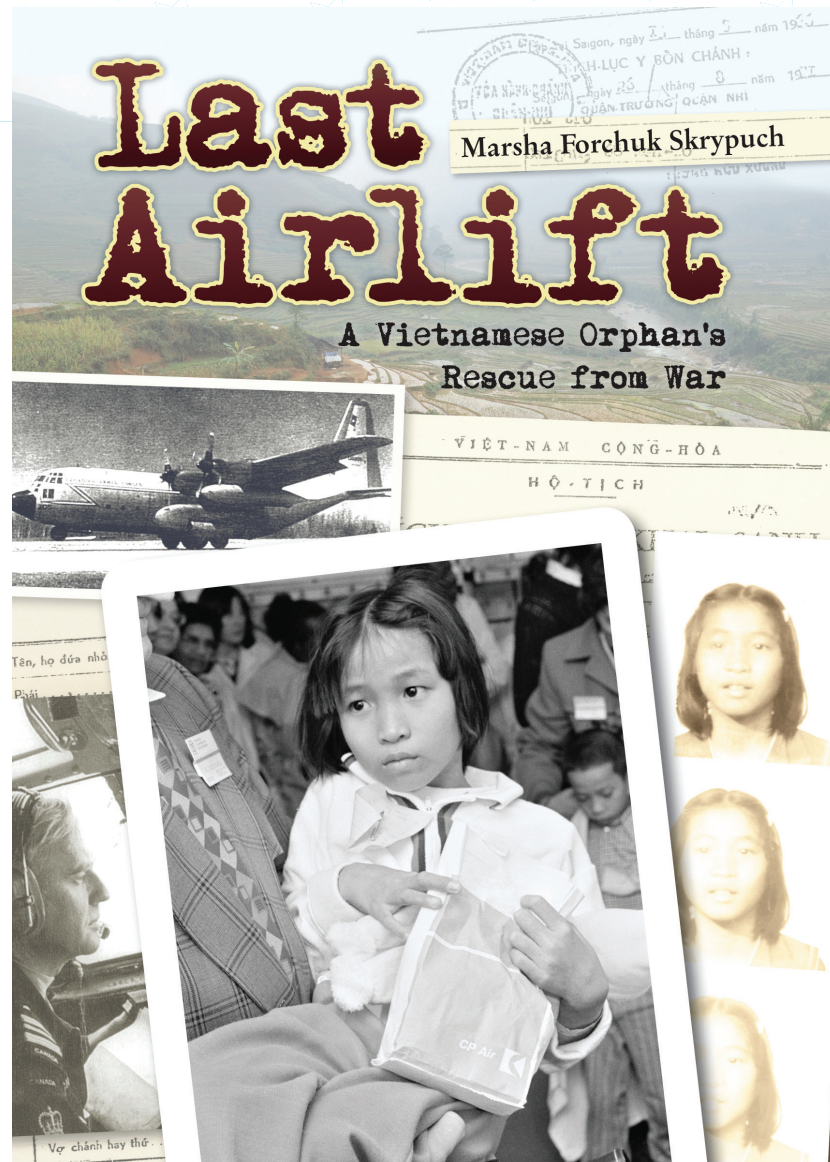


# LAST AIRLIFT

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created by Cassandra Reigel Whetstone



# Last Airlift

## A Vietnamese Orphan's Rescue from War

MARSHA FORCHUK SKRYPUCH

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### STORY SUMMARY

Author Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch tells the story of a Vietnamese orphan, Tuyet, who was airlifted from Saigon, Vietnam in 1975 and subsequently adopted in Toronto, Canada. Tuyet's story is enhanced with photographs of Tuyet, her family, and relevant documents. [Pajama Press, 2011]

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch writes from her home in Ontario, Canada. Learn more about her at:

<http://calla2.com/about-marsha/>

### PRE-READING LESSONS

There are three pre-reading lessons for *Last Airlift*. The first lesson should be completed before beginning the reading. The second and third lessons may be done before the first chapter, or pre-reading two may be done after chapter one, and pre-reading three may be presented after chapter two.

#### PRE-READING ONE: FINDING VIETNAM AND CANADA

**Materials:** World map or globe

**Directions:** Help students locate Vietnam on a world map. Point out that Vietnam is in Southeast Asia and borders the countries China, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as the Gulfs of Thailand and Tonkin, and the South China Sea. Tell students that this book begins in Vietnam and ends in Canada. Locate Canada on the map. Ask students to estimate the distance between Vietnam and Canada. It is approximately 11,000 kilometers or 6,800 miles, crossing the Pacific Ocean. Ask students to identify the different means of travel one might take to get from Vietnam to Canada.

