

Unpolished Gem

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

Getting started

1. Consider the idiomatic metaphor: 'a fish out of water'. What does it mean?
2. Brainstorm situations when you felt like a fish out of water, e.g. starting a first part-time job, visiting an unfamiliar place, taking on a new sport or activity, being in an unusual social situation.
3. Work in pairs to tell each other about a fish-out-of-water experience, describing what you thought and felt at the time (as opposed to what you think and feel now).
4. Write in the first person about your fish-out-of-water experiences, recording how you thought and felt at the time. (NB: Presumably students will gravitate to using past tense.)
5. Experiment with writing about the experience in the present tense. Show both pieces to a partner to gauge different responses. How does the change of tense affect the impact of the writing?

Now read the start of Part 1, from 'Here they all are...' (p. 7) to 'Good stuff.' (p. 12).

Compare Pung's attempt to recount a fish-out-of-water experience with your own. Why has she chosen to use the present tense?

- What are your expectations of the book after reading the start to Part 1?
- To what extent might your first impressions of the book be shaped by your own cultural context?

Book cover

What expectations does the book cover raise about this story?

Does this comment from Alice Pung about the cover confirm or challenge your expectations about the story?

When I saw one of the early proposed covers of Unpolished Gem – gloomy background with some morose looking little Asian girl in a dress sitting in a dark room – I was horrified! I'd written this funny book and suddenly to sell it, it would be presented as every other Orientalist trope. My dad took one look and said, 'Oh no, look at that poor miserable kid on the cover. People will think your book is about childhood sexual abuse!'

Fortunately, I have excellent publishers who then designed a few more covers. When we saw the bright orange sunset and the monks walking in front of the commission houses in a suburban Australian street, I knew we had hit gold.

(from Laura Gordon, 'Interview questions for Alice Pung', located in the Alice Pung official website)

- What is an 'Orientalist trope'? Can you think of some examples?
- Why was Pung not happy with the proposed cover design for her book?
- What does this interview extract tell us about Pung's purpose in writing this book?
- After you have read the book, reconsider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the book cover.

(ACELR038) (ACELR039) (ACELR040)

Genre

In 2017 the Australia Council for the Arts and Macquarie University conducted research about Australian reading behaviour: 'Australian book readers'.

- What groups were surveyed in this research? (p. 2)
- What were the most popular genres of fiction? Did this vary for different groups? (p. 12)
- What were the most popular genres of non-fiction? Did this vary for different groups? (p. 12)
- Identify two or three other findings of the research that you thought were interesting or surprising. (pp. 32–33)

Unpolished Gem is a memoir or autobiography. It charts the life of Alice Pung from birth to starting university. Consider other memoirs or autobiographies you have read or might know about.

- Why is this such a popular genre?
- What are the characteristics of this genre in terms of form, structure, point of view and language?

PERSONAL RESPONSE ON READING THE TEXT

Personal writing task

As a student in Year 11 or 12, you are currently experiencing a transition from childhood to adulthood, dependence to independence. Alice writes about this transition in Part 3 of her autobiography, but of course her experience is likely to be different to yours. Write about your unique experience of this transition.

- View the ABC Education video, 'Alice Pung's writing practice'.
- Over the first few weeks of the unit, keep your own 'tattered journal', recording experiences that relate to the transition from childhood to adulthood, dependence to independence, reporting what happens and how you think and feel in the situation. Include at least three experiences.
- Near the end of the unit, write an autobiographical piece about what it is like to be aged 16–18 undergoing this significant transition today, referring to one or more of these experiences. You should decide whether your piece will be first or third person, present or past tense, factual or fictionalised, humorous or serious.
- Write a reflection statement justifying your decisions as a writer.

(ACELR049) (ACELR051) (ACELR052)

OUTLINE OF KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TEXT

Plot

Unpolished Gem tells the autobiographical story of Alice Pung, an Australian of Chinese-Cambodian background, from birth to starting university in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Occasionally it reaches back to earlier episodes in her family's history before her birth. As non-fiction, *Unpolished Gem* does not have a plot in the strict sense, rather the storyline is based on fact.

