taking his in-line skates to the tennis courts at Tustin High School, his alma mater.

By late evening, after the tennis court lights had been turned off, neighborhood kids had gone home, leaving Ly alone on the courts.

Sometime between 11 p.m. and 7:45 a.m., when a janitor discovered the body, Ly was stomped, kicked, slashed and stabbed to death, a trail of blood running across two tennis courts. Investigators later would count more than 50 stab wounds on Ly's body, including 14 to the heart.

Thien Minh Ly died with his skates on, his body left lying on the grounds of the high school where he had graduated in the top 10 of his class with a 4.53 grade-point average.

The 24-year-old Vietnamese man left behind his parents and two younger siblings. The first in his family to attend college, Ly graduated from UCLA with a double major in biology and English. He then completed a master's degree in physiology and biophysics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He had returned temporarily to his family's home in Southern California just weeks before his death. Contemplating attending law school, Ly dreamed one day of becoming the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam.

For many weeks, the motive in the killing was assumed to be robbery, though all Ly carried on him was a house key that remained at the murder site.

Then a letter surfaced that included a chillingly casual reference to the killing. Sandwiched between chatty news about birthdays and travel plans was this line: "Oh, I killed a jap a while ago … "

The four-page letter, riddled with misspellings and grammatical errors, was written by fugitive ex-con Gunner J. Lindberg, 21. Written on Feb. 23 and addressed to a prison buddy, it was given to police by a confidential informant, leading investigators to Lindberg's Tustin apartment — and to Lindberg's accomplice, 17-year-old roommate and co-worker Domenic M. Christopher.

The two were charged with Ly's murder in March 1996.

Lindberg, Christopher and a cousin of Lindberg's were part of a self-styled hate group called the "2/11 Insane Criminal Posse." (The date, Feb. 11, is tied to an earlier stint in prison by Lindberg.)

Lindberg sought to create white supremacist gangs in Missouri and California, according to evidence presented in the trial. He had corresponded with Canadian and U.S. neo-Nazi organizations and had been linked to violence against minorities on at least three occasions. Other letters of Lindberg's revealed a hatred for nonwhites, and at the trial, a cousin of Lindberg's testified that Lindberg claimed the killing was motivated by a "racial movement."

Police found a variety of white supremacist materials in the pair's apartment, including a poster celebrating

the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., symbols of Nazi Germany and, tucked inside a Bible, handwritten addresses for the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups.

The brutality of the crime is matched by the complete callousness of the Feb. 23 letter, in which Lindberg recounts putting a butcher knife to Ly's throat and growing angry that Ly was looking at him:

"[He was] trying to get a description of me so I stomped on his head 3 times and each time said 'stop looking at me' then he was kinda knocked out Dazzed then I stabbed him in the side about 7 or 8 times he rolled over so I stabbed his back about 18 or 19 times then he layed flat and I slit one side of his [throat] on his jugular vain."

Lindberg's letter also revealed Christopher's role in the killing. Spelling Domenic Christopher's first name wrong, Lindberg said the younger accomplice cheered him on during the attack:

"Then Domminic said 'do it again' and I said 'I already Did, Dude' 'ya. Do it again' so I cut his other jugular vain, and Dominic said 'Kill him Do it again' I said 'he's already Dead' Dominic Said 'Stab him in the heart', so I stabbed him about 20 to 21 times in the heart."

Christopher, who had helped trap Ly and then kicked him repeatedly in the head as he took his final breaths, was convicted in April 1997 of first-degree murder and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

Later that year, in his own trial, Lindberg became the first person in California to receive the death penalty for a racially motivated murder. The jury concluded "the victim was intentionally killed because of his … race, color, religion, nationality or country of origin," using the words of California's hate crime law.

Lindberg's callousness carried through the trial. Each day he wore a faded blue and white Dallas Cowboys jersey, the same shirt he had worn the day he murdered Ly.

Family members testified prior to Lindberg's sentencing, calling him a "monster."

Thu Ly, the victim's 24-year-old sister, said the family had been "living in a nightmare. The unimaginable pain and devastation is beyond words."

A sobbing Dao Huynh, the victim's mother, added, "I miss him every minute."

SOURCES: LOS ANGELES TIMES, UCLA DAILY BRUIN AND VARIOUS OTHER NEWS REPORTS

Lesson 4: Hate Crimes
Handout 4(c)

Personal Action Plan

Fighting racism is difficult work and requires a plan of action. This worksheet helps you identify specific actions you can take to help further your own education and create change in your community.

1. Information I plan to seek out to further my understanding of racism:

2. A topic of conversation I would like to have with my friends, colleagues, or family about racism:

3. The ethnic groups I feel I still need to gain a great deal of knowledge about:

4. Events or activities I plan to participate in to increase my understanding of ethnic groups:

5. An action I can take (through a leadership position, organization, or project) to enhance ethnic/race relations in my school, organization, or community:

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 5

Human Rights

SUBJECTS

World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the issue of human rights and the ongoing international response.
2. To understand the experiences of South Vietnamese prisoners of war, many of whom now live in the United States, as well as those of Vietnamese dissidents living in Vietnam.
3. To be aware of the current human rights violations in Vietnam.
4. To appreciate our inalienable rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and to become active citizens in promoting the recognition of human rights in the world.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand IX: Global Connections.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

2 class periods
Copies of Handout: Background on Human Rights
Copies of Handout: Status of Freedoms in Vietnam
Excerpts from chapters 19 and 22 from James M. Freeman's *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives* ($22.95), available through Stanford University Press and online booksellers.

HOW TO DO IT

ACTIVITY ONE: EXPLORING HUMAN RIGHTS

Distribute the Background on Human Rights Handout, let students read it. Then, solicit feedback. Ask for suggestions on how the United States, "the world's superpower," should respond to countries that commonly violate human rights. Ask them what should be the American response if a country with a poor human rights record is one in which the United States has strong economic interests (e.g. China)?

