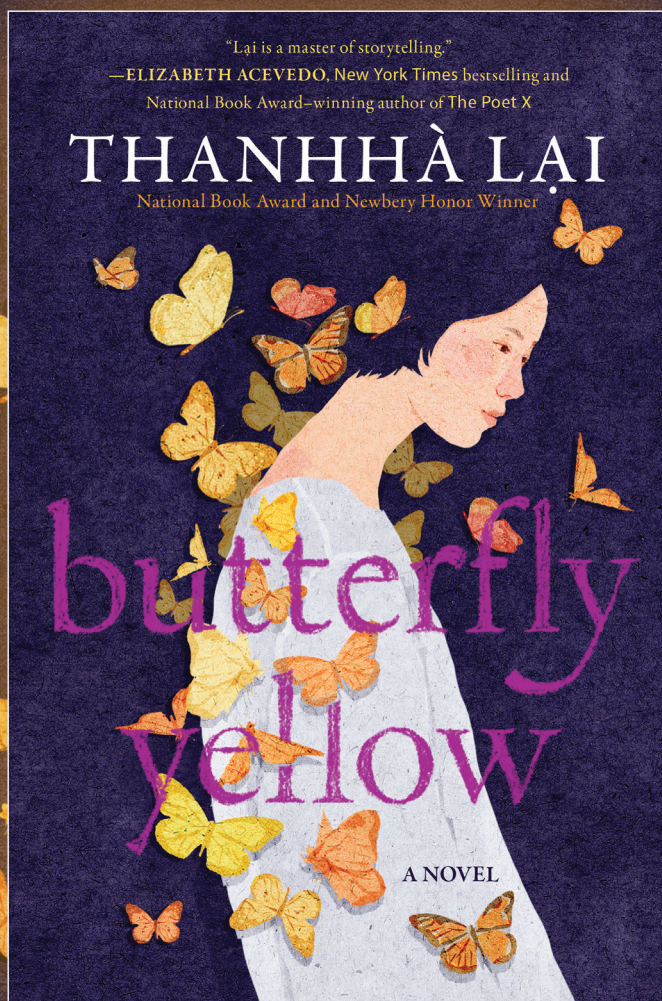


butterfly yellow

THANH HÀ LẠI

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



HARPER

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Hằng, 18, journeys away from a war-torn Việt Nam and arrives in the vast state of Texas with only one goal in mind: to find her brother and restart her life as her family would have wanted. LeeRoy, also 18, has plans of his own: to meet his hero Bruce Ford and become a real cowboy. In an unexpected turn of events, these strangers from different worlds meet and spend their summer together, going from a pair of ornery teens to unlikely friends. Exploring themes of family, friendship, and war, *Butterfly Yellow* is a story many refugees may find familiar.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Hằng takes her grandmother's advice to seek help from those who "can't help but be kind" (pg. 27). Have you ever asked for help from a total stranger? Was it difficult to communicate your issue to them? How did they react?
2. Hằng has conversations with LeeRoy, an American cowboy, in English "re-engineered within a Vietnamese pronunciation key" (pg. 40). Why do you think Lại chooses to use this phonetic style of writing instead of standard English? What effect does it have on you as a reader? How does LeeRoy respond? How do these responses change throughout the book?
3. Despite not having any familial relationship, David (Linh) has an easier time connecting with LeeRoy on the ranch than with Hằng. Why is this the case? What are some ways for people to relate to each other even when they do not know each other well? How do these connections compare to a family bond?
4. Why does LeeRoy agree to allow David to accompany him to the midnight rodeo when David offers to spend more time with his sister (pg. 127–128)? What does this reveal about LeeRoy's character and his relationship with Hằng? Have you ever had a friend or partner who you did not get along with smoothly at first, but knew you could depend on for help? What made them trustworthy?
5. Hằng is shown to be an adept artist, choosing to draw sketches and write down many of her ideas in a small notebook she keeps with her. How can art and writing be a powerful form of communication between people of different backgrounds? Do you ever express yourself honestly without speaking? How?
6. Describe David's relationship with his new "Mama," Cora. How does Cora feel about Hằng and LeeRoy spending time with her son, compared to how David feels about them? Can someone interact with two groups that oppose each other and still remain on good terms with both? Is it worth the risk?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. Why is Chú Quốc so adamant on taking David away from his new family to live with his? Is his objective fair to Hằng and David, or is he being selfish? Likewise, why is Cora protective of David in regards to his biological family? Is her perspective fair? Which side do you think is right?
8. Read pages 196–200. How is Chú Quốc's daughter Angie a bridge between the cultures of the traditional Vietnamese family and the American lifestyle? How does she connect the perspectives of the adults and the teens in the story? Do you know any great mediators in your own social network? What makes them effective at relieving the tension when there are disagreements?
9. Throughout the story, Hằng has traumatic flashbacks of two monks on a boat being attacked by pirates. Who are these monks, and what is their fate? Later, Hằng asks LeeRoy to soothe her by talking about random Texas trivia. Why do you think she suddenly suffers from the terrible recollections? How might having someone there speaking with her help Hằng cope with the pain of her dark past?
10. What is LeeRoy's reaction to Hằng's odd request to keep talking? (pg. 211–213) Does anything he say have an effect on Hằng? Have you ever been in a similar situation where you needed to comfort a friend? How can you help someone emotionally when you do not know the problems that are distressing them?
11. On page 265, Hằng remembers her boatmate declaring a new identity by changing her name and forgetting the horrors she experienced escaping from Vietnam. Why would someone want to completely throw away their past? Compare and contrast Hằng, who cannot forget her ordeals, to her friend, who forces herself to forget everything.
12. What do you think about Bà's philosophy on the relationship between horror and sublimity in the universe (pg. 266)? Do you agree or disagree? Is it possible for an individual to live a life that is free of suffering? If not, how can one maximize the positive aspects of being alive while enduring the most negative of circumstances?
13. In "Silence," the reader gets to observe the characters in the story from Mr. Morgan's point of view. (pg. 269–273) Why does he offer Hằng the job as his gardener? How does viewing her from Mr. Morgan's perspective present Hằng's growth as a character?
14. Throughout this story, we are constantly shifting through Hằng's memories of her grandmother, Bà. Despite no longer physically being by her side, how does Bà prove to be an influential force in Hằng's story? Use quotes and examples from current and past memories.



