TEXTS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: ASIA AND AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA

by Helen Sykes
October 2014

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This is a list of texts that can be used to explore the Australian curriculum cross-curriculum priority: Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. The texts have been chosen with secondary English classrooms in mind, although some - as indicated in the recommendations - are appropriate for use in primary classrooms as well. The list is as comprehensive as possible to make it clear that there is a whole range of solutions to ensuring that the cross-curriculum priorities are satisfied. The texts listed vary greatly in quality and will appeal to readers of different tastes and abilities. Some are very successful for whole-class use.

The list is of course not exhaustive. Most of the texts annotated here are print texts; only a few fairly obvious film texts have been included.

The titles in each category are listed in alphabetical order. At the end, there is an ‘Extension text’ section – texts that may not exactly meet the requirements of the category but will contribute to students’ understanding. For example, Shaun Tan’s The Arrival does not have specific Asian content but it is an essential text to know about when looking at the experience of migration.

Ayu and the Perfect Moon


This is a delightful picture book for young readers about traditional dance in Bali. Ayu learns the Legong, which is traditionally performed for the village by young girls on the night of the full moon. The simple text is accompanied by Cox's evocative illustrations of Balinese village life. The picture book was first published in 1984 and was unavailable for some years. In 2011 Walker Books published this paperback reprint in a new series of Australian picture book classics, making the book easily accessible in the classroom.

Recommendation: This is a picture book for younger readers that can be enjoyed across all age groups. Use it anywhere from Years 1-8. This would be a great introduction to a cross-curricular unit of work on traditional Asian arts, in cooperation with your Drama, Art and Music departments.
**Barry Noodles and DaKillerBs**

by Hung Le. This is currently out of print.

Aimed at boys in the Year 5-8 age group, this is a funny story about a young Vietnamese boy who arrives in Australia with no English but who quickly acquires a passion for AFL, enhanced with some moves inspired by Kung Fu. The text makes little sense to anyone unacquainted with this particular football code. The book is very Melbourne-centric.

**Recommendation:** This humorous look at the migrant experience is suitable for wide reading for the Year 5-8 age group, especially boys with a knowledge of AFL.

**Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, death and hope in a Mumbai slum**


This beautifully written and fascinating book is factual text but the reading experience is very much like that of reading a novel. Boo is an American journalist and the book is based on years of first-hand research in the Annawadi slum that is adjacent to the Sahar International airport in Mumbai. The slum is hidden from the airport by a wall of advertising for expensive Italian floor titles that promise to remain ‘beautiful forever’. The juxtaposition between the extravagant lifestyle promised by the advertising and the fragile shacks of the slum, with their dirt floors, in many ways sums up the Mumbai Boo is reporting on.

Boo chose to present her research by telling the story of three families who live in the slum. The first is the family of Abdul, who is possibly sixteen, possibly nineteen, and the family breadwinner; Abdul has become a skilled recycler, scavenging though ‘the things that richer people threw away’. The second is the family of the ambitious and ruthless Asha, who aspires to be the next slumlord; her daughter, Manju, is the only college-going girl in Annawadi but regrettably does not share her mother's pursuit of material gain at all costs. The third is that of Fatima, universally known as One Leg, who is desperately jealous of Abdul's family's relative prosperity. In a self-destructive rage, Fatima burns herself grievously in a fire and blames Abdul. Much of the narrative of the book centres on this incident and its consequences.

These people are real people that Boo met in the slum, but she writes about them as if they are characters in a novel, so that they come vividly to life, and she informs us about them by telling their stories. Boo supplements her main characters with a large cast, especially of road boys, scavengers that Abdul knows, and corrupt officials. In the world Boo presents, corruption is endemic at every level, especially amongst the police, lawyers and court workers, from the highest to the lowest. Innocence is useless in the justice system; money and influence are everything. The conditions in gaol are even worse than those of slum existence.

At the end of the book, Boo contemplates the situation where the pressure of survival is so great that people simply cannot afford compassion for others:

It is easy, from a safe distance, to overlook the fact that in undercities governed by corruption, where exhausted people vie on scant terrain for very little, it is blisteringly hard to be good. The astonishment is that some people are good, and that many people try to be ...

**Recommendation:** This text is written for adults and it is a sophisticated and fairly demanding read, but as mentioned earlier it is beautifully written and offers unforgettable insights into the lives of those who are forgotten in the huge societal changes brought about by globalisation. It could work very well as the non-fiction choice for whole-class study by a mature Year 10 class.
Beijing Confidential: Lost and Found in the Forbidden City
This is a non-fiction text written for an adult audience. Canadian Wong was a student in Beijing during the 70s, during which time she betrayed a fellow (Chinese) student to the authorities for harbouring western sympathies. She returns to a very different country thirty-three years later to try to find the woman she betrayed. This is a very interesting insight into the lifestyle of modern urban Chinese and the huge differences from just a couple of decades ago.
Recommendation: This would be best with girls in Years 10 or 11. The picture of contemporary China is insightful and interesting. You could add it to a selection of non-fiction texts about China for middle-secondary readers, with titles like Li Cunxin's Mao's Last Dancer, Adeline Yen Mah's Falling Leaves, Jung Chang's Wild Swans and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior.

Bend it Like Beckham
This feel-good film with its lively wedding sequence was the first to give Western viewers a taste of the joys of Bollywood, but most of the action is on the soccer field. Jesminder is a British girl from a traditional Indian Sikh family who are appalled at her ambition to play soccer. Her fellow player 'Jules' faces opposition from her mother who associates athleticism with lesbianism. Both girls have to struggle against their families' prejudices to achieve their dreams.
Recommendation: This is especially successful with girls in Years 8 and 9. Students from many backgrounds empathise with the conflict between traditional family values and the search for identity.

Bend it like Beckham
This is a novelisation of the film, very closely based on the screenplay. It's good fun and like the film raises the issues of cultural expectations of girls and the problems of living between two cultures. Of course it can't reproduce those elements that make the film so successful: the colour, the speed of the editing, the cutting back and forth from such scenes as the wedding to the soccer game. I would strongly recommend that students see the film first. The book is then a pleasant reminder of the film. It would also be a useful tool if the film itself is to be studied.
Recommendation: This will be enjoyed by girls in Years 5-9.

The Best Day of My Life
The opening sentence reads: 'The best day of my life was the day I found out I was all alone in the world.'
Valli doesn't know how old she is - probably nine or ten. Her job is to pick up coal, any stray lumps that she can find. She has to be quick about it, as the bosses regard this as stealing. She is not allowed to go to school, although she hangs around the open-air classroom when she can and has taught herself to write in the dirt with a stick. On this particular day she learns that the family she lives with are not her relations, as she has always believed; they had been paid to take her as a baby after her unmarried mother died in childbirth. The discovery sets her free in a way: there is no reason to stay in Jharia, scavenging for lumps of coal. So she hides in the back of one of the coal trucks.
This is an easier read than some of Ellis's other novels, such as the *Parvana* series, but some teachers may worry whether it is too dark for primary or junior secondary students. When the truck drivers find Valli hidden in their load, they try to sell her to a brothel. She is saved when the madam recognises that Valli is showing signs of leprosy. Valli becomes one of the many homeless street kids struggling to survive on the streets of Kolkata.

The novel exposes with Ellis’s usual perceptiveness the plight of lepers and of street children in India, but it is not depressing. Valli is a wonderfully resilient and engaging character, funny and bright. As always, Ellis provides young readers with a positive and inspiring ending.

Jharia is a real place. A study of *The Best Day of My Life* should include some of the images of Jharia that can be found on the internet: the women in their brightly coloured saris carrying on their heads huge baskets of coal as they toil up the narrow steep trails that Ellis describes; the children blackened by coal dust; the air thick with choking dust.

**Recommendation:** Suitable for readers in the Year 6-8 age group, this is well worth considering for class set use in Year 7. Yes, it is dark - but it is also a celebration of the triumph of the human spirit, and a demonstration of our common humanity, no matter how different our circumstances.

Related texts could include some of Ellis's other work, such as the *Parvana* series set in Afghanistan and Pakistan: *Parvana, Parvana's Journey, Shauzia* and *Parvana's Promise*. Other related texts could include some of those written for this age group about the lives of other young girls, such as *Homeless Girl* by Gloria Whelan, about the plight of young widows in India, and *Spilled Water* by Sally Grindley, about child factory workers in China. *Broken Glass*, also by Sally Grindley, is about two brothers who find themselves forced to scavenge for a living on the streets of an Indian city; it is aimed at the same age group and is a useful companion piece to *The Best Day of My Life*. Other titles that will allow Australian readers to understand the lives of children living in areas of conflict can be found in Allen & Unwin's 'Through My Eyes' series, including John Heffernan's *Naveed*, Robert Hillman's *Malini* and Rosanne Hawle's *Shahana*.

**The Black-bearded Bai and Other Plays from Asian Folklore**


This is a collection of six short plays, all based on traditional tales from Asia and all written to be read and performed in secondary English classrooms. The tales are from Vietnam, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and India. The stage adaptations have been made with an eye on students' tastes: these are very modern adaptations, with lots of action, some wicked - and often black - humour, and plenty of visual gags. There are detailed stage directions, both at the beginning of each script and throughout, and some suggestions for classroom discussion and follow-up at the end of each play.

My favourite is the title story, 'The Black-hearted Bai', described as a play about 'the triumph of intelligence over brute force'. The brutish bully gets his comeuppance very satisfactorily, but there is an amusing twist at the end where the triumphant good guy reveals nefarious plans. When 'The Director' - one of the cast - complains that that's not the proper ending, he is told that this is the modern version. The play uses in an exaggerated way the sort of distancing techniques characteristic of Brechtian theatre: students who perform 'The Black-hearted Bai' will never have problems understanding Brechtian theatre.

The last play in the collection - 'Harisarman' - has sequences of the kind found in Bollywood musicals. It would be great fun exploring examples of Bollywood film with students as preparation for their staging their own version.
Recommendation: These plays offer a good balance of action, excitement and humour, as well as an introduction to the folktales of Asia. They are practical scripts that students will be able to perform. They will have most fun if they can perform them on a real stage with lighting, but they will work in the classroom too. They would be best with students in Year 9 or 10, as some references are a little too mature for younger classes. They are also a great springboard for students working to turn other traditional tales into playscripts.

**Boy Overboard**


In many ways this is the same book that Gleitzman has been writing for years: a story told by an innocent first-person narrator (whether Pommy migrant kid, a mute or a cane toad) who has a sometimes achingly painful sense of responsibility for the family’s welfare. The narrator’s anxious and often ill-conceived attempts to improve the family’s lot lead to all kinds of comic disasters. At their best, Gleitzman’s books achieve a remarkable tension between real sadness and laugh-aloud comedy.

In this case, the narrator is an Afghan boy whose family are fleeing the Taliban and who become enmeshed in John Howard’s Pacific solution. Some adults will be uncomfortable with the apparently flippant treatment of such a subject, but I think it can be very successful in helping Australian kids understand that those demonised boat people are families not all that different from their own, with kids with whom they can identify. Alongside the humour, there is horror as well as sadness: women being executed in the soccer stadium in Kabul; pirates searching the refugees’ boat for young girls; Jamal’s fear that his parents have drowned; the news that they are not welcome in Australia. The humour is a blessed reminder of the resilience of human beings, even in the face of terrible inhumanity.

Gleitzman’s opposition to the Australian government’s treatment of the boat people is clear, but his anger is admirably restrained, limited to the occasional irony such as: ‘Thank goodness Australians are so good at thinking of others.’

Recommendation: Teachers will find this very rewarding for classroom study. It is a fairly easy read and could be used from Year 4 to Year 9, although most schools will opt for Year 7. It would be interesting to explore with gifted kids the advantages and limitations of telling the story differently, without the humour. Boy Overboard could be taught alongside another title from Morris Gleitzman, *Girl Underground*, which explores further the plight of asylum seekers. Useful related texts, all about the Australian experience, include Libby Gleeson’s *Mahtab's Story*, Alwyn Evans’ *Walk in My Shoes*, Rosanne Hawke’s *Soraya the Storyteller* and the picture book, *Ziba Came in a Boat*, written by Liz Lofthouse and illustrated by Robert Ingpen. Jackie French’s remarkable *Refuge* moves into the world of fantasy to explore the importance of boat people in Australian history. Other excellent titles about the refugee experience include Deborah Ellis’s *Shauzia* and *No Safe Place* and Michael Morpurgo’s *Shadow*.

Gleitzman’s *Boy Overboard* could also be linked with the film *Bend it like Beckham*: like Jessminder in the film, Jamal’s sister Bibi is a talented soccer play forbidden to play by her culture.

**Break of Day**


This accessible story begins on the Kokoda Track, where young, untrained Australians – without resources or leadership – are being stalked through the jungle by a much larger Japanese force. This is an important insight into the experience of Kokoda, but it is not just a war story. There are flashbacks to the young men’s lives growing up in Australia, with a focus on two brothers from rural Victoria and their relationship with the local bully. The younger brother, Murray, has long thought of
himself as a coward, because of his inability to stand up to the bully, Sid. Eventually, there on the Kokoda Track, he finds himself alone with a wounded Sid and has to decide whether to abandon or stay with the bully who has made his life miserable for so many years. This is an insightful look at the nature of courage.

Recommendation: There is huge interest now in the experience of Kokoda, and this is a very accessible introduction to it for students. Boys will relish the war scenes, but because this is about relationships as much as it is about war, girls too will enjoy it. You could use it for whole class study with a mixed-ability group in Years 8 or 9, or add it to a wide reading box of war stories. Make up a unit on Kokoda, supplementing Break of Day with the non-fiction text Kokoda Track: 101 Days and the picture book Photographs in the Mud.

Broken Glass

This is an easy-to-read novel for the Year 5 to 8 age group about two boys who run away from a violent home, believing that their depressed father will stop mistreating their mother once they are gone. They have lived a comfortable existence in an Indian village in a two-bedroom house with a kitchen and a room in which to watch television. Unlike some others in their village, they have always gone to school, and they have always had shoes to wear. But now – at ages twelve and nine – they find themselves homeless on the streets of a large city, sleeping at night on a traffic island and scavenging through the rubbish for broken glass, in order to make enough money to feed themselves.

This is a realistic picture of the conditions of homeless children in India. The author is careful to expose the grimness of the life without traumatising young readers too much. She provides some hope at the end for the boys. The novel provides an opportunity for exposing readers to other worlds.

Recommendation: Use this alongside other stories that will open the eyes of Australian young people to the lives of children in other countries, such as other titles by Sally Grindley, including Bitter Chocolate, about the conditions of child cocoa workers in Africa, Torn Pages, about AIDS orphans in Africa, and Spilled Water, about child factory workers in China. Titles by Deborah Ellis are also valuable, including Parvana, Parvana's Journey, Shauzia and Parvana's Promise, all set in Afghanistan; The Best Day of My Life, about a homeless Indian girl suffering from leprosy; The Heaven Shop, about the children who have been orphaned by AIDS in Africa; Diego, run! and Diego’s Pride, about a boy whose parents have been wrongly imprisoned in Bolivia for drug smuggling; and No Safe Place, the story of three adolescent asylum seekers from very different backgrounds who are at the mercy of people smugglers as they try to cross the English Channel. Other titles that give Australian readers insight into the lives of children in other countries include Homeless Bird by Gloria Whelan, about the plight of young widows in India, Trash by Andy Mulligan, about the lives of children scavenging in the rubbish tips of Manila, Eoin Colfer's Benny and Omar, set in Tunisia, and The Wild by Matt Whyman, the grim story of two brothers growing up in the poisoned wilderness of Kazakhstan.

Chenxi and the Foreigner

This is a very interesting look at an Australian girl's experience of Shanghai in the period just before the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Anna White is eighteen and visiting her father, who is a wealthy Australian businessman in Shanghai. As he is working, she decides to spend her days studying Chinese art at a local art school. Her father arranges for a boy from the school, Chenxi, to be her escort and companion.

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Anna is immediately fascinated by the 'gorgeous' Chenxi, who is quite unlike boys she has known back home. She is puzzled by the fact that she cannot judge how he feels about her. She is both annoyed and intrigued by his offhand behaviour: he doesn't come to pick her up as promised, for example, on her first day at the art school. It is his otherness that obsesses her and the fact that her father has warned her against getting involved - 'a Chinese boy would do anything to go out with an Australian girl' - makes him seem even more attractive. But Mr White, in his sheltered ex-pat life, is wrong: Chenxi is not interested in a relationship with an Australian girl and has no wish to use her as a means of getting to Australia. He sees his future as an artist in China, using his art to speak out about where he thinks China should be going. Anna is of interest to him mainly because she appreciates his secret works of art - an art very different from the mechanistic, imitative productions that the school expects of its students.

