

# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

PREPARED BY



SOUTHEAST ASIA CENTER

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**Note:** All descriptions are adapted from the publisher websites and/or Wikipedia summaries. Grade level/lexile scores are approximate. The Southeast Asia Center does not endorse these books as accurate cultural representations, but rather as interesting candidates for an author study. The “national literature” suggestions will not be accessible to most high school students and are not intended for author studies, but are provided as background information. \*indicates that information about the author is widely available.

## BURMA/MYANMAR

### GRADES K-2

#### ***I See the Sun in Myanmar***

**AUTHOR:** Dedie King\*

**YEAR:** 2013

This bilingual tale is set in a small town on the Irawaddy River and narrated by a young girl, Aye Aye, whose father is a fisherman and mother is a nurse in a nearby hospital. The story also provides an introduction to Buddhist traditions such as *metta*, the practice of saying phrases of loving-kindness. Part of the “I See the Sun” series books.

### GRADES 6-8

#### ***Bamboo People***

**AUTHOR:** Mitali Perkins\*

**YEAR:** 2012

Narrated by two teenage boys on opposing sides of the conflict between the Burmese government and the Karenni, one of Burma's many ethnic minorities, this coming-of-age novel takes place against the political and military backdrop of modern-day Burma.

### GRADES 9-12

#### ***The Burma Chronicles***

**AUTHOR:** Guy Delisle

**YEAR:** 2009

This graphic novel tells of the French Canadian author’s time spent in Burma with his young son and his wife, an administrator for Doctors without Borders.

#### ***The Glass Palace***

**AUTHOR:** Amitav Ghosh\*

**YEAR:** 2009

Focusing mainly on the early 20th century, this novel explores the changing economic landscape of Burma and India and asks pertinent questions about what constitutes a nation and how these criteria evolve as society is swept along by the tide of modernity. Ghosh’s collection of essays *Dancing in Cambodia* also contains material about Burma.

#### ***Little Daughter: A Memoir Of Survival In Burma And The West***

**AUTHOR:** Zoya Phan

**YEAR:** 2009

Zoya Phan’s memoir tells of how she is forced to join thousands of refugees hiding in the jungle and eventually flee to the U.K. to claim asylum after the Burmese military attacks her home in the Karen highlands. She now works for the human rights organization Burma Campaign UK. There are several other memoirs from Burmese refugees available.

## CAMBODIA, LAOS AND THAILAND

### GRADES K-2

#### ***The Whispering Cloth***

**AUTHOR:** Pegi Shea and Anita Riggio (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 1996

Mai's grandmother teaches her to stitch a traditional Hmong pa'ndau story cloth in order to tell the story of how she ended up in a refugee camp in Thailand.

#### ***The Story of Silk: From Worm Spit to Woven Scarves***

**AUTHOR:** Richard Sobol

**YEAR:** 2012

The author-photographer visits a village in Thailand to witness the process of making silk textiles, from nurturing the silkworms to weaving the fabric. Richard Sobol also wrote a book about rice in Thailand.

### GRADES 3-5

#### ***A Song for Cambodia***

**AUTHOR:** Michelle Lord and Shino Arihara (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2008

This biography covers the childhood of humanitarian and musician Arn Chorn-Pond, describing how Khmer Rouge soldiers murdered his family and sent him to a work camp. An afterword tells of his work with survivors of war and his efforts to reclaim and spread knowledge of Cambodian music. Arn Chorn-Pond's biography is told for a high school audience in *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick.

#### ***Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom***

**AUTHOR:** Dia Cha, Chue (Illustrator), and Nhia Thao Cha (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 1996

**TEACHING RESOURCE:** [https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2385/teachers\\_guide](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2385/teachers_guide)

Similar to *The Whispering Cloth*, this picture book is inspired by the Hmong tradition of embroidering pa'ndau story cloths. It provides historical background about the movement of Hmong people from China to Southeast Asia. It concludes with the author's personal story of moving to America.

