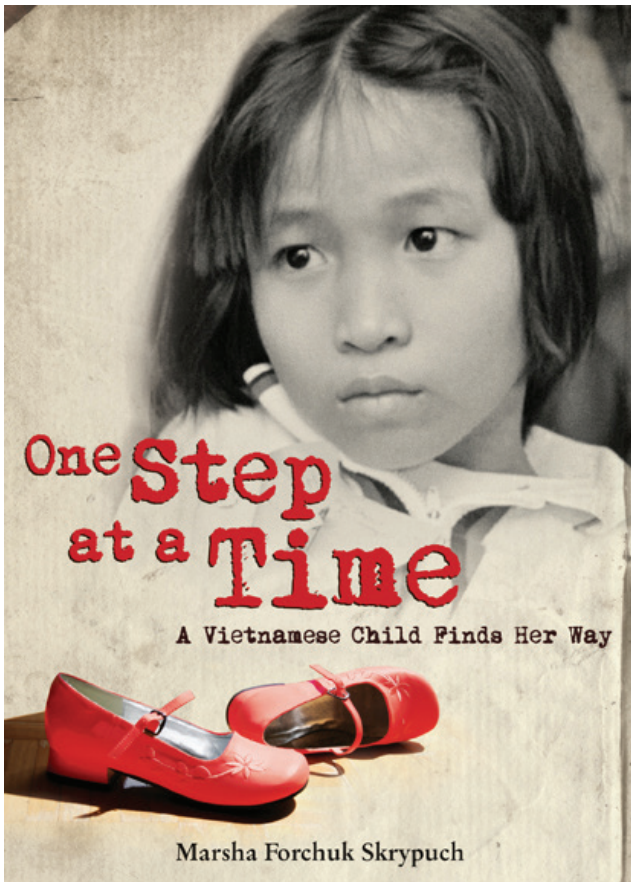


# ONE STEP AT A TIME

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created by Erin Woods



**AGES 8–12 ★ 128 PAGES**  
**NARRATIVE NONFICTION**

“An inspiring story that will appeal to a wide audience.”—*School Library Journal*

“Readers of this moving refugee story will celebrate as well.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Along with the true personal story, the facts about polio across the globe, past and present, will grip readers.”—*ALA Booklist*

“Tuyet’s quiet perseverance is inspiring...”  
—*Publishers Weekly*

## COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

RI.3.1, RI.3.2, RI.3.4, RI.3.5, RI.3.6, RI.3.7, RI.3.9, RI.3.10  
RI.4.1, RI.4.2, RI.4.3, RI.4.4, RI.4.7, RI.4.9, RI.4.10  
RI.5.1, RI.5.2, RI.5.4, RI.5.6, RI.5.7, RI.5.9, RI.5.10  
RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.4, RI.6.7, RI.6.9

## KEYWORDS

**Narrative nonfiction, Biography, Immigration, Adoption, Polio, Vietnam, Vietnam War, 1970s, Hospitalization, Overcoming obstacles, Children with different abilities, Family, Acceptance, Self-esteem**

## FURTHER RESOURCES

*Last Airlift: A Vietnamese Orphan’s Rescue from War*, by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch (Pajama Press)

*In the Clear*, by Anne Laurel Carter (Orca Book Publishers)

*Dear Canada: To Stand On My Own: The Polio Epidemic Diary of Noreen Robertson, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1937*, by Barbara Haworth-Attard (Scholastic Canada)

*Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio*, by Peg Kehret (Albert Whitman & Company)

Rotary International [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)

Polio Global Eradication Initiative  
[www.polioeradication.org](http://www.polioeradication.org)

Teaching Kids News “No More Polio In India”  
<http://teachingkidsnews.com/2012/01/23/no-more-cases-of-polio-in-india/>

# One Step at a Time

## A Vietnamese Child Finds Her Way

MARSHA FORCHUK SKRYPUCH

Discussion Guide created by Erin Woods

### STORY SUMMARY

Vietnamese-born Tuyet has escaped her war-torn homeland and found a loving family in Canada, but she still has battles of her own to fight. Tuyet dreams of running and playing with her adoptive siblings, but her leg has been weakened by polio. Can she face her fear of hospitals and the traumatic memories they awaken if it means walking in matching shoes at last? [Pajama Press]