Tell students that the United States and Vietnam are "normalizing" relations and have a signed a significant Trade Agreement, meaning that trade between the two countries will increase substantially. Ask students if they think Americans should be aware of a country's record on human rights if we are to trade with them. Should a country's human rights record be an important factor in the U.S. government's decision to establish economic relations with this country? Why?

Next, have students review excerpts from *Hearts of Sorrow*. Tell them that this is the actual account of the treatment of a former South Vietnamese officer in a re-education camp by the Vietnamese Communist government after

the end of the war. Most officers initially were led to believe that they would be detained only a few weeks. Many died in prison and many others were forced into hard labor for ten years or longer.

After the reading, have students respond to the following prompts:
Imagine you were the child or spouse of this prisoner. What would your feelings be toward the Communist Vietnamese? What type of person would you expect your "dad" to be after his release? What could you do to help heal his pain?

Have students share their responses.

ACTIVITY TWO: EXPLORING THE LOSS OF FREEDOM
What are the most important freedoms in America? Ask students to list their choices. Vote as a class to select the three greatest freedoms. Ask students what they would do if these freedoms were taken away.

Explain to students that the majority of South Vietnamese prisoners were released in 1989 under an agreement between the United States and the Vietnamese government but that human rights violations continue in less obvious conditions.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam continues to deny the Vietnamese people their most unalienable rights, including:
• Freedom of worship (the government interferes with the nomination of priests who can perform blessings);
• Freedom of association (by restricting peaceful assembly and not allowing the formation of an organization if it does not accept the absolute leadership of the Communist doctrine); and
• The freedom to choose their own government (by not having free elections to choose Communist and non-Communist representatives.)

In addition, individuals can be questioned, detained or have their homes searched at any time, without being charged with a crime. The government also sponsors 500 newspapers and magazines in Vietnam, all of which controlled by the Communist Party or an organization under its direction.

Distribute copies of the Status of Freedoms in Vietnam Handout. Allow time for students to read the document and then share their impressions of what they read.

Next, have the students write a letter to the President of the United States about the unfairness in Vietnam and ask for change. They can do further research on the Internet. Some ideas they might want to present to the President:
• Request that the United States embassy in Vietnam regularly monitor and visit leading dissidents at their residence. If the Vietnamese ambassador in Washington can freely visit any private American citizen, it is only appropriate that the United States ambassador in Vietnam and his staff can exercise reciprocal rights.

• Organize Congressional delegations to Vietnam to visit dissidents. Meetings with dissidents — like the ones Representative Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) made during her recent trip to Vietnam — let the brave voices of conscience in Vietnam know that they are not alone.

• Demand the release of biologist and writer Hai Si Phu, poet Bui Minh Quoc, writer Tieu Dao Bao Cu and war veteran Nguyen Ho. All have been detained under house arrest since August or September 1997.

• Lobby Vietnam to lift restrictions on released prisoners, including Dr. Nguyen Dan Que and Thich Quang Do,

as wellas geologist Nguyen Thanh Giang, who was released from detention in May 1999 but is currently banned from traveling outside Hanoi without permission.

• Support the repeal of Administrative Detention Directive 31/CP, which authorizes village-level People's Committee and Public Security officials to detain, without trial for six months to two years, individuals considered to have violated national security laws.

• Advocate for religious freedom in Vietnam and for the implementation of recommendations made by Abdelfattah Amor, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, in a December 1998 report.

• Support the ability of humanitarian organizations to visit Vietnamese prisons. Related, support the implementation of recommendations made to the Vietnamese government in 1994 by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The Working Group called for better compliance with the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and its provision of immediate and adequate food and medical treatment to all detainees.

• Ask Vietnam to publish a list of the more than 7,000 prisoners released in amnesties in 1998 and 1999 so that their relatives abroad can know with certainty whether their family members are still detained.

• Lift or ease restrictions on press freedom. A recently passed law requires journalists to pay compensation or publish retractions to persons hurt by their reports, even if the information is correct. An earlier directive from May 1997 requires Vietnamese journalists to obtain approval from the Ministry of Culture and Information before passing any information on to foreign reporters.

• Guarantee safety for those who offer peaceful criticism of government policies and institutions. Human Rights Watch has received reports that many key protesters and religious leaders live under surveillance by local authorities, with their publishing rights denied; friends and neighbors discouraged from meeting them; and communication with the outside world hampered by interception of mail and blockage of telephone lines. Of particular concern are Father Chan Tin, Rev. Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, Vu Huy Cuong, Hoang Tien, Tran Do, and Hoang Minh Chinh.

Send your letters to:
George W. Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Lesson 5: Human Rights
Handout 5(a)

Background on Human Rights

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.

These are the second and third paragraphs of the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 without a dissenting vote. It is the first multinational declaration mentioning human rights by name, and the human rights movement has largely adopted it as a charter.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Human Rights covenants were written and implemented in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the Nuremberg war crimes trials, the Bataan Death March, the atomic bomb, and other horrors smaller in magnitude but not in impact on the individuals they affected.

Many people in a number of countries had a crisis of conscience and found they could no longer look the other way while tyrants jailed, tortured and killed their neighbors. Sadly, despite the intent of the Universal Declaration, the violation of people's human rights throughout the world continues today.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON VIETNAMESE RE-EDUCATION CAMPS

The conflict in Southeast Asia was primarily fought in South Vietnam between pro-democracy government forces aided by the United States and guerrilla forces aided by Communist North Vietnam. The "Vietnam War" was also known as the "Second Indochina War" and as the "American War" in Vietnam.