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

TREES AND LEAVES. Consider pages 153, 172, and 173. In these pages we are shown the diagrams Hăng uses to break down her sentences and understand how to correctly place every word. LeeRoy also joins in, often adding onto the sentence with his own contributions. With a partner, write a short story consisting of three sentences using the same structure the characters use.

SNIPPETS OF WISDOM. Choose your favorite philosophical quote from Bà or come up with your own. Find a situation in your daily life that fits the context of the quote, and then come up with a plan to apply it to your life. Share your wise conclusions with a partner.

WRITE IT INTO EXISTENCE. We do not know the English names of the fruits Hăng draws for her brother until the end, but we are given vivid descriptions of each one. Without including its name, describe your favorite thing to eat using five specific sentences. Share the paragraph with your partner and guess each other's favorite food.

FREESTYLE POEM / RAP. LeeRoy is shown to have developed a liking for rap music, which is similar to Hăng's fondness for poetry. Using their compositions on pages 235–238 as an example, come up with your own poem or rap about a vivid memory that you have. It can be humorous or emotional. For a challenge, set a timer and try to create a memorable poem or rap before the time expires.

A PICTURE'S WORTH. Hăng is skilled in the art of drawing and is able to draw her brother's favorite fruits without having them directly in front of her. Her family memories are strong enough for her to recreate the image. Using just your memory and a pencil, draw something from a treasured family memory to the best of your ability. It could be the setting, a food you shared, clothes you wore, or anything else that reminds you of a special time. Share that memory with your partner.



A NOTE FROM THANH HÀ LẠI

DEAR READER,

At a Buddhist temple in San Diego, there is a memorial room filled with tiny photographs of those who have passed. Mostly, the portraits show people with gray hair who I hope lived full lives. One section of the wall, however, is reserved for black-and-white images. All are in their teens, twenties, thirties, forties. Young. The hairstyles date back to the late seventies, early eighties. It is not explained, but visitors know they are looking at those who lost their lives at sea in hopeful attempts to become refugees. Every Vietnamese knows of at least one such person.

On one visit, I kept staring at a particular girl. Her hair was short and jagged, her eyes intense, her lips tight. I researched what might have caused her to join the thousands of Vietnamese who escaped postwar Việt Nam. Then I imagined the details of what she witnessed at sea.

Years later, her face continued to visit me. By now I wanted to focus on what happened to her upon landing in a safe place. How does she return to herself?

I put a name to a face and she became Hằng. I placed her in a land she could not have imagined, the opposite of the lush green she loved yet needed to flee. Enter the Panhandle in Texas. I spent my adolescence in Texas, so I know of its dry flat landscape to the west.

Then I needed a buddy for Hằng. Enter LeeRoy. He was a boy I might have gone to high school with in Fort Worth. A cowboy wannabe, dreaming of rodeo glory while trudging through the halls with horse dung on his boots. His innate kindness would soothe Hằng's fiery vulnerabilities. Together, in spite of themselves, they would trade humor and solace.

Sometimes true connection sprouts between two most unlikely people. And sometimes healing is spurred in a place that reminds you of nothing you have known. Hằng begins to thaw as she gets to know LeeRoy and West Texas. I hope you enjoy getting to know all three.



To life's lovely surprises,

THANH HÀ LẠI



ABOUT THANHHA LẠI

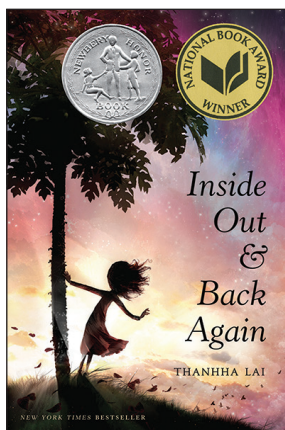
Photo by Paula Landry



THANHHA LẠI is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Inside Out & Back Again*, her debut novel in verse, which won both a National Book Award and a Newbery Honor, and the acclaimed *Listen, Slowly*, which was named to numerous best book of the year lists. She was born in Việt Nam and now lives in New York with her family. To learn more about Thanhha, visit www.thanhhalai.com.



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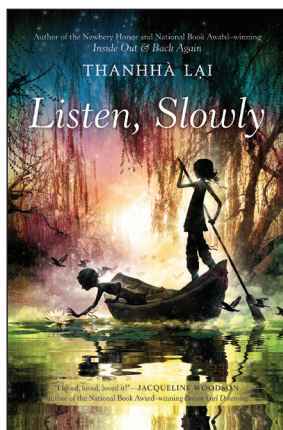
INSIDE OUT & BACK AGAIN

Winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature

A Newbery Honor Book

An ALA Notable Book

A *Publishers Weekly* Flying Start



LISTEN, SLOWLY

A *New York Times* Book Review Notable Children's Book

An ALA Notable Book

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

A BCCB Blue Ribbon Selection