

# Teachers Notes

by Dr Susan La Marca

## Mahtab's Story

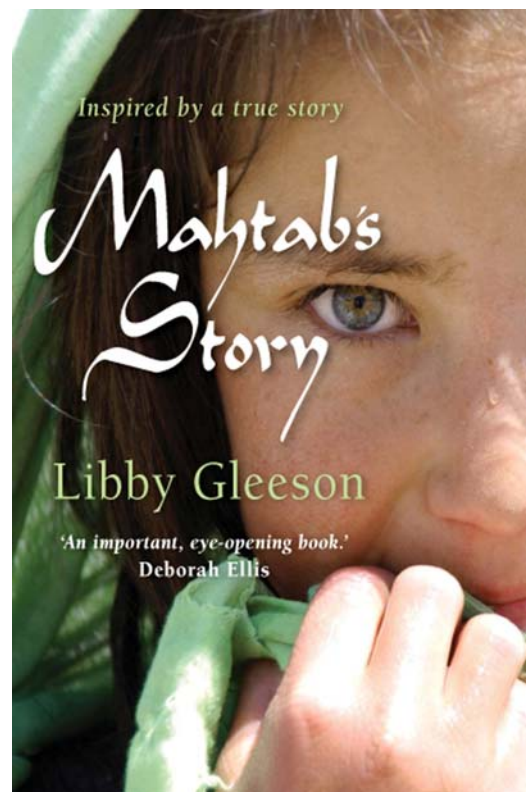
by  
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Recommended for ages 9-13 yrs

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## INTRODUCTION

Mahtab's family are suffering under the Taliban. Their life has been extensively curtailed and the world is confusing and frightening. Then Mahtab's grandfather is taken and killed and her father is badly beaten, something drastic must be done. Mahtab's parents decide that to flee to a better life is the answer but other members, including Mahtab's grandmother, decide to stay in the hope that life will improve. Mahtab, her parents and younger brother, Farhad, and her sister, Soraya, leave as soon as possible. Leaving family, friends and the only life they have ever known behind they begin a treacherous journey. The family hope to start a new life in Australia, a country Mahtab's father has heard about from a friend. They feel Australia offers what they seek for their children – safety and freedom.

The journey that Mahtab's family begin is long, arduous and full of danger. After escaping Afghanistan by truck into Pakistan, Mahtab's father goes on ahead by plane and boat to Australia hoping to bring the family out soon. After many months, Mahtab convinces her mother to make the same journey in the hope of reaching Australia and finding her father. The journey takes all of their strength and many times they think they will get no further. But their final destination, which offers such hope of a new life to the family, proves to be a place of detention and segregation rather than the haven they expected. There is also no sign of Mahtab's father. Life in the detention centre is difficult for everyone and it is hard to keep hope alive. For every new friend and positive sign there is another action or attitude that deepens their feelings of isolation and imprisonment.

Slowly, events begin to go well for the family and they are finally released and reunited.

This is ultimately a story of struggle, family love and reunion but along the way it poses many big questions about the nature of human beings and their potential for both good and bad and the strength to be found in all of us.

## STRUCTURE / LANGUAGE

A number of sections in *Mahtab's story*, in particular the openings to each chapter, use wonderfully evocative language and short sentence structures to convey a sense of urgency and tension. The opening sentences of the book: 'Mahtab ached...All she could taste was diesel and dust.' (p. 1) instantly engage the reader in the story as we wonder where Mahtab might be and what is happening to her. This opening paragraph describes Mahtab's experience of hiding in the back of the truck as her family flees Afghanistan, but at this point the reader is unaware of exactly where she is or what is happening.

This beginning section of this text is structured in a flash-back style. We open with the truck journey and return again to this journey while the connecting sections fill in the background of how the family came to be fleeing to Pakistan.

This approach, unveiling information slowly, whilst plunging the reader immediately into the action, is engaging. By mirroring Mahtab's own thought processes the book unfolds piece by piece making the action real and Mahtab's experiences even more harrowing.