It is, in fact, Anna who uses Chenxi. It is Anna who eventually initiates sexual contact. She is oblivious to the possible consequences for him, in a society where her father's housekeeper is paid to spy on the foreigners, including the contents of Anna's diary.

This is an excellent insight into Shanghai life at the time, with lots of detailed descriptions of the crowded streets, the busy markets and the lifestyle of Chenxi's family. It is also revealing about the nature of a society where freedom of thought and expression are restricted and dissenters face severe punishment.

Note: This was first published in 2002 but Rippin had the opportunity to do a substantial re-write in 2008. She even changed the protagonist's name to make it clear that this is really a different book. She moved the setting to just before the Tiananmen Square protests, and she wrote a much less timid book. This one tells of the drug-taking common among ex-pat students, does not shrink from using vulgarity and describes the sexual encounter between Anna and Chenxi quite explicitly.

Recommendation: This is a very worthwhile text to introduce Australian young people to Chinese society. The huge social changes between the time of the Cultural Revolution, when Chenxi's father was killed, and 1989 are evident; the changes in China since 1989 are of course even more extreme. And yet China still restricts the freedom of its citizens in ways that Australians may find hard to understand. *Chenxi and the Foreigner* is also an important text in its exploration of issues of cultural sensitivity: Anna cannot possibly understand Chenxi, because her experiences have been so different from his. While the frankness of the text may cause some schools to hesitate about using it for class-set study, the rewards of doing so are many. It is an excellent choice for Years 9 or 10.

**The China Coin**


This has been a popular class text, mainly in Years 7 and 8, although it has been used successfully with older classes of ESL students. It is the story of an Australian-born Chinese girl making a trip to China with her Malaysian-Chinese mum. The opening section, where the girl is in a plane heading for a 'home' that is totally unknown to her, in the company of a mother who is becoming more Chinese by the minute, strikes a familiar chord with many kids who have had the experience of being taken 'home' to the country of origin.

Baillie has used the device of a broken coin as an excuse to send his characters travelling around China: they are searching for the other half of the coin, held by family members somewhere in China. We see a range of lifestyles in China: most interestingly, that of a two-thousand-year-old village that has scarcely changed through the centuries. And, finally, we see Beijing at the time of the Tiananmen Square disturbances. Baillie was actually there in Beijing at the time, and the final scenes of the book have a great deal of authenticity.
Recommendation: As well as working well for whole-class study, you can use this as part of a unit on countries or on journeys. Collect examples of other works by Baillie set in Asian countries for a worthwhile author study for Year 8. Include the picture book Rebel!, the short story anthology A Taste of Cockroach and the novels Little Brother, Treasure Hunters, The China Coin and Krakatoa Lighthouse. Two out-of-print novels are worth tracking down: Saving Abbie, about the destruction of the forests in Borneo and the subsequent threat to the survival of orangutans, and Songman, about the experiences of an Australian Aboriginal boy - pre-European settlement - who sails north with the Macassans who have for centuries visited his homeland. The First Voyage, although primarily about Aboriginal history, could also be included, as the voyage begins in the islands to our north.

Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society
Adeline Yen Mah is best-known as the author of the autobiography, Fallen Leaves, and its simplified, abridged version, Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter, which is widely studied as a non-fiction text in junior secondary. This is a novel for readers in Years 5 to 8, based on stories the author wrote in her childhood to escape her loneliness. It’s a kung fu adventure set against the background of Shanghai in World War II.

Recommendation: Use this as one of a selection of titles for an action adventure genre study for Year 7 or 8, all set in Asia. Titles to choose from include another one by Adeline Yen Mah, Chinese Cinderella: The Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting (a time-slip adventure where the heroine finds herself in China eight hundred years ago);

the Young Samurai series by Chris Bradford, set in seventeenth-century Japan and of particular interest to kids who are interested in the martial arts; Gabrielle Wang's A Ghost in My Suitcase (a ghost story for girls set in China) and The Hidden Monastery (a fantasy based on Chinese mythology);

the Moonshadow series by Simon Higgins, action fantasies set in a romanticised historical Japan; the Tales of the Otori trilogy by Lian Hearn, fantasies set in sixteenth century Japan, written for adults but devoured by fantasy fans of all ages; Alison Goodman's Eon and Eona, inspired by the myths and legends of Ancient China; the Vermonia series by Yo-Yo, authentic manga graphic novels to be read from the back to the front and, on each page, from right to left; the Dragonkeeper series by Carole Wilkinson, set in the fantastic world of dragons in Ancient China; and P. J. Tierney's Jamie Reign series, action fantasy set in the New Territories of contemporary Hong Kong.

Chinese Cinderella: The Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting
This is a time-slip story: in a coma, the heroine of Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society discovers a former life 800 years previously at the time of the Song Dynasty.

Recommendation: This is more historical novel than adventure, but it could be added to a selection of action adventure titles for Years 7 and 8, as suggested in the annotation for Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society above.

Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter
This very useful text is widely used to meet the non-fiction requirement for Year 7 or 8. It’s a simplified, abridged version of Falling Leaves, about growing up as the unwanted daughter in a wealthy family in pre-revolutionary China. It is a fascinating picture of the culture and it also meets the need for texts from other times and places. It is also a very obvious example of the way the composer positions the
responder: in this case, to see the character of the stepmother as every bit as evil as any fairytale stepmother.

**Recommendation:** *Chinese Cinderella* is very widely used in Year 7, but it is also used at Year 9 level with less academic classes. The full adult version – *Falling Leaves* (Penguin ISBN 9780140265989) - is often used in Years 9 to 10, especially with girls, alongside other autobiographical books set in China such as *Wild Swans* and *Mao’s Last Dancer*.

**Con-nerd**


This is even funnier than the author’s previous title, *Thai-riffic* – and, again, at times quite moving. The main character is an Australian boy of Chinese background who is being forced to attend high-pressure coaching classes, when all he wants to do is draw cartoons. He is an engaging character, as is his persistent, misguided but well-meaning mother. The characters are perhaps stereotyped, but this is mitigated by the fact that the protagonist is struggling so hard to escape that stereotype.

**Recommendation:** This is delightful but may be a bit young for class set use at secondary level. The boy and his friends are in Year 6. Find an excuse for using it for wide reading anywhere from Year 5 to Year 8. This would also be a great title for the teacher to read aloud in serial form to classes in Years 5 or 6. It is great to have titles like this that reflect the multicultural nature of our society – and to have titles so wonderfully funny.

**Divine Wind**


This was used widely as a class set text from Years 9 to 12 around Australia for many years, but it is as powerful and appealing now as it ever was. It is set in multicultural Broome just before and during World War II. Hart, the narrator, is the son of a pearl master who employs Japanese divers. Most of his workers have lived in Broome for many years. Hart's sister's best friend, Mitsy, is the daughter of one of the Japanese pearl divers, but she was born in Broome and has never been to Japan. As World War II approaches, tensions grow in the community: the Japanese have become figures of suspicion. Hart has fallen deeply in love with Mitsy. After war with Japan is declared, anti-Japanese feeling intensifies. Hart's father gives shelter to Mitsy and her mother after Mitsy's father drowns in a cyclone, and for a period Hart and Mitsy are deliriously in love. But with his sister, Alice, lost somewhere in a war zone and the increasing threat of a Japanese invasion of Australia, Hart's feelings about Mitsy are in conflict. Is it possible to love and hate someone at the same time?

At its heart, this novel is a love story and a coming-of-age story, but it is also about racial tension. It is not just the Japanese who are treated poorly. The Aboriginal population fill most of the menial jobs in Broome. The attitude to the indigenous population is reflected in the prejudice of wealthy landowners who believe that the Japanese will be able to persuade 'the blacks' to help them when they invade; they want to form vigilante groups not only to fight the Japanese but to shoot their native workers if necessary: 'It's the black with a chip on his shoulder I'm worried about. He could easily infect a lot of others. He's got to be nipped in the bud.'

**Recommendation:** There is some explicit sex and some use of four-letter words in *Divine Wind*, so schools will want to use this text with mature students. It has even more to offer today than ever: that underlying racism that Disher describes in war-time Broome seems to be endemic in Australia. This is a great text to use from Year 9 to 12: it is short, powerful and deeply moving.
Dragonkeeper

This is Book 1 of what was originally intended as the Dragonkeeper trilogy, but has now grown beyond the originally intended three books. Dragonkeeper is followed by Garden of the Purple Dragon (ISBN 9781742030609), Dragon Moon (ISBN 978174203061), Blood Brothers (ISBN 9781742031897) and Shadow Sister (ISBN 9781922179579). There is also a prequel, Dragon Dawn (ISBN 9781742030623).

This terrific fantasy quest involves a Chinese slave girl and a very old dragon. The narrative is compelling and there is an array of fascinating characters, including a very young Emperor and a brutal dragon hunter. In the best traditions of fantasy quests, characters are often not what they seem and the slave girl has to learn to depend entirely on her own resourcefulness and courage. Although 346 pages long, it’s not a huge read – the print is fairly large and the text is very readable.

Recommendation: Consider this for use as a class set novel in Years 5 to 8. Recommend it strongly to your fantasy readers in this age group. Recommend it as well to those readers, especially girls, who do not usually read fantasy. Use it in a wide reading box on journeys or a collection of books with strong female protagonists. The series is consistently compulsively readable. It can be included in a selection of action adventure titles set in Asia for wide reading in Years 7 and 8, as suggested in the annotation for Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society above.

Eon

First published as Two Pearls of Wisdom, this is a superb fantasy for older teenage readers. It involves dragons, but this is most certainly not stereotypical. Beautifully written, it is the story of a young protagonist who is convinced that the only way that she can succeed is by denying her identity. Eon has trained to be a potential Dragoneye, but the only way that she can do so is by masquerading as male – a desperately dangerous secret. The novel is set in a richly evoked world of an imperial court inspired by the myths and the history of Ancient China. The emperor’s life is under threat and the plot is tense and exciting.

Recommendation: This is a great read that will be loved by fantasy readers but that will also appeal strongly to girls who normally don’t read fantasy. Add it to a wide reading box of action/fantasy with Asian settings, as recommended in the annotation on Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society. It will extend and delight your better readers.

Eona

This is the thrilling sequel to Eon (annotated above). Eona is now able to be herself, but she has a terrible burden: to win back the Emperor's throne from the evil High Lord Sethon and his army. But Eona is battling more than the forces of evil: her own terrible powers are out of control.

Recommendation: This is a great read for fantasy fans, especially in Years 9 and 10.

Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter

This is the adult version of the autobiography that is published for younger readers as Chinese Cinderella. The author re-visits her childhood in an affluent Chinese family, where she suffered continual emotional abuse as the unwanted stepdaughter. It is a fascinating picture of the impact on
the family of the turbulent changes that came with the Communist Revolution. Many readers find it
inspiring, as the author rises above the emotional abuse of her childhood to carve out for herself a
successful career – first as a doctor, then as a writer – in the United States.

Recommendation: This works well as a class-set text with girls in Years 9 to 11. Use it alongside other
autobiographies set in Asia, as suggested in the annotation on Beijing Confidential above.

The First Voyage

Set thirty thousand years ago, this novel explores what it must have been like for Australia’s first
peoples to make the journey from what is now Timor to the shores of what we call Australia. The
stretch of water to be crossed was narrower than it is now, but it was still substantial, given the fragility
of the boats that were used and the total ignorance of the boat people as to what might lie at the end
of the journey.

The story is told through the eyes of a teenage boy, Bent Beak, from the tiny Yam tribe. Bent Beak’s
people have been on the move for some time: they had lived previously on Long Island, with its huge
mountains and ‘the jungle that roared at night’, but that had been only a short crossing, made on a
calm day, to an island that was visible across the water. The Yam tribe’s enemies, the much larger
tribe - the Crocodile people - had also come from Long Island, and more of them cross over to Bird
Island every day. Bent Beak’s father and other members of the Yam tribe have been killed by
Crocodile warriors, whose spears have sharp flint stones that are superior to the spears the Yam tribe
use for hunting and fishing. The Yam tribe Elder, Eagle Eye, knows that the only way to save his
people is to move on again - to follow the birds that fly south. In a postscript, Baillie identifies Long
Island as the Indonesian islands where Flores, Lembata, Pulau Alor, Ataura and Palau Wetar can be
found today.

We share Bent Beak’s journey, as the warriors cut the tall black bamboo that they will use to construct
their fragile rafts, as they struggle against the attacks of the Crocodile people, and as the women and
children gather food and water to take with them on the voyage. As their food and water dwindle, their
greatest threat is the unknown: they have no idea how far away the land that Eagle Eye insists must
be there might be. There are five rafts in the beginning, but they are separated in a terrifying storm.
Bent Beak’s raft finally breaks up on rocks on the shore of a land that is bountiful in some ways - an
abundance of oysters and fresh water - but threatening in others, occupied by giant animals unlike
anything the Yam tribe has seen before.

While The First Voyage can be categorised as historical fiction, it is also a kind of fantasy. This is a
superb imaginative adventure on the part of the author, as he uses his knowledge of the landscapes
and of the sea to picture what the journey might have been like for Bent Beak and his companions.

We come to know well each member of the tribe on Bent Beak’s raft. Bent Beak himself is an
engaging character and we share his concern for the safety of the girl he loves, The Wind, and of the
orphaned Waterlily. The old man, Eagle Eye, who had the courage to persuade his people to venture
into the unknown, dies almost in sight of land, but a new life, Moonlight’s baby, is born. Distant smoke
even suggests that other rafts have survived the journey.

I don’t usually reveal as much as that about the ending of a novel, but the ending is not what is most
important here. We know this is a story about the first peoples coming to Australia, so we are not
surprised that some of them make it. The interest is in the journey - the fascinating detail of the getting
there. Baillie brilliantly imagines those details, especially the construction of the bamboo rafts.
While the link is never made specifically, the reader can't help but think of other boat people making perilous voyages in fragile craft to escape their enemies, as the Yam people fled the Crocodile tribe.

Recommendation: This short, fast-paced novel offers young people a fascinating insight into what might have been. It deserves a place in our selection of titles to explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. It will work well as a class set title with Years 7 and 8. It would be interesting to use the opening sections of Wheatley's *Australians All* alongside a reading of this novel. Wheatley presents the history as we know it, with some insight as to where our knowledge has come from; Baillie has drawn on this knowledge but has shaped it with his imagination to give us a sense of the lived experience.

*From Kinglake to Kabul*


This non-fiction text is an account of an exchange of stories between a school in Kabul in Afghanistan and a school devastated by bushfires in Kinglake, Victoria. As writer in residence, Neil Grant encourages the traumatised Australian students to make contact with their counterparts in an international school in Kabul. Their contact leads to a great deal of writing, including fictional pieces in which they experience vicariously the lives of others.

Recommendation: This could be added to a wide reading selection of non-fiction texts for Year 10. It could also be a useful resource for teachers.

*The Garden of Empress Cassia*


This charming story was Wang's first published novel. Wang herself is third-generation Australian Chinese, and Mimi's longing to be accepted as fully Australian may have some echoes in the author's own childhood. Through the gift of a set of pastels that enable Mimi to create a magical world, Mimi brings healing and harmony to her neighbourhood - and gains acceptance by her peers.

Recommendation: This is aimed at readers in upper primary school, especially girls.

*A Ghost in My Suitcase*


This award-winning novel highlights the differences between Australia and China, especially in the perception of 'ghosts'. The wonderfully realised setting is the ancient Chinese water town of Wuzhen, with what Wang describes as 'its dark alleyways, great wooden houses standing in water, beautiful moon bridges and winding canals'. Australian-born Celeste goes to Wuzhen to spend time with her Chinese grandmother, a famous ghost-hunter, and becomes caught up in a terrifying adventure.

Recommendation: This is probably a bit young to use as a class-set novel in secondary, but it is a great read. Include it in an action adventure study, as suggested in the annotation for *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* above.
**Girl Underground**


Like *Boy Overboard*, this is quite short and simple and again uses humour to explore some confronting issues. In this case, it is the plight of asylum seekers in detention in Australia. Gleitzman is clearly successful because the book caused howls of protest that such issues were inappropriate for children.

