

# Educator Discussion Guide

## ADRIFT AT SEA: A VIETNAMESE BOY'S STORY OF SURVIVAL

by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, Illustrations by Brian Deines

### Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2018-2019

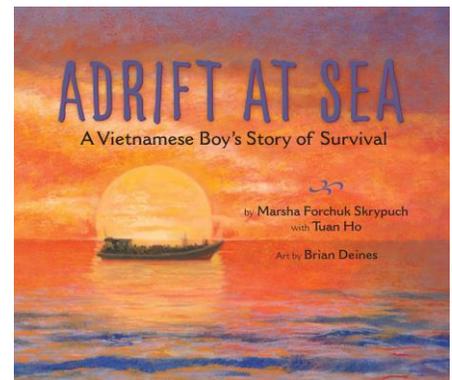
#### Grade 3-5

*Submitted by Doreen Rivere*

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#### ABOUT THE BOOK

This is a true story recounted by Tuan Ho, who as a six year old boy in 1981 escaped Vietnam with his family. Their harrowing journey began under cover of night when dodging bullets, they made their way to a crowded fishing boat. For six tense days they endured crowded conditions, lack of water, leaks, and engine failure until at last they were rescued by an American aircraft carrier. His story is told in first person, and is aimed at readers the same age as him during his escape.



Tuan Ho's story is one of courage and will to survive. The illustrations by Brian Deines—oils on canvas in orange, yellow and blue—capture the fear and disparity that Tuan and his family endured while adrift at sea. The author included numerous photos of the Ho family, both in Vietnam and in Canada. She has also included a brief history of the "boat people," as the refugees were called.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch is a Ukrainian Canadian children's writer who lives in Brantford, Ontario. She received a BA in English and a Master of Library Science from the University of Western Ontario, and began writing fiction in 1992. Most of her books are about young people and war. Her book *Making Bombs for Hitler*, US edition won Amazon.com #1 bestseller in Children's European Historical Fiction.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://www.calla.com/wordpress/about-marsha/>

Accessed 19, September, 2017

## **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

Brian Deines is from Red Deer, Alberta. He graduated from the Alberta College of Art in 1977, where he majored in Visual Communications. Before becoming an artist, he was a “roughneck and a rigger” in the oilfields of Alberta and worked as a groundskeeper at a golf country club. Brian works in mostly oils and has sometimes been called “a painter of light”. His art is inspired by his three children. Awards and honors he has received include: *The Road to Afghanistan*, Young Reader Book of the Year 2014, *Our Canadian Flag*, Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator’s Award, 2005 as well as other Canadian awards and honors.

Biographical information taken from the publisher’s website at  
<http://www.scholastic.ca/books/authors&illustrators/brian-deines>  
Accessed 19, September, 2017

## **BOOK AWARDS**

2017 Canadian Children’s Literature Roundtables Information Book Award finalist  
2017 Red Cedar Information Book Award nominee  
2017 Starred selection: CCBC Best Books for Kids  
2016 Resource Links Best Book

## **OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*Making Bombs for Hitler* (2017)  
*Prisoners in the Promised Land* (2012)  
*Daughter of War* (2008)  
*The Hunger* (2002)

## **OTHER TITLES BY ILLUSTRATOR**

*In a Cloud of Dust* (2015)  
*The Road to Afghanistan* (2013)  
*A Bear in War* (2009)  
*Our Canadian Flag* (2004)

## **RELATED TITLES**

*Sitting Bull: Lakota Warrior and Defender of His People* by S. D. Nelson. Harry N. Abrams,  
2015. 56 p.  
*The Last Princess: The Story of Princess Ka'iulani of Hawai'i* by Fay Stanley. HarperCollins,  
1991. 40 p.

## **PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

- Have the students look at the cover of *Adrift at Sea*. Ask the students to shout out what they think the book might be about based on first impressions of the cover art. Write down all student responses on the board and then choose a few students to justify or explain their answer.

