

## Text and Worksheet: Primary Source: Interview with the Vuong Family

In 1997, Joseph Hieu wrote his master's thesis entitled "A Study of Parental Interviews on Bilingual Programs for Vietnamese Students." In it, he interviewed several Vietnamese families. The following are excerpts from those interview transcripts.

Background information at the time of the interview :

- **Interviewee:** Mr. Tuan Vuong (age 56) is the father of three children. His highest level of education is elementary, up to third grade in Vietnam. He worked as a bus driver in Hanoi and Saigon. He worked for a jewelry company after arriving in Chicago but is now retired and works as a janitor at the local church. He made \$10,000 per year.
- **Time of immigration:** The Vuong family immigrated during the second wave by boat, eventually arriving in Chicago in 1987. They had tried to escape eleven times prior to that but were caught nine times and missed the boat two times. One of the times that they were caught, they were arrested and jailed for one year. During their final escape, two of their children drowned in the sea when their boat sank.
- **Family Background:** The Vuong family consists of the two parents and of three children. Vuong and Trang Vuong (his wife, age 52), went through third grade in Vietnam and neither of them studied English before coming to the United States. After arriving in Chicago, both attended ESL classes four hours per day for five days a week. None of their children had studied English in Vietnam, but the two older children had studied French there. Thuan, their older son, had completed nine years of schooling in Vietnam and studied French from grade eight. In Chicago, he completed high school and graduated from college with a degree in computer science. Hanh, the daughter, went through seventh grade in Vietnam and is a senior at a Catholic university in Chicago with plans to earn a license as a registered nurse. The younger son, Phuong, attended a bilingual program in high school. Since arriving in the United States., the children have acquired an excellent command of the English language though both parents spoke little English.
- **Place of Interview:** The interviews took place at the Vuong residence in Chicago.

<b>OBSERVE</b> Identify and note details. What seems important to you? What seems interesting to you?	<b>READ THE TEXT</b>  <b>Interview with the Vuong Family</b>	<b>QUESTION</b> What do you wonder about? What confuses you? What do you want to further investigate?
	<p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> Mr. Vuong, why did you decide to leave your country?</p> <p><b>VUONG:</b> Life in Vietnam under the Communist regime was miserable. We had no food to eat, no clothes to wear, and no place to sleep at night. We had no choice but to leave Vietnam. Our survival instinct pushed us to head elsewhere.</p> <p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> How did you get here?</p>	

**Source:** Hieu, Joseph. "A Study of Parental Interviews on Bilingual Programs for Vietnamese Students." *Loyola University Chicago*, 1997, [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/4286](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4286). (pp. 132-137) This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).

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**VUONG:** It is a long story. We escaped 11 times and were caught 9 times. Twice we missed the boat. Once, when we were caught by Communist soldiers, we were arrested, tortured, and put in jail for a year with only one cup of water and one bowl of rice a day. We were in darkness and we were never allowed to go out of our cells to see the light. But these sufferings never stopped our desire to escape to freedom.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me something about your final escape.

**VUONG:** We left Ca-Mau near Phu-Quoc Island at two o'clock in the morning. All the Communist soldiers were sleeping. Our boat moved slowly and quietly. We pretended to be fishermen beginning our daily routine. After two days on the open sea, high winds came and our boat sank. We tried to swim, but only 9 out of 29 escapees survived. Among the dead were two of my children. An American ship passed by and saw us. We cried for help and were kindly rescued and brought to Sungei Besi refugee camp in Malaysia.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did you stay at the camp?

**VUONG:** We had to stay there for three years because so many refugees who came before us had to be processed first. It was extremely hot but the activities in the camp helped time pass by quickly. We had ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, GED (General Education Development) classes, and CO (Cultural Orientation) classes. These occupied our days in the camp.

**INTERVIEWER:** I understand that you have a child attending a bilingual program. What is your opinion of this program for your child?

**VUONG:** At the high school my son is attending, all the immigrant children have ESL classes. My son is taught English spelling and grammar. In high schools, ESL covers all areas of learning across the curriculum. ESL is taught within the study of mathematics, science, social sciences, and so on. My child depends upon the teachers' special help, which he actively seeks. Of course, some teachers only come to school to fill in the required time without providing much help, but other teachers are more conscientious. He mostly learned English from friends he had made at school and in our neighborhood.

**INTERVIEWER:** Does your child feel comfortable with his program?

**VUONG:** Yes. I assume so because I hear no complaints from him. He has a lot of homework to do at night. I know very little English, so I am not very helpful to him.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you hear anything about his ESL classmates?

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	<p><b>VUONG:</b> Yes. Sometimes he tells me that students of different nationalities learn English differently. For example, some students learn new words and phrases more quickly than the Vietnamese children, but they tend to forget them in a few days while the Vietnamese students who once learn something do not forget it. Vietnamese students tend to try harder because their parents always tell them: we risked our lives to bring you here, and you must work to be a success. You must learn English and get a degree; then, everybody will look up to you."</p> <p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> What are your opinions regarding the use of Vietnamese at home?</p> <p><b>VUONG:</b> In this home, Vietnamese is almost always spoken because we, the parents, do not know English. If we did speak English, we would speak it to them because we want our children to learn English as quickly as possible. My children always speak Vietnamese with their parents because they want to show respect toward us. Confucianism focuses on respect for the family and respect for learning. My children prefer to speak Vietnamese at home for greater ease in communication with their parents and not because they don't wish to improve their English.</p> <p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> Do you support bilingual programs for your child?</p> <p><b>VUONG:</b> Of course. We, the parents, are happy with the success of our children in learning English and other subjects in school. I believe that my son has had excellent help in school.</p>	
<b>REFLECT</b>	<p>What more did you learn from reading this person's firsthand account? Why is this source important?</p>	

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