### Activity

Discuss this approach to the plot structure of *Mahtab's story*. Compare the style to other books the students may have read as a class or other books that they all know well. It would be interesting to compare this approach in a book to other story mediums as well, particularly television.

The short sentences on page 4 and page 35, for example, instil a sense of urgency in the reader. Consider how varied sentence length affects meaning and the feeling conveyed by the text.

### **Activity**

Consider the style of writing in this opening section.

What are its advantages and disadvantages?

The reader is immediately thrown into the action and engaged but they may also feel lost and have difficulty figuring out what is going on. Look at examples of openings from other texts and discuss their differences in relation to the very effective opening in *Mahtab's story*.

Encourage the students to consider the effect different openings have on them as readers – what makes them want to continue reading?

The language in this section (pp.1 & 2) is compelling. Phrases such as:

- 'taste...diesel and dust'
- 'sucking the life'
- 'chilled her face'
- 'her throat was closed'
- 'She was compelled and sentenced to silence'
- 'Each as still as a block of stone'
- 'the rough timber that held her in'

all suggest imprisonment. They suggest a situation that is slowly killing the participants, a scenario that is almost impossible to bear. Yet later we find this is a situation Mahtab's family have chosen, even paid for. What does this tell us about the decisions they have had to make?

Compare this section with its imagery of imprisonment to the section later in the book when Mahtab's family arrive at the detention camp (pages 125 – 127). Consider the choice of words and the physical nature of Mahtab's response, for example 'Mahtab was hollow. Empty, as if her flesh and blood, her energy that kept her breathing and running, thinking and talking, was gone.' (p. 127)

### **Activity**

Without any prior discussion read the opening, the students stopping at the end of the first section. This could be an introductory session to the text and would need to be done without forewarning.

Speculate as to what might be happening, brainstorming all of the classes' ideas. Where is Mahtab? Where is she going? Why?

Consider language, sentence structure and style – how do these assist in conveying meaning? How do they make the reader feel?

## **TRUTH IN FICTION**

The publicity information for Mahtab's story tells us that this fictionalised account is based on a true story of a girl and her family. Discuss with students this approach to story writing.

How accurate can a story be in conveying real events?

Can someone else effectively tell another person's story?

Do the perceptions of the author, be they participant or onlooker, affect the story that is written?

What differences are there between a story about an event and a factual account like a newspaper report? What are the benefits of reading a story? What can this format convey that other formats can't?

Can fiction ever be factual?

Consider the following quotations in light of fact in fiction:

*Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.*

- Mark Twain

*Facts are the enemy of truth.*

- Miguel de Cervantes

*I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crises. The great point is to bring them the real facts.*

- Abraham Lincoln

*There are no facts, only interpretations.*

- Friedrich Nietzsche

## IMAGERY

Mahtab describes the changes to her life as a fog. She asks:

'When had the fog of darkness and fear wrapped itself around the house?' (p. 2) and thinks "Now that fog had seeped into the house and into their lives" (p. 6).

Why does she describe it like this? Why does this description of a physical thing, blanketing her world, best describe for her what is going on?

The fog is a metaphor for what?

### Activity

Discuss the use of simile and metaphor in writing. Set a task for the students to find examples of a simile and metaphor in something that they are reading and share this with the class. Ask the students to write a small creative piece that uses one of these devices to convey meaning.

Throughout *Mahtab's story* there are the recurring images of both kites and birds:

- On pages 3 & 4 the children's kites are buried as to fly them is now not allowed under Taliban rule
- When the family makes it safely through a checkpoint Mahtab 'felt her whole body go loose. Every muscle had been tense, tight, and now it was as if the wind had suddenly died and she was a kite dropping lifeless to the ground' (p. 26)
- In the story made up by Mahtab, Farhad has a 'great big kite' (p. 54)
- When talking of flying in a plane Farhad says 'we'll be like a kite, like the one we buried that day. Remember?' (p. 75) and as their next plane takes off, Mahtab thinks her family is 'in the air, kites with no string' (p. 81)
- Once in detention Mahtab feels 'Her heart was fluttering like a caged bird again' (p. 126)

- '...tiny green and yellow birds. So beautiful..' (p. 175)
- The festival of the winds (p. 181) '...the wind grabs the fabric and lifts the kites higher and higher...'

