

Teachers' Notes

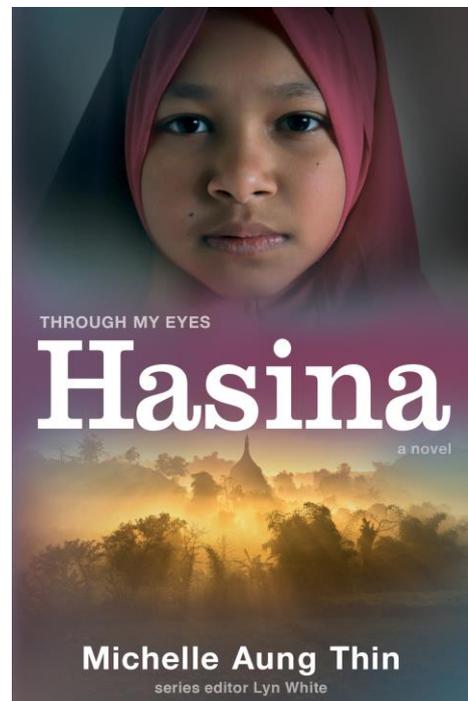
Hasina: Through My Eyes by

Michelle Aung Thin
Series editor: Lyn White

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Recommended for ages 11-14 yrs

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Advisory note

There are students in our Australian schools for whom the themes and events depicted in *Hasina* will be very familiar and all too real. Such students may well have fled similar conflicts and experienced displacement and trauma. It is important that teachers read the text before sharing it with their class, monitor student reactions and respond appropriately.

Most of the webpage links in these notes are to educational sites. However, some links are to news sites with changing news stories and ads in sidebars. It is recommended that teachers preview these sites *on the day students will view them*: possibly disturbing or inappropriate material may be headlined in the sidebar for that day.

INTRODUCTION

Hasina is the seventh book in the first series of Through My Eyes set in conflict zones. This contemporary realistic fiction series pays tribute to the courage and resilience of children living in recent war zones. These inspirational stories give insight into conflict, society, culture and identity through one child's eyes. They bring home to young readers the effects of armed conflict on the civilians who have to survive as their families and, sometimes, their whole way of life, is destroyed.

The strong character-driven story lines will engage young readers and the themes of courage, determination, triumph and perseverance will inspire and challenge them, creating greater cross-cultural understanding and informed empathy.

The Through My Eyes-Natural Disaster Series won the 2019 Educational Publishing Award in Australia for the category Primary Educational Picture or Chapter Book.

See www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au for the eleven books in the Through My Eyes series.

SYNOPSIS

Hasina lives in the fictional town of Teknadaung in Rakhine State in the west of Myanmar. Teknadaung is a river town, near the Bay of Bengal. In the past, people of different religions and ethnicities lived together there. As her father, Ibrahim, is keen to point out to her, the Islamic mosque and Buddhist stupa are both in the old central part of town where the bazaar is. Nowadays, however, Buddhists and wealthier traders tend to live on that side of the river and Hasina's Muslim Rohingya people live on the other side of the river.

The novel opens dramatically with the first sighting of a squadron of low-flying army helicopters, bringing what have so far just been rumours of military violence closer to reality for the inhabitants of Teknadaung. Hasina's cousin, Ghadiya, and her Aunt Rukiah react fearfully to the helicopters. They are already internally displaced 'refugees' from ethnic violence: they fled their own town and had to come to live with Hasina's family. Uncle Rashid, Ghadiya's father, escaped to Malaysia. They do not speak of their experiences.

When the helicopters have gone, normal family life resumes, except that the 'school' that Aunt Rukiah runs in their backyard for local girls is sent home early. Hasina's mother, Nurzamal, is preparing lunch and Hasina must take some in a tiffin carrier to her father, Ibrahim, who works in the family stall in the bazaar in town. Her younger brother, Araf, goes with her and they usually share lunch with their father before returning.

As Hasina goes about her day, we learn much about her family history and lifestyle. Ibrahim, Nurzamal and their children live with Ibrahim's mother, 'Dadi' (Grandma) Asmah, in the family home built in colonial times. They are of mixed ancestry and an educated family, except for Nurzamal who is an illiterate peasant and a bit resentful of

her educated sister-in-law who has brought danger to their family. It is illegal to shelter refugees and Rukiah and Ghadiya must keep a low profile. Ibrahim is proud of Hasina's intelligence and hoped to educate her, but Rohingyas were forced out of government schools a while ago. Hence Rukiah's unofficial school in the backyard.

Hasina and Araf set off for the bazaar, which involves crossing the river, most easily but dangerously done by using 'the Children's Bridge', a series of pontoons. Arriving at the bazaar, the large communal TV set is not showing the normal cartoons etc. but instead is broadcasting a story about a Muslim 'terrorist' attack nearby. Hasina becomes anxious: will the townspeople turn against her because she is a Muslim? She feels as if she has swallowed a stone. The tension is defused by Araf and a kind Arakanese man and Hasina enters the bazaar.

At the bazaar we meet Isak, of the 'Brothers & Sons Puppet Stall'. Isak is also Rohingya and a similar age to Hasina and they are friendly as much as modesty allows. We also meet U Ko Yin, a nasty tea shop owner, who is pushing for Araf to be given to him to work in his tea shop. U Ko Yin is rich and powerful: most people avoid him but will not stand up to him.

The town becomes gradually more tense and once, when Hasina meets the kind Arakanese man, he warns her that bad times are coming and good people like himself may not be able to protect her people, however much they want to. Nurzamal is hassled by police and has her farming knife taken from her when she goes to the family's rice paddy. Then Rukiah's secret cell phone is discovered by the rest of the family: she has been using it to stay in touch with her husband, Uncle Rashid. In response to the increased tension, Nurzamal is more fearful and is angry at Rukiah for putting the family in danger. They argue about the value of education for girls. The school is closed.

Finally, violence erupts. Sit Tat (military) vehicles arrive in the evening and cordon off the Rohingya district. Ibrahim just has time to tell Hasina to take Araf and Ghadiya and hide: *Stay together. Hide. Stay alive. Take care of them, Hasina. I will come for you.* Fleeing towards the Lower Forest, the children discover the army is already chasing people there, so they cross via the Children's Bridge at night and head up into the High Forest, where tigers lurk. They find a hollow beneath a large teak tree and sleep there.

The children stay in the High Forest for five days, wondering when (and if) their father will come for them. Though frightened and hungry, they also have a kind of 'survival adventure': Hasina works out a method of finding her way through the jungle; Ghadiya traps shrimp in the stream with a headcloth and they make fire from broken glass and cook them; they feel safe in their secret hollow at night. Hasina ventures down to the bazaar one day and has a terrifying encounter with a young soldier. He is equally frightened and does not betray her. She flees back to the High Forest.

From a lookout point, they eventually see that the army trucks have left. They go through the deserted town and over the bridge. The standpipe that delivered water to their district has been smashed and all the homes and gardens are burnt and empty of people. The few solid old rooms of their house are standing but there is no one there. Ghadiya finds the cell phone in its hiding place and they ring Uncle Rashid. He tells them to stay put. When Hasina goes to investigate their stall in the bazaar, she discovers that all the Rohingya stalls have been vandalised. Isak's family have all been killed but he dragged himself to safety and hid. Hasina collects what useful things she can from the stall and goes home. Isak is too sick to be moved but she cares for him over the coming days.

Hasina is now head of the family and must find food and cook for all of them every day. They fetch water from the river, sometimes seeing bodies float by. Eventually, Dadi Asmah appears on their doorstep, accompanied by an ethnic minority Mro girl she rescued in the jungle. Asmah had been unable to keep up with the forced march of the Rohingyas, including their parents, and had dropped by the wayside and made her way

back to Teknadaung. Now the children know that their parents will not be coming for them.

Asmah reveals that the Mro girl was found with the lifeless bodies of her whole family: *...this girl's family were killed by ARSA, who fight for the Rohingya. Our people killed her people.* The anti-violence theme comes up frequently in *Hasina*. Older people remember when they lived in harmony with their neighbours. Hasina disapproves when Isak toys with the idea of running away to join ARSA. The kind Arakanese man appears twice again to secretly give Hasina medicine and rice. Civil unrest and government persecution are seen to favour the likes of the wicked U Ko Yin, who exploits the situation for his own financial gain.

After many months, including the monsoon and harvest times, Hasina has managed to pull her little band through tough times. With the help of another Mro refugee family, they harvest as much of their rice as they can. Uncle Rashid is in touch with them and through his refugee network is searching for their parents. He has given them the name and number of a human rights lawyer in Sittwe, the state capital.

