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PEDAGOGICAL GUIDE

From book to film

Amalga

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films

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Intended primarily for high school and college students and teachers.

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Pedagogical Use

This guide offers a didactic sequence and pedagogical tools intended primarily for high school and college teachers of English Language Arts and Literature.

It includes:

- a number of activities designed to prepare students to read *Ru*, which include introducing them to Kim Thúy's life and work, and shedding light on the context of the work's creation and its socio-historical issues;
- a Reading Notebook, containing a number of questions to help students work through the text as they read and gauge their understanding, an activity on targeted extracts and another to study the book thematically;
- a Viewing Notebook, with suggestions about how to critically analyze Charles-Olivier Michaud's film and compare it to the book;
- a Round-Table Discussion Activity to enable students to share their impressions of the film;
- finally, a Writing Workshop "à la manière de Kim Thúy" to get students to write their own recollections while respecting predefined writing constraints.

This set of activities targets the three competencies of the upper secondary English program: "Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts," "Produces texts for personal and social purposes" and "Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn."

At the Cégep level, this guide addresses the following competency: "Appreciating texts from Quebec literature from a variety of periods and genres."

**If you would like to organize a special screening for your classes,
please contact us: info@imminafilms.com**

Presentation of the Film

Creative Team of the Film & distribution

Tinh	Chloé Djandji
Nguyen	Chantal Thuy
Minh	Jean Bui
Quốc	Olivier Dinh
Duc	Xavier Nguyen
Normand Girard	Patrice Robitaille
Lisette Girard	Karine Vanasse
Johanne Girard	Mali Corbeil Gauvreau
Jeannine	Marie-Thérèse Fortin
Director and Script Consultant	Charles-Olivier Michaud
Script and Dialogues	Jacques Davidts
Producers	André Dupuy Marie-Alexandra Forget
Associate Producer	Kim Thúy
Line Producer	Nathalie Tremblay
Director of Photography	Jean-François Lord
Art Director	Marie-Hélène Lavoie
Composer	Michel Corriveau
Sound	Guillaume Daoust Pierre-Jules Audet Hans Laitres
Editor	Claude Palardy
Costume Designer	Rosalie Clermont
Casting	Geneviève Hébert Nathalie Boutrie
Post-Production Supervisor	Érik Daniel
Set Photographer	Drowster
Canadian Distributor and International Sales	Immina Films

About the Director, Charles-Olivier Michaud

Charles-Olivier Michaud is a Quebec screenwriter, producer and director from Saint-Romuald. "During extended stays in Europe and Asia, Charles-Olivier learned to speak 6 languages. Cinema is his greatest passion.

He [notably] wrote and directed the films *Snow & Ashes* and *Anna*, which earned him several awards and nominations around the world. In addition to directing several television series, including *M'entends-tu?*, *Boomerang* and *Prémonitions*, Charles-Olivier has published *Deux Kilomètres Carrés*, a first book of photographic art using the traditional large-format method.

His works, both cinematographic and photographic, are focused on silent transformation. He sees himself as an observer who translates the nature of his characters into images.



His most recent film, *Ru*, is an adaptation of the best-selling book by author Kim Thúy, which had its world premiere in Toronto in September 2023."¹

Film Synopsis

Ru is inspired by the story of the arrival of Kim Thúy (Tinh) in Quebec. After a perilous sea crossing, young Vietnamese Tinh and her family arrive in Quebec, where they begin their new life. Thanks to a warm welcome from everyone, including the family who sponsors them, Tinh slowly adapts to her new reality. Shy and reserved by nature, Tinh will have to draw from deep within herself the determination needed to adapt to her new reality.

¹ <https://agencemva.com/fr/artistes/charles-olivier-michaud/#biographie>

Presentation of the Book

About the Author, Kim Thúy

Kim Thúy was born in Saïgon in 1968. She left Vietnam with the Boat People at the age of 10. She settled in the province of Quebec as a Vietnamese refugee.

Kim Thúy holds two degrees from the Université de Montréal: in linguistics and translation in 1990 and in law in 1993. She has worked as a seamstress, interpreter, lawyer, chef-owner of the *Ru de Nam* restaurant, food columnist for radio and television (*À la di Stasio*, *Des kiwis et des hommes*, etc.), and is now an author.

