

**Vietnamese American Experiences Model Curriculum**  
**California Department of Education**  
**Vietnamese Refugee Experiences: Resilience and Challenges**  
**Grades 11–12**

**Authors:** Duyên Tống, Tori Phù, Jacob Lê, Bryan Hoàng

**Area of Study:** Vietnamese Departures and Transit

**Compelling Question:** How did Vietnamese build communities as they attempted to survive and traverse the hardships of life in transit?

**Lesson Question (Supporting Question):**

- How did Vietnamese boat people show resilience in facing their challenges during their time in asylum countries?
- How were refugees treated in refugee camps in Southeast Asia? What types of services were provided or not provided?

**Lesson Materials:**

- Supplies:
  - Photo: Vietnamese Refugees on Plane
  - Photo: Orote Point Refugee Camp Guam/Guahan
- Readings:
  - SEA Archives: Refugee Camps
  - Operation New Life: What they Remember from the Vietnam War
- Videos:
  - “Biển Nhớ” by Trịnh Công Sơn
  - Exit interview with Tung Trịnh in Philippines
- Handouts:
  - “Biển Nhớ” by Trịnh Công Sơn Lyrics
  - Note Catcher
  - Vocabulary
  - Link to handouts:  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/7mmk4hb4bbn7c9n20pmmsh1jj9p6w42p>

**Lesson Objective:**

Students will be able to describe the life experiences of migrants along refugee camps (Clark Air Force Base, Philippines and Anderson Air Force Base, Guam) and evaluate the overall experience of the refugees in these base camps by completing a graphic organizer.

**Ethnic Studies Theme:** This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *community and solidarity* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students analyze community resistance and alliances between communities, as well as the complexities within these experiences. Students consider the various ways Vietnamese resistance to imperialism has manifested over time.

For additional guidance around ethnic studies implementation, refer to the *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum* (2021) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>.

**Historical Thinking Skills:** This lesson will facilitate student proficiency in *historical perspectives*, one of Seixas' historical thinking skills (Seixas & Morton, 2013). To demonstrate the use of evidence to write historical fiction that accurately conveys the beliefs, values, and motivations of historical actors. Students consider how the perspectives of historical actors are best understood by considering their historical context.

**Standards Addressed:**

HSS-11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2: Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

**Lesson Assessment:**

Students will select one refugee camp site as a focus for their lesson assessment. Students will be tasked with creating a journal entry in the perspective of a migrant along their selected refugee camp, reflecting on the experiences at the designated site. In a one-page letter, students will reflect on a 'day in the life' and complete the letter in a first person narrative. The letter can be handwritten, typed, or students can opt for a video reflection recording. Details and facts from the sources in the lesson should be included.

**Suggested Amount of Time:** 40–60 minutes

**Lesson Background:**

- First wave of Vietnamese refugees were officially organized by the US evacuation procedures, and began in April 1975. The most traveled route (41% of refugees) of these refugees was marked by the following route: 1- Sài Gòn, Viet Nam; 2- Clark Air Force Base, the Philippines; 3- Anderson Air Force Base, Guam; 4 - Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, San Diego, California, US
- US evacuation efforts were part of its long standing history of military colonialism in Viet Nam, the Philippines, Guam, and CA.
  - California military base, the very places credited and valorized for resettling Vietnamese refugees in 1975, were the very ones responsible for inducing the refugee displacement in the first place.

**Lesson Procedures:**

- a. Warm-Up (five minutes)
  - i. Ask students to think of a moment when they had to be resilient in the face of a challenge.
  - ii. Allow students to share with a peer, and then solicit student responses to the class.
  - iii. Encourage students to continue to think about the idea of resilience throughout the lesson.
- b. Hook Introduction (five minutes)
  - i. Play the song “Biển Nhớ” by Trịnh Công Sơn, while showing the lyrics with the translation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CowW8pRypHc>).
    1. Text of Vietnamese lyrics can also be accessed here: <https://genius.com/Trinh-cong-son-bien-nho-lyrics>
  - ii. Prompt students to discuss with a partner: Pick a golden line that stands out to you and may give you insight into the Vietnamese refugee experience. What does this line reveal to you about the refugee experience?
  - iii. Suggested teacher speaking points to discuss context of song: “"Biển Nhớ" is one of the most famous songs composed by Trịnh Công Sơn, one of Vietnam's most revered musicians and songwriters. Trịnh Công Sơn's music is deeply entwined with the history of Vietnam, particularly the Vietnam War, and his songs often speak of love, loss, and longing within the context of war and its aftermath. The title "Biển Nhớ" translates to "Sea of Remembrance" or "Sea of Longing". The song was originally written during the war period and was part of Trịnh's body of

