

Text and Worksheet: Primary Source: Interview with Thuy Hoang

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. Thuy Hoang (age 50), the father of five children, has a college education and was working as a computer programmer for an insurance company in Chicago. He made about \$40,000 per year. He had been an engineer in Vietnam. He is the father of five children. He was a refugee twice in his life. He left North Vietnam for South Vietnam in September 1954 when Hanoi fell to the Communists. Twelve years later, on April 30, 1975, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese, he left Vietnam for the United States.
- **Time of immigration:** The Hoang family immigrated during the first wave and arrived in Chicago in August, 1975
- **Family Background:** The Hoang family resides in the Uptown area of Chicago, where more than 15,000 Vietnamese are now living. The Hoang family consists of five children: Tuan was born in Vietnam, and Lan, Mai, Cuc, and True were born in the United States. Tuan had graduated from a university and was working as an accountant for a bank; Lan was in grade 12; Mai was grade 11; Cuc was in grade 10; and True was in grade 9. Lan was a bilingual student in a Chicago public secondary school (CPSS). Mai, Cuc, and True are in a CPSS regular program. Thuy's wife, Lien Hoang (age 45), passed away a year ago due to cancer.
- **Place of Interview:** The interviews took place at Thuy's house.

OBSERVE Identify and note details. What seems important to you? What seems interesting to you?	READ THE TEXT Interview with Thuy Hoang	QUESTION What do you wonder about? What confuses you? What do you want to further investigate?
	<p>[deleted content]</p> <p>INTERVIEWER: Tell me something about your first experience as a refugee within Vietnam, the 21 years from 1954 to 1975.</p> <p>HOANG: ...[deleted content] I lived in Saigon from 1954 to 1975. I found a job preparing food for a dormitory by day, and I went to school at night. I graduated from high school, then from college, and found a teaching job in Saigon. Then the Communists took over South Vietnam in April, 1975, and I had to say "Goodbye Saigon!"</p> <p>INTERVIEWER: How about your second experience as a refugee for more than 20 years, from 1975 to date?</p>	

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HOANG: April 30, 1975, remains the darkest day in Vietnamese history and the darkest day of my life. It was the day when my hometown, Saigon, fell to the Communists. On that day, as the American soldiers withdrew, thousands of South Vietnamese citizens clamored to flee their homeland. I vividly remember escaping with my family from Saigon and being brought to a small boat owned by a friend of mine. My oldest son, Tuan, asked me where we were going. I just looked down and said nothing. Then I saw tears roll down his cheeks. My wife and son cried. I have seldom cried in my life but that day I cried. I cried because I had not seen my father for 21 years due to the partition of Vietnam, and now I had no chance of seeing him at all for the rest of my life. I missed him dearly from the time I was 7 years of age. I continued to cry and hugged my wife and my son tightly, saying nothing. As our boat drifted out to sea, I did not know where we were going. It was at dawn that I was awakened by lightning, followed by thunderous explosions. Then the rains fell. It was a short storm, but with no roof over us, we were drenched in minutes and shivered in the wind. Morning arrived, drab and gray. Since the water in our canteen was almost spent, we squeezed the water out of our blankets into the canteen, then split a piece of stale bread for breakfast.

INTERVIEWER: How were you rescued?

HOANG: Several hours later, a U.S. ship came into view, bobbing majestically on the horizon. We had to climb a rope ladder to get on board. The ship brought us to Guam, the Philippines, and then America. At first, we stayed in Ft. Chaffee Camp in Arkansas for processing legal papers and health screening. Later, we moved to Chicago and have lived in this city for more than 20 years....[deleted content]

INTERVIEWER: You have one child in a bilingual program and three others in regular classrooms. What have you decided on the matter?

HOANG: Bilingual education is an excellent program for those Vietnamese students who come here with no English background and at ages 14 to 18 or thereabouts. Without bilingual education, it is impossible for them to survive in high school. But those Vietnamese who were born here or arrived here under the age of 13 do not need bilingual education programs because they learn English very quickly through radio, television, video, and their friends. The reason why I enrolled one of my children in a bilingual program was because I wanted my son to know as much about Vietnamese language and culture as he did about English language and American culture. My other three younger children chose by themselves not to be in bilingual classes because they speak little Vietnamese and are very fluent in English. I let my children make their own decisions under my guidance, and I support their wishes along the way.

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Name _____

Date _____

	<p>INTERVIEWER: Is Vietnamese used in your home?</p> <p>HOANG: I must confess that I have failed to teach all my children to speak Vietnamese because television and computer games occupy most of their leisure time. But I still truly believe that knowing two languages is better than one. Besides, the U.S. needs more people who can speak many languages to communicate with different people in many countries all over the world. In addition, excellence in education is the key to our nation's future. Those who come here speaking no English should have an opportunity to learn, and bilingual education is one of the tools that helps these children succeed in school. Promoting the mastery of English as well as the development and maintenance of their native language gives our children a lifelong gift of learning.</p>	
REFLECT	What more did you learn from reading this person's firsthand account? Why is this source important?	

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