*Recommendation*: This is suitable for Years 5-8. Use it in a selection of titles for wide reading about the refugee experience, as suggested in the annotation to *Boy Overboard* above.

**Growing Up Asian in Australia**


This non-fiction anthology is a very rich collection of true stories about the experiences of Asians in Australia – from ABCs who have been here for generations, but who still look Asian, to very recent migrants. All the stories are quite short – many are only three pages long – and they cover a diverse range of experiences and a wide variety of tone. There are stories of discrimination and prejudice that still obviously hurt, even when the memories are decades old, and there are stories of comic misunderstandings. The stories are grouped under thematic headings such as ‘Strine’, ‘UnAustralian?’ and ‘Leaving Home’. Many of the stories are about the conflict that is felt by second-generation migrant children as they are torn between family values and traditions and those of their peers. There are many stories that show how language can divide as well as unite. Food and family traditions are frequent themes.

*Recommendation*: This is a rich resource for all students. It would be a worthwhile text to study in its own right in Years 10 or 11. It is a source of stories to use alongside other texts in a range of units of work on topics like family, migration, difference and diversity, school life. It is an excellent source of related texts for Belonging. Use it alongside other collections of life stories such as *The Glory Garage: Growing up Lebanese and Muslim in Australia* by Nadia Jamal and Taghred Chandab and *Playground: Listening to stories from country and from inside the heart* compiled by Nadia Wheatley.

**Guantanamo Boy**


This is a very significant book that should be widely available to young adult readers. It’s by a first-time author who has worked as a teacher of ‘difficult’ boys, and one of its strengths is that the fifteen-year-old male protagonist is someone that any teacher who has taught in the poorer suburbs of a big city will recognise. He’s just an ordinary kid – more motivated to do well at school than most, but not averse to the occasional bit of shoplifting or skylarking. But he is also a Muslim and, although British-born, has a Pakistani father. Post 9/11 he has been shocked to realise that even at home, in Britain, the fact that he is a young Muslim male makes him a threatening figure to some people. To the American authorities desperate to fight ‘the war on terror’, he is a suspicious character. While visiting family in Karachi, he is kidnapped from his aunt’s house and enters a nightmare world of interrogations, beatings, sensory deprivation, isolation, water torture, and forced confessions. He is finally incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay as an ‘enemy combatant’, without rights of any kind or any contact with lawyers or family. Although the story is told in the third-person, the reader sees everything through Khalid’s eyes and we sink into the nightmare with him, at times unable to distinguish between reality and madness.
This is very moving, especially at those times when Khalid is struggling to hold on to his sanity – for example, after days of being deprived of sleep and subjected endlessly to what seem to be nonsensical questions. His crime? Some of the American interrogators are convinced that he looks as if he’s in his early twenties – they dismiss as nonsense his claim to be fifteen. And he was playing an online computer game with his cousin and some others. Khalid is bewildered by his treatment, but another strength of the book is that he refuses to hate, knowing how destructive hatred can be.

Recommendation: This is an absorbing and affecting read for students in Years 9 to 11. While it is reasonably long, it is not a difficult read, and the reader turns the pages compulsively, anxious to know Khalid’s fate. It would be a fascinating companion piece to Doctorow’s Little Brother, which is speculative fiction about the response of the American authorities to another terrorist attack on American soil. There are so many parallels – two young men kidnapped, allowed no rights, humiliated and beaten – all in the name of keeping the world safe. But they are very different books in tone: Little Brother is a clever thriller where we enjoy the protagonist’s fight to defeat the powers-that-be. Guantanamo Boy is based on the experiences of real people whose humanity was ignored.

**Hana’s Suitcase: A True Story**


This text began life as a radio program, which may be one reason that it is short and accessible. It is the story of a holocaust museum for children in Japan. The museum’s curator, Fumiko Ishioka, had appealed to holocaust museums around the world to donate artefacts that would help Japanese children understand more about the holocaust. One of several items donated by the museum at Auschwitz was Hana’s suitcase. Ishioko set out to find out Hana’s story.

Levine takes us through the story of Ishioko’s quest, but she also reconstructs Hana’s thirteen years of life in a small town in Czechoslovakia, before she was taken to Auschwitz.

Recommendation: This is very accessible as an easy read for mixed-ability classes, Years 7-9. It is invaluable for those whose school is too far away from a Jewish Museum. It also has relevance in our study of Asia, emphasising as it does our common humanity.

**Hannah’s Winter**


This is a charming ghost story set in modern Japan, although the ghost belongs of course to a distant past. Australian Hannah is spending three months in Japan with a Japanese family, each of whom is lovingly drawn. Hannah becomes friends with the daughter of the family, Miki, and together they stumble on an intriguing puzzle that must be solved.

The eventual revelation of the connection between the ghost and Hannah rather stretches belief, but that is not important. The strength of the novel lies firmly in its depiction of Japanese culture through Hannah’s eyes, with all its oddities and wonders.

Recommendation: This is an enjoyable read for girls in Years 4-7. It is probably a little young to be considered for class set use in Year 7. It would work beautifully as one of a selection of action adventure wide reading titles, as suggested above in the annotation on Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society, providing girls with an alternative to the many novels with a martial arts focus.
The Happiest Refugee

The Happiest Refugee has had huge success with the general public and is also a great text for use in schools. Hopefully, reading it will give many Australians some perspective about boat people. Anh Do is a well-known and respected stand-up comedian, but his accomplishments have been many, including the films The Finished People and Footie Legends that he made with his brother Khoa. His family were among the many thousands of Vietnamese boat people who experienced real danger and hardship fleeing from persecution in Vietnam. Their arrival in Australia received bi-partisan support at the time, unlike the response to more recent arrivals. Settlement in the new community was not easy, however. Anh tells of the family's struggle to adapt to their new life, including his own battle to master the language.

Like many Asian migrants, Anh's family valued education highly and he and his brother were sent to St Aloysius, where he was frequently embarrassed by the family's shortage of money. A law degree followed, before he found his vocation as a comedian.

Anh uses humour to tell the story, even at some of the most distressing moments, such as the family's encounter with pirates who threatened to throw his little brother Khoa into the sea. The book is both very funny and very moving, full of great anecdotes that allow the reader to experience his story.

Recommendation: This is a great non-fiction text for Year 10. You could link it with SBS's stunning series Go Back to Where You Came From and the more recent Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta. You could also use this alongside Alice Pung's Unpolished Gem, the autobiography of a Cambodian-Australian.

The Hidden Monastery

This has an Australian setting but it is strongly based in Chinese mythology. Chinese-born Jax migrated to Australia as a seven-year-old but is unhappy here, as his parents work menial jobs in consecutive shifts to survive. Jax has been marked as a baby by the sign of the mythical creature, Peng, whose role is to ensure that the balance of nature is maintained. In the northern Queensland rainforest, Jax meets a mysterious girl called Yu Yu who helps him in his quest to find Peng.

Recommendation: This is pure fantasy, unlike The Ghost in the Suitcase which combines the strong narrative about the paranormal with a vivid picture of Chinese life. It is suitable for readers in the Year 4-7 age group. Add it to an action adventure study, as suggested in the annotation on Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society section above.

His Mother's Voice

This play opens at the time of the Cultural Revolution in China and concludes during the period of student dissent that led to the Tiananmen Square protests. It is in some ways a very large play in scope, touching on such huge political events and a considerable period of time, but it is a very personal story in other ways, centred on the relationship of mother and son. Yang Jia was a talented musician, as was her husband. They played western classical music at a time when that was regarded as bourgeois treachery by the Red Guards. The husband was killed, the piano was smashed and Yang Jia was forbidden to continue to teach music. Despite this, she secretly taught her young son, Quian Lu, to play on a keyboard painted on their kitchen table, covered of course by a tablecloth.
While the boy touched the keys, his mother hummed the notes. The boy grows up to become a great classical pianist.

This is a love story between mother and son, but it is also a love story across cultures. Quian Lu falls in love with the Australian girl, Emma, who acts as his translator. Their relationship is complicated by the fact that Emma is the daughter of a diplomat who has spent years nurturing the sensitive Australia-China relationship.

The story is loosely based on the true story of a young Chinese man who won a major piano scholarship in Sydney in the 1980s.

Recommendation: This is a very accessible play for junior secondary students. Students will relate to the characters and be moved by Quian Lu's extraordinary story. The play makes very clear that huge historical events have impact on the lives of ordinary people. Try this with Years 8 or 9.

Homeless Bird

Koly is obliged to enter a traditional Indian arranged marriage at thirteen; a few months later she is a widow, imprisoned in a kind of social limbo where she is lower than a servant in her husband’s family. She is eventually abandoned by her mother-in-law in the holy city of Vrindavan, home to thousands of unwanted widows who spend their days worshipping in order to be fed by the monks. Koly is rescued by a charity that helps these widows (many of them very young) to earn their own living.

Koly is an appealing character and the story has a romantic ending that will please readers. The book is sensitively written and could lead to some vigorous discussion about the tension between traditional cultural practices and basic human rights.

Recommendation: This is a fairly easy read and could be used as a class set for less academic students in Year 7 and 8, especially for girls. Include it in a wide reading selection of titles about the lives of children in other countries, as suggested in the annotation on Broken Glass above.

The Ink Bridge

The Ink Bridge is a compelling read. It has a great deal to offer for whole-class study, with a particularly memorable representation of the experience of Omed, a young Hazara. The narrative has three main parts: the story of Omed in Afghanistan under the Taliban and his desperate – and unsuccessful – attempt to find asylum; the story of a traumatised Australian teenage boy, Hector; and a final section in which an older Hector goes to Afghanistan to try to search for Omed. The first two parts are limited third-person narrative, the world seen first through Omed’s eyes and then through Hec’s. But the third part is first-person narration in Hec’s voice – the voice of a writer who is telling both Omed’s story and his own. This is metafiction: the narrative makes clear that other story pathways and other resolutions are possible, and readers will disagree about the choices the author has made. The third part also includes the introduction of a new character, an American woman of Afghan heritage, who has returned to the country to help establish schools. Her function in the narrative is to explain the world of Afghanistan to Hec and some scenes, in which he sees the country through the eyes of a tourist and has to be corrected by Arezu, are rather clunky.

The boys Omed and Hec are linked: both suffer trauma and lose the power of speech as a result; both have lost the ability to trust others but, when thrown together in a soul-destroying candle-making factory in Dandenong, they recognise a kinship. This is essential to the structure of the novel but telling the boys’ stories as parallel lives does have some problems: Hec has indeed been through a
terrible experience but it is scarcely on the same scale as Omed’s pain. Hec’s trauma is a domestic and personal tragedy; Omed suffers even greater family tragedy but his trauma is shared with his whole nation.

A great strength of the novel is the sense of place. Grant spent time in Afghanistan and the evocation of the landscape and people is superb. The Melbourne setting is just as detailed and precise, with the Westgate Bridge and its tragic history as focus.

A further strength is the disturbing representation of the ugliness of Australian racism, through the voice of a poisonous foreman at the Dandenong factory who rants against those of his workers who ‘don’t even speaka de lingo’ and are as ‘dumb as dogshit’. Read his rant on pages 138 and 139 and shudder. If you think this is an overstatement of racist attitudes in Australia, just have a look at the bile that is spilt in responses to right-wing blogs such as that of Andrew Bolt. Grant has sadly got this particular Australian voice just right.

This text was shortlisted for the CBCA 2013 awards for Older Readers.

Recommendation: This is a great text to use with a mature Year 9 or 10. I use the word ‘mature’ advisedly: the language may be considered offensive in some schools.

Parts of it are unforgettable: beautiful, strong and disturbing writing. It forces readers to confront the conditions in Afghanistan and the horror of the refugee experience. It forces them as well to consider Australian responses to these problems. There is much to argue about, including the author’s narrative choices.

This is in a completely different league from other titles available about Afghan refugees. Gleitzman’s Boy Overboard and Girl Underground, Gleeson’s Mahtab’s Story, Evans’ Walk in My Shoes and Hawke’s Soraya the Storyteller are children’s stories, designed to educate young readers about the refugee experience. The Ink Bridge is a complex and sophisticated young adult novel, flawed in some ways, but deeply disturbing. The crude language, although completely appropriate to the context, may cause problems in some schools.

Grant has also written the non-fiction text From Kinglake to Kabul, in which he talks about going to Afghanistan.

Interpreter of Maladies

This is a superb collection of short stories. There are nine in all - some set in India, some in America – all related in some way to the experience of Bengali Indians. Many of these stories are about alienation and the longing for home. The stories are beautifully written, with a range of narrative viewpoints.

Recommendation: This is probably best at Year 11 but it is worth considering for a talented Year 10 class. Students will relate to the characters’ experiences, while learning a great deal about how short stories are written.

In the Sea There are Crocodiles: The Story of Enaiatollah Akbari

Translated from Italian, this is based on a real-life story. When his village in Afghanistan was taken over by the Taliban, ten-year-old Akbari was taken across the border into Pakistan by his mother and then abandoned. She had to return to look after the rest of the family but felt that, by smuggling her
son into Pakistan, she was giving him at least a chance at life, whereas she felt that, as a Hazara, he had no chance of survival in their valley in Afghanistan. Akbari, who eventually gained asylum in Italy, told his story in detail to Italian novelist Fabio Geda. Geda insists that the account he has written should be read as fiction. He has recreated Akbari's experience as truthfully as possible, while acknowledging that no one can remember every detail of a traumatic five-year journey. From time to time, the narrative is interrupted by Geda's voice, questioning Akbari.

Geda tells the story beautifully, beginning with the voice of a ten-year-old child trying to come to terms with the fact that his mother has abandoned him amongst strangers. The boy is remarkably resilient and resourceful but his story is full of heartbreak. At home the boy's Hazara people had been hated by both the Pashtuns and the Taliban. The Pashtuns had forced the boy's father and other Hazaras to drive illegal trucks across the Iranian border; the father had been killed by bandits on such a trip. The boy and the rest of his classmates witnessed the Taliban shoot their teacher, because he had refused to obey a decree to close down the school. At one stage Akbari makes a perilous crossing of the mountains from Iran to Turkey, walking for many days in deep snow and watching many of the group die from hunger and cold. On another occasion he is smuggled in a tray underneath a truck, crammed in with some fifty other asylum seekers, suffocating in the dark. That is one of the most difficult sequences of the story to read. Geda recreates the crush, the stench, the utter darkness, and the panic. The boy was imprisoned under the truck for three whole days.

By the time he is eleven and a half, the boy has managed to get to Iran where he does a man's work on a building site. After four months during which his pay goes to the people smugglers, he is able to save money that is needed when he is twice repatriated by the police. Herat, the town closest to the Iranian border, 'is full of traffickers waiting for people to be repatriated. You barely have time to get beaten by the police before the traffickers pick you up and take you back.' He has three years in Iran but tires of living in constant fear - not of repatriation but of being incarcerated in the infamous detention centres. It is for that reason that he eventually risks the terrible crossing into Turkey.

Illegal work was plentiful in Iran but it is hard to find in Turkey and the boy joins three other Afghan boys in a nightmarish sea trip to Greece. The boat that the people smugglers supply them with is a dinghy - an inflatable dinghy. They have no navigation equipment. None of the boys has any sailing experience; none of them can swim. Their voyage is another frightening sequence.

Akbari was fortunate to arrive in Greece just as the Greek government was desperately trying to finish the venues for the Olympics. Illegal workers were in great demand and it was possible to make some money. Eventually he smuggles himself into Italy in a container in the hold of a ship.

The novel is quite short, told in brief, understated episodes. It's easy to forget as the journey precedes that the boy is still just thirteen, fourteen or fifteen years old, facing on his own the most terrifying ordeals.

Recommendation: This is an important exploration of the reality of life for asylum seekers. It is an accessible read, appropriate for students in Years 7 and 8, but it also has that timeless quality that means that adults will read it too. It could be used at any level in secondary school, either for whole class sharing or as one of a group of books about the asylum seeker experience.

I Was Only Nineteen


This picture book begs for a place in the classroom. Schumann has drawn on the words of the famous Williamson song to tell the story of a young Australian who was sent to Vietnam. Craig Smith's illustrations do more than just illustrate the story. It is from the end papers that we get the context:
the front of the book, we see a child and an old man looking at photographs; at the end of the book, they are marching together in what seems to be an Anzac Day march. Their story continues to be told by the pictures throughout the book: as the old man asks the doctor about his health on the right-hand page, we see the boy waiting for his grandfather in the doctor's waiting room on the left-hand page. Other illustrations are of the grandfather's memories of his time in Vietnam.