work that aimed to convey the sorrow, despair, and hopelessness felt by many Vietnamese people amid the devastations of war. After the Fall of Sài Gòn in 1975 and the boat people exodus of over 2 million refugees, "Biển Nhớ" took on a new and poignant significance for the Vietnamese diaspora. The song's themes of longing, solitude, and remembrance resonated deeply with the experiences of the refugees, who were forced to leave their homeland and venture into the vast, uncertain sea. The song thus became a powerful symbol and form of expression for the refugee boat experience, encapsulating the emotional struggles of displacement, the longing for home, and the memories of a past life that the refugees carried with them."

- iv. As teachers introduce the lesson objective and lesson questions, they can make the "Vocabulary" handout available to students as a reference document.
- c. Teacher Modeling: Interaction with first source (10 minutes)
- i. A suggested note catcher can be found in the handouts:  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/7mmk4hb4bbn7c9n20pmmsh1jj9p6w42p>
  - ii. Starting with Source A (Exit interview with Tùng Trịnh in Philippines, <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/81235/d80032/>), play this video to the whole class.
    1. The interview transcript can be accessed here:  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/jlii6clsqewchb77dthcfl8bof4vq38b>
    2. As students watch the video, prompt them to add a list of details about signs of resilience and challenges faced to the 'A' section on the note catcher.
    3. Once the interview video is over, give students some time to revisit section 'A' with an elbow partner.
    4. Before asking for students to volunteer, share one point in each row section. After putting your own response, ask for students to volunteer what details they gathered.
- d. Community Collaboration: Interaction with sources (20–30 minutes)
- i. Have students move onto analyzing sections B-E, either independently or with a partner or group.
    1. Source B: SEA Archives: Refugee Camps  
<https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/sites/all/publications/exhibits/seaexhibit/refugeecam.html>

- a. In this reading, teachers should emphasize the particular ideas: Refugee processing centers were another type of camp for refugees accepted for resettlement. Conditions, and therefore also the refugees' attitude, were much improved in these centers, which provided orientation and language instruction to prepare refugees for their new life in another country. The United States refugee processing centers were located in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand.
2. Source C: Vietnamese Refugees on Plane 1975 Image:  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/h5bxb66y1k40xngtz8et398ob9cdufr>
    - a. Sourced from:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/51137622213>
  3. Source D: Orote Point Refugee Camp Guam/Guahan Image:  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ts6kvmwhnmsjvnysyvme531pt4yqrqm2>
    - a. Sourced from:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/52496779284/in/potostream/>
  4. Source E: Operation New Life: What they remember from the Vietnam War  
[https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/operation-new-life-what-they-remember-from-the-vietnam-war/article\\_7c979d02-f5f5-11eb-abc0-eb6b5b7747f0.html](https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/operation-new-life-what-they-remember-from-the-vietnam-war/article_7c979d02-f5f5-11eb-abc0-eb6b5b7747f0.html)
- ii. Prompt them to follow the same process of tracking signs of resilience and challenges.
  - iii. Remind them that some sources may require them to make generalizations about the pictures or statistics and consider unintended consequences and/or benefits.
  - iv. Once time is up, revisit sources with students and ask for students to share what points were observed from those sources.
  - v. As students are sharing, be sure to have the note catcher projected up on the screen so that you can add their personal notes.
  - vi. Prompt students to answer the lesson questions with a prompt (see lesson scaffolding).
- e. Cultural Production (20 minutes)