A new phase of the government policy now reveals itself. Trucks and construction workers arrive to rebuild the Rohingya district – but not for Rohingya. It is planned to resettle other people from Myanmar and wipe out the property rights of the Rohingya. A nasty truck driver, Zaw Gyi, tries to insinuate himself with the children, inviting Araf into his truck. Isak and Hasina gradually realise that Zaw Gyi is working for U Ko Yin as a smuggler: he is bringing from the capital donated aid rice, meant for hungry people, for U Ko Yin to sell at high prices in his stall, and, on his return journey to Sittwe, he is smuggling kidnapped or tricked children to be sold for child labour.

The climax of the book is reached when U Ko Yin tricks Araf into 'working' for him. Araf is drugged and caged in the back of Zaw Gyi's truck with another little boy. Hasina and Isak rescue Araf but when Hasina goes back for the other boy, she is trapped in the truck. Uncaged, she is flung around as the truck races back to Sittwe and she is eventually knocked out.

Hasina regains consciousness when the truck stops at the Golden Teashop in Sittwe, where the owner is arguing with Zaw Gyi: he ordered two boys, not a girl and a boy. Into the argument comes Hann Linn, the human rights lawyer, and Isak! Isak had bravely hidden in the truck's cab for the journey and then gone to find the lawyer. As soon as the lawyer starts mentioning a police crackdown on child trafficking in the area, the owner and Zaw Gyi flee. Hasina invites the little boy, Ishin, to come home with them. Hann Linn tries over the coming days to discover the boy's identity, but it is impossible. He joins Hasina's family.

Shortly afterwards, when Hasina has recovered from her ordeal, she realises that she is feeling not quite so alone and frightened. The family, now including little Ishin, has rice, oil and salt; the Mro family are living in the yard and have adopted the little Mro girl; Isak is also living nearby and is available to discuss problems with. She discovers that the kind Arakanese man has made sure their 'adventure' became known in town, and U Ko Yin has been reported to police for profiteering by the townspeople and shunned. Zaw Gyi's truck is banned from the construction site and he is never seen again.

News of their parents comes. Ibrahim and Nurzamal are now united with Rukiah in a refugee camp. One day, they manage to get hold of a cell phone and phone the children. The novel ends:

But as her hands shake, Hasina feels something else. She feels as if the Hasina who has had to defend her family at such great cost has been rejoined by Hasina, the girl who loves soccer and geometry and a boy with a crinkly smile. And her heart, bent and broken, is a little closer to whole again.

She takes a deep breath.

'Hello, Baba? Mama? Is it you?'

THE AUTHOR

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Michelle Aung Thin was born in Burma in 1962, the same year as the military coup that shaped the modern history of the country. Her family left the following year, when she was still an infant, emigrating to Canada, where they settled in the capital, Ottawa. Michelle grew up with skating and skiing and spoke French as a second language. English was her family's first language but both her parents also spoke Burmese. At home, her parents only spoke Burmese when they wanted to talk about something secret. Everything she knew about Burma was through the stories her parents and paternal grandmother told her or through the long letters her maternal grandparents sent from Burma.

One of the first books Michelle remembers reading avidly was *A Child's Garden of Verse*, a collection of poems by Robert Louis Stevenson. She first thought of herself as a writer when she was 8 years old and wrote a poem called 'Worries', which her teacher read aloud in class.

Michelle has always made her living through writing. Firstly, as a copywriter and then as a teacher of creative writing at University.

She has lived in London, England, but now calls Melbourne home, although she still speaks with a discernible Canadian accent.

Her first adult novel, *The Monsoon Bride*, is set in Burma in 1930. She has published various short stories and essays. Her essay 'Backtracking' is in the collection *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home* (Affirm Press 2013), a text on various Year 12 reading lists in Australia. More recently, she contributed the essay, 'How to be Different', to the collection, *Meet Me at the Intersection*, (Fremantle Press 2018), writing about her diverse and mixed ethnic background.



MOTIVATION FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

Although she was born in Burma, Michelle only lived there for a few months. Her maternal grandparents remained behind and it was through her relationship with them, via their letters, that she knew something about the political history of Burma.

For example, her grandmother often wrote about a 'black market', where Burmese people who could afford it were able to buy the things that you needed, but that weren't widely available. Michelle worried about the idea of a 'black market'. It sounded like a bad or illegal thing. She did not understand why her law-abiding grandparents were shopping there. As time went on, she began to understand the politics of military rule on a personal level. Family visits to Burma were impossible, because visas were not granted to expatriates. The government was to be feared, was cruel and could not be trusted. The government did not provide services like healthcare as in Canada or Australia.

Family stories from her parents and paternal grandmother filled in the lived history of the country during the period of colonisation, the second world war and first years of independence. The fun things, like tiger shoots and riding trains thrilled her. She also learned how the colonial system that hierarchised Burma was flawed and deeply unfair to anyone not white and British – women in particular. Speaking up, whenever you could, was essential, otherwise your rights would be taken away. But it also required courage and could be dangerous. Michelle began to consider what power and vulnerability a writer may have in such a system.

In 1988, when Michelle was a young adult, Burma became front page news. The 1988 generation were her contemporaries and she was elated by the student protests that broke out and the prospect of change for Burma and, then, saddened by the military crackdown. Despite the widespread media coverage, she never saw anything about the Burma her family had described. Instead, news reports always covered the struggle for democracy.

So, in many ways and on many levels, Burma was a mysterious, forbidden place. It was a place she knew in intimate ways through personal stories. Her fascination grew for the country now known as Myanmar and, in particular, the multicultural cities like Rangoon, as did her fascination for stories about people carving out identity in places where they don't feel like they entirely belong. How people make homes for themselves and create communities around them. And the justice or injustices of this. All classic material for writers.

When Michelle was approached by series editor, Lyn White, to write a novel set in Myanmar, she felt it was a daunting project to take on. The United Nations called the Rohingya the most persecuted minority in history. How to write about them as real people when they are represented as helpless victims? The situation in Rakhine is incredibly complex and access to the state itself is limited which meant researching the story would be a challenge. What's more, Michelle would also have to research the culture and religious practices of the Rohingya. Then there were the ordinary people of Myanmar – it was important to write a story that didn't misrepresent the ordinary Burmese or Arakanese either. Myanmar is still transforming from military state to free democracy and the process has been and will continue to be a painful one. Already, these people were hurting as tourist and business interests once more shunned the country. Michelle has visited Myanmar seven times since 2013 and has close connections to the Rohingya community in Melbourne, who greatly assisted in the research for this novel.

Ultimately, it was this not knowing that led her to write *Hasina*. Writing is one of the best ways to work out what you think and feel about complex ideas, events and extremes of human behaviour.

Michelle wrote this book for two reasons. First, to try and do something positive about the terrible attacks in Rakhine State, but also to make sure that the Rohingya story was told as accurately as possible.

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

THEMES

Hasina is an excellent text for exploring relevant themes, including:

- Resilience and survival
- Courage in the face of danger and adversity
- Culture and family
- Children taking on adult roles in times of crisis
- Role of religion as an identifier in the persecution of social groups
- Role of kind individuals in the face of widespread social harassment of a particular group in society
- The value of ingenuity and perseverance, as well as prior experience
- Importance of family, friendship and community
- Exploitation of child labour, including kidnapping
- Everyday life amongst the poorer citizens of a Myanmar town
- Trust and friendship
- Role of international law and aid agencies

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

English and integrated learning

Hasina is especially suitable for study in the English learning area Years 5 – 8.

The text is highly relevant for integrated learning across learning areas such as English and HASS – Geography and History.

It is also extremely suitable for use in literature circles and guided reading in the upper primary setting and for inclusion on suggested reading lists for lower secondary classes.

These teachers' notes are designed for use with upper primary and lower secondary students in years 5 - 8 of the Australian Curriculum. *Hasina* is a unique literary text that has:

personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value and potential for enriching the lives of students, expanding the scope of their experience. (ACARA 4.2)

The primary focus of these Teachers' Notes is engagement with the English learning area with its three interrelated strands:

Language: knowing about the English language

Literature: understand, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature

Literacy: expanding the repertoire of English usage.

The selection of teaching and learning activities has been guided by Year level Content descriptions of the English learning area.

Literature, with its emphasis on studying texts from a range of historical and cultural contexts helps students understand the perspectives and contributions from people around the world and both the past and present. (ACARA, 2010, p14)

Cross-curriculum Priority - Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

These notes support engagement with the first concept: Asia and its Diversity.

