# Study Questions

*The Gangster We Are All Looking For* Pages 3-35

**1. Identify the characters in the narrative: list them by name (if they have one) and cite one or two facts about them**

*- Uncle 1*

*- Uncle 2*

*- Uncle 3*

*- Uncle 4*

The narrator and Ba met the four uncles at sea, likely on the fishing boat they used to flee Vietnam. They cannot speak English.

*- Ma (mother)*

*- Ba (father)*

*- Brother*

*- Narrator (little girl)*

We don't actually really know much about these people. They were likely a complete family before Ba and the narrator fled Vietnam. Is Ma alive? Is the brother alive?

*- Narrator and Ba*

Both unhappy about their new environment, to say the least.

*- Narrator*

Narrator feels trapped away from her mother and brother and feels like she has nobody to talk to about her experiences. She can't speak any English.

*- Ba*

Definitely not fluent in English but can speak more than anyone else in the family.

*- Four Uncles*

Met the Narrator and Ba on some sort of boat. Have managed to integrate somewhat at the pool hall with other Vietnamese men.

*- Mr. Russell*

The one with the dream about the hand dipping into the sea that caused the birds to fly towards him. That dream was about him helping out some of the people that were maybe disenfranchised by the war going on over there. He was also in some branch of the military. Navy, I think?

*- Mrs. Russell*

The one who is "pressuring" Mel into hosting the narrator and co. She takes the narrator and Ba on walks and seemed to somewhat take on a motherly role for the narrator while they lived at Mel's house.

*- Melvin*

One of the more interesting characters. He's very reluctant to host the family but does anyways to respect his late father's last dream. He seems to not have a really strong presence and appears as a lesser shadow of his father, nearly.

**2. Identify the places in the narrative: list them by name and cite one or two facts about them.**

*- Linda Vista*

It seems that Linda Vista is where they finally end up?

*- Green Apartment*

*- Red Apartment*

*- Mel's Place (is that the red apartment?)*

All six of them shared a single room in Mel's house.

**3. Are there any signs that the narrative is written from the perspective of a small child? Why? How? Give an example.**

At the most basic level, the constant daydreaming would indicate that it is from a child's perspective. However, I think the impeccable attention to detail of objects rather than people shows more.

*I would pair the shoes and leave them in the middle of the room, with their toes pointing towards the door.*

If it was from the perspective of an adult, perhaps this would've been written.

*I left the shoes in the middle of the room.*

There's also how the narrator describes the apartments by color first rather than address first.

**4. Describe the relationships that are developed. How do the characters interact with each other?**

In the first 35 pages, there isn't a whole lot of relationship development. Mostly just describing a setting.

There are two “telling” interactions, I think. One was when the narrator tried to explain to Ba that the butterfly wanted to get free and Ba just shook it off and went to sleep. Then again with the narrator throwing a tantrum about wearing the American dress and Ba just shrugs. Ba seems to have a positive relationship with the narrator but as any parent would with their kids complaining, seems to have limited bandwidth for her.

**5. Give an example of people not saying what they mean.**

*"Why doesn't she take us to the beach?" I asked.*

*Ba shook his head. "No. Not possible. There's no reason for us to go there."*

My interpretation of what Ba is saying: "There's nothing left for us from where we came."

**6. Give an example of a miscommunication based on cultural difference.**

When Ba asks Mel "why white" and Mel says that it's clean, Ba really just wanted to know why the walls being white was a good thing. I guess in Vietnam, perhaps white walls are a sign of death or something.

**7. Give an example of the importance of learning English in this narrative.**

Learning English or any native language of a location is integrating with the local culture in its purest form: communication.

**8. Find an excerpt—a paragraph or shorter—that you think is particularly interesting.**

*I imagined how all the children standing with their feet pressed firmly against the ground and their heads pointing toward the top of the chain-link fence, would slowly slip into the pale blue sky. I imagined the children floating, their dresses ballooning out around them as the wind ruffled their hair across their faces. I'd look over at Ba, also upside down, and I would imagine him floating too, with his hands folded across his chest.*

We’re back to the floating imagery again. This time, the narrator seems like she’s imagining what all the other children would do if they were in her position floating in the fact ocean.

**9. What do you think the metaphorical significance is of the trapped butterfly and glass animals? Explain.**

The trapped butterfly and glass animals represent the narrator and her family members (including the uncles) that are unable to run around and fly as they please. It's just a metaphor for them being trapped in a foreign place.

**10. What do you know about the mother figure?**

Before page 35, not much. We know that she exists and was left behind somewhere in Vietnam. We aren’t even explicitly told if she’s alive or dead but we can infer that she’s alive because of the first page.

**11. Americans houses are full of stuff: “Shelves bowing under the weight of book and files lined the walls, and in the center of the room was a large square desk, its top covered with pens papers, receipt books, a tray of keys and spare change” (22). What is the narrator’s relationship to these things? Why is it so carefully described?**

I don't think the narrator has any particular relationship to the items she describes. I think it's to give the point of view that it's from a child's perspective. Another take on this might be that coming from Vietnam, she was poor-er than Mel. Seeing all these different "stuffs" around would've caught her eye, perhaps.