- i. Students will select one refugee camp site as a focus for their lesson assessment. Students will be tasked with creating a journal entry in the perspective of a migrant along their selected refugee camp, reflecting on the experiences at the designated site. In a one-page letter, students will reflect on a ‘day in the life’ and complete the letter in a first person narrative. The letter can be handwritten, typed, or students can opt for a video reflection recording. Details and facts from the sources in the lesson should be included. The final product can be open to a written, visual, or audio narrative.
  1. Encourage students to be selective and specific; they should identify a name for the fictional character, age, gender, etc.
- f. Conclusive Dialogue (10 minutes)
  - i. Students will share their letters to their peers. Alternatively, all letters can be posted for all students to view and access, and students can self-select into letters to read.

### Scaffolding:

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
  - Invite personal response, evaluation and self-reflection to content and activities
- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
  - Highlight or emphasize key elements in text, graphics, diagrams, formulas
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
  - Provide sentence starters or sentence strips
    - Directions: Questions and sentence frames to address the following *essential questions*: *How were refugees treated? What types of services were provided/not provided? What are some challenges the refugees faced? What are some ways that refugees showed resilience?*
    - “Refugees were treated....”.
    - With compassion.
    - With hostility.
    - With neglect.
    - With respect.
    - As burdens.
    - As contributors.

- With suspicion.
- As second-class.
- With hospitality.
- With delays.
- With support.
- As victims.
- With violations.
- As tools.
- With integration.

“Refugees were provided with services such as....”

- Housing assistance
- Healthcare and medical services
- Education and language training
- Legal aid and refugee status determination support
- Food and nutrition support
- Psychosocial support and counseling
- Job placement and employment support
- Cultural orientation and integration programs
- Community and social support networks
- Childcare and family support services
- Access to clean water and sanitation facilities
- Transportation assistance
- Vocational training and skill development programs
- Access to legal and human rights advocacy organizations
- Interpreting and translation services

“Refugees faced challenges such as...”

- Language barriers
- Cultural adjustment
- Discrimination and prejudice
- Lack of legal status
- Limited access to education
- Economic hardships
- Separation from family
- Trauma and mental health issues
- Healthcare access
- Social integration
- Loss of identity and social networks
- Xenophobia and hostility
- Inadequate living conditions
- Uncertain future and legal status
- Lack of employment opportunities

“Refugees showed **resilience** by...”

- Adapting and persevering in new environments.
- Finding ways to communicate and connect.
- Learning and building a better future.
- Supporting and helping each other.
- Staying strong and hopeful.
- Keeping their traditions while embracing change.
- Sharing resources and knowledge.
- Standing up for rights and fairness.
- Contributing skills to new communities.
- Creating opportunities for themselves.
- Nurturing resilient children.
- Working together for stronger communities.
- Seeking support for emotional well-being.
- Inspiring others with their strength.
- Never giving up.

For additional ideas to support your students, check out the UDL Guidelines at CAST (2018) <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

### **Multilingual Learner Supports:**

- **Emerging:** Consider the following method to support with emerging students:
  - Reading: Preview the text content with pictures, videos, demos, charts, or experiences
  - Reading: Pair students to read one text together
    - Students turn to their designated partners to discuss prompts posed by the teacher. Partnerships are organized in teams of two.
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
  - Reading: Provide a content vocabulary word bank with non linguistic representations
    - Students use a Frayer graphic organizer to support understanding of a key word or concept. Place the target word in the center amid four surrounding quadrants to support different facets of word meaning.
- **Bridging:** Consider the following method to support with bridging students:
  - Reading: Use focused questions to guide reading
    - Students use inquiry posing their own questions and wonderings to guide shared research experiences.