- Draw a timeline of Alice Pung's life as recorded in the book, indicating the highs and the lows and marking key events. How does the graph compare with the typical graph of a well-constructed narrative?
- The writer E.M. Forster makes a useful distinction between plot and story. He describes a story as 'a narrative of events in their time sequence'; a plot is 'also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality'. A writer of fiction converts a story into plot, manipulating a sequential arrangement of events into a causal arrangement, reconstructing the story for a particular effect.
 - Do you think *Unpolished Gem* has a story or a plot?
 - Is there any evidence that Pung has manipulated or reconstructed her story to create a particular effect?
 - Is there an element of plot in all life stories?

(ACELR045)

Character

Just as the storyline of an autobiography is not exactly plot, so too the people who appear in an autobiography are not exactly characters. Obviously autobiography focuses on one particular individual, but inevitably presents other individuals who connect to the subject of the autobiography. *Unpolished Gem* reveals more of Alice Pung, the writer of the autobiography, than other individuals, but we also get to know members of her immediate and extended family, as well as friends. The most important of these other individuals are her mother and grandmother (her father's mother), and perhaps to a lesser extent her father, Aunt Que and brother Alexander, her schoolfriend Nina and boyfriend Michael.

Themes

Unpolished Gem presents a number of important themes through the story of Alice and her family. Through her story, Pung makes comments about the following topics: the refugee/migrant experience, women overcoming oppression, coming of age, the impact of family on the individual, mental illness, the importance of language, the power of stories.

- Divide the class into seven groups. Allocate one of these seven topics to each group. Note that a theme is a particular statement in relation to a topic. What theme is Pung presenting in relation to the topic?
- In their groups, students answer these questions to prepare a report on this theme, then present this report to the rest of the class:
 - How is this theme presented through the story of Alice and her family?
 - Is the theme a focus of a particular section of the book, or does it recur at different points in the book?
 - What does Pung have to say in relation to this theme? Find relevant quotations and explain their significance.
- What do you think is the most important theme in the book? Defend your decision.

(ACELR045) (ACELR047)

SYNTHESISING TASK

'This story does not begin on a boat', writes Alice Pung in the first sentence of her memoir, *Unpolished Gem*. (Consider: What assumptions is she tapping into about Asian migration?)

Pung makes clear what her story isn't, but what kind of story *has* Pung written?

How does she attempt to engage us in her tale?

Support your answer with close reference to the text.

(ACELR037) (ACELR039) (ACELR038) (ACELR040) (ACELR042) (ACELR045)

(EAL12-1A) (EAL12-1B) (EAL12-3) (EAL12-5) (EAL12-7) (EAL12-8)

THE WRITER'S CRAFT

The following sequences can guide discussion and writing.

Structure

Notice that the text is divided into a prologue, five parts and an epilogue. Have you come across this structure in texts before?

Shakespeare's plays all have five acts, and some have a prologue and epilogue as well (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*), although it should be noted that it was editors who made these divisions, not Shakespeare himself. The five-act structure, in fact, goes back to ancient Greek drama and has continued up to modern times.

In 1863, a German playwright, Gustav Freytag, described five stages in the development of stories, stages we might now label as: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. He used a **pyramid to represent the classic five-act structure**.

- Write brief summaries of the events in each of the five parts in *Unpolished Gem*. How old is Alice in each part?
- Does the five-part structure of *Unpolished Gem* conform to the classic five-act structure described by Freytag and used in many narrative texts?
- What role do the prologue and epilogue play in Pung's text? Is there any significance in the fact that the prologue references birth (her father is buying pigs' trotters in the market to make a broth for his wife, who is about to give birth to Alice in hospital) and the epilogue references death (the family is gathered in the cemetery to pay their respects to Alice's grandmother, who died some years before)?
- Can you explain why *Unpolished Gem* has been divided into five parts, bookended by a prologue and epilogue? Is Pung suggesting there is something epic and heroic about her life, as might often be the case in texts that conform to this classic structure? Or is she being ironic?

Mostly the events in memoirs are organised chronologically, i.e. in order of time. In the case of *Unpolished Gem*, the story of Alice's life keeps this chronological order, but occasionally Pung interrupts this narrative to tell a story about her mother's or grandmother's lives in Cambodia, China or Vietnam before they came to Australia. Presumably these stories were told to her by these women.