The war began soon after the Geneva Conference of 1954 provisionally divided Vietnam at the 17° N latitude into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). It escalated from a Vietnamese civil war into a limited international conflict in which the United States was deeply involved. The War did not end, despite peace agreements in 1973, until North Vietnam's final offensive in 1975 resulted in South Vietnam's collapse and the unification of Vietnam by the North.

Within months of April 30, 1975, the date marking the fall of the South Vietnamese government, the new Communist regime ordered every man and woman ever affiliated with the armed forces or governments of South Vietnam or the United States to attend political re-education classes that would help them better function in the new society.

The new government promised that these classes would be short, lasting from three to thirty days, depending on one's rank in the previous military or government. An estimated 2.5 million people reported for re-education – soldiers, military officers, government officials, chiefs, translators, religious leaders and intellectuals.

Little did they know that they were heading to re-education camps, where many would be forced into hard labor and would be subject to horrific living conditions. The treatment of these political prisoners is among the worse treatment of prisoners anywhere in recent history.

On June 20, 2001, the *Orange County (Ca.) Register* published a series of articles, entitled "Camp Z30-D: The Survivors," by staff writers Anh Do and Hieu Tran Phan. The series of articles document the poignant stories of Vietnamese immigrants who were prisoners in one of the largest Communist re-education camps in Vietnam, known simply as Camp Z30-D.

Located three hours northeast by car from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Camp Z30-D was reserved for some of the highest-ranking and most-prominent South Vietnamese military officers, government officials and political figures.

Inmates of Camp Z30-D typically started each day at 6:00 a.m., working eight-hour days and six days per week. They were forced to clear jungles, clear minefields, dig wells and canals, quarry rock, construct barracks, plant and harvest crops, chop wood, sew or tend animals. At the end of the workday, prisoners were required to read Communist doctrine and confessed all their "faults" in writing.

Later in the evening, the prisoners gathered in an outside central courtyard, where they sat or squatted on the ground and listened to Communist ideology for hours over loudspeakers. In teams, the prisoners were then made to sit in circles and forced to critique one another's work. After 15 minutes, each group was forced pick the "laziest" prisoner, who was then punished with less food and more work.

Prisoners who fell asleep or refused to answer questions were beaten with bamboo canes and rods. Other common forms of punishment included: solitary confinement in tiny cells or crates, shackling of hands and legs in painful positions for months, skin slashing by bamboo canes studded with thorns, injections with poisonous chemicals, and insertion of bamboo slivers under fingernails or toenails.

Prisoners who were caught escaping or exhibiting anti-Communist behavior were executed by firing squads. Others were tied to a Jeep and dragged to their deaths. And some were publicly beaten to death over several days.

Inmates had to store urine and feces under their bunks in the barracks. In the mornings, they would then carry the waste to the fields for fertilizer. The barracks, which housed up to 200 prisoners, often had no windows, allowing the stench of human waste to linger. Little amounts of food were given to inmates; so many foraged for insects, mice and snakes. Most prisoners weighed only one-half of their original body weight when released.

The combination of hard labor, malnutrition and unclean facilities caused a host of illnesses, such as malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis and yellow fever. An estimated ten to fifteen percent of the inmate population died from illnesses.

The articles in the *Orange County (Ca.) Register* reported that an estimated 1 million people were imprisoned in re-education camps without formal charges or trials in Vietnam after 1975. The U.S. Department of State reports that prisoners were incarcerated for as long as 17 years, with most terms ranging from three to ten years.

At least 100 re-education prisons were built after Saigon fell 26 years ago. Published academic studies in the U.S. and Europe estimate that about 165,000 prisoners died in these Vietnamese re-education camps. One in three South Vietnamese families had a relative in a re-education camp.

The article series, "Camp Z30-D: The Survivors," can be found on the website of the Orange County Register. See www.ocregister.com/features

Lesson 5: Human Rights
Handout 5(b)

Status of Freedoms in Vietnam

Despite rapid economic growth, significant human rights problems remain in Vietnam. Human Rights Watch, a non-profit advocacy organization, reports that freedom of expression, free association and other basic rights are still severely constrained.

Those who criticize the government, establish independent political organizations, adhere to particular religious groups, or seek to monitor and report on human rights, continue to be imprisoned or subjected to other forms of harassment and intimidation at the hands of the state.

To follow are samples of recent human rights abuses.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

To stop the Hoa Hao Buddhist community from organizing religious celebrations and to expedite the extermination of Hoa Hao Buddhism, the government has confined followers, created difficult travel requirements (such as making it difficult to obtain transit papers), checked identification papers of members constantly, audited member income taxes, created propaganda labeling followers as traitors and terrorists who want to overthrow the government. The government uses noncompliance with these actions as a pretext for arrest and imprisonment of the Hoa Hao Buddhists.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In 1977, the Vietnamese government issues Resolution 297 to forbid the "spread of superstitions," by severely restricting religious practices in Vietnam and allowing the government to confiscate church properties.

Four years later, the government dissolved the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), the main Buddhist organization in south and central Vietnam prior to 1975. The government replace it with the state-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Church.

The UBCV's Supreme Patriarch, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, was first arrested in 1977 and then again in 1982 for his work with the UBCV. In 1994, he was arrested again on charges of organizing a UBCV flood relief operation in the Mekong Delta. Now 84 years old and suffering from blood pressure and a lung condition, Quang is currently under house arrest in central Vietnam.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Nguyen Thanh Giang, whose criticism of the Communist Party has led to constant harassment by the authorities, was arrested and charged under Article 82, "the crime of anti-socialist propaganda," which criminalizes the mere act of expressing a political opinion seen as injurious to the state or keeping or circulating material that does the same. If convicted, Nguyen Thanh Giang could face three to 12 years in prison.