1. *The peoples and countries of Asia are diverse in ethnic background, traditions, cultures, belief systems and religions.*
2. *Interrelationships between humans and the diverse environments in Asia shape the region and have global implications.*

ENGLISH: Students can explore and appreciate the diverse range of traditional and contemporary texts from and about the peoples and countries of Asia, including texts written by Australians of Asian heritage. They develop communication skills that reflect cultural awareness and intercultural understanding.

HASS: Students can investigate the reasons behind both internal migration in the Asia region and from Asia to Australia, and so develop understanding of the experiences of the people of Asian heritage who are now Australian citizens.

THE ARTS: Students can examine art forms that have arisen from the rich and diverse belief systems and traditions of the Asia region.

General Capabilities

It is possible to engage students with all the General Capabilities when *Hasina* is taught as part of a cross-curriculum unit based on inquiry learning.

GLOBAL EDUCATION

Teaching and learning activities support exploration of key themes in global education including:

- Identity and cultural diversity
- Social justice and human rights
- Peace building and conflict resolution
- Civics and citizenship
- Values education

For more information on Global Education see: www.globaleducation.edu.au!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

NAMES

As we note in the book, Myanmar is often still referred to by its former name, Burma. Burma became Myanmar in 1989, just as the capital, Rangoon, became known as Yangon. What complicates the use of names is that some countries officially call the nation Myanmar, like Australia, and others call it Burma, like the USA. This is because many countries held economic sanctions against the country.

Other name changes include Arakan becoming Rakhine. Arakan is the ancient name for the area where *Hasina* lives, the people who live there and the former 'kingdom'. The new name for the region is Rakhine.

Finally, while more English-language media, including the local paper, *Myanmar Times*, use the term 'Tatmadaw', most people in Myanmar use the term 'Sit Tot' or 'Sit Tat'. Tatmadaw translates as 'Army' while Sit Tat means 'the military'. This is a nuance of importance for everyday usage in Myanmar.

GEOGRAPHY

Myanmar is in southeast Asia and borders Thailand, Laos, China, India and Bangladesh. It has a long coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Two major river systems run roughly north/south – the Ayeryarwady and the Salween – and the land is crossed by many smaller rivers, tributaries and streams which traditionally formed communication and trade routes. Most people live along the coast or along the Ayeryarwady valley. Mountains help form national land boundaries and also the boundary between Rakhine State and the rest of Myanmar.

Generally, there are three seasons in Myanmar:

- Rainy – June to September
- Cool – October to February
- Hot – March to May

There are several climate zones in the country:

- Hot, humid monsoonal areas
- Hot, temperate higher areas with cool winters
- Central plain that is hot and dry

ANCIENT HISTORY

Early groups in the country include the Mon, the Pyu and the powerful kingdom of Pagan, an empire which stretched from Arakan, where our story is set, through current day Thailand and Malaysia. The remains of these ancient and sophisticated cultures can still be visited and some are UNESCO heritage listed sites. The Pagan kingdom gave way to smaller kingdoms including the Arakan kingdom mentioned in the book.

MULTI-ETHNIC MYANMAR

There are 135 ethnic groups recognised by the Myanmar government. The Rohingya are not within this 135. In 1982, General Ne Win's government declared them non-citizens, claiming that they were not a people. The word Rohingya was forbidden because the generals said that Rohingyas did not exist before 1823, the first phase of colonisation by the British.

The breakdown of ethnicities includes: Burman (Bamar) 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%. The breakdown of religions includes: Buddhist 87.9%, Christian 6.2%, Muslim 4.3%, Animist 0.8%, Hindu 0.5%, other 0.2%, none 0.1% (2014 est.) (*CIA Factbook*)

The Rohingya were not officially counted in the recent census. Their numbers were estimated at just over a million.

Many other groups, including descendants of Indians who had immigrated to Burma during the colonial years, were expelled in 1964 when General Ne Win's military junta banned foreigners as a way to 'Burmanize' the nation.

RAKHINE STATE

Hasina takes place in Rakhine State. This was formerly the land of Arakan, with a long history – at times it was the most prosperous state around the Bay of Bengal. Before modern day national borders were imposed by colonialism, there had been movement of people from modern day India and Bangladesh to the Rakhine area. Likewise, for hundreds of years there was a small but significant Rakhine population in areas of India and Bangladesh. Periodic persecution of particular groups in these areas has also driven people backwards and forwards around the north of the Bay of Bengal.

Due to the Arakan Roma mountains that separate Rakhine from the rest of Myanmar, Rakhine remained an independent or pseudo-independent state for much of its history. It counts itself, with Sri Lanka, as a 'founder' of Theravada Buddhism. Its population breakdown is different to Myanmar overall. Ethnic Rakhine (mainly Buddhists) are the

majority but for hundreds of years there has been a considerable Rohingya (mainly Muslim) population. These groups tend to live on the lowlands. In the more mountainous regions, there are numerous other minority ethnicities.

Rakhine State is rich in natural resources such as timber, flora and fauna and it is an important zone in terms of economic trading with the rest of the world. Many neighbouring countries, as well as western countries, eagerly keep an eye on it, keen to gain a foothold from which to do business.

Military activity in modern-day Rakhine is complicated by the fact that there are two different armed factions that have been the target of Myanmar government suppression. The Rakhine independence groups (which, confusingly, sometimes act with the government forces against other groups) and the Rohingya defence groups.

COLONISATION

Many different ethnic groups, city-states and kingdoms occupied Myanmar's borders throughout the 19th century. The idea of a 'border' then meant how far a detail of soldiers could ride to defend territory. There weren't the imagined borders like those we see on maps. The concept of 'nation' as an identity was also new.

Over a period of 62 years, Britain conquered Burma in three steps, finally making the former kingdom part of the Indian Empire. Burmese warlike kings posed an ongoing threat to the operations of the British East India Company. Burma was administered as a province of India until 1937 when it became a separate, self-governing colony.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION DURING WORLD WAR TWO

At first, the Burmese embraced the Japanese who granted them independence. For decades, the Japanese had been advocating for an Asia just for Asians. Sixty Burmese Nationalist patriots, including Aung San, the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, travelled to Japan to be trained as leaders in the new Burma. But after occupation, and as in Japan in the 1920s, the army treated the people with an iron-fisted cruelty. It wasn't long before many were supporting British attempts to retake Burma.

In Arakan, the Arakanese fought alongside the Japanese who promised them a kingdom of their own. Rohingya and other Muslims fought with the British. This often bitter hand-to-hand combat is still remembered in Rakhine and continues to shape the current conflict.

INDEPENDENCE

In 1948, Burma was granted independence from the British Commonwealth. But the new, fledging country was plunged into immediate insurgencies, more brutal as they came so soon after the fighting in the Second World War. This internal fighting threatened the viability of the new nation. It paved the way for the military takeovers in the late 1950s and '60s.

CYCLONE NARGIS

Early in May 2008, Cyclone Nargis slammed into Myanmar. Over 138,000 people died and tens of thousands were injured and homeless. The storm is still remembered, over ten years on. Cyclones and storms are common in Myanmar during the monsoon. But the ferocity of Nargis was an exception.

THE BEGINNINGS OF POLITICAL FREEDOM

In 2011 the government began to reform. Political prisoners were released and cease-fires were signed with several ethnic groups. Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to the national legislature in 2012. In 2015, the world watched the November elections in Myanmar. The National League for Democracy (NLD), of which Aung San Suu Kyi is president, won in a landslide. An elected government was sworn in after 5 decades of military rule. But the military retained its own ministry, that was not and is not

answerable to the government. This Ministry of Defence is responsible for the Army and the Border Police.

THE RAKHINE CONFLICT

Most available sources are Internet-based and aimed at adults. They will need to be screened by teachers before students use them.

In August 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya militant group, attacked police stations in northern Rakhine State. The Myanmar military cracked down hard, running what they called 'clearance' operations. Since the conflict began, around 700,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh as refugees. This exodus had begun following smaller scale attacks just under a year earlier. The novel *Hasina* opens in 2016 and ends in the aftermath of the 2017 clearance operations. The Rohingya were also persecuted and chased from Myanmar in the 1970s and 1990s.

Detailed political knowledge is not necessary to understand the themes of the novel. However, one point to grasp is that there are two separate armed resistance groups operating in Hasina's world.

1. AA – Arakan Army, supports an independent Buddhist Arakan (Rakhine) nation, or increased independence within Myanmar.
2. ARSA – Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, which Hasina fears Isak dreams of joining. It began as a Saudi-supported militant Islamist organisation.

The Myanmar military (Sit Tat) have sometimes been supported by the Arakan Army in attacks on Rohingya people. Attacks on the police or military by either AA or ARSA will trigger retaliation on the population by Sit Tat.