- Ask the students, “How do you think you would feel if you were forced to leave this country to find a new home outside the United States?” Have the students do a think/pair/share, and then discuss with the students the different emotions that they might experience.
- Share with your students a brief, grade appropriate, overview of the Vietnam War and life in Post-War Vietnam. Show them on a map where Vietnam is and share photos from this time period to help them visualize the setting of the book.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you think life in Post-War Vietnam is different than life in the United States now? What details from the story helped you determine your answer?
2. On page five, the author used the word “careens,” what do you think that word means? What evidence from the text helped you determine the meaning of “careens?”
3. On page six, the driver of the truck that helps Tuan and his mom escape said, “Get out before they catch me.” What do you think would have happened if the man was caught? Give details from the story to support your answer.
4. On page 18, the author wrote, “She pours a trickle into the cap of the jug and hands it to me.” What do you think the word “trickle” means? What text evidence did you use to help you determine the meaning of “trickle?”
5. With all of the water surrounding their boat, why couldn’t Tuan and the other refugees drink that water? State specific evidence from the story that you used to help you answer the question.
6. How many different boats did Tuan and his family ride on during their escape? Give a description of each boat.
7. When Tuan’s mom was bailing out the boat and she saw many dolphins, she told Tuan, “It’s a sign.” What do you think the dolphins were a sign of? What from the story helped you reach your decision?
8. On page 31, when the American aircraft carrier rescued Tuan and his family, a sailor talked to Tuan but he could not understand him. Why do you think that Tuan didn’t understand what the sailor told him? What details in the story helped you determine the reason?
9. How does the image on page 19, add to the meaning of the story?
10. How did the main characters in the story solve their problem?
11. Summarize the story in your own words, and cite specific details from the story in your summary.
12. Describe the main characters from the story. Give two traits for each of the main characters, and evidence from the story to support those traits.
13. Who is telling the story? Cite specific evidence that helped you determine who was telling the story.
14. What are some sacrifices that Tuan’s family made to come to America? Were these easy things to give up and leave behind? Why or why not?
15. What is the author’s purpose for writing this story? Explain your reasoning using specific details from the story.

16. In what ways is it difficult for immigrants to resettle in a different country?  
17. What are some ways that you can show kindness to immigrants resettling in America?

## **CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

### **Science:**

- Ask students to think back in the story *Adrift At Sea*, and ask if anyone knows why Tuan could not drink the water from the ocean. Show students a short video, “What Happens When You Drink Saltwater.” [Http: //paradise.docastaway.com/drinking-sea-water/](http://paradise.docastaway.com/drinking-sea-water/).
- Discuss the process of distillation-the only way to make seawater drinkable. Then demonstrate the distillation process by taking a glass of saltwater, boiling it, and then letting it cool. After the water has cooled, let the students taste the water.

### **Physical Education:**

- Set up that has large rocks, a balance plank, and a rope ladder. The course is representative of the obstacles that Tuan faced in *Adrift At Sea*, such as jumping over rocks while running toward the boat, walking the plank to get to the large fishing boat, and climbing the rope ladder to get on the American Aircraft ship.

### **Social Studies:**

- After a brief presentation on Vietnam have students go to the library and research Vietnam. Then have students make a poster board of images and information about Vietnam, including maps and photos, main industries today, notable historic sites, and places of interest to visitors. The poster boards will be exhibited in the classroom so all students can learn facts they may not have included on their project. Students can also give a brief oral report about their project.

### **Math:**

- Students will calculate how many minutes Tuan and his family were adrift at sea by converting days to minutes.
- Each student will then create a word problem that has some time conversion (years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds). Each student will then partner up with another student and try to work each other’s time conversion problem.

### **Vocabulary:**

refugee	skiff	bailing
adrift	parched	careens
mutters	subside	envelop
commotion	scrabbles	

## **RELATED WEBSITES**

### **History of the Vietnamese Boat People**

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/vietnam-war/vietnamese-boat-people/>

A history of the “boat people” explains why the refugees tried to escape Vietnam after the Vietnam War.

### **The Fall of Saigon**

<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/why-they-fled-the-fall-of-saigon>

A video introduction of the aftermath of the Vietnam War, which caused people to try to escape Vietnam.

### **Untold Stories of The Vietnamese Boat People**

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/untold-stories-of-the-vietnamese-boat-people\\_us\\_58d176a2e4b00705db536ced](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/untold-stories-of-the-vietnamese-boat-people_us_58d176a2e4b00705db536ced)

This has a video that shows a celebration of many Vietnamese refugees that came together to celebrate their freedom. There is also an article with interviews from five “Vietnamese Boat People” that tell what their life was like after they escaped Vietnam.