



# I'LL CALL AUSTRALIA HOME

TEACHERS NOTES

## Synopsis

Refugee families from Burma and Sudan discover the joys and challenges of their new Australian home.

While the immediate horrors of war and the confinement of refugee camps are behind them, the new lives of these families are not without struggle as they negotiate the everyday realities of settling in a new country. They face getting to know a new currency, schooling for their children, learning a different language and reuniting family torn apart by war.

Over six months, *I'll Call Australia Home* offers an intimate record of these families as they tackle their new life experiences; from their first supermarket trip to their first day at school, to dealing with Australian welfare agencies.

For the ethnic Karen family from Burma so many things are startling—suburbs that seem to be for cars not people, too many clothes to choose from at 'op' shops, using automatic teller machines and discovering chickens wrapped in plastic from the supermarket fridge. But learning English in 510 hours of government paid lessons is proving the biggest challenge of all.

For Constance and her extended family from Sudan who have been in Australia longer, the task is not so much the practical realities of Australian life but drawing together all the members of her family separated for over 10 years.

Made with the cooperation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Australian Government's resettlement agencies, this is a gentle and revealing story of ordinary people who have witnessed extraordinary tragedy. But united in a new country they find the strength, resilience and courage to start again.

## Curriculum Links

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Media Studies, SOSE/HSIE, History, Civics, and Politics.

## Homelands: Sudan and Burma

As we see in the program, Constance and her husband Will have fled Sudan for a refugee camp in Kenya, while Constance's brother Phillip and his wife Betty escaped from Sudan to Uganda. Both families eventually arrive in Australia.

Ma San Myint and her husband Kaw La have also fled from their own homeland, Burma, and later spent many years in a Thai refugee camp which was, in some respects a jail, before resettlement in Australia. (In order to avoid confusion, note that Burma is also sometimes known as Myanmar, and recognised as such by the United Nations and some countries.)

- Draw a small map of the African continent showing where Sudan, Kenya and Uganda are situated. Then draw a larger map of the northern half of Africa, ensuring you indicate and label the boundaries of the same three countries. Find out where the Kakuma refugee camp is, in Kenya, and mark it on your larger map. Also mark the deserts, rivers and lakes, and the major cities of the region.
- Carry out some research then write an account of the long-running civil war in Sudan. Is Sudan a democracy, a military dictatorship, a theocracy? What are the reasons for the war? Is it politically doctrinal, or pursued for religious, tribal, ethnic or other purposes? In which regions has the war mainly taken place? Has the war been resolved or is it still being fought today? How has it affected the populace's quality of living conditions, schooling for children, employment, homelessness, poverty, disease, food and water supplies and medical supplies? Has there been any attempt at intervention by the United Nations, either militarily or diplomatically, to achieve an ending to the war? What is the extent of United Nations aid to the Sudanese people? Are individual world nations and aid organisations offering assistance such as food, medical supplies, other resources and personnel?
- In pairs, drawing on details from the program and from further research, prepare an informative magazine-style spread, using desktop publishing tools, of one or more items about general living conditions and daily existence in one of the Sudanese refugee camps, such as the Kakuma camp in Kenya. Include text, photographs and other illustrations, statistics and graphs where applicable. (See website references to 'Kakuma'.)
- Draw a map of South-East Asia, ensuring you label and mark the boundaries of Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand. Carry out research then indicate on the map the location of the Mae La refugee camp where Ma San Myint spent about 17 years. Add the locations of major cities and geographical formations such as important riverways in the region.
- Is Burma a dictatorship or a democracy? Research and write an account in 350-450 words of the political and military situation in Burma that has led to the refugee situation forcing citizens such as Ma San Myint to flee for their lives.

- Ma San Myint and her family belong to a Burmese minority ethnic group called the Karen. Who are the Karen? Working in pairs prepare a written report about this ethnic minority, including poster material such as photographs and other illustrations where applicable. In which part of Burma do, or did, they live? In what ways may they be considered different from other Burmese? What has happened to them, and why? Has the Burmese government persecuted them? Why are they considered to be stateless, and what does this mean in practical and legal terms? Explain whether the United Nations has made efforts to save them from annihilation. Why is the current national name of 'Myanmar' considered unacceptable by Burmese ethnic minority groups such as the Karen? (See website references to the Karen.)
- From what you have seen in the program, discuss in class then write your own notes about the conditions under which Ma San Myint and her family exist in the Mae La refugee camp. What restrictions are placed on them by the Thai authorities? Offer an explanation as to why these restrictions are imposed. (Note that one of the website references to the Karen is a blog written by young students in the Mae La camp.)