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch writes from her home in Ontario, Canada. Learn more about her at:

<http://calla2.com/about-marsha/>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you tell the difference between a book that is fiction and one that is nonfiction?
2. Nonfiction books that tell a story are called “narrative nonfiction.” Why is this a good name?
3. What clues can you look for to tell whether a book is a made-up story or a work of narrative nonfiction?
4. What do you think Tuyet is remembering as she lies awake the night before her operation? (1–2)
5. The book says, “Tuyet thought she had buried those memories for good.” What does that mean? Why do you think the memories would come back now? (2)
6. Why are the red shoes Mom bought Tuyet so special? (8)
7. Why is Tuyet afraid when Mrs. Nguyen comes to the house? (12)
8. How does Tuyet feel about her upcoming operation? (15)
9. What makes Tuyet feel calmer when she is frightened of the hospital? (17)
10. Have you ever been scared because you didn’t understand what was going on around you? How did you learn what was really happening? Once you knew the truth, how did you feel? (19–23)
11. Tuyet thinks, “Didn’t everyone feel constant pain? It was just a part of living after all.” Did this surprise you? Is there anything that seems normal to you that might be different for other people? (21–22)
12. Have you ever tried to talk with someone who spoke a different language than you? Was it difficult? Funny? Frustrating? How did you manage to communicate? (25–34)
13. Tuyet shares her balloons with Beth, Lara, and Aaron and thinks, “It was exciting to have something to give her brother and sisters.” Why would this be exciting for Tuyet? (39)
14. Why does Tuyet insist on climbing the stairs on her own, even though it is hard? Have you ever felt the same way about a difficult but important task? (40)
15. “Now that she had a family, she didn’t have to worry about being in the exact same room with them all of the time.” Why might Tuyet have worried about being in the same room as her family all the time before? Why might she feel differently now? (44)
16. How does Lara help Tuyet remember that she belongs in the Morris family even though she looks different than her parents and the people she sees on TV? (48)
17. Why is Tuyet alarmed when she sees her birthday cake? (59)

18. Tuyet’s birthday introduces her to several “strange Canadian customs,” including “burning cakes” and “ripping up little boxes.” What other holiday celebrations would be strange to Tuyet? How might she describe them? (59–61)

19. How does Tuyet feel about the brown shoes when she first sees them? How does she feel about them later? (78–86)

20. “Not all hurts show on the outside,” says Mrs. Nguyen. What does she mean? (90)

21. In the Author’s Note, Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch explains that hospitals were different in the 1970s and “if Tuyet were a child now, the experience would not have been so terrifying.” In what ways do you think *One Step at a Time* would be different if she were a child today? (Page V)

### I RECOMMEND... (PERSUASIVE WRITING, READING COMPREHENSION, MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS)

**Materials:** Reading journals or lined paper, pencils

#### Directions:

Have students write a persuasive letter to a friend recommending that they read (or, if they prefer, do not read) *One Step at a Time*. The letter should address the following points:

- What is the story about? **Note:** Older students can provide a sentence describing the main idea of the book and also list several of the main events.
- Why do you/do you not recommend reading *One Step at a Time*?
- What is one historical event or subject discussed in *One Step at a Time* that you think your friend would find interesting? Suggest some other resources (informational texts, historical fiction, videos, etc.) where he or she could learn more about it.

### WHAT IS BIOGRAPHY? (FEATURES OF TEXT, CLASSIFICATION)

**Materials:** White- or blackboard, “Features of Biography” handout, pencils

**Preparation:** Prepare photocopies of the “Features of Biography” handout found on page 10 of this guide.

#### Directions:

- Explain to the class that *One Step at a Time* is a biography. If the students have also read *Last Airlift: A Vietnamese Orphan’s Rescue from War*, they will understand that *One Step at a Time* is a further story about the life of Last Airlift’s real-life subject, Tuyet Morris.
- Using a white- or blackboard, work with the class to develop a list of the features of fiction. Do the same for nonfiction informational texts. Discuss how biography is a form of non-fiction that uses many of the same features as fiction. Develop a list of the features of biography.
- Distribute copies of the handout “Features of Biography.” Have students use the lists you created to fill in the sections of the diagram.