PERSECUTION OF ROHINGYA AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

For student research on these topics, use the links provided in the 'Find out more about...' section on p. 213. Save the Children sites such as : <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/Our-Stories/Rohingya-explained> are also useful, being written for children.

In modern times, the Rohingya have suffered various degrees of persecution since the 1970s including:

- no right to free movement; they are not allowed to travel without official permission
- no right to higher education or other social services, such as healthcare
- subjected to routine forced labour on military or government projects
- a denial of Burmese citizenship since 1982
- their property and land has been seized by the military—often given to Buddhist settlers from other parts of Myanmar.

* It should be noted that many other citizens of Myanmar are also subject to the first three restrictions above.

In 2016, however, the persecution of Rohingyas escalated drastically to include:

- unlawful arrest and detention
- extrajudicial killings, bombing and placing mines in the path of refugee boats
- brutal attacks on civilians
- burning of homes, farms, mosques and entire villages
- trapping refugees and killing them.

It is estimated that over 700,000 people have fled over the border and are now mostly in refugee camps in Bangladesh, India and Thailand. Cox's Bazaar is the area with the greatest number of refugees.

International communities and human rights officials have described the violence as ethnic cleansing and genocide.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN MYANMAR

Myanmar is still not well known to the outside world but it is increasingly becoming a tourist destination. Here are some details about everyday life in the country.

Rice, oil, salt

These are the staple foods of any Myanmar household and the saying goes, 'if you have these three in your kitchen, life is liveable'. Rice has a fascinating history in Myanmar. In colonial days and the early 20th century, Burma was the largest exporter of rice in the world, due to the opening up of land for cultivation to trade.

Rice comes from various regions and is of different qualities as mentioned in the novel. For example, there is rice from Patheon and Shwebo, two types which are easier to digest. Nga Kywe rice is chewier and makes you feel fuller but is also more fibrous and difficult to digest. Rice prices today in markets all over Myanmar reflect these different qualities.

Pink, green and white National Registration Cards

A National Registration Card is needed for all travel around the country for Muslims. Most people have identity cards, which entitle them to access services. There are three types of cards.

Pink = full citizen.

Green = Second class citizens. For example, if you are of Chinese extraction, you can own businesses but cannot own more than 49% and you cannot attend medical or technical university courses.

White = takes on the identity of 'foreigners'. You 'pay' for a white card, which is given by political parties in exchange for votes.

Thanaka

A paste from fragrant wood used as makeup and sun protection. Here is what it looks like in its raw condition and what it looks like on the shelves of a shop after processing.



(Photos – Michelle Aung Thin)

Weaving and longyis and identity

Men who cannot read are like the blind; women who cannot weave are like the cripple.

— an old Burmese saying from the time when every household had a handloom and the women wove all the longyis for the family. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longyi>

Different regions of the country have their own weaving patterns for textiles. Many Myanmar people can readily identify the region a piece of cloth comes from. In the past, there were many woven clothing accessories that signified rank, as did hair styles.

Traditionally, weaving was part of a woman's life in Rakhine. Every girl from the age of 12-13 years old had to learn the basics of weaving from her mother or grandmothers. In modern times, only a few villages have managed to position themselves as 'weaving villages' in order to exploit tourist and other markets for traditional woven cloth. Elsewhere, you will no longer find a loom in every home. However, pride in traditional Rakhine patterns is strong and, if they can afford it, most adult men and women will have at least one traditional, hand-woven outfit for special occasions.

The *longyi* is mentioned in *Hasina*. Modelled on the sarong from Malaysia and Indonesia, a longyi is worn by either sex. In Myanmar, they tend to be woven cloth, rather than printed cotton. Men's longyis will be in geometrical or checked patterns but women's longyis may be more decorative. Silk cloth is the most valuable. Before British rule, a fuller, distinctly Burmese, woven cloth was worn.

Here are examples of Myanmar weaving patterns, said to be Arakanese (Rakhine), from *Pinterest*.



LIFE IN RAKHINE STATE TODAY

In urban areas, there are white-collar workers working for government and business; merchants and traders; and poorer workers usually paid very low wages and without much job security. Less than a quarter of the population of Rakhine State live in an urban area.

In rural areas, there are smaller numbers of white-collar workers, merchants and traders. Most rural families own a small patch of land and, if they are lucky, some oxen to plough it with. They live a hand-to-mouth existence. There is also paid forestry work available, cutting timber and bamboo. These activities are dependent on weather and are subject to disruption when fighting or civil unrest is occurring. Fishing is another source of income.

City versus country

Myanmar cities are more developed than rural areas, with schools and medical and social services widely available. The main cities of the country are often also sites of trade. Yangon is still a big deep-river port with access to the Indian Ocean shipping lanes via the Twante canal. Mandalay is the old royal capital but also near the Chinese border. Mawlamyein and Sittwe were former port cities and due to their strategic location, became colonial capitals. However, modern Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, is a relatively underdeveloped city.

Education

As Myanmar rebuilds, education is a high priority. Teachers are supplied by the Ministry of Education and sent around the nation. For those in rural areas most schools only go to the 4th standard (about Year 3 or 4). After that, few villages offer a local school and students must travel to larger settlements. The schools themselves vary a great deal in terms of size and quality, from the buildings to the teacher training to the resources available. For someone in a small town, like Hasina, school would be less of a problem. However, recent government policy has denied education to various groups, in particular, the Rohingya.

Among 15-24-year olds, Rakhine State has the lowest literacy level in Myanmar. About 71% of children attend primary school and only 32% attend secondary school.

Language

Burmese is the majority and official language of Myanmar. English is the second language taught in school. There are over 100 ethnic languages spoken within Myanmar. The Arakanese language, spoken in the bazaar, is similar to Burmese with some different pronunciations and spellings. Mro language, spoken by 'the cat girl' in the novel, is spoken in Bangladesh as well as Rakhine State by approximately 22,000 people. U Ko Yin uses the Malay- or Hakka-English sentence-ending, 'la'. Dadi Asmah has a library of books in many languages, including Bengali.

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UN Refworld, <https://www.refworld.org/>

Other sources:

- Interviews and author's own archival research
- Haymann Oo, art curator and textiles expert
- Hsan Winn, translator
- MayKyel Winn, Interpreter

BEFORE READING - ENGLISH

PREDICTING BY SCANNING THE NOVEL

ACTIVITY: Examining the Cover

Front Cover

- Look at the pictures below the title. What geographical features do you notice?
- Look at the title.
- Look at the picture above the title.
- What is the effect of putting the photo of Hasina on the top half of the cover and her name in the largest type in the title? Is this a fiction book or an information book? How do you know?
- What is the effect of Hasina's gaze being directed at the viewer?

Brainstorm ideas about possible countries, settings and themes

- How does the cover make you feel?

Back Cover

Now read the blurb on the back cover and highlight key words and phrases that relate to the plot and setting e.g. *soldiers, Rakhine forest, smouldering village, Rohingyas, Hasina must fight to save her family, persecution in Myanmar.*

Photographic images on texts are often associated with nonfiction. Have students locate the words on the cover that let us know that this is a narrative/novel and what sort of reading experience we can expect. What are they? [*a gripping story, an authentic tale, the drama and tension draw the reader in till the very end, Fiction.* And, of course, the words *a novel* written faintly on the front cover].

ACTIVITY: Discussion about Genre

Hasina is an example of the contemporary realistic fiction genre.

Discuss:

- What is realistic fiction?
- What other books of this genre have you read?
- What is their specific appeal?
- Are books such as *Hasina* important? Why?
- What changes would need to be made for *Hasina* to be written as non-fiction?

ACTIVITY: Examining the sections of a book

Ask students to quickly scan the entire book and find what else besides the story is included.

- What layout features suggest this is an information book? [*Map, Glossary, Timeline, 'Find out more about...'*]

Although many Rohingya words used in the text are explained by the context, students' attention should be drawn to the glossary at the back of the novel.

Now flip through the story section.

- What features suggest this is a fiction text? [*Few pictures in the text, chapter numbers, dialogue in the text*]

BEFORE READING - SOSE

LEARNING ABOUT REFUGEES

Hasina is not a refugee: she is one of the people who stays behind in a country beset by civil unrest. She is discriminated against, almost to the point of starvation, and risks injury or death if she is the victim of violent persecution. Her parents and aunt and uncle, however, *are* refugees by virtue of having been forced out of their country.

To discuss the internal and international situation regarding refugees from Myanmar or other countries, students need to develop their vocabulary.