## International and national refugee assistance

The central international organisation coordinating worldwide action to protect and to look after the welfare of refugees is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It has a regional Australian office in Canberra. Allied to UNHCR, on a generally broader scale that encompasses natural disasters such as famine, earthquakes and floods, as well as political upheavals such as civil war, is the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), formerly known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

- Under what circumstances are people rendered refugees from their homelands? As a class discuss, define and write the meaning of 'refugee'. Find and make your own written record of UNHCR's definition of the term.
- Research then construct a bar chart (or bar graph) of countries, including Sudan and Burma that, as currently as records allow, produce high populations of refugees. (For statistical information on refugee numbers, see the UNHCR website.)
- Working in pairs or small groups, research, plan and draft a script for a radio broadcast of between seven and 10 minutes on UNHCR's aims and objectives, and the wide range of work, activities and projects it carries out around the world. Also look at how UNHCR is funded, and whether UNHCR personnel and officials are welcomed into all countries where there are refugee issues. What other problems does UNHCR encounter? What are UNHCR's successes? Does Australia, through the Australian Government and other national non-government agencies, contribute to UNHCR in any way, whether through funding, personnel assistance, research projects and delivery of assistance programs? Rehearse and revise the script to completion stage, then record it for playback or podcast on your school intranet. (You may wish to include music and sound effects where applicable.)
- UNHCR celebrates World Refugee Day on 20 June every year (see website references to 'United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees'). In Australia there is an annual Refugee Week held during the week in which 20 June falls (see website references to 'Refugee Week'.) Research the types of programs and activities that are organised, then plan and develop a display poster that incorporates information about both World Refugee Day, and the Australian Refugee Week.
- Write a short fiction story about the experiences of a specialist aid worker who arrives at a large refugee camp. Will it be presented in the third-person narrative or from the personal viewpoint of the worker? Will it be in diary form, or perhaps written as a letter to a relative or friend? Will the worker be emotionally overwhelmed by the job he or she is expected to carry out? Who will he or she meet, and what sorts of relationships will be created between others in the camp, specialists, refugees, the local people, police and armed forces? Will the entire venture be a learning experience one way or another? (For further information and ideas for your story, see 'Priorities for running a refugee camp', and 'Volunteer teacher at Mae La refugee camp', in website references.)
- Imagine you are writing for an information and current affairs magazine or website aimed at young teenagers. Keeping your audience in mind, carry out research, then plan and write a current affairs informational item (or collection of items) about Australia's official refugee program. (See 'Australia's refugee and humanitarian program' in website references. Note that this site, for example, contains statistical charts; you may wish to interpret this information in your own written words for your specific reading or viewing audience.)
- Following from the previous activity, discuss in class then write a letter to the editor in 350-400 words arguing about the merits of an Australian Government program that encourages or even insists on refugees returning eventually to their homeland (such as Sudan) when it is safe for them to do so, in preference to ensuring that refugees are adequately resettled and integrated permanently into the Australian community.

In your class discussion, and perhaps in your letter, you should examine the advantages and disadvantages of both aspects of the refugee program, from both the viewpoints of the refugees themselves, and the Australian populace. For example, if a refugee couple have children who are born in Australia, should those children be 'repatriated' with their parents, or should they—and their parents and other members of their family—have a right to remain in Australia, the country of their birth? Is there an age, a stage in growing up, at which it would be far too disruptive for a refugee's Australian-born child to be returned to his or her parents' homeland?

- Do you consider that the Australian Government's response to the world's refugee problems is adequate in terms of yearly intake of refugees? What are the issues surrounding either increasing or decreasing the intake of particular national or cultural groups? Should Australia accept refugees purely on humanitarian principles, regardless of race, culture, religion, nationality, language and education, or accept only those refugees from specific places of the world because they offer the Australian community particular skills, education or training at that moment in time? Debate in class then write a considered argument in 600-700 words in response to these questions. (See website reference to 'Sudanese refugee cuts, 2007')

## Dislocations

After 17 brutal years in refugee camps on the Burma-Thai border, and years of persecution prior to that, Ma San Myint and Kaw La are to relocate to Australia. Their children have never known life outside the confines of a refugee camp, and lack an education even in their own language. The difficulties they all face in arriving and settling into a completely different culture from what they've always known are therefore enormous. Similarly, Sudanese couple Constance and Will and their children, who have already been in Australia for some years, must also confront ongoing issues literally of life, death and identity that have abruptly arisen from the past, with the potential to wrench their family unit apart.

- From what you have observed during the sequences of the program that take place in the Mae La camp, discuss in class then write your own appraisal of Ma San Myint's and Kaw La's hopes, plans, expectations and concerns about their new lives in Australia. Is their knowledge of Australia, its people, culture and customs going to help them on arrival? Will the orientation lessons they attend be of worth? Are they as ready for life in Australia as they will ever be, or should more have been done to ensure a less traumatic transition from one world to another?
- Ma San Myint's sister Mae Lah remains behind when the rest of her family group leaves. Why? Will she ever see them again? From Mae Lah's internalised emotional viewpoint, write 300-350 words about the leave-taking. This may be written, looking back at the events, or it may be in the present tense, as though narrated at the moment of family separation.
- Following from the previous activity, we hear later in the program that Ma San Myint has spoken to Mae Lah by phone from Australia. Working in pairs, plan and write a conversation between them in at least 300-400 words. What do you think they would say to each other? What questions would they have for each other? What emotions would they be expressing through their words and silences? What fears, worries, doubts, concerns, hopes and plans might each of them impart to the other? Would Ma San Myint be entirely positive about her new Australian experience? You may wish to rehearse and record the conversation, or enact it to the class.
- Carry out appropriate research then write a short newspaper-style report on the purpose, efficiency and suitability of the type of medical and disease quarantine procedures Ma San Myint's family have to undertake before leaving Thailand for Australia. For example, what is dengue fever? Can it be carried from one person to another? How can it be treated? Could such quarantine stations be argued to be demeaning for refugees, or absolutely necessary for the wellbeing and health of Australian citizens who later come into contact with newly arrived refugees? Consider how such a newspaper article could be headlined and presented. Will it be informed and rational, or sensationalist and emotive?
- Write about the journey from the refugee camp to the aeroplane flight and arrival in Melbourne, Australia, from the viewpoint of one of Ma San Myint's children who was born in the camp and has never experienced the outside world.
- Discuss in class the traumatic situation that arises when Constance discovers the truth about her sister-in-law Betty and her brother Phillip (Betty's husband), and the potential impact on Lily, who is being raised as Constance's daughter. How would you attempt to deal with and resolve any of these issues?
- We see Lily on film when she is asked by Constance where she will live. What is her reaction? What do you think she is feeling? Is she confused, mistrustful of the adults around her? Plan and write a series of personal diary entries as though you were Lily, confronted by these issues and by the question of her own identity.

- In pairs or small groups plan and draft a short drama script about a ten-year-old child who is suddenly confronted with fears about her own identity, and that of her assumed parents. Rehearse a play-reading of the script and revise it where appropriate. Present a reading or a staged performance to the class.
- Write a commentary on the decisions and sacrifices Betty and Phillip eventually have to make about Lily. In what ways are they constrained by Australian law in their actions and needs, in comparison to how they may have dealt with the situation in their homeland?
- Plan and write a short fiction story in any way you consider suitable, based on Constance's experiences. Consider the viewpoint and narrative approach of the story. Would it be possible to write the story from her viewpoint, or would it be preferable to present it in the third-person? (As this is fiction, you may depart from what is depicted in the program, while nevertheless attempting to remain realistic.)

### Strangers in a strange land

As we see during the program, the orientation programs that refugees undertake before travelling to Australia do not prepare them for the culture shock they inevitably experience on arrival and resettlement.

- From the program, discuss and make notes on the range of disorienting situations and environments experienced by Ma San Myint and Kaw La in the days and weeks after arriving at Tullamarine Airport, Melbourne, that most of us, as Australian citizens, might take for granted. Discuss whether it is possible to prepare refugees for these eventualities before their arrival.
- Write a commentary on the vision of Melbourne's outer suburbia, housing and local community experienced by Ma San Myint. How does she adjust to it? (See more on the topic of Australian suburbia in the Media Studies section.)
- Following from the previous activity, compose a short poem that captures Ma San Myint's impressions, mood and feelings as she gazes across her backyard at both her new house and across the surrounding suburb. Consider such elements as physical space and its emotional effect, especially in comparison to all of her previous experiences of space, crowding and density after years spent in Mae La. After completion, place your poem onto a display poster and illustrate it as desired.
- During the program we see Kaw La, Ma San Myint and Betty Ochieng taking compulsory English lessons. Research and write 300-400 words about the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), examining its purpose, how and where the program is carried out, how many migrants (including refugees) participate, how it is funded, whether the program is achieving its aims and, if possible, what migrants themselves think about the scheme. (See 'Adult Migrant English Program' in website references.)
- After viewing the program, discuss in class the reasons a public meeting is called in the NSW town of Wagga Wagga to discuss integration issues concerning the local population of resettled Sudanese refugees. What concerns do the Sudanese themselves express at the meeting? What is the result of the meeting?
- Following from the previous activity, and using this sequence from the program as a starting point, write either a local newspaper report or a local radio news report about the meeting and its aftermath. Include interview, background and follow-up material where applicable.
- You may first require background research for this activity. Discuss in class then write your own views as to what your own local community does, or could do, to welcome migrants, and refugees in particular, and to make them feel less isolated over the long term of their resettlement. Does your own school play a role in integrating and assisting refugee school-aged children? What programs and activities has it instituted, or could it institute, within the school community?
- Discuss in class what you think Constance is saying about 'home', in the closing sequence of the program, then plan and write a short story about someone from another land searching elsewhere for that sense of 'home' and peace.
- Write a 500-word commentary on what you have discovered, realised, learnt and appreciated from the program, and from further research you have done as a consequence of viewing the program, about what it means to be a refugee in a strange land.

## Media Studies

- Discuss in class then write your own commentary on the purpose and effectiveness of *I'll Call Australia Home* as a 'fly on the wall' observational documentary film, referring to specific scenes to support your views. Include a commentary on the use of contrasting, bleached-looking archival film of military activity in Sudan and Burma. (For comparison in style, approach and subject, you may wish to view another documentary by the same director, Belinda Mason, titled, *Growing Up and Going Home*, about a family of young Ethiopians in Australia; see Film/TV references.)
- Discuss in class then write a short commentary on the way in which the film develops and presents two different storylines of refugee experience through constant cross-cut editing between one family group (Burmese) and another (Sudanese), across widely divergent locations. Comment on whether there are any linking or converging themes and images between cross-cuts at particular points in the program.
- Discuss in writing how the scenes of Ma San Myint standing outside her new home in Werribee are framed, shot and edited to depict her sense of isolation and alienation in suburban Australia (in comparison to those scenes shot in the refugee camp), and to increase our sympathy for her. Also argue whether the film at this point (through the director's and editor's vision) is consequently critical of Australia's suburban design and lifestyle. In what ways might the later scenes of Ma San Myint installing pot plants in the same location of her yard be interpreted as symbolic imagery?
- You are approached by the Australian Department of Immigration to plan a 30 second TV ad informing Australian citizens about the Government's refugee program. Discuss in class, and working in pairs plan, script and prepare a storyboard for visuals (camera shots and angles) and sound (voice-over narration, dialogue, sound effects, on-location incidental music, and soundtrack mood music). Should the promotion, for example, concentrate on telling Australians that they should feel emotionally good about welcoming and helping those less fortunate than themselves? What alternative thematic approaches and messages could be taken?
- Plan and write a review in 300-400 words of *I'll Call Australia Home*, designed for a weekly TV newspaper liftout section.