- Make a list of these older stories, indicating page references.
- What is the overall purpose of these stories?
- How do each of these stories connect to the narrative of Alice's life?
- Compare the tone of these stories with the narrative of her own life.
- Why does Pung not focus more on these stories of her family's past in Asia?
- Identify one story of interest. What is the particular purpose of this story? How does Pung engage readers in this story?

(ACELR037) (ACELR038) (ACELR040)

Approach to characterisation

As explained above, the people who appear in an autobiography are not exactly characters since they are more real than constructed. On this point, it may be helpful to view the ABC Education video, '**Shaping character with Alice Pung**' (1:57).

As a writer, Pung must make decisions about what to reveal about the individuals in her text, including herself.

- *What* does Pung reveal about herself in her autobiography? Record this information briefly on a timeline representing the part of her life covered by the text. What has not been revealed or emphasised? Can you explain why she has focused on some aspects of her life more than others?
- *How* does Pung reveal herself through the memoir? Complete the following table. Which methods are most effective in revealing the 'true' Alice?

Method to reveal self	Examples from the text	Comments about effectiveness
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Showing herself through actions or behaviour		
Revealing what other characters think about her		
Showing herself through dialogue		
Revealing her innermost thoughts		
Other methods		

In interviews about her writing, Pung claims that she works deliberately to shrug off a cultural tendency to 'save face' in an effort to tell the truth. How successful do you think she has been in this endeavour in revealing herself in *Unpolished Gem*?

Teachers may divide the class into seven groups. Allocate one of these seven other individuals from the text to each group: mother, father, grandmother, Aunt Que, Alexander (her brother), Nina (her schoolfriend) and Michael (her boyfriend). Students may answer these questions to prepare a report on this individual for the rest of the class:

- What do we learn about this individual through the course of the story?
- How would you describe the individual's relationship with Alice?
- Does the relationship change? Why?
- What role does this person play in the story?

Can you explain why Alice has focused on some individuals more than others? Why her mother and grandmother most of all? Note that some editions of the book carry the subtitle: 'My mother, my grandmother, and me'.

(ACELR037) (ACELR038) (ACELR039) (ACELR040)

Setting

Setting refers to where and when a story is set. In non-fiction texts, such as biographies and autobiographies, the setting plays a critical role in shaping real events that influence the lives of people. *Unpolished Gem* is set in Australia, specifically the city of Melbourne in the last two decades of the twentieth century, although it occasionally skips back to earlier events in Cambodia, China and Vietnam.

- Compose a digital collage of words and pictures depicting life for immigrants and refugees in Australia, specifically Melbourne, in the 1980s and 1990s.
- In what ways was life for these groups then similar or different to today?
- The first part of the book is set in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray. Scan through the prologue and Part 1 to find examples of words and phrases that depict this setting. How effectively does Pung recreate life in Footscray in the 1980s?
- At the start of Part 3, the family moves to a new house in the suburb of Avondale Heights. Scan through Part 3 to find examples of words and phrases that depict this setting. In what ways was life in the outer suburbs of Melbourne in the 1990s different to Footscray in the 1980s?
- In the stories of her family before they came to Australia, Pung attempts to recreate various Asian settings in the 1950s to 1970s, but she focuses mostly on Cambodia during the Pol Pot

regime in the late 1970s. Briefly research this period in Cambodia's history. Then scan the second last chapter of Part 2, pp 110–118, noting examples of words or phrases that depict life in Phnom Penh during this period. Note that Pung is relying on her family's stories and her reading in presenting this setting; she did not travel to Cambodia until after she wrote *Unpolished Gem*. How effectively does Pung recreate this setting? In what ways is this setting different to the Australian settings used in her book?

(ACELR037) (ACELR040)

Use of contrast

One effective way in which to represent the nature of human experience is through contrast. Pung has cleverly used this technique at the beginning and end of her autobiography.

- In the early parts of the story, Pung contrasts life in Cambodia and life in Australia. Find examples of this contrast. What is the purpose of this contrast?
- At the end of the story, Pung contrasts her 'world' with that of Michael, a boy she meets at university. Find examples of this contrast. What is its purpose? In what ways does Michael attempt to reconcile these cultural differences?