ACTIVITY: brainstorm

Brainstorm definitions for, and links between, the following:

natural disaster	persecution	discrimination
political unrest	civil conflict	organised violence
flee (past tense: fled)	citizen/ship	government-sanctioned violence
militia	birth certificate	passport
refuge	land title/property rights	ethnic cleansing

Have any other words come up during the brainstorm? Clarify those words, too.

Make sentences using one or more of these terms.

ACTIVITY: arriving at definitions

In groups, match the person to the category. (One of the people will not match to any category.)

Category

Refugee

Migrant

Asylum seeker

Returnee

Stateless person

Internally displaced person

Person

It was unsafe in my town, so I had to go to my aunt's town and stay with her family.

I was in a refugee camp in another country, but now I think it is safe for me to go home.

I have no passport because there is no country in the world that recognises me as a citizen.

I had to flee across the border into another country to escape natural disaster or civil conflict.

I had to escape persecution or civil conflict and now I want another country to give me a new home.

I was visiting another country but there was so much violence in the streets that I had to come home.

I left my country and went to a new one to make a better life for myself.

IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY

Students collect family history at home, in particular, the country or region of origin of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

- Mark these origins on a class map.
- Individually, map the 'journey' of your family over the generations.

Do students have relatives who are citizens of other countries or residents in other parts of Australia?

- On your individual map, draw lines connecting you to any relatives in other countries.
- Draw lines connecting you to any relatives in other parts of Australia.
- Use photos or draw pictures of your relatives and place them on your map.

DISCUSSION: Why am I here?

Students share the story of how their family came to be in Australia.

- Were they refugees? (A number of grandparents may well have come as post-WWII immigrant refugees to Australia.)
- For what other reasons have people come to Australia?

ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As part of an integrated unit, classes may study the United Nations and human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

In some places, there is ineffective or no government protection of human rights for some or all of their citizens. If life becomes impossible, for instance due to civil war or being forbidden to work, people may be forced to move to another country to seek safety and peace. They then become refugees and fall under the remit of the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).

UNHCR teaching resources

UNHCR produces curriculum and lesson plans for classroom teachers, divided into materials for four different age groups of students: 6-9-year olds, 9-12-year olds, 12-15-year olds and 15-18-year olds.

Their website can be a bit difficult to use. There are orientation suggestions for primary classrooms, referred to as 'main curriculum', aimed at establishing a respect for diversity, a peaceful classroom and a welcoming and inclusive classroom for newly arrived immigrant and refugee students:

9-12 yr olds: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/publications/education/59d360bf7/teaching-refugees-9-12-year-olds-primary-curriculum.html?query=curriculum>

6-9 yr olds: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/publications/education/59d354967/main-curriculum-refugees-asylum-migration.html?query=curriculum>

Other materials are for classroom teaching specifically about refugees. Start with 'Teaching about refugees' at <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/teaching-about-refugees.html?query=for%20teachers>.

Work down the 'Teaching about refugees' webpage, which provides a brief introduction to terminology, eye-opening facts and figures, links to downloadable reports and multi-media, notes on including refugee children in your own classroom and, for each age group, curated resources produced by other UN organisations or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International ('Other teaching resources').

For more depth, return to the top of the 'Teaching about refugees' page where there are links to the curriculum and teaching materials for the four age groups as well as a link to extra 'Teaching Resources' such as book lists, class activities and games.

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

<https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/information-for-children>

<https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/unicef-in-emergencies/protecting-rohingya-refugee-children>

LEARNING ABOUT RAKHINE STATE IN MYANMAR

First, examine the map at the beginning of *Hasina* and note neighbouring countries and the location of Rakhine State within Myanmar. If a globe or large world map is available, ask student(s) to find Myanmar on that. Where does Myanmar lie in relation to Australia and New Zealand?

Then, locate Myanmar on Google Maps and note the neighbouring countries and general shape of Myanmar.

ACTIVITY: switching views in Google Maps

Search Google Maps for 'Rakhine State, Myanmar'. This will produce a map of Myanmar with the state border outlined. On Map view, what do you notice about Rakhine State, in itself and in relation to the rest of Myanmar? Locate the capital, Sittwe. How big does it look?

Switch to Satellite view. Does anything else stand out about Rakhine State? [*forested mountains between Rakhine and the rest of Myanmar, few roads, flat area near the coast*]

ACTIVITY: predicting and developing vocabulary and concepts

If the class is going to do in-depth study of the historical, social and political background to Hasina, the following suggestions may be useful:

- From the Google Maps activities and class or group discussions, collect vocabulary to describe Rakhine State.
- Read the Wikipedia entry for Rakhine State, particularly the sub-headings Demographics, Transport, Economy, Education, Health care [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rakhine_State] and add more vocabulary to your lists.
- Create WordStorms to describe Rakhine State. A WordStorm is a visually organised brainstorm, using graphics and/or varying font sizes to link or highlight various words or groups of words. Depending on the class level and aims of the lessons, WordStorms can be a brainstorming session re-organised graphically by concepts or a full set of lessons orienting students to the likely content of the novel/other resources they will read. The aim is for students to develop familiarity with vocabulary they will encounter and need to use in later activities.

[Teachers can see two ways to use WordStorms at the following sites:

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/cheatl.plr.wordstorm/word-storming-reading-strategy/#.W1WHM9IzaUk>

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/using-word-storms-explore-886.html?tab=4#tabs>]

ACTIVITY: research the background

Option if no pre-teaching about Myanmar or Rohingya persecution is occurring:

Students use the references on the 'Find out more about...' page and the final section of the Timeline, from 2014 on, to familiarize themselves with the real events and organisations they will be reading about in *Hasina*.

DURING READING

DEVELOPING EMPATHY

Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts. (ACELT 1613)

ACTIVITY: Near misses

Ask students about any 'near misses' they have witnessed or experienced. Drawings of their 'near misses' could be pinned up on the wall.

ACTIVITY: Reading to the class

Students listen while the teacher reads Chapter 1.

DRAMA ACTIVITY: Run!

When the helicopters come, Hasina only just makes it into the door of the madrassa for cover.

If you have gym mats available (for Hasina's landing!) create a *madrassar* around the mats, with an outside area beside them.

In small groups, students develop sounds and body movements to represent the following:

- Aunt Rukiah – How does she feel? What information might she have that her students don't? When she is sheltering with the other students, how does she feel about Hasina?
- Ghadiya – She is fearful from the first sight of helicopters. She is the one who points at them and calls out when she realises they are Sit Tat (Army) helicopters.
- Araf, Tara, Aman, Rosie – First they are pinned to the spot in amazement, then when Aunt Rukiah yells 'Run!', they all rush inside the madrassar with her.
- Hasina – She can't drag her eyes away from the helicopters and the loud sound freezes her. At the last minute, she must dive for the madrassar doorway and safety.
- Helicopters – They fly in tight formation, at first going past in the distance, then turning sharply in perfect unison towards the town. In perfect unison, they drop down low and come right overhead.

Students combine to re-enact the scene.

READ-ALOUD ACTIVITY

Suitable read-aloud sections in *Hasina*:

- *The men come at night...The river. The Lower Forest,' Hasina gasps. 'Quickly.'* (pp. 68-70)
- *Over the next few days,...Now is the time to go home. But to what, she does not know* (pp. 97-99)

Showing ordinary people caught up in sectional discrimination and violence:

- *She drops down from the rocky forest path...'Go,' he hisses. 'Run!'* (pp. 93-94)
- *Ghadiya breaks the silence...What say did she, Hasina, have in this act? None at all.* (pp. 134-135)
One day at the rubbish pile...Where he was standing is a white bag. Hasina picks it up. It is full of rice. (pp. 142-143)
- for three students: a narrator, Hasina and the kind Arakanese man:
Hasina tries stall after stall...Just stay away from U Ko Yin. (pp. 176-177)

Have a **RALFF Performance** (Read Aloud For Fun) using the sections above. Students could choose their favourite scene and read aloud to the class.

VOCABULARY

ACTIVITY: Glossary

- While reading, students should be adding to a class or individual list any words they need to learn that are NOT in the glossary on pages 211-212.
- Using contextual clues in the novel and image searches on the Internet and in information books, students could create their own pictorial dictionary for words such as *chinlone*, *htamein*, *longyi*, *stupa*, *numal*.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION POINTS

The [discussion points](#) and comprehension questions at the end of these notes may be useful in guiding students' responses to *Hasina*.

AFTER READING

The MyRead website describes effective strategies for responding to the text:

- <http://www.myread.org/organisation.htm> (page down webpage to select, for example, Jigsaw.)

