

Inside Out and Back Again

By Thanhha Lai

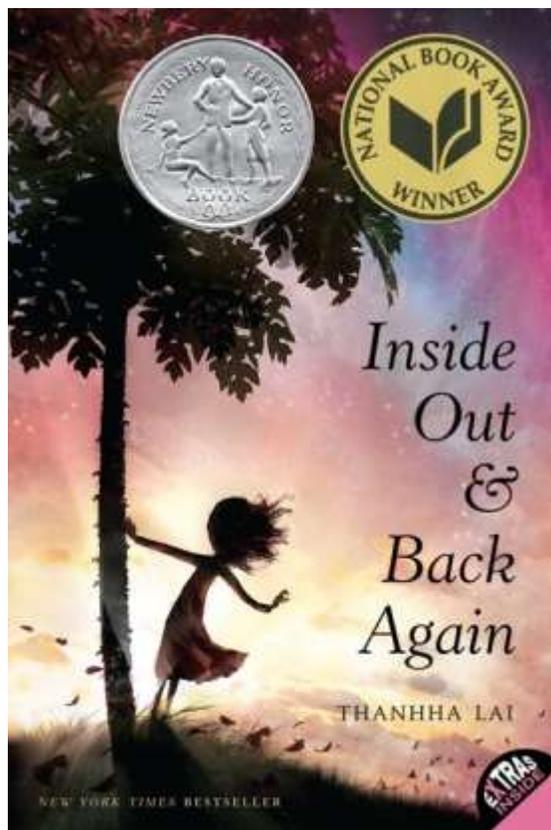
Imagine that a war forces you to leave the only home you've ever known. You must take a difficult journey to a place where no one speaks your language, eats the food you love or understands your culture. This is the experience of 4th grader Há, who immigrates with her family to Alabama after fleeing war-torn Vietnam. Há must adjust to a new life with an unfamiliar new language and bullies who treat her harshly. Through verse, the author Thanhha Lai tells Há's moving and inspirational story of perseverance despite adversity.

About the Author

Thanhha Lai was born in Vietnam at the end of the Vietnam War. She immigrated to Alabama with her mother and brothers at a young age. The memories of her experiences inspired her to write the book *Inside Out and Back Again*. Before becoming a writer of juvenile and young adult fiction, she was a journalist for the Orange County Register and wrote fictional short stories for various publications. In addition to *Inside Out and Back Again*, Lai has written *Listen, Slowly* (2015) and *Butterfly Yellow* (2019), her YA debut. She currently lives in upstate New York with her husband, daughter, and dog Pico. Go to this link to [hear Thanhha Lai talk about her name and how to pronounce it correctly](#).

Getting Started

You can find *Inside Out and Back Again* at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It's also available as an ebook.



While You're Reading

Every good story is full of captivating characters, timeless and timely themes, significant settings, pivotal plot points, and vivid vocabulary that combine to engage our brains and our hearts. In this section of the website, you will find activities that invite you to dig deeper into each of these literary elements for a better understanding and enjoyment of the book.

To aid your investigation, save our “Writing While You Read” guide (see pages 19 and 20), with helpful tips on keeping a reading journal and annotating a book while you read.

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Parts I and II (pp 1-111) of *Inside Out and Back Again*:

- The key way a writer helps his or her readers connect with a story is through its characters. Which qualities, behaviors, and choices do you think make some characters more appealing than others? To help you answer this question with specific evidence from the book, use the Character Grid you'll find on pages 21 and 22 below (and you can make extra copies of page 22 if you need them). Tuck it inside your book, and, each



time you meet a new character, take a minute to jot down the name and your initial observations about him or her on your Character Grid. Be sure to revisit your Grid every few chapters or so, too! There may be more ideas you want to add as you get to know each character better.

- Just like every new year, Há and her mother visit the I Ching Teller of Fate to have their fortune told. “This year he predicts our lives will twist inside out” (4).

The author wants us to recognize that something important is about to happen. This is an example of foreshadowing in the story. Authors often use foreshadowing to give the reader clues about what will happen later in the story.

- What does it mean for life to “twist inside out”? What do you think is going to happen to Há and her family?

- Why do you think that the author uses foreshadowing at this point in the story?
- How does the quote build suspense and make you want to continue reading?
- On April 20, Há says, “We pretend the monsoon has come early”(48).
 - What is the author comparing to a monsoon? How are these two things alike? Use examples from the text to explain your thinking.
 - Why do you think the characters were pretending it was a monsoon instead of accepting what was actually happening?
- In literature, *mood* refers to the feelings that an author evokes, or brings to mind, in the reader. Authors are deliberate about the phrases and descriptions they use to create these moods. For example, when Há and her family board the ship to leave Vietnam, she describes the experience saying: “Above us bobs pierce the sky. Red and green flares explode like fireworks. All lights are off so the port will not be a target. In the dark a nudge here a nudge there and we end up back on the first ship in the same spot with two mats. Without lights our ship glides out to sea” (65).
 - What mood or emotion does the author create in this quote?
 - What phrases evoke those feelings in you, the reader?
- During the time Há’s family is on the ship, Brother Quang begins questioning the family’s choice to leave Vietnam. “*We must consider the shame of abandoning our own country and begging toward the unknown where we will all begin again at the lowest level on the social scale*” (79).
 - Why do you think Brother Quang feels this way about the family’s future?
 - What does it mean to be at “the lowest level on the social scale”?
- Symbolism is when an author uses an object to represent something else like a person, a place, some other object, or an abstract idea. It is a type of figurative language that writers use to deepen meaning and feeling in their writing.

