

Teachers Notes
by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright

The Little Refugee
Anh Do and Suzanne Do
Illustrated By Bruce Whatley

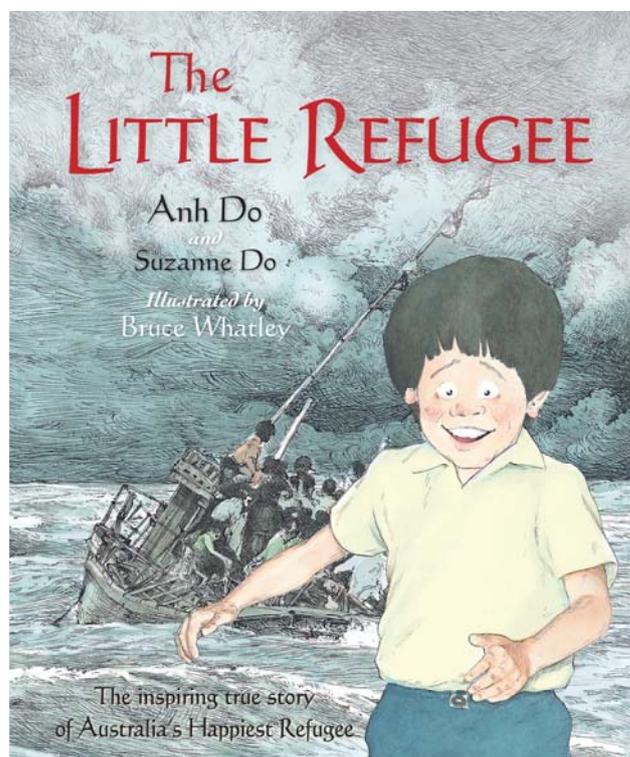
ISBN 9781742378329

Recommended for ages 4-8 yrs

Older students and adults will also appreciate this book.

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INTRODUCTION

You must always have hope that things will be okay.

This text tells Anh Do's story of his amazing journey. From a childhood of poverty in Vietnam, and the aftermath of the Vietnam War, he and his family and their friends fled from their country by fishing vessel.

They battled heat, storms, hunger, thirst, attack, loneliness and fear before they found a safe haven in a new country, and a new life in Australia. But there they were forced to adapt and to learn new skills in order to survive.

Anh's early struggles were rewarded by both academic achievement and a highly successful career as a comedian. And then, when he wrote and published the memoir of his life, he achieved further acclaim.

This picture book is drawn from his memoir, and with Bruce Whatley's evocative drawings, tells Anh Do's inspiring story to children for the first time.

It is a testimony to the power of hope, resilience, family, friends and good humour to carry us through even the darkest of times.

CURRICULUM AREAS

This book could be studied in lower primary or even upper primary and lower secondary classrooms. It is relevant in two **curriculum areas**: **Arts** (Language and Literacy, Visual Literacy, Creative Arts); and **Studies of Society & Environment**.

It could be used to explore **Themes** such as:

- **Refugees**
- **War and Dispossession**
- **Vietnamese Culture and History**
- **Racial and Ethnic Difference**

and to explore **Values** such as:

- **Compassion**
- **Fear & Resilience**
- **Hope**

Teachers might prepare themselves by reading more widely on the background to Anh Do's journey in texts intended for adults. [See **Bibliography** and **Internet Resources**.] Use **quotes** from the book to explore these themes. For example:

*Even though we were poor and the house was crowded,
I was happy because there were always lots of people to play with me.*