PLOT

ACTIVITY: Table to book trailer

Discussion in groups:

- What are the main 'complications' of the story? e.g. immediate survival after the burning of the houses; keeping everyone safe and fed in the months after; finding Araf; finding their families? Are there any more main complications? Any important lesser complications?

After a class discussion, pooling the results of the group discussions,

- Create a table of the main plot points in *Hasina*, explaining how a problem was resolved and what, if anything, was added to our understanding of characters or issues.

Problem	Resolution	Did the reader learn more about the characters or issues because of the way this problem played out in the book?

- Convert the first two columns of the table to a line graph, showing relative intensity of plot points as peaks on the graph. Where would you put the climax (i.e. highest plot point) of this book? (There is no right answer to this one!)
- Create a book trailer for *Hasina* showing the main plot events. This website provides good ideas: <http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/>. (See also [Book Review activity](#), below.)

CHARACTERISATION

Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts. (ACELT1621)

The author has created engaging characters of depth and credibility, drawing much empathy towards the protagonist, her family and friends.

ACTIVITY: Character Grid

After reading *Hasina*, have students in groups find passages in the text that provide details of the characters' appearance, personality and, optionally, their role in the story—a more sophisticated task.

Character	Physical Characteristics	Personality	Role in story
Hasina			
Araf			
Aunt Rukiah			
Nurzamal			
Dadi Asmah			
'Cat Girl'			

ACTIVITIES: Compare and Contrast

- Find references in the text to Aunt Rukiah and Nurzamal that give insight into their very different personal journeys. Using Think Pair Share strategy, which character draws forth the greatest sympathy? Support your opinion with text evidence.
- Why is there tension between these two characters and how does the author convey this?
- Work in pairs to create Kennings poetry for characters such as U Ko Pin and Isak.
- Create a piece of artwork that represents the character that you find the most inspiring.
- Which character do you relate to the most? Why? Create an Open-Minded Portrait for your character. Explanation is provided at <http://rhsliteracystrategies.weebly.com/open-mind-portrait.html>
- Gather text descriptions for the major characters and complete interactive character maps using: <http://readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/storymap/>

STYLE – PERSON AND POINT OF VIEW

ACTIVITY: Third person limited perspective

A traditional tale, such as a fairy tale, is told by an omniscient author in the third person. All characters are referred to as 'he', 'she', 'it' or 'they' and the author knows, and tells the readers, what everyone is thinking or feeling all the time.

But many modern authors tell their story from the point of view, or perspective, of one main character. This narrative voice is called 'third person limited'. All characters are still referred to as 'he', 'she', 'it' or 'they' but the reader only knows as much about the other characters' thoughts and feelings as the main character knows. We hear, feel and see everything through Hasina's experience.

- When reading the novel, how aware were you of 'being inside Hasina's head'?
- Did the third person limited voice increase your identification with Hasina? Explain your answer.
- Does this narrative voice deny the other characters their own voice?
- Were there other voices you felt you, as a reader, needed to hear (more) from? If so, make suggestions.

STYLE - EXPOSITION

Expository writing is writing that explains, informs or describes, such as newspaper articles, sets of instructions, or encyclopaedia entries.

In literature, certain literary devices have been developed that explain necessary background to the reader. These devices can be grouped under the heading of *exposition*. They are frequently employed in storytelling that is set in a time or place outside the knowledge of readers.

One of the features of *Hasina* is the author's 'lightness of touch' – she delivers a large amount of exposition throughout the story without interrupting narrative flow.

ACTIVITY: How do we know?

Brainstorm how readers come to know the following facts:

Fact	Exposition
Hasina likes geometry (p. 1)	<i>a particularly juicy geometry problem</i> – by hearing Hasina's thoughts, we realise she likes geometry.
Nagar is the Rohingya word for dragon (p. 2)	' <i>Is it nagars?... 'No, Araf...it is not dragons'</i> – by using the English word in dialogue to respond to the Rohingya word, we learn what <i>nagars</i> means.
The violence four years ago touched every Rohingya family in Rakhine State. (p. 10)	<i>Hasina knows only too well that...</i> - these paragraphs show us Hasina's thoughts but mainly give us background information to help us understand her family's situation.
Hasina is attracted to Isak (p. 43)	<i>Hasina is thankful that her numal helps hide the blush she feels spreading across her cheeks.</i> – We are inside Hasina's mind and so know what she feels. We <i>deduce</i> that she is blushing because she is attracted to Isak. This is an <i>implied</i> fact.
What is ARSA? (p. 45)	One character directly asks another a question. The answering dialogue contains the information.
What do the Rohingya want? (p. 54-5)	Again, dialogue is used. Hasina asks her father if war is coming and whether the country will break up. In his replies to her questions, he gives us his opinions and argues against some other opinions. So in this case, the exposition not only contains information about politics, it also shows us Ibrahim's opinions and character.

The main expository devices in *Hasina* are:

- Hasina's internal monologue – we see, hear, learn, remember and feel things as if we are Hasina
- Dialogue – in their conversations, characters tell the readers important information
- 'Show, don't tell' – the reader can work things out for themselves by paying attention to the way a character reacts or how a scene is described. This is often *implicit* information, and students may have to back up their conclusions by referring to the text.

STYLE – DESCRIPTIVE AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Use the section in Chapter 18, pp. 122-125 for language analysis. Hasina has gone back to the bazaar after the soldiers have left the town. She discovers the cat Daamini, who leads her to the wounded Isak.

Students can make lists on paper, or help the teacher highlight language features on the text projected onto the interactive white board.

ACTIVITY: language analysis

List or highlight the verbs used to show how the scene is described through actions:

pleads, streaking across, pauses briefly, dashing, came, chased away, calls, crawling, bends down...

List the clauses that describe Hasina's feelings:

feels a terrible pang of regret, cannot bear to let her go, relief floods Hasina's heart, heart pounds, heart pounding again...

Note the figurative language:

light knives past her, darkness crowds around her, a groan splits the darkness, groan rends the air, (she) ignores the hammering in her heart, words are like rubble in his mouth.

(The last is a simile, the earlier examples are metaphors.)

Most of the descriptive work in this passage is done by the verbs, with some carefully chosen adjectives, adverbs and figurative phrases or clauses.

- What effect does this have on the reader?
- Why might such a passage not include a whole lot of descriptive language such as adjectives and adjectival phrases?

ACTIVITY: conveying character and foreshadowing

The final short paragraphs of Chapter 8, on page 51, are more effective because they are placed at the end of the chapter. A sense of foreboding is created as we wonder how this new character, U Ko Yin, will affect the plot. We must turn the page to find out! (Also, the plot is returned from a cosy family scene to the threatening wider world.)

'Mingalar bar.'

Hasina jumps, startled. A shadow looms over the three of them. She looks up into a wide, bloated face, a false smile showing big yellow teeth.

It is U Ko Yin, the teashop owner.

- The rest of this chapter has described the children's visit to their father in the bazaar to take him lunch. What is the effect of ending this chapter with this small scene?
- Why is Hasina *startled*? What effect does this have on the reader?
- Note the way that in one small sentence, U Ko Yin is introduced as an unsavoury and untrustworthy character.

- Try writing one or two sentences to introduce the villain in a well-known film or story.
- *A shadow looms over the three of them.* This is a literal description, but does it also 'foreshadow' a metaphorical shadow looming over the family?

THEMES

RESILIENCE

DISCUSSION: What is 'resilience'?

Discuss what *resilient* means.

- Does being resilient mean you don't need any help?
- Is resilience something some people just have, or can it be taught?
- How much stress on a person is too much? How do you know if you are under too much stress?
- What is the difference between resilience and courage?
- When have you or someone you know shown resilience?

DISCUSSION: What makes Hasina resilient?

Hasina ends up supporting three or four younger kids, her grandmother and Isak.

- In what ways does Hasina's upbringing and her personality enable her to do this?
- What people and events lend support to Hasina?

Skills and experience

All the children have certain skills that help them survive in the High Forest.

- What do Hasina, Ghadiya and Araf contribute to their own survival?

FEAR

Throughout the book, Hasina feels 'a stone her stomach' (pp. 39, 103, 143, 178) or her stomach 'curls with anxiety' (p.117). Her heart pounds (p. 47, 77, 79, 80, 92, 123,)), falls (p. 12), 'clenches with fear' (p. 98), 'beats faster' (p. 114) or 'lurches' (p. 103).

- What makes you feel afraid or a little anxious?
- Discuss Hasina's anxiety in relation to the final paragraphs of the novel: *Hasina's heart swells...her heart, bent and broken, is a little closer to whole again.* (p. 199).