There is an epilogue, which is a letter from John Williamson, explaining the significance of the song and how it came to be written.

Recommendation: This is a great way to introduce the history of the Vietnam War to students. The book will work with any class, from Year 7 to 10. It would be a great related text to use with the film, The Sapphires.

Jameela

This is set in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Jameela lives in a remote rural village in a war-torn country. Her life becomes impossible when her mother dies and her father remarries, with her new stepmother determined to marry her off. Thrown on her own resources, she eventually finds refuge in an orphanage. The novel is based on the life of a real girl and the orphanage actually exists.

Recommendation: Use this with Years 7 and 8, especially girls. Make up a wide reading box about the lives of teenage girls in other countries, including Homeless Girl, Spilled Water, Parvana, Torn Pages and Sold.

Jamie Reign: Last Spirit Warrior

This rollicking adventure for readers in Years 5 - 8 is set in Hong Kong's New Territories. The setting is a tiny fishing village, untouched still by tourism and following a traditional way of life. Jamie, who has just turned twelve, lives onboard his father's tug in the harbour and does the work of an adult man. He has never known his Chinese mother, but he knows his brutish father, Hector, only too well. Hector is a drunk, a bully and a racist bigot, who has refused to learn the language despite the fact that he has lived and worked in Hong Kong since before Jamie was born.

Jamie is a huge fan of the legendary kung fu expert, Master Wu, but has always assumed that he is not Chinese enough to ever participate in the ancient rituals of the Way. Jamie's world is turned upside down by the arrival of Mr Fan, an old man with surprising powers. To Jamie's astonishment, the last spirit warrior whom Mr Fan seeks - and who is needed to save the world - could just possibly be Jamie himself.

Jamie's adventure takes place in the company of an engaging cast of characters - the indomitable Wing, who is even worse at kung fu than Jamie, the mysterious and highly skilled Jade, and the obscenely wealthy Lucy. The presence of such strong female characters ensures that the book is as appealing to girls as boys. For girls, there's an extra bonus in the discovery of Jamie's mother's extraordinary story as a warrior.

There is plenty of action and the novel moves swiftly, against the well-realised setting of the fishing village and the dangerous waters around it. Some of the most exciting sequences occur on the remote island of Chia Wu that is the site of Mr Wu's warrior school. Jamie at first seems an unlikely hero, but, as the reader becomes better acquainted with his courage, his selflessness and resilience, we cheer him on.
The fantasy elements, including the spirit powers that Jamie discovers, are blended seamlessly with the realistic details of the setting.

A sequel has been published: Jamie Reign: The Hidden Dragon. A further title - Jamie Reign: The Lost Soul - is due in 2015.

Recommendation: This is a great addition to a Year 7 - 8 action adventure or fantasy box of wide reading titles. It would work well too as one of a selection of action adventure titles with Asian settings, as suggested in the annotation on Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society above. The Jamie Reign titles give more insight than most of the other such titles into contemporary Asia.

Jasper Jones


This is a remarkable novel that is working very well in Year 10 classes, usually with those classes with whom you would once have studied To Kill a Mockingbird. It has, of course, been referred to as the Australian Mockingbird. Set in a small Western Australian community in the 60s, it is a useful reminder that the golden years were only golden if you were a successful white Anglo male.

This is a terrific thriller. The narrative opens with thirteen-year-old Charlie being woken in the middle of the night by Jasper Jones, the town's notorious teenage outcast. Jasper is in serious trouble and he comes to Charlie for help. He knows that innocence is of no relevance in a community where it has always been assumed that he is guilty of even the most trifling misdemeanours. After all, he does not have a proper home and he is of mixed race. There is no question that the police and the community as a whole will assume that he is responsible for the death of one of their most respected citizens.

Being black and from a dysfunctional family was not good news in country Australia in the 60s. Being Vietnamese was also not a good idea. Charlie's friend, Jeffrey Lu, the cricket fanatic, is a particularly engaging character as he cheerfully battles the prevailing racism and contempt. The friendship between Charlie and Jeffrey and their constant banter are a joy to read. The scene where local hoons trash Mr Lu's beautiful garden is one of the most memorable.

The whole story is narrated by Charlie, heavily burdened by the secret he is concealing and by his growing awareness of the ugly narrowness of his world. The narrative is - unusually - in the present tense, and the reader is kept on tenterhooks, as tense as Charlie himself.

The tension is accompanied by some wonderfully comic scenes, such as Jeffrey's triumph on the cricket field and Charlie's 'heroism' in confronting the town's bogeyman.

Recommendation: Jasper Jones is one of the ‘must buy’ books for any English Department. It makes a great companion text to study in Year 10 with To Kill a Mockingbird.

The Joy Luck Club


This story of four Chinese mothers and their four first-generation-American daughters has become something of a classic. Set in San Francisco and based on the mothers' meetings for their regular game of mahjong, the novel explores the difficulties of migrant families coping with the inevitable changes in their children as they grow up between two cultures in a new world.

Recommendation: This is a popular senior text that could be suitable for a mature class of Year 10 girls.
The Killing Sea

This American novel is set in Aceh in Indonesia, at the time of the 2004 tsunami. It follows the fate of two teenagers in the aftermath of the disaster: Muslim boy, Ruslan, searching for his missing father, and American girl, Sarah, whose family had been holidaying on a yacht just off the coast when the tsunami hit. Sarah is culturally insensitive and arrogant. The pair are thrown together by circumstances and, despite their differences, Ruslan helps Sarah to care for her seriously ill younger brother. The climax of the story is their encounter with a frenzied media pack when they finally reach safety. The indifference of the journalists to the young people’s condition in their eagerness to get a good story is shocking, as is the clear message that the life of wealthy American Sarah is of much greater value than that of Ruslan or of the thousands of Indonesian children who have died. Sarah has learnt otherwise, her new understanding demonstrated by the fact that she insists on following local custom and dressing modestly for the media interview, in contrast to her contemptuous refusal to ‘pander’ to local sensitivities before the tsunami.

This is a moving story about the tsunami and its effects, as both young people search for their missing fathers against a background of devastating chaos. It is very much about the essential humanity that we share, despite cultural differences.

Recommendation: This is an excellent text for exposing students to an understanding that people of other cultures are not to be feared as ‘the other’ and that different cultural practices are simply different, not necessarily better or worse. This is suitable for use as a class set text for Years 7 or 8. Use it as one of a selection of texts about children from different cultures learning to understand each other, such as Eoin Colfer's Benny and Omar, Crusade by Elizabeth Laird, Camel Rider by Prue Mason, Tamburlaine’s Elephants by Geraldine McCaughrean, The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas by John Boyne and The Girl with No Name by Pat Lowe. The novel could also be used as a companion text to Allan Baillie’s Krakatoa Lighthouse, about the tsunami in 1883.

Kokoda Track: 101 Days

This is a very readable account of the small Australian force that slowed and eventually stopped the advance of a much larger and more experienced Japanese army who were attempting to cross the Owen Stanley range into New Guinea. Like other non-fiction titles from this publisher, the story uses first-person fictional accounts (although often in the voice of real people) to introduce each chapter.

Recommendation: This is an excellent overview of this iconic event for readers in the Year 6 to 9 age group. Use it alongside the novel Break of Day and the picture book Photographs in the Mud.

Krakatoa Lighthouse

Set in 1883 during the period of Dutch colonial rule, this is an exciting story of the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano and the subsequent terrible tsunamis. It is set in the small fishing port of Anjer, where the Dutch have built a stone lighthouse to guide the increasing ship trade through the strait. The protagonist, Kerta, is the young son of the lighthouse keeper.

Baillie’s research is impeccable and he describes the eruption from the first trembles, including the tourist trips taken by the Europeans to view the sights. They scorn the locals’ warning that something huge and dangerous is awakening. Research into the historical events is informed by an
understanding of what happened in 2005. The final scenes of the devastating power of the water are unforgettable.

**Recommendation:** This is an excellent class set choice for Years 7 or 8. It has the excitement of the survival story and the sadness of the loss, as well as great insight into the nature of colonialism and its impact on both the rulers and the oppressed. It could be used alongside *The Killing Sea* by Richard Lewis, which is about the 2005 tsunami. It could also be used as part of an Allan Baillie author study, as outlined in the annotation on *The China Coin* above.

**Little Brother**


This is a novel about the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia that may still be found in many English bookrooms. Mang and his younger brother are separated as they try to flee the soldiers who are destroying life and society in Cambodia. Vithy has a dangerous and difficult task to find his way to the border to be reunited with his brother.

**Recommendation:** It's forty years since the killing fields formed the context of this moving story; many students in Year 7 and 8 will be unaware of this context and would benefit from reading and discussing this novel. This has long been a popular class-set choice from Years 5-8. Use it too as part of an Allan Baillie author study, as suggested in the annotation on *The China Coin* above.

**Little Paradise**


This romance is inspired by the experience of the author’s parents. Wang is third-generation Chinese Australian. Her protagonist, Mirabel or Lei An, is based on her Australian-born mother. At seventeen Mirabel falls in love with a young Chinese soldier who is briefly posted to Melbourne. JJ has to return to China where the civil war is raging. Mirabel, with her baby daughter, sets off against all warnings to a chaotic Shanghai to find him.

The strength of the novel lies in the vivid depiction of China in the early forties.

**Recommendation:** Girls in middle secondary will thoroughly enjoy this unusual romance and its courageous protagonist and will acquire a good deal of knowledge about Chinese history at the same time.

**The Little Refugee**


This picture book version of the early part of Anh Do’s autobiography *The Happiest Refugee* is aimed at young readers. It tells the story of life in Vietnam, explains the urgency of leaving Vietnam at the end of the war as Anh’s father and uncle had worked for the Americans, and describes the escape in an overcrowded, rickety fishing boat. The section of the story that relates the encounter with pirates is scary but not confronting. The account of the family’s early life in Australia includes the humour of Anh’s little brother being dressed in girls’ clothes, because Anh’s mother is too polite to reject the donation from the nuns, and the initial sense of isolation. The story ends with Anh’s election as class captain in Year 5.

**Recommendation:** This is a useful addition to the selection of texts available on the refugee experience. Anh’s experience reflects that of so many Vietnamese Australians; this picture book is a good introduction to the story of these earlier ‘boat people’. The picture book invites obvious
comparison with Li Cunxin’s The Peasant Prince, which presents in picture-book format the early part of Li’s autobiography Mao’s Last Dancer. Both are aimed at young readers, but Cunxin’s text uses words much more sparingly and is much more evocative. It is always productive to have students examine what happens when a story is re-told in a different format; to have here two very similar stories re-told, from adult autobiography to children’s picture book, is very valuable indeed.

**Mahtab’s Story**


Based on true stories of Afghan girls now living in Australia, this is the story of a girl whose family is forced to flee Afghanistan. With her mother and younger sister and brother, Mahtab spends almost two weeks crammed under furniture in the back of a truck as they make the journey across the mountains into Pakistan. There follow lonely, isolated months in a shed, when their father decides to go ahead and find a home for them. Eventually, not knowing whether their father is alive or dead, Mahtab’s family risks the journey through Indonesia to an overcrowded, leaking boat that eventually reaches the Australian mainland. The welcome they expected, however, is not there.

This is an accessible account that enables young readers to experience the situation through Mahtab’s eyes. The emphasis is on the discomfort and boredom, as much as it is on the fear and loneliness. Worst of all for Mahtab is her ignorance of her father’s fate.

**Recommendation**: This is an excellent book for readers in the Year 5 to 8 age group. You could use it as a core text in a unit of work on asylum seekers, as outlined in the annotation for *Boy Overboard* above.

**Malini**


The book opens with a scene in the yard of the school where Malini’s father is principal. There are 22 boys and 128 girls. The Tamil Tiger commander has come to recruit more child soldiers. Although he only takes six boys with him - the youngest just eleven - he has done this at least twelve times previously, which explains the fact that there are so few boys among the school’s pupils.

The setting is a Tamil town on the east coast of Sri Lanka in 2009, not long before the end of the civil war. Malini’s father knows that the Tamils are doomed to lose the war, but that they will fight desperately to the end. The next morning the soldiers come at dawn for the whole village. The people are to be used as human shields, herded into a small ‘no-fire zone’ between the Tamil Tigers and the advancing Sri Lankan army. In the chaos of the evacuation, Malini manages to escape with her younger sister Banni. Together they embark on a dangerous journey of survival through disputed territory to try to reach their grandfather’s village. On their way they are joined by other child refugees, scarred by wartime experiences.

This novel is part of the excellent ‘Through My Eyes’ series, novels that give young readers (the Years 5-8 age group) insight into the lives of children in areas of conflict. As in other titles in the series, the author is careful to give readers some hope for the characters with whom they have empathised, while making clear at the same time that war exacts a terrible toll on civilian populations - and, especially, on children.

**Recommendation**: This is an excellent novel for the Year 5-8 age group. It’s another worthwhile title to add to a wide reading selection of titles about the lives of children in other countries, as suggested in the annotation on *The Best Day of My Life* above.
Mao’s Last Dancer

This autobiography is absolutely wonderful and has been widely used in schools at senior levels, despite its size. This film tie-in edition is even bigger, with additional chapters added to cover the period from the publication of the book, through the years of fame as a writer, to the release of the film. Despite its length, the book is very accessible. The author, born in 1961, grew up in severe poverty in China – one of seven boys in a family whose diet consisted often of nothing but dried yams. Selected by chance as a student in Madame Mao’s ballet school, he became a great dancer, eventually defecting to the West where he established an international reputation. About three-quarters of the book is about the years in China – in the family village and then in the ballet school in Beijing, and it is this part of the story that is so fascinating. It’s also a very positive story. The representation of the poverty of his childhood is memorable, but so is his picture of the warmth of a loving family.

There is no better example of literature from other places – and of other times, because there are many differences between the China of Li Cunxin’s childhood and China today.

The author, now a Melbourne stockbroker, has become something of a media star and your librarian will probably be able to access videotaped interviews with him. He is also often available to speak to schools.

A simplified and abridged Young Readers’ Edition is also available (9780143301646).

Recommendation: Use the Young Reader’s Edition in Years 7 and 8 and for mixed-ability classes in Years 9 and 10. Use the unabridged original edition for better readers in Years 9 to 12. This is strongly recommended for whole class study, or use it as part of a wide reading unit on other countries or other cultures, as part of a wide reading selection of autobiographies, or as a related text in an ‘Overcoming adversity’ unit of work.

Mao’s Last Dancer
directed by Bruce Beresford. 2009. PG.

The film of Li Cunxin’s best-selling autobiography achieved that rare accolade for Australian films - box-office success in Australian cinemas. While the ballet scenes are probably the strongest in the film, the scenes in the reconstructed village of Li’s childhood are of great interest.

Recommendation: This can be used alongside a version of the autobiography (including the picture book version, The Peasant Prince) or as a film study in its own right, especially in Years 8 or 9.

Mao’s Last Dancer: Young Readers Edition

This is a simplified and abridged version of Li Cunxin’s best-selling autobiography Mao’s Last Dancer (see annotation above).

Recommendation: This is suitable for use from Years 5-8.

The Moonshadow series

The author describes this series of action adventure novels as being set in a ‘romanticised historical Japan’, loosely based on the period of the Tokugawa shogunate. Moonshadow is a teenage warrior, highly trained in martial arts, who survives a series of dangerous events. There is a fantasy element, with some characters possessing magical powers. The stories are fast-paced, with a strong emphasis on themes of loyalty and friendship. The books have a detailed Japanese glossary.

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Recommendation: These are very popular with readers in Years 7 and 8, especially boys who are interested in the martial arts. They are an easier read than the Young Samurai series, and although they are fairly long the font is quite large. Add these to a wide reading selection of action adventure novels with an Asian setting, as outlined in the annotation on Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society above.

Titles in the series in reading order:
The Eye of the Beast 9781741662832
The Wrath of Silver Wolf 9781741664058
The Twilight War 9781864719772

Mountain Wolf
Fourteen-year-old Razaq survives the earthquake in the Pakistani mountains that kills his whole family only because that day he is away from the house, collecting water for his mother. His dying father tells him to go to Rawalpindi and find his uncle Javaid. But Razaq's good looks cause him trouble as he attracts the attention of sex traders. Gradually, both Razaq and the reader begin to realise the nature of the job he has been promised.