**Bonus:** Ask students to identify the features of biography exemplified by *One Step at a Time*. For example, it has a setting like a work of fiction, but it also has factual information like an informational text.

### RESEARCHING A BIOGRAPHY (SOCIAL STUDIES)

#### Directions:

- Choose an event that happened earlier this year and ask for two volunteers who were present.
- Have one volunteer leave the room while you interview the other closely about the event, asking for detailed information about what they saw and heard, including specific conversations. Keep notes about what the student remembers.
- Ask the second volunteer to return to the classroom and interview her in the same way, asking the same questions about small details and dialogue.
- When both interviews are complete, discuss with the class:

*Did both of our volunteers give exactly the same answers? Why not? When Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch began interviewing Tuyet, Tuyet did not remember very much about her childhood. How do you think the author learned the details her subject could not remember?*

## POINT OF VIEW (WRITING)

**Materials:** Paper, pencils

### Directions:

1. Introduce students to the idea of first-person and third-person narration. Ask them to identify the narrative voice of *One Step at a Time*.
2. Ask students to speculate why third-person narration is used for biography. How would the book be different if the story were told using first-person narration? What if it were told from more than one point of view?
3. Tell students that Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch interviewed many people, including Tuyet’s mother, sisters, and doctors, to learn all the details she used to write *One Step at a Time*. Those interviews are not published, but by looking at the text we can imagine what the other members of Tuyet’s family were thinking and feeling. Ask students to choose a scene in *One Step at a Time* and re-tell it from another character’s perspective.

## SIMILES (FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE)

**Materials:** White- or chalkboard, “What is a Simile?” handout, pencils

**Preparation:** Make photocopies of the “What is a Simile?” handout found on page 9 of this guide.

### Directions:

1. Tell the class, Tuyet feels strong emotions about the possibility of having her ankle straightened. Instead of writing, “Tuyet felt like Mrs. Nguyen understood her dream” or “She was excited and nervous,” Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch uses similes to express the feelings:

“It was as if Mrs. Nguyen had reached inside Tuyet’s heart.” (14)

“This plan to have her ankle straightened felt like reaching for the stars.” (15)

2. Explain that a simile is a figure of speech that describes one thing by comparing it to something else using the word “like” or “as.” Ask students to speculate why similes would be useful for describing emotions.

3. Working as a class, come up with a list of emotions. Ask a student to share an experience that made him or her feel one of those emotions.

4. Ask the class to come up with a comparison for that feeling. Write it on the board in the format of the following example:

**Experience:** Finding a lost toy

**Feeling:** Very happy

**Comparison:** A dog digging up a bone

**Simile:** When I found my toy I was as happy as a dog digging up a bone.

5. Distribute the handout “What is a Simile?” and have students complete the exercise themselves.

## LEARNING NEW WORDS (VOCABULARY, INFERENCE)

**Materials:** Crossword handout, pencils

**Preparation:** Prepare photocopies of the crossword handout included on page 7 of this guide.

### Directions:

1. Throughout *One Step at a Time*, Tuyet learns new words in English. Students reading this book may also learn many new words. Challenge each student to share one new word he or she encountered and use context to infer the word’s meaning.
2. Distribute copies of the crossword handout. Page references are provided for each word to help students decode the clues.

**Bonus:** Have students use the Index to find further instances of many of these words.

## LOST IN TRANSLATION (DRAMA)

Tuyet and her family face the challenge of communicating without speaking the same language. The following drama game is a lighthearted play on communicating without words. It can be thought of as an action-based version of Broken Telephone.

**Directions:**

1. This game is most effective in groups of eight or so, especially if the players do not have long attention spans.
2. The players line up one behind the other, all facing in the same direction.
3. The player at the back of the line (Player 1) taps the next player (Player 2) on the shoulder. Player 2 turns around to face her. Player 1 thinks of an activity and acts it out.
4. When Player 1 has finished, Player 2 taps Player 3 on the shoulder. Player 3 turns around and watches while Player 2 mimics the actions he has just seen Player 1 perform.
5. Player 3 then performs them for Player 4, and so on. When the final participant has watched the actions, she must guess what activity Player 1 was thinking of. Since the actions are likely to morph with each performance, the results are likely to be entertaining.

## **POLIO** (HEALTH, SOCIAL STUDIES, ART)

**Materials:** Internet access, large screen for sharing Internet resources with class, paper, pencils, colored pencils or markers

**Preparation:** Load the Internet resources described below.

**Directions:**

1. Read the Historical Note beginning on page I.
2. Read the article “No More Cases of Polio in India” on the website *Teaching Kids News*:  
<http://teachingkidsnews.com/2012/01/23/no-more-cases-of-polio-in-india/>

**3. Discuss:**

*How did knowing Tuyet’s story help you understand the article?*

Look at the children in the second photograph, captioned “Child carrying Polio immunization sign at Lucknow rally, November 7, 2009.” Why was it important for children to be a part of the rally?

4. Share the following public-domain Alaska Division of Public Health “Wellbee” poster promoting polio booster shots: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/BoosterWellbee7221.jpg>

5. Tell students that Wellbee was a character used on many posters telling people about the polio vaccine. Ask them to speculate why these posters were effective in helping to eradicate polio in North America.

6. Remind students that there are still places in the world where polio is a problem. An up-to-date list of affected countries can be found at [www.polioeradication.org](http://www.polioeradication.org). Using facts they have learned about polio, have students create a poster encouraging immunization in those countries.

**Bonus:** Older students can research and write a report about polio and the fight for its eradication using the resources listed in the book (Page IV).

## **HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS** (ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION)

**Materials:** Internet access, large screen for sharing photographs with class

**Preparation:** Load the Internet resources described below.

**Directions:**

1. Explain that not all of the photographs in *One Step at a Time* show exactly what the text describes. On page 76 we see “An updated version of the leather and metal brace that Tuyet wore.” Page 78 shows “A pair of orthopedic shoes similar to Tuyet’s.” Page 19 has a photograph of a “McMaster University Medical Centre operating room, circa 1975.”

**2. Discuss:**

*Why might the publisher have included these pictures even though they don’t show Tuyet’s actual brace, shoe, and operating room?*

*Did the pictures give you any information that the text did not?*

*How did the pictures help you understand the text?*

3. Share the following public-domain images with the class:

A physiotherapist helping two young children with polio perform rail exercises [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f3/Polio\\_physical\\_therapy.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f3/Polio_physical_therapy.jpg)

An ancient Egyptian stele showing a priest with a withered leg, thought to be a polio survivor [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/Polio\\_Egyptian\\_Stele.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/Polio_Egyptian_Stele.jpg)

United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a polio survivor, in his wheelchair [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/be/Roosevelt\\_in\\_a\\_wheelchair.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/be/Roosevelt_in_a_wheelchair.jpg)

### Discuss:

What can these photos help us understand about One Step at a Time? What can they help us understand about polio?

Thinking about these photos, can you imagine what it would have been like to live before the polio vaccine was created? How would life be different? How would life be the same?

Can you think of any other images that would have helped your experience of reading this book?

**Bonus:** Older students can research more public domain photos relating to polio and other subjects discussed in One Step at a Time by searching the Wikimedia Commons at <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

## TELLING STORIES

### (MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS)

**Materials:** Internet access, large screen for sharing Internet resources with class

**Preparation:** Load the video found at the following link: <http://youtu.be/rmmfM5CH8K4>

### Directions:

1. Read pages 20 and 21 from “Tuyet willed herself not to think about that other time in the hospital” to “A

time that she needed to forget.”

### 2. Discuss:

Why did Tuyet not want to remember the other time she had been in a hospital?

What does this passage tell us about Tuyet’s early childhood?

Why do you think Tuyet went to an orphanage after the hospital instead of home?

If the woman who visited Tuyet was her mother, why do you think she stopped coming?

**3. Watch the video** “Global Citizen Festival: Archie Panjabi, Ramesh Ferris, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari & John Hewko on polio” from 00:00 to 03:51. Explain that the organizers of this presentation were celebrating the end of polio in India, and encouraging others to keep working to eradicate it from the last few countries where it survives. Vietnam (Tuyet’s birthplace) and North America are both polio free.

### 4. Discuss:

What are the similarities between Ramesh’s story and Tuyet’s? What are the differences?

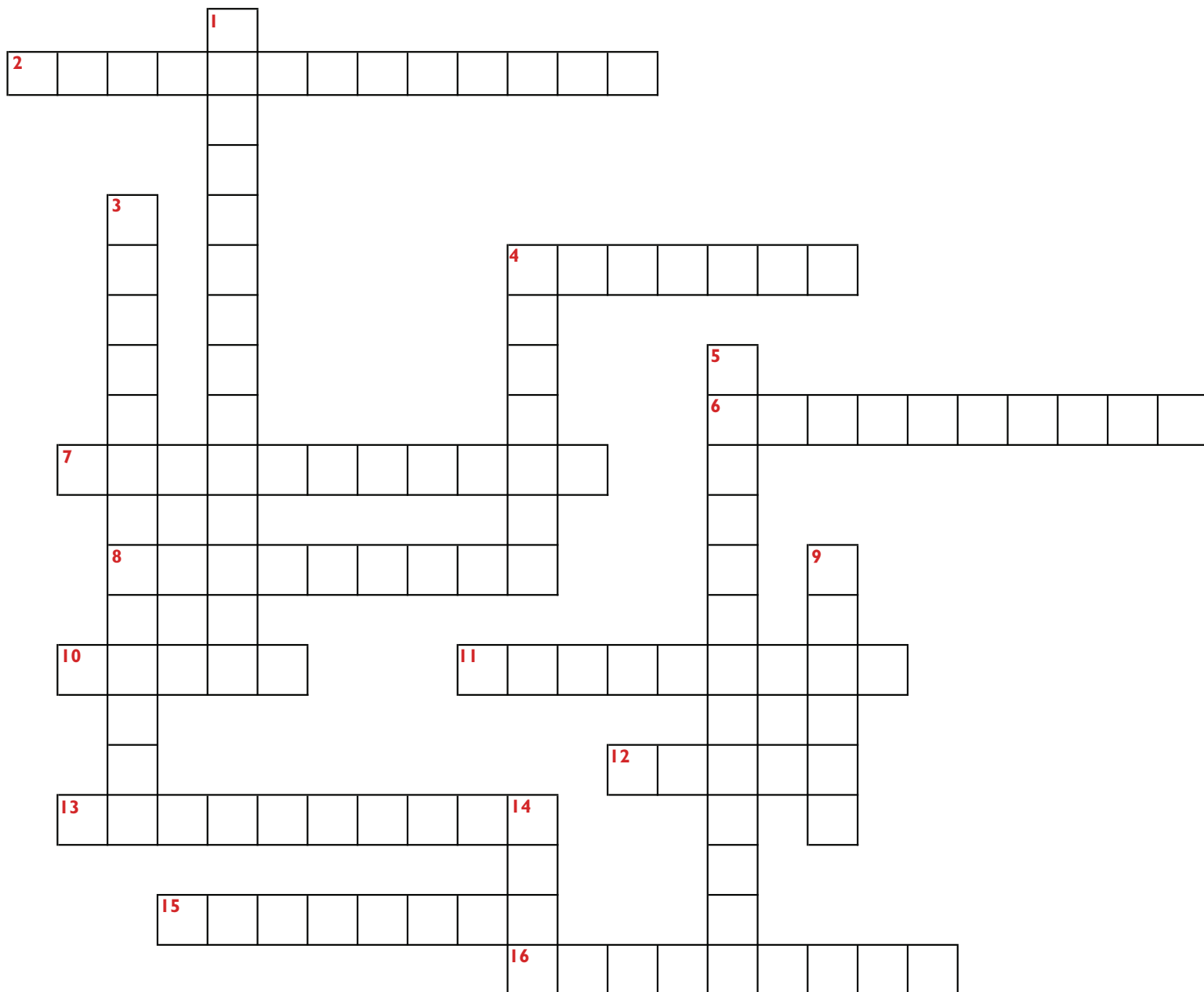
One Step at a Time and Ramesh’s story can both be considered secondary sources. Why? What features do they share? What features are different?