In recent years he has issued a number of public letters calling for peaceful reforms and "real democracy in which people from both the top and the bottom would equally benefit." He and his family are is constantly under surveillance.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Recently, retired Vietnamese General Tran Do wrote to Vietnam's Ministry of Culture and Information (MCI) for permission to operate an independent newspaper. He based his request on provisions in the Constitution and Press Law, which provide for freedom of the press. The MCI rejected his request noting that only organizations, not individuals, have the right to operate a newspaper. However, individuals do not have the right to form independent organizations in Vietnam. Do has been under government surveillance and harsh measures have been used against his family.

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 6

Ho Chi Minh and Freedom of Speech

SUBJECTS

World History, American Experience, United States Government, and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES

1. To develop a basic understanding of the First Amendment.
2. To develop a higher appreciation of democratic values.
3. To take, defend and evaluate positions on a contemporary case involving the First Amendment.
4. To understand Freedom of Speech within the context of a Vietnamese American case study.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand X: Civic Ideals and Practices.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

2-3 class periods
Copies of Handout: Background Information on the "Little Saigon Incident"

HOW TO DO IT

ACTIVITY ONE: HOW FAR SHOULD FREEDOM OF SPEECH EXTEND?

Have students take out their notebooks and create a K-W-L chart (Know —Want to Know—Learned). Tell them to write down what they know about freedom of speech. Ask them to define it and give examples of what they think it means.

Next, engage students in an activity called "Stand if You Can." The rules are simple. Tell them you will be making statements regarding freedom of speech. They are to stand if they agree with the statement. Students need to be prepared to defend their stance with those who disagree. Take time to discuss every statement.

Stand if you think freedom of speech should cover:

- Harsh criticism of the government in a newspaper
- A Ku Klux Klan march
- Burning the United States flag
- Publishing lies about a student in the school paper
- Spreading false and negative gossip about someone
- Nude photographs in a museum exhibit
- A radio host urging listeners to use any means to take over the government
- Wearing a Nazi swastika at a non-school event
- Profane language on television
- Use of racial slurs

After the discussion, have students return to their K-W-L charts and add to or change any opinions they may have had about freedom of speech.

For homework, have them read the Background Information on the Little Saigon Incident Handout. Ask students to take notes in a double entry journal, which allows students to write important passages as well as make comments or questions. Ask them to:

• Think about why so many Vietnamese Americans reacted so negatively to the merchant's posting of Ho Chi Minh's portrait and the Vietnamese Communist flag. In the minds of these people, is displaying the Communist flag and Ho Chi Minh's portrait in the middle of Little Saigon the same as shouting fire in a theatre?

• Write down individuals and categories of people affected by the incident. For example, write down the name of the merchant and describe groups opposed to his actions.

ACTIVITY TWO: THE DEBATE

On the next day, prepare for a mock debate where students will role-play people affected by the incident.

Divide the class into groups representing the following interests: Hi-Tek merchant Truong Van Tran, elected officials, law enforcement, merchants in the mall, Vietnamese American community members, non-Vietnamese who live in the area, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Allow each group further investigate the flag incident. The online archives of the *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register* offer extensive coverage of the demonstrations and are excellent starting points. Students also might conduct oral interviews with members from the community.

Each team should prepare a three to five minute presentation on their position based on their research. After all positions have been presented, the entire class should vote on whether the flag and photo of Ho Chi Minh should be taken down or allowed to remain posted.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE

After results of the class vote have been made public, ask students to write justifications for their own individual opinions. Opinions should be based on the testimony of the participants, as well as their own research.

Lesson 6: Ho Chi Min and Freedom of Speech
Handout 6(a)

Background Information on the "Little Saigon Incident"

CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES. — First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

The right to free speech is the cornerstone on which a democracy is built. Every person has the right to speak freely and to question government decisions. Our democratic system depends on people's ability to make educated judgments on matters of public policy. For these reasons, the First Amendment's freedom of speech clause has been broadly interpreted to include not only pure speech but also symbolic speech.

Symbolic speech is defined as nonverbal expression using symbols. The Supreme Court has given symbolic speech substantial protection. For example, in the *Texas v. Johnson* case (1989), the Supreme Court held that burning the American flag was a form of symbolic speech protected by the First Amendment.

The distinguished Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935) once said the country needs to "protect not free thought for those who agree with us, but freedom for the thought that we hate." But he also said that freedom of speech "would not protect a man from falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing panic."

A CASE IN POINT

In early 1999, Truong Van Tran ignited the largest and longest mass protest or mobilization in the history of the Vietnamese American community, lasting 53 days and drawing crowds of up to 15,000 protestors. The following is a condensed chronology of events:

November 1998: Tran begins hanging the flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and a portrait of Vietnamese Communist architect Ho Chi Minh in his Hi-Tek video rental store in the heart of the Little Saigon commercial area in Westminster, California.

Tran, a refugee who escaped Vietnam in 1980, became an ardent advocate of normalizing trade and diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States. His stance frequently placed him at odds with many Vietnamese Americans who oppose normalization.

January 1999: When the display at his store fails to receive much attention from community members, Tran sends faxes to local Vietnamese American media, informing them of his actions and challenging the community to make him take down the items.

January 17: Protests begin in front of his store. Some four hundred demonstrators fill the shopping center lot on the following day.

January 20: The shopping center landlord announces his seeking of a court order to evict Tran for violating lease conditions prohibiting a tenant's creation of a public nuisance.

January 21: Orange County (Calif.) Superior Court Judge Tam Nomoto-Schumann issues a preliminary injunction

ordering Tran to take down the items, siding with the landlord's argument that Tran violated his lease contract. The American Civil Liberties Union then joins in Tran's defense and claims that Tran's First Amendment rights (freedom of speech) were violated by the judge's order.