In the story, Há’s mother has an amethyst ring that she never takes off. It was a gift from Há’s father. When Mother decides to sell the ring in order to buy supplies for the family, Brother Quang protests, “*What’s the point of new shirts and sandals if you lose the last tangible remnant of love?*” (103-104).

 - What does the symbol of the ring represent in the story?
 - How does the fact that Há says she “can’t fall asleep unless [she] twist[s] the ring and count[s] circles”(103), make you feel as you read? Why do you think the author includes this in the story? Explain your thinking.
- Thanhha Lai ends each section of the book with a date to signify when the event happened.
 - How do the dates at the end of each section help us to understand the current events that are happening at the same time?
 - Why do you think the author includes a date at the end instead of the beginning of each section? Explain your thinking.

- At the end of the verse “Kim Há” on pages 5 through 7, the author labels it “everyday” instead of writing a specific date. Why do you think she does this? What is different about this verse than the other verses?

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Parts III and IV (pp 115-262) of *Inside Out and Back Again*:

- After Há and her family arrive at the cowboy’s house they begin unpacking. However they quickly change their minds. “One look at our cowboy’s wife, arms, lips, eyes contorted into knots, and we repack” (115). The author uses imagery to paint a picture in the reader’s mind of how the wife looks at them.
 - Sketch a picture of the image you see in your mind after reading the quote above.
 - What words did the author use to create this image in your mind?
 - How does this description of the cowboy’s wife make you feel what Há and her family might be feeling? Explain your thinking.

- In class, Miss Scott has Há practice her numbers and letters. “I say ABC and so on. She tells the class to clap. I frown... So this is what dumb feels like. I hate, hate, hate it” (156-157).



- Why do you think Há feels dumb even though she’s getting the answers correct and her class is clapping for her?
 - How would you feel if you were in Há’s situation at school? What would you do?
 - Why do you think that when a person is unable to speak the language in a country, other people view them as less intelligent?
- As Há and her brothers spend time with Mrs. Washington, their lives in America begin to change.
 - What are these changes? Include some specific examples from the book that show those changes.
 - Why do you think Mrs. Washington offers to work with the children? Explain your thinking.
 - How has Há’s life changed since leaving Vietnam? Draw a Venn diagram (see pages 23 and 24 below) to compare and contrast Há’s life in Vietnam to her life in Alabama.
 - One of the themes of the story is that *change forces people to adapt and learn new things while still remaining connected to their true identity.*

- What examples from the story support and develop this theme?
- What other books have you read that have a similar theme? Explain how the messages are similar.
- At the end of the book, the author includes an author's note. An author's note is a common device authors use in historical fiction to explain what is real and what is fiction.
 - In what ways did the author's note change your perspective of Há's story?
 - List one example from the novel that actually happened in history and list one example that is fictional (did not actually happen).



Refugee boats leaving Vietnam in 1975

Getting to the Root



English is a living language. It changes and grows all the time. One of the best ways to understand the history of the English language and to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words is to learn Latin and Greek word parts. As you study biology, you will learn more and more of these word parts, and once you know them, you will begin to recognize them in all kinds of words—and you'll find that your knowledge of those word parts will help you decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Roots are the "base" of plants, and Latin and Greek roots form the base of many English words. For example, the Latin root *audi* means "to hear." How many modern English words can you think of that include the root *audi*?

Next, take a look at each word part below. Beside each part is a word from *Inside Out and Back Again* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- **glutin** – **glutin**ous (1)
- **cycl** – **cycl**o (32)
- **cap** – **capt**ured (50)
- **tang** – **tang**ible (104)
- **mega** – **meg**aphone (166)
- **lev** – **reliev**ed (184)

1. Can you determine the meaning of the root from your knowledge of the word beside it?
2. If not, think of other words that you know that also contain that root. What do those words have in common? Based on that common element, can you figure out the meaning of the root?
3. If you're still stumped, check out this [list of Latin and Greek roots](#).
4. Now that you know the meaning of the root, how many words can you generate that use the root?
5. Once you understand the meaning of the root, you'll find that even your understanding and appreciation of familiar words will deepen and grow when you think about how that root works in those words.

Words, Words, Words

Inside Out and Back Again is full of great words. Below is a list of some of the words from the book that may be unfamiliar to you, along with the page number on which each word appears in the story. Be sure to follow the steps below for other words in the book that are new to you.