### **Discuss**

What do both the kites and the birds represent to Mahtab and her family?

## **LANDSCAPE**

The different landscapes that Mahtab passes through are all a comparison to her homeland.

How does Mahtab see Australia? She describes her journey by bus to the detention centre (p. 121-125) and the immediate area around the detention centre, 'bare brown earth', 'flat brown land' (p.132) and then the park where the family celebrate at the festival of winds (p. 180-181). These views are Mahtab's experience of Australia.

After her first views of the country she feels a 'stranger in a strange land. This is not my place' (p. 122). Might she have felt differently if a welcome had been more forthcoming?

Are any of the views Mahtab describes the Australia you know?

### **Activity**

Encourage students to write a short piece describing an area that they know – a shopping strip, a section of land, a building – imagine that they are seeing it for the first time, that it is different from what they are accustomed to in style, colour etc. Try to give a flavour of the place through words.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **MAHTAB**

Mahtab is a brave and resourceful young girl. It is Mahtab that convinces her mother to leave Pakistan and follow her father's footsteps to Australia and she often takes on the role of carer or entertainer for her younger siblings during the story. As this is her story it is her view of the world that we see.

Once they have got past the check points and the family may travel unhidden, Mahtab felt 'tall and strong and ready' (p. 41). At the end of her story she feels 'happiness and joy', she 'stands her ground' backed by the 'shimmering, triumphant [kite]' in a 'cloudless sky', (p. 181). Compare these descriptions to Mahtab in the detention centre – 'Mahtab was hollow. Empty, as if her flesh and blood, her energy that kept her breathing and running, thinking and talking, was gone' (p. 127)

Which is the true Mahtab? Are such extremes within all of us?

### **Discuss**

Why does Mahtab give up her grandmother's bracelet (p. 100)?

Why does Mahtab lie to her brother and sister (p. 67-8)?

Mahtab's father tells her - 'The moon and the stars are constant. That's why we named you Mahtab: moonlight'. (p. 36)

In what other ways does Mahtab's name suit her? List words to describe the characteristics that Mahtab and moonlight share.

## **MAHTAB'S SIBLINGS - FARHAD & SORAYA**

We see Mahtab's siblings through her eyes. They are younger and it is her task to both entertain and protect them. This is often a big responsibility. Farhad and Soraya don't understand as much about the journey as Mahtab does but they do react to what is going on around them and are deeply affected by some events.

What changes come over the two as the journey progresses? Consider:

- Why does Farhad become angry (p. 51)?
- Why does Farhad disobey his mother and go outside the compound (p. 65)?
- Why does Soraya think her father is dead (p. 67)?

## **MAHTAB'S PARENTS**

Mahtab's parents sacrifice everything for a better life for themselves and their children. As this is Mahtab's story we don't get to know her parents as well as if they were telling the story.

### **Activity**

Write a letter as Mahtab's mother or father, either home to relatives or to a character of your choice in the text. Try to capture something of their personality in your words from what you know of them from the story.

When Mahtab knows her father is to go on ahead without them she watches him, committing his physical presence to her store of memories. What does Mahtab see? What does her description of him (p. 47-48) tell you of his nature? His outlook?

### **Activity**

Brainstorm in small groups a list of words that you feel describe Mahtab's parents. Look to the text for clues.

## **THEMES**

### **REFUGEES**

#### **THE JOURNEY**

The journey that Mahtab's family takes is momentous and truly amazing when you consider their lack of knowledge of the world beyond Afghanistan. The family has not seen the sea before and never been on a plane, yet through the kindness of those that help them and their strength as a family unit they make it through.

### **Activity**

Have the students mark on a map the journey of Mahtab's family. Ask them to work out the distance that they travelled. Consider the various ways the family travelled.

During the journey, when the situation becomes frightening or difficult, Mahtab employs strategies to take her mind off the situation she is in, for example, counting backwards (p. 24). Similarly, Mahtab's mother gives the children sugar to suck when the need is for quiet during the truck journey (p. 25).