Ru, her first book, was published by Éditions Libre Expression in October 2009. A bestseller in Quebec and France, the book was sold in over forty countries, been translated into 31 languages and won numerous literary awards, including the Governor General's Award in 2010.

Her body of work has earned her a place on the prestigious shortlist for the Alternative Nobel Prize in 2018, the title of Chevalière de l'Ordre National du Québec in 2015 and Chevalière de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de la République Française in 2023. Her book sales today exceed 850,000 copies.

Despite Kim Thúy's international success, which has made her a star author, she still sets aside time and energy to nurture her commitment as a spokesperson for causes close to her heart, such as autism, immigration and the French language.



Ru Book Summary

In a sequence of memories, like a quilt weaving together pieces of the past, random fragments form Ru's narrative, sometimes dark, sometimes bright, which traces the story of the narrator, 10-year-old Nguyen An Tinh, who has to flee Vietnam's communist regime with her family. Inspired by her own journey as an immigrant, Kim Thúy recounts the courage of uprooting, the harrowing crossing with the Boat People, the long months of uncertainty in a refugee camp in Malaysia, and the adjustment to a new life in Quebec, her adoptive homeland. As she meets new people and resets her bearings, the heroine looks forward to a better future, where despair gives way to the will to survive, and then to live again. In an intimate, feminist tone, the author bears witness to this migratory experience which, despite the suffering of exile, will be the journey towards her rebirth.

Before the Read

Socio-Historical Context of the Book

Geographical location

Vietnam² covers an area of 331,690 km² and had a population of almost 100 million in 2023. It is bordered by China to the north, Laos, Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand to the west, and the South China Sea to the east and south. Its capital is Hanoi.

Political situation

Vietnam's history is dotted with political conflicts, notably brought about by British, American and French colonization. Colonized by France for almost a century, independence was proclaimed in 1945 by Hồ Chí Minh. The Indochina War began the following year, and in 1954, after the battle of Điện Biên Phủ, agreements were signed. Vietnam was then divided in two: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (or North Vietnam), with Hanoi as its capital, and the Republic of Vietnam (or South Vietnam), with Saigon as its capital. The North was communist, while the South was supported by the United States and thereafter the two were at war for some fifteen years (the Vietnam War). Reunification came in 1976, when Saigon was renamed Hồ-Chi-Minh, and the entire country has been communist ever since.



Today, Vietnam is a developing country that is gradually regaining its original peace, with French and English tourists.

² <https://www.bourse-des-voyages.com/guide-voyage/vacances/pays-vietnam-4.html>

Boat People³

This expression refers to people who fled Vietnam, a country with a planned economy and a ban on free trade and freedom of opinion. In 1975, when the Vietnam War ended and communism prevailed, many Vietnamese people associated with the old regime were seen as a threat to communism and had no choice but to flee.

Often overloaded, these boats claimed many victims among the refugees from the sea due to drowning, starvation and cold. Those who managed to escape were stranded on beaches, then spent years in refugee camps in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Malaysia⁴.



³ <https://www.museedelhistoire.ca/cmce/exhibitions/cultur/vietnam/vilea03f.html>

⁴ <https://www.rcinet.ca/patrimoine-asiatique-fr/le-mois-du-patrimoine-asiatique-au-canada/les-refugies-de-la-mer-la-communautaire-vietnamienne>

Migrant Literature

Migrant literature is defined as literature produced by writers who have experienced the immigration process and adaptation to the host country, or who were born of immigrant parents. This literary trend covers all genres: poetry, novels, plays and essays. In Quebec, it's especially since the early '80s that we've been able to read a multitude of voices from elsewhere discussing their experiences, often tinged with the following themes:

- Difficulties of living as an expatriate
- Identity crisis linked to the migratory process, multiple identities
- Wandering, rootlessness, exile
- The pain of breaking with one's cultural and social roots
- Expression of the sometimes-tense relationship between the emigrant and the host society
- Description of expectations linked to immigration
- Transmission of varied experiences reflecting the diversity of cultures around the world: war, extreme poverty, dictatorship, religious mores, etc.
- The space of the novel is plural: stories take place in a wide variety of places.
- Issues are more universal; they are no longer linked to Quebec identity.
- Writing is often highly personal, even autobiographical
- Linguistic roots and hybridization



