

First They Killed My Father

A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

By Loung Ung

Critical Reading Guide

Personal Reflection Questions

- How did it affect your reading of the book that you were aware of Loung's father's impending death long before she was?
- Do you believe that we (as humans) are naturally good? Why? Why not?
- What fundamental problems existed in the Khmer Rouge's plan that caused the destruction of so many lives? Were there any values that the Khmer Rouge claimed to hold that you share?

Literature

- What impact did the narrator's perspective have on your experience as a reader? How would you characterize the transformation that takes place in her narrative voice throughout the story?

Gender Studies

- Would you describe Loung as a feminist? How did the experiences of the Ung family differ during the war because of gender?
- How were gender roles depicted in the book? Did these roles change during the war?
- What challenges did the characters in the book face because of their gender?
- Examine the concept of beauty, as depicted in the book. How was the concept different between Cambodian and Vietnamese society? Which concept is most similar to the American concept of beauty?

Education

- How does the author's age and cognitive development affect the events depicted in the book?
- At the age of 5, Loung made the transition from living a middle class childhood to living in poverty. Considering poverty as a theme, how do you think school and education are different for American students living in poverty than for students living middle class lives?
- How does Loung's perception of herself change after her childhood experiences in Cambodia?
- How does Loung's cultural/ethnic identity develop as she moves through the book?

Mathematics

- Do you think it is possible to calculate the cost of war? What factors would go into calculating cost?
- Examine the cost of living in both the United States and in Cambodia during the period described in the book.

Sociology

- Are Americans like the base people? Explain.
- What was your impression of the final separation, both geographic and cultural, that Loung had with her surviving family? Did you sympathize with her eventual desire to assimilate into the new/dominant culture, or had you expected her to be more aggressive about pursuing her family relationships?
- What factors influenced societal hatred between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese?
- How can power facilitate corruption?
- Is it possible for a society to recover from war? How do people return to an original, uncorrupted state?

Nutrition

- Given Loung's daily work, how many calories should she have eaten to maintain her body weight?
- What are the long term effects of malnutrition on the human body?

Psychology

- What are the major emotions Loung experiences throughout the book?
- Cite an example of where Loung suppressed her feelings in the book.
- How do you think that Loung's experiences will affect her parenting style?

History

- How much did the American presence (or lack thereof) influence key events in this book?
- The concept of ethnic cleansing is not new. Do you believe that it is becoming more common, or do you believe that the media has enabled us to simply become more aware? Why?

Resources:

- 1) http://www.wsl.state.wy.us/crook/book_disc_group.htm#Tula%20Station%20by%20David%20Toscano
- 2) http://www.harperacademic.com/catalog/instructors_guide_xml.asp?isbn=0060931388
- 3) http://www.loungung.com/ung_books.php?book=FTKMF