



# Teachers' Notes NOODLE PIE

RUTH STARKE

Teachers' Notes written by Fran Knight

## OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Author	Ruth Starke
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## INTRODUCTION

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Tuoc Nguyen escaped to Australia by boat at the end of the Vietnam War and on his return visit he takes his son Andy with him. Through Andy's eyes the reader sees Hanoi from an Australian point of view, and as he becomes more attuned to the Vietnamese lifestyle, the reader is drawn into the rituals and customs of a very different way of life.

Accustomed to strict Australian health standards, Andy is shocked by the state of the family restaurant. At first, Vietnamese behaviour bewilders him. He views the family's treatment of his cousin Minh as repressive and cruel, and he finds the traffic lawless and chaotic. Puzzled by the new suit his father wears, his expensive watch and talk of his business, Andy cannot understand why his father is pretending to be someone he is not. He learns that things cannot be taken at face value, and that there is more to his father's story than the one he has been told in the past.

During his stay, Andy befriends his cousin and discovers that she skips school during the afternoons, selling postcards to tourists to earn money to visit her mother in Saigon. Together they hatch a plan to increase the restaurant earnings, and produce a flyer which they give to tourists. The resultant influx of customers causes some mayhem with the neighbours in the street. But all is resolved, and Tuoc takes his son out for the afternoon to tell him some home truths. Together they decide not to tell lies to each other or their families, calling them 'noodle pies', giving a double meaning to the tourist name of the restaurant.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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South Australian author **Ruth Starke** teaches English and creative writing at Flinders University and TAFE. She started writing fiction for young people in 1992 and has since earned such accolades as Honour Book (Younger Readers) in the 2001 CBC Awards, a CBC Notable Book, 1998, and an Aurealis award in 1997. In her latest novel, *Noodle Pie*, Ruth again focuses on one of her favourite subjects, the different ethnic groups that make up contemporary Australia.

## BEFORE READING THE TEXT

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Find out about Vietnam.

- Find a map of Vietnam in your atlas. Look at where it is in relation to Australia.
- What countries surround Vietnam? How far is it from Australia? What is its capital? Have a look for main cities.
- Find a map large enough to display in the classroom. Each student should have a map in their books or folder.
- Divide the class into groups and allocate the following tasks. Ask them to report their findings to the class.
  - a. Check out the website for the Vietnamese Embassy in Canberra <http://www.vietnamembassy.org.au/>.
  - b. Find a picture of the Vietnamese flag and research what each part of it means. Books about flags can be found in the library, Dewey 929.
  - c. Research Vietnamese people in Australia. An article in *The Age*, April 26 2006, provides information about Vietnamese in Australia. Ask the group to see if they can find it. They can use the following link: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/30-years-ago-today-the-first-vietnamese-boat-people-arrived/2006/04/25/1145861348232.html> or go to *The Age* website and type in the date or title, '30 Years On', of the article.
- As a class, read about Cuc Lam's suitcase. On this website: <http://dl.filmaust.com.au/module/224/> is information about Vietnamese refugees as well as the story of Cuc's suitcase. Watch the video of the story. There are teacher notes accompanying this website. Consider what this shows about the people who came to Australia during the 1970s.
- Find out about Vietnamese refugees. Many people came to Australia after the fall of Saigon. Some came by boat, but thousands went to refugee camps across Malaysia and Indonesia where they were checked out by immigration officials from USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Look in Wikipedia (use the search topic: Boat People) and find the numbers of refugees who came out of Vietnam after the end of the war.

## READING THE TEXT

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There are a number of different ways your class could read this novel:

- Together as a class
- In small groups (literature circles)
- Allow students to read it at home, while some chapters are read aloud in class
- By students preparing sections to act out to the class
- By students preparing readings for other classes

As the students read, ask them to keep a diary charting their progress.

(Make a larger copy of this outline for the students to keep in their folder or book)

Chapter	Main characters	Main events
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		

If working in Literature Circles, make sure there is a leader in each group who keeps them on task. Have a timetable in the room to show when each chapter should be completed.

Each week, allocate one lesson to discussing the novel. Spend some time each lesson to ensure the students are all keeping pace with the class, and completing their outline sheet.

Keep a word list on the display board and encourage the class to add new Vietnamese words as they appear in the text. Include the English translation.

Keep a food chart on the display board. As the class reads the novel, they will find many references to Vietnamese food. Add each new food or recipe to the food chart.

## **AFTER READING THE TEXT**

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### **1. CHARACTERISATION**

Draw a profile of each of the main characters. In the classroom, make large cutout figures of each of the main characters and pin these to the display board. Ask students to add words that describe each person on the sheet. Discuss the best words to describe that person and write up a report about one of the characters.

Ask leading questions such as:

- Who do you like the most and why?
- Who do you sympathise with the most and why?
- How has the author developed your involvement with the characters?

### **2. SETTING AND PLOT**

Reread Chapter 3 and note the differences between a restaurant in Adelaide and the restaurant owned by Andy's relatives. As Andy, write a letter home to a friend explaining your bewilderment at the lack of hygiene and health standards that you see.

In Chapters 6 and 8, Andy sees street kids selling postcards to tourists. Reread these chapters. What methods do these kids use to sell their postcards? What does Andy find out about them? Read the section at the end of the novel about the street kids and the programs set up to help them. Check out the website

Streetvoices. What does KOTO do? How can we help? Present an argument to the class stating why they should support KOTO.

In Chapter 12, Andy and Minh decide to encourage tourists to the restaurant. Reread the chapter. Recreate the flyer they produce. The episode creates trouble in the street. Write a newspaper article about the trouble between the restaurant and the shop next door.

