



2010

Inside Out and Back Again

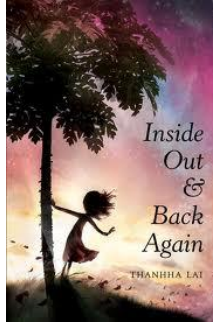
Debbie Barr

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Lai, Thanhha. *Inside Out and Back Again*. HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 9780061962783. \$15.99. 262 p.

Reviewer: Debbie Barr

Reading level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fiction; Historical fiction;

Subject: Vietnamese Americans--Juvenile fiction; Emigration and immigration--Juvenile fiction;

Vietnam--History--1971-1980--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Hà loves her home in Vietnam. She is growing a Papaya tree, her mother and brothers are happy, and they are waiting for their father to come home after being held captive for nine years. When war reaches their home, Hà and her family must flee on a ship to America. There they are sponsored by a man in Alabama and have to learn how to live an entirely new life. Hà is heartbroken. She feels stupid because she doesn't know English, the other kids at school make fun of her, the food is strange, and nothing seems to be right. Over time, though, she comes to accept her new home. She befriends their neighbor, a retired teacher who teaches her English, and her brothers find work and happiness in their new country. Even though she misses Vietnam, Hà comes to peace with her new life.

Lai based *Inside Out and Back Again* on her own experiences as a young Vietnam refugee in America, which gives a strong sense of realism to her description of the emotional struggle of a young girl going through the same events. The book is written in verse, which adds to the story using short, poignant sentences and ideas. Hà is a charming narrator, describing American culture from a fresh standpoint, such as when she calls Thanksgiving the “coming holiday/ when Americans eat a turkey/ the size of a baby.” This would be a wonderful book in a unit about the Vietnam War, giving American readers the often neglected viewpoint of a Vietnamese refugee.

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