

# Teaching history from **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:**

## 7th Grade Lesson on Centering Southeast Asian Refugee Experiences in the Study of Vietnam War

### GA Social Studies Standards

**SS7H3 Analyze continuity and change in Southern and Eastern Asia.**

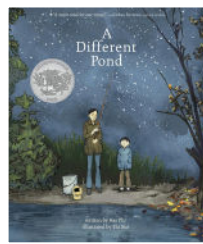
**e. Explain the reasons for foreign involvement in Korea and Vietnam in terms of containment of communism.**

The Vietnam War caused countless death and destruction in Vietnam and neighboring countries including Laos and Cambodia. This devastation created a refugee crisis, forcing more than 1.2 million Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, and Cambodian peoples to leave their homes and resettle in the United States.



In teaching about the Vietnam War, including and centering Southeast Asian refugee experiences and perspectives is critical. If not, students may think the Vietnam War had nothing to do with Southeast Asian migration to the US, and such thinking can lead to verbal attacks such as “Go back to your country!” and physical harassments against Southeast Asian and Asian Americans in general.

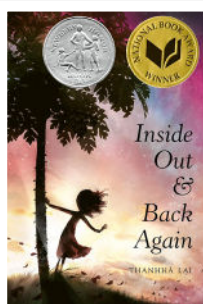
Children’s literature written by Southeast Asian refugees can be a great instructional tool to learn about the Vietnam War from Southeast Asian refugees’ perspectives.



**Bao Phi (2017). A Different Pond.** Capstone.

Bao, a young Vietnamese American boy, wakes up early in the morning to accompany his father who goes to fish for family dinner. While fishing, the father talks about his life in Vietnam and shares sad memories of his lost brother during the war.

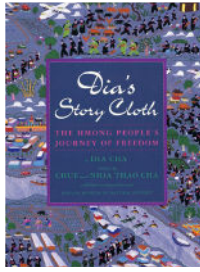
This book vividly describes a Vietnamese refugee family’s struggle with poverty and their resilience. Yet the book is short on details about why the war happened and what role the United States played in the war. Students can use this book as a starter to go deeper into the Vietnam War legacies in terms of Vietnamese displacement and resettlement struggles.



**Thanhha Lai (2013). Inside Out & Back Again.** HarperCollins.

Ten-year-old Hà and her family leave their home and become refugees at the end of the Vietnam War. They go through difficult journeys to America. After living in a refugee camp in Florida, they move to Alabama. There, she and her brothers and mom deal with their immersion in American culture and society in different ways.

This semi-autobiographical novel provides Vietnamese experiences of the war through the voice of ten-year-old Hà. It greatly and vividly describes complex, divergent, diverse experiences of the refugees.



**Dia Cha (1995). Dia's Story Cloth.** Lee & Low Books.

Hmong American Dia Cha tells her family story of peaceful living in Laos prior to the Vietnam War, wartime struggle, living in a Thailand refugee camp, and resettling in the US as refugees.

This book vividly tells a story of the US secret war in Laos and its legacies on Hmong refugee crisis, Hmong resettlement in the US, and Hmong resilience and agency. Students can use this book to go deeper into the diverse stories of Hmong people in the US.



**Icy Smith (2010). Half Spoon of Rice.** East West Discovery Press.

Nine-year-old Nat and his family are forced to leave their home and to the labor camps when the Khmer Rouge takes over the country in 1975. There Nat is separated from his family and endures forced labors with other children.

Later, Nat escapes to Thailand where he is reunited with his family. After many months in the refugee camp, Nat's family gets permission to resettle in the US.

This book vividly describes the tragic results of the war on Cambodian civilians. The author's note gives more detailed information on U.S.'s secret war in Cambodia and how the U.S. carpet bombings over Cambodia fueled Cambodian civilians' support for the Khmer Rouge.



Asian American Voices for Education

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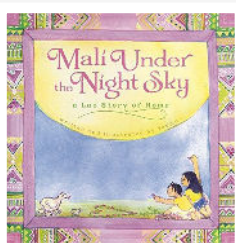
**Written by Sohyun An**

**Design by Justine Chung**

**Photo credit:**

**(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)**

1. Phi, Bao and Thi Bui. *A Different Pond*. Raintree 2020.
2. Lli, Thanhha. *Inside Out & Back Again*. Harper Classic ed. Harper an Imprint of HarperCollins 2017.
3. Cha, Dia et al. *Dia's Story Cloth*. 1st ed. Lee & Low Books ; Denver Museum of Natural History 1996.
4. Smith, Icy and Sopaul Nhem. *Half Spoon of Rice : A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide*. First U.S. ed. East West Discovery Press 2010.
5. Landowne, Youme and Malichansouk Kouanchao. *Mali Under the Night Sky : A Lao Story of Home*. 1st ed. Cinco Puntos Press 2010.
6. Vongsay, Saymoukda Duangphouxay and Cori Nakamura Lin. *When Everything Was Everything*. Full Circle Publishing 2018.



**Youme Landowne (2010). Mali Under the Night Sky.** Cinco Puntos Press.



**Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay (2018). When Everything was Everything.** Full Circle Publishing

Here are some recommended books. For the complete article, recommended books, and discussion questions, use QR code below.

Do you want to include more stories of Asian America into your lessons? Check out this fabulous book, *Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms* by Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, Sohyun An, & Ester June Kim.

**Complete Article and Lesson Plan**