#### ***Moon Bear***

**AUTHOR:** Gill Lewis\*

**YEAR:** 2015

**TEACHING RESOURCE:** <http://images.scholastic.co.uk/assets/a/3f/a5/moonbear-act-free-1101815.pdf>

Twelve-year-old Tam is tricked into a city job to support his desperate family: he must milk the bladders of caged bears for their priceless bile. When a new cub arrives, Tam vows to save him. This story of cruelty and compassion provides a view into contemporary Laos, and the real-life plight of moon bears.

### GRADES 6-8

#### ***Children of the River***

**AUTHOR:** Linda Crew

YEAR: 1989

TEACHING RESOURCE: <http://childrenoftheriver2011.weebly.com/discussion-questions.html>

Having fled Cambodia four years earlier to escape the Khmer Rouge army, seventeen-year-old Sundara is torn between remaining faithful to the customs of her own people and adjusting to the differences of American culture in her Oregon high school. *Recommended with reservations.*

### ***Fisso's World in Cambodia: Living in a kingdom of wonders***

AUTHOR: Sophie Lizeray

YEAR: 2013

These cartoons explore the 'whats', 'hows' and 'wows!' of life in Cambodia today.

### ***Stone Goddess***

AUTHOR: Mingfong Ho\*

YEAR: 2005

Twelve-year-old Nakri's family is forced to flee their home in Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge takes control of the city. She and her siblings end up in a children's labor camp. Eventually, Cambodia is liberated and Nakri's family sets out for America. Mingfong Ho has several other YA novels set in Southeast Asia.

## GRADES 9-12

### ***Captian Cambodia***

AUTHOR: Patrick Samnang Mey\*

YEAR: 2015

AUTHOR INTERVIEW: <http://sea-globe.com/patrick-samnang-mey-comic-cambodia-southeast-asia-globe/>

This comic tackles political issues in contemporary Cambodia.

### ***Dancing in Cambodia***

AUTHOR: Amitav Ghosh\*

YEAR: 1998

In 1906 Cambodia's King Sisowath and a troupe of Cambodian classical dancers travelled to France. Ghosh connects their encounters with the more recent history of the country's decimation by the Khmer Rouge.

### ***First They Killed My Father***

AUTHOR: Loung Ung

YEAR: 2000

TEACHING RESOURCE: <http://loungung.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/FTKMF-Teaching-Guide.pdf>

In this memoir, the holocaust orchestrated by the Khmer Rouge is presented by a woman who built a new life in the United States.

### ***In the Shadow of the Banyan***

AUTHOR: Vaddey Ratner

YEAR: 2010

TEACHING RESOURCE: <http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/my-cambodia-and-my-cambodian-america>

Set during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, this novel tells the story of seven-year-old Raami, whose world of carefully guarded royal privilege is swept up in the chaos of revolution and forced exodus. Raami fights for survival in a climate of systematic violence.

## INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

### GRADES K-2

Note: the following are all folktales. We could not locate any picture books about contemporary culture.

#### ***The Great Race***

**AUTHOR:** Nathan Kumar Scott and Jagdish Chitara (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2011

An adaptation of an Indonesian folk tale about Kancil the mouse deer and Pelan the snail. Kanchil the mouse deer is the same character as Kantjil from ***Kantjil and Tiger*** (below). There are two other books by Nathan Kumar Scott, also about the trickster Kanchil. The art in each of the three books is done by different illustrators in their native South Asian styles (not Malay styles). Scott is a Seattle-based author.

#### ***Kantjil and Tiger***

**AUTHOR:** Cathy Spagnoli\* and Fabricio Vanden Broeck (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 1997

Cathy Spagnoli, another Seattle-based author, started collecting stories from Southeast Asian refugees in the 1980s. This trickster tale from Indonesia is out of print, but her ***Nine-In-One, Grr! Grr!***, a story from Laos, and other titles are available online.

#### ***Kraken-ka The Komodo Dragon***

**AUTHOR:** Jodi Parry Belknap and Tamara Montgomery\* and Joseph Dodd (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2007

A cautionary tale about the first Komodo Dragon on earth, illustrated and written by professors in the Drama department at the University of Hawaii.