February 10: The judge revokes her previous order, stating that Tran's display of the items is protected by the First Amendment. On the same day, Tran returns with police escort to the store to put up the items again, but is met by a crowd of one hundred protestors. He collapses with chest and stomach pains after a light slap on the head from a protestor. He is hospitalized overnight.

February 20: Tran and his wife, Kim Nguyen, return to the store to re-hang the items. Police officers are in full force, creating a barricade separating the angry protestors from the storeowners. After re-hanging the flag and picture, the couple pays homage to the items, getting down on their knees and bowing several times. Their actions incite the crowd, and the police respond by arresting 31 protestors.

February 26: Led by the younger Vietnamese American generation, demonstrators hold the largest community rally in Vietnamese American hostory, with an estimated 15,000 people turning out peacefully for a flashlight vigil designed to draw attention to human rights abuses in Vietnam.

March 5: The police raid Tran's store and seize more than 17,000 videotapes and 146 VCRs, alleging Tran of running an illegal video piracy operation. It is learned that the police had been secretly investigating Tran's business operation for the last two weeks.

March 8: Tran's attorneys announce that he would not return to the store, acknowledging he would be unable to reopen his business.

March 11: Demonstrations end as the landlord removes the "Hi-Tek" sign over the store, amid the cheers of protestors.

August 10: Orange County Superior Court Judge Corey Cramin finds Tran guilty of running the illegal operation and sentences him to 90 days in jail, 80 hours of community service, three-years probation, and a $200.00 fine.

July 2001: After an unsuccessual appeal to reverse his misdemeanor conviction, Tran begins his three-month sentence.

The incident garnered extensive local, state and national media attention. Major media outlets, including *Newsweek* and CNN, covered Tran's antics and the ongoing protest. Tran himself was invited as a guest on Rosie O'Donnell's national daily show.

In particular, local newspapers, such as the *Orange County Register* and the *Los Angeles Times*, chronicled the day-to-day events and activities taking place outside of the Hi-Tek video store and served as a forum for public discussion of the issues involved in the incident.

Commentaries and citizen opinions regularly filled these local publications. The mainstream public's response to Tran's actions and the community's protest was mixed.

Many supported the efforts of the protestors, sympathizing with their experiences as victims of war and persecution. They believed that both the protestors and Tran were entitled to First Amendment rights to engage in their activities. An equal number opposed the actions of the protestors, accusing them of stifling Tran's right to free speech guaranteed

under the First Amendment.

Others expressed disagreement or lack of comprehension with the entire incident, having little sympathy for the community's emotional outpouring and anti-Communist positions. Many felt that such sentiments should have been discarded after the end of the Cold War. They could not understand why Vietnamese Americans have not come to terms with their past experiences; America, they claimed, has since healed from the wounds of its involvement in Southeast Asia.

As the events in Little Saigon ensued, many in the mainstream public began to grow more and more intolerant of the efforts of the protestors, fueled by regular media reports of the escalating costs of maintaining a law enforcement presence in Little Saigon to protect Tran and to control the crowd. Moreover, non-Vietnamese residents living in nearby areas publicly complained of the increase in traffic and noise caused by police and protestors.

And for some, the incident fueled anti-immigrant sentiments. A host of news opinions and commentaries appeared in local newspapers that were outright bigoted and offensive.

At the grassroots level, the incident was a momentous period for the Little Saigon community, which was challenged on several fronts. Orange County's Little Saigon, the capital of Vietnamese America, has always served as a hotbed of information and discussion (political, social, economic and religious) about the Vietnamese diasporic communities, as well as about Vietnam.

During this period, the Little Saigon community had to grapple with organizing community members, fostering unity among community groups, and, at times, coordinating protest and education efforts with other Vietnamese Americans in other areas, such as San Jose and Houston. Protestors also had to address the needs and concerns of the local merchants neighboring Tran's Hi-Tek video store; many experienced a substantial drop in business revenue.

Simultaneously, Vietnamese American community leaders and civic groups were responsible for maintaining communication with law enforcement and articulating to the mainstream media and public the reasons behind the protest of Tran's actions, and to shed light on the continuing human rights violations in Vietnam.

Relations between the protestors and police during the incident were tense at times, especially after media reports of the use of racist and derogatory words over police radio lines to refer to the protestors (the actions were later linked to an outside source).

Vietnamese Americans involved in the protest wanted the American public to understand the contextual background and reasoning behind the community's response to Tran's actions. Some protestors argued that most Americans hold a limited, more liberal view of Ho Chi Minh and Communist rule in Vietnam – one that is influenced by the anti-war movement of the 1960s.

Many Americans are not aware of Communist atrocities and persecution that occurred in Vietnam during and after the war. Thang Ho, who was held in a Vietnamese re-education camp for 10 years and beaten regularly while there, explained his presence at the protests to the *Orange Country Register:* "We tried to forgive, put our past behind us, go on for the sake of our children, but this Truong Van Tran… he's ripping my chest open and stabbing my heart all over again."

Protestors likened Tran's hanging of the items in Little Saigon to the display of the Nazi flag or Adolf Hitler's portrait in a Jewish community. Hypothetically, such an action, protestors argued, would not only have angered and galvanized the Jewish community into protest but also would have brought out the disgust and opposition of most Americans.

The first months of 1999 were definitely a very trying period for the Vietnamese American community. As direct or indirect victims of war and of an oppressive Communist government, many Vietnamese Americans were deeply moved by the events during these months, having to re-live many of their shared experiences and to confront the subsequent collective outpouring of emotions.

And as an immigrant community as well as a community of color, Vietnamese Americans had to also deal with a significant portion of the American public that was unwilling to understand or sympathize with the community's concerns and experiences.

