**12th Form National Poetry Recitation Contest**

**Title of Poem**: Things We Carry On the Sea  
**Poet**: Wang Ping

**Link**: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/things-we-carry-sea



**About the Poet**:  
Wang Ping, 1957 - present (adapted from: www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/wang-ping)  
Wang Ping was born in August 14, 1957, in Shanghai, China, during the Cultural Revolution. She received her BA in English literature from Beijing University in 1984 and immigrated to the United States in 1985. Ping is currently an associate professor at Macalester College in Minnesota.

**Things We Carry On the Sea**

**By Wang Ping**

We carry tears in our eyes: good-bye father, good-bye mother

We carry soil in small bags: may home never fade in our hearts

We carry names, stories, memories of our villages, fields, boats

We carry scars from proxy wars of greed

We carry carnage of mining, droughts, floods, genocides

We carry dust of our families and neighbors incinerated in mushroom clouds  
  
We carry our islands sinking under the sea

We carry our hands, feet, bones, hearts and best minds for a new life

We carry diplomas: medicine, engineer, nurse, education, math, poetry, even if they mean nothing to the other shore

We carry railroads, plantations, laundromats, bodegas, taco trucks, farms, factories, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, temples…built on our ancestors’ backs

We carry old homes along the spine, new dreams in our chests

We carry yesterday, today and tomorrow

We’re orphans of the wars forced upon us

We’re refugees of the sea rising from industrial wastes

And we carry our mother tongues  
爱(ai)，حب  (hubb), ליבע (libe), amor, love  
平安 (ping’an), سلام ( salaam), shalom, paz, peace   
希望 (xi’wang), أمل (’amal), hofenung, esperanza, hope, hope, hope

As we drift…in our rubber boats…from shore…to shore…to shore…

**Pre-Reading**:  
This poem lists things that the speaker is going to “carry” with them “from shore…to shore…to shore…” The speaker is a refugee – someone who is leaving their homeland. Unlike immigrants, who chose to leave their country for another, refugees are seeking safety and security. Often there is a war in their country and they are afraid for their lives. The speaker of this poem is traveling in “rubber boats” and likely is not really carrying any physical objects. Instead, they describe the important feelings, memories, and non-physical things they are carrying in their head and their heart.  
  
**Vocabulary**:

proxy – representing something else

refugee – a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster  
orphan – someone without parents or family  
plantations – very large farms that may use slaves as a workforce  
bodegas – small stores on street corners in big cities

**Post-Reading Questions**:  
Why does this poem use the third-person “we” instead of singular “I”? Who is “we”?  
What is the mood of this poem?  
How can you relate this poem to your life or to your family history?  
What are the positive things the speaker is carrying? The negative things?  
-Is it important to “carry” both positive and negative things in our lives? Why?