During the Read

Activity 1 - Comprehension questions throughout the book

1. What does *Ru* mean?

2. What is the "Tet Offensive"? In what socio-political context was the narrator born? (p. 1)

3. In what way is the meeting with her French teacher a turning point for Nguyen An Tinh? (p. 9)

4. How would you describe the education Nguyen's mother passed on to her daughter? (p. 19-20)

5. Although communication remains difficult, the narrator and her family feel welcome in Granby. Why is this? (p. 21-23)

6. How does the juxtaposition of the memory of the Granby flies and that of the Malaysian flies show a change in tone? (p. 25-26)

7. Explain the book's formal structure. How do the various paintings in the book follow on from one another?

8. Describe the impact of communism in Vietnam at the time. (p. 28-30)

9. Why does the narrator say she doesn't like brick walls? (p. 33)

10. Why does the author write that women carry the history of Vietnam on their backs? (p. 39)

11. What is the narrator's vision of inheritance? (p. 39)

12. Why does the narrator tell the story of how her family became Chinese? (p. 43-46)

13. Describe the narrator's relationship with her cousin Sao Mai. (p. 18, 47-52)

14. Why does Nguyen say she is "a shadow"? (p. 51-53, 135)

15. Who is Uncle Two and what does he mean to the narrator? (p. 46-47, 54-58)

16. In your own words, describe the narrator's mother (p. 60-63), then her father (p. 63-66).

17. What is the "American dream" according to the narrator, and how does it relate to the immigrant figure? (p. 71-75)

18. What are the "two solitudes" in Canada, and how do they compare with Vietnam? (p. 79-80)

19. Who are the GIs? (p. 80-81)

20. Who is *Monsieur An*? (p. 84-85)

21. Who is Anh Phi and why does Nguyen consider him a hero? (p. 89-91)

22. What does the head symbolize for the Vietnamese? (p. 95-97)

23. Describe the narrator's relationship with smell. (p. 110-113)

24. What does the "hybrid state" described by the narrator mean? (p. 132, 135-136)



Activity 2 - Recognize aspects of migrant literature in 2 excerpts from the book

- ✓ In the following two excerpts⁵, identify elements that allow us to associate this work with migrant literature.
- ✓ How does the author evoke the relationship between the emigrant and Quebec society? Answer this question using formal elements (literary devices/stylistic devices).

Excerpt 1 (p. 8)

When I saw my first snowbanks through the porthole of the plane at Mirabel Airport, then too I felt naked, if not stripped bare. In spite of my short-sleeved orange pullover purchased at the refugee camp in Malaysia before we left for Canada, in spite of my loose-knit brown sweater made by Vietnamese women, I was naked. Several of us on the plane made a dash for the windows, our mouths agape, our expressions stunned. After such a long time in places without light, a landscape so white, so virginal could only dazzle us, blind us, intoxicate us. I was as surprised by all the unfamiliar sounds that greeted us as by the size of the ice sculpture watching over a table covered with canapés, hors d'oeuvre, tasty morsels, each more colourful than the last. I recognized none of the dishes, yet I knew that this was a place of delights, an idyllic land. I was like my son Henri: unable to talk or to listen, even though I was neither deaf nor mute. I now had no points of reference, no tools to allow me to dream, to project myself into the future, to be able to experience the present, in the present.

Excerpt 2 (p. 132)

Coming home after leaving my cousins at the University of Sherbrooke, I was approached in a gas station by a Vietnamese man who had recognized my vaccination scar. One look at that scar took him back in time and let him see himself as a little boy walking to school along a dirt path with his slate under his arm. One look at that scar and he knew that our eyes had already seen the yellow blossoms on the branches of plum trees at the front door of every house at New Year's. One look at that scar brought back to him the delicious aroma of caramelized fish with pepper, simmering in an earthen pot that sat directly on the coals. One look at that scar and our ears heard again the sound produced by the stem of a young bamboo as it sliced the air then lacerated the skin of our backsides. One look at that scar and our tropical roots, transplanted onto land covered with snow, emerged again. In one second, we had seen our own ambivalence, our hybrid state: half this, half that, nothing at all and everything at once. A single mark on the

⁵ Thúy Kim. Ru, Les Éditions internationales Alain Stanké, collection 10/10, 2014, 139 p.