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 7

Oral History and Multiculturalism

SUBJECTS

World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature, and Multicultural Education

OBJECTIVES

1. To observe the human or personal side of history by learning about the people in the community who are essentially "living" histories.
2. To compare the histories of different ethnic groups and to locate areas or patterns of commonality.
3. To identify the cultural diversity and history of the local community, and to appreciate the contributions that members of diverse cultures or ethnic groups have made to the economic, political and social development of the community.
4. To understand the social, political, and economic conditions that force individuals and families to take drastic measures such as moving to a new area or another country.
5. To open a new avenue for communication with an older generation.
6. To follow the process of preparing a manuscript for publication, including gathering information, organizing, writing, editing, rewriting and formatting.
7. To appreciate the interrelationship of literature and history.
8. To realize that history is constructed, and that students can participate in writing history.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standards, Strand II: Time, Continuity and Change, Strand IV: Individual Identity and Development, and Strand V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

5 class periods
Copies of Handout: Interview Outline (This particular outline was previously used in an interview of a former South Vietnamese military officer who spent close to a decade in a Vietnamese Communist re-education camp.)
Copies of Handout: Sample Agreement Form for Interviewee
Tape recorders and, at most, two blank recording tapes for each team of students.

Note: Teachers may want to do additional research in the area of oral history. An internet search on "oral history" or "oral history guide" will give you an abundance of resources. Also, your local college or university may house an oral history program that could provide additional resources.

HOW TO DO IT

INTRODUCING THE PROJECT

Introduce the oral history project to the students and tell them that they will be working as teams on the project.

Explain to the students that many historical documents and books tend to focus on famous people and big events, and tend to ignore ordinary people and everyday events. But everyone has a story to tell about his or her life; we all have interesting life experiences to share.

Oral history preserves the stories and conversations of people who have participated in or lived through important political, cultural and/or economic developments in modern times. Oral history captures these direct personal experiences and eyewitness testimonies.

An oral history project involves students in the pursuit of history, where they learn new, unexpected facts and stories that strengthen and personalize their own knowledge of history. This is their chance to participate in the actual writing of history.

DEFINING THE TOPIC

The first step is to define the main topics or subjects to explore. Explain the purpose and objectives (listed above) of the project to students. General themes of the project are "multiculturalism," "diversity" and/or "immigrants and immigration."

Ask the students to identify all the racial and ethnic groups represented among the inhabitants of the local community. To further define the main topic, ask the students to brainstorm historical events or experiences often shared by members of each ethnic/racial group. Topics you might suggest:

- Experience of a Vietnamese refugee who escaped Vietnam in the late 1970s and 1980s.
- Experience of a Vietnamese prisoner in a Communist re-education camp.
- Adjustment and acculturation experiences of newly-arrived immigrants and refugees from Eastern Europe or Africa.
- Native American childhood memories of separation from families and tribal affiliations.
- Experiences of African Americans in schools prior to and after the Brown vs. Board of Education case (desegregation).
- Experiences of Japanese Americans in U.S. relocation camps during World War II.
- Experiences of European immigrants during the Depression.
- Life as Latino migrant workers in the early 20th century.
- Factors that influenced decision to immigrate to the U.S. or to move to your community.

RESEARCHING FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Divide the class into teams of two students each. Team members should decide on topics of interest to them – topics or subjects they would like to further explore.

To better prepare the students for the interview, ask them to conduct some background research on the topic or subject of choice. Information could be gathered on specific topics derived from the brainstorming session or on general characteristics and experiences of ethnic/racial groups.

Suggest they look at newspapers, magazines, textbooks, novels, maps, photographs of an era or place, internet census data and other websites. Remind students to record their thoughts and formulate questions that they may want to ask in the interview.

IDENTIFYING THE NARRATOR

After further defining the purpose and focus of each project, each team will identify an individual who could help shed light on the chosen subject or information they have gained from the background research.

To foster understanding of different groups, each team must choose an interviewee who belongs to a different racial or ethnic group than those of the team members. Ask the students:

• Where they would likely find people who are willing to volunteer for the project?
• How could they widen the pool of potential interviewees?
• Who are some of the people they know in the community? Neighbors? Other teachers and administrators in their school? Members of their church or temple? Immediate family members or relatives? Grandparents? Members of civic groups, senior citizens center, or community organizations? Parents of friends?

Stress the importance of safety for the students. Are they personally familiar with the potential interviewees? Do the interviewees come from a trusted source? The teacher can also have his or her own list of trusted individuals who would be willing to participate in the project. Interviews could also be conducted on school grounds.

Make sure that the people chosen by the teams somewhat represent the actual diversity of the local community.

PREPARING THE INTERVIEW OUTLINE
With the information obtained from the background research, each team should construct an interview outline. Provide students with copies of the Interview Outline Handout as a sample.

The interview outline is a general list of topics and questions; students should use it to help them in their interviews, but should not strictly adhere to it. The interviewers should remember to maintain the oral history as an open-ended process that allows the interviewee to shape the narrative in his or her own style. An oral history may not necessarily be sequential or chronological. The interviewer is there to simply guide the narrator.

CONTACTING THE NARRATOR
Now, each team should contact the person it plans on interviewing to ensure their cooperation. Explain to the potential interviewee the purpose of the class oral history project, ensuring that they know its plans and intentions. Give the interviewee a general outline of what will be covered in the interview. Make sure the interviewee knows you will be taping the interview. Also, provide an estimate of the length of the interview.

The next step is to arrange an interview appointment at a time most convenient for the narrator. It is recommended that teams reconfirm in advance just to be sure.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW
Remind the teams to practice using any equipment, such as a tape recorder, before the interview. Use good quality, 60-minute tapes. Remember that tapes have a few seconds of "lead time," so warn students to not begin recording the moment they turn on the tape recorder. Students should label tapes by writing the narrator's name, date and purpose on each side of the tape. If one side is blank, write "blank" on it.