- incense (12)
- salaries (14)
- pronounce (22)
- conviction (25)
- bypasses (42)
- gaunt (54)
- bougainvillea (57)
- hordes (65)
- rations(77)
- saute (100)
- remnant (104)
- sponsor (107)
- diacritical (140)
- bulkiest (151)
- yearning (176)
- confession (214)



Before you look these words up in a dictionary—or ask someone what they mean—try working through the following steps:

1. Generate a list of other words that share one or more of the same word parts. What do the words on the list have in common? Are there any clues from those commonalities that you can use to help figure out the meaning of the unknown word? Hint: Some word parts—as they appear in English words—have multiple meanings as we look back at the Latin and Greek, in part because of changes that have occurred in the words over the years. For example, does the "ped-" in "pedestrian" mean the same thing as the "ped" in "pediatrician"? Where there is possible confusion, or when you don't see familiar word parts, context clues (see step 2) are extremely important.
2. Go back and reread the word in its context. This context includes the sentence in which you find the word, but you should also read one or two sentences both before and after the appearance of the word. What context clues do you find that might unlock the meaning of the word for you?
3. Make your best guess at the meaning of the word.
4. Look up the definition in [a dictionary](#). Be sure to also look for information about the word's origin. This information will often contain the Latin or Greek word from which the word is derived.
5. How close was your guess?

Explore

Our world is full of connections—between people, places, and events. In this section of the website, you will find activities that uncover some important connections—in history, language, culture, and engineering — between *Inside Out and Back Again* and our world.

The Vietnam War

When Há is still in school in Vietnam, Há’s class talks about the events that are happening around them, “how close the Communists have gotten to Saigon, how much prices have gone up since American soldiers left, how distant bombs were heard the previous night” (18). The fictional story of Há and her family’s experience during and after the Vietnam War are based on true events that happened in history.

- Learn basic facts about the [Vietnam War in this article](#).
- Watch a [short video](#) to discover the causes and outcomes of the Vietnam war.
- Read this article to understand the [timeline of the Vietnam War](#).
- Learn about [the life of Ho Chi Min by reading this biography](#).
- Delve into a [story map](#) that shows how the Vietnam War affected refugees who immigrated to the United States.
- Explore an [interactive map of Vietnam](#) and view fascinating landmarks in the country by clicking on the icons.



Reflection Questions

- How did the Vietnam War affect the everyday lives of the characters in the book?
- How might the lives of Há and her brothers have been different if they had not been forced to flee Vietnam?

Figurative Language



Thanhha Lai uses figurative language devices to clearly describe things and events in the story. She uses the simile, “A seed like a fish eye slippery shiny black”(8), to describe the seed that her papaya started from. Later in the book she describes the mouth of a boy using the metaphor, “The pink boy shouts, showing a black hole where sharp teeth glow”(147).

Check out the links below to learn more about types of figurative language including similes and metaphors.

- Learn the difference between metaphors and similes by [watching this video](#) or reading this [poster](#).
- Gain insight about [different types of figurative language](#) by reading the information on this webpage.
- Read this [article about the history of metaphors](#). It also includes a short video and quiz.
- Play one of these [fun figurative language games](#) to test your knowledge!

If you had the opportunity to build a parade float, what would it look like? Make a simple sketch or illustration of your float.

Reflection Questions

Review your reading journal and *Inside Out and Back Again*, as well as other literature you’ve read, looking for examples of similes and metaphors. Create a chart in your reading journal and record the following information for each example you find:

- Title of the book
- Page number
- The example from the book
- Is the example a simile or a metaphor?
- What are the two things being compared?

After you’ve found several examples, consider the following questions:

- Why do you think writers use figurative language in their work?

- Why do authors choose the particular simile or metaphor that they do? For example, why do you think Lai refers to the seed as a ‘fish eye’ rather than something else, like a pearl, or a marble? Use the examples in your chart to help you think more deeply about this question

Food for the Soul



Throughout the story we learn how important food is to Há and her family. She talks about the food they eat on Tet and about the delicious treats she finds at the market. The food of Vietnam is an important part of her culture and her identity. For Há, one of the most difficult things about coming to the United States is that she can no longer get the food she loves, like papaya and Banh Cuon. Visit the links below to learn more about the cuisine that Há mentions in the story.

- [Click here for a basic introduction to Vietnamese food.](#)
- Become more familiar with one of the foods that Há eats in the story, Banh Cuon (34), by watching [a short video of the food being prepared](#) in a modern day Vietnamese street market.
- Learn about [the connection between Vietnamese food and culture](#) as you read this article.
- Discover [seven traditional dishes](#) that people eat to celebrate the Vietnamese lunar new year, Tet.
- Find out how [Vietnamese immigration has influenced food in the United States](#).
- Read [basic facts about the papaya fruit](#) on this page.