Activity 3 - Ru, a Garden of Figures of Speech

Definitions

Anaphora: a figure of speech that consists in beginning verses, sentences or sets of sentences and verses with the same word or phrase.

Antithesis: a figure of speech that consists in bringing together two words in a sentence or paragraph that evoke contradictory ideas.

Comparison: a figure of speech based on analogy, in which two elements are compared using a comparative term.

Gradation: a figure of speech involving the use of a series of terms in ascending or descending order.

Metaphor: a figure of speech that establishes a comparison between two realities, without using comparative terms.

Personification: a figure of speech that consists in attributing human traits, feelings or behavior to a non-human reality, be it an animal, an inanimate thing (object, geographical reality, etc.) or an abstraction (idea, feeling, phenomenon, etc.).

✓ Identify the following figures of speech.

1. An antithesis on p. 8: _____
2. A personification on p. 10: _____
3. A gradation on p. 11: _____
4. A gradation on p. 13: _____
5. A comparison on p. 31: _____
6. A metaphor on p. 41: _____
7. An anaphora on p. 96: _____
8. A simile on p. 94: _____

Activity 4 - Chart the book's major themes

- ✓ As you read, identify passages associated with the major themes of the work, in colour in your book and in the following chart. Then compare them with the way these same themes are explored in the film. Are they all present? Are they shown in the same way? Compare your chart with that of a classmate.

Themes to observe:

Escape: Is it positive or negative? Does it bring anxiety or freedom? Is it just a loss of bearings or a passport to a new life?

Mothers: What is their role? How do the personalities of Vietnamese mothers influence the education they pass on to their children?

Friendship, love, ties to others: How do these relationships help shape the narrator's identity? How do her relationships with others and new encounters (friends, lovers, teachers, neighbors, etc.) influence her outlook on life?

Resilience: How do the narrator and her family embody the ability to rebuild, to find happiness again, to bounce back from hardship? How is this shown in the work? Find examples of difficult situations in the work that are nevertheless portrayed with more resilience than revolt.

SEE NEXT PAGE



Themes

Book

Movie

<p>Escape</p>		
<p>Mothers</p>		
<p>Friendship, love, ties to others</p>		
<p>Resilience</p>		

From Book to Screen⁶

Suggested resources

DUFOUR, Marie-Pierre, Émile FOURNIER and Maude PROULX. 2009.

"Séquence d'enseignement et d'apprentissage visant à développer la capacité à planifier et à réaliser la rédaction d'une critique de film au deuxième cycle du secondaire"

Portail pour l'enseignement de la littérature, Québec, Université Laval, 30 p.

https://www.enseignementdufrancais.fse.ulaval.ca/fichiers/site_ens_francais/modules/document_section_fichier/fichier_f4d4eee7d75d_SD_ecriture_critique_de_film.pdf

LACELLE, Nathalie and Christine VALLÉE. 2010.

"Lire le roman et visionner son adaptation filmique"

Québec français, n° 158, p. 56-60.

<https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/61556ac>

QUÉBEC, MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION AND MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DES COMMUNICATIONS. 2001 [1997].

Éducation cinématographique au secondaire : cahier d'introduction pour l'étude de films, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 32 p.



⁶ The following section is inspired by Julie Brunet's work for the Teacher's Guide to the novel *Maria Chapdelaine*: Dossierpedagogique_secondaire_MariaChapdelaine (distributionhnh.com).

Activity 5 - Film fact sheet

- ✓ Before screening the film, work with your students to explore the language of film (framing, editing, shot types, lighting, soundtrack, etc.). You can draw inspiration from the ministerial document entitled *Éducation cinématographique au secondaire : cahier d'introduction pour l'étude de films*.
- ✓ Fill in the film's technical data sheet.