In Chapter 15, Andy's father explains to his son why he has gone to such lengths to show that he is successful. Can you explain this in your own words?

In Chapter 16, Tuoc explains why he is so beholden to his family. What did the family do for Tuoc? What did it mean for Tuoc? What did it mean for his family?

### **3. FIND OUT ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ruth Starke has written some wonderful books showing readers the diversity of the Australian community. Several of her books have won awards, and she is recognised for her lively stories and believable multicultural family relationships.

Ruth's books include *Nips X1*, a CBC Honour Book, and *Nips Go National*, *Saving Saddler Street*, *Orphans of the Queen*, *The Twist in the Tale*, *Coming Out* (CBC Notable Book) and *Stella by the Sea* (CBC shortlist title and shortlisted for Queensland Premier's Awards).

Divide your class into groups and ask them to check out Ruth's website [www.ruthstarke.itgo.com](http://www.ruthstarke.itgo.com). Each group could look at a different section such as, the range of books Ruth has written, the reviews and excerpts, the awards and the information about where her books have been published.

Each group can share the information from the website with the class and write a class biography.

Google Ruth Starke and look at the information from the sites which come up. More information can be added to the class biography. One site which will appear is the Western Australian Department of Education Library site at: [www.det.wa.edu.au/cm1s/eval/fiction/authors/at19.htm](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/cm1s/eval/fiction/authors/at19.htm). This site features links to additional information which can be added to the class biography.

#### 4. VIETNAM

In *Noodle Pie*, Ruth Starke recreates the smell, sights, sounds and feel of living in Hanoi. Use the grid to list the things the students find out about Vietnam.

Subject	Chapter	What did you find out?
Food		
Airport		
Clothing		
School		
Tourists		
Bathroom		
Bedroom		
Restaurant		
Transport		

There are many more headings which can be added. Ask the class for suggestions.

#### 5. FOOD

Does your mouth water when you read of the food described in this book? List some of the dishes which are mentioned. Refer to the list of food on the chart on the display board. Where would you be able to taste these dishes? (Look for some Vietnamese restaurants in your state). Are there any Vietnamese families in your class or school who could show you how to make these dishes? Are there some books describing Vietnamese food in your library? (Dewey 641) If not, perhaps the class can cook some of these dishes. At the end of the novel are listed a number of easy-to-prepare Vietnamese dishes. If this is not possible, investigate the possibility of taking a trip to a Vietnamese restaurant, or a local market that has Vietnamese food stalls.

#### 6. THEMES

Ask your class to suggest some of the themes in the book. Remind them that a theme is not the story or plot, but a subject within the story. *Noodle Pie* has themes of family, Vietnamese refugees, tourism, honesty, respect, amongst others, which could be explored.

Put the class into small groups, each group choosing one theme. Ask them to look closely at the theme, and how it is presented in the novel. Write down examples of where the theme is discussed and explored. For instance, tourism is a theme discussed by Andy in Chapter 12. He sees the tourists at Hoan Kiem Lake. Through his observations the reader learns about tourism in Vietnam and the group looking at this theme will be able to reread the chapter and write down what they learn.

Each group could brainstorm ideas on to butcher paper which can be pinned up and shared with the class.

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

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In Chapter 16, Tuoc tells Andy the story behind his escape from Vietnam. Reread the chapter and think about how Tuoc escaped. Tuoc mentions pirates. Where were the pirates? How did they treat the Vietnamese boat people? Are there still pirates today? Check out this website:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/72475.stm> for a news item about modern pirates. If you use google and type in 'boat people pirates', the top three articles are about the refugees trying to escape pirates in the 1970s. Create a poster warning boat people about the threat of pirates. Do today's boat people have the same problem?

In Chapter 16, Tuoc tells his son Andy the reasons behind his escape. Why did Tuoc and others decide to leave Vietnam after 1975? Check out Wikipedia and type in Boat People or Vietnamese Australians. Here you will find more information about how the supporters of the American War were treated once Australian and USA troops left Vietnam. Write a letter from Tuoc to his family, once he arrived in Australia, thanking them for their support. How do you think he may have talked about his escape and eventual settlement in Australia?

Why is Vietnamese food called World Food? What influences have there been on Vietnamese food? Read some recipe books (Dewey 641) and look at the range of food in Vietnam. Can you think of reasons for this variety?



## FURTHER READING

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Read some other adolescent novels about Vietnam, to compare with *Noodle Pie*.

Aaron, Moses	<i>Elijah Greenface</i>
Antle, Nancy	<i>The Longest War</i>
Baillie, Allan	<i>Little Brother</i>
Bauer, Michael Gerard	<i>The Running Man</i>
Bone, Ian	<i>Tin Soldiers</i>
Brookshank, Anne	<i>On Loan</i>
Caswell, Brian	<i>Only the Heart</i>
Caswell, Brian	<i>Maddie</i>
Catran, Ken	<i>Jimmy Moran: Regular</i>
Crew, Gary	<i>Tagged</i> (picture book)
Crew, Gary	<i>Memorial</i> (picture book)
Dechlan, Sonja	<i>Dark Dreams</i> (short stories)
Dechlan, Sonja	<i>No Place like Home</i> (short stories)
Flynn, Warren	<i>Different Voices</i>
Hyde, Michael	<i>Hey Joe!</i>
Paterson, Katherine	<i>Park's Quest</i>
Tolbert, Steve	<i>Settling South</i>
Tolbert, Steve	<i>Stepping Back</i>
Tolbert, Steve	<i>Channeary</i>
Whelan, Gloria	<i>Goodbye Vietnam</i>

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