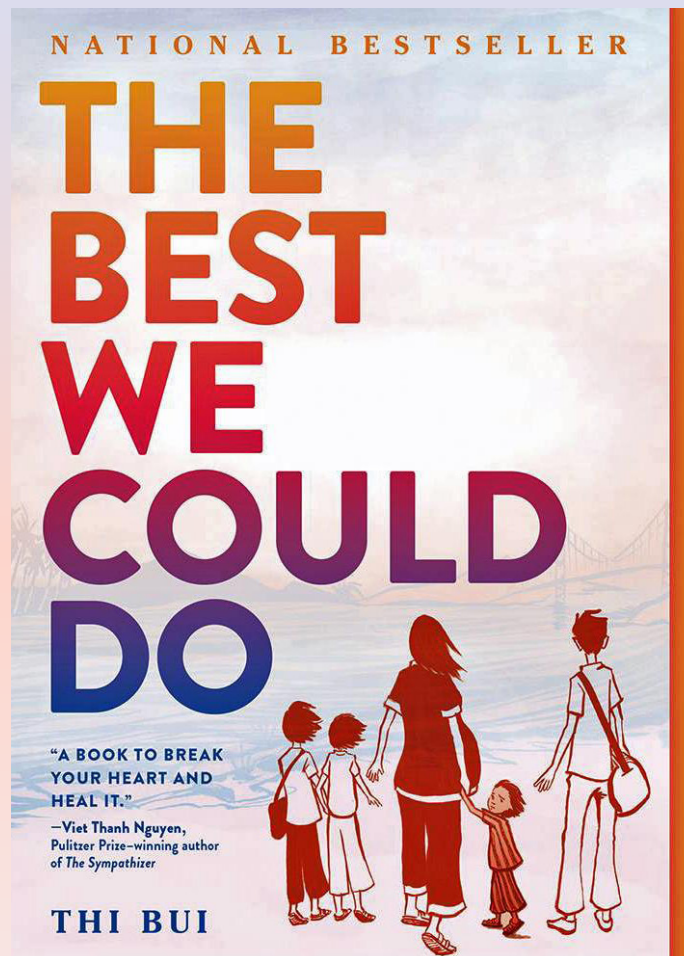
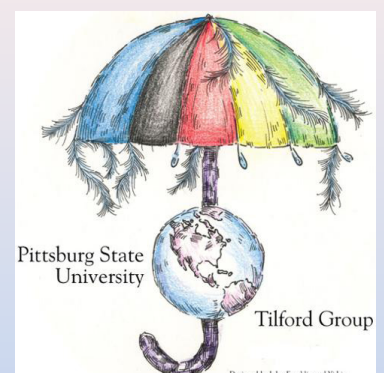


Tilford 2020-2021 READ



Readings for Empowerment and Diversity

<https://www.pittstate.edu/office/provost/tilford/index.html>



Events & Dates

This year's READ session will be held as virtual events through zoom. Log in to Canvas for zoom links. During read aloud events participants are encouraged to read from the panels. Two events a week, participate on either date.

Read Aloud & Book Discussion

Week 1 (Chapter 1 & 2)

September 21st 5pm | September 24th 6pm

Week 2 (Chapter 3 & 4)

September 28th 5pm | October 1st 6pm

Week 3 (Chapter 5 & 6)

October 5th 5pm | October 8th 6pm

Week 4 (Chapter 7 & 8)

October 12th 5pm | October 15th 6pm

Week 5 (Chapter 9 & 10)

October 19th 5pm | October 22nd 6pm

Final Wrap up - October 26th 5pm (Recorded)

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About the Author

About Thi Bui

Cartoonist, Writer, and Illustrator Thi Bui was born in Sài Gòn, Viet Nam in 1975. Three years later her family escaped as refugees to Malaysia and then to the United States. Thi and family arrived in the United States in 1978. Thi and siblings grew up in California trying to assimilate to the American culture.

Pronunciation

From her biography, “Hi, my name is Thi Bui. It’s pronounced tea, like the drink and buoy like the thing that floats on water. Seriously, what I tell people. It is the way that I say my name in the US, in the English-speaking world. The name that was given to me is Vietnamese, and the way that you would say it in Vietnam is Bui Phương Thi. The family name first, then my middle name, then my first name...”



Works

Thi Bui works as an illustrator and author. Her most recent work, the graphic memoir *The Best We Could Do*, is the 2020-2021 PSU Tilford common READ book. Thi illustrated the 2018 Caldecott Honor Book *A Different Pond*. And she worked with her thirteen-year-old son, Hien Bui-Stafford, to illustrate the children’s book *Chicken of the Sea*.

