Middle Years

Student Reading Book

"The Voyage of the Lucky Dragon"
Student Reading Book

Middle Years Reading Task

“The Voyage of the Lucky Dragon”

This activity assesses the following

- Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements

1. understands and uses different skills and strategies to read.
   1.4 understands elements of literature — fiction

2. understands the meaning of what is read.
   2.1 comprehend important ideas and details
   2.2 expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas
   2.3 think critically and analyze authors’ use of language, style, purpose, and perspective

3. reads different materials for a variety of purposes.
   3.1 read to learn new information
The Voyage of the Lucky Dragon

Jack Bennett

Story Summary: What's Happened So Far

In the late 1970's, a Vietnamese family left their country to find a new place where they could live. Like thousands of other Vietnamese, the family fled in a boat. They tried to land in Malaysia, but the government of Malaysia turned them away because there was no room for refugees. The family was given supplies and then sent to the island of Bidong. As Chapter 15 starts, they are approaching the island. The characters in the story are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phan Ti Chi</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuyen</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quan</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ly</td>
<td>daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Tan</td>
<td>family relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Binh</td>
<td>family relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah Soong</td>
<td>friend of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Cu</td>
<td>boat crew member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky Dragon</td>
<td>the boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanmar</td>
<td>the boat's engine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 15

"There it is," said Captain Cu. 'Bidong.'

Clustered in the wheelhouse, the family watched the island grow out of the sea ahead of them.

At first it was a dark speck on the glittering sea. Then it changed shape, grew, developed hills and palm trees. And houses. Hundreds of houses. Except they weren't houses when one got closer. They were shacks. Shacks of all shapes and sizes. Plastered against the hillside like flotsam after a flood. Hovels made of packing cases and cardboard and flattened tins and drums.

About a kilometer offshore the Malaysian patrol boat cast off the towline and turned away seawards. Captain Cu started the Yanmar and slowly, reluctantly, Lucky
Dragon slipped through the sea, calm now in the late afternoon, towards Bidong's solitary wharf.

Quan watched with mounting horror as the island unfolded before them. A tapestry of misery and despair. Narrow muddy tracks between rows of crazy hovels. And the smell! It reached out and lapped around Lucky Dragon as though it were the tentacles of some foul monster. A raw ripe miasma of dirty clothes, rotting fruit, decaying household refuse: a truly foul cocktail of evil smells. And despair, resignation, stagnation. Dull faces, blank stoic masks of surrender and defeat, stared idly, unwonderingly, at Lucky Dragon as she neared the wharf:

"Take the line ashore, Quan," said Captain Cu, deflated by the sights and smells of Bidong even before he landed.

Listlessly Quan picked up and coiled the bowline. He looked at the ghastly place they had come to. A seething garbage dump of unwanted people. Three years! Maybe forever! Perhaps no country would ever take them!

Lucky Dragon was fifty meters from the wharf when something snapped in Quan. He threw down the bowline and hurled himself into the wheelhouse. He grabbed the wheel from the startled Captain Cu and put it hard over. Lucky Dragon heeled sharply, turned away from the wharf and its small crowd of ragged, beaten-looking spectators.

"We're not going to that dreadful place," said Quan, his jaw set. "Look at it! You heard what that patrol boat man said—we could stay there for years! We'll rot there!"

He put the wheel amidships, holding Lucky Dragon on a course to take her away from Bidong.

Captain Cu took off his helmet and scratched his dark stubble.

"That's fine," he said. "But where are we going?"

"Yes," said Ly. "Where, Quan?"

Quan hesitated. He realized that he had not the slightest idea of where he was going. He just knew that it would never be Bidong. Suddenly a thought struck him and he laughed aloud.

"Australia!" he shouted. "Yes, that's where we'll go. Australia!"

Captain Cu grinned and slapped him on the back. "You're right," he said. "Australia! They take anyone! I met plenty Australians in the war. Diggers, they call them." He put his head out of the wheelhouse, grinning at the rest of the family, who were clustered at the starboard rail, watching, with complete bewilderment, Bidong rapidly retreating into the late afternoon haze. "Hey, we're going to Australia! Yes, to Australia!"

"We'd better eat," said Ah Soong, and set up her charcoal stove.

"They have kangaroos in Australia," said Aunt Binh authoritatively as she helped Ah Soong. "I've seen them in the movies. Funny things." She shook her head. "It's a long way away."

It was a very worried Phan Thi Chi who voiced the doubt lurking in Quan's mind. "How do we find Australia?" he asked, very quietly and reasonably. "How, Quan?"

There was silence. A long silence. Behind them the coast of Malaysia had shrunk to thin wrinkled line on the horizon; Bidong Island was a dot on the sea. Ahead lay the South China Sea, ruffled by the wind, empty as far as the eye could see. Lucky Dragon creaked as she lifted to the long low swells.