CULTURE AND FAMILY

Hasina's Rohingya family are Muslims.

- What evidence of their Islamic faith and customs can you find in the first six chapters?
- How is their religion woven into their culture i.e. other customs, behaviour etc? Would you say it is a prominent part of their culture?

Hasina's mother, in particular, stresses to Hasina that she must always behave in a 'proper' way for a young girl.

- What kind of behaviour is Hasina expected to demonstrate? Find examples in the text.

After the soldiers come, Hasina struggles with the fact that some of these behaviours are no longer appropriate or useful.

- How has the conflict changed the way she behaves?

Ibrahim seems to be quite a liberal father to Hasina.

- Can you find textual proof of this?

On page 48, Hasina reflects: *I am seeing into the world of men.*

- What lets her see into the world of men?
- In your culture, are these things seen as belonging to 'the world of men'?

Despite Ibrahim's liberalism towards his daughter, his family still divides roles by gender.

- Describe the roles of family members.
- How do Aunt Rukhiah and Ghadiya fit into the family?

KIND INDIVIDUALS AND RESISTANCE TO PERSECUTION

- List the people who help Hasina or display compassion or kindness. Are these people taking a risk in helping others?
- Do we have an obligation to always speak out against persecution? If so, where does that obligation come from?

Poem

*First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist*

*Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist*

*Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist*

*Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew*

*Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me*

This poem is based on a speech by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller in 1946 after the end of WWII. He was confessing to the role that he and many other Germans played in allowing the Nazis to take over their country and implement the extermination of different groups in society.

Also frequently quoted is James Baldwin's message to Angela Davis: 'If they come for me in the morning, they will come for you in the night.'

- List the reasons for and against Isak joining ARSA.

Read pages 54-56:

- Consider the warning of the kind Arakanese man. Is there a limit to what individuals can achieve, as opposed to organised groups?
- After reading pages 54-56, discuss whether it is necessary, in the end, to use violence to stop violence.

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies the right to education: Articles 28 & 29.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf>

It is an accepted fact that the education of girls is one of the most important factors in the economic development of a country.

- Why do you think this is?
- Why do you think that girls are denied education in some countries/cultures?
- Analyse the argument on page 60 between Nurzamal and Rukiah over education and the role of women. Why do the two women have such different views? What does Hasina feel about this argument? How does she feel about her own education?

ACTIVITY: Role play

Divide the class into small groups. Each group will take on the role of Nurzamal, Rukiah, Dadi Asmah or Ibrahim.

Taking on the role of your character *before the town is burnt*, prepare a series of points to be presented at a family discussion about Hasina's future.

- Should she continue to be taught in secret by Aunt Rukiah?
- Should she be married so that she can be protected by a man?
- Will the family have to choose between education and survival for Hasina?

GROWING UP QUICK

'Yes, I had to grow up quick' is an old saying used by people looking back on a childhood full of hardship.

- Is there a problem with 'growing up quick'?

DISCUSSION: Is there a right to childhood?

- What has Hasina gained and what has she lost due to her situation?
- Would you rather be Araf, innocent of the wider social and political environment and able to enjoy moments of play or fun, or Hasina, full of worry but taking care of everyone after her parents are gone?
- What do you value about childhood?
- What do we expect of children that we do not expect of adults? And vice versa?

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND AID AGENCIES

At the crucial moment, Hasina is rescued by a human rights lawyer, Hann Linn.

- How does Hann Linn defeat the child traffickers?
- Research the international action and laws/treaties that support his work.

We also read that U Ko Yin is selling for a profit rice donated as aid i.e. it is meant to be distributed free to those who are facing starvation.

- Why do you think that, initially, he is not dealt with by the authorities?
- What do you think of the 'community justice' that is dealt out to Zaw Gyi and U Ko Yin at the end of the book?

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

After reading *Hasina*, students may want to know how they can help refugees. This can be broadened to volunteering in general, if desired.

ACTIVITY: Volunteers – brainstorming and research

- Hasina and Araf walk past the International Aid Office (p.33). What organisations are students aware of that might run such an office?
- **Explore** the work of Australian refugee aid organisations. Some are dedicated to helping refugees settle in Australia. Others are dedicated to helping refugees overseas who have not yet been resettled in a third country.

Refugee Council of Australia <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>

UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/>

Save the Children <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/>

UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org.au/about-us>

CARITAS: <https://www.caritas.org.au/>

Catholic Relief Services <https://www.crs.org/>

ShelterBox <https://www.shelterboxaustralia.org.au/>

Médecins Sans Frontières/ Doctors Without Borders Australia

<https://www.msf.org.au/>

Mercy Corps <https://www.mercycorps.org/about-us>

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre <https://www.asrc.org.au/>

- What other differences do students see between the organisations? [Hint: *Some may spend more time on 'advocacy'; others on relief programs. Some are UN organisations; others are NGOs. Some are religious-based; others are secular. Some specialise in refugee work; others provide broader assistance.*]
- What volunteer organisations could you join/support if you were keen to help Rohingya refugees?

ACTIVITY: Volunteers – taking action

- There are many ways that students can **raise funds** for an aid organisation or project.
- It is also possible to **donate goods** to some organisations, although others specifically do NOT collect from the public. See <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/donating-goods/> for a list of Australian organisations who accept donated goods.
- UNICEF Australia provides materials to support young people speaking up for the rights of children:
<https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/information-for-children/speak-up-for-child-rights>

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY: Comparative text study

1) Create a **literature circle** around novels dealing with displaced young people.

The Once series by Morris Gleitzman: *Once* (2005), *Then* (2008), *Now* (2010), *After* (2012), *Soon* (2015), *Maybe* (2017) and, to come, *Always*. Penguin/Puffin Australia – follows the story of Felix, a young Polish Jew, from the invasion of the Nazis to post WWII and his descendents.

Refuge by Jackie French. HarperCollins 2013 – a boat of refugees is sunk and Faris wakes to find himself washed up on the coast of Australia. But where, in fact, is this idyllic place? Deals with the history of child migration to Australia.

Shauzia by Deborah Ellis. A&U 2003 – a teenaged girl is an Afghani refugee in Pakistan.

Walk in my Shoes by Alwyn Evans. Penguin Australia 2004 – a young Afghani refugee's journey to a detention centre in Australia.

The Bone Sparrow by Zana Fraillon. Hachette Australia 2016 – a Rohingya refugee boy uses his love of stories and imagination to survive in a detention centre in Australia. Often allegorical and metaphorical.

2) Further students' **visual literacy** with a study of the growing number of picture books, often for older readers, dealing with people living in or fleeing from conflict zones. Students could then create a picture book edition of *Hasina* or create their own graphic response to the novel.

Out by Angela May George, illustrated by Owen Swan. Scholastic Australia 2016.

Pea Pod Lullaby by Glenda Millard, illustrated by Stephen Michael King. A&U 2017.

My Dog by John Heffernan, illustrated by Andrew McLean. Scholastic Australia 2001.

Azzi in Between by Sarah Garland. Frances Lincoln 2012.

The Island by Armin Greder. A&U 2007.

The Mediterranean by Armin Greder. A&U 2018.

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey by Margriet Ruurs, illustrated by Nizar ali Badr. University of Queensland Press 2017. Contains parallel Arabic text.

3) Compare *Hasina* with another Through My Eyes book (complete series listed below), looking at the following:

- the nature of the conflict zone
- The nature of the problems facing the protagonist and the dangers involved
- The personal characteristics that the protagonist draws on
- The help received from other individuals by the protagonist
- The help, if any, received from organisations, agencies or government
- The writing style of the author

ACTIVITY: design a book series

- Examine other books in the Through My Eyes series and the Through My Eyes—Natural Disaster Zones series. What about the cover designs shows that these are series? What do you think are primary considerations in creating a cover design template for a series?
- Research cover designs of other book series you know of—both fiction and non-fiction.
- In groups, come up with an idea for a series of books on any topic, in any genre. Create a template of the cover design for the books in your series OR write the brief for the designer who will create the template.