Hawke gives us, from Razaq's perspective, a quite detailed picture of the brothel to which Razaq is taken, where young boys and girls are trained to dance for the entertainment of clients, and to provide massage. Worse, they learn to consent to whatever the client demands. Razaq becomes friends with some of the girls and experiences their pain and humiliation, as well as his own.

This is a difficult book to read. I felt constantly angry. At the same time I admired Hawke's sensitive handling of such confronting material.

Recommendation: Young readers will be disturbed and angered, as I was, but they may also be inspired to recognise that we cannot simply ignore what is happening to children in other parts of the world. This is a companion piece to Patricia McCormick's Sold, about child sex trafficking in Nepal and India.

Naveed
This has been published as part of an excellent new series, 'Through My Eyes', stories about children living in conflict zones. Heffernan has written an engaging story about a resourceful and courageous teenage boy living close by Bagram Airfield, the huge American airforce base in Afghanistan. Naveed is the sole supporter of his widowed mother and his irrepressible younger sister, Anoosheh, who - like so many others in countries that have been battlefields - has lost both her legs after stepping on a landmine. Naveed makes an uncertain living finding work wherever he can - making deliveries and stacking the shelves for shopkeeper, Mr Waleed; helping with the lunch time orders at Mr Hadi's chai house; washing cars. When desperate, he scavenges at the tip, but the gangs that control the trade there are dangerous, and he cannot afford a beating that would disable him to the extent that he could not work. The landlord who rents the family their one-room hovel will not wait for the rent, and Naveed's mother and sister are dependent upon him for their next meal.

Naveed occasionally shares the little food he has with a stray dog. She is a big dog, although starving. His kindness to the dog saves his life when she defends him against the gangs. From that moment on, Naveed and Nasera are inseparable.
While the story is told mainly from Naveed's point of view, there are occasional chapters from the point of view of Jake, an Australian serving as a dog handler with the military. It is the dog, Nasera, that Jake first notices; he is looking for Afghans who can become dog handlers and continue the work of detecting explosives after the Australians and the other westerners leave Afghanistan. While Naveed is much younger than the recruits he was wanting, he and Nasera prove to be a formidable team. The opportunity of a real job and a regular income transforms Naveed's life.

This very readable story gives great insight into the lives of ordinary Afghans living in desperate circumstances.

Recommendation: This is a great novel for class study in Years 7 and 8. Students will relate to Naveed and enjoy the story of his dog, Nasera, and Jake's dog, Stingray. There is plenty of action and danger, as well as some hope for the future.

The novel Shadow, by British novelist Michael Morpurgo, is a good companion piece; it is also about sniffer dogs and Afghan boys.

Never Fall Down


This is an intensely disturbing novel, firmly based on a real-life story. It begins with an eleven-year-old boy, Arn, walking through the countryside. His family and neighbours are walking with him. It is the beginning of a terrible, gut-wrenching journey, because this is Pol Pot's Cambodia.

Patricia McCormick’s chilling novel is based on the real experiences of Arn Chorn-Pond, who somehow survived when more than two million of his fellow-countrymen were starved or slaughtered. The title is taken from the advice Arn was given - 'never fall down', because, if you do, that will be the end of you.

Arn survives on his wits and through sheer luck. He is protected because he plays the khim in an orchestra playing the new songs for the Khmer Rouge. Often they are forced to play to mask the sounds of killing. Later, he becomes a child soldier, used as a bait to trap the invading Vietnamese. Arn's experiences are vivid: the sounds, the smells and the images stay in the reader's mind long after the book is closed.

The novel is narrated in Arn's voice. McCormick's decision to use Arn's broken English is inspired. It gives a great sense of authenticity but it has a powerful lyricism not usually found in first-person colloquial narration.

Arn Chorn-Pond survived to become a peace activist.

Arn Chorn-Pond and Patricia McCormick discuss the book on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-A_Y1kJJww. There is also an interview with Patricia McCormick at her website http://patriciamccormick.com/never-fall-down.

Recommendation: Never Fall Down is both powerful and disturbing. Some people will argue that young people should be protected from stories as grim as this; others will insist that it is essential to know such history, in the hope that it may not be repeated. McCormick is an extremely talented writer for young people and has managed a delicate balancing act between presenting the truth of Arn's experiences but providing readers as well with some sense of hope about human resilience.

Consider using the book as a class novel with Year 9.
New Guinea Moon


The time is December 1974, nine months before Papua New Guinea gained independence. After an argument with her mother, sixteen-year-old Julie finds herself at Port Moresby airport on a visit to her father, Tony, whom she has not seen since she was a toddler. Tony is a pilot based at Mt Hagen.

The novel is about Julie and Tony getting to know each other, but it is also about Julie discovering Papua New Guinea and its people, including the Australian ex-pat community. The ex-pats are divided about independence: many who have lived in the country for years want to stay but others intend to leave, convinced that the locals will be unable to govern successfully. Some ex-pats are patronising and contemptuous of the locals. Constable exposes the ugliness of colonialism. But Julie is fortunate to meet Simon Murphy, who has a Papuan mother and an Australian father, and she becomes very uncomfortable with the colonial attitudes. For a while, she is torn between Simon and her father’s boss’s son, Ryan, but Ryan’s racist arrogance alienates her.

Constable grew up in Papua New Guinea, where her father was a pilot, so she is writing from real knowledge. The setting is vividly recreated.

Recommendation: This is a gentle romance and an engaging coming-of-age novel that will appeal to girls in Years 7 - 8.

Some people argue that Papua New Guinea is not part of Asia, but given that the intention of the cross-curriculum priority is to give students an opportunity of understanding our neighbours, I think it is appropriate, especially as Constable explores so well the nature of colonial attitudes.

Nine Hours North

by Tim Sinclair. This title is out of print.

This is a terrific verse novel about the experience of teaching English in Japan and about the different phases that ex-pats experience in terms of their engagement with the local culture. The title refers to the duration of the flight from Sydney to Japan. Adam and Sarah have been teaching in Japan for a year. Their term is almost over, and they are planning an extended European cycling holiday before returning to Australia. Initially, Japan had been enormously exciting, especially in contrast to the boredom of their home town of Adelaide. They had delighted in what was different about Japanese culture. They had been keen to take every opportunity to explore further. But twelve months down the track, they are jaded and homesick. What Adam had once wondered at with admiration, he now scorns. Weekends are for sleep, not for cultural exploration. When Marianne, who was at university with Sarah, arrives and sees everything with fresh eyes, they are cynical.

This is a love story - or at least a falling-out-of-love story. The breakdown in Adam and Sarah’s four-year relationship reflects their disillusionment with their cultural adventure.

Recommendation: This is a great read for students from Year 9 upwards if you are able to get hold of copies. The verse-novel format is perfect for what Sinclair is wanting to do. The vignettes of Japanese life are superb.

Only the Heart


This superb novel about the Australian-Vietnamese experience is based on the real-life experience of co-author, David Phu An Chiem. To write the book, Brian Caswell would listen to David’s true stories.
of his experiences. These stories were then fictionalised, using two main characters: a boy character based closely on David himself and a slightly older girl cousin.

The novel uses Caswell’s characteristic narrative: multiple voices moving backwards and forwards in time and space in a style very like that of cinema. The book is tightly structured. It presents the classic refugee story: the escape from Vietnam in the middle of the night, the encounter with pirates in the China Sea, the Malaysian refugee camp, and then the long hard years becoming established in Australia. It does not avoid the difficulties. We meet the Vietnamese gangs on the streets of Cabramatta and we see how dangerous they are. But we’ve also seen the origins of the gangs in the Malaysian camps, so although we are aware of the tragic consequences of their actions, we have some understanding of the gang members as well.

**Recommendation:** This was widely used as a class set in Years 9 and 10 and was also very successful with older ESL students. You may still want to use it in class sets. It would be particularly interesting to explore how the world of Australian-Vietnamese people has changed since the book was written, and how the experiences of more recent refugees are similar and different to that of the Vietnamese boat people. It would be interesting for students to read alongside *The Happiest Refugee.*

**Parvana**


When her brother dies and her father is imprisoned by the authorities, twelve-year-old Parvana and her mother and sister are unable to leave the family home. Under Taliban law, women and girls are not allowed to leave home without a man, so Parvana, her mother and sisters must stay inside. Living in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime means that all the liberties we take for granted as free people are denied Parvana and her family. When their food runs out, they face starvation, so Parvana decides to try and support her family. She dresses as a boy, to make a living in the marketplace of Kabul, knowing that discovery could mean a beating, imprisonment, torture or death. Her courage in the face of crushing fear and repression is inspiring.

**Recommendation:** This is the first book in a series of four. It is followed by *Parvana’s Journey* (ISBN 9781865089997), *Shauzia* (ISBN 9781741142846) and *Parvana’s Promise* (ISBN 9781743312988). Use this novel and its sequels in Years 7 or 8. Asking students to imagine living in a country where women and girls are not allowed to leave the house without a man will allow for discussions about human rights and the treatment of women, in a context of cultural diversity and difference. A comparison with Islamic women’s experiences in Australia in such texts as *Does My Head Look Big in This?* and *The Glory Garage* would be important in establishing that prejudice knows no borders.

**Parvana’s Promise**


This is the fourth book in the *Parvana* series, a sequel to *Parvana, Parvana’s Journey* and *Shauzia.* It is the most powerful and disturbing book in a series that has been widely used in secondary school classrooms. While Ellis as usual provides readers with an inspirational resolution, the overwhelming impression that this book leaves is of the ongoing devastation in Afghanistan, including the brutality of the American military.

The book opens in an American military prison in Afghanistan, where a teenage girl has been detained as a possible terrorist. Despite intense pressure, the girl refuses to answer any questions. As the reader realises that the girl is indeed Parvana, the story moves to flashback - returning, at intervals, to the interrogation room or Parvana’s prison cell. We learn that Parvana’s mother had established a school for girls just outside the village near the refugee camp that the family ended up in in *Parvana’s Journey.* Older sister Nooria and Parvana’s friend Asif were on the staff. While Parvana’s mother had
had some success in attracting financial donations for the school, there was constant opposition and threatened violence from some of the village men, who disapproved strongly of education for girls and women.

Ellis exposes the enormous difficulties faced by girls and women in Afghanistan today. She pulls no punches with her representation of the American military: they are not in the business of winning hearts and minds; they are actively and rightly feared. The book is both a condemnation of western interference and a celebration of strong and courageous women. It could be argued that Ellis is positioning her readers quite deliberately to share her views of the situation in Afghanistan today, but personally I think she should be thanked for doing so. This book will make many readers angry and a little less likely to dismiss the sufferings of women in Afghanistan because they are ‘the other’, not like us.

**Recommendation:** This will work especially well with girls in Years 8-10, although it would be great if you could get boys to read it too. It is certainly powerful enough to consider for whole-class study. While there is additional meaning and poignancy for those who have read the previous books in the *Parvana* series, it can stand alone.

**The Peasant Prince**


This is the picture book version of *Mao’s Last Dancer*. It is simply and lyrically told, using two main unifying symbols – the kite that the boy and his father are flying on the first double page spread, and the father’s story of the frog who wants to escape from the well.

**Recommendation:** You can use this with students in Years 4 to 8 who have not read any other version of Li Cunxin’s story, or you could explore with older students the way in which the long and detailed autobiography has been transformed into this visual medium.

**Photographs in the Mud**


This picture book tells the parallel stories of a young Australian and a young Japanese on the Kokoda Track during World War II. There is a very clever use of framing, mainly reflecting the domestic lives of the two men – lives that are very similar. At the end the framed photographs are found, stuck together by the mud of the track and the blood of the dying men. ‘War’s a mug’s game, hey?’ says Jack to Hoshi as they lie dying, and although they cannot understand each other they recognise their common humanity.

**Recommendation:** This is a powerful story about the consequences of war and is worth reading for its own sake, but you could use it as well beside other texts about Kokoda, such as Tony Palmer’s novels *Break of Day* and the non-fiction text, Peter Macinnis’s *Kokoda Track: 101 Days*.

**Preloved**


This is a charming novel that crosses genres: part ghost story, part teenage romance, part bildungsroman. Amy has grown up with a Chinese mum who fits all the stereotypes, particularly in her possessiveness and her constant stream of advice. Amy particularly resents her mother’s dependence on old superstitions, especially about the ghosts that threaten daily life. So it is something of a shock to Amy when she realises that she is being stalked by a ghost - the ghost of a very attractive teenage
boy from the eighties. There is a considerable amount of humour as Amy tries to cope with Logan, but there is also a growing awareness by the reader that Amy has serious problems with self-esteem. She feels inadequate, especially compared with her socially popular best friend Rebecca or compared to the nerdy Asian girls whose view of life is so different from her own. Amy's self-esteem problem is not helped by the discovery that the attractive ghost is haunting the wrong person.

Recommendation: This is a great read for girls. Girls who have grown up between two cultures will recognise Amy's frustration with her Chinese mum and also the strong bond between them. Add this to any selection of wide reading titles for girls in Years 7 and 8.

Punchlines

This is just as funny as Phommavanh's previous novels, Thai-riffic! and Con-nerd, but its main characters are also quite a lot older - Year 10 students at Fairfield High School, making this a more suitable text for secondary students. It accurately reflects the diverse community of Fairfield. The protagonist, Johnny, is of Laotian background and the love of his life, Josie, is Australian-Cambodian. Johnny's dad acts as MC for weddings and birthdays in the area and there is a delightful picture of the culture of the Fairfield region. Johnny's ambition to be a stand-up comic is helped by his English teacher, who encourages several students to take part in a student competition, culminating in finals at the Sydney Opera House.

This is a warm and positive story with a strong basis in supportive family life.

Recommendation: This is a fairly easy read and would be fun to share with students in Years 7 or 8, especially those from a community such as the one represented here. There is still very little young adult literature reflecting the diversity of Australian society.

The Rainbow Troops

The title in Indonesian is Laskar Pelangi. The novel was a record-breaking bestseller in Indonesia and has been translated into many languages. Based closely on the author's childhood, it tells the story of a very poor community on the Indonesian island of Belitung, a place where some people at the time were very wealthy as a result of the huge tin-mining operation. The wealthy mining executives live comfortable lives on The Estate, but the daily paid laborers, like the narrator's parents, live a precarious existence. Fishermen, like the parents of the narrator's best friend, Lintang, are even poorer. For such parents, sending their children to school is a huge sacrifice, not just because of the unaffordable school fees but because even the youngest children can be employed for a pittance as coolies or as shop assistants.

Ikal, the narrator, is one of a small group at Muhammadiyah Elementary, a school so poor that the teachers aren't even paid, surviving at a subsistence level on work that they do outside school hours. The school and its students are despised by the privileged, who attend the PN School, a centre of excellence. Ikal's school has trouble even buying chalk, and survival seems unlikely. Against all the odds, the devout old man, Pak Harfan, and the fifteen-year-old girl, Bu Mus, not only keep the school open but preside over unexpected triumphs: awards for the best arts performance at a festival and then, even more unexpectedly, for academic excellence, after Lintang proves superior to even the brightest students from the wealthy schools.
This is an inspirational story of great charm and occasional sadness. It is also a fascinating insight into a way of life very different from our own.

_Recommendation:_ The Rainbow Troops is written for adults. While it would probably be best as a senior text, it may be suitable for an advanced Year 10 class. Use it as well as a source of related material; many of the most charming scenes are relatively self-contained. The quality of the writing is superb.

A film based on the novel was released in Indonesia in 2008. _Laskar Pelangi_, directed by Riri Riza, broke all box-office records for Indonesian films. It is rated PG in Australia and is perfectly appropriate for showing to students in Years 7 and 8. The film is available, with English sub-titles, on YouTube. Be warned, however, that it is two hours long and, while delightful, it is not action-packed. Selected scenes may work better - and be just as useful in exposing students to an unfamiliar way of life - than showing the film in its entirety.

_Rebel!_


This superb picture book, first published in 1993, was re-issued in 2011 in paperback, making it accessible for classroom use. Set in Burma, it tells the story of one of the generals coming to the village to bully and threaten the villagers. A brave protester succeeds in making the general look ridiculous. The resolution is very satisfying.

