

October 20, 2021

Dear Ms. Lai,

“Inside Out and Back Again” is a book that really changed my view of myself and life in general. My mom’s side of the family is Vietnamese, and they all came to the U.S because of the Vietnam War. Everyone was really little, my oldest aunt being only 7. They have each told me stories of their experiences, but I couldn’t really understand how they felt until I read about a girl’s experience who was around my age. This was one of the first ones I’ve seen on this specific topic, the book being narrated by someone coming from Saigon, or just a book about the Vietnam War in general. Ha fled her home, not knowing anyone but her mother and brothers, and she couldn’t speak any english. However, she still found happiness and made friends despite the fact she had basically moved to another continent.

As most of my family is from Vietnam, I also connected with the holidays she celebrated. For example, I love celebrating Têt, not only because it’s fun, but because I feel connected to Vietnam’s culture. Another example is the food she and her family ate because I eat the same things with my family now. Language and history are a big part of a culture, and this novel helped me to understand my culture better, and the events that took place in it. After reading, I wanted to find out more, and that was what led me to asking my mom and aunts about their journey coming here, as well as some of the Vietnamese words I weren’t sure about the meaning. I can remember when I was in first grade, I decided to stop calling my grandmother “Ba”. Instead, I wanted to call her grandmother or grandma, just like my friends at school. That lasted about a day before I wanted to go back to calling her what I had before. Now that I’m looking back on that, it seems silly that I wanted to change something like that to be more like the other kids.

I additionally learned a lot of what daily life was like in Saigon, and how a young girl might feel to have 3 older brothers! The aspect that it was written in verse helped me to understand Ha’s feelings better, especially how she felt adjusting to school, getting teased and feeling like there wasn’t any more hope. I also learned a bit about life in a refugee camp, but I didn’t even think about how you might feel after escaping a situation like that until I got to that part. A few simple words can make a huge impact on the reader, especially on a subject this meaningful. Furthermore, this book taught me to adapt, and make the best out of my situation, because things can always get better with time. There will always be at least one person who is friendly, or who is willing to help you. Thank you so much for writing this book, as I was able to learn a lot from it!

Sincerely, Lillian Salon