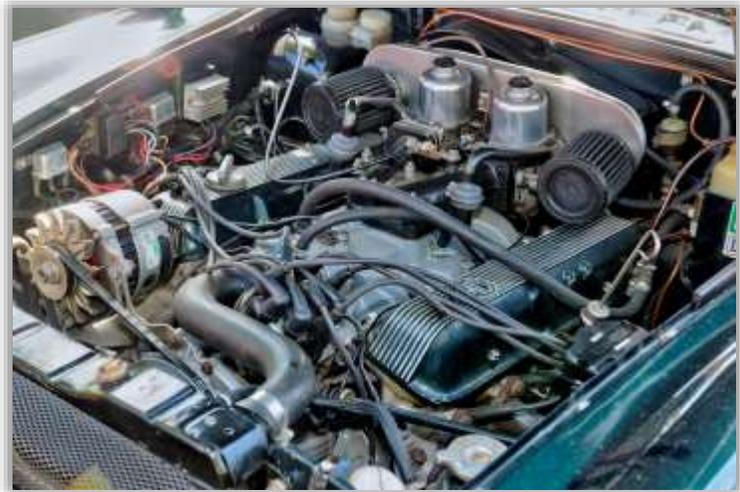
Reflection Question

- What special foods or dishes does your family connect to their culture or traditions? Explain why these foods are important to you or your family.

Mechanical Engineering

Há's eldest brother studied engineering in Vietnam. This skill serves the family when an American who sells cars is looking for a mechanic. Brother Quang's previous studies make him the perfect candidate. Though it takes a while for the other workers to recognize Brother Quang's skills, eventually he "comes home with happy shouts. He did it, repairing a car no one else could. From now on he's to work only on engines" (212). Click on the links below to learn more about mechanical engineering.

- Watch [this video](#) to learn information about the job of an engineer.
- Review the [history of mechanical engineering](#) by reading this article.
- Investigate how [a car engine works](#).
- Examine the parts of an automobile by viewing this [diagram](#).
- Become an engineer [by creating one of these hands on projects](#).
- Learn about how [electromagnetism causes motors to work](#).



Reflection Questions

- Reflect on what you've learned about mechanical engineering and list all the things that mechanical engineers have created that make your life easier.
- What surprised you most about the mechanical workings of an automobile? Why was this so surprising?

Create

An important part of learning is having the chance to produce something of your own. Here you will find engaging projects that connect with the novel and that allow your creative abilities to shine.

Your Own Story in Verse

In the interview featured in the back of the book, Thanhha Lai explains that she chose to write this book in free verse, a style of poetry, because it was the easiest way to clearly communicate the thoughts and feelings of a 10-year-old girl from Vietnam. She found that when writing in free verse, “Words came out in quick, sharp phrases that captured her feelings in crisp images. These phrases reflected what Vietnamese sounded like. Remember, Há was thinking in Vietnamese because she hadn't learned English yet. Then I knew I would be able to penetrate her mind by writing in phrases choked with visuals” (Interview p.5).

You also have important thoughts and feelings to share. [Go to this site to learn more about how to write free verse poetry.](#) Then follow the steps below to create a free verse poem that reflects a moment in your life:

- Pick a moment in time when you have had an experience that created strong emotions in you.
- Begin writing your thoughts and feelings down in a way that flows naturally.
- Use the structure of lines and stanzas instead of paragraphs.
- Remember you don't have to create complete sentences.
- Make sure to include details and imagery that make the reader feel like they're actually experiencing the events unfold.
- You can write and rewrite your poem as many times as you want in order to make sure it flows in a way that your thoughts would.
- Title your poem.
- Write the date at the bottom of your poem.
- Share your poem with friends and family.



Judge the Book by Your Cover

The cover of a book is usually the first thing a reader notices when they are determining what to read. The artists and graphic designers who create cover art must capture a reader's attention and draw them into the book.



Here's your chance to become a book cover designer!

- Create your own design of a cover for *Inside Out and Back Again*. Make sure to include images that illustrate the symbols, setting, characters, and/or themes that are most essential to the story.
- After creating a rough draft of the cover design, ask a family member or friend for helpful feedback. What meanings or ideas do they notice in your cover design? What do they like about the design and what would they suggest you change to make it even better?
- Revise your original design and create a final illustration in full color.
- Now, write a paragraph explaining the choices you made when you created the cover. (Why did you use certain symbols or images? Why did you make specific color choices? Why would this cover attract readers and entice them to read the book?)

Teaching Through an Infographic

After completing the Explore sections above, pick one of the topics you've learned about and create an infographic that will teach others about the topic.

An infographic is a presentation that clearly gives information in a way that is easy to read and understand. It often orders the information in a list or sequential format and includes images that match the text. [Click on this resource to learn more about how to create an effective infographic.](#)

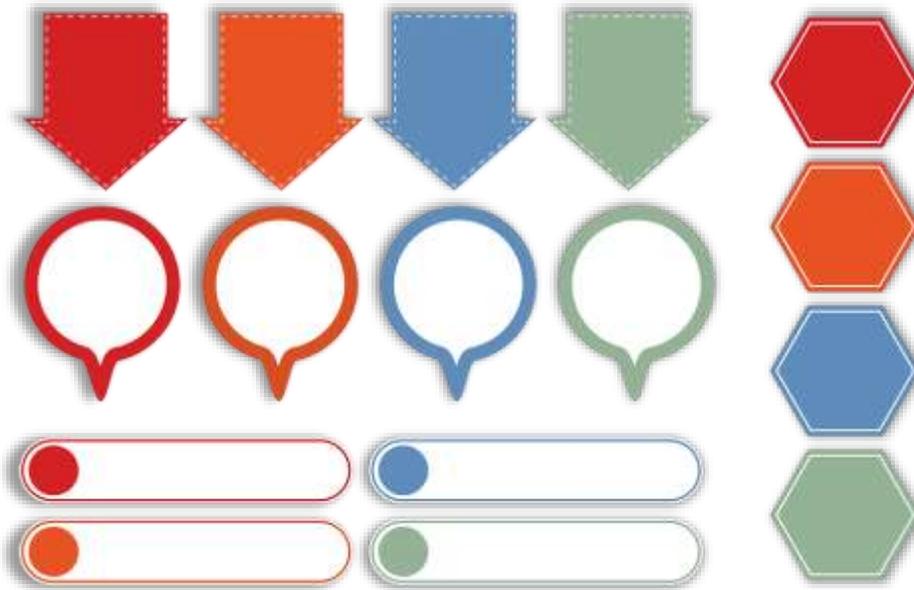
Steps to creating your own infographic:

1. Choose your topic.
2. Write down 5-10 facts that you've learned about the topic.
3. Decide how you are going to create your infographic. (You can create it on paper or in a digital format like google docs.)
4. Create a title that clearly communicates your topic. (This should be the largest text on your infographic.)

5. Write your facts in different sections. (It may help to draw or insert tables or text boxes.)
6. Draw or insert images to go with each fact.
7. Include sources at the bottom.

Helpful Tips:

- Carefully choose a color scheme that will support the content and message.
- Use colors to enhance the overall design. (Colors should not be distracting.)
- Write or use a font that is easy to read.
- Create images that reflect the theme of the presentation. (Images and illustrations should contribute to the knowledge you are sharing and not look crowded or distracting.)



Reflect & Connect Prompts

In Duke TIP's online Book Club, the "Reflect & Connect" prompts provide an opportunity for students to share their ideas about the book with other Duke TIP students. You may choose to record your responses to these questions in your Reading Journal, or you can use them to talk about the book with friends or classmates who have also read it.

A Mother's Choice

As the communists from the North come closer to defeating and conquering South Vietnam, Há's mother has to decide whether her family will flee or remain. It is a very difficult decision for her because several of the brothers feel very strongly about staying, but Mother will not go unless they all leave as a family. Eventually she tells Há, "You deserve to grow up where you don't worry about saving half a bite of sweet potato" (47). She then makes plans to flee her country with her children.

- Do you agree with Há's mother's choice to move her family away from Vietnam? Why or why not?
- Give examples from your life of how your parent(s) act in ways that protect you.
- How is Há's relationship with her mother similar or different than your relationship with a parent?

Grammar Discoveries

One of the most difficult things for Há about coming to Alabama is not being able to speak English and communicate with her classmates and neighbors. She finds English grammar rules very confusing. "Some verbs switch all over just because. I am She is They are He was They were Would be simpler if English and life were logical" (135). Learning English is beyond frustrating for Há, but it also opens up a world of possibilities for her and her family.

- Give 3-5 other examples of grammar rules that you notice in the English language.
- Share a grammar rule that is particularly confusing or hard for you to understand or remember.
- How would your life be different if you didn't speak the language that everyone else did at school?
- What would make learning a new language difficult?

A Funeral for a Country

Two weeks after the ship leaves Vietnam, Há describes a painful event that occurs on the ship: "The commander calls all of us above deck for a formal lowering of our yellow flag with three red stripes. South Vietnam no longer exists"(85). The author titles this section "Last Respects," which is a reference to what people often do when someone dies.

- How is this experience like a funeral?
- Why do you think the commander chooses to have everyone attend the symbolic gesture of lowering the flag?

- Why do you think one woman tries to throw herself overboard after the flag is lowered? Do you agree with her reaction?
- How would you feel if your country no longer existed? What would you do? Explain why and how.

Traditional Moments

Thanhha Lai begins Há's story with the celebration of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, Tet. Há explains many of the traditions her family follows on this day each year. She describes the foods they eat and the things they are not allowed to do: "No one can sweep, for why sweep away hope? No one can splash water for why splash away joy?"(1). These traditions are part of Há's cultural identity and keep her family connected to Vietnam.

- Make a list of examples of other traditions Há and her family practice during the story.
- What traditions do you and your family celebrate or practice?
- Why are these traditions important to your identity or cultural heritage?

The Practice of Being Seen

On September 13, Há begins taking defense lessons from Brother Vu. "I need the lessons. I'm hiding in class by staring at my shoes. I'm hiding during lunch in the bathroom... I'm hiding during outside time in the same bathroom, I'm hiding after school" (160). Up until this point, Há has chosen to hide instead of facing her bullies. If you were Walter, would you have asked for more of the stone? Explain your thinking.

- How do you feel about Há's decision to hide at school? What would you do if you were her?
- As Há learns self-defense, she says she is "practicing being seen" (161). What does it mean to be seen?
- Why do you think Há's classmates don't "see" her for who she truly is?
- Tell about a time you have felt like you weren't "seen" by others. What did you do to resolve the situation?