Source: <https://www.thibui.com>

About the Book

The Best We Could Do

In this graphic memoir, Thi Bui explores her relationship with her parents and how perceptions of parenting change after giving birth to her son. Thi probes family members for details about their experiences growing up in Viet Nam and surviving the country's 1955-1975 civil war between the Communist North and American-backed South. The conflict that in the United States is referred to as the Vietnam War.

Throughout the book, Thi illustrates very different childhood experiences, from her parents surviving a country in turmoil to her difficult experiences in assimilating and adjusting to the United States. While exploring her family's history, she weaves in details of government occupations, military conflicts, and highlights the richness of Vietnam's culture and lore.



Reader notes:

The story is told from multiple viewpoints and the narrator jumps to different time periods.

In exploring her family history, Thi takes us through Vietnam's occupations and history. It is a multi-lingual story. Some names, locations, and terms might be shown in French, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, or English.

The novel explores the history of a country that has undergone numerous occupations, regimes, and military conflicts. Violent themes are explored.

More on the book: <https://thebestwecoulddo.abrams.link/>

Pronunciations & Key Terms

This graphic novel contains names and terms that readers may not be accustomed to and may find difficult to pronounce. Please visit www.abramsbooks.com/thebestwecoulddo for a complete list of terms and recorded pronunciations.

Key names:

Quyên

Lan

Bích

Tha'ò

Thi

Tâm

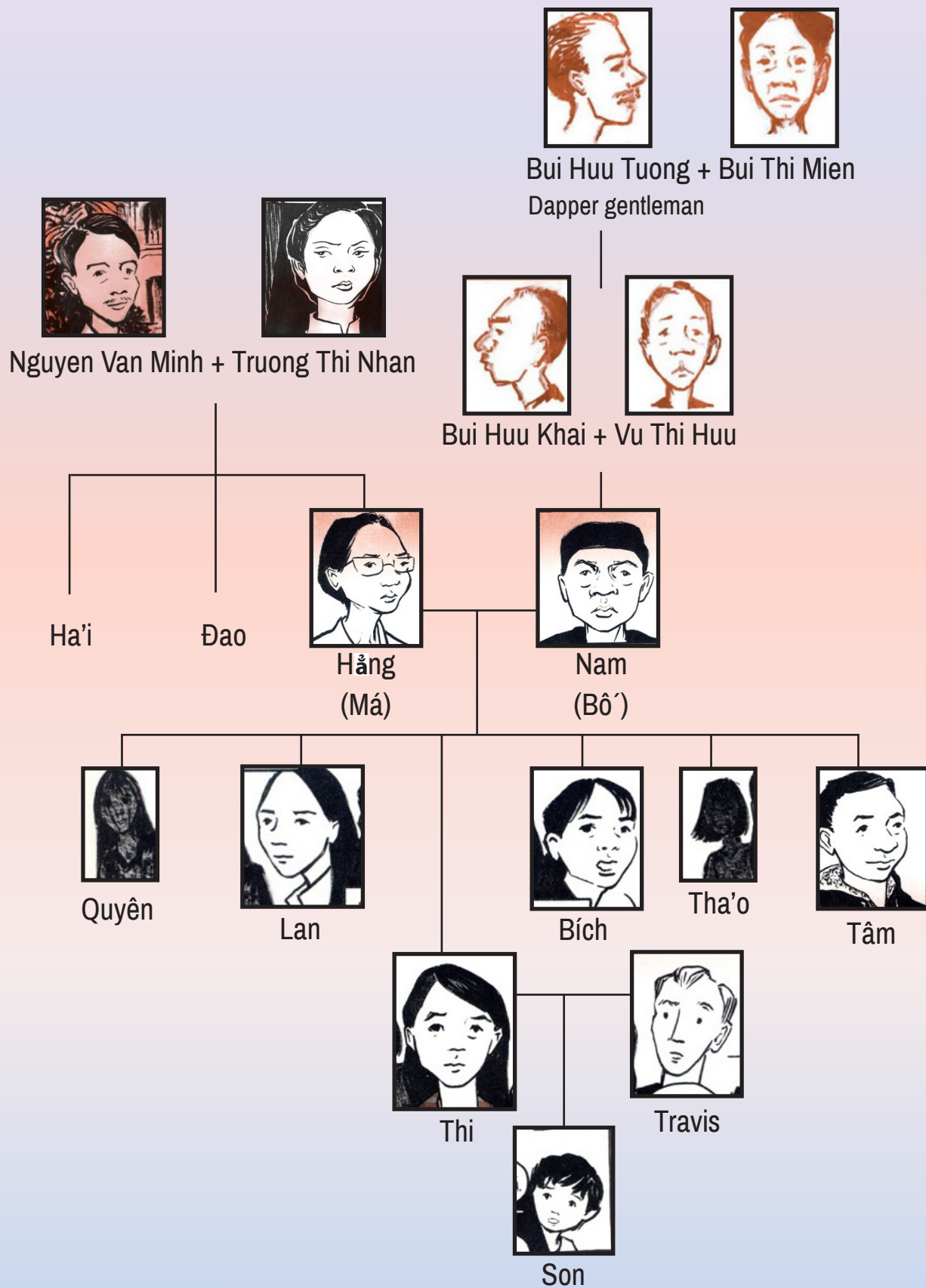
Má

Bô'

Vietnam or Việt Nam? Bui intentionally left place and character names in the original Vietnamese with diacritics. As she put it in an interview, “I was always writing for us [Vietnamese people]. The existence of Vietnamese words being spelled in Vietnamese [with] the proper diacritics—people like me can read them.”



Family Tree



Discussion Questions

Family (questions from the [publisher](#))



1. “Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into”(pg. 21). What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between “created” and “born into”? What is similar?
2. Bô´ states, “You don’t have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us” (pg. 27). What events caused Bô´ to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tâm, how would you interpret this statement?
3. On page 29, the author draws portraits of her parents and siblings. In the second panel, Quỳn and Tha’o are shadows. What was the artist’s purpose for blurring these two siblings? Was it effective to use an image instead of words? Explain


Additional Family Questions

4. When talking about becoming closer to her parents, Thi says, “...I recognize what it is NOT, and now I understand - proximity and closeness are not the same.” What is she referring to? (pg. 31)
5. Thi illustrates and details her mother’s Six (6) childbirths, even the children that did not survive. She does this in reverse chronology. Why is it important for Thi to set this painful part of her family’s history in such detail? (pg. 42-55)



6. Thi makes it clear that her relationship with Ma changes when she becomes a mother. On page 310 she illustrates a discussion the two had when her newborn was kept in the hospital. How does their relationship change in this section? Do any statements showcase her newfound understanding of “parental sacrifice”

Culture & Identity (questions from the [publisher](#))



1. “And imagine each block, each day turned us a little more American” (pg. 65). “I learned about America mostly through books and TV, and from what my sisters learned in school” (pg. 67). If you were going to mentor a new classmate from another country, how would you share and explain what it means to be “a little more American” to your new classmate? What books, television shows, or other media would you use to demonstrate your ideas? What elements in your everyday environment shape your national or cultural identity?

2. Examine the panels where someone spits on Bô´ on page 67. What is meant by “there were reasons to not want to be anything other?” How would you have reacted if you were Bô´? How would you react if you saw someone spit on another person? What might motivate one person to react to another in that way?

Can you think of similar hateful actions and tensions you’ve seen or read about throughout history or on the news?

3. “Don’t be such a REFUGEE!” (pg. 285). What is meant by this comment? When you hear the word “refugee,” what do you think of? How do perceptions of refugees affect their experience?

Additional Identity Questions

4. “...In which my parents placed the essential pieces of our identity” This line refers to a file folder with vital documents the family kept (pg. 297 and 298) for each member. What do you think of this as a survival coping strategy? How does this coping strategy compare or contrast to strategies in your own childhood?



Conflict & History (questions from the [publisher](#))

1. Using examples from the book, how did class differences affect people's experience of war and their decisions about which side to take?
2. How did certain features of geographic location affect people's experience of war? Cite specific examples from the book.



3. Thi's family escapes to Việt Nam on a boat bound for Malaysia. They face many hardships—little food (pg. 235), tight sleeping arrangements (pg. 236), possible pirates (pg. 242), bad potable water (pg. 244), etc. If you were aboard a boat headed toward freedom, what five items would you want to bring on the boat to survive? What would you have to leave behind? Share your list of items with a partner, and then narrow your list to three items for the two of you. What similar stories of escape have you read about throughout history or on the news?

4. On page 267, Bui incorporates her family's real refugee camp identification photographs into the graphics. What was Bui's intention in doing so? Was it effective?



External & Additional Resources

Much of the content on this guide comes from the publisher and the authors websites. Please see below for their links and additional information.

[Thi Bui Biography](#)

[Abrams Comic Arts](#)

Additional Resources:

[Waging Peace in Vietnam](#)

[Vietnam Full Disclosure](#)

[Another War Memorial: Memories of the American War in Viet Nam](#)

[Ted Talk by Luma Mufleh: Don't feel sorry for refugees - believe in them](#)