

TEACHING GUIDE

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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER

A DAUGHTER OF CAMBODIA REMEMBERS

LOUNG UNG

P.S.
INSIGHTS,
INTERVIEWS
& MORE...

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About the Book

Until the age of five, Loung Ung lived in Phnom Penh, one of seven children of a high-ranking government official. She was a precocious child who loved the open city markets, fried crickets, chicken fights, and sassing her parents. While her beautiful mother worried that Loung was a troublemaker—that she stomped around like a thirsty cow—her beloved father knew Loung was a clever girl. When Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge army stormed into Phnom Penh in April 1975, Ung’s family fled their home and moved from village to village to hide their identity, their education, their former life of privilege. Eventually, the family dispersed in order to survive. Because Loung was resilient and determined, she was trained as a child soldier in a work camp for orphans, while other siblings were sent to labor camps. As the Vietnamese penetrated Cambodia, destroying the Khmer Rouge, Loung and her surviving siblings were slowly reunited. Bolstered by the shocking bravery of one brother, the vision of the others—and sustained by her sister’s gentle kindness amid the brutality—Loung forged on to create for herself a courageous new life.

About the Author

Born to an affluent Cambodian father and Chinese mother, Loung Ung was only 5 years old when the Khmer Rouge stormed into her native city of Phnom Penh. Four years later, in one of the bloodiest episodes of the 20th century, some two million Cambodians – out of a population of seven million – had died at the hands of the infamous Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime. Among the genocide victims were Loung’s parents, two of her sisters, and 20 other relatives. Today, Loung has made over 30 trips back to Cambodia. As an author, lecturer, and activist, she has dedicated 20 years to promoting equality, human rights, and justice in her native land and worldwide.

About the Film

Starring Sareum Srey Moch, Phoeung Kompheak, Sveng Socheata, Netflix produced the 2017 film adaptation of *First They Killed My Father*, an unflinching portrayal of the Khmer Rouge’s reign of terror and genocide, from the view of a five-year-old survivor cut off from her family in 1975. The screenplay was written by Loung Ung and Angelina Jolie, who is also the film’s director.

About the Guide

This guide is organized by the years during which Loung’s story takes places. The questions that are listed under each heading will stretch across the chapters listed in the Table of Contents for the corresponding years. The questions listed under Writing Prompts can be applied to the whole of *First They Killed My Father*.

Discussion Questions

1975

- When we first meet the Ung family, what are they like? How would you describe them individually, and how they relate to each other?
- How does the Ung family's class status make them different from other families in their neighborhood?
- When the family must evacuate, how does Loung's age affect how she responds to their constant moves? Are you critical of her reactions or sympathetic to her as a young girl trying to understand her experience?
- How is the family's life different when they arrive in Anlungthmor?
- In *Ro Leap*, the family's circumstances change again. How are they different?

1976

- At the labor camps, what is Loung forced to learn about how soldiers treat girls throughout their village? How do you think this affects her?
- As Pol Pot's regime takes over, society within the camps is supposedly made equal. Everyone must dress the same and share with their community. Why does the man who killed the stray dog disappear? What crime has he committed?
- Keav, one of Loung's sisters, is taken ill and ultimately dies in hospital. How does Loung cope with her death?
- Loung's father is taken by soldiers in the last chapter of this year. What is the effect of his absence on Loung's family?

1977

- Kim, one of Loung's brothers, steals corn to get more food for his family. One night he is caught, but his life is spared. What is the unexpected outcome of his being caught? Does the change surprise you?
- How has Loung's family changed since they lived in Phnom Pehn? Can any positives be taken from these changes?
- Loung's mother devises a plan in an attempt to have her family survive. What is her plan? Do you think she is courageous for her idea?
- In the child labor camp that Chou and Loung enter, why is Loung abused by other children? Why does her difference matter to them?
- Loung is moved to a different camp to train as a soldier. Do you think she is suited for this role?
- Loung is able to go back to see her mother and Geak. How does she find them? What is she able to find out about the rest of her family during her visit?

1978

- What causes Loung to be reunited with her family?
- Conditions in Loung's camp are deteriorating again because of the war with the Yous. How does the reduction of rations affect the people in the community?
- When she returns from the infirmary, Loung returns to her soldier training. She soon has a vision about her family. What does she think the vision is trying to tell her? How does she react to it?
- How does the loss of her mother and Geak affect Loung? What does it do for her spirit and her training?

1979

- When the Youn invasion happens, what positives occur for Loung and her family?
- What are Loung and her siblings experiences like with foster families?
- How does Loung meet Pithy? What kind of experiences do they have together that help forge their friendship?
- How does the failed Khmer Rouge defense of their village unite Loung with more of her sibilings?
- The Youns capture a Khmer Rouge soldier and execute him. What was his execution like? Who was involved in killing the soldier? Did their participation surprise you?
- Why does Meng choose Loung to go with him to Vietnam?

1980 & EPILOGUE

- How do Meng and Loung adjust to life at Lam Sing Refugee Camp? What changes do they choose to make to help their futures?
- Why is sponsorship important to the refugee process?
- Where do Meng and Loung end up in America? What are some of the ways in which this change was so significant for them?
- How does Loung build a life for herself in America?
- When Loung returns to Cambodia for the first time since she was a child, how does her family react to her? Would you describe their reunion as a happy one?

Writing Prompts

- One of the obstacles Loung and her family face as they adjust to life under Pol Pot's regime is their class status. How does their loss of status affect their family?
- After her father is taken and then killed, Loung continues conversations with him in her mind. Why are these conversations helpful to her? What are they able to provide her as she lives in such difficult circumstances?
- Now that you have read their whole story, how would you describe the dynamics of Loung's family?
- How do you interpret Long's attitude to the violence that surrounds her every day? What similarities and differences can be drawn between how Loung responds to the violence around her and the women who take part in the Khmer Rouge soldier's execution?
- When she comes to America, Loung is able to change her life completely. How does this change help her raise awareness about Cambodia, its people, and genocide?

Other Titles by Loung Ung

Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind

LuLu in the Sky

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