



## **The People Smuggler by Robin de Crespigny**

### **Unit of Work Written by Laura Gordon**

#### **Synopsis**

At once a non-fiction thriller and a moral maze, this is one man's epic story of trying to find a safe place in the world.

When Ali Al Jenabi flees Saddam Hussein's torture chambers, he is forced to leave his family behind in Iraq. What follows is an incredible international odyssey through the shadow world of fake passports, crowded camps and illegal border crossings, living every day with excruciating uncertainty about what the next will bring.

Through betrayal, triumph, misfortune – even romance and heartbreak – Ali is sustained by his fierce love of freedom and family. Continually pushed to the limits of his endurance, eventually he must confront what he has been forced to become.

With enormous power and insight, *The People Smuggler* tells a story of daily heroism, bringing to life the forces that drive so many people to put their lives in unscrupulous hands. It is an utterly gripping portrait of a man cut loose from the protections of civilisation, attempting to retain his dignity and humanity while taking whatever path he can out of an impossible position.

## Introduction

As an accomplished film-maker, Robin de Crespigny set out to bring to life the story of Ali Al Jenabi. Over three years of researching, talking with Ali, retracing his footsteps in Indonesia and chasing down records of a lengthy trial in Darwin, this text was born. It is highly unusual in its structure and style as it is not a novel, nor a biography, nor a memoir. It is told in first person, through the eyes of this man who became known only as a people smuggler. And yet as readers engage with the terror, cruelty, torture and persecution he endures, they come to realise he is much, much more than just this. Unlike a traditional biography, Robin de Crespigny decided to tell Ali's story through a construct, a voice that is created to immerse readers in his experience. Her film making expertise brings the reader alongside his journey, allowing them to identify with him and his struggle and imagine what they might have done if faced with any of the choices he was forced to make. Her intention is to invite people to develop respect for this man, demonised by this description as 'people smuggler', by recognising his kindness and compassion. By walking in Ali Al Jenabi's shoes, a man with such a strong moral spine, the author intends more than just understanding, she hopes to affect change.

Described on the cover as a "non-fiction thriller and a moral maze, this is one man's epic story of trying to find a safe place in the world", *The People Smuggler* is a text that many believe should be read by every Australian. Exposing the young people in our country to this bleak part of our history may begin to breed the compassion and understanding our country requires to adequately address the refugee crisis we are currently experiencing. It will challenge readers and confront them with the physical violence, mental torture and endless suffering that some people experience. It needs to be treated delicately and the personal circumstances of the students in these classrooms considered. It is a text filled with unusual names of people and places and many dates, but at the core is a story of heroism and compassion and that is essentially what students need to understand. Before you begin, read The Author's Note at the front of the text with your class to establish the context and understand the voice. Abu Ghraib may need some introduction also.

### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: Silent Writes**

Find an image of an asylum seeker boat or 'people smuggler'. One is included as a possible example. Ask students to complete a silent write on this image. They may choose to write from a perspective of an individual, someone on the outside writing a letter to a newspaper or watching the news; the less teacher direction the better. Ask them to write about what they see or how the people in the photo might be feeling. Collect the writing pieces. Repeat this task with exactly the same image at the end of the unit. Then return their original writing piece and ask them to take note of any differences.



Image courtesy of news.com.au

## Timeline

This is intended as a Teacher's Reference as the first Learning Activity is for students to record their own timeline of key events during their first reading of the text.

### Part One: IRAQ 1970 - 1999

- 1970 Ali Al Jenabi, the eldest of the children was born in Diwaniyah, Iraq.
- 1978 Hassan Pilot is arrested for the first time for dissent against Saddam Hussein. Ali's mother challenges the judge to jail all the children. He is freed.
- 1979 Saddam Hussein launches a bloodless coup and overthrows Hassan al-Bakr making himself President, Prime Minister and General Secretary.
- 1980 Iraq declare war on Iran.
- 1981 Ali makes a jibe in the schoolyard about Saddam Hussein. He is called to the principal's office and does not deny it.
- 1981 Hassan Pilot disappears. The family are finally told he is in Section 5 Prison. His mother must appeal directly to Hussein for clemency. She is successful. He has served nine months in prison but is released. Hassan Pilot is unrecognisable and serves seven months in a mental asylum.
- 1982 Khalid, Ali's second brother dies while on Ali's watch. Hassan Pilot is sent back to the army to fight for another seven years.
- 1991 Hassan Pilot, Ali and Ahmad are all caught by Saddam's army and sent to Abu Ghraib. They were severely tortured.
- 1994 Ali Al Jenabi is released from Abu Ghraib. He returns home to his family. Intisar's family have moved away.
- 1994 He creates a fight with his boss at the tailor shop, asks Intisar to promise she will wait for him and flees to Kurdistan. He gets his first job for the resistance.
- 1994 He meets Mohammed.
- 1994 He returns to Baghdad and is picked up by the Secret Police and enlisted in the army. They release him and he runs. He lies to his mother that he has enlisted and secretly works for a tailor Fariq whose house he hides in.
- Ala, Mohammed's friend is picked up and gives Mohammed's name. He is arrested, kept jailed for a month and tortured. Mohammed is murdered.
- Ali flees to Kurdistan asking his brothers to follow. They arrive late and are arrested. They are sentenced to seven years jail. Asad in Abu Ghraib, Basim will join him when he is older. The resistance get Ali's family to join him in Kurdistan. They try to get into Turkey but are held in a refugee camp in Duhok.
- 1996 they try to find enough money to get into Syria. A people smuggler agrees to take them and he changes his mind at the last minute and Ali abuses him. He discovers the smuggler has put their name on a list meaning they cannot get into Syria. Instead they go to Arbil and find a house to rent.
- Abdul-Haqq agrees to smuggle them to Iran, but when they arrive, they cannot go. They return to Arbil. Bombing starts and everyone flees. Umi and the children are accepted into Iran. Ali must remain behind.

- He makes it to Kermanshah where his family are living, but when he arrives they have already left. He is arrested again. Eventually he makes it Qom. He gets in touch with Intisar, but his mother warns him against it and he must leave again. Afrah marries and leaves for Australia.
- He agrees to leave for Turkey. They make it after an arduous journey only to have someone arouse the suspicion of the police. They are arrested and sent back to Iraq. They meet a clever smuggler Farid who helps them back into Iran.
- 14 July 1999 The Jenabi family receive the UN letter denying their application to seek safety Australia.
- 1999 Basim is freed and Ali leaves Iran on a plane for Tehran.

## **Part Two: INDONESIA 1999 – 2003**

- 1999 Ali arrives In Kuala Lumpur then travels to Jakarta via a smuggler
- Ali pays his money to Omeid to travel by boat to Australia, but the boat leaves without him.
- Ali agrees to work for Omeid for the promise that he will take Ali's family to Australia for free.
- Ali decides to work on his own and Malik and Resa join him.
- They send their first boat to Australia. It is smashed on the rocks and all the passengers taken into custody by the authorities.
- Khalid is sent on the boat to Australia. It arrives safely on Ashmore Reef. He is detained in Woomera.
- Ali cuts ties with Malik, Resa, Abud and Thalma. He is takes on employees and is finally debt free.
- The fourth boat arrives in Australia safely.
- Ali marries Eni.
- Eni is pregnant with a baby girl.
- Umi and the children arrive safely in Kuala Lumpur.
- 2000 The fifth boat with Ali's mother and most of his siblings arrives in Australia.
- The Australian Federal Police are spying on Ali.
- The sixth boat leaves. This one with Basim on it.
- Hassan Pilot calls from Iraq. Asad will be freed but they must pay \$US10000 and get him out of Iraq.
- September 2001 The attack on the World Trade Centre occurs.
- 353 people drown on the SIEVX – Abu Quassey's boat
- Ali's boat is turned back to Lombok
- Nagis is born.
- Asad is released.
- Ali gets information that Ahmad is alive and needs to find \$25000 to have him released. His family talks and the deal is cancelled.
- The Weasal gives Ali a Morrocan Passport to get into Thailand. Ali is arrested by Interpol.
- He is jailed in Bangkok in horrendous conditions for seven months.

### **Part Three: AUSTRALIA 2003 - 2012**

- 2003 Ali is deported to Australia.
- The committal hearing in Darwin begins. He is committed to stand trial.
- June 2004 The Trial in The Supreme Court begins.
- 21 September 2004 Justice Mildren sentences Ali to four years with only 21 months left to serve.
- 2006 He is released from jail and instructed to sign papers agreeing to be deported to Iraq. He refuses and applies for a Protection Visa.
- Eni files for divorce.
- 2008 The Minister awards him a Removal Pending Bridging Visa.
- Umi visits Iraq and discovers Intisar has been waiting for Ali. She is not married.
- He is freed from detention and returns to his family.
- Intisar is forbidden to speak to Ali and the Australian government refuse her a tourist visa to visit.
- 2010 Umi and Ahlam travel to Iraq to see Ali's father and visit Intisar. They discover she is being severely punished by her family.
- 2011 A boat filled with asylum seekers smashes into the rocks on Christmas Island.
- 2012 Intisar is married. Ali remains in Australia with a very uncertain future and no access to his daughter in Indonesia.