Upon arrival, students should politely greet their narrator, introduce themselves, and thank the narrator for volunteering. Once the narrator and interviewers are settled and the equipment is ready, the students should record on the tape the date, location and the names of participants of the interview. To help smooth the interviewing process, students should not turn the tape recorder on and off; they should do so only when the tape needs to be turned over or when the narrator asks for it to be turned off.

Students should begin the interview with the most general question to see where this leads them, before asking

more detailed questions. Basic questions include: "Can you tell me about…?" or "Can you describe…?"

Students should ask open-ended questions and avoid questions that result in "yes" or "no" answers. Ask follow-up questions that would yield the most detail. Remember to formulate and ask questions that answer "who-what-when-where-and-why."

Students should not strictly adhere to the interview outline. Students should listen attentively, and follow and pursue the direction of the interviewee's narrative with additional questions that could capture more detail, rather than simply moving to the next question on the interview outline.

Remind students to be flexible. They should not let periods of silence fluster them. Ask only one question at a time. Keep questions short and clear. Do not interrupt. Give the narrator a chance to think about the question. Allow plenty of time for the narrator to answer. Respond positively with nods and smiles.

Students should be polite and respectful of the narrator's wishes. If the narrator asks for a break or that the tape recorder be turned off, the team should comply.

Since this oral history project is a team effort, suggest to the students that they take turns asking questions. Remind them to respect and to consider each other's feelings, opinions and input.

Remind students to take notes during the interview, as a reminder for later questions, clarification of details or additional research.

Also, students should pay attention to non-verbal cues, which may improve the students' analysis of the interview and the narrative. Some behaviors could be captured on tape, such as long pauses, laughter, or sighs. But there are equally important non-verbal behaviors; for example, the narrator may become particularly nervous, distracted at specific points in the interview, or may tear up as they narrate.

Students should end the interview at a reasonable time. One and one-half hours is usually enough time for the scope of this lesson.

Once the interview is completed, thank the narrator for volunteering and sharing. Remind the interviewee that the narrative will be used for the class project, and ask the interviewee to sign the agreement form (please see attached sample agreement form). Take the time to thank the narrator and answer any questions the narrator may have about the project.

Before the students depart, they should leave contact information (classroom teacher's information) for the narrator in case he or she would like to contact someone about the project. Remind students to send a thank-you card or letter to the narrator shortly after the interview.

PROCESSING THE INTERVIEW

The teams should get together as soon after the interview as possible. This could be for a short period of time, but it is important for the team to process the interviewing experience and to take additional notes of each member's observations and thoughts.

The next step is for students to transcribe their interviews. First, students should attempt to record the narrative verbatim and ignore grammatical structure. After completing the transcript, students should help each other with the editing process, with final approval from the teacher.

The final stories could be completed in a variety of formats, from question-answer to story narrative. All final stories should give credit to those who contributed information for the project. Photographs, newspaper clippings and other documents could be incorporated into the story.

At this point, teachers have discretion on how the students should present their stories in a final product. Teams can simply turn in their stories or make presentations to the rest of the class. Or, to make this class project more exciting and worthwhile, consider the possibility of publishing the oral histories as the final product of the project — a compilation book of oral histories of real people from your local community.

(Teachers who have helped students publish a book of oral histories report that students feel a high sense of excitement and accomplishment after the book copies come back from the printer.)

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE

After the class shares its oral histories, an important closure activity is necessary to help students evaluate their experience with the oral history project. A group discussion and/or writing assignment could address the following questions:

1. What did you learn from an oral history interview that you would not have learned from reading a book?
2. What did you learn that you did not know before about this particular person, historical event or time period, or ethnic/racial group?
3. Is there additional historical or other information that you would like to know or pursue about your interviewee, a particular event/time period, or an ethnic/racial community?
4. In hindsight, what could you have done to improve your oral history project (i.e., your interviewing skills or the questions asked)?
5. What, if any, skills did you gain from this oral history project (i.e. your speaking or communications skills, an ability to communicate with an older generation or your listening skills)?

SOURCES: ADAPTED FROM SEVERAL ORIGINAL LESSON PLANS BY ELAINE SEAVEY AND BY RICHARD OAKES PETERS; "AN ORAL HISTORY PRIMER" BY SHERNA BERGER GLUCK; AND THE INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO, "ADVENTURES IN ORAL HISTORY: USING ORAL HISTORY IN K-12," A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH AND LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND DIRECTED BY SHERNA BERGER GLUCK AND KAREN HARPER.

Lesson 7: Oral History and Multiculturalism
Handout 7(a)

Interview Outline Sample

Topic: The Story of a Vietnamese Prisoner of War
Personal and Family Background
1. Tell us about growing up in Vietnam.
Where were you born/raised?
How many were in your family?
What did your family do for a living?
What do you remember about growing up there?
What was your schooling there?
What were your plans for the future when you were going to school?
What made you join the military?

Life in Vietnam
2. Tell us about your life in Vietnam after 1975.
Why were you unable to escape Vietnam shortly before or after the fall of Saigon?
When were you imprisoned by the new Vietnamese government?
Where was the prison located?
How were you treated in the prison?
What was a typical day in prison? Please describe?
Were your family members able to visit you in the prison?
When did the Vietnamese government release you from prison?
What was life like for you after your release?

Leaving Vietnam
3. Tell us when and how you left Vietnam.
How old were you at the time?
Why did you and/or your family leave?
What were your plans?
By what means did you leave Vietnam?
Did you leave any immediate family members behind?
Did you have any reservations about leaving your homeland?

4. Tell us what you expected life to be like in the U.S.
What was your definition of the American Dream?
What is your definition of the American Dream now?
Do you think you or your family can attain it?

