

ENGLISH ADVANCED

Creative Writing: War and Freedom

The wind howled in her ear and whipped her silky, long, black hair around her face. She peered down over the edge and the sight made her hands clench the rail with such force that her knuckles went pale. A boat pulling out of its dock glided through the rippling water, its mast swaying. She stared at its slim figure as it sailed off into the distance.

The Vietnam War. 1959-1975. Her father use to tell her about it all the time mixing his Vietnamese with English. Her ears automatically tuned out to a blank daydream every time her father mentioned it. It was more of a lecture to her then a historical recount.

The untidy scrawl on the whiteboard made her eyes unfocused. She remembered that she did not bother to commit the words to memory. Concentrating hard on the 'Aimee Tran' written neatly on the top of her book she listened to the class discussion. The blonde in the second row, Alana, stood up, turned to face Aimee with grin slowly unfurling on her face as she spoke, "I know Malcolm Fraser let the Vietnamese come in because of the war tearing up their country but all these migrants are taking all *our* jobs in this country."

Aimee suddenly felt a rush in her head and wondered if it was either anger or embarrassment.

"I mean," Alana continued on, "I just don't want this country to come so *Asianised*. You walk around in some suburbs and there are no Australians in sight. It's sort of being in an Asian city!"

It was an uncomfortable silence as if everyone was suddenly conscious of 'the Viet girl' in the last row.

"Just take Aimee for example," Alana persisted, raising a finger at Aimee.

The tension in the room magnified as Aimee was under the spotlight.

"If you have spoken to her dad on the welcome night in February then you would have noticed that he could barely speak English. He should have learnt it before he came here."

"The boat Aimee," her father would whisper like it was a bad omen, "was so small yet there was so many of us squashed in it. It was so hot and people were getting sea sick. It was too risky to open the hatch for fresh air because we were taking all precautions to not get caught by the coastal guards."

The tired looked on his face surprised her as she realised how much her father had aged.

"The coastal guards were not the only thing to worry about," he sighed as he wiped his glasses on his cotton shirt in a weary way, "There were also storms which were close to unbearable and pirates."

"The pirates came across the boat," he said in Vietnamese, "and they tried grabbing all the young children and women. When they tried to get your aunty, I threw boiling water on the pirate and the pirates left only a few of us on the boat."

Aimee remembered the change of expression on his face as he always finished his story with the same line.

"I thought I was going to die but a US ship caught sight of our small boat." He murmured, "From then on I knew that my boat had finally set sail. To freedom."

She slowly shuffled herself around the railing and took one more gulp of the fresh breeze. The taste of sea salt lingered in her throat making her cough. A tear slowly escaped down her cheeks as she let out a cry sounding like a wounded animal. She took both hands off the rail and got ready to jump.

The rush in Aimee's head pounded and pounded. It was definitely anger that was swimming through her. In one swift movement, she stood up quickly and a collective gasp was made from her peers.

"My father," she began her voice shaky, "was fighting for his country's freedom."

"After the war," she continued, "he spent a long time in a re-education camp staying alive on insects. When he escaped, he had to defend himself pirates to be here. He never has complained ever since he has been in Australia. Just being in Australia is the holiday itself."

Tears started swelling in her eyes as she placed a piercing gaze on Alana.

"My mum or my dad might not speak English well or at all," she whispered, "but we are... we can be a family here."

Half poised for the jump she stopped herself. Suicide was running away. She was stronger than that. Her father would not have wanted her to do this. She slowly turned around back to safety on the other side.

She came to a realisation.

"I am Aimee Tran," she proudly whispered, "and I am a Vietnamese Australian."

She pulled out two flowers trying to grow along the bridge sidewalk and waited. She signaled to a bus, content with herself. The bus ride was short and she got off nodding thanks at the bus driver. Walking slowly she decided go and give the flowers to the man that had bravery, sacrifice and love within him. She caught sight of him and ran fast to reach him. Her legs ached at the speed but she did not stop. Tears fell down her face as she got closer. She stumbled as she reached him. She knelt at her father's grave and placed the flowers at his tombstone. Then, she recited a story to him. The very story that she has heard so many times from him.

In the distance, a boat is barely visible, anchored out at sea in front of the setting sun. It gleams gold in the sun's reflection and as its engine roars to life, it slowly takes off to sail.

To freedom.