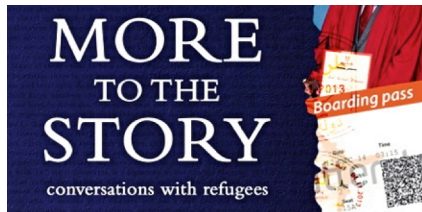




MARGARET RIVER  
• P R E S S •

## TEACHING NOTES



**More to the Story**  
**Rosemary Sayer**  
**ISBN**  
**Themes**  
**Year level 10-12**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Rosemary Sayer's unease with 'the negative, often politicised debate dehumanising refugees and asylum seekers' in Australia led her to seek more information beyond media reports, political speeches and statistics, convinced there was more to the story.

Her interviews, conducted over several years, with former refugees and asylum seekers from Burma, Afghanistan and South Sudan have uncovered powerful, moving stories of persecution, violence and starvation; families separated for a time, or forever; the desperation of thousands in refugee camps, awaiting relocation under humanitarian programs; the perilous journeys by boat of those for whom waiting would have meant death; life in mandatory detention; and the challenges of starting over in Australia. None of them chose to be refugees; all of them chose survival.

Written with empathy and humility, *More to the Story* combines history, commentary and personal memoir with the voices of ordinary Australians who came to this country as refugees and asylum seekers. It is an inspiring account of human resilience that every Australian should read.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rosemary Sayer is a former journalist, a business communications consultant and the biographer of Sir Gordon Wu, chairman of Hopewell Holdings, Hong Kong (*The Man who Turned the Lights On*) and Trevor Eastwood, former chairman and CEO of Wesfarmers Limited (*The CEO, the Chairman and the Board*). She teaches professional writing at Curtin University where she is currently undertaking a PhD in the school of Media, Culture,

Communication and Arts about the importance of refugee stories. She is a board member of not-for-profit organisations, supporting refugees (Edmund Rice Centre) and the arts (writingWA) in Western Australia. She has worked extensively throughout Australia and the Asia Pacific region, and currently lives in Perth with her husband, Terry Grose.

## DETAILED STUDY NOTES

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that by the end of 2014, 59.5 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations – this roughly equals the population of the United Kingdom or Italy (“World at war. UNHCR global trends- forced displacement in 2014”, June 2015, p.2). It can be difficult to visualize the extent of crises that seem so far removed from our lives in Australia and when the statistics and numbers are so large and often confusing. It is hoped the power of the individual stories in *More to the Story* can help demystify the global challenge and help students understand what it means to be a refugee today.

Many people are confused by what the terms refugee, asylum seeker and migrant mean. Much of the commentary in the general media mixes up the language. After the foreword in the book, the author has provided a short list of definitions (Names Matter: Definitions and Terms, p. xiv). It would be helpful to discuss these with students and encourage them to refer to the list throughout their reading.

### AUTHOR STYLE

Rosemary Sayer combines history, commentary and personal memoir with the voices of ordinary Australians who came to this country as refugees and asylum seekers to create an inspiring collection of stories about human resilience.

The book features stories from seven different refugees who now live in Australia and the text is clearly indented to identify the refugee voices for students. Each refugee collaborated in how his or her story was presented in the book. They all had the opportunity to read, make changes and check their stories as well as all their individual quotes.

The author includes detailed history, facts and commentary to help provide an overall context for each refugee story. Rosemary also provides her own personal reactions to each refugee’s circumstances as their story unfolds helping the reader to ask themselves questions about home, identity, trauma and the challenges of starting over in a new country.

### IN THE AUTHOR’S OWN WORDS

According to Rosemary Sayer: ‘I am a story-teller. I was totally disillusioned by many of the negative and dehumanizing stories that were being written about refugees. I wanted to shine a light on individual refugees living in Australia, to give a voice to just a few, and in the process remind everyone that we are all human and we all have a story.’

‘I am not an historian and my goal was not to provide a factual treatise, but I wanted to honour each person’s story by relating the political context in which they had become refugees. I have provided a detailed list of references at the back of the book. I tried to ask the questions and find out what I thought the average person would want to know about

each refugee and their life story. My book aims to inform readers with as much independent information as possible alongside each personal story.'

'It took me over two and half years to research and write the book. It has been a life changing experience for me. The last chapter is about the time I spent in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border. I hope my work helps readers think about what it would be like to walk in the shoes of an asylum seeker or refugee – including the many millions who continue to wait in refugee camps around the world behind fences hoping to be re-settled in a new home. I am in awe of what the refugees in this book overcame and what they have achieved since they came to Australia.'

## **LITERACY: READING, LISTENING, REFLECTION AND VIEWING**

### **Predicting:**

- a. Look at the front cover – why do you think the designer Anne-Marie Reeves has chosen these images?
- b. What do you think is the meaning of the title - More to the Story and does it make you want to read it?
- c. Read the table of contents and see if you can predict the home country of each of the refugees in the book?
- d. Why do you think the author decided to write this book?

### **Reading plan:**

- a. Read chapters together as a class.
- b. Read to each other.
- c. Assign independent reading for homework.
- d. Share with a partner the stories that move or inspire you.

### **Possible discussion topics:**

1. Compare and contrast the experiences of the two refugees from Burma – Paul and Naw Pi. How were they different and why?
2. What were the main differences between living in a refugee camp like Naw Pi and some of the Burmese refugees mentioned in the Katanning chapter and living as a stateless person like Paul?
3. The two South Sudanese refugees, Piok and Akec, both spent many years in refugee camps in Africa. How and why were their experiences different?
4. Two of the refugees from Afghanistan escaped persecution and certain death by coming to Australia as asylum seekers on a boat. Why do you think they wanted to tell their stories?

### **Comprehension strategies to consider:**

- a. Examine the key themes in the book
- b. Identify the different voices presented in the stories
- c. Use the individual stories to teach summarizing skills
- d. Show students how to draw conclusions from each chapter and from the issues raised in the book

**Possible Discussion topics:**

1. Discuss the role of the author and her role as narrator in presenting the book as a series of “conversations”. Does the additional commentary help you to understand the refugee story and context? Why/why not?
2. Writers such as Tim Winton and the CEO of World Vision, Tim Costello say we need to put a human face to the refugee crisis facing the world. Why do you think individual stories are so powerful? How can stories help people understand big global issues?
3. Many of the refugees in the book commented that they wished more people in Australia would take time to talk to new arrivals, volunteer or help refugees in some way. Has reading this book made you think more about this?

**Reader response journal**

Have students keep a reader response journal that records emotional responses to each chapter they read in *More to the Story* as well as questions and discussion topics they wish to raise in class.

**Other suggested support activities for teachers**

Many You Tube videos are easily accessible through Google searches and show what life inside refugee camps is really like, e.g.: Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and Mae La Refugee Camp on the Thai-Burmese border are excellent examples. Consider incorporating these into the study and discussion of the book during the appropriate chapters (Akec, Piok and Behind the fence).

Identify remembrance events such as International Human Rights Day, December 10 every year, which commemorates the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or celebratory events that recognize the contribution of refugees in the Australian community to see if your students can participate in some of the many activities that occur around Australia. Refugee Week is held every year during June and World Refugee Day has been mandated by the United Nations as June 20 every year. These events could provide ‘platforms’ for further discussion.

**Further reading and more information**

The book contains further reading suggestions at the back.

It also has a list of ways you can help or become better informed with websites and information about the plight of refugees.