Title : _____ Year : _____ Running time _____

Direction : _____

Production : _____

Scriptwriting : _____

Cast: _____

Cinematography: _____

Art Direction: _____

Editing: _____

Costume Design: _____

Music: _____

Sound: _____

Activity 6 - Critical observations

- ✓ Read the following questions before you see the film. Then write down your impressions as you watch. If necessary, complete the questions once the film has finished, or after a group or team discussion.

Comparative observations of story composition

1. Scenes from the book have been deleted from the film. Give an example. Why do you think they were removed?

2. Scenes missing from the book have been added to the film. Give an example. Why do you think they were added?

3. Were any scenes from the book changed in the film? Give an example. Why do you think they were changed?

4. Generally speaking, do you think the film stayed true to the book? Outline the similarities and differences between the two works?

5. The film opens with a close-up showing two important objects in turn: a photo camera and a pink bracelet. What is the symbolism of these two objects in *Ru's* story?

The characters

6. Would you say the acting is convincing? What makes the characters believable? Do they match the portrait you had of them when you read the book?

7. Chloé Djandji plays the role of Kim Thúy putting a strong emphasis on body language. In which scene in particular did you notice this? How does the way she plays her role accurately reflect the personality of a young Vietnamese woman of the time?

8. Which actor/actress impressed you the most? Why or why not?

The soundtrack

9. Identify a moment in the film in which the sound contributes particularly well to the mood of the film or the emotion of a scene and explain why.

10. Director Charles-Olivier Michaud is said to be "an artist who makes silence speak." Identify one or two scenes in which the absence of dialogue becomes as powerful as words.

11. Do you recognize a song in the film? Which song? What link can be made between the lyrics of this song and the action it supports?

Editing

12. How does the film's montage correspond in part to the fragmentary structure of the book?

13. What do you think is the point of the multiple flashbacks?

Overall assessment

14. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Charles-Olivier Michaud's film?

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

15. How would you rate⁷ the film?

- Masterpiece
- Remarkable
- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Mediocre

⁷ The Mediafilm rating system was created in 1968 by Robert-Claude Bérubé.

Activity 7 - Round tables

- ✓ In sub-groups of 6 students, the teacher leads a discussion on the following questions. Each student can prepare a 2-to-3-minute response to each question. The questions can be given to the students in advance or selected at random at the time of the round-table discussion. Once the first round is over, a discussion period is launched, during which students are invited to comment on their colleagues' contributions or to ask them questions. An evaluation grid is suggested below.

Film viewing experience :

- ✓ Your answers to the questions should illustrate your understanding of the film in a relevant, original and sensitive way.
- ✓ **For question 1 to 4, choose question A or B.**

- 1.** A) Suppose you lived in this film, what role would you like to play? Why or why not?
B) Which of the characters in this film would you have coffee with? To listen to them or to talk to them?

- 2.** A) Identify and comment on a scene from the film that made you think or touched you.
B) What parts of the film stayed in your mind after you'd finished? Why or why not?

<p>3. A) Who would you recommend this film to? Why or why not? B) How is this film emblematic of our times?</p>
<p>4. Would you say you saw this film more with your heart (A) or with your head (B)? A) What emotions did you experience during the viewing? B) What reflections did this film generate on your life and your vision of the world?</p>
<p>5. Did you enjoy the film? Develop your comments by considering some of the following cinematographic elements: adaptation of the novel (screenplay), cast (actors), acting, photo direction (images), soundtrack (music), editing, etc. Did you prefer the book to the film, or vice versa? Why or why not?</p>

6. Does the film correspond to the vision of the story that the novel left in your mind? Explain the similarities and differences between the different media in *Ru* (book/film).

--

7. Identify a scene from the film that particularly moved you and explain why. Did the same passage in the book have the same effect on you? Why or why not?

--

8. *Ru* is a highly poetic book. How do you think this poetry has been transferred to the screen? Give a concrete example, choosing a passage from the book AND a scene from the film that corresponds to it.