It is these simple solutions and things that remind them of their normal life that ease the stress. Story is very important to the group (this is discussed under another sub-heading), playing soccer with a paper ball allows Farhad a moment of play outside the

truck and allows Mahtab to physically relax – ‘Mahtab felt the muscles in her face relax and her body lighten and she too lifted her hands and joined in’ (p. 30).

### **Discuss**

If you were in a similar situation what items or activities would help you cope?

### **THE COMMUNITY DEBATE**

Discuss these quotations in relation to the text, its characters, and the issues that it raises:

*Washing ones hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.*

- Paulo Freire

*If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion.*

- The Dalai Lama

*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.*

- Lao-tzu (604 BC - 531 BC), The Way of Lao-tzu

*It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters in the end.*

- Ursula K. Le Guin

The issues of refugees / asylum seekers / detention centres and the treatment of other cultures in our society have dominated the front pages of our newspapers for a number of years. They have been divisive issues, causing a great deal of debate both between and within political parties and in the wider community. A good school library will have access to vertical file clippings, factual texts, online newspaper databases and newspaper and magazine collections that will contain an enormous number of possible sources for research. (See also the list of related resources, below.)

### **Activities**

Research could be conducted on a particular issue for the production of a report, a presentation or a debate in conjunction with a study of the text.

A guest speaker from one of the many support organisations or asylum seeker advocacy groups could be invited to address the class.

After classroom research, discussion and debate, encourage the students to respond to the issue in a form that helps them to express their feelings. Encourage all forms of expression (art, drama, music, etc) and community involvement.

The ‘Issues in the News’ section of the *Education Age* has focused on various aspects of these related issues on a number of occasions. These pages contain background details, editorial, links to other articles, public opinion, student opinion and, for Victorian teachers, CSF links. They are available online through the *Education Age* ‘Issues in the News’ Archive at <[www.education.theage.com.au](http://www.education.theage.com.au)>

Pages worthy of note are:

- ‘Family left in Limbo’ October 27<sup>th</sup> 2003
- ‘Truth Overboard’ August 30<sup>th</sup> 2004
- ‘The fear of Muslims’ December 4<sup>th</sup> 2002

A comprehensive search through this archive would yield many useful background pieces to support discussion.

## **FAMILY**

Family is everything to Mahtab. Her family is the centre of her life. For her parents, family is also everything – it is because of their young family that they are prepared to risk everything to journey around the world for a better life.

In doing so, they also leave behind extended family, the traditional home of their family, their country and the source of many of their traditions and views.

Discuss the importance of family and family heirlooms.

Though Mahtab gives up her only object from home, her grandmother's bracelet, what aspect of her family can never be taken from her?

## **LOSS AND GRIEF**

Mahtab's family has lost everything. They have taken almost nothing with them and some of what they do have must be sacrificed along the way to enable them and their friends to continue the journey. For example, the jewellery belonging to Mahtab and her mother is sold (p. 73 & p. 100).

One item that does make the journey is the jar of dirt collected by Mahtab's mother in the mountains as they began the journey into Pakistan. This jar of dirt is part of the country they are leaving, a small token to help them remember where they have come from. Carrying it on their long journey is also symbolic of their quest for new land, a better place to call home.

As the journey drags, Mahtab starts to wonder if she ever had another life. She 'willed herself to remember' (p. 33). Memories have become prized possession to be guarded and looked after.

### **Activity**

Ask the students to put together a 'show bag' of items to represent the journey made by Mahtab's family. In small groups, ask students to collect items for such a show bag to present to the class. It might include a paper chess piece, some gold jewellery, a head scarf, a plane ticket or a passport. Encourage the students to return to the text to discover objects to include in their show bag. When the group presents their show bag contents to the class they explain what each piece is and how it features in the story.

The loss that Mahtab's family has endured, though, is far more damaging than the loss of material possessions. Once Mahtab is in the detention centre she fades quickly – 'Mahtab was hollow. Empty, as if her flesh and blood, her energy, that kept her and running, thinking and talking, was gone' (p. 127).