*Even when things seem really terrible,
something good can come of it.*

CURRICULUM TOPICS

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

- The **first person memoir** is a form of writing which requires the author to not only have a story to tell, but a style and voice in which to tell it. Discuss the various narrative devices used in this book to convey the feelings of Anh Do and his family as they forge a new life in Australia.
- Anh Do has used both **humour and pathos** to tell his story. Humour often stems from adversity. Which incidents did your students find funny, and why? Discuss.
- **Compare this picture book to other first person accounts** of similar experiences. E.g. *The Peasant Prince* by Li Cunxin and Anne Spudvilas (Penguin, 2007); *The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong (HarperCollins, 1986).
[Older students might like to read *Unpolished Gem* by Alice Pung (Black Inc, 2006) which details the experiences of a Chinese-Cambodian family in Australia through the eyes of a young woman.]
- Encourage students to explore their own stories of their past, by engaging them in a **memoir writing exercise**. Use models of writing drawn from these and other pieces of autobiographical writing. See Donna Baker 'Memoir Writing'
<<http://www.theeducatorsnetwork.com/webpages/thewriteresource/TeachingMemoirWriting.pdf>>
- This story employs a **first person narrative voice** suggesting that Anh Do is recalling the events of his childhood. Re-write one incident in **third person** and observe how that changes the story. Re-write it again in **first person**, from his brother Khoa's point of view.
- Test your students' **comprehension** after reading the story and doing some further research about the background to Anh's life, by answering simple questions.
[See **Blackline Master 1.**]

VISUAL LITERACY

- Discuss the **layout and design** of the book, and of the individual double page spreads within it.
- Encourage students to **read for the 'sub-text'** and observe how the pictures often add to or illuminate meaning, complementing and enriching the text.
- Discuss the artist's **choice of medium and use of colours** in terms of the themes in this work.
- The artist's images are deliberately executed in two contrasting **styles**. The **cartoon-like coloured images** are contemporary and childlike, and the **sepia-coloured more realistic ones** are historical i.e. they depict Anh Do's childhood in Vietnam and journey to Australia. Discuss this contrast with your students and then encourage them to draw two pictures in these contrasting styles, depicting the story about their own lives which they wrote in the exercise above [under **Language and Literacy**] and then to illustrate an incident in the present as well.
- How does Bruce Whatley **convey emotions** in his images?
- Discuss the **format, and use of perspective and spatial relationship** in this visual text, in individual **double page spreads**. For example, the page which depicts the pirate deliberately foregrounds him in a threatening way on the right hand page with the boat depicted on the left as a much smaller image. This layout

denotes the threat he presents. Discuss the composition of such images with your students.

- Examine the **cover**, and discuss why the illustrator has depicted Anh Do in the foreground in colour, with the fishing vessel in a sepia tone behind him? Draw your own image of him.

CREATIVE ARTS

This book could also be used to explore a range of other creative arts such as acting, improvisation, music and dance.

- Improvise the scene in the book where pirates capture Khoa.
- Choose two pieces of music which are suggestive of the feelings of the families aboard this vessel.
- Make a dragon puppet [See 'Make Your Own Dragon Puppet for Asian New Year' <<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/vietnamese/tet-puppet.htm>>
- Watch the Vietnam National Puppetry Theatre perform the dragon dance on Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFpkAg_YOKA>. There are other videos of water puppet dances on Youtube as well.

[See also **Blackline Masters 2, 3 and 4.**]

SOSE (THEMES)

Refugees

- This book demonstrates the hardships refugees often endure in order to reach a place of safety and refuge. Discuss the situations which are encountered by Anh Do's family on the journey to Australia. How might you have reacted to them?
- There are many sources which teachers might use to inform their reading of this book with their students. For example, the website accompanying the television series of the book *My Place* <http://www.myplace.edu.au/aligned_resources.html>.
- These situations are still being experienced by people coming to Australia today. Read more about the government's policies towards refugees or asylum seekers. How should we treat such refugees? Do we treat them well?
- What is a refugee? What is an asylum seeker? Which countries are they escaping from today?
- Share the stories of people in your class. There may be people from a range of backgrounds who will tell stories you've not known about them. Some of them may even have been refugees.
- Despite the negative views presented in some media coverage of refugees, migrant people in successive decades have contributed to Australia's prosperity and growth through hard work, new skills, and commitment to their new lives here. Discuss.
- The term 'boat people' is often used to describe those refugees who arrive in Australia by boat, and is sometimes used in a dismissive fashion. Discuss with your students the various misconceptions about refugee boat arrivals in Australia. Teachers might prepare themselves for this discussion by referring to the facts listed at 'Debunking the Myths' BOAT-PEOPLE.ORG <http://www.boat-people.org/?page_id=148>