(ACELR039) (ACELR040)

Point of view

An autobiography is, by definition, written from the point of view of the person who is the subject of the text, i.e. it is written in first person. The logical consequence of writing a story in such a way is that we cannot know other individuals' thoughts or feelings, except as they are revealed through behaviour and dialogue, and we cannot know of events beyond the experience of the first person narrator, except as told to the narrator by others. However, Pung moves freely from first-person narrator to omniscient third person as it suits her.

- Find examples of where Pung uses the omniscient third person. The prologue is a good place to start, but there are other examples. Why has she departed from first-person narration in these examples?
- Do you think Pung has used this flexible approach to point of view successfully? How has she made the transitions between different points of view smooth?
- Some writers choose to write apparently true stories about themselves in third person. Why might a writer choose to take such an approach? Can you suggest why Pung has not taken this approach in *Unpolished Gem*? (Note that in a subsequent book focusing on her father's life, but including herself, called *Her Father's Daughter*, Pung does indeed use third person throughout the book).

(ACELR042) (ACELR044)

Voice

The particular way in which an author writes conveys their personality, and establishes their unique writing style. When a writer does this successfully, we say they have created 'voice' in the text. In the front cover blurb, **Amy Tan**, a famous Chinese-American writer, claims, 'Alice Pung is a gem. Her voice is the real thing.'

- How would you describe Alice Pung's voice as a writer? How is it different to other writers you know?
- How successfully does Pung's voice represent her rather unique position as an individual of Chinese-Cambodian background growing up in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s?

(ACELR044)

Tense

We might expect that an autobiography would be written in the past tense. However, Pung begins her tale in present tense and sustains this until the last chapter of Part 1, when she recounts stories about her grandmother in Cambodia in past tense, and then mostly continues with past tense until the end of the book.

- What is the effect of writing about the past in present tense? Is this approach effective in the prologue and Part 1?
- Is the switch to past tense at the end of Part 1, where Pung digs back into family history before her birth, justified?
- Why does Pung then continue in past tense even when she returns to the story of her life? Is this a fault in the text? Note that other writers have mixed up past and present tense for good effect, e.g. **Tara June Winch** in her novel, *Swallow the Air*.
- Note the brief return to present tense at the start of the last chapter in Part 2 (p. 119). Why is present tense justified here? Does this give us a clue about the use of present tense at the start of the book?
- In the past-tense section of the book, Pung mostly uses past simple (e.g. *my grandmother screamed*), but occasionally she uses 'would' as a modal auxiliary with a basic verb form (e.g. *she would grab my hand in hers*) to suggest a past habit (like 'used to'). Read, for example, the last paragraph of the first chapter of Part 4 (pp. 175–176). What is the effect of these uses of 'would'?

(ACELR042)

Humour

A feature of Alice Pung's autobiography is her use of humour.

- Read the short anecdote of Alice's mother and Aunt Que shopping in an Australian supermarket for the first time (first chapter of Part 1, pp. 11–12). What is the source of humour in this story?
- Find another example of a humorous anecdote in the text. Share it with a partner, then discuss why the anecdote is humorous.
- Find examples of Pung's representations of migrant English in the prologue and the first chapter of Part 1. Why might it be politically incorrect for a person outside of this cultural group to make such jokes? Is it funny when Pung does it?
- Discuss the humour of this sentence: 'Every journey is one small step for Australians, but one giant leap for the Wah-sers'. Why might a writer use such self-deprecating humour?
- A more subtle humour is evident when Australia, as perceived by the newly arrived family, is described as 'Paradise' (p. 15), a 'Wonder Land' (p. 16). In what ways is Australia not so perfect for Alice and her family later in the book? Read, for example, the story of the school lesson about paganism (p. 174) and the story of the valedictory dinner (especially pp. 186–187). What is the effect of this irony? Can you find other examples in the text?
- What is the effect of using irony to depict both her own family *and* Australia?
- What is the overall effect of the humour in this text? Why has Pung deliberately not focused too much on the terrible suffering endured by her family before they arrived in Australia?

(ACELR042) (ACELR044)

Metaphor and symbol

Metaphors are generally regarded as a feature of poetic texts, but they feature liberally in Pung's prose. Metaphors are a significant aspect of communication in Chinese culture, but tend to be used sparingly in the more laconic communication typical of Anglo-Australians.

