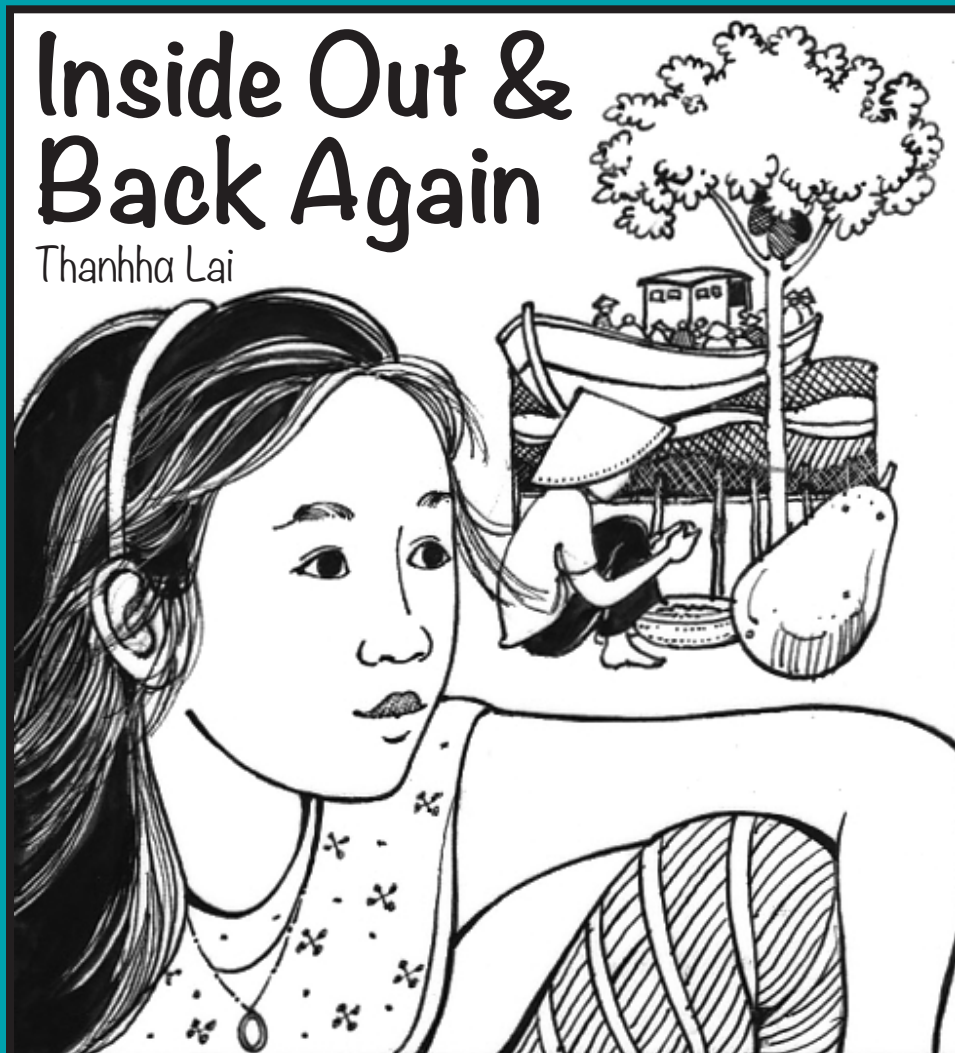


Novel·Ties



Inside Out & Back Again

Thanhha Lai

A Study Guide

Written By Joyce Friedland

LEARNING LINKS

P.O. Box 326 • Cranbury • New Jersey 08512

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Synopsis	1
Background Information	2
Pre-Reading Activities	4
Part I – Saigon: pages 1 – 31	6
Part I – Saigon: pages 32 – 69	9
Part II – At Sea: pages 73 – 111	12
Part III – Alabama: pages 115 – 144	14
Part III – Alabama: pages 145 – 186	16
Part III – Alabama: pages 187 – 234	18
Part IV – From Now On: pages 237 – 262	20
Cloze Activity	22
Post-Reading Activities	23
Suggestions For Further Reading	25
Answer Key	26

Novel-Ties® are printed on recycled paper.

The purchase of this study guide entitles an individual teacher to reproduce pages for use in a classroom. Reproduction for use in an entire school or school system or for commercial use is prohibited. Beyond the classroom use by an individual teacher, reproduction, transmittal or retrieval of this work is prohibited without written permission from the publisher.

SYNOPSIS

In this book that tells its story in free, or non-rhyming verse, ten-year-old Hà describes her family life in Saigon in 1975, the year that Saigon fell to the Communists. She lives with her mother and three older brothers, just scraping by while her father, who has been captured by the North Vietnamese army, is not there to help.

Through Hà's eyes we see a family trying to hold on to the traditions of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, even though the end of the war is getting closer. Food becomes scarce, inflation causes Mother to work two jobs, and Hà's school closes. Uncle Son convinces Mother to gather her family and get ready to leave Saigon on a naval ship. Crammed together with other refugees on the ship, the family learns that Saigon has fallen and that they left just in time to escape the chaos that was bound to ensue.