**Note:** You may need to explain that as a recording of the 2012 Global Citizen Festival in New York City, this video is a primary source, but as a hindsight account of Ramesh’s childhood, it is a secondary source.

Having listened to Ramesh, do you have any new ideas about why Tuyet’s mother might have left her at the orphanage?

Why did Ramesh tell the audience about his childhood? How are stories helpful in persuading people to take action?



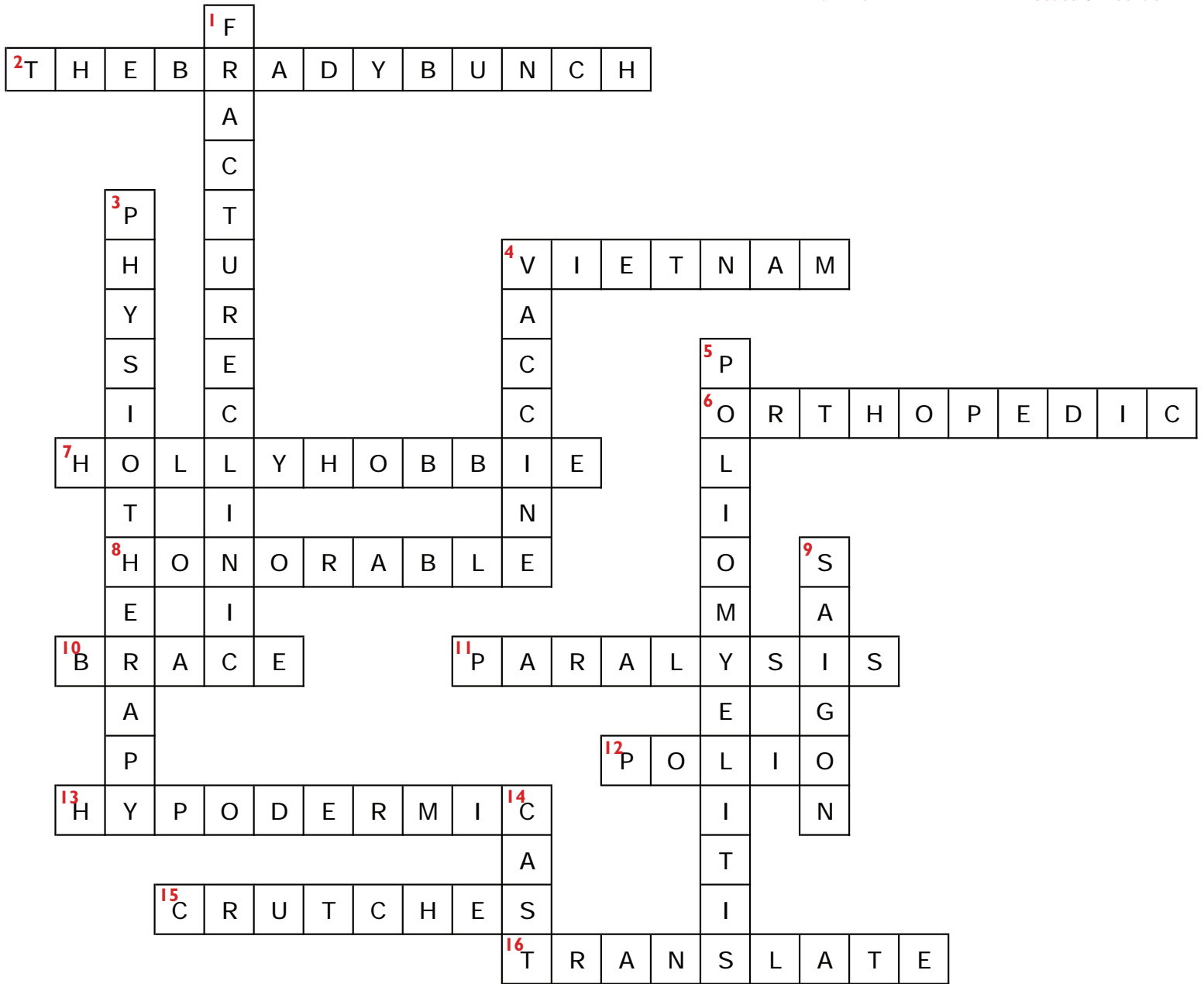


**ACROSS**

- 2. A television show about a large family with three boys and three girls (47)
- 4. The country in which Tuyet was born (2)
- 6. Made to hold the joints in the correct position (78)
- 7. A rag doll first popular in the late 1960s (1)
- 8. A title used in Vietnam to show respect (33)
- 10. A set of metal rods and leather straps that support a weak body part (77)
- 11. Loss of movement in a body part (Historical Note I)
- 12. A disease that can permanently damage the muscles in a child’s arm or leg (64)
- 13. A kind of needle that injects medicine under the skin (31)
- 15. Supports that help an injured person to walk (36)
- 16. Explain the meaning of words in another language (13)

**DOWN**

- 1. A medical clinic that helps patients with broken bones (64)
- 3. Exercises that help patients strengthen parts of their bodies that are weak or damaged (72)
- 4. A medicine given to healthy people to make them immune to a disease (Historical Note II)
- 5. The long name for Polio (Historical Note I)
- 9. The city where Tuyet lived before coming to Canada (2)