- In the first chapter of Part 1, Alice's father chooses to give his daughter two names: a traditional metaphoric one, 'Good News', and an English name, 'Alice'. (pp. 14–16). What is the symbolism of these names?
- Discuss the significance of the metaphoric title, *Unpolished Gem*.
- A particularly effective use of metaphor can be found in the second chapter in Part 4 depicting Pung's experience of depression. What is it? What makes it so effective?
- One striking symbol used in the memoir is gold. What does gold represent for poor people like Alice's family? Why does Alice's mother insist on digging up the backyard of their former home (first chapter of Part 3, pp. 131–134)? What is the significance of her failure to find what she is looking for? In what ways is gold both a treasure and a curse (see pp. 68, 136, 154)? What significance is there in the fact that her father could not offer a gold ring to Alice's mother before they married, only a promise (p. 120)? And what significance is there in the fact that Alice cannot wear gold (p. 69)?
- Find references to hair and shoes in the text. Discuss the meaning of these symbols.
- Identify other examples of metaphor and symbol in the text. Discuss their effectiveness.

(ACELR042) (ACELR044)

SYNTHESISING TASK

Arrange for students – individually, in pairs or in small groups depending on your circumstances – to prepare and deliver a three-to-five-minute presentation to the class, supported by a concise PowerPoint presentation, in which students address the following questions:

- In your opinion, what is the most important theme to emerge from Pung’s memoir, *Unpolished Gem*?
- How does Pung use structure, point of view, voice and language to present this theme effectively?

This task provides an opportunity for peer assessment. The teacher might jointly construct with students a set of criteria, then build these into an assessment rubric that students use to assess and provide feedback to each other.

(ACELR038) (ACELR040) (ACELR042) (ACELR044) (ACELR046) (ACELR047) (ACELR048)

(EAL12-1A) (EAL12-1B) (EAL12-2) (EAL12-3) (EAL12-5) (EAL12-9)

COMPARISON WITH OTHER TEXTS

Tara June Winch and Alice Pung are Australian women of similar ages; their books were published in the same year, 2006. Both texts represent a particular thread of human experience: growing up female in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s.

Read Tara June Winch’s novel *Swallow the Air* and compare it with Alice Pung’s autobiography *Unpolished Gem*.

- In what ways is the experience of growing up different in both texts? How can you explain the differences?
- In what ways is the experience of growing up similar in both texts, despite the very different backgrounds of those coming of age?
- Both Alice, in *Unpolished Gem*, and May, the main character and first-person narrator in *Swallow the Air*, are outsiders. What are the causes of their alienation? How do they both try to find a sense of identity and belonging?
- How does family impact on both Alice and May in positive and negative ways?
- Consider the themes identified in the study of *Unpolished Gem*. Are any of these themes also evident in *Swallow the Air*? Are there thematic differences between the texts?
- *Swallow the Air* is partly based on Winch’s experience of growing up in Wollongong, and then Sydney, as a young woman of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous background. Can you suggest why she may have chosen to fictionalise her story? And why did Pung not take this path?
- Winch has opted to write *Swallow the Air* in first person, giving it the feel of an autobiography. How does the use of first person affect the impact of the novel?
- Both texts use a mix of present and past tense. Find examples and comment on the effect of mixing these tenses in each text.
- Despite similarities in subject matter, themes and narrative technique, the texts represent the experience of growing up in mostly different ways: *Swallow the Air* is serious and poetic, while *Unpolished Gem* tends to be humorous and prosaic. Do you agree with this summation? How effective are these different styles in helping each writer to achieve her purpose?
- If you were to write the story of your life growing up in the first two decades of the twentieth century, would you write an autobiography, a novel or something different? Would your style be similar to either Pung or Winch? Explain your thinking.

Read several short stories from one or more of the collections in the *Growing Up in Australia* series:

- *Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia* (edited by Anita Heiss)
- *Growing Up African in Australia* (edited by Maxine Beneba Clarke, Ahmed Yussuf and Magan Magan)
- *Growing Up Muslim in Australia* (edited by Amra Pajalic and Demet Divaroren)
- *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (edited by Alice Pung)

- *Growing Up Queer in Australia* (edited by Benjamin Law)
- *Growing Up Disabled in Australia* (edited by Carly Findlay)

Choose one story of interest and compare with *Unpolished Gem*.

