

QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE REFUGEES
Part 3

The Refugees is a set of short stories involving Vietnamese refugee families and their children. The stories are very insightful. Non-refugees can learn a lot from them.

The questions below cover stories and essays from page 151 to the end.

Someone Else Besides You

1. Who is Mimi? Describe her.
2. Why does Thomas (the narrator) say he wants to go to the bathroom?
3. Who is Sam?
4. Describe Mr. P (Thomas's father). What does he do for a living?
5. What does Thomas do for a living?
6. Why does Sam leave Thomas?
7. What has caused the traffic jam on the freeway?
8. Why does Mr. P believe Sam left Thomas?
9. What is Mr. P's plan to get Sam and Thomas back together?
10. How does Sam surprise them both?
11. What does Mr. P do to Sam's car?
12. Why has Mr. P resolved never to choose a woman for his son? Does this excuse his own behavior toward his own wife?
13. How does Mimi react when Thomas claims Mr. P will cheat on her?
14. Sam suspects that Thomas wrecked her car. Why does she suspect this?
15. What does Thomas offer to do in payment? Does Sam accept?
16. Who do you think is the baby's father?

Fatherland

17. Who is Phuong? Who is Vivien? How are they related?
18. Why does the older Phuong call herself Vivien?
19. Where does Vivien take the family for dinner?

20. What is Phuong's job at the restaurant? How does she behave when guests take her picture? How does she feel?
21. Why did Vivien's mother flee Vietnam? What did Mr. Ly (Phuong's father) do when she fled?
22. How does Mr. Ly treat Vivien? How does he treat Phuong?
23. Why did Mr. Ly give his second family the same names as he gave the first children?
24. Why are Vivien's clothes inappropriate for Mr. Ly's tour?
25. When Mr. Ly says, "We reunite our country through courage and sacrifice," is he sincere? If not, why does he say it?
26. What does Vivien give Phuong on her second last night? What is Phuong's reaction?
27. What secret does Vivien tell Phuong? What is Phuong's reaction?
28. What secret does Phuong tell Vivien at the amusement park? What is Vivien's reaction?
29. What is the main reason Vivien came to Vietnam?
30. What does Vivien reveal to Phuong about how she earns a living?
31. What does Phuong ask Vivien to do? What is Vivien's response?
32. How long did it take Vivien to send her first letter? How long after she gets home does she send her second letter?
33. What is Phuong told to do with the pictures Vivien sends? What does she actually do? Why does she do it?

On Being a Refugee, an American – and a Human Being?

On Being a Refugee is a powerful essay and its eight pages contain enough material for many discussions. If time permits, pick one or more of the following points to discuss.

34. Explain why refugees leave their homes and travel to new lands, where they are often not wanted.
35. Give reasons why refugees are such a political issue in many countries.
36. Discuss the sentence on page 217: "The average American, or European, who feels that refugees or immigrants threaten their jobs does not recognize that the real culprits for their economic plight are the corporate interests and individuals that want to take the profits and are perfectly happy to see the struggling pitted against each other." Is this a valid criticism?
38. The author Viet Thanh Nguyen is a refugee whom America has sheltered, educated, and honored. Do you believe such a person has the right to criticize his adopted homeland, or should he be simply and humbly grateful for his good fortune?