_Recommendation:_ This can be read by primary school students but it resonates with readers of all ages. Consider using it for close study as a text in its own right. Use it as one of a group of texts about human rights abuses, including _The China Coin, Revolution is not a Dinner Party and Trash._

_Refuge_


This is very different from the many novels about the refugee experience that I have previously read. The backcover blurb does, I think, give some clues that it is different, but I read this in ebook where there is no backcover blurb to consult, so it was a wonderful surprise as the story unfolded. It begins much as I had expected: teenager Faris and his grandmother Jadda are on a small crowded boat on a grey sea under a grey sky. We learn something of their story: the flight of Faris's father from home five years earlier to avoid arrest, their need to move to much poorer accommodation, the warning that they too were about to be arrested, the sale - piece by piece - of family jewellery to buy them the smugglers' help. Like so many others who have come to Australia by boat, Faris experiences a terrible storm that is too much for the fragile boat. Chapter 1 ends with Faris and Jadda being swept overboard by a gigantic wave.

The surprise begins with the opening of Chapter 2. Faris wakes in a soft bed in a beautiful bedroom in a luxurious house. Breakfast, with a smiling Jadda at the top of the table, is a buffet of everything he could dream of. Gradually the reader becomes suspicious that all is not quite as it seems: the pet koala gnawing a chicken leg is a pretty good clue.

French has made the transition seamlessly from the grim realism of the first chapter to a fantasy world - an Australia that Faris had imagined, based mostly on tourist websites. He leaves his fantasy house for his fantasy beach but discovers a different beach altogether:

_This wasn't his beach! He had never seen this beach before._

It was a small beach, ending in two jagged cliffs of tumbled black rocks at either end. Six great stones rose like giant's teeth across the small bay, with a few metres of rippled blue water between each of them.
them. Small waves purred a little way up the beach, then slipped back, leaving the shine of water on the sand.

Faris discovers children playing on the beach. Again, there are little clues that this is not what it seems. A boy of about Faris's own age wears 'a strange woollen suit, with short pants and long grey socks'. An older girl wears a head shawl, with bright green pants and a long shirt. An older boy describes Faris as 'a new cove'. Descriptions of clothing and the type of speech characters use usually give us clues to context - time and place, but the clues we pick up here are all contradictory.

French is not just telling us Faris's story. She is telling us the stories of all the children who have come by boat to Australia over the centuries. Even the First Australians came by boat, and they are represented in the character of Mudurra, who fishes with a spear on the beach. French mentions in the novel twenty-five children who have played on the beach, including those from Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and French ships that predated Captain Cook. But she concentrates on a handful: Susannah, who came from Ireland in the 1920s; the little Greek boy Nikki, who arrived in the 1950s; fifteen-year-old Billy, the convict boy who grew up to become an important citizen and the patriarch of a large family; Afghan teenager Jamila, who arrived in the early 1990s; and David, also thirteen, a Jewish boy from Austria. In the fictional biographies French provides at the end of the book, each of these children - like Faris - passes from the real world in which he or she was dying to the fantasy world of the beach and then returns to reality, to live a productive life in modern Australia. Only the First Australian, Mudurra, and the Sudanese girl Juhi who falls in love with him, remain in the past, perhaps 60 000 years ago.

Faris remains the main character. Not only do we have much more detail about his past, before he boarded a boat in Indonesia, than we have about any of the other children, we also learn a great deal more about what happens to him after he arrives in Australia. But French has been careful not to tell us too much: Faris's nationality or religion are never mentioned. He could be from any one of quite a large number of countries. Because the detail is not there, any stereotypes the reader might be inclined to bring to the text are not relevant.

This is an awesome task that French has set herself - to tell the story of all of Australia's peoples - and it works beautifully. The transition between fantasy and realism is completely credible, and the novel becomes a celebration of nationhood.

**Recommendation:** This is a superb choice as a class novel for Years 7 or 8. It is also an excellent text to tick off both the Asian and Indigenous cross-curricular priorities.

**The Reluctant Fundamentalist**


This is a superb text for senior study. It is short enough and easy enough to be accessible to less academic streams, but the ideas explored will challenge your most talented students. The whole novel is a dramatic monologue. The speaker is a young Pakistani who has spent a lot of time in the United States where he had great success, first as a student and then as a businessman. But 9/11 changed everything for him. Here he is in a cafe in Lahore, talking to a stranger. Over the course of the afternoon and evening we learn his story, as he tells it to the stranger. We never hear the stranger directly, although we can guess at some of what he says and what he does from the narrator’s comments. The stranger is probably an American, possibly a military type, and he becomes an increasingly sinister figure as the afternoon progresses. Is it a wallet or perhaps a gun that is in his inside coat pocket? What is his purpose there in Lahore? The tension mounts, climaxing in a violent but ambiguous ending.
Recommendation: I have had very positive reports of the success of this in the classroom. It allows for an intelligent exploration of issues raised by the ‘war on terror’: the simple good/evil, black/white dichotomies are questioned. It is mostly being used in Year 11, and in Victoria it is set for study for Year 12, but it is within the capabilities of a good Year 10 class.

**Revolution is not a Dinner Party**


Heavily based on the author’s own life, this novel tells the story of life during China’s Cultural Revolution. The narrator, Ling, tells of how her family's life changed from the time she was nine until age thirteen. Both her parents were doctors, and her father had even studied in America, so they are people under suspicion. They are forced to take in a boarder, Comrade Li, who condemns their bourgeois ways. Ling is forced to watch the humiliation sessions, led by Comrade Li, in the courtyard of her housing complex. She is forced too to see her father scorned, demoted and gaoled.

While the brutality of the regime is evident and the reader feels Ling's fear, the story offers hope. Ling is a survivor who eventually watches the Red Guards destroy each other after the arrest of Madame Mao.

Recommendation: This is an easy read for students in Years 5-8 and is an absorbing class-set novel.

**Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes**


This easy-to-read classic tells the story of a twelve-year-old Japanese girl who becomes ill as the result of radiation sickness caused by the dropping of an atomic bomb on her town when she was two years old. Sadako, responding to a Japanese legend, sets out to fold one thousand paper cranes in the hope that she can ward off the illness. Eleanor Coerr's simple narration is very moving.

Recommendation: This is suitable for students at both primary and secondary level.

**The Sapphires**


Even the best of Australian films have a hard time with the Australian box office, but this lively, upbeat film was enthusiastically embraced by local audiences when it was released in 2012. It is based on the highly successful stage musical that was also written by Tony Briggs, telling the real story of four young Aboriginal women who meet Dave, a feckless Irish musician, who is looking for a new act to revive his career. The girls love music, by which they mean Country and Western; Dave introduces them to Soul Music, so that they can perform in Vietnam for the American Marines.

Part of the appeal of the film are the many musical numbers and the great sense of fun, at times interspersed with real black-and-white television of the war in Vietnam. While the film touches on the futility of the Vietnam War and the reality of racism in Australia in the 1960s, the issues are not pursued in any great depth.

Recommendation: The film is usefully rated as PG, making it available at any level, from Years 7-10. The existence of the filmscript is a bonus for class study.

**Bran Nue Dae**, directed by Rachel Perkins (2009) is also rated PG and would be a useful comparison to *The Sapphires*. Music, humour and a great sense of vitality are common to both.
Secrets of the Henna Girl

This is a story that will appeal strongly to girls, especially those brought up in a family culture that conflicts with that of the wider society, as is the case for many daughters of migrants. Zeba Khan is the sixteen-year-old daughter of Pakistani migrants to the UK. The Yorkshire hills are well and truly her home. She has visited her parents’ homeland only once as a child, and with her O levels successfully behind her, she is facing another family visit to Pakistan. While some of her English friends envy her ‘exotic adventure’, she sees nothing very exotic in the poverty she remembers and is more focused on the A levels ahead of her and possible future career options.

This is a story about forced marriages. Zeba’s father’s honour takes precedence over her personal rights; she is facing a nightmarish marriage to a cousin she despises. Because she protests, her parents cut off all communication with her. Only her maternal grandmother is on her side - a strong and independent woman who is nevertheless powerless against the brutal local warlord. Zeba meets another British girl who has already been forced into a miserable marriage. Sehar, who is emotionally fragile, is the most interesting character in the book.

This novel is unashamedly a polemic. It has been written to expose the evil of forced marriages, which the author makes clear need to be distinguished from arranged marriages, which take place with the consent of both bride and groom. The author is also concerned to make a distinction between Islamic beliefs and cultural customs, some of which are actually against Islamic teaching.

Recommendation: This could be a worthwhile class study with a class of girls in Year 7-9. Interesting titles as related text - titles written to expose social evils, but in a less overtly polemical fashion than Secrets of the Henna Girl - are Roseanne Hawke's Mountain Wolf and Patricia McCormick's Sold. Both are about the abduction of children for the sex trade; Mountain Wolf is set in Pakistan and Sold in Nepal and India.

Shadow

This is a moving story about the refugee experience from one of the UK’s best writers for children. Morpurgo was inspired by the story of the Australian sniffer dog that went missing in Afghanistan for 14 months. The dog he writes about was used by the British to detect explosives, but it disappeared after an attack and was presumed to have been killed. The dog turned up months later many hundreds of kilometres away in the caves where Aman, his mother and grandmother are trying to survive.

Aman and his mother make the terrible journey from Afghanistan to try to join relatives in England, including several days locked in the back of a truck with many others without food or water. The story is narrated by 15-year-old Matt, who becomes Aman’s best friend at school and who is horrified when, after six years living in the UK, Aman and his mother are denied refugee status, are arrested and are about to be deported. Matt’s narration is interspersed with Aman’s story, told to Matt’s grandfather in the visiting room at the detention centre.

Recommendation: Morpurgo achieves admirably his purpose of allowing young readers to understand that boys like Aman are just like them, not ‘the other’. This would make a great Year 7 class set. However, you may have to struggle against students’ initial assumption that the book looks a bit young for them. The font is a comfortable size and there are Birmingham’s wonderful illustrations, so that the format seems to be that of a book for younger readers. However, the characters are in their mid-teens and the content is perfect for junior secondary.

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**Shahana**


This is the first title in an exciting new series from Allen & Unwin called the ‘Through My Eyes’ series, novels about children living in conflict zones. There could not be a better author than Rosanne Hawke to write the first book in the series. Rosanne worked for ten years in the Middle East, mainly in northern Pakistan, and she has written extensively about the lives of young people from that part of the world.

Shahana lives in the area known as the Line of Control, the border that divides Kashmir in two. Her tiny village is on the Neelum River that runs along the border on the Pakistani side. It is an area of ongoing conflict involving not only Indian and Pakistani soldiers but also militia who have their own agenda. Shahana has lost her mother and older brother in a militia attack on the village. Her father has been killed trying to cross the river to sell his goods on the other side. For a year or so Shahana and her young brother Tanveer lived with their grandfather, but he has died the previous winter. Shahana and Tanveer now survive alone in their tiny isolated house on the side of the mountain, some distance from the village. Shahana’s grandfather had left her a valuable legacy: the ability to embroider, a skill usually confined to men. She earns enough to buy them food but is aware that the trader, Mr Nadir, is exploiting her; worse, she knows that Mr Nadir’s carpet factory depends on the slave labour of young boys from penniless families and that Mr Nadir is plotting to get Tanveer to work for him.

Shahana and Tanveer’s lives change when they rescue a fifteen-year-old boy, Zahid, from wild dogs. Zahid comes from the other side of the Line of Control. He is looking for his father who, like so many men, has disappeared, possibly victims of the militia. While there are several very exciting incidents, including a chilling scene when Mr Nadir tries to auction Shahana as bride to the highest bidder, the strength of the novel is in the characterisation and in the depiction of the lifestyle. Students may well be shocked by a world in which a thirteen-year-old girl is left to raise her nine-year-old brother, where children can be exploited by evil, greedy men like Mr Nadir, where homes have no running water or electricity and where food almost never includes meat. They may well be impressed by Shahana’s perseverance, resourcefulness and resilience.

**Recommendation**: This is strong enough to be used as a class set novel. It will work best with girls in Year 7 - 8. It is a great title to add to the resources available for exploring the cross-curricular perspective, Asia. Add it to a wide reading selection of titles about children in Asia - or, more broadly, children around the world.

**Shauzia**


This companion volume to *Parvana* and *Parvana’s Journey* takes up the story of a minor character in the previous books. Shauzia escapes from a Pakistani refugee camp and tries to survive on the streets of the city. Deborah Ellis, who has worked in the refugee camps, provides a realistic picture of life in the camps and of children’s desperate struggle to survive on the streets. Shauzia is eventually taken in by an American family and exposed to levels of material comfort that she has never dreamed of, but there is a serious clash of values, particularly over the notion of ‘sharing’, and she is returned to the camp. As the novel ends, the Americans have begun bombing Afghanistan and Shauzia chooses to return to her homeland with a group of nurses.

**Recommendation**: This is for Years 7-8. This is a useful text for exposing students to lifestyles very different from their own.
Sold

Written in free verse, in a series of short but powerful scenes, Sold tells the story of child prostitution in India. Lakshmi lives with her family in the mountains of Nepal. At thirteen, she is sold by her stepfather for four hundred dollars to a charming man who promises her a good job in India as a domestic servant. Instead, he takes her to ‘Happiness House’, a brothel full of young girls who are enslaved by debt. The story is told in Lakshmi’s voice. While it is confronting and often painful to read, she is a strong and resilient character.

Recommendation: This powerful text will make a strong impression on girls in Years 8-10. It is an obvious companion piece to Rosanne Hawke’s disturbing Mountain Wolf, about the trade in young boys in Pakistan. While there will always be some adults who regard books with subject-matter such as this as unsuitable for young people, the abuse can only continue if we turn a blind eye to it.

Songman
by Allan Baillie. This is currently out of print.

This absorbing adventure story is set in the north of Australia, long before European settlement. Macassan fishermen from the islands to the north regularly visited the coast and traded with the Indigenous population. An Aboriginal boy, Yukuwa, and his father travel to the islands with the Macassans in order to show them how to make bark canoes. Yukuwa is exposed to a whole range of new experiences - not only the superior technology of other peoples, but also the brutality of ‘civilised’ justice systems and racism. The reader sees this new world through the eyes of the boy.

Recommendation: This is an exciting read for Years 7 and 8. It is also a cleverly imagined recreation of Indigenous life prior to European settlement and a critical look at the effects of colonisation.

Soraya the Storyteller

Soraya is a twelve-year-old Afghan girl whose family has been persecuted by the Taliban. Their attempt to find sanctuary in Australia results in a period in the Woomera Detention Centre, followed by an uncertain future in the community on Temporary Protection Visas. Like her father, Soraya is a storyteller, and it is her stories that enable her to make connections between the difficulties of the present and the traditions of her homeland.

Recommendation: This is an accessible account, based closely on real experiences, of the asylum seeker experience during the years when TPVs were in place. It is aimed at readers in Years 7 and 8.

The Spare Room

This excellent Australian novel is about culture shock: the experience of a young Japanese man sent by his family to Tasmania to learn English. His homestay family are not quite what he was expecting. The tension between Akira and his Australian family is finally resolved when they discover that they have something very important in common: a shared grief. This is an excellent look at the experience of trying to learn to survive in an alien culture, with much humour based on strange Australian customs and the peculiarities of the Australian idiom. Despite being quite short, this is fairly mature in its appeal. It is both moving and funny.
Recommendation: This works as a class set in Year 10. It is especially useful if you have students of English as a Second Language.

**Spilled Water**


This is a charming story of a young Chinese girl from a poor but happy family, whose life is transformed when her father dies. She is trapped first in domestic servitude in the apartment of a wealthy family who are looking for a wife for their mentally disabled son; then, when she flees, she becomes a virtual prisoner in one of China’s many factories, making toys for the West, the youngest of a horde of very young girls working very long hours of ‘voluntary’ overtime in appalling conditions.

How can the word ‘charming’ be used about a story of such adversity? The girl has great courage and resilience and, in even the harshest of conditions, she finds friendship and sometimes even fun. This is a girl who refuses to be a victim. She remembers always her father’s words that ‘The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet.’ Her story is narrated in the first person and it is an appealing voice. There is even a happy ending.

**Recommendation:** For Years 5-8, especially girls. It could be used for shared reading – as a class set novel, for group work or even for reading aloud. Although it is over 200 pages long, the print is large and the language accessible. Add it to a wide reading box on other cultures, on family or on journeys. Consider it as a title to explore concepts like courage and resilience. Consider also including it in a study of gender: it is because she is a girl that her uncle insists that the family can no longer support her after her father’s death.