Prepare a three-to-five-minute presentation to the class, or if time is a restriction, to designated groups in the class in which you address the following questions:

- What does the story have to say about a particular experience of growing up in Australia?
- Are the themes similar or different to *Unpolished Gem*?
- How does the story represent an experience of growing up in Australia in particular ways?
- Is the style similar or different to *Unpolished Gem*?
- What is your overall opinion of this story? Justify your evaluation.

(ACELR045) (ACELR047)

Social commentary

Unpolished Gem represents a particularly optimistic period in the history of Australian immigration. Alice's parents arrived here in 1980, not long after the end of the White Australia Policy and the establishment of multiculturalism as a public policy supported by both sides of politics. Since the mid-1990s, there has been less enthusiasm towards the concept of multiculturalism, a trend precipitated by the recession of the early 1990s, the collapse of local manufacturing and the loss of blue-collar jobs, the events surrounding 9/11 and other acts of terrorism, the purported rise of Asian gangs and crime, the rise of *One Nation* and other anti-immigrant political groups, a more punitive approach to refugees by both sides of politics, increasing hate speech and discrimination and crime directed at particular cultural groups or migrants in general.

- How does Pung convey her family's optimism about living in multicultural Australia in Part 1 of the memoir?
- In what ways does the family achieve the 'Great Australian Dream' (p. 127)?
- In what ways does the family's optimism wane a little by the end of the story? Are any of the social changes noted above reflected in the second half of the book?
- Read the following essay and article by Alice Pung. How has her tone changed since writing about these issues in *Unpolished Gem*? What sort of book might she write about Australia today?
 - Pung, A. (2016). 'Caution! Danger! Stop race mixing!: Class and race in the formation of Australian national identity' [essay]. *The Australia-Indonesia Centre Essay Series*, 6 October 2016.
 - Pung, A. (2016). 'Living with racism in Australia' [article]. *The New York Times*, 7 December 2016.

RICH ASSESSMENT TASK 1 (RECEPTIVE MODE)

Students are to write an evaluative essay of between 900 to 1200 words in which they address the following question and task.

Part 1: Analytical

How does Pung represent both particular human lives and the general human condition in her memoir, *Unpolished Gem*?

Part 2: Comparative

Compare *Unpolished Gem* with one other story, true or fictional, that also deals with these concerns.

In your answer, consider how both texts use structure, point of view, voice and language to represent aspects of the human experience.

(ACELR038) (ACELR040) (ACELR042) (ACELR044) (ACELR045) (ACELR046)

REFLECTION ON LEARNING

Look back over your initial impressions of the book recorded in the Introductory Activities of this unit. Discuss in small groups the ways in which your first impressions have been confirmed, challenged or confounded by your close reading and study of the book. Groups should then share these ideas with the class.

Topical anthologies

Review the work on topics and themes from earlier in the unit. Ensure the class has a clear understanding of the difference between a topic and a theme.

Coming of age

- Consider the topic of 'coming of age' in *Unpolished Gem*. In groups of three, identify a passage (about 2–3 pages) from the memoir that represents this topic in a significant way. Each group reads the passage to the class and explains why it chose this passage and what particular theme about coming of age Pung is presenting. As a class, choose the 2–3 best written and most relevant extracts.
- Now compile a class anthology of texts entitled *Coming of Age: the Australian Experience*. The class has already chosen the first texts for this anthology: the 2–3 extracts from *Unpolished Gem* voted best and most relevant. Then choose a passage from *Swallow the Air* and 2–3 of the stories from the *Growing Up* series studied earlier in the unit that could contribute to this anthology. Also choose any of the stories written by students at the start of the unit about the transition from childhood to adulthood – note that these might need to be carefully revised to ensure they meet editorial standards. Finally, look beyond the texts students have studied or written for other stories, poems, songs, extracts from fiction or non-fiction, that are of sufficient relevance and good quality to be included in this anthology.
- Jointly construct (with students) a preface to the anthology, briefly introducing the texts and reflecting on the range of themes about coming of age and the diversity of ways in which the Australian experience of coming of age is represented.
- Compile and produce a digital or hard copy of the class anthology. Share with students in another class. These students could be invited to review the anthology.