#### PRE-READING TWO: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

**Materials:** Map of Vietnam: <http://www.history-place.com/unitedstates/vietnam/vietnam-map.htm>

**Directions:** Show students the map of Vietnam. Explain that after World War II Vietnam was temporarily partitioned, or separated into two parts: a northern zone and a southern zone. The two sides began a war that lasted close to twenty years. During the war it is estimated that over three million people were killed, including over one million Vietnamese people, 58,000 soldiers from the United States, and an unknown number of people in Cambodia and Laos. The war ended in 1975 when the northern army captured the capital of Southern Vietnam, then called Saigon. *Last Airlift* begins its story in 1975, when the northern armies were approaching Saigon (now called Ho Chi Minh City.)

#### PRE-READING THREE: OPERATION BABYLIFT

**Materials:** None

**Directions:** Tell students that in April of 1975 the situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating. As the northern armies were moving to the south, food and medicine were scarce and people were leaving the country. United States President Gerald Ford ordered the beginning of a mass evacuation of some of the 70,000 Vietnamese orphans. During the month of April, approximately 3,300 Vietnamese orphans were flown to the United States, Europe, Australia, and, as in the case of *Last Airlift*, Canada. This evacuation was called Operation Babylift.

**Extension for students in grades 6 and above:** Have students learn more about Operation Babylift by using Internet resources or the resources listed at the end of this book. Students may research other child evacuation events such as Operation Peter Pan (1960–1962, Cuba to the United States), or Haitian Orphan Airlift (2010, Haiti to the United States). Discuss the pros and cons of these events.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was a day like for Tuyet? Note: Tuyet uses the pronunciation “Too-YET.” This is the pronunciation that her family uses in Canada and how she refers to herself. In Vietnam, her name might have been pronounced similar to “Tvet.” (page 1)
2. Why might it be Tuyet’s duty to help with the younger children and babies? Did you, or do you, have similar responsibilities at age 8? (page 2)
3. Why weren’t the children allowed to go outside? What do you think could have happened to Tuyet before she arrived at the orphanage? (page 3)
4. Tuyet shares that she has polio. What do you know about polio? Explain that polio is a contagious, viral disease and in some instances can lead to partial or full paralysis. Historically it’s been a devastating disease but due to the polio vaccine it has largely been eradicated in Europe, North and South America, much of Asia, and Australia. Tuyet explains that her left ankle was so weak she had to walk on her heel and that in order to move forward she had to push on her left knee with her left hand. Consider inviting students to respectfully try to walk around as Tuyet described. Have students share what is especially challenging about moving in that way. What sorts of activities might be harder to do with that type of physical challenge? (page 3)
5. Why was an orange so important that it stands out as a special memory for Tuyet? (page 5)
6. Who might the two visitors have been? Why might they have stopped coming? (page 6)
7. The man called Tuyet, “Son Thi Anh Tuyet.” Explain that in Vietnamese, names are arranged as family name then given name. So “Tuyet,” which is her given or proper name, comes at the end of her full name. Arranging names this way is referred to as “Eastern order” and is common in many countries in eastern Asia, parts of Africa, and Hungary. In areas influenced by European naming traditions, such as North and South America, names are arranged in “Western order,” with the given name first, followed by the family name. (page 10)
8. What do you know about Hercules? Do you think that was a fitting name for the plane? Why or why not? (page 19)
9. A woman on the plane gave Tuyet a cloth doll. What did it mean to her to have that doll? What does “breathed in its fresh newness” mean? (page 26)
10. What was Tuyet safe from at the end of chapter three? Could there have been dangers that the woman knew about that were unknown to Tuyet at that time? (page 29)
11. Why did Linh advise Tuyet to say “No” when people said things to her in English? Do you think this was reasonable advice? Why or why not? (page 34)
12. Describe what different sensory experiences Tuyet had when she stepped off the plane in Toronto. What did she see, hear, smell, feel, and taste? Have students step outside the classroom to see what they immediately see, feel, taste, smell, and hear. Compare and contrast their experiences to Tuyet’s. (pages 37–38)
13. When Tuyet sees her photograph she says, “Did she really wear her sadness on her face for all to see?” What does she mean by that question? Have you ever seen a photograph of yourself and been surprised by how you looked? If so, what was that like? (page 43)
14. How do you think Linh felt about going with her new family? Do you think she wanted to stay in Surrey Place with Tuyet? Why did Tuyet push Linh away? (page 53)
15. Why did Tuyet assume the family wanted her to be their helper? Tuyet had experienced the loss of her birth family, her home and friends at the orphanage, and Linh. How do you think those experiences might affect her ability to trust and bond with a new family? (page 56)
16. Why didn’t the idea of a dad seem very real to Tuyet? How might growing up in a country besieged by war influence a child’s concept of dads? Why would she have not ever seen a dad (or realized she’d seen one) before? (page 61)
17. What do you think of Tuyet’s first dinner at home? Why did she drop the corn and chicken into her sock? (page 72)