--

Suggested evaluation grid for round tables

Name : _____

Criteria	Exceptional	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Uneven	Unsatisfactory
Rigour and depth of purpose Relevant and nuanced interventions demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the film.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4 -3 -2 -1
Richness and originality of reflection The student makes connections with their reality or with that of society and proposes a personal vision informed by that of the author. The interventions confirm a committed vision of the film.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4 -3 -2 -1
Clarity and conciseness of speech The interventions are clear and articulate, the ideas are conveyed with clarity and precision.	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2 -1
Interaction The student listens to their peers and reacts to their words with respect. They communicate positively with them, both through speech and looks. They are present and involved in the exchanges.	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2 -1
Examples Relevant and significant passages from the film are targeted and explained.	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2 -1
Quality of speaking The student expresses themselves in an appropriate level of language. Their speech is fluid and coherent. The code is respected (grammar and syntax).	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2 -1

Round Table / 40

Activity 8 - Kim Thúy-Style Writing Workshop

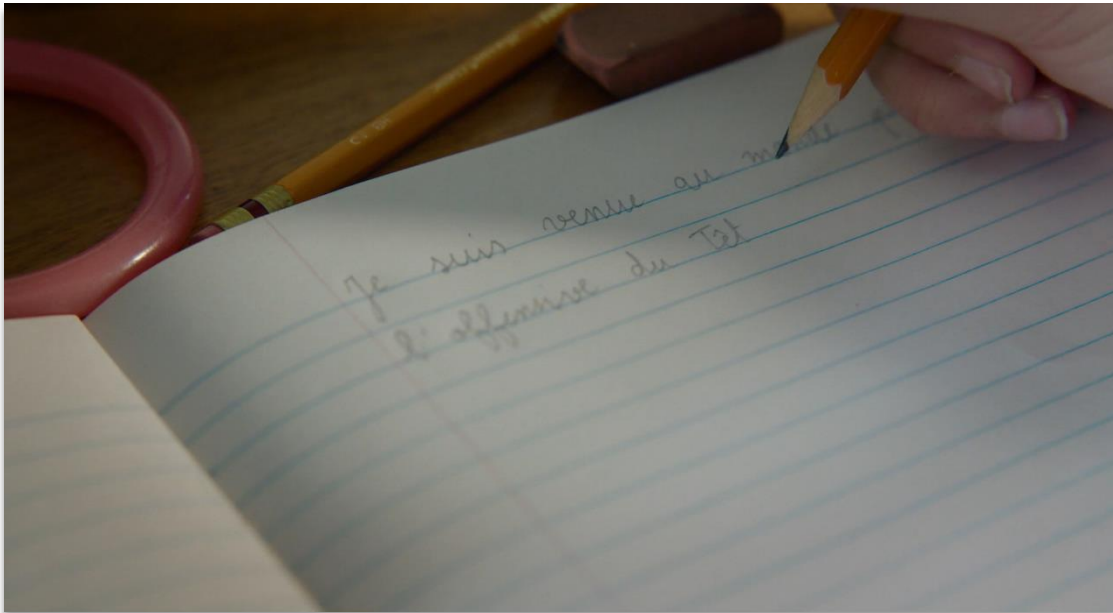
- ✓ In a short paragraph of 250 to 300 words, recount a touching memory from your life (or invent one!). In the style of Kim Thúy, respect the following writing constraints:
- ✓ Begin the story of your memory with an object or a word that has symbolic value for you and give it two different meanings. Make the chosen object or word travel through time or emotions.

E.g., with an object: Candles on a birthday cake (happy memory), set against candles lit during a power cut (worrying memory).

E.g., with a word: The word "boat" associated with a plastic toy you used to move in the water in your bath when you were three, set against the boat you took on your first cruise when you were 18.

- ✓ Include at least three different figures of speech.

Then share your text in teams of four and see together in what order you can link your memories to create a logical or zany sequence.



Mediagraphy

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Dossierpedagogique_secondaire_MariaChapdelaine (distributionhnh.com)

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NFB, 1986. Les Boat People, 10 ans après, 26 min.
https://www.onf.ca/film/les_boat_people_10_ans_apres/

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URRO, Marie-Hélène. 2014. Kim Thúy: From migrant writing to transcultural writing. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies as part of the requirements for the M.A. program in French literature, 100 p.