For additional guidance around scaffolding for multilingual learners, please consult the following



resources:

- *English Learner Toolkit of Strategies*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ujkdc2xp1dqjzrlq55czph50c3sq1ngu>
- *Providing Appropriate Scaffolding*  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-to-olkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>
- *Strategies for ELD*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/dcp15ymah51uwizpmmt2vys5zr2r5reu>
- *ELA / ELD Framework*  
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-framework>
- *California ELD Standards*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/vqn43cd632z22p8mfzn2h7pntc71kb02>

### Enrichment Opportunities:

1. Operation Babylift - Have students visit this website to learn about Operation Babylist that occurred in April 1975. Students also have the option of engaging with the interactive timeline at the bottom of the webpage.  
<https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/museum/exhibits/babylift/>
2. Advocacy - Considering the experiences and treatment of the Vietnamese refugees at these camp bases, students are to create (digitally or on poster paper) an advocacy poster sign. This poster sign should request for action steps that the community or government can take to uplift the Vietnamese refugee community at the bases towards a better future. Students can consider the challenges and create a slogan or action steps based on the negative experiences.

### Works Cited:

- American Initiative. 2022. *Asian American Studies K-12 Framework*.  
<https://asianamericanresearchinitiative.org/asian-american-studies-curriculum-framework/>
- Biển Nhớ (Trịnh Công Sơn) - Khánh Ly*. (n.d.). www.youtube.com. Retrieved December 1, 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CowW8pRypHc>
- Britt, K. 2020, May 11. *English learner toolkit of strategies*. California County Superintendents.  
<https://cacountysupts.org/english-learner-toolkit-of-strategies/>
- California Department of Education. 2021. *Ethnic studies model curriculum*.  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>
- California Department of Education & English Learner Support Division. 2012. *California*

*English Language Development standards (Electronic Edition) kindergarten through grade 12 (F. Ong & J. McLean, Eds.).* California Department of Education.  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/eldstndpublication14.pdf>

California Educators Together. (n.d.). *ELA / ELD framework.*

<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-framework>

CAST. 2018. *The UDL guidelines.* <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Flickr. 2021, April 25. *Vietnam (S) People Refugees Evacuating Plan.* Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/51137622213>

Flickr. 2022, November 13. *Vietnamese Refugees entering the tent city at Crote Point in Guam Naval Base.* Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/52496779284/in/photostream/>

San Diego County Office of Education. (n.d.). *Providing appropriate scaffolding.*

<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-to-olkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>

SEA Archive. (n.d.). *Refugee Camps.* SEA Archive, UC Irvine.

<https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/sites/all/publications/exhibits/seaexhibit/refugeecam.html>

Seixas, P., & Morton, T. 2013. *The big six: Historical thinking concepts.* Nelson Education.

*Trịnh công sơn – biển nhớ.* (n.d.). Genius. <https://genius.com/Trinh-cong-son-bien-nho-lyrics>

Tulare County Office of Education. (n.d.). *Strategies for ELD.*

<https://commoncore.tcoe.org/Content/Public/doc/Alpha-CollectionofELDStrategies.pdf>

Viet Stories: Vietnamese American Oral History Project (VAOHP). 2005-2007. *Exit interview with Tung Trinh in Philippines, tape 10.* UCI Southeast Asian Archive.

<https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/81235/d80032/>

Wen, A. 2021, August 10. *Operation New Life: What they remember from the Vietnam War.* *Pacific Daily News.*

[https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/operation-new-life-what-they-remember-from-the-vietnam-war/article\\_7c979d02-f5f5-11eb-abc0-eb6b5b7747f0.html](https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/operation-new-life-what-they-remember-from-the-vietnam-war/article_7c979d02-f5f5-11eb-abc0-eb6b5b7747f0.html)

### Supplementary Sources:

Zhou, M., & Bankston III, C. L. 2000. Straddling Two Social Worlds: The Experience of Vietnamese Refugee Children in the United States. Urban Diversity Series No. 111. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED439180.pdf>

University of California Irvine Southeast Asian Archive. (n.d.). Seaa.lib.uci.edu. Retrieved September 19, 2023, from <https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/sites/all/publications/exhibits/seaexhibit/refugeecam.html>

Zhou, M., & Bankston III, C. L. 2000. Straddling Two Social Worlds: The Experience of Vietnamese Refugee Children in the United States. Urban Diversity Series No. 111. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED439180.pdf>