### GRADES 3-5

#### ***The Tiny Boy and Other Tales from Indonesia***

**AUTHOR:** Murti Bunanta and Hardiyono (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2013

A collection of eight tales of courage from Indonesia.

### GRADES 6-8

#### ***Kampung Boy***

**AUTHOR:** Lat

**YEAR:** 2006

Lat, a noted Malaysian cartoonist, tells the story of the early life of a Muslim boy growing up on a rural rubber plantation during the 1950s in this graphic novel. The sequel is ***Town Boy***.

#### ***Ten Sticks And One Rice***

**AUTHOR:** Oh Yong Hwee and Koh Hong Teng (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2012

As Singapore transforms from a *kampung* to a cosmopolitan city, Hock Seng struggles to make sense of life and eke out a living, even as he finds his old ways and values increasingly challenged in this graphic novel.

## GRADES 9-12

### ***Abraham's Promise***

**AUTHOR:** Philip Jeyaratnam\*

**YEAR:** 1995

Abraham Isaac is a Latin teacher and philosopher. A new pupil reminds him of his days of youth and promise, when he threw himself into the politics of Singapore in the 50s and 60s, the time when the culture and society of Singapore were defined.

### ***The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye***

**AUTHOR:** Sonny Liew

**YEAR:** 2016

This graphic novel is a "History of Singapore 101," told critically and with subtlety.

### ***The Garden of Evening Mists***

**AUTHOR:** Tan Twan Eng\*

**YEAR:** 2012

Yun Ling Teoh, the scarred lone survivor of a brutal Japanese wartime camp, seeks solace among the tea plantations of Cameron Highlands. There she discovers the enigmatic Aritomo, an exiled former gardener of the emperor of Japan. Other approachable novels that explore colonial and Japanese-occupied Malaya include Tan Twan Eng's debut novel *The Gift of Rain* and Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory*.

## NATIONAL LITERATURE

### ***This Earth of Mankind***

**AUTHOR:** Pramoedya Ananta Toer

**YEAR:** 1975

Minke is a young Javanese student of great intelligence and ambition. His royal heritage allows him to live as a near-equal with the Dutch in 19th-century Java, but he battles against the confines of colonialism nevertheless.

## THE PHILIPPINES

### GRADES K-2

Note: Many bilingual English-Tagalog picture books are available from <http://tahananbooks.com/>.

#### ***Cora Cooks Pancit***

**AUTHOR:** Dorina K. Lazo Gilmore\* and Kristi Valiant (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2014

When her older sisters and brother head out, Cora finally gets the chance to be Mama's assistant chef. And of all the delicious Filipino dishes that dance through Cora's head, she and Mama decide to make *pancit*, her favorite noodle dish.

### GRADES 3-5

#### ***Sarimanok Series: A Philippine Primer***

**AUTHOR:** Leonor Testa-Feliciano

**YEAR:** 2010

This in-depth picture book is an introduction to the culture of the Philippines examining various aspects including climate, farming and industry, history, religions, food and peoples.

### GRADES 6-8

#### ***Tall Story***

**AUTHOR:** Candy Gourly

**YEAR:** 2012

**TEACHING RESOURCE:** <http://www.slideshare.net/candygourlay/tall-story-reading-guide>

Andi's half-brother Bernardo moves from the Philippines to London. When he arrives, Andi discovers that Bernardo suffers from Gigantism. The two learn to bond despite their height and cultural differences.

### GRADES 9-12

#### ***America is in the Heart***

**AUTHOR:** Carlos Bulosan

**YEAR:** 1946

*America is in the Heart* is a semi-autobiographical novel written by Filipino American author and activist Carlos Bulosan. The novel was one of the earliest published books that presented the experiences of the immigrant and working class based on an Asian American point of view and has been regarded as the premier text of the Filipino-American experience.