- Draw a fishing vessel like the one depicted in this book, and then create a collage image of the various faces on board by cutting pictures of 'boat people' from magazines and newspapers and pasting them on to the picture.
- Invite a member of your community who has experienced the events which Anh describes, to address the class about their journey to Australia.
- Visit websites about Vietnamese boat people and the journeys they undertook to arrive in Australia. [For example, see 'Vietka: Archives of Vietnamese Boat People' <http://www.vietka.com/Vietnamese_Boat_People/>]
- Compare their stories to those of refugees today.

War and Dispossession

- Discuss with students why a family might leave a country after a war.
- Read other books about war. E.g. The fictional 'Survivors' series (Hodder Wayland) includes accounts of young people affected by conflicts. Clive Gifford's *The Water Puppets* tells thirteen-year-old Xuan's story of life after his small village in South Vietnam is destroyed when (with his mother and young sister), he makes his way to Saigon where he witnesses the terrible events of the Tet offensive; or *Grandfather's Dream* by Holly Keller (Greenwillow, 1994) in which the birds disappear from a Vietnamese village due to war; or *Water Buffalo Days: Growing up in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong (HarperCollins, 1999). [See 'Children's Story Books: Vietnam and Vietnamese Culture' <<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/books/books-children-fiction.htm>> for further titles. You might also source relevant books by a subject search on <<http://www.amazon.com>> which will direct you to similar titles]
- This book shows that people can survive war and find new opportunities. Discuss.

Vietnamese Culture and History

- Research the culture, religious and ethnic mix of the population of Vietnam and its history including the impact of the French Colonial era, and later the Vietnam War. Then create a classroom display including students' responses and findings. To elicit responses, ask students questions about what they have read. [For example: How many official religions does Vietnam have? Answer: Six: Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, the Hoa Hao faith and the Cao Dai faith.] Invite them to include some of the activities created in response to these notes.
- Vietnamese food and cuisine is often very delicate in flavour and preparation. Encourage students to locate a simple Vietnamese recipe and share Vietnamese food in class. Rice (*Gao*) is the staple food and many varieties are grown there and made into delicious dishes both savoury and sweet, such as *Gao nep*, a sweet glutinous rice used in making rice cakes. Water spinach (*Rau muong*) is considered to be Vietnam's national vegetable. Other popular dishes include, for example, *Cha gio* or spring rolls made from minced pork and other ingredients wrapped in rice paper; *Pho* is a beef noodle soup flavoured with onion, ginger and other herbs and spices.
- The traditional dress of Vietnamese people is very distinctive. Women often wear the traditional tunic known as the *Au dai*. Create your own costumes using crepe paper or some form of malleable and yet durable material. Make a *nón lá* or *non bai tho* – the conical hats worn in Vietnam by men and women.

- The geography of Vietnam is very much influenced by the Mekong River which runs from north to south and which generates many occupations such as fishing, agriculture, and tourism. Draw a map of Vietnam featuring the Mekong River. Research other natural features which are considered tourist attractions in Vietnam e.g. Halong Bay.
- Research major figures in the history of Vietnam such as Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) OR Bui Xuan Pha (1920-1988) who is considered the 'father of modern Vietnamese art' OR the Trung Sisters (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi) who led the first revolt in Southeast Asia against China and are regarded as national heroines. They died in 43AD.

[See **Bibliography** and **Internet Resources** below.]