Wishes

One way authors teach us more about their characters is by sharing the character's inner thoughts or feelings. Thanhha Lai writes that Há makes silent wishes on her birthday: "Wish I could stay calm no matter what my brothers say.... Mostly I wish Father would appear in our doorway and make Mother's lips curl upward, lifting them up from a permanent frown of worries" (30-31). Read over the entire list of wishes on pages 30 and 31 and answer the questions below:

- What do you learn about Há's character from the wishes she has chosen?
- Why do you think Há has so many wishes?
- What do you think about the wishes Há has chosen? What items on the list would you add or remove?
- Make a list of wishes that you have for your life right now.

Choosing War Over Peace

In order to share with the class where Há is from, Miss Scott shows sad and disturbing pictures of Vietnam. Há feels that, “She should have shown something about papayas and Tet. No one would believe me but at times I would choose wartime in Saigon over peacetime in Alabama” (195).

- Why does Há wish her teacher had shown pictures of Tet and papayas instead?
- What are some reasons Há might prefer to be in Vietnam instead of Alabama, despite the dangers she would face in her home country? Make sure to give evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- How do you feel about Miss Scott’s decision to show the pictures of a war-torn Vietnam to the class?

Poetry and Prose

The story of *Inside Out and Back Again* is written in a poetic style called free verse. Instead of writing the book in a structure of paragraphs and chapters, the author tells Há’s story through a set of poems.

- How is reading a book in verse, like *Inside Out and Back Again*, different from reading a typical prose novel?
- What was challenging about reading a novel in verse?
- What made it enjoyable?

Keep Reading

A few thoughts on books and reading...

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes."—Erasmus

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."—Groucho Marx



What's next?

We hope that you enjoyed reading *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai. Check your email for information about our next book club selection. In the meantime, if you are looking for a new best friend—and aren't inside a dog—here are some books you might enjoy. Don't forget to use the tips from “Writing While You Read” (see pages 19 and 20) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, by Robert C. O'Brien
- *Rasco and the Rats of NIMH*, by Jane Leslie Conly
- *All Four Stars*, by Tara Dairman
- *The Stars of Summer*, by Tara Dairman (sequel to *All Four Stars*)
- *The Tell-Tale Start* and other books in “The Misadventures of Edgar & Allan Poe” series by Gordon McAlpine
- *Masterminds*, by Gordon Korman
- *My Near-Death Adventures*, by Alison DeCamp
- *The Scavengers*, by Michael Perry
- *A Single Shard*, by Linda Sue Park
- *The Island of Dr. Libris*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *The Lost Kingdom*, by Matthew J. Kirby
- *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The House of Power*, by Patrick Carman
- *Rivers of Fire*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Dark Planet*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster
- *Navigating Early*, by Clare Vanderpool
- *The Apothecary*, by Maile Meloy
- *The Apprentices*, by Maile Meloy (sequel to *The Apothecary*)
- *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The People of Sparks*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Prophet of Yonwood*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Diamond of Darkhold*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, by Trenton Lee Stewart
- *Chasing Vermeer*, by Blue Balliett
- *The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan
- *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick



Writing While You Read

Have you ever read every word on a page, and turned every page, but when you finished reading, you couldn't remember anything that you had read? If so, you're not alone! Reading can be relaxing, but sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that reading is passive, when it should be active. This doesn't mean you need to run while reading – that might not be a good idea. Writing as you read, however, makes reading active. This process involves some effort, but the payoff for that effort is a deeper understanding and greater enjoyment of the books that you read.

Two strategies for being an active reader are keeping a reading journal and annotating your books.

How do I keep a reading journal?

Below are some suggestions of things that you might write in your reading journal. Experiment with them. You may find that one strategy works really well for you, while others don't work at all. There's really not a right or wrong way to keep a reading journal, as long as you use it as a place to explore your thoughts, reactions, and questions as you read.

What Do I Write?

Write a brief summary, in your own words, at the end of each chapter or section. Include the main ideas or concepts of the chapter, major events in the plot, and any new information that you learn in the chapter.

Do you meet a new character? If so, what is the character like? How do you know? What are the reasons behind what that character says and does? How is the character like other characters in the book? How is the character different? Does this new character remind you of characters you've read about in other books?

Does the setting change? If so, how does the new setting compare and contrast with the previous one? Why does the setting change?

Create your own title for the chapter. If the book includes chapter titles, you might write about why the author has chosen that particular title for the chapter. How does it relate to the main ideas or concepts, major events, and character action in the chapter?

Respond to the chapter. What is the most interesting thing in the chapter? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Do you agree or disagree with the choices the author is making about plot and character? Why or why not? What do you think is going to happen next? How can you connect what is happening in the book to other things you've read? To other things you know? To your own experience?

Identify words that you don't know. Some of these words may just be new to you; others may be jargon, terminology that is used in a particular field or academic discipline. Look these words up in a dictionary, write down their definitions in your notebook, and be sure you understand their meanings and how the author is using them. Often these words are some of the most important in the reading.

Make note of passages where you are confused and/or have questions, and be sure to include a page number. Once you finish the chapter, you can return to the passages. Perhaps further reading clarified the confusion. If not, you know exactly which points in the text to further research or to ask questions about.