"Your father is right," said Quan's mother. "How will we get to Australia?"
Quan looked at Captain Cu. The fat man took off his helmet and scratched his head.

"Don't look at me. I can steer, I can work the nets. But I can't navigate. Out for a day, back at night, always near land. Why should I learn about the stars and such things?"

"We haven't any navigational equipment, anyway," pointed out Uncle Tan. "No compass. No charts even. Nothing."

"Charts!" shouted Quan. "Yes, we have!" He darted to the forward fish hold, clambered in, and returned with his battered school suitcase. He opened it and produced a dog-eared school atlas, a plastic ruler and a ballpoint pen.

"Here," he said excitedly, folding the atlas. "Here! Here's Vietnam, and Malaysia, and the Gulf of Siam, and Singapore—"

Phan Thi Chi glanced at the map. "Where's Australia?" he asked.

"Well, it's not on this page," conceded his son. "But, see, here, this page ends just south of Singapore—and just shows the top of Borneo. Now—" he ruffled the pages hastily. "See? Here—this map shows more of Borneo and most of Indonesia and look there, where my finger is—that little piece of land and that city, Darwin—that's the top of Australia!"

"And without a compass, how do we know which way to go?" asked Uncle Tan.

'I know," said Ly. "I learned in geography. If you want to go south, the sun in the morning must be on your left."

"That's right," said Quan. "I learned that, too. Keep the sun on your left in the mornings and on your right in the afternoon and you can't go wrong."

"God help us." said his father. "Truly, God help us."

Captain Cu looked at the atlas and shook his head. "It's going to be a long trip. I'll see how much water we have. And whether someone's left a fishing line aboard. I don't think it's much use working the nets out here. Water's too deep."

"It's deep enough to drown in." said Phan Thi Chi somberly. "Quite deep enough."

"We won't drown," said his wife. "We've got Captain Cu and Quan and Uncle Tan to drive the boat. And Ly knows how to keep us going in the right direction. And I and Ah Soong and Aunt Binh can—we can cook—"

"Cook what?" said Phan Thi Chi bitterly. "That rice won't last long."

"Then you must catch fish," said his wife, briskly, determined to look on the bright side of things. "Captain Cu will find a fishing line."

Poor woman. She sensed that her husband was close to panic, the panic of utter despair. In the past few months he had lost everything: his shop, modest though it was, and with it his livelihood; his father, his country. And now, uprooted, stateless, rejected by the country he had confidently believed would take him in and give him the change of a new life, he believed he had lost his future as well. Xuyen could see him clinging desperately to the last few rags of his self-respect.

Phan Thi Chi was a simple man who had earned a modest income in a community in which he and his family were known and respected. Even through the war certain standards, certain traditions, had remained intact: and he had believed that they always would. Then had come peace and the new ideas, and his world had collapsed about his ears.
Now here he was, a man in his mid-forties, a city man, sailing across terrifying unknown seas to a strange unknown country. And how did they know Australia would take them in? Australia was a land of Europeans, not Asians. And would this old boat get them there? Every creak and groan as Lucky Dragon breasted a swell sent shivers of fear through Phan Thi Chi. And he hated looking at the sea; he hated the huge watery desert which swept with a soft menacing sighing from horizon to horizon. He had come from a crowded city. And now there was nothing, nobody within—his mind reeled—thousand of kilometers.

He hunched himself up into a ball beside his wife, hugging himself to himself, and tried to shut out the sea and the pale sky.

Ah Soong and Aunt Binh separated the gift rice into meal-sized packets—made from old newspapers found in the fish-holds—and stowed them in different parts of the wheelhouse; that way, there was not one single vulnerable central store of rice to be rained on, swept overboard, or turned into a salty, sodden mass by a stray wave.

Captain Cu tuned the Yanmar to its leanest rate of fuel consumption, reducing Lucky Dragon's speed to about five knots—as accurately as he could estimate by watching the passing sea—and then took over the wheel from Uncle Tan.

Uncle Tan sat on the forward fish-hold cover with an incredibly tangled old nylon fishing line Captain Cu had found a cat's cradle of fouled monofilament loops and knots and rusty hooks, and patiently set about untangling it: a task that was to take hours.

Several times that afternoon flying fish had pattered into the sea across Lucky Dragon's bows; but none landed on board. The sea still breathed with a slow, heavy sigh and the sky turned a strange murky gray. The wind fell away completely and the long swells shone like oil as they slid by.

The Yanmar thumped away industriously with a slow, regular bombom-bombom and the occasional bubbling gulp as a steeper swell lifted the water intake ports clear of the water.