- 14. A hard casing that keeps a limb straight so that bones can heal (33)



**ACROSS**

- 2. A television show about a large family with three boys and three girls (47)
- 4. The country where Tuyet was born (2)
- 6. Made to hold the joints in the correct position (78)
- 7. A popular rag doll in the 1960s (1)
- 8. A title used in Vietnam to show respect (33)
- 10. A set of metal rods and leather straps that support a weak body part (77)
- 11. Loss of movement in a body part (Historical Note I)
- 12. A disease that can stop the muscles in a child’s arm or leg from growing (64)
- 13. A kind of needle that injects medicine under the skin (31)
- 15. Supports that help an injured person to walk (36)
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# What is a Simile?

A simile describes one thing by comparing it with

something else using “ \_\_\_\_\_ ” OR

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

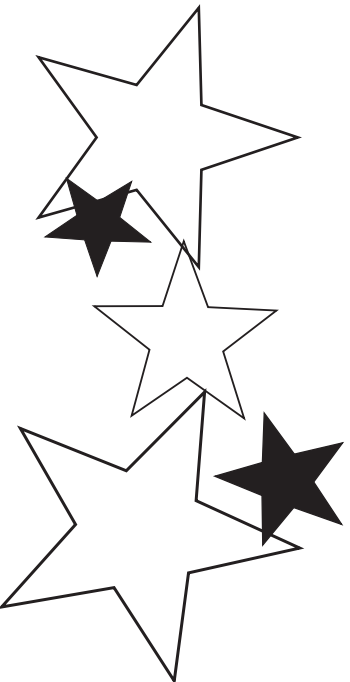
**Example from ONE STEP AT A TIME**

**Experience:** Tuyet thinking about the surgery to straighten her ankle

**Feeling:** nervous and excited

**Comparison:** reaching for the stars

**Simile:** This plan to have her ankle straightened felt like reaching for the stars.



## YOUR TURN:

**Experience:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Feeling:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comparison:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Simile:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# FEATURES OF BIOGRAPHY