### **Discuss**

Mahtab is strong but the detention centre appears to have beaten her at first. What has Mahtab lost? Freedom? Hope?

Can you imagine what it would be like to leave behind the world you know, your family and friends, to travel to a place you know nothing about?

Do you think Mahtab's family are brave? What is bravery? Are there other descriptive words you would use to describe their actions?



There are many kinds of grief and loss and many ways to cope with them. Mahtab turns to stories when she is in need of reassurance. Different things give each of us strength.

Why do Mahtab's nightmares start in the detention camp? (p. 140) Why does she walk the wire and count? (p. 149)

### **POWER OF STORY AND SONG**

In times of stress throughout the text, Mahtab's family return to the old stories and songs that remind them of home and comfort them. These were the folktales and legends of their country and its people, intricately linked to who they are and where they have come from; stories of adventurers such as Aladdin, Ali Baba and Sinbad. The family all carry with them memories of Mahtab's grandfather telling these stories and this makes them even more special.

- Her grandfather told stories....(p. 5)
- The story of Ali Baba's cave helps Soraya back onto the truck (p. 22)
- The Ali Baba story helps the children endure the truck journey (p. 23)
- The family's regular prayer (p 21) is a similar ritual that also embodies their culture and their past. It is also a source of comfort and strength.
- The La La Song (p. 31, 157)
- The stories are told over and over again on the truck (p. 23)
- Mahtab makes up new stories about her brother and sister in Australia (p. 54, p. 60)
- Mahtab makes up stories to calm the children the night the baby is born (p. 90)

Story is an important part of any culture and the stories we create within our own family are a version of this. Note that at first the stories are all of home and the legends of their people and, as the text progresses, the stories are more often about their future in Australia.

#### **Discuss**

What do the stories and songs represent to Mahtab and her family?

What stories/ rhymes / songs etc would your family tell to represent them as people?  
Have other mediums replaced these old stories in western cultures?

### **RELATED / FURTHER READING**

#### **THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE**

**Al-Windawi**, Thura (2004) *Thura's diary*. Penguin.

The diary of an Iraqi teenager during the bombing of Baghdad.

**Anderson**, Rachel (2001) *Warlands*. Penguin.

The story Of Ho, a Vietnamese war orphan, and his resettlement in Britain.

**Ashley**, Bernard (1999) *Little soldier*. Orchard Books

Kaninda is an East African child victim of war. He joins a rebel army, but becomes an unwilling refugee when he is 'saved' by the Red Cross.

**Baillie**, Allan (1986) *Little brother*. Nelson, Melbourne.

**Breckler**, Rosemary (1996) *Sweet dried apples: A Vietnamese wartime childhood*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. (Picture book)

**Catran**, Wendy (2001) *Not raining today*. Lothian.  
The story of two young Tibetan Buddhist nuns in danger after hanging a poster of the Dalai Lama.

**Cha**, Dia (1996) *Dia's story cloth: the Hmong people's journey of freedom*. Lee & Low, New York. (Picture book)

**Edwards**, Hazel (1990) *Boat boy*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Marrickville. (Picture book)

**Ellis**, Deborah (2001) *Parvana*. Allen & Unwin.  
When Parvana's father is arrested by the Taliban, she must transform herself into a boy so her family can survive. Also: *Parvana's journey* (2002) and *Shauzia* (2003)

**Evans**, Alywyn (2004) *Walk in my shoes*, Penguin.

**Filopovic**, Zlata (1993) *Zlata's diary*. Penguin, Ringwood.

**Flynn**, Warren (1996) *Different voices*. Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle.

**Garland**, Sherry (1993) *The Lotus seed*. Harcourt, Brace. [Vietnam-US]  
A young Vietnamese girl saves a lotus seed and carries it with her when she flees Vietnam (picture book).