Write down striking or unusual use of language. Often writers use particular words, expressions, or sentences in ways that we wouldn't have thought to use them, and the effect can really jump off the page at us. If you come across a passage that seems really cool to you, write it down in your reading journal.



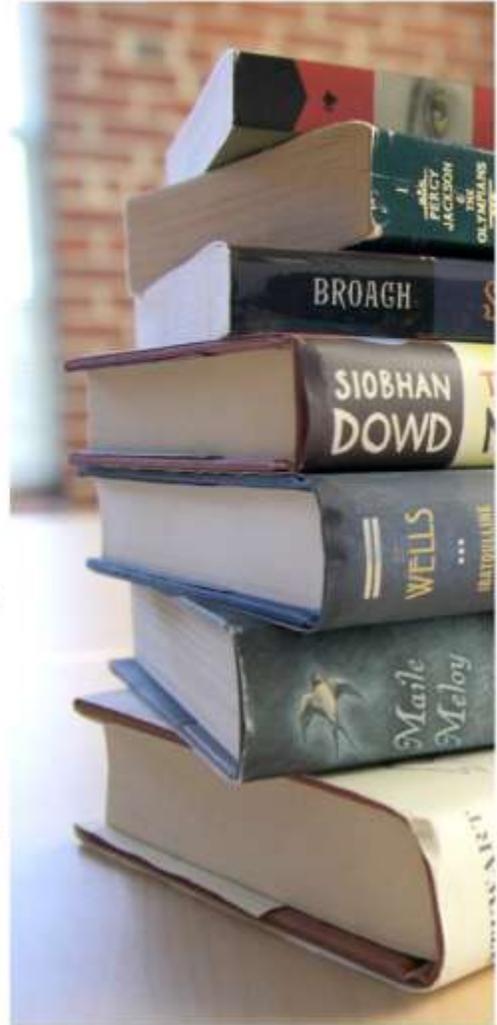
Throughout the online book club activities, you will find activities that are specifically labeled "Reading Journal." When you see that label, read the writing prompt, and respond to it in your reading journal. These prompts will usually ask you to write about a personal connection to what you've been reading. For example, a journal prompt might ask you to write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that is similar to a situation of one of the characters in the book.

To Write or To Type, That is the Question!

Your reading journal doesn't have to be a hard-copy, hand-written one, but there are some advantages to using an old-fashioned journal:

- The physical act of writing promotes a stronger memory for new words, phrases, and strategies you will be learning
- The hard copy notebook can evolve into a collage, a scrapbook, even a work of art that represents your creative, messy, overflowing mind!

How and where you keep a reading journal is much less important than actually doing it! So find an old notebook that may be buried in your desk, ask mom or dad if you can buy an inexpensive composition book, or create a new folder on your home computer and get started!!



How do I annotate a book?

As the word suggests, annotating a book involves making notes or other types of marks that help you focus on particular words or passages that seem important, are often repeated, relate to other things you've read, or simply interest you as a reader. An active reader annotates a text by doing any or all of the following:

UNDERLINING

Specific words that convey significant events or elements of the story's characters, plot or theme

VERTICAL LINE ALONG THE MARGIN

This helps the reader quickly find an important passage underlined, or to highlight a paragraph or other section too long to underline.

* ASTERISK/STAR/DOODLE ☆

Placed in the margin, this device is reserved for the most important, special ideas, events or elements of the book. There would be no more than a dozen of these in the entire book; by flipping through, one could easily find once again the most significant passages in the text.

4. NUMBERS

Placing numbers in the margin can help count a set of related points or ideas the author is listing.

P.#32 PAGE NUMBERS

Often indicated by "p. #" or "Cf. #" next to the number, this indicates an idea or element is connected to another on different page of the book, and should be considered together.

CIRCLES

These serve the same function as underlining key words or phrases, but may be reserved for the **BIGGEST** ideas or facts in the book.

Of course, all of these strategies involve marking in the book. So if you're planning on annotating your book, we recommend that you have your own copy – librarians take a very dim view of writing in books that belong to the media center/library!



Names, Places, & Faces...Oh, My!

Keeping Track with a Character Grid

When reading a new book, it can be helpful to keep track of the characters you meet and what you think about them. This Character Grid is one way to do just that!

Characters in books (or movies!) are often very like people you meet every day in real life. You may notice the way a character dresses, talks, thinks, behaves, or makes new friends. As you record your ongoing thoughts here, remember that some characters will change and grow depending on what happens to them—or whom they meet—as the story progresses. These are called **dynamic** characters. On the other hand, some characters stay the same no matter what happens to them. These are called **static** characters. Whether a character is willing to change and grow can affect the kind of person he or she turns out to be in the end, and it can also influence how we, as readers, feel about that character.

