

Vietnamese American Experiences Model Curriculum
California Department of Education
"The Boat" by Nam Le and Matt Huynh
Grades: 4–5

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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 Questions (Supporting Questions):

- What themes and takeaways can be observed about Vietnamese boat people’s experiences from reading the graphic novel “The Boat”?
- What are the major plot elements of “The Boat” graphic novel?

Materials:

- Supplies:
 - Access to laptop device
- Readings:
 - Digital book, *The Boat*
- Handouts:
 - Plot Elements Diagram
 - Link to handouts:
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/u1vuz4ayrz2596nh82ybwm1tqoloyhg1>

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to summarize the experiences of the second wave of Vietnamese refugees (boat people) and identify major plot elements in the digital story, “The Boat” by Nam Lê and Matt Huynh by answering text dependent questions and completing a plot elements diagram.

Ethnic Studies Themes: This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *reclamation and joy* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students explore the ways that communities reclaim histories through art, cultural

expression, and counternarratives. Students will unpack the Vietnamese refugee experiences from the perspective of a Vietnamese narrative.

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 different historical actors have diverse perspectives on the events in which they are involved. Exploring these is key to understanding historical events.

Standards Addressed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

Lesson Assessment:

Students will choose from one of the following assessments:

- **Book Cover:** Students will create a book cover for “The Boat”. This can be done digitally or by hand. Students will recreate a title for this graphic novel that reflects the theme and takeaways of the story. Students should incorporate symbolism into the book cover and include two to three standout quotes from the story.
- **Visualizing Theme Collage:** Students should identify the main two to three themes of “The Boat” and create a visual collage to reflect the theme components. The collage can be done by hand or digitally and should incorporate the following: five symbols, two to three quotes that connect to the theme, and four key words that describe the theme.

Suggested Amount of Time: 40–70 Minutes

Lesson Background: The second wave of refugees from Vietnam were during the time period of the mid 1970s to mid 1990s. For the purposes of this lesson, we will focus primarily on the years 1979-1984. The first wave of refugees were officially organized by the United States government. However, when the US became populated by refugees, they stopped organizing the migration of Vietnamese refugees into their country. From there, Vietnamese refugees had to find

other means and ways to leave Vietnam. The second wave occurred during the 1980's, labeled so by the Carter Administration in America. There were no air transports, or any other transports. Many people resorted to traveling by sea. Often they found themselves in global political standoffs between countries who did not accept them. Many ended up in temporary camps, attacked by pirates, lost at sea or victims of human trafficking. It is estimated that over 400,000 people lost their lives in this wave alone.

Lesson Procedures:

- b. Lesson Opener: Making Predictions (five minutes)
 - i. Prompt students to think of three to five words that come to mind when they hear the phrase 'Boat People'.
 - ii. This can be written down on a paper, shared with a peer, or a co-constructed digital word cloud that is presented to the class.
 - iii. Once students have thought of their words and shared it to the class, display the co-constructed word cloud and then prompt students to make a prediction as to what the digital book may be about.
 - iv. Alternatively, teachers can display the opening images from the website: (<https://www.sbs.com.au/theboat/>) and have students make a prediction about the plot of the story.
- c. Shared Learning: Interaction with Source (25–40 minutes)
 - i. Open the link to the digital book “The Boat”, (<https://www.sbs.com.au/theboat/>) and go through Chapter One together as a class.
 - Chapter One can be displayed on the screen and students can follow along from there.
 - ii. Prior to reading the digital book, text dependent questions (TDQ) should be made available to students (digitally or on paper). Link here: <https://ucdavis.box.com/s/u1vuz4ayrz2596nh82ybwmltqoloyhg1>
 - Preview questions with students or give them time to preview questions with a partner or independently. Advise students to ask questions if they are unsure of some vocabulary.
 - a. Possible TDQs to prompt students:
 - i. Who is the protagonist of the story? What do we find out about her personality and her background?

- ii. Who are the other main characters of the story? What do we find out about their personalities and backgrounds?
 - iii. Who are the side characters? What role do they play in the story of Mai?
 - iv. Identify the main settings (plot elements) of the story (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, conflict, etc).
 - v. The main themes of this story are: loneliness, fear, loss, family and resilience. Identify a scene from the story where each theme is powerfully communicated.
 - vi. How does the use of sound effects and images (moving and static) help develop each setting?
 - iii. After chapter one has finished playing, ask students to revisit their predictions from the hook activity.
 - Do their predictions match what they think of when it comes to boat people, or have their thoughts changed after this first chapter of the book?
 - Revisit the TDQs as a whole class and see if any questions are able to be answered yet.
 - iv. Chapters two through four can continue to be played along in class, but allow for partner discussion of the TDQs.
 - After students complete TDQs with a partner, allow for class share to ensure all students are following along adequately.
 - v. Chapters five and six can continue to be played along in class, but allow for students to independently answer TDQs.
 - After students complete TDQs independently, allow for class share to ensure all students are following along adequately.
- d. Plot Element Diagram (15–20 minutes)
 - i. This diagram can be printed on paper worksheets for students or can be on large poster papers for groups (of two or three) to work on.
 - See sample template for plot element diagram:
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/mc6u0vc6gbheecqbfjrd5p2p19wruy65>