**Gavin**, Jamila (1994) *The wheel of Surya*. Mammoth, London.

**Gleitzman**, Morris (2002) *Boy overboard*. Penguin.  
Soccer-mad Jamal and his family escape Afghanistan.

**Gleitzman**, Morris (2004) *Girl Underground*, Penguin.  
Jamal's family is now in an Australian detention centre.

**Hawke**, Rosanne. (2004). *Soraya the storyteller*. Lothian.  
Soraya, an Afghani refugee, adapts to life in Australia.

**Hathorn**, Libby (2002) *The wishing cupboard*. Lothian. [Vietnam-Australia]  
Grandma has a cupboard that she has brought from Vietnam. Each drawer holds a treasured memory of her old life. (picture book).  
On-line activities available at: <http://www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/Wishing/Default.htm>

**Heffernan**, John (2000) *More than gold*. Margaret Hamilton Books.  
Raiko, a Bosnian refugee, lives in a small Australian country town. He dreams of being an Olympic runner.

**Heffernan**, John and Andrew McLean (2001) *My dog*. Margaret Hamilton Books.  
Short listed for both CBCA Book of the Year (Younger readers) and Picture Book of the Year in 2002. *My dog* is the sad and moving story of a young boy fleeing his home in Kosovo. (picture book)

**Hest**, Amy (1997) *When Jessie came across the sea*. Walker Books, London. (Picture book)

**Hicyilmaz**, Gaye (2000) *Smiling for strangers*. Dolphin.  
Fourteen-year-old Nina is forced to leave her village in Yugoslavia and escape to England. Her only hope, the name and address of a complete stranger.

**Ho**, Minfong (1991) *The clay marble*. Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, New York.

**Hoffman**, Mary and Littlewood, Karin (2002) *The colour of home*. Frances Lincoln, London.  
Hassan's family flees Somalia and settles in England. (Picture book)

**Huynh**, Quang Nhuang (1982) *The land I lost: adventures of a boy in Vietnam*. Harper & Row, New York.

- Jolly**, Jane (2006) *Ali the bold heart*, Limelight Press. (picture book)
- Kidd**, Diana (1989) *Onion tears*. Collins, Sydney.
- Kilborne**, Sarah S. (1999) *Leaving Vietnam: the true story of Tuan Ngo*. Aladdin, New York.
- Knight**, Margy Burns and O'Brien, Anne Sibley (1993) *Who belongs here? an American story* Tilbury, Gardiner, Me. (Picture book)
- Laird**, Elizabeth (1991) *Kiss the dust*. Mammoth, London.
- Lingard**, Joan (1991) *Between two worlds*. Hamilton, London.
- Latifa** (2002) *My forbidden face: growing up under the Taliban: a young woman's story*. Virago.  
The true story of Latifa, a young Afghani woman, who is 16 when the Taliban take control.
- Mattingley**, Christobel (1985) *The angel with a mouth-organ*. Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton. (Picture book)
- Mattingley**, Christobel (1993) *No gun for Asmir*. Puffin, Ringwood, Vic.
- Mattingley**, Christobel (1995) *Asmir in Vienna*. Puffin, Ringwood, Vic.
- Mattingley**, Christobel (1996) *Escape from Sarajevo*. Puffin, Ringwood, Vic.
- Munsch**, Robert (1995) *From far away*. Annick Press, Buffalo, N.Y. (Picture book)
- Nye**, Naomi Shihab (1999) *Habibi*. Simon Pulse.  
Liyana's father moves the family from St Louis to Jerusalem.
- Sendak**, Maurice (1994) *I dream of peace* UNICEF, New York. (Picture book)
- Shea**, Pegi Dietz (1995) *The whispering cloth: a refugee story* : Boyd Mills, Honesdale, Pa. (Picture book)
- Strachan**, Ian (1984) *Journey of a thousand miles*. Methuen, London.
- Strachan**, Ian (1992) *The second step*. Mammoth, London.
- Tolbert**, Steve (1991) *Channeary*. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.
- Tolbert**, Steve (2005) *Dreaming Australia*, Ginninderra Press.  
Soraya flees Aghanistan and after a difficult journey finds herself in Australia's Woomera detention centre.
- Whelan**, Gloria (1993) *Goodbye Vietnam*. Random House, New York.
- Zephaniah**, Benjamin (2001) *Refugee boy*. Bloomsbury.  
Half Eritrean, half-Ethiopian, Alem becomes an asylum seeker when his father takes him to England and leaves him to struggle with the bureaucratic hurdles faced by asylum seekers.
- Zhang**, Song Nan (1993) *A little tiger in the Chinese night: an autobiography in art*. Tundra Books, Montreal. (Picture book)