A thousand kilometers east of Lucky Dragon, in the southern waters of the South China Sea, powerful invisible forces were stirring: air, heated by the sun and the blood-warm sea, began to rise. As it rose, atmospheric pressure dropped. The air outside the affected area, sucked in to fill the vacuum left by the rising air and the low pressure zone it created, began to move, slowly but steadily, in a spiraling, clockwise motion. As yet the movement was slow: but it had begun. Unimaginable forces had been awakened. Enormous powers stirred in the upper air and on the surface of the sea. Far-ranging seabirds sensed it and winged landward. Porpoises, sensitive to the slightest change on the ocean's mood, stopped feeding and playing and joined the whales, who had already prudently started moving south, away from the disturbance which was as yet only a murmur in the skies.

Aboard Lucky Dragon, Captain Cu was on the wheel. The family slept. Captain Cu did not have the inbuilt weather gauge of a porpoise, seabird or whale, but he felt uneasy as he ran south-south-east throughout the night. The big swells, shining in the threequarter moon, rushed to meet him, lifted Lucky Dragon, and passed sighing beneath. Captain Cu wished they had a compass. And charts. And radio. There were so many things he wished they had.

Once he got a fright something huge, black, and shining surfaced with an explosive gasp beside Lucky Dragon. Captain Cu saw puffs of spray burst above the
long shape as it arched its back and disappeared; he saw a stubby fin against the moon as Lucky Dragon dropped into a trough. Then another sigh and whistling gasp and a strange whii of some animal smell and he saw **two** whales falling **a**stern, diving hard across the swells, swimming strongly and decisively towards some unknown destination. During the night he heard them blowing again and again as they passed him in the darkness. He envied the whales. This was their world. They knew where they were going. He wished he did.

Now open your Student Response Book and do numbers 1 through 9. You may look back at the story as often as you want.
The Refugees

by Brent Ashabranner

The collapse of South Vietnam in 1975 led to Communist regimes, not only in that country, but also in Laos and Cambodia. People in those countries who had served in the armed forces, worked for the government, or who in any way had opposed the Communist forces, were marked for Communist retaliation. That might mean being put in a "reeducation center" at hard labor. It might mean death. Anyone who had worked for the American military or diplomatic organization was in particular danger.

Fear of death, imprisonment, and life under communism caused a mass exodus from Southeast Asia. Vietnamese fled in boats, many of them completely unseaworthy. Their destinations were Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong. Untold thousands of these "boat people" perished in their frightening journeys. Their boats sank in stormy seas. They died from lack of food and water. They were attacked by Thai and Malaysian pirates, robbed of what pitifully few possessions they had, and killed if they resisted. When they reached land they often had to wait for days before officials would let them come ashore. Sometimes they were towed back out to sea by naval ships and told to go to some other country.

Laotian and Cambodian refugees traveled overland toward Thailand, walking at night to avoid Communist troops, finding almost no food in the famine-stricken countryside. As they neared the Thai border, there were more soldiers to avoid, and there was the added danger of being blown to pieces by land mines. Finally, for the Laotians, there was the wide Mekong River to somehow get across. These were the "land people."

Once the boat people and the land people reached Thailand, Malaysia, or Indonesia they were put into hastily organized refugees camps. These camps were overcrowded and without sanitary facilities. The refugees lived in makeshift tents or hovels made of mud, tree branches, packing cases, and anything else that could serve as a roof or a wall. There was never enough food, and clothing and medicine were almost completely lacking. Death and despair were a constant part of camp life.

When the international assistance agencies began to help, conditions improved. The Red Cross, the Catholic Relief Service, United Nations agencies, and the United States government working through these and other groups brought desperately needed supplies, shelter, and organization to the camps. But life for the refugees was still hard, and there was nothing to do all day but...
wait and wonder what was going to happen to them. Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia were countries of "first asylum," poor countries that could not accept the hundreds of thousands of refugees permanently. So there began the long process of finding countries that could take the refugees for resettlement. Australia, Canada, several European countries, and a few in South America accepted refugees and are still taking some, but by far the largest number have gone to the United States.

The process of moving refugees from the countries of first asylum to countries of permanent resettlement takes time. Most refugees have to wait for several months and many wait years before being accepted by a country. There are still tens of thousands of refugees in camp waiting to be resettled.

Refugee Boats coming into Indonesian waters were often guided by the great flares of waste gas being burnt off by Americans offshore oil well and drilling operations. The flame could be seen miles away, and boats would steer toward it. When boats came in sight, the rig radio operator would notify the Indonesian navy that more refugees had arrived.

A young Vietnamese man in an Indonesian refugee camp spoke of seeing the flame from his boat. "We had been three days without food, two days without water," he said. "My mind was not right. When I saw the flame in the sky at night, I thought it was the torch of the Statue of Liberty. I thought somehow we had come to the United States."

The young man looked around the squalid refugee camp, where he has now been for two years. "But I am still waiting to see the Statue of Liberty."

Now turn page 5 in your Student Response Book and do numbers 10 through 13. You may look back at this passage as often as you want