



# THREE BEGINNINGS

## AN INTRODUCTION TO — The Coconut Children

### FAMILY

#### Prologue

##### The Ripple Said to the Tsunami

The full moon floats in the night sky like a cataract. Heaven has turned a blind eye to the boat people. But you see everything, don't you? There, a tiny fishing boat carrying two hundred too many, bodies suspended over a blade of water. This is where myth and memory meet. Where history comes to daydream, immortalised in ink, mortalised in minds.

He is calling out to you, ông bà tổ tiên. Ancestors. Here he sits, beneath entangled limbs and destinies. My father. Your son. You have watched him grow up from thumb-sucking infant to bullet-biting boy. You know him well; he does not disturb you from your resting place without good reason.

### VINCE

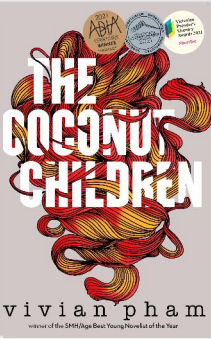
#### Morning Glory

On the day of Vince's release, you could hear his laughter thundering through the entire neighbourhood. It was February 1998. The centre of summer. The timbre of his voice shook the trees and rumbled through the streets, tearing through the delicate seams of silence. He was with his posse of old friends, the type of kids that carry knives in their back pockets. Maybe it was a trick of the light but it was almost as if he had never left – there was Vince, sipping on his sugarcane juice.

### SONNY

#### Page 4

And as Sonny watched him laugh with his mouth wide open and his neck craned as if in defiance of the sun, she tried to figure out what exactly this could mean for her. She hoped that maybe he would catch her eye and stop mucking around for one second, hold her gaze and make some kind of telepathic promise. Like: You look beautiful, I'm going to rescue you from your crazy mother. But of course, she wasn't in his line of sight and he was too concerned with pulverising glass bottles as he raced down the footpath to notice her anguish. Besides, she wasn't even sure if he remembered who she was. Sonny receded from the window, relieved she couldn't be seen like this. Framed by glass. Stuck in her bedroom. Soiled by the unspeakable.



# PLACE & CHARACTER

p35-6

By 8pm, the sky had dimmed and the boys began to walk back home. They passed the karaoke room they had sung and slept in the night before and laughed. Beneath pockets of light on lonely street corners, they recalled the times before Vince's arrest. Those were the Golden Days. Needle-infested playgrounds, men lying on park benches and frothing at the mouth, yes. The silhouette of a handgun in the pocket of a boy who reminds you of your little cousin, yes. The amputees who roam the streets like sleepwalkers in their military fatigues, yes. But is that all you see? Try harder. You remember, even if you weren't there. The laughter in the streets, the sun warming you with your mother's love, at once distant and felt everywhere. Watch the way your friends dance in their sweat, limbs flailing and skin sizzling in the afternoon light, with enough mischief to escape their own shadows. Picture the thrones of cracked-leather chairs in restaurants where your name becomes currency. Keep your head up. Look everybody in the eye. Clear your throat. Your voice is the only thing that can save you.

p36

Under faltering light, Vince knew they had arrived home when he spotted the old shirt dangling from the sweat-stained bench in the front yard, beside a stack of overly ambitious dumbbells. Ever since the death of Alex's father when they were thirteen, it had become a place the boys could run to in times of need. It had given them something resembling freedom, at the very least somewhere to revel in the stench of week-old clothes, somewhere to drink milk straight from the bottle, somewhere you didn't stay up all night waiting for parents who kept forgetting to come home. Everything looked exactly like it had before: the sofa on the front porch, still covered in clear plastic tablecloth - as if to seal the freshness to fake leather - the sparse tufts of grass growing amongst the weeds, the pile of shoes outside the front door, a few pairs recently stolen from the piles of shoes outside a neighbour's front door. The window was boarded up with bolts and plywood. It had only recently been broken; shards of glass lay scattered in the moonlight. A break-in or a drive-by? Vince didn't bother to ask.

## CHARACTERS WHO MIGHT BE IN THIS LOCATION

• IN THE SPACES BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THREE CHARACTERS YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER IN THESE LOCATIONS

①

②

③

StoryFACTORY

①

②

③

StoryFACTORY



# WEEK 1

**Story**  
FACTORY

## WRITING SPACE

## A PLACE A CHARACTER MIGHT WANT TO ESCAPE (OR GO TO!)





# STRUCTURE: THE SIX STAGE PLOT

MICHAEL HAUGE

StoryFACTORY

TO CREATE YOUR SHORT STORY YOU ARE GOING TO FOCUS ON 1-3 SCENES OR MOMENTS FROM THE STRUCTURE BELOW.

## ① SET UP

Character living fully within identity: The character is introduced, we see the setting of their everyday life. We establish identification with the character, feel sympathy or anxiety for them. The character will be seen (eg) as likeable/funny/powerful/confused...

- Vince returns to Cabra
- Sonny watching

YOUR SCENE

## ② NEW SITUATION

The character glimpses his destiny, it's a glimpse of living life in 'essence' (Inner journey stage 2): The character is presented with an opportunity that creates a desire. 'Essence' is the spiritual, deeper self - who the character really is.