#### **ANTHOLOGIES OF SHORT STORIES AND POETRY**

**Ajidarma**, Seno Gumira (1995) *Eyewitness*. Potts Point, NSW: Imprint.  
Protest stories from Indonesia.

*Breaking Free: An anthology of human rights poetry* (1994) Hove: Wayland.

*Dare to be Different: A Celebration of Freedom in Association with Amnesty International.* 1999. London: Bloomsbury.

Illustrated stories and poems for young people.

**Flattley**, Kerry & Wallace-Crabbe, Chris (1992) *From the Republic of Conscience: An international anthology of poetry.* Flemington, VIC: Aird Books.

**Goode**, Katherine (1997) *Jumping to heaven:: stories about refugee children.* Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press.

Short stories based on interviews with Australian refugee children.

**Hyde**, Michael & Parr, Helen (1995) *Same difference.* Carlton, VIC: Curriculum Corporation. Access Asia series.

Stories about teenage experience in Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia and Australia.

**Mitchell**, Dee (ed) (1993) *Amnesty.* Port Melbourne, VIC: Minerva Australia (Reed Books).

Stories by Australian writers for adults and children.

**Muse**, Daphne (ed) (1995) *Prejudice: Stories about hate, ignorance, revelation, and transformation.* New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

**Naidoo**, Beverley (2001) *Out of Bounds: stories of conflict and hope.* Camberwell, VIC: Puffin Books.

One short story for each decade of Apartheid in South Africa.

#### MEMOIRS AND TESTIMONIES – NOVEL LENGTH

**Jackson**, Livia E. Bitton (1980) *Elli: Coming of age in the Holocaust.* London: HarperCollins.

Memoir of a young Hungarian Auschwitz survivor.

**Latifa** (2002) *My forbidden face: Growing up under the Taliban: a young woman's story.* London: Virago Press.

**Lobel**, Anita (1998) *No pretty pictures: a child of war.* New York, NY: Avon Books.

A refugee from WWII.

**Pilkington**, Doris (Garimara, Nugi) (1996) *Follow the rabbit-proof fence.* St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press.

Book on which the film, 'Rabbit-Proof Fence' was based. Stolen aboriginal children escape back to their families.

**Ung**, Loung (2000) *First they killed my father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers.* Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins.

Living under the Khmer Rouge regime.

**Zable**, Arnold (1991) *Jewels and ashes.* Newham, VIC: Scribe Publications.

Australian-Jewish refugee family history.

#### MEMOIRS AND TESTIMONIES – ANTHOLOGIES OF SHORTER PIECES

**From Nothing to Zero: Letters from refugees in Australia's detention centres.** (2003) Footscray, VIC: Lonely Planet.

**Chee** Soon Juan. *To be free: Stories from Asia's struggle against oppression.* Clayton, VIC: Monash Asia Institute.

**Tikvah: Children's book creators reflect on human rights** (1999) New York, NY: SeaStar Books (North-South Books).

Well known children's illustrators and writers present an image and accompanying explanation.