For example, Marlin, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, starts out as an overprotective dad who doesn't believe his son Nemo should try new things because he might get hurt. As the movie progresses, though, Marlin makes new friends, like Crush and Dory, who help him learn to guide and encourage his son without keeping him from experiencing the fun life has to offer. By the end of the movie, Marlin has changed his way of thinking about how to be a "good" dad. This not only makes him a dynamic character but also makes us like him better and want him to succeed as a parent. (If Marlin had not changed his ways, we might have ended up being frustrated by him.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Tuck this Character Grid into your book or Reading Journal. Then, each time you meet a new character in the book, take a moment to write down his or her name on the grid and answer the "As You Are Reading" questions. (If you run out of writing room, feel free to create your own grid or answer these questions in your Reading Journal!)
2. Once you have finished the book, go back through your grid and answer the "After You Have Finished the Book" questions. As a way of wrapping up, consider: With which character(s) did you connect most strongly? What does this tell you about yourself?

Character's Name	As You Are Reading...		After You Have Finished the Book...	
	Where/When do you meet this character?	Describe this character's appearance and behavior.	What stands out to you about this character's name, behavior, or choices?	Why is this character important to the story overall?
			Is this character static or dynamic ? What evidence from the book tells you so?	

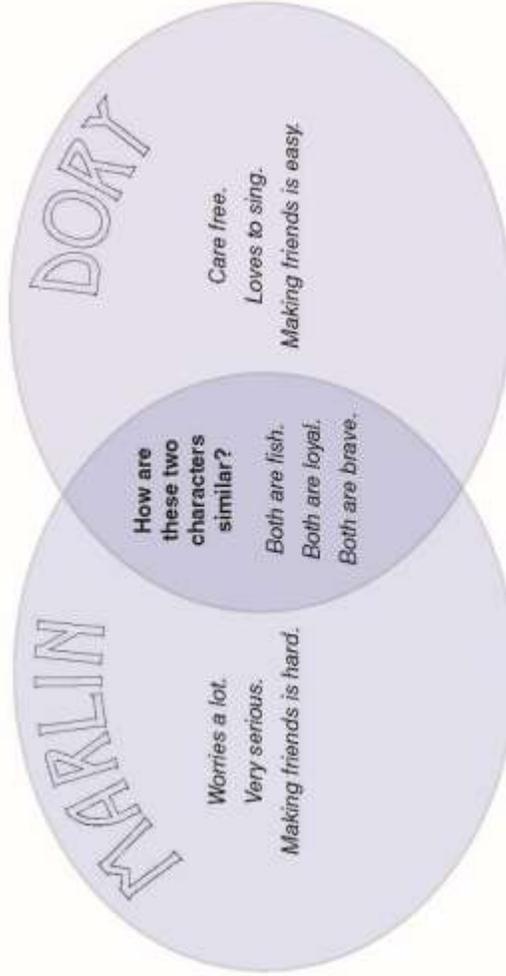


Finding Common Ground

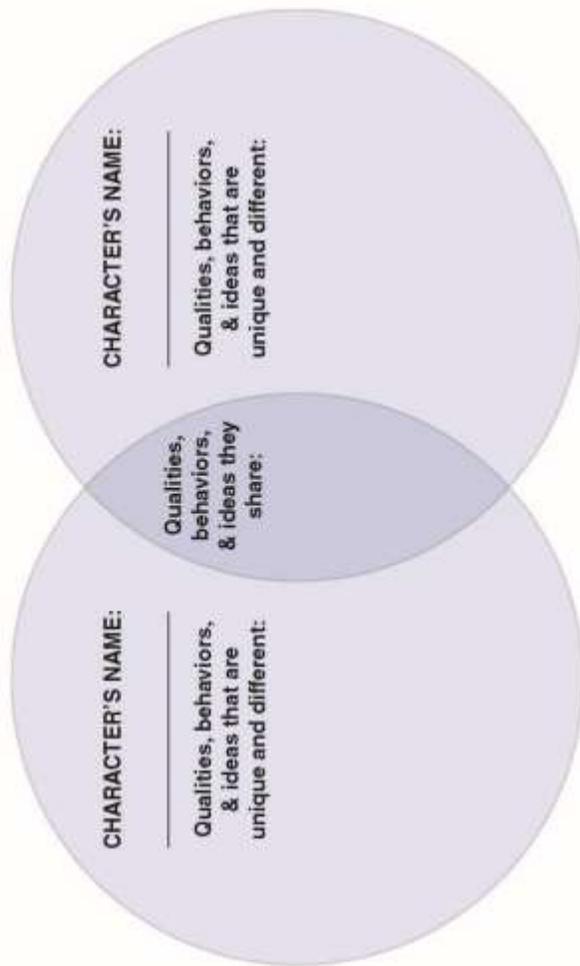
Side-By-Side Comparison with a Venn Diagram

Creating a Venn Diagram can help you visualize and make sense of the similarities and differences between two or more things. For example, as you are reading a book, you could use a Venn Diagram to compare key characters, places, or events.

A basic Venn Diagram is made up of two, partially overlapping circles. Let's say you wanted to compare two characters. In the outer part of each circle, you would write one character's name and list the qualities, behaviors, and ideas that make him or her unique and different. In the space where the circles overlap, write down characteristics the characters share. If we were comparing Marlin and Dory, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you've seen this movie, try adding some observations of your own!):



Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:



If you want to compare more than two characters, places, or events, simply add additional circles to your Venn Diagram. Be creative! Just pay attention to the places where your circles overlap and look for similarities there. Here are some other possibilities:

