

Teachers' Notes by Fran Knight

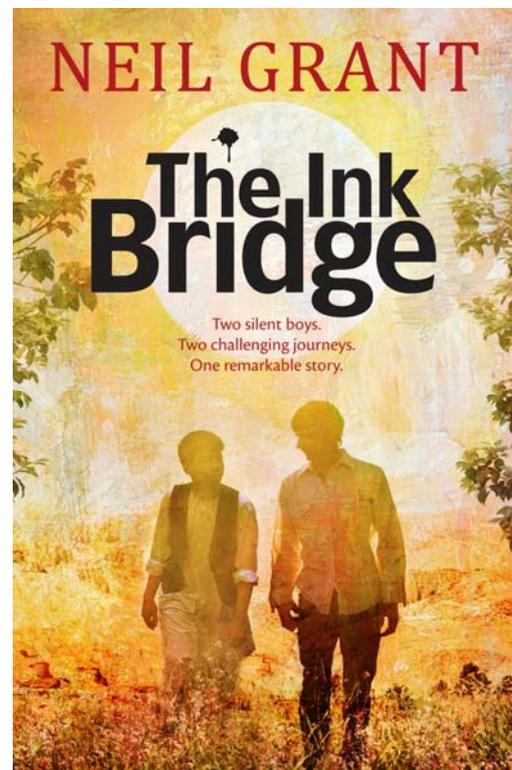
The Ink Bridge

by
Neil Grant

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Recommended for ages 14+ yrs

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INTRODUCTION

Told in three parts, the stories of two young men, one a selective mute and the other physically mutilated so that he can no longer speak, come together as one seeks asylum in Australia and the other grudgingly attempts to work rather than return to school after a family tragedy has overturned his life.

Omed's story begins the book, reflecting the cruelty and injustice which stalks countries where the rule of law has broken down and the government has been taken over by religious zealots. He and his friend watch as the Taliban blow up the Stone Statues, the famous Buddhist statues in Afghanistan which provided a small living for some people in the area. But Zakir is hit by some of the flying stone debris from the blast and is killed, enraging Omed to distraction. Without thought he attacks the men who triggered the explosion and in response they cut out his tongue.

Later realising that the men will come and kill him, he flees his family, seeking refuge with a known people smuggler in his village. He is off on a journey that takes him to Australia.

Hec's story follows, and we see this traumatised boy not communicating with his father, the psychiatrist or his teachers and friends, rather, staying home alone. His father is at a loss and suggests that he works for a while enlisting the help of a friend he knew at primary school to take him on as a labourer in his candle factory. There he meets the other workers, many on visas, some asylum seekers, but all traumatised by what has happened to them. The racist foreman taunts the workers, and Hec takes a stand, and so develops an unusual relationship with Omed. Both mute, they learn to communicate. Through an odd set of circumstances Omed and his 'uncle' end up staying with Hec and his father, and at night, Omed takes Hec back to the candle factory to show him what really happens there. One night, after a terrible tragedy, the authorities become involved, the illegal smuggling racket is disbanded, and Omed is deported.

In the concluding section of this novel, Hec, now a 22 year old whose voice has returned, travels to Afghanistan to find out what has happened to his friend.

The Ink Bridge is an intriguing novel, showing the reader the complex issues which dog the lives of those trying to find a safer life for themselves. Omed's story will tug at the hearts of all readers, to be so cruelly treated in such a random fashion is gut wrenching, and his and the stories of those he meets along the way will add to the knowledge of students about the people who seek asylum in Australia. Hec's story too parallels Omed's to a degree, and their coming together impels Hec to take a stand and speak up. It is this which forces him to throw off his depression and take hold of his life for himself. The final section of the novel, where the two young men meet again brings the story to a satisfying conclusion, and one which will be much discussed.

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The Australian Curriculum is available online at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Home>

The outlines of the three interrelated strands—Language, Literacy and Literature—can then be accessed.

Thus: Language is knowing about the English language; Literature is understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature; and Literacy is expanding the repertoire of English usage.

The notes for this book exemplify these three strands, ensuring that the work fits the criteria that these strands suggest.

LITERATURE

BEFORE YOU START

Classroom

Set aside a large area of pin-up board space.

Have the class brain storm what they know about Afghanistan and Afghan people. Put their responses onto paper to have around the classroom, or set up a Wiki, or use the electronic white board to tabulate their ideas.

Hang a map of the Middle East in the classroom.

Have a map of the world and South East Asia ready for work.

Ask the class to collect any novels from the library about the Middle East (ask your teacher librarian to do a bulk loan for your classroom).

Collect any articles about the Middle East to pin up in the classroom.

Ask the students to access any websites about the Middle East which they think will help the class in its work. Have these displayed for all to see. Perhaps students could evaluate the website and add comments.

Community

Check to see if there are any refugee support groups your class can access in your area.

Check to see if there are support groups for people from the Middle East in your area.

List any Middle East shops/restaurants/places of worship that your class can access.

Are there any staff or friends of staff who would be happy to talk to your class about their experiences?

Wider community

Check out websites (particularly government funded) which support Afghan people in Australia.

The Middle East

Have each student take a map of the Middle East to mark where the story takes place. A significant number of places are mentioned and should be added to their maps.	Collect recipes of food that is eaten in Afghanistan, or go to a local Afghan restaurant or cafe to check out the menu or buy some food for the class.	Collect images of Afghanistan to add to the display wall in the classroom.
Collect images of Afghan people to add to the display wall.	Collect Afghan clothing to display (some students may have some, or there may be a shop in your area)	Use Wikipedia to find out what has happened to Afghanistan in the recent past.
Have each student or group of students draw a map of Afghanistan, adding the main cities and towns, rivers and mountains.	Have each group check out different aspects of Afghanistan to present to the class (weather and climate, topography, currency, clothing, industries, tourist venues etc)	Ask each group to prepare a brochure about Afghanistan to present to the class, showing what they have learnt.

READING THE NOVEL

Introduce the students to the novel, ensuring that they understand that there are sections which will be confronting and, at the same time, informative.

You may like to read the first chapter aloud, to get the students into the story and allow for any questions to be asked, and ideas shared.

Perhaps ask the students to keep a notepad in their book to jot down unfamiliar names, places and events to enable them to share their questions with the rest of the class.

Perhaps draw up a timeline with the class, allowing them to pace their own reading and discuss with the class.

Allow a lesson a week for the group to share what they have read, to go over chapters, events and ideas they may be unsure of and to do some of the work suggested.

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE: THEMES

INTOLERANCE

Intolerance is shown at all levels of society and by all people. In the first chapters, the reader is introduced to the intolerance within Afghanistan under Taliban rule prior to the coalition invasion in late 2001, with tribal leaders handing out summary justice to people from another branch of their religion.

As Omed's story progresses we are shown intolerance in places that Omed's path takes him.

In Australia, we see the intolerance of the foreman at the candle factory who represents such Australians with their suspicion of anyone not Australian. Some Australians can be called xenophobic.

Ask students to follow one of the questions posed in the following table, to add to a class list of what *xenophobia* means and how it is manifested in the novel.

<p>What is the meaning of the word xenophobia?</p> <p>Use dictionaries, Wikipedia and encyclopedias to find its meaning and derivation.</p>	<p>What motivates the Taliban to blow up the Stone People? (Chapter One)</p> <p>Why do they cut out Omed's tongue?</p>	<p>Reread Chapter 2, about Omed's father.</p> <p>How did he come to be killed?</p> <p>How does this reflect xenophobia?</p>
<p>Sharia Law is mentioned several times in the novel.</p> <p>What is it?</p> <p>What examples of its use are shown in the novel?</p>	<p>Why is Omed initially suspicious of the Poet of Kandahar?</p>	<p>In Part Two, Chapter 2, we meet Splinter the foreman at the candle factory.</p> <p>What is his attitude to the workers at the factory?</p>
<p>Splinter's generalisations about the workers reflect some attitudes prevalent in the world today.</p> <p>What do his generalisations say about Splinter?</p>	<p>Later in Part Two, Chapter 2, Hec is watching a news program about a town where refugees are going to be living.</p> <p>Paraphrase the arguments put forward by some of the townspeople in wanting and not wanting them there.</p>	<p>In Part Two, Chapter 5, we see an appalling sight of exploitation.</p> <p>What has happened?</p> <p>How have these people been brought to Australia?</p> <p>What may happen to them?</p>

ASYLUM SEEKERS

Note: This topic may raise some contentious issues and divided opinions in the classroom. Be prepared.

1. As Omed's story is revealed, take note of the reasons he needs to escape Afghanistan and the reasons of those he meets.

The incident in the opening pages of Chapter 1 reveals the reasons for Omed's flight.	Reread Chapter One and put the details of the incident in chronological order. What may have happened to his family?
The Poet of Kandahar is in Chapter 2 in the refugee camp with Omed.	What does the poet tell Omed about his reasons to flee Afghanistan? Why does he wish to go to Australia?
Omed keeps meeting the Snake.	Why does the Snake wish to get to Australia?

2. As the novel is read, note all the different groups of immigrants to Australia that are mentioned.

The man who picks up Omed and the Snake near Maree after they escape detention explains how he came to be an Australian. (p 106)	Is this a common story? How many Afghans came to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century? Where are their descendants today? What part did they play in Australia's history?
The fisherman on the pontoon near the West Gate Bridge. (p 158)	What is the story he tells of his decision to come to Australia?
Hec's family	Hec realises that he knows nothing of his background. Why is this important?

3. As the novel is read, note the different stories of the people Omed mixes with in Australia, and their yearning for a better life.

The woman and her children on the boat to Australia	Why is she travelling to Australia? What happens to her and her children? Why does Omed feel guilty?
Omed works with a group of people on Temporary Protection Visas.	Revisit Sami's story (p 148): Why does Sami see himself as different from the others?
And others....	

4. It may be appropriate to look at the laws regarding asylum seekers as a class after the book is read. Put students into groups to research the websites and then come back to the class with their findings.

The Australian Human Rights Commission gives a large amount of information which will need some direction to the class to use. http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/asylum_seekers.html

What is the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?

What are their human rights?

Where does the Commission's opinion differ from that of the Australian Government?

What examples are in the book of the authorities in Australia in action?

5. Neil Grant plainly shows the range of people who profit from the needs of asylum seekers, from the Snake to those in Lahore, Kuala Lumpur and Java who help the asylum seekers on their way and finally at the candle factory in Melbourne, where the Snake again has made contacts and pursued his trade of people smuggling.

Writing a report (A report must be factual: who, what, when, where, why and how)

Write a report on the activities of the Snake to present to the authorities who have caught him in Melbourne.

OR

Write a report about the activities of the people smugglers who put Omed on the boat in Lombok.

OR

Write a report on the activities of the manager of the candle factory, Merrick Hope.

WORLD HERITAGE VANDALISM

The opening sequence of the destruction of the Stone Statues caused outrage around the world. There is footage on YouTube about this destruction which can be accessed by your students.*** But be careful as looking up stone statues + destruction + Taliban also gave me footage of a stoning of a woman.***

From Kinglake to Kabul (by Neil Grant and David Williams) gives a potted history of Afghanistan's invaders (pages 2-5) It may be helpful to have this background available for the class.

Classwork

Reread the first section of the book where the statues are destroyed	What information is given to the reader about the stone statues?	What is their importance to the region?
What has happened to them?	Why did the Taliban blow them up?	What opposition did they receive?
What is happening to the stone statues now?	How did Omed and Zakir view the destruction?	Why could the local people do nothing about it?

Think of the world outrage if this had been the Pyramids of Egypt or the Golden Temple at Amritsar or the Sydney Harbour Bridge. But how can these be protected?

Classwork

Some sites around the world are considered as belonging to everyone. Compile a list of these sites - the class could brainstorm this.	The United Nations has collated lists of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World, and the Seven Modern Wonders of the World.	The United Nations has collated a list of World Heritage Sites (930 in all). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site
Check the World Heritage websites to find how many are on the official list and compare this with the one the class brainstormed earlier.	Read particularly the section called <i>The legal status of heritage sites</i> , on the Wikipedia site above.	What can the United Nations do when a government or terrorists attempt to destroy such a site?

WAR

War is ever present in Part One, Omed's story, and although not with the same intensity as Part One, Part Three certainly reflects the vestiges of war.

Class work

Revise the history at the start of **From Kinglake to Kabul** (pp. 3-6). This potted overview of thousands of years of Afghanistan's history shows just how their country has been framed by war. For more detail, go to the USA Department of State's website at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

1. Draw up a timeline of the wars that have ravaged Afghanistan.
2. What have been the results of these wars?
3. Why did Russia invade? What is the legacy of this war?
4. Can Afghanistan's unsettled nature be attributed to decades of war?
5. What are the physical legacies of these wars?
6. How has Afghanistan's geographical position dictated its history?
7. What vestiges of war do you read about in **The Ink Bridge**?

Individual work

Comparing stories in **The Ink Bridge** with personal stories in **From Kinglake to Kabul**.

1. Reread some of the stories in **From Kinglake to Kabul**.
2. Can you find instances of similar stories told in **The Ink Bridge**?
3. Evaluate the differences between each telling.
4. How does each affect the reader?
5. Which is more successful in telling the reader what the effect of war upon the individual is like?
6. Why do you think this is?

Saving Private Sarbi

A fascinating side story of war in Afghanistan occurred two years ago when Sarbi, an Australian sniffer dog, was missing, presumed killed, after a battle with the Taliban. She

was found 14 months later and awarded several military honours and is now the subject of a book, **Saving Private Sarbi** by Sandra Lee (Allen and Unwin, 2011)

Apart from its obvious interest to all animal lovers, the book, **Saving Private Sarbi** gives a background look at the war in Afghanistan, the dangers not only facing our troops, but the ordinary people, and the work of the specialised sniffer dogs and their handlers.

Sarbi now has a Facebook page and a page on the Australian Government website <http://www.defence.gov.au/sarbi/index.htm>

Class work

1. An account of the story can be found at the BBC site <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8356224.stm> (put this up on the electronic whiteboard to read and discuss with the class)
2. With all the horror of the war and its effect on ordinary people trying to live out their lives, discuss why this story was given so much publicity?
3. Students may like to debate a topic around the story of Sarbi. Possible topics are:
 - Saving Sarbi was a waste of tax payer's money.
 - There are more important things to concentrate on than a dog.
 - Sarbi is an inspiration to us all.
 - The cost of training and keeping Sarbi is more than justified.

Group work

Some students may like to read sections of the book, sharing the story in a reading circle, or using the book as one of the Literature Circle books.

WOMEN

A less obvious theme within the book which interested me was that of women. There are women presented in the book whose situations are quite different.

- Omed's mother
- Hec's mother
- Hec's tour guide, Arezu (Part Three)
- Omed's sister, Leyli, (Part Three, Chapter 3)

Individual work

Reread the sections above which tell the reader about these women characters. Choose one woman who appeals to you.

1. Fill in the six-box proforma (BLM 1) found at the end of these notes, filling it with information about one of the women.
2. Use the information gathered to write a report about that woman and her life.
3. Some of the stories in **From Kinglake to Kabul** also give glimpses of women's lives in Afghanistan today.
4. Use these stories to compare your life with one of theirs.

LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE IN AFGHANISTAN

Two official languages are used in Afghanistan, Persian (Dari) and Pashto. Wikipedia's entry about Afghanistan includes a section on language which will give some background to this exercise.

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

Neil Grant uses the Dari language throughout his novel, expecting in the main that the reader will be able to elicit the meaning from the context.

Examples are on page 3 *badam*, or page 14, *chaikhana*, where we can understand from the context what each is.

Whole class work: Create a glossary

When the class comes across words that are in a different language or are specific words uncommon to the reader (Mujaheddin, for example) ask the reader to note the word and its meaning (perhaps set up a Wiki so that all the students can add words to the list as they read, on line)

When the class has finished reading the novel, these words can be collated to make a glossary for the novel. The glossary could be used as a word guide for other readers or part of a display done by the class when the work is complete.

Words from Afghanistan that are used in the English language

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_words_of_Persian_origin

This is an interesting article on Wikipedia that details many of the words from Persian, now used in the English language. Some are very well known, others are not, and it is interesting to see that this writer has included proper nouns. Words like *balcony* and *kiosk*, *Iran* and *China*, are included in the list.

Some students may like to look more closely at the list and put up a list of common words used, or of proper nouns used around the world to designate places we hear about many times.

Some students may like to speculate why so many of these words have been incorporated into the English language.

English words now used in languages other than English

It is always a surprise watching a foreign language film, to hear English words in the middle of that language. A Danish television series recently on SBS always surprised me with words like *OK*, *hello*, *goodbye*, *thank you*, *cell phone*, *radio* etc.

Think about why these words are commonly used instead of the Danish words. Have you noticed any English words being used by Afghan people on the news on TV?

- What words might be the ones so commonly used?
- Think about the children. What words might they pick up quickly in their contact with American and Australian soldiers?
- In Chapter One, Omed had learnt words from the tourists who came to see the Stone People. How common do you think this might be?

POETRY

Neil Grant includes poetry in his book, especially in Chapter 2, where Omed shares a tent at the refugee camp with a poet.

1. One of Persia's famous poets, known widely in the west, is Omar Khayyam.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubaiyat_of_Omar_Khayyam

Many stanzas from this poem are well known. He is famous for having written over 1000 rubaiyat or quatrains, and was first translated into English in the seventeenth century and then more famously by Edward Fitzgerald in the nineteenth century. He is revered for his imagery and economy of style, alliteration and themes. The rubaiyat, or ruba, contains four lines in a particular rhythmic scheme.

- a) When did this man live?
 - b) What else was he famous for?
 - c) Why is he remembered in the West?
 - d) Find several of his quatrains, and work out the rhythmic nature of the lines.
 - e) Are there poets you know of who use the quatrain form?
 - f) Find some examples of the quatrain form being used in English.
(you can find examples on the Wikipedia site, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quatrain> which deals with quatrains)
 - g) Find some of the poems mentioned in the Wikipedia article on quatrains. Perhaps learn one as an example to read out aloud to demonstrate the quatrain form.
 - h) Practice the form to write some of your own.
2. In the companion book, **From Kinglake to Kabul**, some of the work done by the students in both those communities is poetic.

Relook at some of their work.

(The three-lined poems by some of the Australian students are known as haiku.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiku>)

- Can you find any poems in this book from the Afghan students?
- How different is this poetry?
- Can you explain the difference to another member of your class?

THINKING OUTSIDE THE SQUARE

1. After reading the novel, discuss what happens to Omed and Hec at the end of Part Three. Then choose one of the following writing activities:

- write an editorial about their lives after their meeting;
- write a letter back to Melbourne from Hec to his father;
- add an extra chapter telling what happens to the two young men;
- write a letter or long email from Omed to Hec's father.

2. Why has the author called the novel, **The Ink Bridge**? Revise the sections in the book where bridges are spoken of. What other titles could have been used? Justify Grant's use of **The Ink Bridge** as a title.

3. Some asylum seekers see the people smugglers as their saviours. Are there any such stories on the Internet? One I found that was brief and to the point was the article by Bob Ellis <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/30770.html> which made me rethink what

I had heard. You may like to read it and others and present an argument to the class that people smugglers are neither heroes nor villains.

4. Take a closer look at Shaun Tan's **The Arrival**. Can you link any of the images found in that book to the characters in the novel, **The Ink Bridge**? You may like to enlarge some of the images and display them with a title that relates to **The Ink Bridge**.

5. Take a close look at the cover of the book. How has it been produced?

- What image does this cover present to you? Do you think it successfully conveys the ideas of the book to its audience? Would it impel a reader to pick up the book?
- Given the opportunity, what sort of cover would you have designed for this book?

KNOW THE AUTHOR: NEIL GRANT

<http://www.neilgrant.com.au/> takes you to Neil Grant's homepage, which contains his biography, blog from Afghanistan in 2009, Youtube clips, a list of novels and his contact details. The website is fascinating, enabling the reader to gain an insight into Neil's background and motivations. To summarise:

Neil Grant was born in Glasgow and came to Australia at thirteen years of age.

He has backpacked through India, Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, Israel, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka and has worked as an instrument sterilizer, a cook, a brickie's labourer, a roof-tile reclamer, a carrot picker and a tree planter to support his travel, but all with the aim of becoming a writer.

All three of his novels have centred on journeys. The first, **Rhino Chasers** (Allen and Unwin, 2002) is about three surfers following their dream along the Australian coastline once they finish school. The second, **Indo Dreaming** (Allen and Unwin, 2005) has surfers in Indonesia following their dream of sun, surf and sand, and the third, **The Ink Bridge** (Allen and Unwin, 2012) follows the lives of two young men, one an Afghan asylum seeker, and the other a selective mute living in Melbourne. Their paths cross.

The Ink Bridge was written with a grant awarded from the Australia Council for the Arts in 2005 to write a novel about the refugee situation in Australia. Neil travelled to Afghanistan in 2009 to research this project. The resulting novel is set primarily in suburban Melbourne and in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.

As a result of a writer-in-residence at Kinglake High School, Neil worked with the English teacher, David Williams, in encouraging the students to write of their experiences during the bushfires, and link up with similarly traumatised students in Afghanistan. The book, **From Kinglake to Kabul** (Allen and Unwin, 2011) is a result of the students' writings, published together.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER, DISCUSS OR WRITE ABOUT AFTER RESEARCHING THE AUTHOR

1. What in his background gives Neil Grant the confidence to write such a story and know that it is an honest reflection of what happens in Afghanistan?
2. After reading the novel, what sort of questions would you ask the author, Neil Grant? How do you think the discussion would go? (Perhaps set up a twosome, one the questioner and the other the author responding to the questions.)
3. Can you find his other novels? Perhaps several groups within the class may like to read one of his other novels and present a 'show and tell' to the class, explaining what the novel is about and how it differs or has similarities to **The Ink Bridge**.

4. Neil Grant lives in an artist's colony outside Melbourne.
 - What is an artist's colony? Can you find out more information about one?
 - Have there been any others in Australia that have been well known? What are the benefits of living with others of like mind? Can you think of any drawbacks?
5. What other authors have you read that may be similar to Neil Grant?
6. Can you make an addition to his web page that lists other similar authors and their novels? Some libraries give out a bookmark, *If you liked this author, then you may like...* with a list of authors and novels similar to the one just read. Prepare one for your library.
7. On a map of South East Asia and the Middle East, pin point the places that Neil Grant travelled to as a young man; where his novels are set; and where he went to gather information for his most recent novel.
8. It is intriguing that writers like Neil Grant do not follow the worn path of completing Year 12, going to university and then settling down to a working life. His life has been quite different. Do you know of any other authors for whom the straight and narrow path was not followed?
9. Many authors say that to experience a wide variety of work places, countries and people enhances their writing. How is this reflected in Neil Grant's writing?

LITERATURE CIRCLE

A Literature Circle occurs when a class is divided into small groups, each group reading one of a number of books similar to the one being studied. It is important that each group set the rules of the group and assess themselves. It is expected that each group read one book over 6 or so weeks, keep records about what they like about that book and report back to the class. Ask your teacher-librarian for help with this as they may be able to suggest other works to include, and give a book talk to your class to help the groups select their book. I usually have 6 or so copies of each of the books ready for the groups to select and allow each group to select which novel they will read. I usually ask volunteers to come in and read with each group to help keep them on task.

Once selected, the groups will have a lesson a week to read in class, and the leader of the group will allocate how much of the book will be read between lessons. At each session, the group discusses what has been read so far and works out things like plot, story, characters and theme(s), to present to the class. Proformas are available as Blackline Masters at the end of these notes (BLM 2 & BLM 3).

Each group is then able to make a presentation at the end to showcase in some way the book they have read.

There are a number of books that have been written around the theme of refugees and asylum seekers. Some are for younger readers (*Soraya the storyteller*, *To the boy in Berlin* and *Boy overboard*, for example) and some are picture books (*The littlest refugee*, *Ziba came on a boat* and *The arrival*, for example) and could be used in this unit.

Each group takes one novel to read, but one group may like to look at several aimed at younger readers, or look at a group of picture books on the theme.

RELATED TITLES:

The arrival (Shaun Tan, Lothian, 2006)

This award winning picture book will stun its readers when they see the pictures showing immigration in all its aspects, from single people, families and children leaving the places they were born to find a new life. Their sufferings, their dreams, the realities of moving from one country to another are exposed here. Working with a group of young New

Arrivals in a school I was amazed at how much they recognised and the discussions which came out of their reading this wordless book.

Australia locked up (John Nicholson, Allen and Unwin, 2006)

John Nicholson takes readers through the array of prisons in Australia, from those that kept the convicts enclosed in the first 50 years of the country, to the detention centres of today's Australia.

Boy overboard (Morris Gleitzman, Puffin, 2005)

Middle Eastern boy, Jamal is given a voice in this story of a refugee coming to Australia via the help of people smugglers, but separated from his parents on the long trip over the sea from Indonesia. All the heartbreak of having to leave the country of your birth, of trying to avoid the authorities to finally end up in a detention centre in the country which you hoped would take you, are given full rein in this story for middle school readers, with the sequel, **Girl underground** following in 2006.

From Kinglake to Kabul (Neil Grant and David Williams, Allen and Unwin, 2011)

Children traumatised by the bushfires of 2009 in Victoria were part of a project writing short stories and poetry along with a group of children in Kabul, living in the midst of war. The two groups opened their hearts to each other through their writing and eventually some of the group from Kabul visited Australia in 2010. This book is a collection of their writings showing each group's tenacity and hope.

The happiest refugee (Anh Do, Allen and Unwin, 2010)

Comedian Anh Do brings his infectious smile and contagious laughter to the story of his family's flight from Vietnam in the 1970's to the relative calm of Australia, where his parents worked hard to create a better life for their children. Anh Do is candid about his life, educated in the Catholic tradition, going to university but ending up as a comedian and then marrying.

The little refugee (Anh Do, Allen and Unwin, 2011)

Anh Do's award winning story of his life, **The happiest refugee**, is reduced to its basics in this picture book for younger readers of his family's escape from Vietnam and finding peace in Australia.

Mahtab's story (Libby Gleeson, Allen and Unwin, 2008)

Gleeson interviewed and talked to many girls in schools in Sydney, to develop this story, an amalgam of all their stories, refugees forced to flee their own countries as religious fanaticism took over. Mahtab and her mother are told to wait in Pakistan by their father who has gone on ahead but after months of not hearing from him, decide to move on to put themselves into the hands of people smugglers.

Refugee : the diary of Ali Ismail (Allan Sunderland, Scholastic, 2007)

One in the series, **My Australian Story**, this one tracks the life of Ali Ismail as he flees persecution in Afghanistan, boarding a rickety boat to come across the sea to Australia, then finding himself in a detention centre. But the story becomes scarier as he escapes and finds his way to Melbourne, where in hiding from the authorities he falls into unscrupulous hands.

Refugees (David Miller, Lothian, 2004)

A fascinating picture book which reduces the idea of becoming a refugee and fleeing for your life to the story of two ducks, having to find a new pond to live in. The parallels are obvious to all readers, and much will be gained by discussion.

Saving Private Sarbi Sandra Lee (Allen and Unwin, 2011)

The story of the Labrador/Newfoundland cross sniffer dog has all the ingredients of a page turner as Sarbi, no longer able to stay with her family, is trained by the army in

sniffing out explosives and deployed to Afghanistan. When she goes missing in a battle with the Taliban, it is thought she is dead, but surprisingly she is found 14 months later.

Sektion 20 (Paul Dodswell, Bloomsbury, 2011)

Asylum seeking from a different angle is shown to readers when during the Cold War Alex and Geli are smarting under the strict regime in the German Democratic Republic. After being tortured, Alex's family realise that they will always be under suspicion and that their children will have many doors closed to them, so they escape into West Germany. But their troubles are still not over.

Soraya the storyteller (Rosanne Hawke, Lothian, 2004)

Hawke has drawn together a story from all those she heard while living and teaching in Pakistan, making a story imbued with the folk tales of that country. The girl Soraya also knows and loves these stories and she holds them for her family as they travel to Australia, eventually settling under a Temporary Protection Visa, not knowing where their path will lead.