**Tyler**, Heather (2003) *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*. South Melbourne, VIC: Lothian.

#### **STRENGTH AGAINST ADVERSITY – TRUE STORIES**

**Al-Windawi**, Thura (2004) *Thura's diary*. Penguin.

**Cunxin**, Li (2003) *Mao's last dancer*, (condensed version for younger reader published in 2005) Penguin

**Latifa** (2001) *My forbidden face: growing up under the Taliban: a young woman's story*. Virago.

**Murray**, Kirsty (1999) *Tough stuff: true stories about kids and courage*, Allen & Unwin

**Nazer**, Mande & Damien Lewis (2004) *Slave: the true story of a girls childhood and her fight for survival*, Penguin.

**Pryor**, Boori (1998) *Maybe tomorrow*, Penguin

**Tonkin**, Daryl & Carolyn Landon (1999) *Jackson's track: memoir of a dreamtime place*, Penguin

**Yen Mah**, Adeline (1999) *Chinese Cinderella*, Penguin

In constructing these lists I found the expertise of the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC) invaluable. They offer a large collection of materials relating to various cultures and the issues surrounding our multicultural country. They are also a resource centre for languages other than English and English as a second language. The material is available for loan to all Victorian schools and their knowledge of the field is extensive. Similar resources exist in some other states: contact your department of education.

LANGUAGES & MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE  
(LMERC)

150 Palmerston Street, Carlton 3053

Tel.: (03) 93491418

Fax: (03) 93491295

<[www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/lmerc](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/lmerc)>

#### **RELATED RESOURCES**

##### **Coalition for Asylum-seekers, Refugees and Detainees**

[www.carad-wa.org](http://www.carad-wa.org)

The website contains a vast number of useful resources.

Many school libraries have collected resources to support the study of this issue in various courses. The **P. L. Duffy Resource Centre** at Trinity College in Western Australia very generously shares its material with others. Their page of web resources on refugees and asylum seekers is excellent and can be found at:

[www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/subjects/sose/refugee.htm](http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/subjects/sose/refugee.htm)

### **Doctors without borders**

This site details what life is like in a refugee camp.

[www.refugeecamp.org](http://www.refugeecamp.org)

### **Australian Immigration fact sheets**

[www.immi.gov.au/facts/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/index.htm)

### **Asylum Seekers Centre, Sydney**

Includes a page on resources for teachers.

[www.asylumseekerscentre.org.au.html](http://www.asylumseekerscentre.org.au.html)

### **Chilout**

Group of parents and citizens opposed to the mandatory detention of children in immigration detention centres. Includes factsheets and articles. Members of this organisation helped Libby with information for *Mahtab's Story*.

[www.chilout.org](http://www.chilout.org)

### **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.**

Their page on Asylum seekers includes links to many formal reports and other resources.

[www.hreoc.gov.au/human\\_rights/asylum\\_seekers](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/asylum_seekers)

The **Education Age** 'Issues in the News Archive' at [www.education.theage.com.au](http://www.education.theage.com.au) has a number of excellent pages that relate to the issues raised in the text. Each offers a variety of opinions from diverse sources.

**Please Note:** This is a very short list of the enormous amount of material available on the Internet. An extended search would supply more than enough to stimulate discussion and encourage a deeper understanding of the issues.

## **ABOUT THE WRITERS**

### **LIBBY GLEESON**

Libby Gleeson is an acclaimed and much-loved author of over 30 books for children and teenagers. Her books have been shortlisted for Children's Book Council awards eleven times and she has won three times – most recently the Early Childhood Award for *Amy and Louis*, illustrated by Freya Blackwood. *The Great Bear* (with Armin Greder) was the first Australian title to win the prestigious Bologna Ragazzi Award, in 2000. Libby has been a teacher and lecturer and a speaker at national conferences, and is actively involved in writers' organisations. In 1997 she was awarded the Lady Cutler Award for Services to Children's Literature and in 2007 she was made Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to literature and literacy education. You can find Libby's website at [www.libbygleeson.com.au](http://www.libbygleeson.com.au).

### **DR SUSAN LA MARCA**

Susan La Marca is a secondary school teacher-librarian. Her PhD, completed in 2003, explored how a teacher-librarian creates a reading environment.

Susan works for the School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) and edits their research journal *Synergy*. She is also an associate editor of the journal *Viewpoint: on books for young adults* and editor of a number of books on reading and school library design. She is the co author, with Dr Pam Macintyre, of *Knowing readers: unlocking the pleasures of reading* (2006).

As well as being the Children's Book Council of Australia awards judge for Victoria for 2006/7, Susan works as a consultant and writer in areas related to reading and teacher-librarianship. She has presented in these areas both nationally and internationally.