- Sonny + Vince reconnect

YOUR SCENE

## ③ PROGRESS

Moving towards Essence without leaving identity (Inner journey Stage 3): As the character pursues his new goal he gets scared, so he wavers between his identity and his essence)

- Sonny at School
- Vince working

YOUR SCENE

## ④ COMPLICATION

Complications and Higher Stakes: The conflict magnifies, the character doesn't give up, they can't go back. Success feels within their grasp. Major Setback: An 'all is lost' event occurs. The character may attempt to hide behind their old life mask again. Often a sidekick character will point out how the main character is stuck.

- Vince - FIGHT

YOUR SCENE

## ⑤ FINAL PUSH

Final push: The character has to face the outward manifestation of their quest, they must defeat the 'villain' or find the prize.

- LANE COVE & THE RIVER

YOUR SCENE

## ⑥ AFTER-MATH

Aftermath (Outer journey stage 6): The outer story is resolved, loose ends are tied up as the victory or defeat is now clear.

- THREE ENDINGS

YOUR SCENE

# POT OF REALITY

p11-12

**YOUR POT OF REALITY CONTAINS THE ELEMENTS  
THE WILL BE USED TO WRITE YOUR STORY.**

**CHARACTERS** - Who are the key characters?

**STYLE** - How do you want to write the story?

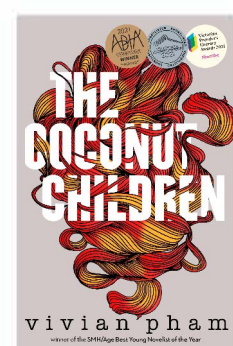
eg. Person, Style, Tense...

**DETAILS OF REALITY** - Every place and situation is unique. As a writer you reveal uniqueness through detail.

**IDEAS • PLOT** - What is the story? What are the big ideas you want the reader to think about?

At the Boys' School, the annual wave of Year 7 students were viewed as utterly oblivious non-entities who breathed too much, and far too loudly, a detested vice redeemed only by their backpacks which jingled with the promise of lunch money. Luckily for Oscar, his appointment with the systemic abuse of the highschool hierarchy had been postponed; the older boys were too busy for bullying. The return of Vincent Tran left no room for sideshows.

As the bell rang for first period, the reigning boys gathered outside, at the front gate where the flagpole stood. Oscar watched tentatively, caught in the middle of a crowd he mistook for a morning assembly. Strangers stood so close he could smell the sweat on the back of their necks. Their ashy elbows poked against his ribs. His better instincts wore his sister's face and screamed at him to weave his way out, but he stood still. He saw one of Vince's friends put a metal bin on the ground, and another climb a nearby tree to tear off a branch. Standing on the very tips of his toes, Oscar finally caught a glimpse of the famous Vince. He stood in all his glory, looking like Michelangelo's last word. Such origins might have explained his marbled musculature, the violent grace and violent liberty that marked his movements, as though he feared turning back into stone if he stayed still for too long. Vince's head jerked back wildly as he laughed with his eyes closed and his chin tilted towards the sun. Here was a man who had taught his sufferings to chisel him free.







# POT OF REALITY - Maybe Space

Week 2

NAME:

• THIS IS THE SPACE WHERE YOU GATHER IDEAS FOR THE STORY YOU WILL WRITE

**CHARACTERS** - Who are the key characters?

**STYLE** - How do you want to write the story? eg. Person, Style, Tense etc...

**DETAILS OF REALITY** - Every place and situation is unique. As a writer you show uniqueness through detail. Gather details!!

**IDEA & PLOT** - What is the story? What do you want to leave the reader thinking about?



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**Story**  
FACTORY

NOW, INTRODUCE YOUR CHARACTER USING THE TINY DETAILS.

# YOUR TINY DETAILS

## MAYBE SPACE

There was Vince, with his gleaming gold necklace, the jade Buddha nestled contentedly between his newly defined pectorals. There was Vince, with his sunny smile and over-gelled hair, lying in the Woolworths trolley as somebody less important pushed him along. There was Vince, never less than vibrant, always pulsating, always looking as though he was about to break out of his own body.

This is how Vince made his first reappearance: standing beneath a dying symbol, a sunrise scorching the edges of his evening eyes...But in the eye's dark room, images of the invincible smile, the gathered brow, the tensed neck, the riverbed veins of a free hand, and the eternally unbuttoned button-up, were already beginning to develop. Chemicals mixed with light. There, against the dark lining of their eyelids, backlit by their most golden memory, would live the real Vince. The boy, the flesh of legend, the breath of an oral tradition.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery. There is no handwriting or other markings on the page.



# WEEK 3

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p 205-7

'I thought you were asleep. How long you been listening to anh hai talk for?' he mumbled to Emma. He hadn't been planning on telling the future about his past so soon.

# MAYBE SPACE

**Story**  
FACTORY

## WHO IS THE CHARACTER YOUR CHARACTER IS SEEN BY?

... How & Why !!