- Agriculture is very important to Vietnamese people many of whom make their living from growing rice, watercress, etc. They still use traditional farming methods and rely on animals such as the water buffalo for assistance in ploughing and carting loads. Research this topic as well.
- The rich history of the country has left a legacy of architectural treasures, and museums full of art and antiquities. Choose a Vietnamese building or structure which is remarkable, and after researching it give a presentation to the class about it. E.g. The Thai Hoa Palace (The Palace of Supreme Peace) in Hue.
- Tet is the Vietnamese New Year celebration. It falls between the period when crops are harvested and when farmers sow new crops. So it is both practically and symbolically a time of celebrating new hopes. 'In the ancient times, it was once a custom to provide a carp to the Gods on which they can travel. The carp basically symbolizes the second last stage of the process through which the animals were slowly and gradually transformed into dragons.' Tet Vietnamese New Year <<http://www.123newyear.com/vietnamese-new-year/>> Discuss such customs with students. How do we celebrate New Year in Australia?

[See also **Blackline Master 2** and **Blackline Master 3**]

Racial and Ethnic Difference

- 'I had different food to the other kids and some of them laughed at me.' Why would students laugh at someone just because they are different? Discuss sharing different cultural experiences and what students learn from them.
- What differences might students have observed in Anh? For example, his food, and his uniform are mentioned. What else might students have noticed about him?
- Read more about Vietnamese life and culture. What might have seemed strange to Anh and his family about life in Australia?

SOSE (VALUES)

Compassion

- Encourage students to think about how they would feel in someone like Anh's position, in the various situations detailed in this book. E.g. How would you make a new student at school feel welcome?
- Write a fictional story as if you were a person arriving at a new school where you know no one. Create a situation in which you are both helped and hindered in your efforts to fit in, by the reactions of classmates.

Fear and Resilience

- Invite students to discuss how they might have felt if a pirate attacked the ship they were travelling in? What might be the best reaction when you are confronted by an aggressor? What might be the worst?
- What gives people in such dangerous situations the strength to go on? Does the book give you any indication of how Anh's family overcame their fear?

Hope

- Mum said, 'We are so lucky to be alive and living in this beautiful country. There are many people much worse off than us.' This is a wonderful philosophy for life. Whenever you have a problem, think about those who are suffering in war, famine, floods, tsunamis etc. Discuss.
- Discuss the word 'hope' with your students. Ask them what gives them hope? What do they hope for?

CONCLUSION

The Little Refugee is a warm and refreshing exploration of migrant experiences. It is also a testimony to hope, hard work and resilience.

It speaks to those who are uncertain about the journey that they have embarked upon, to leave one country and settle in another.

It gives comfort to those who have either not yet completed that journey, or who have found their initial impressions or experiences disappointing.

Anh Do's family made a new life against impossible odds.

His story is an inspiring and uplifting example of how life might be re-invented and how one might find a new beginning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS

PICTURE BOOKS

Baker, Jeannie *Mirror* Walker Books, 2010

Greder, Armin *The Island* Allen & Unwin, 2007

Heffernan, John *My Dog* Margaret Hamilton Books/ Scholastic, 2001

Lofthouse, Liz and Ingpen, Robert *Ziba Came on a Boat* Penguin, 2007

Marsden, John and Ottley, Matt *Home and Away* Hachette, 2008

Miller, David *Refugees* Lothian, 2004

Tan, Shaun *The Arrival* Hachette Livre, 2006

ABOUT PICTURE BOOKS

Anstey, Michèle, and Geoff Bull *Reading the Visual Reading the Visual: Written and Illustrated Children's Literature*. Sydney: Harcourt, 2000.

Gleeson, Libby *Making Picture Books* Scholastic, 2003.

FICTION FOR OLDER READERS

Evans, Alwyn *Walk in My Shoes* Penguin, 2005

Gleitzman, Morris *Boy Overboard* Penguin, 2005

Gleitzman, Morris *Girl Underground* Penguin, 2005

NON-FICTION FOR CHILDREN

Grant, Reg *The Vietnam War* (Atlas of Conflicts series) World Almanac Library, 2005.

Guile, Melanie *Culture in Vietnam* Heinemann Library, 2005.

Simpson, Judith *Vietnam* (Focus on Asia Series) Watts Publishing, 2003.

Parker, Edward *Vietnam* (Countries of the Worlds Series) Evans Brothers, 2005.

Welcome to Vietnam written by Yumi Ng/Amy Condra-Peters (Welcome to My Country Series) Times Editions, 2003.

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR UPPER PRIMARY, SECONDARY READERS AND TEACHERS

Dao, Quynh *Tales from a Mountain City: A Vietnam War Memoir* Odyssey Books, 2010.

Dechian, Sonja, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis (eds) *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years* Wakefield Press, 2004.

Dechian, Sonja, Jenni Devereaux, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis (eds) *No Place Like Home: Australian Stories by Young Writers Aged 8-21 Years* Wakefield Press 2005.

Do, Anh *The Happiest Refugee* Allen & Unwin, 2010.

Hoag, Carina *Boat People: Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus of 1975-1996* Penguin,

Nguyen, Pauline *Secrets of the Red Lantern: Stories and Vietnamese Recipes from the Heart* Murdoch Books, 2007.

Pung, Alice *Unpolished Gem* Black Inc, 2006.

Pung, Alice *Her Father's Daughter* Black Inc, 2011.

Pung, Alice ed. *Growing Up Asian in Australia* Black Inc, 2008.

'Refugees' *The Literature Base* Volume 13 Issue 1 February 2002 pp 18-23.

INTERNET RESOURCES

'A True Story' BOAT-PEOPLE.ORG

http://www.boatpeople.org/a_true_story.htm

Amnesty International

<http://www.amnesty.org.au/>

This site outlines temporary protection visas, mandatory detention of asylum seekers, the refugee determination process and other relevant topics; it also contains Teacher Resources on Human Rights issues.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)

<http://www.asrc.org.au/>

Australia's largest provider of aid, advocacy and health services for asylum seekers in Australia.

Brisbane Actionweb for Refugee Collaboration

http://www.barc.org.au/oldsite/res_offl_print.htm

This site contains a useful Bibliography of resources.

'Children's Story Books: Vietnam and Vietnamese Culture'

<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/books/books-children-fiction.htm>

'Debunking the Myths' BOAT-PEOPLE.ORG

http://www.boat-people.org/?page_id=148

This section of the website offers a useful list of facts about boat people and Australia.

Dudek, Debra 'Of Murems and Snigs Detention-Centre Narratives in Australian literature for Children and Young Adults' *Overland* 185 2006

<http://www.overlandexpress.org/185%20dudek.html>

The Loreto-Vietnam Australia Program (LVAP)

<http://www.aquinox.com.au/loreto/index.html>

The program supports and assists children who are disadvantaged, poor and disabled, through education training programs. (Anh and Suzanne Do have donated 100% of their profits from this book to the program.)

'Make Your Own Dragon Puppet for Asian New Year'

<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/vietnamese/tet-puppet.htm>

My Place

http://www.myplace.edu.au/aligned_resources.html>

Television series based on picture book (1987) about Australian multicultural historical evolution.

PEN

<http://www.pen.org.au>

The Australian body is affiliated with International PEN which exists to emphasise the role of writing in the development of mutual understanding and world culture. PEN has been a strong advocate for the release of inmates from Australia's detention centres.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>

This site offers facts, statistics and useful information about refugees. It contains a list of 'Myths About Refugees' which could be used to provoke discussion with students and to test their own biases and opinions, and a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' which outlines the definition of refugees, asylum seekers and other issues.

Refugee Camp in the Heart of the City

<http://www.refugeecamp.org/>

This virtual website has been created by Médecins Sans Frontières to show how the basic needs of people are not being met in such camps all over the world. This site offers powerful messages to students about the issues involved in this crisis.

Tet: Vietnamese New Year

<http://www.123newyear.com/vietnamese-new-year/>

United Nations

<http://www.un.org/rights>

This page on the UN website will give you information about human rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Human Rights Council.

US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Refugee Survey 2005*

<http://www.refugees.org>

This page not only includes information on this survey but also on the activities of this body.

Vietka: Archives of Vietnamese Boat People

http://www.vietka.com/Vietnamese_Boat_People/

ABOUT THE WRITERS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anh Do is one of Australia's leading comedians. He has also acted in television series and films, written screenplays and is a sought-after keynote speaker. His unique and inspirational experience leaving Vietnam as a toddler and growing up in Australia is the subject of his bestselling and award-winning memoir, *The Happiest Refugee*. He lives in Sydney with his family.

- Read any online information about Anh Do and discuss what you have gleaned from it, with your students. See his website <<http://www.anhdo.com.au/>>

Suzanne Do was formerly a practising solicitor and was co-writer of the screenplay for the Australian film, 'Footy Legends'. She is a full-time mother to three sons, and lives in Sydney with them and her husband, Anh.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Bruce Whatley is one of Australia's best-loved and most-respected author-illustrators. Bruce has illustrated over forty books to date, including *Monster* written by Andrew Daddo and a number that he has co-written with Rosie Smith. Many of Bruce's books have been acknowledged by the Children's Book Council of Australia including *Looking for Crabs* and *Detective Donut and the Wild Goose Chase*. He lives with his family in Berry, NSW.

- Read and compare Bruce's style and approach in a range of his works, and discuss it with your students.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THESE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, has published widely on children's and YA literature, and in 2011 was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch)'s Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland.

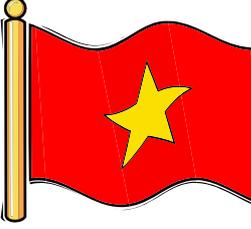
TEXT COMPREHENSION QUIZ



1. How many people lived in Anh Do's childhood home in Vietnam?
2. Why did he and his family leave Vietnam?
3. How did they escape?
4. Who did they meet on the high seas?
5. What is Anh Do's brother's name?
6. Who rescued them?
7. What strange clothes did Anh's baby brother wear when he first arrived?
8. What sort of business did his parents establish in Australia?
9. Who was the red headed boy Anh befriended at the beginning of Grade 3 at school?
10. What announcement did the principal make about Anh at the prize giving ceremony at school?

Answers: 1. Fourteen. 2. Because Anh's father and uncles had fought on the losing side in the Vietnam War alongside the Australians and the US soldiers, and therefore feared being persecuted by the victors. 3. An old wooden fishing vessel. 4. Pirates. 5. Khoa. 6. A German cargo ship. 7. Girls' clothes donated by the nuns. 8. A sewing business. 9. Angus. 10. He announced that Anh would be Class Captain of Grade Five Blue.

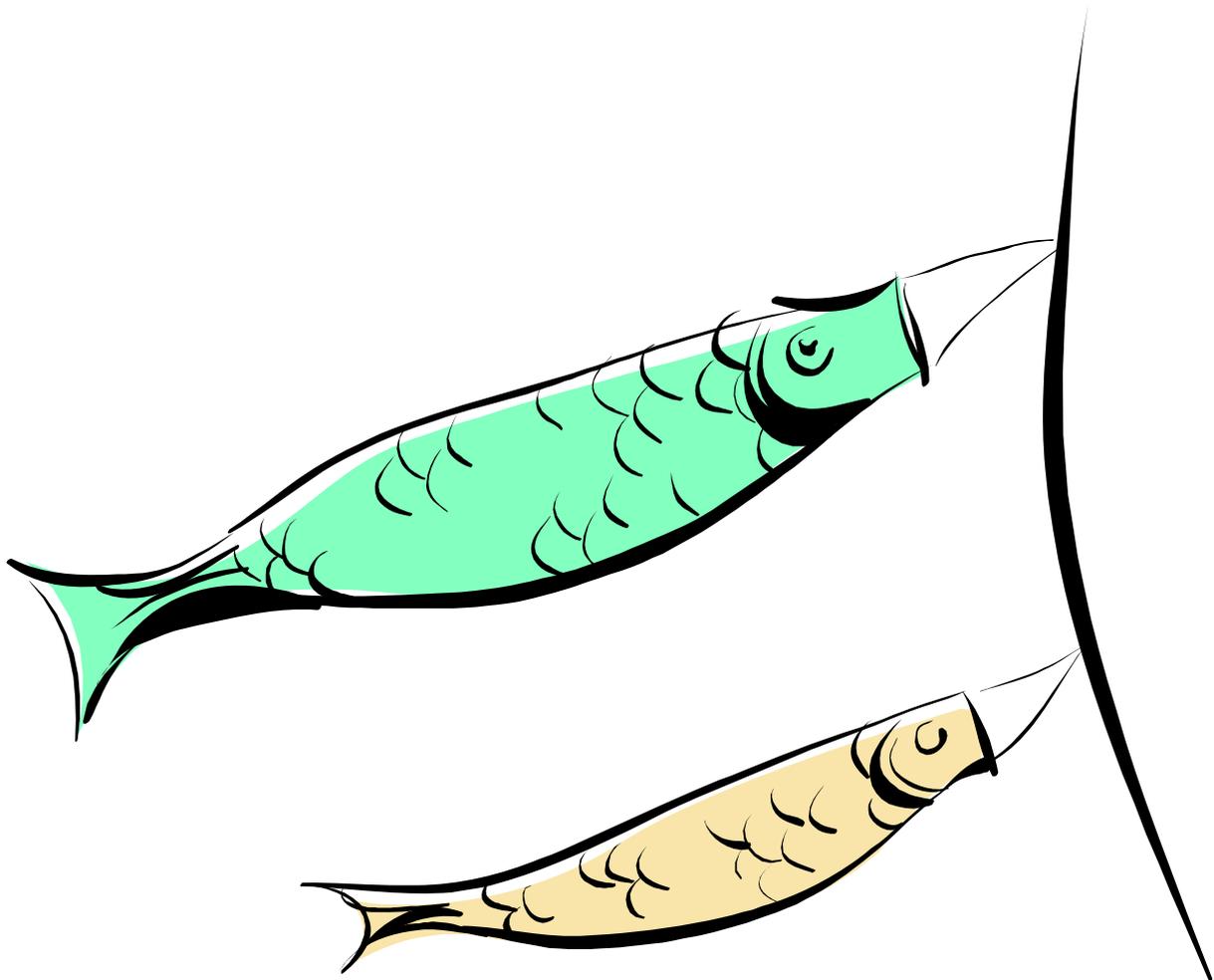
IMAGE COMPREHENSION QUIZ

	<p>1. What is the name of this building?</p>		<p>6. What is the name of the major river which flows through Vietnam?</p>
	<p>2. What sort of material is this boat made of?</p>		<p>7. What is this traditional dish made out of rice paper?</p>
	<p>3. What is the name of the traditional Vietnamese tunic frock worn by these three girls?</p>		<p>8. Which religion (which most people in Vietnam practise) does this figure represent?</p>
	<p>4. Which animal is the farmer pictured with? (It is often used in agricultural work in Vietnam.)</p>		<p>9. What is the symbol on the Vietnamese flag?</p>
	<p>5. What fruit is very popular in Vietnam?</p>		<p>10. On what river in the ancient city of Hue are world heritage listed monuments situated?</p>

Answers: 1. Sydney Opera House in Australia. 2. Wood. 3. Áo dài. 4. Water Buffalo. 5. Lychee. 6. Mekong River. 7. Spring roll. 8. Buddhism. 9. Star. 10. Perfume River.

DRAW AND COLOUR IN A CARP

Draw some more carp attached to this string. Then paint them in different watercolours.



FESTIVAL!

Trace and then colour in this picture.