To the boy in Berlin (Elizabeth Honey and Heike Brandt, Allen and Unwin, 2007)

When Henni makes contact with a boy in Berlin, Leo, with the same name of the family which once owned her house, she is ecstatic, but over the months the prejudice which she uncovered directed at her house's family 100 years ago, seems to be happening all over again in Germany with the Guest Workers, the son of one being Leo's best friend. The parallels in both countries make fascinating reading for middle school readers.

Walk in my shoes (Alwyn Evans, Penguin, 2004)

Gulnessa and what is left of her family flee Afghanistan after their father and brother are taken away by the Taliban. She survives keeping her family together despite the treatment by authorities in the place they all hoped would be a refuge for them, Australia.

Ziba came on a boat (Liz Lofthouse, illustrated by Robert Ingpen, Penguin, 2007)

A story about refugees for younger readers, this has Ziba on a unseaworthy fishing vessel being taken across the sea, dreaming of her father telling stories, of gunfire and running away and then of happy smiling faces welcoming her to her new land.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

NEIL GRANT

Neil Grant was born in Glasgow Scotland in the Year of the Fire Horse. He learnt to speak Australian at the age of thirteen when he migrated to Melbourne with his family. He finished high school at the International School of Kuala Lumpur in 1985 and spent the next fourteen years working on his résumé and travelling to places such as Israel, Yugoslavia, India, Nepal, Thailand, Greece, Italy, the UK and Tasmania. In 2000 he graduated from RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing course and had his first novel (*Rhino Chasers*) accepted by Allen & Unwin. He travelled through Indonesia for two months researching his second novel *Indo Dreaming* which was published by Allen & Unwin in 2005 and shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Award and the Melbourne Prize for Best Writing.

The Ink Bridge is about candles, friendship and refugees and based partly in Afghanistan. To research this novel, he travelled to Kabul and Bamiyan in Afghanistan in 2009 with the help of an Australia Council grant. After this trip, he worked with teacher David Williams at Diamond Valley College to produce the student anthology *1000 Pencils: from Kinglake to Kabul* (www.1000pencils.com.au) published by Allen & Unwin as *From Kinglake to Kabul* in 2011.

At every opportunity he escapes to write and dream to a mudbrick cottage he built himself on the Far South Coast of NSW.

Neil has three children and lives in Cottles Bridge, Vic.

FRAN KNIGHT

Fran is a retired teacher librarian who loves adolescent fiction. She speaks at conferences, writes teacher notes and has articles in *The Literature Base*, *Magpies*, *ACCESS* and *Viewpoint* and has reviewed since the 1970's for *Magpies* and *Fiction Focus*.

In 2005, her book, *Ngadjuri: Aboriginal peoples of South Australia's Mid North Region* was published, following 20 years of research. Pledger Consulting has published ten books which reflect Fran's reading, with lists of books in subject headings, the latest being *Literature to support the Australian curriculum, Annotated lists of fiction and poetry*.

Fran's contribution to teacher librarianship has been recognised with the South Australian Teacher Librarian of the Year award in 2005, and Honorary Life Membership of SLASA (School Library Association of South Australia) in 2007.

Women in *The Ink Bridge*

In **The Ink Bridge**, some women are presented whose situations are quite different.

- Omed's mother
- Hec's mother
- Hec's tour guide, Arezu (Part Three)
- Omed's sister, Leyli, (Part Three, Chapter 3)

Individual work

Reread the sections of the book which tell the reader about these women characters. Choose one woman who appeals to you.

Fill in the form below, filling it with information about one of the women.

Name of the woman Her place within the community	Description	Family situation
Relationship to main characters	What work does she do?	What does the future hold?

Literature Circle: *The Ink Bridge*

Group members:		
Novel being read	Author	Characters
When is the novel set?	Where is the novel set?	What is the theme of the story?

Reading Schedule

	Chapters to read	Summary
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		
Week 5		
Week 6		

Literature Circle: *The Ink Bridge*

Summary of story and its theme(s)	The reasons my group enjoyed the story