THROUGH MY EYES

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES, 'THROUGH MY EYES'

Hawke, Rosanne. *Shahana* (Kashmir conflict), Allen & Unwin NSW, 2013

Heffernan, John. *Naveed* (war in Afghanistan), March 2014

Hillman, Robert. *Malini* (civil war in Sri Lanka), Sept 2014

Mason, Prue. *Zafir* (civil war in Syria), March 2015

Masson, Sophie. *Emilio* (the drug war in Mexico), June 2014

Powers, J.L. *Amina* (civil war in Somalia), Sept 2013

Thin, Michelle Aung. *Hasina* (persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar), Sept 2019

Books in the related Through My Eyes: Natural Disaster Zones series

Beale, Fleur. *Lyla* (2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand), March 2018

Chim, Wai. *Shaozhen* (2014 drought in Henan, China), August 2017

Daniel, Zoe. *Angel* (2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines), August 2018

Heffernan, John. *Hotaka* (2011 Tsunami in Japan), March 2017

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

See [Biographical Notes and Motivation for Writing this Book](#), above

ABOUT THE SERIES EDITOR

LYN WHITE

Lyn White is the series creator and editor of all the acclaimed Through My Eyes texts. She has extensive experience as a primary school teacher-librarian and EAL teacher and in 2010 completed postgraduate studies in Editing and Communications at the University of Melbourne. Lyn is passionate about children's literature and has great expertise in engaging students with quality texts. Her work with refugee children motivated her to create the acclaimed Through My Eyes series of books set in contemporary war zones. The Natural Disaster Zones series pays tribute to children and their families whose lives are severely affected by natural disasters. Lyn is currently commissioning the next Through My Eyes series that will be set in Australian Disaster Zones.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DISCUSSION POINTS

Chapter One

- When did you realise that *tocata tocata tocata* was the sound of helicopters?
- How does the text tell you what *madrassa* and *nagar* mean? Did you stop reading when you didn't understand the words or did you keep reading and understand the **contextual clue**? How else might you quickly find the meaning of these words?
- If you had to guess, how would you explain Ghadiya's behaviour?
- '*...the eight birds do another strange thing. Something Hasina has never seen birds do before, except one: the hawk.*' What do you know about hawks? What emotion does this sentence evoke? On the next page, find the sentence where Hasina thinks of the hawk again, to explain her feelings.
- What sport do you think Hasina plays? Do you think she plays it well? How does her skill at this sport help her now?

Chapter Two

This chapter does a lot of work, giving us brief introductions to relevant history, geography and politics. It also gives us more information about some of the characters. In groups, students could consider one of the following questions and report back to the whole class.

- Can you summarise the recent conflicts in Rakhine (Arakan)?
- What have been the effects of this conflict on people's lives and on Hasina's family?
- What restrictions have been placed on Rohingya people?
- What do we find out about Aunt Rukiah's behaviour and appearance? Look at her actions and speech, as well as the narrative description of how she came to be living with Hasina's family.
- What do we find out about Nurzamal – Hasina's mother's – behaviour and appearance?
- What do you make of this passage?

Yet Hasina suspects that her mother would have loved the chance to study herself; would still love the chance to read books and discuss ideas and think about the world. (p. 14)

Chapter Three

- What do we learn about Dadi Asmah in this chapter?

This chapter could also be a launching point for a shared lunch of Myanmar food, presented in tiffins, if your school is located in an area where such food is available. The students could learn to eat with their right hands, as many people around the world do.

Chapter Four

- Describe the gardens of the homes in Eight Quarters District.
- What is Monu Mush? Why do you think Monu Mush is 'prized' by his owner?
- Where do the people of Eight Quarters District get their water from?
- How does Hasina demonstrate her sisterly and neighbourly responsibilities at the pump?
- How does she 'take a risk, break the rules a little' on her way to the bazaar?

Chapter Five

- How would you feel if you were not allowed to attend any school, but other people could?
- What history can be read in the architecture and layout of Hasina's home town of Teknadaung?

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DISCUSSION POINTS

- What history can you read from the architecture and layout of your own suburb?
- Why does Hasina feel more comfortable once they reach the bazaar?
- What happens to change that feeling to one of fear?

Chapter Six

This time, events at the bazaar make Hasina not just uncomfortable but 'as if she has swallowed a stone'. She is frozen, wondering how the people around the TV will react to Araf and her.

- How do the people react?

Chapter Seven – Chapter Nine

In these chapters we are still learning information about Hasina's family and the wider community and history i.e. we see her father's stall, Isak's family stall and meet U Ko Yin; Ibrahim explains the different armed factions and Hasina recalls the dashing of hopes after the recent elections. In fact, quite a lot of information is imparted with a very light touch.

- In what way is Ibrahim privileged, compared to many other local people?
- Do you think he will succeed in passing that privilege on to his daughter, Hasina?

Read the last two paragraphs of page 48, when Hasina reflects on her father's belief in education: *What he asks of himself...while women do not.* This not only tells us something about her father and her society, it also tells us about Hasina.

- What do we learn about Hasina through such thoughts?
- Compare the character and behaviour of U Ko Yin and 'the kind Arakanese man'.

Chapter Ten

In this chapter, the background violence ramps up and directly affects Hasina's family.

- List the incidents of civil unrest or violence that occur.
- Compare the attitudes of Aunt Rukiah and Nurzamal to Rukiah's home school.
- Why do you think Rukiah eventually closes the school?
- Is Nurzamal over-reacting to the threat of danger and the rudeness of the police when they search her?
- What outside event finally makes things 'far worse'?

Chapter Eleven – Chapter Fifteen

p. 69: 'Stay together. Hide. Stay alive. Take care of them, Hasina. I will come for you.'

In these chapters, men arrive in trucks with guns and flame-throwers and destroy Eight Quarters District. Hasina is entrusted with the care of Ghadiya and Araf and told to flee. The children hide in the High Forest and survive there for five days.

Araf's childishness tries Hasina's patience. Hasina hears Ghadiya's story of how her family had to flee their home and come to live with Hasina.

Hasina works out a 'Hansel and Gretel' method for finding her way through the forest. The children work out how to catch shrimp and light a fire. Araf is able to climb a high tree and act as lookout.

Hasina ventures down into an almost deserted town and has a frightening encounter with a young soldier – another 'near miss'.

- Write this encounter from the young soldier's point of view

Chapter Sixteen – Chapter Eighteen

p. 98: 'They are going home...Hasina's heart clenches with fear. What will they find there?'

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DISCUSSION POINTS

Eight Quarters District is deserted.

- Explain the significance of the smashed water pump and slaughtered Monu Mush. Why would the soldiers have done these things?

Two important events occur:

1. Ghadiya finds the cell phone and they call her father, Uncle Rashid, who tells them to stay put.
2. In salvaging what they can from the bazaar stall, they discover the wounded Isak and hear about the massacre of his family.

The Rohingya stalls in the bazaar have been thoroughly ransacked and destroyed yet the electricity still works, so Ghadiya can charge the cell phone.

- What conclusion does Hasina reach when wondering why the electricity has been left untouched?

Hasina wants to take the wounded Isak home and care for him, but hesitates. 'Will he be offended if she asks? It is not proper for her to have a boy, even Isak, in her house. But these are strange times. Proper doesn't seem to count anymore.' (p. 127)

- How important is it to maintain customs and practices, even in dangerous and chaotic times?

Chapter Nineteen – Chapter Twenty-three

Three months pass. Dadi Asmah arrives home with a young Mro girl. The children learn that their parents have been force-marched towards Bangladesh. The children and their grandmother must survive in their own country by keeping a low profile, but even harvesting their own rice crop is difficult. Hasina worries constantly about the food supply and what the future holds. p. 147: 'Nothing can ever be the same again.'

We see U Ko Yin selling black market AID rice at a time when many are starving. Then trucks and construction workers come to rebuild Eight Quarters District – but not for Rohingyas to live in. We meet Zaw Gyi, a truck driver.

Chapter Twenty-four – Chapter Twenty-eight

The story climaxes as a result of Dadi Asmah's illness. Hasina tries to trade with U Ko Yin for medicine and U Ko Yin uses this as an excuse to kidnap Araf, who he tricks into signing a 'work contract'.

Hasina and Isak realise that U Ko Yin and Zaw Gyi are part of a smuggling operation, bringing black market goods to Teknadaung and taking children to sell as labour in Sittwe. In rescuing Araf, Hasina is herself trapped in Zaw Gyi's truck, about to be transported to Sittwe. But first, she overhears the following:

'Where to with this lot, boss?' Zaw Gyi asks in Burmese.

'Golden Teashop, Sittwe,' the voice says.

Hasina recognises the voice.

'Do you want to inspect the merchandise?' Zaw Gyi asks.

No. You do your job, I do mine. Just make sure they get enough water. We don't want any more deaths, la. Not good for business'. (p. 187-8)

- Explain the significance of this conversation.
- Explain the role of the 'kind Arakanese man' in these chapters.
- How is Hasina finally rescued from the smugglers? Explain the role of Hann Linn.

'And her heart, bent and broken, is a little closer to whole again.' p. 199.

- Does this make a satisfying end to the novel?