- a. Original source:
<https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/articles/2018-2019/teacher-mag/fall/blank-plot-diagram.pdf>
- ii. Before proceeding with the diagram, provide students with a vocabulary list of the plot element terms and definitions.
- iii. Teachers can follow a gradual release model to scaffold the completion of the plot element diagram (with the following categories: setting, characters, exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, theme).
 - Once students complete the plot element diagram, provide time for class share out to double check student responses.
- iv. Alternatively, students can create the plot diagram digitally.
- v. Answer Key:
 - Setting: on a boat, post-Vietnam War time era, dangerous waves in the ocean.
 - Characters: Mai, Truong, Quyên
 - Conflicts: Bodies crammed on boat, treacherous wind conditions, sicknesses, fear, loneliness, death.
 - Exposition: A dangerous storm rocks the boat and Mai is left in fear. She notices a little boy, Truong, also in distress and feeling ill.
 - Rising Actions: Mai tries to comfort Truong, while also trying to find personal ways to cope with her fear of the dangerous storm. Mai reminisces to strong memories with her fragile mother and blind father. Mai recalls her process in going onto the boat in preparation for escape. Boat eventually finds land but Mai realizes that there are a lot fewer bodies and people on the boat.
 - Climax: Truong has passed away and his body was wrapped up.
 - Falling Action: Mai and Quyên had to throw Truong’s body overboard into the sea.
 - The main themes of this story are: loneliness, fear, loss, family and resilience.
- e. Cultural Production (20 minutes)
 - i. After students have identified the major plot elements of “The Boat”, students will choose an assessment to reflect on the theme of the digital novel. The final product can be open to a written, visual, or audio narrative.

- ii. Option A: Book Cover
 - Students will create a book cover for “The Boat”. This can be done digitally or by hand. Students will recreate a title for this graphic novel that reflects the theme and takeaways of the story. Students should incorporate symbolism into the book cover and include two to three standout quotes from the story.
 - iii. Option B: Visualizing Theme Collage
 - Students should identify the main two to three themes of “The Boat” and create a visual collage to reflect the theme components. The collage can be done by hand or digitally and should incorporate the following: five symbols, two to three quotes that connect to the theme, and four key words that describe the theme.
 - iv. Option C: Have a modified socratic seminar, or oral class discussion using the lesson question: What can we learn from the Vietnamese boat people’s experiences on their route towards America?
- f. Conclusive Dialogue and Reflection - In small groups or with a partner, students will share their final assessment.
- i. Guide students to consider the lesson questions when sharing theme statements:
 - What can we learn from the Vietnamese boat people’s experiences on their route towards America?
 - ii. Optional thinking skill prompts: Whose perspective does this narrative represent? Why is this narrative presented this way?

Scaffolding:

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
 - Vary the level of sensory stimulation:
 - Variation in the presence of background noise or visual stimulation, noise buffers, number of features or items presented at a time.
 - Variation in pace of work, length of work sessions, availability of breaks or time-outs, or timing or sequence of activities
- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:

- Pre-teach vocabulary and symbols, especially in ways that promote connection to the learners' experience and prior knowledge
 - A Word Bank can be made available of academic language of the text dependent questions (terms such as protagonist, setting, sound effects, resilience, theme, etc).
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
 - Use story webs, outlining tools, or concept mapping tools

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: Use choral reading or shared reading
 - Teacher reads text aloud, modeling fluency and expression, inviting students to engage in extended conversations in response to text-dependent questions. Teacher uses strategically planned stopping points to highlight vocabulary and prompt student thinking and discussion about text. Students use vocabulary from the text when talking and writing about text collaboratively and independently.
 - Students listen to a content-rich text read aloud, take notes, collaborate with a partner and rebuild (as precisely as possible) the original text.
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
 - Reading: Use guided reading
 - In a shared or interactive writing format, chart out characters, setting, problem, and events (including orientation, complication, and resolution). Add theme, as appropriate.
- **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. Theme Collage: Students can create a digital or physical collage surrounding the theme word that they have chosen. The word should be visible on the collage and the surrounding quotes, images, or symbols should reflect the theme. Collages can include but are not limited to the following: pictures, quotes from “The Boat” graphic novel, statistics, other facts, themes, and more.
2. Character Analysis - Have students choose a character from “The Boat” digital novel of their choice. As they analyze characterization, students will use the S.T.E.A.L strategy: what the character says, what the character thinks, their effect on others, their actions, and their looks. After this initial note taking, students can showcase their character in any of the following formats: a customized license plate, a shoe design, a social media post, or other. As they design, students should consider symbolism and choose text or visuals that best represent the character.

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