Settling in the U.S.
5. Tell us your first impressions of the U.S.
Did you know anyone here?
Where did you first settle? Why there?
Did you know or meet other Vietnamese people here?

Life in the U.S.
6. Tell me about your life in the U.S.
How did you go about finding a job?
housing?
making friends?
What was the most challenging adjustment for you?
Have you experienced any acts of prejudice or racism?
How does your life here compare to your life in Vietnam?

7. Were you able to maintain Vietnamese customs? Language?
What difficulties did you face maintaining your culture?
To become an American, do you think you can retain your culture?
Did you maintain ties with Vietnam? Visit?

Reflections
8. Looking back on your experience, what would you have done differently?
Would you have stayed in Vietnam?
What would you do differently in the U.S.?

Lesson 7: Oral History and Multiculturalism
Handout 7(b)

Agreement Form

Your story (oral history) is valuable for our Oral History Class Project on the topic of _____.
We are students at _____School.
If you are in agreement, please complete and sign the form below.

I hereby give to the ORAL HISTORY CLASS PROJECT and/or the _____ SCHOOL for educational uses and purposes outlined in the class, the following tapes of the interviews recorded on (dates) _____.

Unless otherwise specified below, I place no restrictions on non-commercial access to and use of the interviews.

Name _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

_____ _____
Signature of Interviewee Date

Name of interviewer _____ School phone _____

Name of interviewer _____ School phone _____

School Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

_____ _____
Signature of Teacher Date

I wish to place the following restrictions on the use of the recorded interviews (please check and initial those restrictions you wish to place on the use of your interview(s)):

☐ I wish to be identified by a different name _____

☐ I wish to restrict access to the materials until (date) _____

☐ Other (specify) _____

I/we agree to abide by these restrictions

Signed by _____ Date _____

Position _____ Phone/email_____

If you should wish to make inquiries at any future date about your interview, feel free to contact _____ _____, teacher and project supervisor at ( )_____.

Vietnamese Americans
LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

LESSON 8

A Vietnamese American Monument

SUBJECTS

World History, American Experience, World Literature, American Literature, Multicultural Education, Art, Math and Computer Aided Design (CAD)

OBJECTIVE

1. To use the expressive power of shapes, forms, and spaces.
2. To understand that memorials are designed to convey meaning through emotional connections.
3. To allow students to form their own judgments in interpreting the Vietnamese American experience.

STANDARDS SUPPORTED

This lesson supports national social studies standard, Strand II: Time, Continuity and Change.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

2-3 class periods
Pictures of various monuments
Construction paper, pencils, markers and pens

HOW TO DO IT

Tell students that they will be drawing a monument that reflects the Vietnamese American experience. In this activity, students can choose between using abstract geometric shapes or more complex forms to create the monument.

Good examples of these contrasting designs are the three Vietnam War Memorials in Washington, D.C.: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Ying Lin, The Three Servicemen statue by Frederick Hart, and the Vietnam Women's Memorial by Glenna Goodacre. Have students compare and contrasts merits of all the monuments. (Another good comparison would be between the Washington and Lincoln memorials.)

Discuss geometric shapes with the class and review the definitions of the shapes:
• Discuss the emotional response we have to certain shapes. For instance, compare several circles with a row of acute triangles. Which seems more inviting? Which seems less secure?
• Consider the position or orientation of shapes. For example, a triangle resting on its base is a very stable shape, but inverted it is unstable. Rectangles tipped at an angle become dynamic, suggesting either action or the potential for movement. A large shape leaning toward us can seem very threatening, but two shapes leaning against each other can be stable and even suggest shelter.

Explain that the students are to use geometric shapes to create a monument. Such memorials have taken many

forms and have expressed many different themes. Some are dedicated to the memory of the victims, while others specifically commemorate the struggle, the agony or the resistance of the victims. Monuments are also erected to the heroism of rescuers and liberators. Show students photos of various memorials.

Provide time for students to view architectural monuments online. Websites to visit include:
www.yad-vashem.org.il
www.flholocaustmuseum.org
www.splcenter.org/center/crmc/civil.jsp

To stimulate student thinking, have them brainstorm major themes in Vietnamese American history (e.g. the boat experience, the Vietnamese Communist flag incident, development of Little Saigon, family strengths, etc.). Have students choose one theme that best captures the Vietnamese American experience and develop it into a drawing of the monument.

Once students have decided what they would like to express in their memorial, they should make pencil sketches of various arrangements of shapes. Allow time for students to discuss their preliminary sketches in small groups. Students should then select the sketch that is most expressive of their chosen theme.

You may ask the students to draw into their sketches one or more human figures viewing the monument to establish a sense of scale. These figures can be drawn directly on the background paper.

If the teacher wishes to extend this activity as a math lesson, students could be asked to calculate the area of their monument. Problems of scale and ratio could also be introduced. For example, if the drawn figure is six inches tall, how tall would the monument be?

Students should also be required to write a justification for their artwork. The justification should describe the intent of the monument through materials used, colors, explanation of shapes and forms, etc.

Student projects may be completed as architectural renderings or as models.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSURE
Provide students with a rubric. The rubric should ask the students to answer the following questions about their finished product:

1. Is the chosen idea(s) or theme(s) easy to see or understand in my final project? Explain.
2. Did I need more information or research abou the idea or subject?
3. Did I show enough details to express what I had in mind?
4. How did my use (or non-use) of colors give my artwork the feeling I wanted to convey?
5. What mood(s) does my finished product express?
6. Could I make some part(s) more interesting? How would I do it?
7. Am I satisfied with this artwork?
8. Did I enjoy making my artwork?

Have them share artwork in small groups. Let them choose their favorite works from each group and then show to entire class.

REFERENCE: YOUNG, JAMES E. (1994). THE ART OF MEMORY: HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS IN HISTORY. NEW YORK: PRESTEL-VERLAG.