18. Why did Tuyet sleep on the rug? What makes changing sleeping habits difficult? Do you remember changing your sleeping arrangements, such as from a toddler bed to a larger bed, or changing your sleep environment? If so, what was that like? (pages 80–82)

19. Why did Tuyet burp after eating the sweet cereal? Was she being impolite? Why or why not? (page 87)

20. At the end of the story Tuyet’s bedding is moved into the girls’ room. Why is this significant for Tuyet? Why do you think the author might have chosen to end the story with the image of Tuyet slipping out of bed to look at the stars? (page 99)

21. What are some of the challenges Tuyet might have faced in adapting to her new family and new home? What are some of the joys she might have experienced? (end of book)



## TUYET’S JOURNEY (GEOGRAPHY, MAP SCALE)

**Materials:** One copy of a world map per student, rulers, pencils, crayons or colored pencils, a transparency of the map (optional)

**Preparation:** Prepare copies of the map. Use the free map “World 2” at <http://www.yourchildlearns.com/megamaps/print-world-maps.html> or a map that is similar.

### Directions:

1. Distribute maps and rulers to students. Help them label the continents and major oceans on their maps.

2. Have students find and label your city on the map. Identify and label a second city that is approximately one cm away from your city on the map.

3. Use Mapquest.com or another tool to identify the true distance between your city and the second city on your map. Use this information to create the scale for the map. Have students draw a map scale key on their map, i.e., 1 cm = x km.

4. Identify and label Saigon, which was renamed Ho Chi Minh City right after the northern armies claimed Saigon in 1975. Remind students that this was where Tuyet lived before the airlift.

5. Reread the first sentence of the second paragraph on page 36 of *Last Airlift*: “There were more flights between Hong Kong and Toronto, but they all blended into one long dream.” Identify and label Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto on the map.

6. Using the map scale, have students identify the approximate distances from:

- a. Saigon to Hong Kong
- b. Hong Kong to Vancouver (via the Pacific Ocean)
- c. Vancouver to Toronto

7. Add the distances from each leg of the journey to find the estimated distance that Tuyet traveled from Saigon to Toronto.

8. Discuss where else the flight might have stopped after Hong Kong.

9. Make three columns on the board. Label the columns “Tuyet,” “Babies,” and “Staff and Crew.” Discuss the varying emotions and feelings that each person or group might have experienced during this journey. List your answers in the appropriate columns.

10. Compare and contrast the experiences of the different people on the plane.

**Extension:** Have students use information from the activity to create a newspaper article about Tuyet’s journey. Include facts about the travels and use information from steps 9 and 10 to create quotes from the passengers and crew on the plane.

## FROM VIETNAM TO CANADA (WEATHER, CLOTHING, FOOD)

**Materials:** A weather website such as weather.com, chart paper; markers; access to Internet or library for research; writing paper

**Preparation:** Make a grid on chart paper that has three rows and six columns. Label the first row with the name of your city, the second row “Toronto,” and the third row “Ho Chi Minh City.” Label the first column with the current date.

### Directions:

1. Read the paragraph on page 37 that begins with, “The first thing Tuyet noticed when she approached the open door was cold air blowing on her face.”
2. Say, “Tuyet says, ‘It was always hot and humid in Saigon.’” If students are unfamiliar with humidity explain that it’s like the air in the bathroom when you turn on a hot shower.
3. Use a weather website to find the current temperature in your city, in Toronto, and in Ho Chi Minh City. Write the temperatures on the grid. Continue checking the weather once a week for the next five weeks or longer to see how the temperatures change.
4. Discuss how the temperature and climate of an area affects what people wear in that area. Ask, “What sorts of clothing do you wear where it is warm? Hot? Cold?” Ask, “What new items of clothing might Tuyet have learned about when she moved to Canada?”
5. Divide students into six groups. Assign each group a topic to research: climate in Ho Chi Minh City, climate in Toronto, food in Ho Chi Minh city, food in Toronto, clothing in Ho Chi Minh City, clothing in Toronto.
6. Give each group a piece of chart paper and markers. Have them research their topic and create a poster that uses words and illustrations to give information about their topic.
7. Have students present their posters to the class. Display the posters around the room.