After three weeks at sea, Hà's ship is rescued by an American ship and towed to the island of Guam, where the family is settled into a camp for other Vietnamese refugees.

Given a choice, mother decides to take her family to America where she believes her children may eventually receive college educations. After spending some time in a Florida refugee camp, Hà and her family are accepted by a sponsor who takes them to Alabama.

Although they are given a home, and Mother a job, life is very difficult. Hà is taunted by her classmates and spends her school days hiding from bullies. The community as a whole rejects Hà and her family until they agree to be baptized at the local church.

Life begins to improve for Hà when Miss Washington, a widow and mother of a son who was killed in Vietnam, takes on the role of English tutor and advocate for Hà.

After finally admitting to her mother that she is suffering at school, Hà begins to learn martial arts skills from Brother Vu and gains the self-confidence to confront "Pink Boy," the bully who has been the main source of her despair. Having turned the tables on him, and with the support of her new friends, Pem and Steven, Hà is able to continue her school days free of fear.

Hà and her family sadly acknowledge the news that Father is dead. Mother mourns his death in a traditional Vietnamese way, but is determined to continue on to fashion a new life for her family in America.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and the author’s name and by looking at the cover illustration. Where and when do you think this story takes place? Do you think it will be a serious or humorous book? Notice the Newbery Honor and National Book Awards medals on the front cover of the book. What do these medals suggest about this book? Have you read anything else by Thanhha Lai, the author of this book?

2. Thumb through the book to notice how the story is told in free, or non-rhyming verse. Choose any one page in the book, read it completely, and then determine how the writer managed to use so few words to tell so much, and how words were used to create pictures in your mind to help you have strong feelings about the events taking place. Have you ever read any other novel that was written in verse?

3. Read the Background Information on pages two and three of this study guide and do some additional research on Vietnam and the Vietnam War. Fill in the first two columns of a K-W-L chart, such as the one below. When you have finished reading, you may fill in the third column. It will be interesting to compare your responses with those of others who have read the same book.

Vietnam/Vietnam War

What I Know -K-	What I Want to Know -W-	What I Learned -L-

4. Do some research to learn about the people who were able to leave South Vietnam when their government fell to the Communists of North Vietnam. Learn about the problems they faced in America and other places where they settled and how they built new lives for themselves.

5. Imagine that a boy or girl is coming to your community as a refugee from another country. What are all the challenges this person will have to face? How long would you expect it would take before this person would feel comfortable in this new land? What could be done to make this person’s transition easier?

6. Read the verse titled, “Early Monsoon,” at the very beginning of the book. Notice how each word is carefully chosen to establish the historical context of the story as well as provide a feeling for what is about to take place. What was the monsoon?

Part III – Alabama: pages 187 – 234 (cont.)

3. Why isn't Hà pleased with the way that Miss Scott introduces life in Vietnam to her class?
4. Why does Hà finally confess to her mother that she is experiencing terrible problems at school?
5. How does Miss Washington show Hà that she doesn't blame her and her country for her son's death?
6. What causes Hà to scream, "I hate everyone"?
7. Why does Hà confess to Mother all the things she did that were wrong in her past?
8. How does Hà defeat "Pink Boy"?
9. Why is Hà disappointed with Christmas?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think Hà wonders whether wartime in Vietnam was worse than peacetime in Alabama?
2. Do you agree with Mother that chanting or meditation might soften the effects of the difficulties Hà faces?
3. Do you think it is a good idea to bring school problems to the principal, as the sponsor did for Hà, or should you keep problems to yourself and try to work them out alone?
4. Do you believe, as Hà did, that errors of the past are punishable in the present?
5. How does the reconstituted papaya illustrate Mother's message to compromise?

Literary Device: Symbolism

Notice the references to papaya in the verses about Christmas. What has papaya symbolized for Hà in prior verses? How is its symbolic meaning changing as we witness Hà tossing the dried papaya into the trash and then eating the reconstituted papaya?

Writing Activity:

Imagine that you are Hà or Brother Vu and comment on the way that Hà has been bullied at school and the way that these bullies have been defeated. Also, tell why you think the children in school and the people in the community have not been welcoming.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- * Alvarez, Julia. *Before We Were Free*. Laurel Leaf.
- Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *The War that Saved My Life*. Dial Books.
- * Choi, Sook Nyui. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. Yearling.
- * Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage.
- * Levitin, Sonia. *Journey to America*. Aladdin.
- * Park, Linda Sue. *A Long Walk to Water*. HMH Books.
- * _____. *A Single Shard*. HMH Books.
- * _____. *When My Name was Keoko*. HMH Books.
- * Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Becoming Naomi Leon*. Scholastic.
- * _____. *Esperanza Rising*. Scholastic.
- Warren, Andrea. *Escape from Saigon*. Square Fish.
- * Watkins, Yoko Kawashima. *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*. HarperCollins.
- Whelan, Gloria. *Goodbye, Vietnam*. Yearling.
- * _____. *Homeless Bird*. HarperCollins.
- * Yep, Lawrence. *Dragonwings*. HarperCollins.

Another book by Thanhha Lai:

Listen, Slowly. HarperCollins.

- * NOVEL-TIES Study Guides are available for these titles.