

Inside Out & Back Again
Discussion Guide
Grades 3-7

Before Reading: to activate schema, build background knowledge, and set a purpose.

- This novel is written in verse, which may be a unique genre for students. Begin by activating prior knowledge about verse. Give students the opportunity to explore the genre with various examples drawn from this book or others. Discuss why authors may choose to write in verse and why readers enjoy books written in verse.
- Build prior knowledge about Saigon in 1975 by searching for photos and videos online (e.g., papaya tree, lotus seeds, Vietnamese dress, landscapes, etc.).
- Get to know the author, Thanhha Lai, by watching interviews with her or listening to her read parts from her book online.

During Reading: to engage students, check for understanding, and make connections.

- Why do you think Hà's mother warns the children that the way they behave on Tết will foretell the whole year? (p. 1)
- How does Hà feel about her family? Use details to support your thinking. (pp. 1-17)
- Why do you think Hà says, "I'm glad we've become poor so we can stay." (p. 11)
- What does Hà know about her father? How does she find out details about her father? (pp. 24-25)
- What are Hà's birthday wishes? Why do you think she keeps them to herself? (pp. 30-31)
- Why does the family decide to leave Vietnam? How does Hà feel about leaving? (pp. 42-48)
- How does Hà feel about papayas? What details does the author use throughout part 1 to illustrate this? (part 1)
- What happens to Saigon? How do you know? (pp. 67-69)
- What is life on the boat like for Hà? Use details to support your thinking. (pp. 73-90)
- Why do you think Hà's mother says, "At least the moon remains unchanged"? (p. 89)
- What happens in "A Kiss"? How does Hà's mother feel about being given food? Use details to support your thinking. (pp. 91-93)
- Why does Hà's mother choose America over Paris? (p. 106)
- How is Hà feeling at the end of part 2? Use details to support your thinking. (part 2)
- How does Hà's mother feel about the children learning English? How does Hà feel about learning English? (pp. 116-135)
- Why do you think Hà's mother tells her to be grateful? How does Hà really feel? (p. 126)
- What happens on Hà's first day of school? (pp. 139-148)
- Why does Brother Vu decide to teach Hà defense? What do you think will happen? (p. 153)
- What does Miss Scott do that makes Hà feel dumb? Can you think of a time when you have felt this way? (pp. 156-157)

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During Reading: (continued)

- What does Hà mean when she says the English words *a*, *an*, and *the* “act as little megaphones to tell the world whose English is still secondhand”? (p. 166)
- Who is Miss Washington? How does Hà feel about her? (pp. 165-167)
- Why does Hà’s family go to church? Do you think Hà likes this church? Why or why not? (pp. 169-172)
- Who are Pam and Steven? Why do you think Hà calls this her “Most Relieved Day”? (pp. 183-186)
- What happens in “War and Peace”? How are Hà’s memories of Saigon different than what Miss Scott is showing the class? What is Miss Washington’s response? (pp. 194-195,200-202)
- What happens when Miss Scott brings in a photo of Buddha for the class? How does Miss Washington comfort Hà? How are Hà’s experiences with her two teachers different? (pp. 205-211)
- Why does Hà confess to her mother that she tapped her toe on the tile last Tết? How does her mother respond? (pp. 213-216)
- What happens with Pink Boy? (pp. 221-228)
- What do Hà’s brothers think happened to their father? How does mother feel about this? (pp. 240-242)
- The story ends one year later when it is Tết again. What do you think Hà learned from her last year? What are her hopes and dreams for this new year? (part 4)

After Reading: to summarize, question, and reflect.

- Poetry and novels written in verse use figurative language to express emotions and experiences. Use RIF’s Figurative Language Graphic Organizer to explore the many types of figurative language used throughout the novel, describe how it relates to the story, and draw conclusions about why the author used that language.
- This novel explores many themes including adaptation, cultural differences, resilience, discrimination and racism, generosity, language barriers, and luck. Have students select one theme and complete the Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World graphic organizer.
- Use a Venn Diagram to compare/contrast Saigon to Alabama based on descriptions from the book.
- Why do you think the author uses imagery of food throughout the book? In what ways are the descriptions of food tied to Hà’s feelings? Provide as many details and examples as you can.

If your students enjoyed this book...

- Encourage them to continue to discuss it and refer to it in other lessons and conversations.
- Let them explore more about the topic by reading other books with similar themes, structure, characters, or content.