**Closure:** Compare and contrast the climate, food, and clothing from Toronto and Ho Chi Minh City. Ask what it would be like to move from one city to the other if you didn’t have any information beforehand. Have students pick one of the cities and imagine that they have just moved there. Give students writing paper and have them write a letter to a friend as if they have just moved to this city. Encourage them to use sensory details and to include information about what would be the same as in their old home and what would be different.

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES (SOCIAL STUDIES)

### Directions:

1. Review the documents and photographs on pages 12, 32, 39, 54, and 66.
2. Tell students that these are primary sources from Tuyet’s story. Remind them that “primary” means “first” in this context. Explain that primary sources are documents or objects that were created during the time of the event being studied or written about.
3. Ask students, “Would Last Airlift be considered a primary source?” Explain that things such as articles, movies, or books that tell or examine a story after the event are considered secondary sources.
4. Discuss how to identify whether something is a primary source or a secondary source. Ask students to identify which of the following in each pairing is a primary source and which is a secondary source (the primary source is in bold).
  - a. **a pilot’s diary**—a book about a pilot
  - b. a book about soldiers in Vietnam—**a collection of letters from soldiers in Vietnam**
  - c. **an eyewitness account of the evacuation of Saigon**—a newspaper article about the evacuation of Saigon
  - d. **a photograph of Operation Babylift**—an illustration made from a photograph of Operation Babylift
  - e. **an interview with Tuyet**—an interview with someone who read Last Airlift

5. Ask, “Why does it matter whether the source is primary or secondary?” Discuss that primary source materials tend to be accurate and can include emotion and details from events. Secondary materials might include more objectivity and additional historical information about the event.

6. Discuss how Marsha Skrypuch uses primary sources. For example, in *Last Airlift*, interviews with Tuyet gave the author interesting and intimate details about her experience traveling, while primary source documents gave facts such as dates, names, and places. The author then added this additional historical information (which Tuyet might not have known about at the time the events occurred) to Tuyet’s story to create a secondary source that gives the reader a full picture of what took place.

## TELLING YOUR STORY

### (BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE WRITING)

**Materials:** Pencils, index cards (approximately 4 per student, depending on the number of questions generated in step 6), blank paper, writing paper

**Preparation:** Decide whether students will interview someone at home or someone in the class for this activity. Students might also interview “Big Buddies” from other classrooms for this activity. *This activity can easily be adapted to personal narrative writing if appropriate; simply skip the interview section and allow students time to brainstorm their own experiences.*

### Directions:

#### SESSION ONE: DEFINE BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

1. Read the first three paragraphs of chapter one. Ask, “What voice does the author use to tell the story? Is it fiction or non-fiction?” *third-person narrative, non-fiction*

2. Discuss what evidence they can find from the opening chapter and cover/back cover to support their answers.

3. Tell students that *Last Airlift* is written as a non-fiction biographical narrative. Explain that there are three main types of narrative writing. Fictional narratives are made-up stories such as *Charlotte’s Web* or books in the Harry Potter series. Personal narratives are autobiographies that focus on major events in the author’s own life, such as *Thank you, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco, or *Boy and Going Solo* by Roald Dahl. Biographical narratives like *Last Airlift* are written using the facts from an event in someone’s life.

4. Tell students that the author of *Last Airlift*, Marsha Skrypuch, used interviews and documents to learn the facts about Tuyet’s story, which she then wrote as a third-person biographical narrative. Tell students they are going to write a biographical narrative essay about an event in someone else’s life.

5. Assign each student a partner or subject for the interview. Tell students they will be asking their interviewee to describe an event they have experienced. Direct students to ask for positive events that are safe for the interviewees to share, such as “Tell me about a time when you did something really fun,” or “Tell me about a family celebration such as a birthday party or holiday.”