## THE START OF A SCENE USING THESE IDEAS:





- IN THIS ACTIVITY WE FLIP THE TONE FROM TRAGIC TO COMIC (OR COMIC TO TRAGIC).

# Coco - Comic

**(to the GHOST) You can't say I did it. Don't shake your bloody head at me.**

there . . .

▶ SELECT ONE OF THESE SCENES & FLIP THE TONE

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



NAME:

## WEEK 4

p182

He looked away innocently, in the manner of making up an excuse. 'I just got these pants from the wash, so the tissue's been cleaned too.' It wasn't a lie.

# MAYBE SPACE

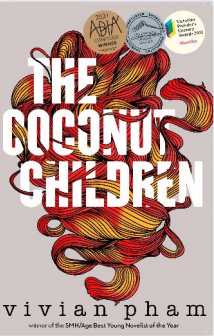
## WHAT IS YOUR UNEXPECTED?

## UNEXPECTED (COULD BE):

- an object rediscovered
- a shift in tone
- a character that doesn't act the way they feel

## START A SCENE THAT MAKES USE OF YOUR UNEXPECTED ELEMENT

[illegible]



# ENDINGS

## THE ENDING YOU NEED

P277-8

The wedding portrait will catch her off guard. The bride and groom don't see her; they are trapped in looks of love, a gooey and glutinous dessert. She will be careful with the image, take note of the delicate fringe which frames her face, her red and gold áo dài, her girlish smile. She holds a bouquet of bursting chrysanthemums and her husband holds her from behind, leaning his chin onto her shoulder, the vibrancy of his grin competing with that of the flowers. Their joy is so eager to evoke envy that it travels two decades into the future and glares up at her through the forgotten photograph. She will blink a lifetime away, a second time. She will look around, distrustfully, at the dream they have spent so long asleep in, at the framed photos of their accomplished children, his garden glimmering through the window, her cupboards filled with never-used china, and wonder where the two of them can possibly go from here. The tumble of the tyres as his car delivers him home will pull her from her thoughts. Her heartbeat will catch in her throat as she listens to the key turning. She will run to the door and pull it open as he pushes, feeling the latch that longs to be caught and held by its mechanical lover. There he is. This time, like the first, she will be afraid even to blink. The light can sometimes withdraw if it finds you with your eyes closed.

P279

Vince stands outside in his garden. The cuttings from Lane Cove never made it through. But all around him, the ones from the embankment hold their faces up to the sun, seeming to see more of the sky, to breathe in the air around them. He thinks about their earlier life, behind that barbed-wire fence, and how we call things weeds when they flower in places we don't care to look. Hearing the groaning of tired springs, Vince gazes over the fence to find Sonny leaping from her trampoline. The crow-black hair catches the light. There she goes, the only girl he knows who can waltz with thin air. He stares, and stares, and cannot stop staring. To think that anything that ever happened in the history of all history has led to this. What an enormous thought, and yet true of every moment. He takes a breath and keeps it in, thinks of this hour on its own and holds it, not like a fugitive but like a fruit. He feels its tenderness. Suffers with it. Knows it has been waiting to be held just like this, for longer than anyone has been alive. Every metamorphosis has its melancholy. Every born blossom already feels itself beginning to be forgotten. But ask the tree how it gets through summer, autumn, winter, spring, and it will tell you about the ending of everything.

P281

At the time of publication, the following page was intended to be left blank in remembrance of a young boy's lost poem. The article had been declared missing since 4.08 pm on April 9th, 1994, shortly after the end of Mrs Bennett's English class that Tuesday. You may be surprised to discover, however, that the once empty page is empty no longer. The poem has since reappeared. At first almost invisibly, like a few specks of pillow dust or travelling pollen. And then as fine traces of graphite, like someone was trying to write something honestly but didn't want to cause the paper any pain. Finally, there was ink. Pale, pale lavender melting into the sepia tint of a grape skin, then deeper, and darker, until a semi-sparkling red. The concentrate of all those colours is how these words appear now. Black jellied stains, as indelible as the blood of a berry. In fact, the words were still nervously getting ready to exist at the moment you were turning over to this page, as if summoned by magic. Maybe the magic was you. Because you remember it, even if you weren't there.

NAME:

WEEK 5

## MAYBE SPACE

Will your ending... provide a final thought

LINK BACK TO EARLIER EVENTS

provide a new view or re-understanding

## BEGIN YOUR ENDING



I Will by \_\_\_\_\_

I will be	
I will be	
I will be	
I will be	
I will live longer than	
I will make the stars	
I will be louder than	
I will be the action that	
I will not be	
I will struggle with	
I will be more than	
I will be the	
I will be my	
I will not believe	
I will be what I should	
I will be made	

## **I Will by Vincent Tran**

I will be dawn  
I will be day  
I will be dusk  
I will be dark  
I will live longer than any sunflower  
I will make the stars gaze  
I will be louder than thunder  
I will be the action that learns to speak  
I will not be still in life  
I will struggle with serenity  
I will be more than my impression  
I will be the painting, not the painter  
I will be my self-portrait  
I will not believe the light's distortions  
I will be what I should see  
I will be made in my own image

***from The Coconut Children by Vivian Pham***