#### ***Growing Up Filipino: Stories For Young Adults***

**AUTHOR:** Cecilia Manguerra Brainard

**YEAR:** 2003

Twenty-nine Filipino American writers explore the universal challenges of adolescence from the unique perspectives of teens in the Philippines or in the U.S

## NATIONAL LITERATURE

### ***Noli Me Tángere***

**AUTHOR:** José Rizal

**YEAR:** 1887

"The Noli," as it is called in the Philippines, was the first major literary manifestation of Asian resistance to European colonialism. José Rizal became a martyr for the revolution that would subsequently rise up in the Spanish province.

## VIETNAM

### GRADES K-2

#### ***Going Home, Coming Home***

**AUTHOR:** Truong Tran and Ann Phong (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 2003

Ami Chi is traveling to Vietnam, where the streets are crowded with scooters and the fruit are shaped like dragons and stars. Her parents still consider Vietnam home. But Ami Chi is confused. How can home be a place you've never been? ***In a Village by the Sea*** by Muon Van is another picture book set in Vietnam that explores the concept of home.

#### ***The Lotus Seed***

**AUTHOR:** Sherry Garland\* and Tatsuro Kiuchi (Illustrator)

**YEAR:** 1997

When she is forced to leave Vietnam, a young girl brings a lotus seed with her to America in remembrance of her homeland. Sherry Garland has also written two chapter books for grades 6-8 set in Vietnam, ***The Shadow of the Dragon*** and ***Song of the Buffalo Boy***.

### GRADES 3-5

#### ***Inside Out and Back Again***

**AUTHOR:** Thanhha Lai\*

**YEAR:** 2011

Inspired by the author's childhood experience of fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama, this coming-of-age novel told in verse has been celebrated for its touching child's-eye view of family and immigration. Thanhha Lai's ***Listen, Slowly*** prose novel is also suitable for grades 3-5 (see below).

#### ***The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam***

**AUTHOR:** Quang Nhuong Huynh

**YEAR:** 1982

This selection contains action-filled memoirs of the author's childhood in rural Vietnam, reveals the quality of day-to-day village life, and describes dangerous confrontations with wild animals. The last story reflects the violence of the war that forever changed the quality of life described in these stories. The author is also known for ***Water Buffalo Days: Growing Up in Vietnam***.

### GRADES 6-8

#### ***The Buddha's Diamonds***

**AUTHOR:** Carolyn Marsden and Thay Phap Niem

**YEAR:** 2010

Set in postwar Vietnam, this story comes from co-author Thay Phap Niem's childhood. Tinh is ten years old and learns from his father about how to support the family using a fishing boat. When a storm comes, Tinh's courage is tested. Cultural and Buddhist references are woven throughout.

### ***Listen, Slowly***

**AUTHOR:** Thanhha Lai

**YEAR:** 2015

**TEACHING GUIDE:** <http://www.harpercollins.com/9780062229182/listen-slowly>

A California girl born and raised, Mai can't wait to spend her vacation at the beach. Instead, though, she has to travel to Vietnam with her grandmother, who is going back to find out what really happened to her husband during the Vietnam War.

#### GRADES 9-12

### ***Eaves of Heaven: A Life in Three Wars***

**AUTHOR:** Andrew X. Pham

**YEAR:** 2009

Once wealthy landowners, Thong Van Pham's family was shattered by the tumultuous events of the twentieth century: the French occupation of Indochina, the Japanese invasion during World War II, and the Vietnam War.

### ***Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey***

**AUTHOR:** GB Tran

**YEAR:** 2011

When his last surviving grandparents die within months of each other, the author visits Vietnam for the first time and begins to learn the tragic history of his family, which is told in this graphic novel memoir.

#### NATIONAL LITERATURE

### ***Tale of Kieu***

**AUTHOR:** Nguyen Du ; **Translator:** Huỳnh Sanh Thông

**YEAR:** 1820 (1987)

This long narrative poem is considered the masterpiece of Vietnamese literature. This translation is illuminated by notes that give comparative passages from the Chinese novel on which the poem was based and literal translations with background information explaining Vietnamese proverbs and folk sayings.