### **LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**

- Villain or hero?

Discuss the title with the class. What images or concepts does this conjure up with students? Discuss how this description has been demonised and therefore how the title affects students' preconceptions about this man. Divide the page in half with 'villain' on one side and 'hero' on the other. As events occur students can record whether these particular actions make Ali a hero or villain in their eyes.

- Timeline of Ali's life – the highs and lows

Create a graph with the horizontal axis being the key events and the vertical axis being a scale of euphoria to despair. Plot the key events of his life on this chart according to whether they are the greatest or worst moments of his life.

- Map his travel

The maps in the front of the text could be enlarged and photocopied and used to track the journey he goes on. They may use their own timeline for this, or the one attached to have a sense of where he must flee to and how many times he is returned to Iraq.

### **Individual Chapters**

#### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: Chapter snapshot: Timeline, symbols and adjectives.**

- As students read the text for the first time, encourage them to record the key events at the end of each chapter. This makes for an easy and useful summary and allows them to organise the events effectively. Ask them to be very selective rather than record every event.
- Ask students to draw one symbol that appropriately sums up the atmosphere or narrative or character development for that chapter. For example; The Big Dipper or the beating of his unborn babies heart.
- Robin de Crespigny is the author and uses a construct to voice the story of Ali Al Jenabi. Readers are invited to stand in the shoes of this man and consider all that he experienced. This enables readers to still see him quite objectively, especially in the shadow of the title. Create a profile of Ali as he develops throughout the text by selecting an adjective for him at the conclusion of each chapter.
- The Reading Guide that follows could be used as students read the text for the first time.

## READING GUIDE

### Chapter 1: Hassan Pilot

1. Who is the chapter named after? How did this name come about?
2. Find four key quotes that show how Ali felt toward his father.
3. List three things that surprised you about Iraq in the 1970's.
4. Is Ali justified in feeling as though he betrayed his father?
5. Describe how you felt reading the section when Ali's mother must meet Saddam and they get news of his father's release.
6. What does Ali mean when he says "they can't hurt me anymore"?

### Chapter 2: The kindness of strangers

1. Read page 30. Look at the cover of the book. Has this passage changed your original impression based on that image? How and why?
2. Why does Akram help Ali?
3. What is particularly cruel about Yasin's death? How does this contribute to the horror of Abu Ghraib?
4. How do you feel about the prank they play on Nabil?
5. How does the shame he feels when his mother discovers him in the bathroom save him?
6. Retell Akram's story. How does this exemplify the cruelty of Saddam Hussein's regime?

### Chapter 3: In a good cause

1. What do the roosters symbolise?
2. What is your reaction to the guard's behaviour in the tea shop? What does this reveal about Ali?
3. What is the driving force behind his decision to flee to Kurdistan?
4. What does he mean on page 64 when he says "I pray to God I have not just ruined my life"?
5. What appeal does the resistance have for Ali? Does it fulfil his expectations?
6. How does the author create an ominous feel without giving anything away?

### Chapter 4: Sleeping with the dead

1. Does Ali do the right thing by asking his brothers to come to him? Should he have stayed and waited for them?
2. Imagine how Ali's mother feels now? What might she have said to Ali on the phone?
3. "It has become a tragedy of gigantic proportions" (p101). What does Ali mean by this?
4. What has surprised you about Ali's story up to this point? What is the greatest injustice he has experienced so far?
5. Look at the map in the front of the text to see where they have travelled and where they are trying to escape from.
6. What do his Uncle's actions reveal about Iraqi family values?
7. How do you feel toward the smuggler who changes his mind and Ali's response to this disappointment?

8. What does the analogy 'the tiger and the chicken' mean on page 108?

#### Chapter 5: Hejira

1. Why is it so hard for them to consider fleeing to Iran?
2. Why was the arrival of a coffin with three bags of sand so unfair for the family to receive?
3. What does the anecdote about Umi on page 110 reveal about her strength, but also about the regime they live under?
4. What is so shocking about this act of betrayal?
5. Despite having their money stolen, their trust betrayed, losing their house, they return to Arbil full of hope. Why? How does this make us view Ali?
6. What are three clever decisions Ali makes to save his family?
7. Finally they experience the kindness of human nature. Who helps them, how and why do they do this?
8. What is the final act of utter cruelty that befalls Ali? Do you agree with his mother?

#### Chapter 6: Clutching at straws

1. The simple error of not bringing warm clothes reveals just how naïve these men were. It is the first of many miracles they survive. Do you think Ali's survival is due to luck or sheer will?
2. What does it say about his life so far, when he considers they may have given them tea to purposefully cause pain? Do you think this was the intention?
3. Describe your reaction to the man in Turkey who costs them their freedom.
4. On page 135 Ali says; "I should be grateful". Should he?
5. Why does Ali say he "knows the price of blame"? What does the expression 'salve the pain' mean? Why doesn't Ali join Mustafa in drinking?
6. What are the adjectives Ali uses to describe Farid? What feeling do you have about him?
7. What is most surprising about the bus journey with Farid?
8. How is Australia described? What is the process of getting there? Where are the flaws in this?
9. Why is it that Ali hates goodbyes so much?

## **PART TWO: INDONESIA 1999 – 2003**

### Chapter 7: Seize the Day

1. What surprises you about Ali's journey from Iraq to Indonesia?
2. Find a quote that accurately sums up the injustice of the boat leaving without them.
3. Should Ali work for Omeid? What are the pros and cons? Why is it so hard for him to make a decision and why is this decision so significant?
4. Why does Ali begin to run his own business? Is it wise?
5. Why is his advice to these passengers so significant?

### Chapter 8: My Own Master

1. How does he feel about being in control? Is he good at this job?
2. What aspects of his personality make him good at this? What aspects might make him not suitable for smuggling people into Australia?
3. Who does he meet and what does this meeting reveal about Ali's friends?
4. Abud comes on board the operation as well. What can he offer?
5. What is significant about Ali's decision to let the boat go?
6. Why does Ali "feel (his) blood running cold" on page 194? List all of the complications of this disaster.
7. Are you surprised at Resa's behaviour? What warning signs were there?
8. How does Ali make sense of the way these refugees behaved on the boat?

### Chapter 9: The cards we are dealt

1. What does his ride on the Big Dipper at the theme park symbolise?
2. Describe the scene of Francesca and Ali driving the streets of Jakarta collecting the Iraqi's?
3. How do you feel about Zaqi's betrayal?
4. How do you think Ali keeps going with the constant threat of betrayal from those he is trying to help?
5. Find five quotes to describe Wayan and the way he helps Ali?
6. Is it pure coincidence that in times of desperation Ali seems to find someone to help him? How else can you explain this?
7. Why is this boat making safely to Australia bittersweet for Ali?

### Chapter 10: Unspoken Bonds

1. Why is Ali's warning futile?
2. What do we learn about the plight of these people when he says; "To even enquire about this journey means that nothing could be more terrible than what they are running away from?"
3. Describe the injustice of the police releasing the extra fifteen people as they were departing from the beach.
4. Why does Abud's betrayal hit Ali badly?
5. What does he mean when on page 226 Ali says "I wonder how he could be so cavalier with such precious cargo"? Why does this stand out to Ali?
6. What does his promise to Eni mean about his past?

### Chapter 11: Two Families

1. Why does Ali keep risking his life and safety for others?
2. Describe what those two families might have been feeling at each step of this horrific journey since being detained.
3. What is the most surprising thing Ali has done up to this point? What is the most dangerous? What is the most compassionate?
4. What makes Ali cry tears of joy at his wedding?
5. What makes Ali as sad as he is joyful at the reunion of his family?
6. Select one image that symbolises the happiness and freedom they now have.
7. What does 'panacea' mean?

### Chapter 12: Staring at the Horizon

1. Why doesn't Ali get on the boat with his family? Is this the biggest sacrifice he has made so far?
2. This is everything he has worked for but he is terribly distressed. Why is it so hard to say goodbye this time?
3. Imagine the devastation Ali feels as he thinks his family has drowned. Write a brief passage describing his despair.

### Chapter 13: The Tide Turns

1. What is your response to the fact the AFP are spying on Ali despite the fact people smuggling was not made a crime in Indonesia until 2010.
2. How do you feel when Ali gets ripped off by Mushbah?
3. Why is there so much detail about the work they do to the boat?
4. Explain the way the people smuggling operation works in Indonesia.
5. Why do Australia have little chance of stopping it?
6. What is the significance of Ali buying a house?
7. What does it mean to 'demonise asylum seekers'?
8. Choose the most significant quote about people who flee to Australia by boat.
9. What is Ali's comment on the 'children overboard scandal'?
10. Why does he call his brother Asad his father's child? Why is he hurting again?

### Chapter 14: The Moroccan Passport

1. Draw a concept map of the emotions Ali goes through in this chapter.

2. How appropriate is the Weasal's nickname and why?
3. List the terrible conditions of the Bangkok jail.
4. Does anything surprise you about the Australian authorities?
5. What is the irony at the end of this section?

## **PART THREE: AUSTRALIA 2003-2012**

### **Chapter 15: A Dangerous Man**

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter?
2. Why is the treatment in Australia worse than Abu Ghraib?
3. Is denying his identity a smart decision?
4. What has happened to his family? How does he feel about the UN process?
5. Why does Ali believe John Howard is more of a criminal than himself?  
How does he justify this?
6. What is the devastating news his mother brings home from Iraq?
7. How does the evidence presented in the Committal Hearing work against the prosecution?
8. What is the injustice about the way the Weasal is treated?
9. How does Ali feel when Saddam is finally caught?

### **Chapter 16: Making a Case**

1. What does the football analogy suggest about Ali's time in Australia?
2. What is the strategy of Jon and Greg. How does their approach affect Ali's mental state?
3. What is the cruelty about not being allowed to do anything other than lay on a bed and smoke cigarettes?
4. Why do his lawyers try and make a deal? What is on their side?
5. What does the Crown's investigation reveal about the notion of 'queue jumping'? How does this challenge some of the rhetoric of politicians in the current political climate?
6. Why does the judge compare Ali to Oskar Schindler? Is this a compliment?
7. What does the sentence say about his offences?
8. If smuggling is the wrong word for his crimes, what should it be called?
9. Is his hope of seeing Nagis before her fifth birthday reasonable?

### **Chapter 17: Asylum**

1. The cruelty of these prison guards is different. How does their treatment differ to previous jails he has been in?
2. What shocks Ali in this chapter?
3. How long has it been since he has seen his family? How does he try and protect himself from further disappointment?
4. How does he use food as a means of mental survival?
5. Why is detention "more terrible than jail"?
6. "They kill you not by torture or execution, but by hopelessness and despair". How does it feel to read about this happening in our own country?

### **Chapter 18: An Egregious Failure**

1. What does the word 'egregious' mean?
2. How must Ali feel when he discovers that Kate Watson's report recommended he receive a permanent visa over a year ago, but that the government suppressed this?
3. Why do all of these people fight for Ali?

4. What is ludicrous about the money the government have spent on this case?
5. Are you surprised Intisar has waited for Ali all this time?
6. What is significant about Faris' story?
7. Choose one word to sum up this reunion.

#### Chapter 19: Romeo and Juliet

1. What makes life so difficult on this visa? Do the government do this on purpose?
2. Explain the quote "The rosy glow of liberty begins to dim and I realise I am back on the treadmill of endurance." (p341)
3. What immense pleasure does he gain from having a heart attack?
4. Describe the horror they discover when they visit Intisar?
5. Why do you think Chris Evans makes that decision?
6. How does Ali take the final blow? What does his vow say about him as a man?

#### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: Three parts – One world – One man.**

Group Task: Divide the class into three groups, one for each section of the text. Invite them to create a presentation that reflects the key events, character development, symbols, characters and quotes. They need to rely on imagery to support this exploration and the presentation could take the form of a traditional full wall display, one wall per section, or they could use programs like Glogster to present to the class.

## CHARACTERS

### **Ali Al Jenabi**

Described by Justice Mildren who finally sentences Ali in Australia as “the Oskar Schindler of Asia”, he is the first ‘people smuggler’ tried by the Australian Courts under the new harsher sentences. He is painted by the Australian Government as a dangerous criminal and associated with those people who are described as “absolute scum of the earth...the vilest form of human life who should rot in hell” (p347). And yet, this could not be further from the truth. As the eldest son born into Iraq before the horrific Saddam Hussein regime began, he had a privileged childhood. It was certainly one that was filled with the love of family, the admiration of his father, and the joy of his siblings.

This golden life is quickly taken when Hassan Pilot is arrested and taken to prison. The cruelty his father endures affects their family irrevocably and Ali must begin to provide for his mother and siblings, no matter what the cost. When he finds himself in Abu Ghraib, it is not his own safety that concerns him, it is the safety of his beloved brother Ahmad. Subjected to torture, cruelty and unthinkable degradation at the hands of his captors, he maintains a strength in his mind that enables him to survive. It is through sheer will, some luck and desperate hope that enable him to survive all that he faces in the years that follow. His father’s advice to never look back as you need every bit of energy to stay in the moment and strive forward into the future sustains him. Ali is betrayed repeatedly by those he has reason to trust, and some he is foolish enough to give a chance to. And yet he never blames; he just moves on trying to solve the next problem facing him. He has to witness the torture, misery and fear of those he loves. He remains at the whim of those in power, corrupt or not, rather than be given any choice about the life he might want to lead. Ali resists and his persistence to have a better life - a safe life - is indefatigable. He is determination personified. Especially when it comes to the pursuit of his life-long love, Intisar.

The promise Indonesia holds for him is empty as once again Ali’s fate is at the hands of those with the lowest moral code. He pays a terrible price. The life he finds in Indonesia takes him to the pits of despair and the heights of the true love he finds in the birth of his daughter. He is betrayed, he is taken advantage of, abused, threatened, lied to and is stolen from. But he also takes charge of his life and begins to make decisions that he has some control over. And he helps so many people. After all that he has experienced he is absolutely justified in doing whatever it takes to ensure a safe passage for himself and his family to Australia, and yet he doesn’t.

Engaging in the operation of people smuggling, puts him in trouble with the law in a way he had never experienced. The government of Australia may not torture people the way they do in Abu Ghraib, but his years served in detention prove that their cruelty is as unforgiving. Ali is a survivor, but by the end of this text, haunted by the ghost of his brother, heartbroken over the absence of his daughter and tormented by the treatment of Intisar, he is only barely holding up.

He promises to “go on doing time”, but with no end in sight, this is extremely difficult, even for someone as tenacious as Ali Al Jenabi.

### **LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**

The worst of the worst: In pairs make a list of the terrible things Ali endures throughout the book. As a class reduce this into a shortlist of twenty key moments. As individuals they must rank the terrible things in order from worst to least worst. Write each moment on an A4 sheet and give it to a student. The class now has to order them into the order of worst to least worst.

E.g.: Watches his brother Ahmad be tortured and have fingers chopped off  
Watches the boat leave for Australia without him on board  
Discovers Intisar is being beaten by her brother  
Is deported from Turkey because one man gets drunk and gets in a fight.  
Discovers the first boat that cost \$35,000US is smashed on the rocks  
Is told Mohammad is dead.  
Is released from jail in Australia and put into detention.  
Are denied access to Syria because of a few angry words.  
Blamed by his father for the death of his brother Khalid.  
Intisar is refused a tourist visa to come to Australia.

### **Donut: Choices**

Arrange the students into two concentric circles. They may be seated or standing. The inside circle have to support the choice Ali made and the outside circle have to consider what other options he had. Each student is given one moment within the text when he has to make a hard choice; e.g. put himself at risk of being caught by the authorities, or wait for his brother's to arrive; marry Eni or wait for Intisar; work for Omeid etc. At the end of this task, students need to select one of the choices he makes in the text and reflect on how they would respond if faced with that scenario. Students can then write a piece detailing what would they do.

## **Pictures of Me:**

It is likely that the only two photographs Ali still has are those that appear in this text. Imagine he had more at his disposal. Choose five of key people he met in his life and write a passage describing what he learnt from his time with these people. You may ask students to find photographs to support these reflections, or draw their own image to support each one.

## **Hassan Pilot Al Jenabi**

*“He was a man with indomitable spirit. Once a proud and dignified man. Once the centre of my universe. He was full of fire yet tender, outraged but calm. For the first ten years of my life I loved everything about him.” (p3)*

This is the man Ali introduces us to. A father that loved passionately and who wasn't afraid to show this love to his children. And while Ali feels every bit of that love, it is the relationship between his sister and, for a long time Hassan Pilot's only daughter, Afrah, that is the truly special bond in the family. He not only carries them on his shoulders through the streets of Iraq to eat kebabs, but he would tell fantastic stories and take his daughter to the cinema, “oblivious to the outrage (he) was causing” (p5). Hassan Pilot was a man who was “utterly fearless” (5) and this in some ways caused his downfall. He joined the army and trained diligently, but eventually he is captured and taken to Prison 5 where is never quite the same again. He is released only to be taken to a mental institution for seven months. He returns to his family but “it was as if the substance had gone out of him and he was imitating what he remembered of himself for our benefit” (p21).

After Ali's younger brother drowned in a well, Hassan Pilot crumbled. His mental health was tenuous and he turned to drinking to rid the memories and the guilt from his broken mind. He became violent and then they sent him back to the front for seven years of brutal warfare. He endures the worst prison in the world for many years and every bit of torture they throw at him, including the physical punishment of his sons. Ali tells us how this time in Abu Ghraib, a time he blames himself for, “they broke him as a man and they fractured his mind, but somewhere inside that spirit remained intact.” (p6). Hassan Pilot never leaves Iraq and even at the end of the book, when the rest of the family that survived are living in Australia, and Hassan Pilot is very ill, he remains in his home country, still protecting his sons and still seeking the help of Ali. “Nine months of torture in jail would be enough to send most people mad, but for my father this was followed by seven months in the mental asylum and then seven years fighting a war he profoundly disagreed with. He never had a chance of restoring his mind.” (p23)

- Can Hassan Pilot be held accountable for any of his actions?
- How does he endure his time in Abu Ghraib when he has already experienced all of this horror before he has already arrived?
- Is it fair for Hassan Pilot to blame Ali for the death of Khalid?

- If you were Chris Evans, the Immigration Minister, would you accept Hassan Pilot's application to come to Australia?
- Why do you think he never leaves Iraq?

### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: A bag of magic**

Divide the students into small groups and give each group a bag of ordinary items they can use for props. These might include red fabric, a rope, a large sheet, a bowl, a wooden frame, a blank sheet of paper, a stick etc. Given that Hassan Pilot's story comes to us in a series of snapshots, ask students to create five frozen pictures that sum up the life of Hassan Pilot. They may choose any parts of his life and use the objects in any way they see fit. One quote might accompany each frozen picture.

### **Umi Al Jenabi**

*"If you are going to take my husband, take all the children too...I can't feed them without him so take them all." (p11)*

*"As time passed I came to see my mother not as a tyrant, but as a woman so bold she would do anything to protect her family." (p13)*

*"My mother could be very appealing with fiery determination." (p14)*

*"She started to cry which I couldn't bear. No matter how angry she made me, she was my lynchpin to life. I was full of love and hate for her, but by anybody's standards we were exceptionally close." (p18)*

*"So it looks like we might be saved by my mother's maddening refusal to take off her costume." (p120)*

*"One thing you can trust about my mother is that the survival of her children will always come first." (p121)*

Ali's mother is a constant in his life. She never wavers in her love for him and remains steadfast, prioritising the protection of her family over everything. She is a proud Arabic woman and her insistence to always wear her traditional dress at times puts them in great jeopardy, while in other times is the only thing that saves them. She loves Ali dearly, and expects the very best of him as the eldest son. When Hassan Pilot is taken away it is Ali's job to sell at the markets and his mother will not accept his mediocre attempt. His mother's approval is at the core of Ali as a man and so his life is dedicated to ensuring the survival and protection of his family as his father is unable to for most his life. These children of Hassan Pilot become the children of Ali; they are his responsibility. Umi is strong, brave, resourceful and persistent. Even as an older woman, safe in Australia, she returns to Iraq to visit Hassan Pilot, now old and sick. Umi is a fierce protector of her family, held for ransom by the regime of Saddam Hussein. She has no choice but to get on a leaky fishing boat and travel through perilous waters to the safe haven of Australia. Finally, she is granted the protection she is deserving of.

## **LEARNING ACTIVITY: 'HOT SEAT'**

Along with the other key characters from the text, create a Hot Seat scenario for each. Divide the class into groups and allocate one character per group. The students must then write three fat questions for each of the other characters in the class, and prepare their representative to answer the fat questions the other groups will pose them. A fat question is something that requires a large, detailed and complex answer rather than a 'skinny' yes or no answer. These might include 'what if' questions, or include words like justify, explain, consider, why and reflect to challenge those on the hot seat to carefully consider the perspective of the character they are representing. Each student takes the 'hot seat' and answers the questions of each group as authentically as they can for the character they are representing.

### **Ahmad Al Jenabi**

*"I look at Ahmad, my sweet, gentle brother. I was his protector when my father was no longer able. Together we worked the markets to support the family. Together we laughed and made the best of things. He is my best friend, my brother, my first love." (p28)*

*"He of all of us is so ill-equipped to face the slow and painful death they are about to inflict on him, and I cannot save him. I can't even see him one last time." (p29)*

The capture and torture of Ahmad, Ali's closest brother cuts him deeply. It fuels his fury and breaks his heart. It is the ultimate act of cruelty for Ali, to witness the torture and physical abuse of his younger brother. This particularly stings as Ali incorrectly blames himself for the three of them being captured and taken to Abu Ghraib. His schoolyard taunts attracted the wrong kind of attention and his youth prevented him from understanding enough to deny the words that came from his mouth. As a result they are all under suspicion and despite not having done anything to resist the regime of Saddam Hussein, they are arrested and taken to the worst prison in the world. And Ahmad is the victim. Even many years later when Ali has made part of a life for himself, he seeks out news of his brother. He has never given up hope that perhaps he was freed, or still incarcerated but alive. When he discovers that there may be a glimmer of hope, he is arrested in Kuala Lumpur and any chance of sending the money they require is lost forever.

### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: Time lost – creative writing**

Write the story of what happens to Ahmad after he is separated from Ali. Students may decide whatever they believe the fate of Ahmad to be. They may need to research some other stories of prisoners in Abu Ghraib to have a sense of what is a credible and authentic version of events. Consider other people he may have met, strategies he used to survive, torture he may have endured and whether he ever sees his father in the prison.

### **Asad, Basim, Afrah, Khalid, Ahlam, Inas, Hashim**

*“When he gets off the plane I realise Khalid is no longer a boy but a man, who has been shouldering the burden of supporting the family.” (p215)*

These were the other siblings, much younger than Ali that became his responsibility the minute his father was taken away. They remain his responsibility for the rest of his life, more like children than brothers and sisters to Ali. As children, before Hassan Pilot was taken, they were great friends, and doted on by loving parents. Afrah in particular, the only girl for a long time, has a gentle touch that soothed everyone, even the increasingly violent Hassan Pilot. These children were left with only their mother to care and provide for them for many years, until finally Ali arranged for them to leave Iraq. Asad and Basim spend time in jail, desperate to flee to safety with their brother. But they leave too late and the police find them and arrest them immediately. It is a consequence Ali struggles with for many years.

These children spent many years as refugees, fleeing terror, surviving on basic essentials. The times they lived in refugee camps, where there was no school, or play or friends, they became withdrawn. But eventually, Ali ensures their safe passage to Australia and they are deemed genuine refugees. Afrah leaves the family much earlier, having married and left for Australia. They love their brother dearly, and as Ahlam says as he finally walks into their home in Australia; “He is my brother, but he is more like a father to me” (p338). Ali has given up his own freedom and safety to ensure his family have an opportunity of a better life. It is an enormous price to pay, but one he does without question.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY: A Witness for the Defence

Select one or two of the siblings to offer their defence of Ali at his trial. It is reasonable to consider that they may have been interviewed and a transcript of their story could have been offered to the judge to consider especially when sentencing. This might be Afrah and her description of their life in Iraq. It might be Asad and his own experience of Abu Ghraib and the lengths Ali went to to ensure his safe passage from Iraq to Australia. Or it might even be Hashim, and this could be a series of pictures he may have drawn to explain his relationship with Ali.

Intisar

*"She let her hair hang free and continued to laugh without inhibition. I had never seen a girl like this. I felt a rare surge of happiness and I wanted to hold her hand and laugh too. But no such thing was possible." (p56)*

*"I will wait", she says softly. "I love you too." (p64)*

*"There were black bruises all over her white skin, on her back, behind her knees, one her arms and head. She begged me to take her with me. She is beautiful, Ali. But if she doesn't marry soon they will kill her." (p348)*

*"Intisar is married." (p351)*

Intisar's story is in some ways the most tragic of all in the text. She finds love but is never able to experience what it is like to be loved by someone else. As a beautiful teenager, lacking inhibition and full of life, she attracts the attention of the much older Ali. She agrees to have secret relationship with him in the belief that soon it will become something much more. Throughout many uncertain years, Intisar remains an honest, hard-working daughter, yet because she keeps a promise she made to Ali such a long time ago, she is the scourge of her family. Her loyalty is her demise. She is beaten, tortured, threatened and eventually married against her will because her culture does not allow for her to remain unmarried. Despite being a teacher and achieving impressive results for her studies, her entire worth is attributed to her marital status. And because Ali cannot stay in the country she is in, nor access legal relocation to Australia for her she is punished. Eventually her brother has her married off and Ali's heart is broken.

## **Romeo and Juliet or not?**

This is the story that Ali chooses for their plight. Students need to write why this is a good choice, what are the common themes, how do their lives mirror Shakespeare's characters. Then they need to choose another story that might be more appropriate for Intisar and Ali. It may be a fable or fairy tale or movie or contemporary story.

## **Mohammed**

*"I couldn't be happier. I never knew him well but I like him. He is a gentleman with street smarts, a good-humoured liberal thinker with savior faire."* (p67)

*"I try to hide my disappointment. I had imagined us as comrades fighting for the cause."* (p68)

Mohammed and Ali meet in the north, where Ali has gone in search of supporting the cause. He befriends Mohammed and the short time they spend together reminds him of his brother so intensely that he is desperately disappointed when Mohammed announces he is leaving for Germany. They spend all of their time together, going out for meals, wandering the streets, sitting in teashops. But mostly they talk. This is a time of healing for Ali. He has no one to look after other than himself and he feels relatively safe and out of danger. He spends time with Mohammad as though he is his brother and the cruelty of Abu Ghraib begins to fade. When they meet some extremely conservative Iraqi men, instead of challenging the ideals that Mohammad does not agree with, he farts while playing cards. This is a huge insult and one that could cause him serious repercussions. But instead he makes a joke of it and they loosen up. Mohammad is a man who releases the tension in people and brings out the best in those around him. He trusts and helps when he can. And unfortunately it is this which causes his demise. The death of Mohammad devastates Ali completely. The capture, the torture and finally his murder seem so completely unjustified for the man Mohammad is. Ali never forgets his friend.

## **Malik**

*"I share with Malik, a good-humoured, friendly guy in his mid-twenties who came on the same plane."* (p152)

Malik is a likeable, easy-going Iraqi man that Ai meets on his arrival in Indonesia. They are both denied passage on the boat with Omeid and Malik jumps to the support of his friend when Ali chases Omeid and pummels him. Malik is equally as outraged, but less passionate than Ali. He is happy to go along with whatever plans Ali has. He agrees to work for Omeid, but the reasons for his own association are less clear. Perhaps it is a way to fill the time and fill his pockets. He seems happy enough sunning himself by the pool, going to clubs and spending time with women. Ali disapproves of Malik's behaviour, but relies on his trustworthy demeanour to venture away from Omeid and work on their own. Eventually he cuts ties with Malik, as he does with all his other partners and takes control of the operation on his own. He is tired of being let-down, betrayed

and cannot afford to lose any more money at the hands of other people's decision making.

### **Omeid, Abu Quassey, Zaqi, Resa**

*"I could have been in Australia by now if Omeid had been a decent human being."  
(p159)*

*"...we meet Abu Quassey. He is tougher than Omeid and just as unlikeable." (p159)*

*"I presumed Resa was well endowed for the job, but now I begin to question if perhaps he hadn't made more of himself than he actually is." (p188)*

The old adage 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' most certainly applies to Ali and his involvement in people smuggling. Once that boat departs from the coast of Indonesia, Ali and Malik are left stranded, penniless and desperate on the beach. Ali's fury leads to a severe beating of Omeid, the despicable smuggler who manipulates people, relying on their fear and vulnerability to make money out of them, but with little regard for their humanity. Malik joins Ali in punishing Omeid and together they force him to repay their fee. Resa relays Omeid's message to the men that he would like Ali and Malik to work for him. Infuriated and insulted Ali hangs up the phone, but Omeid's promise that he will help Ali earn the money to get his family to Australia, he has little choice but to agree. He despises the operation, the lack of morality, the complete disregard for the trauma these people have already been through, but on the run from the law and destitute he has few other options. He decides that "by working from the inside (he) may be able to get even with Omeid" (p161). Resa's moral code is only marginally higher than Omeid's and leaves Ali to starve in Jakarta. Furthermore, his choice to lie about the translation from Eni, the beautiful Indonesian girl they meet is juvenile and selfish.

Abu Quassey and Zaqi are more despicable than Omeid. Eventually Ali is able to sever ties from these criminals, but in desperation he seeks out the help of Zaqi. And this is the opportunity Zaqi uses to get his ultimate revenge. These men are unscrupulous, vindictive and cause the death of many terrified refugees. They offer a service these people are in desperate need of, but do so without any of the compassion or justice that seems to signify Ali's operation. Omeid uses people in a human auction, only allowing those with the highest price access to the service he promises to everyone who can pay. Zaqi is happy to betray his promise to help Ali and instead takes the \$10,000US without any intention of assisting Ali's clients in any way. Abu Quassey sent a dilapidated, overcrowded boat into treacherous waters. 353 people drowned, of these 146 were children and 142 were women. It was preventable, but his greed caused the death of these innocent, traumatised people. Ali grieves for them, believing if he had have known the state of the boat he would have convinced more to travel with him.

## **LEARNING ACTIVITY: The Crown Prosecution**

Build a case against any one of these men. Students can choose how they will present the evidence against them. This may take the form of witness statements, media reports, Australian Navy reports, or interviews on the stand. They need to present an opening or closing address to the court that summarises the charges and the evidence used to pursue these charges.

### **Eni and Nagis**

*"There are no words to describe the happiness I feel, or the outpouring of love and need to protect her I experience." (p276)*

*"I am besotted. I am love-struck. I am so drunk with her I am on another planet. She has tiny perfect hands like her mother's, the softest smooth brown skin, and an intoxicatingly sweet baby smell. Her very existence wipes away the misery of my life and I am reborn with the bliss of Nagis."*

Ali meets Eni unexpectedly, in a club in Jakarta. Their eyes meet and although he is reluctant to talk to her, and cannot converse in Indonesian, he begins a conversation through Resa and Francesa. Resa lies about Eni wanting to see Ali again and so he decides that he will pursue this friendship without the help of a translator. So through a significant language barrier they speak on the phone for hours. The relationship runs hot and cold as Ali doesn't understand Eni's constant early departure. When the explanation finally comes, and with some more time spent together, Ali agrees to marry her. The ceremony fills them both with emotion so raw, for beauty has become a rare pleasure in Ali's life. They immediately fall pregnant, but Eni miscarries soon after. She falls pregnant again and this time she gives birth to a baby girl, Nagis. Ali's family has arrived safely in Kuala Lumpur and he has returned with them to Indonesia. He has his family of his own, whom he loves and adores, and he has to safely farewell his mother and siblings to Australia. It is a brief time when he feels as though he can truly love and protect the family he has made before it is all taken from him. When he is arrested, Nagis is only three months old. He does not see her again.

### **Ngareta Rossell**

This middle-aged woman, "with a kind, determined face", befriends Ali during his time in Villawood Detention Centre. She is a refugee advocate and seeks Ali out to aid him in defending himself against the persecution he has suffered at the hands of the Australian Government. She not only becomes a trusted and valued friend of Ali's, but she works tirelessly to publicise his cause and create an emotional response from the public. She tries to tell the story behind the 'dangerous people smuggler' he has been portrayed with. Media articles, photographs and interviews begin to spread through the pages of the major newspapers. This is significant not only for the public support he needs to pressure the government to determine his fate favourably. But it is also significant because many of the people Ali helps travel to Australia seek him out. They come to visit him, to thank him, to share their stories of success. Ngareta

Rossell is instrumental in instigating this text. She believed in Ali and the power of someone's story to truly change public perception.

## **THEMES**

There a diverse range of themes that can be considered within the context of this text. The key passages following each theme are a suggested example to consider for close reading. They are only some examples and cover more than one theme.

### **BETRAYAL (The Weasal - p304 - 306)**

The repeated betrayal that Ali is subjected to over the years would break an ordinary man's spirit. Luckily Ali is no ordinary man. Perhaps it is because he grows up believing he betrayed his own father with a foolish schoolyard game, perhaps it is because he has no choice. Often it is because it is the only means of survival he has; to trust that others may just possess the same moral code he does. At times it pays off; at times it hurts him infinitely. Mohammad's friend Ala, under duress, gives Ali and Mohammad's name to the police. His stupidity brings about a desperate escape for Ali and death for Mohammad. Omeid and Zaqi the smugglers in Indonesia value money more than honour. They each make promises to Ali they have no intention of keeping. Worse yet is Weasal, the man who befriends him, relies on him and completely undermines Ali for his own benefit. And for his deception the Weasal is handsomely rewarded in a way Ali could only ever dream of. Perhaps the most heart-breaking are all of the people Ali helped, through free passage, provisions for food and accommodation, ensuring the boat was safe and the captain well skilled to have the life he never will. When they stand in the courtroom and point accusingly it is too much for Ali to bear. Which is why when Faris speaks to the media, "from the depths of his grief", in support of this gentleman, Ali is deeply touched. The kindness of people is far more surprising to him than the cruelty. Betrayal and injustice he has become used to.

### **CRUELTY (Abu Ghraib p20-29)**

The capacity for human cruelty is unwavering. It is matched only by the human capacity to survive and endure. Abu Ghraib has a reputation for being the worst prison in the world. After Ali's account of his experience, and of those around him who were subjected to equal or worse treatment, it is difficult to defy that description. It is lawless, unpredictable, degrading and terrifying. The fear that is perpetrated about what might happen is as terrible as what they are currently subject to. Akram's account of unimaginable torture that leads him to tell his captors what they want to hear, no matter the impact it will cause on these innocent people, will haunt him for the rest of his days. These prisoners, famished, filthy, diseased and broken find solace in one another, and yet they "are all careful not to ask too many details about each other's lives because none of us trust ourselves not to speak under torture" (p41). Saddam Hussein's regime destroys the souls of every young man that is taken into his prison of horror. Perhaps the most disturbing realisation about this heinous treatment of people

is revealed in the photograph of Ahmad at the back of this text. It was taken just prior to him being sent to Abu Ghraib and he is only a boy.

### **HOPE and LOVE OF FAMILY (Baby Nagis p267 - 277)**

Despite the constant inhuman treatment, the deception from those he trusts and the innate ability of humans to treat each other with disregard, Ali remains hopeful. It is the most enduring characteristic of this man. He continues to believe in the possibility that people want to help other people. And because of this hope and this belief in the inherent human kindness that he feels, every time someone else betrays him, a little piece of his spirit shrivels up. At times he has no choice but to believe that people will help him, will trust him, that they will honour their word as he undoubtedly would do. Other times he must throw his fate into the hands of those in power, lawfully or not, and at times he is burnt very badly. When his baby daughter is born, the world seems to shift a little for Ali; he begins to feel a warmth that he never knew existed. He loved his brother's intensely and completely, but his baby daughter is something else. Her vulnerability, her sweet perfection reminds Ali that there is still good in a bleak, desperate world. He is willing to sacrifice the life he had been hoping for, a life free and safe in Australia with his family, to stay in Indonesia and soak up the beauty of his precious baby girl. And yet, tragically, this is not to be. Hope is his catalyst to endure everything the Australian authorities throw at him. He will resist, sustain, pursue and hope as long as there is a chance he will see his daughter again. In the final pages when it seems this dream of being the father he has never been able to be is finally extinguished, Ali still manages to dig deep within himself and endure. For Intisar. For Ahmad. For the life he deserves.

### **GUILT (Doing Time 347-352 & Guilt for living p90-96)**

Just as hope keeps him buoyant and fortifies his struggle, guilt erodes his soul. From the very first few pages of this text, when Ali was still a boy, guilt pervades his experience. Ali believes it is a schoolyard jibe that begins the events he will suffer for the rest of his life. Repeating his father's remarks about Saddam Hussein sees him hauled to the principal's office, and very shortly after his father disappears. It is not Ali's fault that they are arrested, it is far more complicated than that, but as a boy, he cannot help but feel some responsibility. Hassan Pilot's first term in prison changes their lives forever, and the guilt is forever embedded into this young man. Survivor guilt is a documented state that many victims of trauma endure. As more and more of Ali's friends and family are taken and tortured, and even murdered, this sense of guilt for still living blackens his consciousness. In some ways it is what enables him to endure, but over and over again it breaks his heart and crushes his spirit. And when he has any opportunity to blame others for their stupidity or lack of insight, he remembers that dark afternoon when he father held him accountable for the drowning of his brother Khalid, and he refrains, "he knows the price of blame". In the last pages of the text, when hope seems to be shrivelling up, guilt is still pervading his sense of self, he blames himself for life Intisar has endured, he blames himself for the life

Ahmad never had and he blames himself for Nagis never having the father he wanted to be.

### **RESPONSIBILITY (“I knew you would come” p211- 218)**

As the eldest son, responsibility comes with the territory. Even without the regime of Saddam wreaking havoc in Iraq, he would have had a sense of responsibility to support and protect his family. When his father is taken, the responsibility of the family sits squarely on his shoulders. This ten-year-old boy becomes the head of his family; he must assume this enormous responsibility for the rest of his life. As a boy he is sent to the markets to work. Homework becomes impossible and so he must endure the beatings at school and the threat of being sent to the army if he fails, while at home he must make enough money to ensure the survival of his mother and siblings. It is Ali who is sent away, to establish the path, do the time, whatever it takes to ensure safe passage for his family. It is Ali who must smuggle his family across borders, find accommodation, clean water, some income. It is Ali who must sacrifice any chance of his own life, his wife and children, while he must “parent (his) father’s children.” This is his family and they are his responsibility. For brief moments he grieves what he doesn’t have. He is furious at his mother for forcing him to leave Intisar behind. He knows ultimately it is the only way, but the injustice stings for many years. Perhaps it is these years of putting the needs and safety of others before his own that makes him such an effective people smuggler. He doesn’t abandon them or rip them off. He is sympathetic to their plight and is sick with anxiety every time a boat leaves the shore. These people become his responsibility, with little regard for the price he will pay. He knows he is their only hope.

### **THE ASYLUM SEEKER DEBATE (The political landscape 270 -272 & 312 - 314)**

Robin de Crespigny sheds light on the deep dark world of people smuggling by providing the human face behind the issue. It is not intended as a political tool, rather an opportunity to tell the truth. She exposes the injustice of the system, the cruelty of our detention centres, the futility of the fight against ‘boat people’ and the ridiculous notion of jumping a queue. She would argue, she is simply telling the truth. It is Ali’s own interpretation of our country, our laws, our misspent funds, our fear-mongering politicians, which reveals the hypocrisy in the current system. This is a man whom our law threw everything at. It is only when you read his story that readers may realise just how ludicrous that was.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

- Have students respond to the following words in any form they wish.
  - Betrayal
  - People Smuggler
  - Deception
  - Cruelty
  - Hope
  - Forgiveness
  - Guilt
  - Responsibility
  - The Asylum Seeker Debate
  
- YES/ NO/ MAYBE: Pose a range of questions that consider the thematic exploration of this text. Students fold a piece of A4 paper in half, with one side Yes, the other side No, and the inside Maybe. They respond to the questions with their signs, only using maybe once. They are asked to justify with evidence their position on the statements. At the completion of the discussion they need to write a minimum of 200 words on each idea.

Ali's friends betray him more than they help him.

Ali is foolish to keep hoping at the end.

Intisar is betrayed by Ali.

Ali should be punished severely for sending people on boats to Australia.

It is unfair that Ali is responsible for his siblings.

- EXPERTS: In groups students are allocated one of the themes evident in the text. They need to find three key scenes that explore the theme. This will include a close analysis of these scenes, highlighting key quotes, visual cues, symbolism, authorial comment and the creation of an essay question on their theme. The groups are then rearranged to have one representative from each theme. They share and record the findings of their peers to compile detailed notes on each of the themes. They choose one essay question to answer for homework.

Betrayal: Despite being betrayed repeatedly, Ali never gives up believing in the inherent goodness in people. Do you agree?

- DOUGHNUT: Select a statement that allows for adequate argument for each side. Create two circles with the students, one inner and then a student sitting behind each one to make the outer circle. The inner must agree and offer one argument with evidence from the text to support this view. The outer circle must record the arguments and offer a rebuttal in their own argument of the student they are sitting behind. No comments are allowed to be made during each presentation.

E.g. 'Survival is pure luck'. A student on the inside circle might argue that Ali survives Abu Ghraib because they are freed unexpectedly. Whereas the student on the outside circle immediately behind him might argue that he survives Abu Ghraib because of the friendship he makes and his mental toughness.

## **QUOTES**

### **LEARNING ACTIVITY: Sticky Note Quote/ Quote Off**

Provide each student with a sticky note. They must write one quote on the front and their own name on the back and then stick it to the board up the front. Each student collects any sticky note other than their own. They take it to their desk and must identify the character, context and theme associated. The responses are shared as a class and answers checked with the student who wrote the quote initially. It is an excellent revision tool as preparation for the final assessment.

#### Quote Off:

This is similar to the previous task, but is an oral task. The students are divided into two teams and they take turns to recite a quote. The other team must identify the character and context of the quote and if each is correct, the teams get a point. Each student is only allowed one turn each.

#### Quote Table:

This is an excellent resource for students to complete as a table and keep as a reference. You can also use it to cut up and have students attach the quote to the appropriate theme, electronically or physically. It builds a deep understanding of the text and provides them with the textual detail required for a high quality analytical essay.

## QUOTE TABLE

| PAGE | QUOTE   | CONTEXT  | THEME          |
|------|---|--|----------------|
|      | IRAQ  |  |                |
| 1    | <i>I am the oldest son, which meant my parents gave me everything.</i>  |  |                |
| 1    | <i>He was a man with indomitable spirit. Once a proud and dignified man. Once the centre of my universe.</i>  |  |                |
| 1    | <i>He was full of fire yet tender, outraged but calm. For the first ten years of my life I loved everything about him.</i>  |  | Family         |
| 5    | <i>Yet in this land that became ruled by fear, my father remained utterly fearless.</i>   |  | Abuse of Power |
| 6    | <i>It was about this time that I betrayed my father, but his unconquerable spirit was never quashed, not even by the torture he endured as a consequence of my error.</i> | <i>The overwhelming sense of guilt and betrayal Ali carries forever.</i> |                |
| 7    | <i>But that night my father disappeared and our lives changed forever.</i>  |  |                |
| 9    | <i>...the ensuing sense of paralysis that flooded by body when I let my mind imagine how different our lives would be if I had lies to the headmaster.</i>                |  |                |
| 11   | <i>'If you are going to take my husband, take all the children too.'</i>  |  |                |
| 14   | <i>My mother was as brave as my father was fearless.</i>  |  |                |
| 21   | <i>It was as if the substance had gone out of him and he was imitating what he remembered of himself for our benefit.</i>   |  |                |
| 22   | <i>The last thread that was holding my father's mind together snapped.</i>  |  |                |
| 23   | <i>There is no justice to why the three of us are here in Abu Ghraib.</i>   |  |                |
| 28   | <i>He is my best friend, my brother, my first love.</i>   |  |                |
| 29   | <i>In a flash they take another finger.</i>   |  |                |
| 29   | <i>They can do anything they want to me now. They can't hurt my anymore.</i>  |  |                |
| 36   | <i>Fearless and teetering on the edge of insanity, fuelled by rage and alcohol, he was probably perfect for the job.</i>  | <i>Hassan Pilot made a Commando in Saddam's army.</i>                    |                |
| 38   | <i>With not knowing when you are going to be taken for execution or torture, the indignities of the toilet soon become</i>  |  |                |

|     |  |   |                  |
|-----|--|---|------------------|
|     | <i>insignificant.</i>  |   |                  |
| 39  | <i>"What is it that drives one human being to want to inflict terrible pain and suffering on another for no reason?"</i>   |   |                  |
| 41  | <i>We are all careful not to ask too many details about each other's lives, because none of us trusts ourselves not to speak under torture.</i>  |   |                  |
| 47  | <i>"You're no better than your father. But at least he has a reason, so I can still love him."</i>   |   |                  |
| 51  | <i>"They tortured me until I begged them to let me die, but they wouldn't. They waited for me to revive so they could keep on with it...until I told them all the other teachers in the school were part of an Islamic movement too...So they picked up the twelve other teachers. They tortured them all, then executed six of them."</i> | <i>Akram's story of his own horrific past as told to Ali in Abu Ghraib.</i> |                  |
| 58  | <i>I professed my love and told her how pretty she was, then I asked if she was interested in having a secret relationship with me.</i>  |   |                  |
| 72  | <i>What the US is paying to prop up the resistance efforts for a year would probably be comparable to a day of engagement with Saddam in Kuwait.</i>   |   |                  |
| 87  | <i>I realise I had given up any hope of seeing him again, and that somewhere over the last four years my mourning must have ended.</i>   |   |                  |
| 96  | <i>I weep for Mohammad, and my brother, and my father, and finally at my guilt for still living.</i>   |   |                  |
| 100 | <i>'They arrived a few hours after we left, and instead of waiting they found a smuggler on their own, which was really stupid.'</i>   |   |                  |
| 101 | <i>In a final blow to completely break my mother's heart, they will be separated. Asad will go to Abu Ghraib, then in two years, when Basim is older, he will join him. By then, supposing they survive, they will be so hardened by fear and loneliness they will be strangers.</i>   |   |                  |
| 106 | <i>But instead I discover that the agent has put our name on a list that prohibits us from crossing. So now, because of a few angry words, we are blocked forever from going to Syria.</i>   |   | <i>Injustice</i> |
| 110 | <i>When they put us in Abu Ghraib, I later discovered she had tried to find us, and instead was incarcerated and beaten so</i>   |   |                  |

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|     | <i>badly that the baby she was carrying died, and remained dead inside her womb until she was let go many days later.</i>   |  |      |
| 113 | <i>This is just a small setback. None of us is dead.</i>  |  | Hope |
| 119 | <i>As we drive slowly past endless lines of people I feel guilty to be the ones riding, but it's time we got a break.</i>   |  |      |
| 120 | <i>So it looks like we might be saved by my mother's maddening refusal to take off her costume.</i>   |  |      |
| 121 | <i>One thing you can trust about my mother is that the survival of her children will always come first.</i>   |  |      |
| 121 | <i>'You did the right thing', Walid whispers and he is probably right. But if I never see them again this moment will haunt me for the rest of my life.</i>   |  |      |
| 128 | <i>She has jolted me into realising marriage is an impossible dream so long as I have my family in tow, but this time it seems really unfair.</i>   |  |      |
| 134 | <i>One again, in one small gesture, my dreams of a future are gone.</i>   |  |      |
| 141 | <i>'You are some smuggler'. He grins and goes on his way, but I won't forget him.</i>   |  |      |
| 144 | <i>'You will never get there if you try to do it the right way, my friend.'</i>   |  |      |
| 144 | <i>By their criteria we have not suffered enough. Thus another road is closed.</i>  |  |      |
| 147 | <i>They stare wet-eyed back at me, and I wonder if I will ever see them of the Middle East again and where on earth I will end up on this journey to the other side of the world.</i>                               |  |      |
|     | INDONESIA   |  |      |
| 155 | <i>There are screams from the shore and shouting, but it's too late. The boat has left, our money and our hopes for the future with it.</i>   |  |      |
| 156 | <i>We are all just part of Omeid's human auction.</i>   |  |      |
| 167 | <i>We knew there was a detention, but not that it was a jail...We were so used to escape being the main game that we seldom contemplated what would happen on arrival, we just dealt with it when we got there.</i> |  |      |
| 168 | <i>I can feel myself reclaiming my life again. I</i>  |  |      |

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|     | <i>am back at the helm.</i>   |  |  |
| 175 | <i>Maybe because I have spoken from the heart and genuinely want the best for these people, they believe me enough to trust me.</i>   |  |  |
| 181 | <i>I put Intisar out of my mind as an impossible fantasy, and drift into a contented state dreaming of countless intimate acts with Eni.</i>  |  |  |
| 194 | <i>Thirty-five thousand American dollars gone to the bottom of the sea. I want to be sick.</i>  |  |  |
| 206 | <i>I give him the money and leave feeling the weight of responsibility lifting. But Zaqi never calls, then after two days he switches his phone off.</i>  |  |  |
| 212 | <i>That I would find the right man through a taxi driver within a few hours of being here is all too incredible. But of course it's a small community.</i>  |  |  |
| 217 | <i>I am happy. I have achieved my first objective. Only five more of my family to go.</i>   |  |  |
| 219 | <i>To even enquire about this kind of journey means that nothing could be more terrible about what they are running away from.</i>  |  |  |
| 226 | <i>I wonder how he could be so cavalier with such precious cargo.</i>   |  |  |
| 227 | <i>My friendship with Malik and Abud had given me safe port in a bleak and lonely landscape.</i>  |  |  |
| 236 | <i>By the time I get on a plane to head home my money bag is all but empty, but I am last free of debt and with the next boat I will be able to bring more of my family.</i>  |  |  |
| 243 | <i>Together with the navy man I help each one to board, and as they leave they thank us with tears and hugs before they disappear up over the side for yet another traumatic journey.</i>                               |  |  |
| 246 | <i>It is exquisite, fragile, beautiful, and when I glance at Eni I see her eyes glistening... There has been so little beauty in my life for so long that I have forgotten how our souls yearn to be touched by it.</i> |  |  |
| 249 | <i>I try to lock it away as I hug them all again, but inside I ache for Ahmad to be sharing this with us.</i>   |  |  |
| 258 | <i>I am crying and I am laughing. I have done what I set out to do. They are on their way, and I am alone again.</i>  |  |  |
| 261 | <i>Haider puts his arm around me and I weep like a child.</i>   |  |  |

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| 262 | <i>So far everyone I have put on a boat arrived in Australia safely.</i>  |  |  |
| 262 | <i>So Haider goes to their office every two weeks and tells them what they want to know, but never accurately enough for them to catch me, and then we have lunch with the money they pay him.</i>                  |  |  |
| 266 | <i>So what chance would Australia ever have of stopping any of it in a country this poor is questionable.</i>   |  |  |
| 267 | <i>I am tired. I am only thirty years of age and I feel that at last I can move on with my life.</i>  |  |  |
| 270 | <i>There is no doubt my Muslim brothers who presumably unleashed this catastrophe will wound the pride of America so greatly that the retribution could change the world forever.</i>                               |  |  |
| 271 | <i>It's hard to imagine why terrorists would embark on such an ordeal by boat, only to end up in a detention centre for years, when they can afford to fly in comfortably with false passports and visas</i>        |  |  |
| 271 | <i>If Australian people only knew the strength it takes to get on one of these boats, to keep holding onto life after the horrors these people have been through, they would be filled with awe and admiration.</i> |  |  |
| 274 | <i>To make things worse, we hear that the boat that sank, which the Australians are calling SIEVX, was Abu Quassey's boat and it is making international headlines because so many people died.</i>                 |  |  |
| 275 | <i>It is hard to accept that I have sent my little brother to somewhere that sounds worse than what he escaped from.</i>  |  |  |
| 276 | <i>There are no words to describe the happiness I feel, or the outpouring of love and need to protect her that I experience.</i>  |  |  |
| 280 | <i>I wonder if I would have left Iraq if I had known Ahmad was alive.</i>   |  |  |
| 287 | <i>Not only have I lost my wife and daughter, but any chance of saving Ahmad is gone, not to speak of Asad.</i>   |  |  |
| 290 | <i>A black cloud of despair settles over me.</i>  |  |  |
| 290 | <i>When the day arrives and they come to get me, the irony is it is the hardest thing I have ever had to do, to walk out of that jail and onto a Qantas flight to Australia.</i>                                    |  |  |
|     | <b>AUSTRALIA</b>  |  |  |

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| 294 | <i>In my culture, when you make a man naked the shame breaks his spirit more than any bashing can do. It reduces him to the status of an animal. Even in Abu Ghraib you were only stripped for torture</i> |  |  |
| 296 | <i>I am the first smuggler to be extradited to Australia, and the government will prove how despicable I am by the money I have made out of human misery.</i>  |  |  |
| 298 | <i>If I broke someone's law it was for something good. I provided a path to safety for people who had few other options.</i>   |  |  |
| 299 | <i>My mother has returned from Iraq, and as is the case with thousands of Iraqis, she could find no evidence from prison records or exhumed graves that Ahmad ever existed.</i>                            |  |  |
| 304 | <i>Even if I get a chance to deny it, once said, the picture of me as a dangerous man is growing just like the government wanted.</i>  |  |  |
| 309 | <i>How can I describe the complexity of what I feel about the disloyalty of my own people?</i>   |  |  |
| 309 | <i>I don't remember this feeling of being looked after since before my father disappeared when I was ten.</i>  |  |  |
| 310 | <i>Considering the success of the government's demonising of asylum seekers and people smuggler, I hold little hope.</i>   |  |  |
| 312 | <i>Even if there was a queue to join, there is no office in Iraq. The nearest is Pakistan, two countries away.</i>   |  |  |
| 314 | <i>"I accept that the prisoner was not solely motivated by money, but was largely motivated by the need to get his family to Australia."</i>   |  |  |
| 317 | <i>But many of the guards want to make you feel you are nothing. In Iraq and Thailand it was physical, but here they play with your mind and there is no flexibility with their rules.</i>                 |  |  |
| 318 | <i>'I need you to sign this paper saying you agree to be deported back to Iraq.' I stare at her. I am flooded with images of those terrible years of trying to escape my homeland.</i>                     |  |  |
| 321 | <i>They, like Nagis, are the beginning of my family's next generation. I try not to let myself imagine them playing together.</i>  |  |  |
| 321 | <i>We are finally going to have life we had planned eight years ago in Iran.</i>   |  |  |

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| 325   | <i>'Why does Ali have to stay in a cage?' they keep asking their mother, but how can she explain?</i>   |  |  |
| 328   | <i>There is nothing to fight against and the boredom is insufferable; they kill you not by torture or execution, but by hopelessness and despair.</i>   |  |  |
| 330   | <i>Once again, with the stroke of a pen, my happiness or misery is in the hands of others.</i>  |  |  |
| 332   | <i>To survive she will marry him. Because of my impotence. The punishment of four years in jail is nothing compared to this.</i>  |  |  |
| 334   | <i>The whole thing has cost the taxpayer millions, just to punish me for something I did in someone else's country, where it wasn't even a crime.</i>   |  |  |
| 336   | <i>"I think he is a very, very gentleman. He is the best smuggler. He had a good heart. He was not hard, not a greedy person. I have a conscience about what I saw from Ali Al Jenabi."</i>           |  |  |
| 338   | <i>"He is my brother but more like a father to me."</i>   |  |  |
| 341   | <i>The rosy glow of liberty begins to dim and I realise I am back on the treadmill of endurance.</i>  |  |  |
| 341/2 | <i>The responsibility I feel for her pain is crippling.</i>   |  |  |
| 345   | <i>How can I tell Intisar I have let her down again? If I had wanted to torture her I couldn't have found a more effective tool.</i>  |  |  |
| 347   | <i>I never had to beg anyone to get on one of my boats or promise them a good life in Australia. Most of them were devastated to leave their own country and would not have if they had a choice.</i> |  |  |
| 348   | <i>To know torture is being inflicted on someone you love, when you are helpless to do anything, is unbearable.</i>   |  |  |
| 350   | <i>If you want to stop people smugglers you have to do something about what causes people to flee their own countries in the first place.</i>   |  |  |
| 352   | <i>I am wrenched by guilt and sadness for what Intisar has endured for me, and for what I cannot have...all that is left now is my daughter, who I cannot ever see.</i>                               |  |  |
| 352   | <i>'Eventually', I whisper to him, 'there will be someone in power that has a kind heart and</i>  |  |  |

|  |   |  |  |
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|  | <i>a family he would do anything to protect, who must understand how I got into this situation. So for you, my brother, I will keep on going. For you I will go on doing time.'</i> |  |  |
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## **ASSESSMENT**

### **VCE ENGLISH: AREA OF STUDY 2: Creating and Presenting**

#### **CREATIVE RESPONSES:**

##### **A Collection of Letters**

There are a number of letters that are written to plea for help, or support or freedom in this text. Select two and write them in detail.

- Umi Al Jenabi must write to Saddam Hussein directly to appeal for Hassan Pilot to be released. Write this letter.
- The letter applying for refugee status to the UN to get into Australia. There is a form to complete. Write the questions that might appear on a form like this and write the family's response to these questions.
- Afrah's letters back to her family describing life in Australia.
- Ali Al Jenabi sends secret letters across the border to Intisar. They must not arouse suspicion of the authorities but must still indicate he is waiting for her.
- Any number of letters that are sent back and forth between Eni and Ali once he is taken to Australia.
- Applications for reconsideration of Ali's fate to the Australian authorities. These may come from the lawyers, the refugee advocates or Ali himself.

##### **A Dangerous Man: Feature Articles**

It was in the interests of the Australian Government to present Ali as a dangerous man. Write two opposing articles that would have appeared in the media to represent his story. The first is what they believe they know about him and the reason he has been arrested. The second is any of the articles written by the journalists who visited him in jail and in detention and who interviewed him. Consider the photos that might be used to accompany the article, the headline and the caption for the photo.

Consider the public's response to his story and write two letters to the editor that reflect opposing views of his guilt or innocence.

## **The Refugee Convention**

Students need a sound understanding of Australia's obligations to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Have students research The Refugee Convention and in light of the events in the text write a speech that they could present to a Parliamentary Inquiry. The speech needs to demonstrate how the Australian Government is failing to meet these requirements that they are a signatory to. They need to cite specific articles from the document and use events from the life of Ali Al Jenabi and his family to support this claim.

### **AREA OF STUDY 1: READING AND RESPONDING**

#### **ANALYTICAL RESPONSES:**

1. *The People Smuggler* reveals more about the goodness in humankind than it does the cruelty. To what extent do you agree?
2. Ali Al Jenabi survives because of his constant willingness to find the good in people and trust them. Discuss.
3. Hope sustains Ali Al Jenabi even when he has nothing to be hopeful for. Does this explain his miraculous ability to survive? Discuss.
4. Ali Al Jenabi asks ; "What is it that drives one human being to want to inflict terrible pain and suffering on another for no reason?" How does this text address this question?
5. "There has been so little beauty in my life for so long that I have forgotten how our souls yearn to be touched by it." How does this shape Ali as a man?
6. "There is nothing to fight against and the boredom is insufferable; they kill you not by torture or execution, but by hopelessness and despair." The incarceration Ali Al Jenabi experiences reveals the essence of the human character. To what extent is this true?
7. Is Ali Al Jenabi a hero or a villain?
8. In *The People Smuggler* Robin de Crespigny explores the incongruity between the expectation we have of those who have been demonised by this term and the reality of the man we learn about. Explain the irony of the title.

## **USEFUL LINKS**

*The People Smuggler* website

[www.thepeoplesmuggler.com](http://www.thepeoplesmuggler.com)

Q and A with Robin de Crespigny via Penguin Books

[www.penguin.com.au/products/9780670076550/people-smuggler-true-story-ali-al-jenabi/86090/q-robin-de-crespigny](http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9780670076550/people-smuggler-true-story-ali-al-jenabi/86090/q-robin-de-crespigny)

The People Smuggler Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/ThePeopleSmugglerbyRobindeCrespigny>

The Refugee Council of Australia

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

Edmund Rice Centre

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

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

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