(ACELR045) (ACELR047) (ACELR048) (ACELR049) (ACELR050) (ACELR052)

Other topics

- Divide class into groups of 3–4, allocating to each group one of the other topics identified in *Unpolished Gem*:
 - the refugee/migrant experience
 - women overcoming oppression
 - the impact of family on the individual
 - mental illness
 - the importance of language
 - the power of stories.
- Groups follow the process modelled above to produce an anthology based on this topic with a focus on the Australian experience.
- Choose 1–2 extracts from *Unpolished Gem*, an extract from *Swallow the Air*, 1–2 stories from the *Growing Up* series, any student stories relevant to the topic (of good quality) and other short texts suitable for the anthology (poems, songs, extracts from fiction or non-fiction, other stories, etc).
- Write a preface for the anthology, briefly introducing the texts and reflecting on the range of themes and the diversity of ways in which the topic is represented.
- Compile the texts and the preface into a digital or hard copy of the anthology. Share with other students, who might be invited to review.

(ACELR045) (ACELR047) (ACELR048) (ACELR049) (ACELR050) (ACELR052)

Critical reviews of *Unpolished Gem*

- Divide the class into pairs. Ask one member of each pair to read *The Age* review and the other to read the *Eureka Street* review. Note that both reviews were written just after the book was published.
 - Hughes, J. (2006). 'Unpolished Gem [review]'. *The Age*, 2 September 2006.
 - Smith, T. (2006). 'Unpolished gem shines brightly [review]'. *Eureka Street* 16(16), 30 October 2006.

- Students work in groups of three to analyse the allocated review, focusing on the following questions:
 - According to the reviewer, what are the main themes in *Unpolished Gem*?
 - How does the reviewer describe the style of the writing? Which particular features are noted?
 - What is the reviewer's overall opinion of *Unpolished Gem*? Identify quotations that show this opinion.
 - Do you agree with the reviewer? Why or why not?

(ACELR045) (ACELR046) (ACELR047) (ACELR048)

RICH ASSESSMENT TASK 2 (PRODUCTIVE AND RECEPTIVE MODES)

Part 1

Write your own review of *Unpolished Gem*, entitled '*Unpolished Gem – fourteen years on*' (adapting the number depending on the number of years since publication in 2006), in which you present your own views of the book: what it means to you and what you think is the significance of the text now some years after its publication. Does the memoir still speak to audiences today?

Students could share and respond to each other's reviews through a class blog.

Part 2

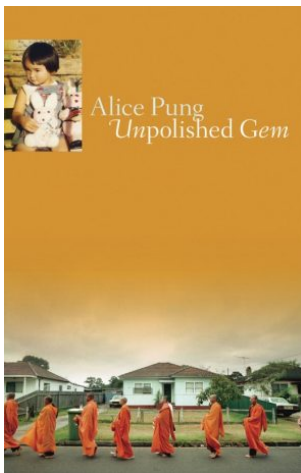
Based on their studies of this memoir and others investigated throughout this teaching resource, students could write their own mini-memoirs based on their own experiences and lives to date. Remembering the differences between story and plot as analysed in the Introductory Activities section, encourage students to mix the two narrative techniques for dramatic effect.

Again students and teacher could co-construct key assessment criteria and work them into a rubric to assess their completed work.

Note: This personal writing exercise may need some sensitive teacher interaction with individual students as their own experiences may trigger some traumatic memories of events in their lives. In these situations, encourage students to take on Pung's light-hearted, humorous style and to be selective in what they choose to write about, particularly publicly.

(ACELR037) (ACELR040) (ACELR042) (ACELR043) (ACELR045) (ACELR048) (ACELR049)
(ACELR051) (ACELR052)

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Unit Suitable For AC: Senior Secondary Literature (Year 12, Unit 3)

Duration Eight weeks

Curriculum Summary

Find a [summary table](#) for Australian Curriculum: English content descriptions and NSW syllabus outcomes for this unit.

Themes

Australian identity, coming of age, Day of the Girl, family, impact of family on the individual, importance of story, Language, mental illness, oppression, power of language, resilience, women

General Capabilities

Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy

Cross-curriculum Priorities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

FURTHER DETAILS

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Date of Publication 2006

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Category Memoir

SCIS number

5467469

Unit writer

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