**Stones into Schools**


Mortensen is an American who has a mission to build schools - especially for girls - in the most remote parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He employs an interesting group of locals to assist him in his mission. He established a charity - the Central Asia Institute - about 17 years ago and works tirelessly promoting the cause. He told the story of how he was inspired to take up this mission in *Three Cups of Tea*, which is also available in a version for younger readers. This sequel, aimed at an adult audience, provides a great deal of insight into life in remote rural areas.

Note: While for many years Mortensen was lauded for his work, receiving many personal awards and honorary degrees, from 2011 onwards there were serious questions asked about the extent to which he was benefiting personally from the charity he had established. Questions were also raised about the authenticity of some of his accounts.

**Recommendation:** Year 10 students with an interest in world issues will find this informative, but they should be encouraged to consider the wider context when judging Mortensen’s accounts of his work.

**Tales of the Otori**

by Lian Hearn. Hodder.

Recommendation: These are for an adult audience. The sex is fairly explicit and the violence is quite graphic, so in most cases you will recommend them only to mature readers. You will find, however, a devoted readership among younger fantasy fans who revel in the romance, the action and excitement, and the sheer mastery of Hearn's narrative control.

Tamburlaine’s Elephants


McCaughrean transports the reader with effortless ease to fourteenth-century Delhi, where the Hindus surprise the Mongols’ leader Tamburlaine by attacking with an army led by terrifying, unknown giant beasts. Rusti, a twelve-year-old, is ordered to take a young elephant prisoner: such is the arrogance of emperors! McCaughrean conflates the terror of Rusti and Kavi, the Indian boy mahout, with the terror of the young elephant Mumu, who lifts up both boys with her trunk and runs into Tamburlaine’s camp. There, amid the swirling dust of the plain and the wails of one hundred thousand prisoners, ‘life was as worthless as a fly in a jug of milk’. Rusti, now in charge of the emperor’s elephant, needs to save Kavi to teach him to look after Mumu. In the next attack on Delhi, Kavi, in turn, saves Rusti. Their interdependence gradually becomes friendship.

Rusti disguises Kavi as a girl (a Mongol boy would rather die) and the two have happy days, as Kavi teaches Rusti the skills of a mahout. Further adventures come when the emperor’s chronicler discovers Kavi’s disguise. However, the chronicler is conspiring to assassinate Tamburlaine, and all their lives are threatened. There is a wonderful climax when the elephants perform for Tamburlaine’s latest marriage amid the chaos of the assassination attempt.

McCaughrean is unafraid to comment on the different cultural values of the racial and religious groups. Kavi escapes attention because foreigners ‘all look the same’. When Rusti’s brother dies, his wife has to marry him. Finally, Samarqand is a city where all nationalities live, and Rusti learns from the chronicler the inter-racial secret of his birth.

Recommendation: This superb writer has won every major award for children’s books. The continued pace and tension of the Mongol wars and Kavi’s endangered life in disguise, set against the personal intrigues of Rusti’s family and the chronicler, ensure that the ideas in the text are always accessible but do not ever detract from the action. The book is almost an easy read for reluctant readers, who may well be drawn into the reading by their enchantment with the elephants. It is a great Year 7 class set. Use it with related texts about children from very different cultures learning to understand each other, as outlined in the annotation on The Killing Sea above.

A Taste of Cockroach; Stories from the Wild Side


This terrific collection of Baillie’s stories, mostly set in South-East Asia, was reprinted in 2014. They are all fiction, apart from the introductory story about Baillie's trip as a young man, recently disabled, into the mountains of Nepal and his dilemma when offered by a village elder, as a welcoming courtesy, a drink of water that he knows is highly likely to be quite dodgy. It's a typical humorously self-deprecating Baillie story, recording a typical Baillie moment in which his natural courtesy and kindness cost him.

There is an excellent range of stories in the collection. One of them is a short story version of Baillie’s picture book Rebel! (see annotation above), set at the time of the generals in Burma. 'The Pencil' is the story of a young girl intercepted by the Taliban on her way to her forbidden school. My favourite, 'Only Ten', has as its protagonist a boy from Lebanon rather than from one of the countries of Asia, but it is telling the universal story of a refugee child viewed with some suspicion by his new Australian classmates. Baillie's decision to tell the story in the first-person plural, so that we are exposed to the
group-think about the strange new arrival, is masterly. Other stories are based on Baillie's experiences as a freelance journalist in conflict areas of South-East Asia.

Recommendation: This collection is a great resource for Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia. You will use the stories across Years 7 to 10.

**Thai-riffic!**

Lengy (Albert Lengviriyakul) is of Thai heritage but it’s not something he boasts about. He’s underwhelmed by the clever name his parents have given to their restaurant (Thai-riffic!), by the fact that he is the main guinea pig for Dad’s curry recipes (when he would much rather eat pizza), by the need to help out in the restaurant each night and to spend weekends letterboxing the district with promotional flyers. He tries to sabotage the Year 7 feast to celebrate cultural diversity by adding so much chilli to the dishes his parents cook that he is sure no Aussie will be able to eat them. It’s only when he is persuaded to help his friend Rajiv with a school project about Thailand that he realises that being an Aussie Thai can be cool.

There is a sequel, **Thai-no-mite!** (annotated below), with a third book expected later.

Recommendation: This is a high-interest title for readers in the Year 4-7 age group. Boys especially will enjoy the humour. It’s a warm story about family, friendship and community and a celebration of Australian multiculturalism.

**Thai-no-mite!**

This is the sequel to **Thai-riffic!** (see below). Lengy’s family has decided to go ‘home’ to Thailand for a holiday, something that is causing him some angst as he thinks very much of Australia as ‘home’. The actual experience of the holiday has been reserved for a third book in the series. In this volume, Lengy and his friend Rajiv plot to engineer a romance between two of their teachers and the family takes part in a karaoke competition involving all the shop owners in their Fairfield street. Lengy gets to know one of his Thai aunts and watches in fascination as she buys piles of tacky Australian souvenirs from a souvenir shop. He also begins to understand some of the family’s cultural rituals, such as the annual Loi Krathong festival on the Parramatta River.

Recommendation: This is fun for readers in Years 4-7.

**Throne of Jade**

This is the second book in the magnificent **Temeraire** series, set in an alternate world based very closely on that of the Napoleonic Wars. In Book 1 the strong bond between Captain Will Laurence and the dragon Temeraire is established, and together they have been part of an army of dragons defending Britain against Napoleon. But the dragon’s egg had been intended by China as a gift to Napoleon, and in the second book Laurence and Temeraire are forced to travel to China, to the imperial court of the eighteenth century. Although this is fantasy, there is much to fascinate the reader in the depiction of the court and in the Chinese worldview, so different from that of the British. The British, for example, have never been able to accept that the dragons’ intelligence is superior to their own: in China, dragons - especially the rare Celestial dragons like Temeraire - are treated with proper respect.
Recommendation: This is a great read for mature fantasy fans, Year 9 upwards. You could use it as part of a fantasy wide reading unit.

Trash


This impressive novel is a perfect class set text for Years 7-9. Set in the Philippines, it is narrated by multiple voices, including those of three young boys who make a meagre living scavenging on a huge tip in Manila. The tip is their home as well as their workplace. One day one of the boys discovers a bag, containing an identity card, a key and some money. The money is very welcome, but it soon becomes clear that the bag is much more valuable than it appears, when hordes of police descend on the tip offering large rewards for its recovery. The bag holds a deadly secret and the boys’ decision to solve the mystery propels them into a very dangerous situation.

This is a breathtaking thriller with wonderfully appealing characters. The surprising ending is astonishingly right.

This will give students insight into the lives of the very poor in third-world countries and the impossibility of social justice in corrupt regimes. It will also give them an appreciation of the possibilities of multiple narration.

The huge tip in Manila is a real place. Have students go online to find photos of Smokey Mountain. You can match the photos with specific scenes from the novel.

Recommendation: I would use this with a Year 8 class, but it will work with bright Year 7s and it would be a satisfying text for those Year 9 students who might not cope with something longer and more difficult. It is a fairly easy read. It begs to be accompanied by some research into the lives of children growing up in intense poverty. It also lends itself to an investigation of the consequences of stereotyping people: these kids have been labelled ‘trash’. This is an outstanding novel, ideal for use with the Australian curriculum.

The film, Slumdog Millionaire, is rated MA and is clearly not suited to the children who would be reading Trash. However, some selected scenes of children working on similar garbage tips in India might be useful.

Treasure Hunters


This is vintage Baillie: an exciting adventure story set against the background of a troubled South-east Asian country – in this case an Indonesian island where the army is ruthlessly suppressing the local independence movement. Pat has joined his father in a search for treasure in the many wrecks off the coast. The action is exciting and the danger deadly but this is much more than just a boys' adventure story. Baillie’s characteristic narrative technique is perfect for the exploration of what motivates people to take life-threatening risks. He moves backwards and forwards from third-person narration into a kind of stream-of-consciousness style that allows the reader to slip into the mind of the main character. There is also a strong sense of history and its influence on the present, with Pat’s vividly imagined stories of what might have happened to the people on board the ancient wrecks.

Recommendation: This is an excellent class set novel, especially with boys in Years 6-9. Use it as part of an Allan Baillie author study, as suggested in the annotation on The China Coin above.
Under the Persimmon Tree
This American young adult novel tells the parallel stories of a girl living in a remote rural area of Afghanistan and a recently married American woman living in Pakistan. Najmah and her family live a simple but happy life on a farm that mostly provides them with adequate food. Staples provides an excellent picture of their day-to-day life, carrying water to the trees in their orchard in ghee tins and shepherding their flock of goats further into the hills to look for good pasture. Their happiness is threatened first by drought and then by the coming of the Taliban, who force all the men and boys from the village to leave their homes. Devastation comes with the American bombing that kills Najmah’s mother and baby brother. Meanwhile, Elaine is waiting in Peshawar – with increasing anxiety – for news of her Afghan-born but American-trained doctor husband, who has gone to set up a field hospital. The picture of Elaine’s in-laws gives a very different insight into Afghan lifestyles: exiled from Kabul because of the Taliban, they are educated and cultured professionals with relatively wealthy lifestyles. The two stories converge when Najmah finds herself as a terrified and lonely refugee in Peshawar.
This novel will broaden readers’ understanding of Afghan culture and religion. American Elaine has chosen to become a Muslim, and there is an explicit discussion of her reasons for doing so, including her discussions with an Imam about Islam as ‘the cradle of modern mathematics and astronomy’. Najmah is interesting because she rejects an offer of a comfortable life in the States because of her love for her country and her longing to be able to reclaim the farm that has been in her family for generations. It is too easy for Westerners to assume that everyone from everywhere else aspires to share our lifestyle; in fact, few refugees choose to leave home.
Recommendation: This is a great read for girls in Years 7-9.

The Unforgotten Coat
This is utterly charming, sweetly sad and totally original. It's the story of a brief summer of friendship that changed the life of the narrator. When Chingis and his little brother Nergui arrive in her Year 6 class, Julie is asked by the teacher, Mrs Spendlove, to look after them. Chingis tells Julie that he is from Mongolia. He is fiercely protective of Nergui, who he claims is being pursued by a demon. Julie is the one who does the research and informs the class about Chingis's country and culture, so very different from anything she has known before. She becomes fascinated by Chingis's polaroid photos, apparently telling the story of his family's journey from their homeland. But the photos are not quite what they seem and Chingis and Nergui simply do not arrive at school one morning. The teacher informs the class that Chingis and his family were apparently illegal immigrants and that they have been deported.
The story is told thirty-four years after that summer when Julie was in Year 6. Julie returns to her old school because she has heard that it is about to be knocked down. Mrs Spendlove is still there, as is the distinctive coat Chingis left behind, now in the Lost Property box. The twelve-year-old Julie had explained to the class that such large thick coats were needed in Mongolia to protect people from the cold, but the adult Julie recognises that it's not an authentic Mongolian coat at all - rather, with its British label, most likely something that Chingis's refugee family found in a charity shop.
The publishing format of *The Unforgotten Coat* is also unusual. As well as being accompanied by Chingis’s polaroid photos - photos that are not what they first seem to be, the story is printed on ruled pages with a ruled margin, like a school exercise-book.

**Recommendation:** This is one of those timeless stories that can be used with almost any age group. Students in Years 7 and 8 will enjoy the strangeness of Chingis and Nergui and the gradual revelation of their attempt to make their own narrative, but even the most sophisticated reader will be charmed and touched - and, like the author, a little disturbed that 'civilised' societies send their police at dawn to take away children like this.

**Unpolished Gem**


Always entertaining and often humorous about the migrant experience, Alice Chung’s memoir contributes to our understanding of the Chinese experience in Australia. ‘This story does not begin on a boat’, she insists in the opening sentence, and the reader is plunged into the Footscray markets in Melbourne, ‘the loudest and grottiest in Australia’. Alice represents her mother as a shouter rather than a talker and enjoys telling comic stories against her in her role as the constant harbinger of doom and the amused observer of the ‘white ghost’ European Australians, like a scientist observing slides under a microscope, exclaiming ‘Wah!’ at their ‘vomit food’ and the ‘round red-headed demons’.

Pung often uses present tense liveliness to dramatise family events and tensions. She uses italics to give the reader her thoughts about her very mild rebellion in getting a ‘skip’ boyfriend. ‘You’re like his third world trip … his substitute exotic experience.’ Does he like her, just to spite his parents? She feels like ‘Woody Allen in a black wig.’ However, there are more tender reminders about adjusting to life in ‘paradise’ after surviving Pol Pot’s rape of Cambodia. Her mother suffers black clouds of depression, boredom and frustration about learning English and being dependent on her daughter. Alice becomes the go-between in the war between mother and grandma. This role leads to some time leaps and compressions, as old wounds from the past are revealed. Mum finally finds that her fierce bargaining instincts can be reversed to help her become a successful salesperson in her husband’s white goods franchise.

Alice, too, suffers depression, being mute at school and adopting her ‘rubber mask of a face’. Fearful of her end of school results, she wins a Premier’s Prize and heads for Law study. After her brief rebellion, there is a tender scene where she breaks up with her boyfriend to resume her role as ‘dutiful daughter’.

**Recommendation:** This is a prescribed text for HSC, but that should not prevent you from using it at Year 10 level. Both European Australians and those with Asian parents enjoy this entertaining and humorous memoir. It is a valuable book written from the Chinese point of view and one that is brave enough to go beyond memoir into not so gentle satire.

**Wicked Warriors and Evil Emperors**


This is enormous fun, with Lloyd’s very accessible text, an appealing layout that breaks information down into easily digestible chunks, and Denton’s comic illustrations. The story, set more than 2 300 years ago, is that of a twelve-year-old Chinese king: Quinshi hunagdi, the First Emperor, who not only ruled China until his death but declared that his empire would last for ten thousand years. The backcover blurb tells us that: ‘He was brilliant and brutal. You might even call him evil ...’ He had an army of a million soldiers, innumerable enemies, an extensive spy network, and some innovative weaponry. Lloyd tells the story with great gusto and lots of humour.
Recommendation: Readers from Years 4-8 will find this thoroughly enjoyable. They may even find ancient history more intriguing than they had ever thought possible.

The Vermonia series
by Yo-Yo. Walker Books UK.
Titles in reading order:
Quest for the Silver Tiger
Call of the Winged Panther
Release of the Red Phoenix
The Rukan Prophecy
The Warriors’ Trial
To the Pillar of Wind
This is an authentic manga series of adventures, presented in unique hardcover formats. They are graphic novels to be read, as in Japanese, from the back to the front and, on each page, from right to left. There are full colour inserts and gateway foldouts that provide teasers to following episodes. Doug, Jim, Naomi and Mel are faced with a series of life-threatening challenges which they can overcome only by releasing their inner warriors. The series has web support, including online games with clues to be found in the stories.

Recommendation: Students in Years 5-8 who have become fans of anime movies will embrace these with enthusiasm.

Walk in My Shoes
Strongly based on the author’s research into the real experiences of asylum seekers in Australia, this is the fictional story of teenager Gulnessa and her family, who flee Afghanistan after their father is taken away by the Taliban. The family spends years of boredom and uncertainty in a remote detention centre in Western Australia before finally being granted temporary protection visas.