6. Brainstorm a list of questions that students will ask their interviewees.

- a. Tell me about . . .
- b. How old were you when it happened? Where did it take place?
- c. How did the event start?
- d. What are some of the things you liked best about the event?
- e. How did you feel during the event?
- f. What did you say during the event?
- g. When and how did it end?

7. Have students write questions on index cards. Use one side of a card for each question.



**SESSION TWO: THE INTERVIEW AND WRITING PROCESS**

1. Have students interview their subjects. Encourage them to write as much information on each index card as possible.
2. Give students a blank page. Tell them they are going to create a story web to organize their information.
3. Have them write the topic of their event in the center of the page. Say, “This will be the basis of your topic sentence,” and ask them to put a circle around the topic.
4. Ask students to extend a short line from the circle toward the left side of the page. Have them write a word or a few words about the beginning of the event and circle it. Direct them to do the same under the topic sentence for the middle of the event, and to the right side of the topic for the ending of the event.
5. Have students add details to each of their circles. For example, details for the topic sentence might include a description of the subject, their age, and the place where the event took place. Details for the beginning, middle, and end would include facts about the event, sensory details, emotions or feelings, etc.
6. Pass out writing paper and have students use their story web to write their rough drafts. Students in grade three might write a paragraph while students in grades four and above should be challenged to write a full essay that includes an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs about the event, and a concluding paragraph.

**SESSION THREE: REVISION AND FINAL DRAFTS**

1. Have students edit their stories for clarity and correct spelling and mechanics.
2. If possible, allow students to read their drafts to their interviewee to ask for more details (if needed) and to make sure their story is accurate.
3. Give students time to revise their essays or paragraphs and then write their final drafts.

**THE JOY OF PLAY  
(HEALTH, CREATIVITY)**

**Materials:** Assortment of recycled objects such as paper tubes, empty cartons and pint baskets; construction paper; chenille stems (pipe cleaners); glue; scissors

**Directions:**

1. Ask, “What were some of the activities Tuyet learned to do with her new family?” Discuss teeth brushing, baths, eating new foods, and playing.
2. Ask, “Why didn’t Tuyet have experience playing outside?”
3. Ask, “Is play important?” Talk about the different types of playing that children do. Have students share their favorite playtime activities now and things they did when they were younger.
4. Ask, “Do we learn from playing?” Brainstorm things that children can learn through playing and list them on the board. The list may include problem solving, coordination, taking turns, planning activities, creativity, language, and physical skills (fine motor and gross motor).
5. If students are allotted recess time at school, ask, “What value do you think recess adds to your school day? When recess is canceled because of weather or other reasons, how do you feel and why do you feel that way?”
6. Discuss what children don’t get to learn when they don’t have the opportunity for play.
7. Tell students that children all over the world make toys from everyday objects in their home and environment. Discuss how children might play with cardboard boxes, wrapping paper tubes, string, rocks, etc.
8. Tell students they are going to use everyday objects to invent a toy they might give to Tuyet.
9. Put materials on a table and allow each student to take a few items. Give them time to create a toy with the materials.
10. While students are working, ask questions about their toy such as “How would she play with it?” and “Is this something she might play with alone or with someone else?”

**Closure:** When students are finished working, have them present their toy to the class or to their groups. Ask them to explain how it works, why they made it, and why they would give it to Tuyet.



## STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT (ART)

**Materials:** Tagboard or cardstock, aluminum foil, scissors, pencils, one pushpin per student

**Preparation:** Cut the tagboard into squares of approximately 12x12cm (5x5") and cut foil into squares of 24x24cm (10x10")

### Directions:

1. Read page 99 of *Last Airlift*. Discuss the importance of stars in this story. Ask, "What do you think stars meant to Tuyet?" Note that they were not something she could enjoy in Vietnam because it wasn't safe to go outside, and that they were one of the first things she saw when she arrived in Toronto.

2. Give students a tag board square each. Have them draw a five-point star that fills the square. Tell students to cut the out star.

3. Pass out the foil squares. Have students carefully place the tagboard star in the middle of the foil. Help students cut the foil between each point of the star. Have students fold the foil over each point until the star is covered with foil.

4. Ask students to think of a word that Tuyet might have thought of when she looked at the stars. Words might include peace, family, safety, shelter, hope, play, mom, dad, sisters, brother, etc. Have students lightly print their word on the front of the star.

5. Give each student a pushpin. Have them prick holes along the lines of the letters to form the word.

6. Display the stars on a bulletin board or hang them throughout the room. Stars could also be displayed to form "Tuyet" or another word from the story.

