

Text and Worksheet: Primary Source: Interview with Thien Duong

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. Thien Duong (age 55) is the father of 16 children. His highest level of education is elementary. He owned restaurants and made \$81,000 per year.
- **Time of immigration:** The Duong family immigrated during the second wave, leaving Vietnam by boat in 1983. They arrived in Chicago in September 1983.
- **Family Background:** The Duong family consists of 20 people: 2 parents, 16 children, and 2 adopted children. The adopted children are a white Amerasian boy and a black Amerasian girl. Fourteen of the children are married and work in the four restaurants owned by their parents. Four of the youngest children attend bilingual programs. The Duong family lives in the Uptown area of Chicago, where they have more access to Vietnamese markets, restaurants, clinics, etc.
- **Place of Interview:** The interviews took place at the Duongs' home. Seven members of Their's family were present.

OBSERVE Identify and note details. What seems important to you? What seems interesting to you?	READ THE TEXT Interview with Thien Duong	QUESTION What do you wonder about? What confuses you? What do you want to further investigate?
	INTERVIEWER: You just told me that your family escaped Vietnam on a small boat, carrying 51 people. Your boat encountered high seas and pirates. Please tell us more about your trip. DUONG: One day in April, 1983, a boatload of 51 men, women, and children fled Vietnam. Several days later, as we crossed the Gulf of Thailand, pirates robbed our vulnerable party and then attacked a second time with grievous consequences. Three women, aged 25, 26, and 30, were abducted. Twelve of the group were clubbed, knifed, and thrown into the sea. Another 12 drowned; our boat sank as the pirates attempted to tow it. All died but our family. It was a miracle, and our family is always very thankful for God's blessings. INTERVIEWER: How could your family survive in such a situation? DUONG: We were a family of 20 people. All of us knew how to swim and had learned special survival techniques on the open sea in case of emergency. We were all fishermen, you know. When our boat sank, the Thai pirates thought that we had died, and they left us alone. We swam for seven hours to the site	

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of an abandoned American oil refinery. We stayed there for nine days before an American commercial ship came to rescue us. We were brought to a Malaysian refugee camp for processing before we were permitted to go on to the United States.

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INTERVIEWER: Were there more refugees like yourselves, facing the same situation?

DUONG: As you may already know through reports of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and via American and Vietnamese newspapers, more than 750,000 Vietnamese have fled their homeland by sea since 1975. An unknown number have died or been kidnapped on the open water, never to be heard from again. These people were attacked by pirates with staggering vehemence and frequency: half of the refugee boats that arrived in Thailand or landed in Malaysia in 1981, 1982, and 1983 had been victimized. When I was still in the refugee camp, I heard horrible stories about piracy and I saw victims of these criminals....[deleted content]

INTERVIEWER: In our conversation you told me that you had enrolled four of your children in bilingual programs. How did you and your family arrive at that decision?

DUONG: As parents, we were invited to attend a number of workshops for parents conducted by the Chicago public schools. There were Vietnamese bilingual teachers at these meetings to interpret what the speakers said from English into Vietnamese. My wife and I learned a great deal from these workshops and decided to enroll our children in bilingual programs.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you learned a great deal about bilingual education from these workshops. In your opinion, what is bilingual education?

DUONG: Bilingual education is understandable instruction. In other words, bilingual education is aimed at making instruction understood by the student. My children spoke no English when they arrived here in Chicago. If I had enrolled them in regular classes, they would not have understood anything. It would have been a waste of time for them. But with bilingual classes, my children learned both languages, English and Vietnamese, at the same time. This made learning more meaningful, and it also prevented my children from dropping out of school, joining gangs, selling drugs, or committing criminal acts. My 20-person family did not die in the Communist forced-labor camps; did not die on the high seas; and did not die from pirate attacks. Why should we die on the streets of America?

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Name _____

Date _____

	INTERVIEWER: Has bilingualism had any effect on family life? DUONG: Bilingual education has helped us maintain our Vietnamese language, culture, and family values. This ties our big family together through "understandable" communication. Furthermore, if my children know how to speak Vietnamese and behave in Vietnamese ways, they are easily accepted anywhere in our community. They do not feel ignored or rejected by our people. They have self-esteem and self-confidence. INTERVIEWER: Have you encouraged your children to speak Vietnamese at home? DUONG: Absolutely! We feel extremely comfortable speaking Vietnamese at home. Besides, we are planning to return to Vietnam for a visit. If we speak no Vietnamese, we are very, very shameful! In addition, many American and foreign companies in Vietnam nowadays are in need of workers who can speak fluently in both languages, English and Vietnamese. I hope my four younger children will be among those selected.	
REFLECT	What more did you learn from reading this person's firsthand account? Why is this source important?	

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