The story is told in the first person by Gulnessa, a courageous and empathetic voice. The nightmarish memories of the family’s experiences in Afghanistan and of the traumatic journey to Australia are told in flashback. The book gives real insight into the experience of asylum seekers and can be disturbing. How many Australians, for example, knew that the guards in Australian detention centres were instructed to address the inmates by number, not name?

Recommendation: Sadly, this will be read mainly by girls, because of the female protagonist, or by boys who are already politically aware. It is perhaps a little too long for use as a class text in mixed ability classes, but be sure to read it as extension reading in Years 7-10 for any unit of work on refugees or on other cultures.

The Young Samurai series
This is an exciting series of action novels that appeal especially to boys in Years 7 and 8 – particularly boys who are interested in martial arts. They are set in seventeenth century Japan and, while they make no claims to historical accuracy, they are based on some real people and events. The main character, Jack Fletcher, is a British boy stranded in a country that is deeply suspicious of strangers. His survival depends on the warrior training he has received. The fight scenes – and there are plenty
of them – are superbly described and the action moves at a breathless pace. The books have a note on sources (including some quite sophisticated quotations and many haiku), a Japanese glossary and a guide to pronouncing Japanese words.

Recommendation: These are substantial reads that may tempt some readers to stretch themselves. Add them to a wide reading selection of action adventure novels for Years 7 or 8.

Titles in the series in reading order:
The Way of the Warrior 9780141324302
The Way of the Sword 9780141324319
The Way of the Dragon 9780141321288
The Ring of Earth 9780141332536
The Ring of Water 9780141332543
The Ring of Fire 9780141332550
The Ring of Wind 9780141339719
The Ring of Sky 9780141339728

The Wild

This is a compelling and disturbing read. It is set in Kazakhstan, in a vast toxic desert that was once the Aral Sea and the home of a thriving fishing community. Dams built for irrigation in Russia have destroyed the sea and consequently the community. Most people are unemployed, living desolate lives in crumbling Soviet-era blocks of flats. Sixteen-year-old Alexi survives by recovering the metal from the booster rockets that fall back into the desert after being launched from a distant cosmodrome. It is dangerous work, the rival gangs even more lethal than the radioactivity to which boys like Alexi are exposed. Many of the inhabitants are ill, like Alexi’s young brother Misha. A nurse at the inadequate local clinic tells Alexi that he must get Misha away from the deadly environment. They journey to Moscow, in search of medical help, and find the urban desert even more desolate and deadly than the environment they have fled.

The story is told in the first-person by Alexi and we come to care deeply for the brothers and the tragedy of their lives. Alexi’s courage and resilience are impressive. Many of the scenes, especially early in the novel, are very exciting and will hold readers’ attention. Few Australian young people will have any idea that children elsewhere are living lives as desperate as this. Few will have encountered examples as stark as this of the consequences for human lives of environmental degradation.

Recommendation: This could be used as a class set in Years 9 and 10, especially as the core of a unit of work on the environment, but I think it is too sad for that: opening students’ eyes to the reality of others’ lives is one thing, but focusing on it day after day for several weeks might be too much. Instead, include the novel in wide reading selections on themes like the environment, other cultures, or survival. Make sure that students have opportunities to talk about the book.

Wrong about Japan

This fascinating non-fiction text tells of a trip to Japan by Peter Carey and his son, Charley, to discover ‘the real Japan’ - something that they see very differently. Charley, living in New York, had become fascinated by manga comics and anime films. Carey, trying to understand Charley’s obsession and to also understand the origins of manga and anime, decides that they need to go to Japan to explore
further. Carey's interest in a 'real Japan' that embraces temples, tea ceremonies and Kabuki theatre, is anathema to his son: Charley is a digital native and is excited by the world of Akihabara Electric Town, miniature mobile phones and complicated Japanese toilets. Charley's guide to this world is the friend he has met online, Takashi - a 'real' Japanese adolescent with a carefully manufactured persona who has no time for Japanese gravel and rock gardens or simple houses with rough timber.

Through his publishing contacts, Carey is able to organise interviews with some of the most famous producers of manga and anime but his struggle to understand a culture that seems increasingly alien ends each time in frustration.

One aspect of the book that I found particularly fascinating - and disturbing - is the eyewitness accounts of the firebombing of Tokyo at the end of World War II. Carey rightly points out that the western world is aware of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but we seem to have expunged from cultural memory the terrible toll on civilians of a nation that was already defeated.

Recommendation: This book was written for adults, but the manga-style illustrations will entice Year 10 readers who share Charley's fascination with a culture so immersed in modern technology.

Ziba Came on a Boat


This picture book is a beautifully told story of a little Afghan girl taking the perilous journey that so many others have taken in the hope of finding freedom. The story moves from the frail fishing boat to Ziba's memories of home, giving the reader a rich picture of the world that she has come from, including the fear and danger. There are warm memories of her father but it is only her mother on the boat with her. Did he perish in the fighting, or has he gone on ahead of them? Ingpen's paintings are as always stunning, capturing the warm ochre tones of the Middle Eastern background, the huge expanse of the sea and the wonderfully expressive faces.

Sadly, people like Ziba and her mother are still being demonised in this country. That is only possible if they are thought of as being alien and different – ‘the other’. This succeeds in enabling the reader to see the world through Ziba's eyes.

Recommendation: Use this as a related text in units of work about the migrant experience or about refugees.

Extension texts

These are texts that are not about Asia but will enhance your teaching of texts that meet the specific Asian requirement of the curriculum.

The Arrival


There are few schools not using this stunning wordless text and, now that it is available in paperback, there should be even fewer. Although there are no specific Asian references, it is a magnificent exploration of migration and of culture shock and could be used as an extension text.

The Island


Greder's confronting picture book tells the story of a vulnerable human being on a fragile raft who is washed up on the shores of an island. The islanders don't want him; he is ‘the other’, someone to be feared. While post-Tampa readers read this as the story of asylum seekers trying to find refuge in
Australia, this was written before that incident. Greder was thinking of his native country of Switzerland. Again, there are no specific Asian references but the text is completely relevant to any attempt to help students understand cultural difference and diversity.

**Mirror**  
Baker’s amazing picture book tells, through her trademark collage, two parallel stories: one of a suburban Australian family and one of a Moroccan family in a small village in the desert. This is all about differences and similarities across cultures.

**No Safe Place**  
Ellis is a Canadian writer whose activism has taken her to many parts of the world where children are in danger. She has written about children in countries like Afghanistan and Palestine. Her Diego books are about a boy whose parents are in prison in Bolivia and The Heaven Shop is about children orphaned by AIDS in Africa. No Safe Place is about child refugees. The story begins with fifteen-year-old Abdul from Baghdad, who has finally made it to Calais and is attempting to make the dangerous crossing to England. His path crosses those of two very different and equally vulnerable children: Rosalia from the Roma people of Romania and Cheslav who, as an orphan, has been educated in a military institution in Russia. Each has different reasons for fleeing and each has been deeply scarred by their past. All of them have learned not to trust others. This is an intriguing adventure story where the young people’s resourcefulness and persistence enable them to triumph against the odds. Because this is fiction, there is a ‘feel-good’ ending. The ending for the real-life young people on whose experiences this story is based is rarely so easy.

**Ten Things I Hate About Me**  
This follows the author’s successful first novel published the previous year - Does My Head Look Big in This? – which was almost a Lebanese Muslim Alibrandi. Important though that first book was, because of the insight it gives into the experience of being Muslim, Lebanese, female and Australian, this second book is much stronger and will allow all teenagers to identify with the main character, who suffers the usual teenage angst of feeling different from her peers. Jamilah has become Jamie, has dyed her hair blonde and wears blue contact lens in order to turn herself into someone she thinks is more acceptable to her peer group. The process of her journey to self-discovery is entertainingly told.

**Wide reading suggestions**  
**An author study: Allan Baillie**  
While in most cases you will fulfil the cross-curricular requirements by choosing a text for whole-class study, there are other ways of doing it. One is by offering students a wide reading unit, such as an author study of an author who writes extensively about Asia. The Australian writer Allan Baillie is a perfect choice for such a study.

Baillie has a background in journalism and he has travelled extensively, especially in South-East Asia, which he uses as the setting for some of his most successful writing. Unlike most other books for young people, his work often reflects the political situation: the unrest of separatist groups in Indonesia in Treasure Hunters, the bullying by the Burmese generals in Rebel!, the suppression of democratic movements in Tiananmen Square in The China Coin. Against these settings he writes engaging and exciting stories that work particularly well with students in Years 7 and 8.
Base an author study on the picture book Rebell!, the short story anthology A Taste of Cockroach and the novels Little Brother, Treasure Hunters, The China Coin and Krakatoa Lighthouse. Two out-of-print novels are worth tracking down: Saving Abbie, about the destruction of the forests in Borneo and the subsequent threat to the survival of orangutans, and Songman, about the experiences of an Australian Aboriginal boy - pre-European settlement - who sails north with the Macassans who have for centuries visited his homeland. The First Voyage, although primarily about Aboriginal history, could also be included, as the voyage begins in the islands to our north.

**An author study: Deborah Ellis**

Ellis is a Canadian writer and activist who has first-hand experience of the lives of children living in difficult circumstances around the world. It is the four books in the Parvana series, set in Afghanistan, that represent her best work: Parvana, Parvana's Journey, Shauzia and Parvana's Promise. In the first book, titled The Breadwinner in north America, Parvana has to dress as a boy to continue her father's work as a scribe in the market-place when her father is imprisoned by the Taliban. In the last book Parvana herself is imprisoned and brutally interrogated by the Americans, who are convinced that she is a terrorist. A wide reading study could include other novels Ellis has written, even those that aren’t set in Asia, including The Best Day of My Life (India), No Safe Place (child refugees trying to reach the UK), Diego, Run! and Diego’s Pride (Bolivia) and The Heaven Shop (Africa). The non-fiction texts Three Wishes (Israel and Palestine) and Children of War (Iraq), in which Ellis interviews children whose lives have been disrupted by war, could also be included.

**A wide reading study: action adventure novels with an Asian setting**

There is a wonderful diversity of action adventure novels with Asian settings, perfect for a wide reading unit for Years 7-8. You will find titles that will suit both girls and boys and readers of quite different ability levels. Most of these are high-interest titles and many come in series with multiple titles. If you provide a good range, you will find students reading voraciously.

Set an assignment that does not punish kids for reading. Have students, for example, work in groups to produce a rehearsed reading of the most exciting scene from a chosen novel, with sound effects and background music. You might also like to ask students to do some research to find out to what extent the book they have read is based on real conditions in the country and time in which it is set. A number of these titles involve fantasy elements, but many of them have an imagined world that is firmly based in a real historical world.

**Titles to choose from include:**

- Gabrielle Wang’s A Ghost in My Suitcase (a ghost story for girls set in China) and The Hidden Monastery (a fantasy based on Chinese mythology)
- the Moonshadow series by Simon Higgins, action fantasies set in a romanticised historical Japan (The Eye of the Beast, The Wrath of Silver Wolf, The Twilight War)
- the Tales of the Otori trilogy by Lian Hearn, fantasies set in sixteen century Japan; written for adults but devoured by fantasy fans of all ages (Heaven’s Net Is Wide, Across the Nightingale Floor, Grass for His Pillow, Brilliance of the Moon)
- Alison Goodman’s Eon and Eona, inspired by the myths and legends of Ancient China; Eona must disguise herself as a boy, Eona, to become a Dragoneye; for good readers
- Adeline Yen Mah’s Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society (a kung fu adventure set in Shangai in World War II) and Chinese Cinderella: The Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting (a time-slip adventure where the heroine finds herself in China eight hundred years ago)
• the Vermonía series by Yo-Yo, authentic manga graphic novels to be read from the back to the front and, on each page, from right to left (Quest for the Silver Tiger, Call of the Winged Panther, Release of the Red Phoenix, The Rukan Prophecy, The Warriors’ Trial, To the Pillar of Wind, Battle for the Turtle Realm)
• the Dragonkeeper series by Carole Wilkinson, set in the fantastic world of dragons in Ancient China (Dragon Dawn, Dragonkeeper, Garden of the Purple Dragon, Dragon Moon, Blood Brothers, Shadow Sister)
• P. J. Tierney's Jamie Reign series, action fantasy set in the New Territories of contemporary Hong Kong (Jamie Reign: Last Spirit Warrior, Jamie Reign: The Hidden Dragon)

Try to include in your selection all the titles from each of the series, to encourage students to read multiple texts. It might make sense to have several copies of the first book in each series, and then one copy of each of the sequels.

A wide reading study: children around the world

There are some wonderful novels for Years 7 and 8 about children in other countries - books that will help Australian students understand how privileged we are. You could confine your selection to books set in Asia or widen the selection to countries anywhere. You will find annotations on the titles set in Asia in the notes above, but the other titles listed are worth considering as well. Suitable texts to choose from - all of which are fairly contemporary - include the following:

• Bitter Chocolate by Sally Grindley, about the conditions of child cocoa workers in Africa
• Torn Pages by Sally Grindley, about AIDS orphans in Africa
• Spilled Water by Sally Grindley, about child factory workers in China
• Parvana, Parvana’s Journey and Parvana’s Promise by Deborah Ellis, about conditions for girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban
• Ellis’s companion story, Shauzia, about an Afghan girl refugee in Pakistan
• The Best Day of My Life by Deborah Ellis, about a homeless Indian girl suffering from leprosy
• Ellis’s novel, The Heaven Shop, about the children who have been orphaned by AIDS in Africa
• Homeless Bird by Gloria Whelan, about the plight of young widows in India
• Trash by Andy Mulligan, about the lives of children scavenging in the rubbish tips of Manila
• Eoin Colfer’s Benny and Omar, set in Tunisia
• The Wild by Matt Whyman, the grim story of two brothers growing up in the poisoned wilderness of Kazakhstan
• Diego, run! and Diego’s Pride by Deborah Ellis, about a boy whose parents have been wrongly imprisoned in Bolivia for drug smuggling
• No Safe Place by Deborah Ellis, the story of three adolescent asylum seekers from very different backgrounds who are at the mercy of people smugglers as they try to cross the English Channel (see annotation in the Extension Texts section)
• Mahtab’s Story by Libby Gleeson, about a girl and her family forced to flee Afghanistan
• Shadow by Michael Morpurgo, about life in Afghanistan.
• Naveed by John Heffernan, about contemporary Afghanistan
• Malini by Robert Hillman, about a girl struggling to survive in Sri Lanka’s civil war
• Shahana by Rosanne Hawke, about a girl living in the area known as the Line of Control, the border that divides Kashmir in two
• Sold by Patricia McCormick, about child sex slavery in Nepal and India
• Mountain Wolf by Rosanne Hawke, about child sex slavery in Pakistan
A wide reading study: the fantasy genre

If you have students in Years 9 and 10 who love fantasy, make up a wide reading unit with Lian Hearn's *Tales of the Otori* and Alison Goodman's *Eon* and *Eona*. Add to these titles the second volume of the wonderful *Temeraire* fantasy series, *Throne of Jade*, set in the political intrigues of Imperial China in the eighteenth-century.

A wide reading study: non-fiction titles set in China

This would work best with a mature Year 10 - especially with girls, as a majority of the titles have female protagonists. Begin with the very accessible - although very long - *Mao's Last Dancer*. Add *Falling Leaves*, *Wild Swans*, *The Woman Warrior* and the contemporary *Beijing Confidential*.

A wide reading study: the refugee experience

You could confine this to refugees from Asia or widen it to include refugee stories from anywhere in the world. There is an excellent range of titles for Years 7 and 8, including: Gleitzman's *Boy Overboard* and *Girl Underground*, Gleeson's *Mahtab's Story*, Evans' *Walk in My Shoes* and Hawke's *Soraya the Storyteller*. All of these are about asylum-seekers coming to Australia, as is the beautiful picture book, *Ziba Came in a Boat*. Other excellent titles about the refugee experience include Ellis's *Shauzia* and *No Safe Place*, and Michael Morpurgo's *Shadow*.

A wide reading study: friendships across cultures

Texts that are appropriate for Years 7 and 8 include Eoin Colfer's *Benny and Omar*, *Crusade* by Elizabeth Laird, *Camel Rider* by Prue Mason, *Tamburlaine's Elephants* by Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, *The Killing Sea* by Richard Lewis and *The Girl with No Name* by Pat Lowe.