## References and Further Resources

### Books and other published material:

Diane Barnes, *Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Australia: Issues of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, Transcultural Mental Health Centre, Parramatta, 2003

Carol Bohmer and Amy Shuman, *Rejecting Refugees: Political Asylum in the 21st Century*, Routledge, London, 2008

Alephonsion Deng, Benson Deng, Benjamin Ajak; with Judy Bernstein, *They Poured Fire from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys From Sudan*, Public Affairs, New York, 2005

Dean Lusher and Nick Haslam (eds.), *Yearning to Breathe Free: Seeking Asylum in Australia*, The Federation Press, Leichhardt, 2007

Peter Mares, *Borderline: Australia's Response to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Wake of the Tampa*, UNSW Press, Sydney, second edition, 2002

*School's In for Refugees: Whole-School Guide to Refugee Readiness*, Foundation House, Brunswick, 2004, updated 2007

Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices Behind the Razor Wire*, Lothian, South Melbourne, 2003

### Film/TV:

Peter Lloyd (reporter), 'Rohingyas, the Forgotten People', in *Foreign Correspondent*, series 16, episode 27, screened 27 March 2007, ABC TV

Belinda Mason (director), *Growing Up and Going Home*, Film Australia, 2006

Sieh Mchawala (director), *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men*, SBS TV, 2007

Megan Mylan and Jon Shenk (directors), *Lost Boys of Sudan*, ABC TV, 2003

*Young Africans in Schools*, DVD of edited highlights of professional learning workshop, Australian Refugee Association, Underdale, 2005

(Note: For further titles see 'Films about refugees' in website references.)

### Websites:

Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP):

[www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/learn-english](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/learn-english)

[www.ames.net.au/AMEP](http://www.ames.net.au/AMEP)

Australia's refugee and humanitarian program:

[www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm)

[www.immi.gov.au/refugee](http://www.immi.gov.au/refugee)

Burma (Myanmar):

[www.unhcr.org/country/mmr.html](http://www.unhcr.org/country/mmr.html)

Films about refugees:

[www.icar.org.uk/download.php?id=54](http://www.icar.org.uk/download.php?id=54)

Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kakuma>

<http://travel.mongabay.com/kenya/topics/kakuma%20refugee%20camp1.html>

The Karen:

[www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org)

[www.karenpeople.org](http://www.karenpeople.org)

<http://karenrefugee.livejournal.com/4570.html>

Map of refugee camps along Burma-Thai border:

[www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/44103c910.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/44103c910.pdf)

Priorities for running a refugee camp:

[www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/pid/1681](http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/pid/1681)

Quarantine, dengue fever:

[www.globalhealth.gov/refugee/refugees\\_health\\_burmese.html](http://www.globalhealth.gov/refugee/refugees_health_burmese.html)

Refugees International (carry out site search for Kakuma and Mae La camps):

[www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org)

Refugees and regional settlement:

[www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/refugees\\_and\\_regional\\_settlement.pdf](http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/refugees_and_regional_settlement.pdf)

Refugee Week:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html)

Sudan:

[www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/southsudan](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/southsudan)

Sudanese refugee cuts, 2007:

[www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=3533](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=3533)

[www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=3573](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=3573)

Teacher resources:

[www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/\\_pdf/resource-gateway.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/_pdf/resource-gateway.pdf)

[www.druginfo.adf.org.au/article\\_print.asp?ContentID=supporting\\_refugee\\_student\\_in\\_your\\_classroom](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/article_print.asp?ContentID=supporting_refugee_student_in_your_classroom)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

[www.unicef.com.au](http://www.unicef.com.au)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

[www.unhcr.org.au](http://www.unhcr.org.au)

Volunteer teacher at Mae La refugee camp:

[www.indcatholicnews.com/thaibur.html](http://www.indcatholicnews.com/thaibur.html)

A Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Becker Entertainment. Produced in association with SBS Independent.

Narrator: **Tara Morice**

Executive Producers: **Anna Grieve (Film Australia), Sue Clothier (Becker Entertainment)**

Producer: **Mike Bluett**

Director: **Belinda Mason**

Year: **2008**

Duration: **52 Minutes**

Study guide written by Roger Stitson. Photographs by Belinda Mason, Ilana Rose. © Film Australia and Nopadol Puntakerngamorn (Boyd). Under licence to Film Australia.

For information about Film Australia programs, contact:

Screen Australia

Sales Office

GPO Box 3984

Sydney NSW 2001

tel 02 8113 5800 tollfree 1800 213 099

fax 02 9416 9401 tollfree 1800 077 471

sales@screenaustralia.gov.au

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au)

