A Different Pond Reader's Guide

Tips for reading & discussing a quiet picture book

Family. Survival. Hope.

Sometimes a fishing trip is about more than catching fish… Carrying a tackle box and gathering kindling, a boy helps his dad catch the family's dinner.

And a father helps his son begin to understand the long journey their family has taken.

About the Author

Bao Phi was born in Vietnam and raised in the Phillips neighborhood of South Minneapolis. He is an author, a poet, a community organizer, and a father.

About the Artist

Thi Bui was born in Vietnam and grew up in California and New York. Now all these places are a part of her. She draws and writes and teaches. Her graphic novel, *The Best We Could Do,* (Abrams, 2017) is about her mother and father.

★ "This wistful, beautifully illustrated story will resonate not only with immigrant families but any family that has faced struggle." —*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "Powerfully understated picture book, which shifts the focus of the refugee narrative from the harrowing journey to the reality awaiting the family members once they reach their destination." —*Horn Book* (starred review)

★ "Phi's gentle, melodic prose and Bui's evocative art … rise above the melancholy to tell a powerful, multilayered story about family, memory, and the costs of becoming a refugee. Spare and simple, a must-read for our times." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ "An unexpected superhero: a father who endures a strange new culture, works to support his family, cherishes time with his son, and draws no attention to the sacrifices he's made." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

★ "This gentle coming-of-age story is filled with loving, important aspects of the immigrant experience and is a first purchase for all libraries." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

★ "In Bao Phi's affecting picture book, a Vietnamese American boy illuminates the immigrant experience with his description of a father-son fishing expedition." —*Shelf Awareness* (starred review)

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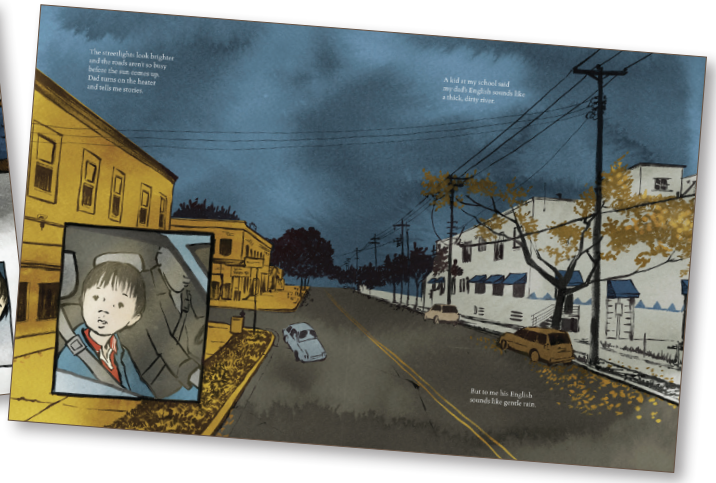
Tips and Suggestions for Reading *A Different Pond*

Reading picture books *with* rather than *to* a student keeps them more engaged and allows for better comprehension. To share a picture book, study and point out interesting details in the illustrations. Allow students to linger over pictures before moving on to the next section. Share your thoughts about each illustration, and allow students to share theirs. The layout of this book allows for several illustrations on each spread. Use a finger to connect the text to its accompanying artwork.

Read aloud with expression, changing voices for each character. Almost all of the action in this book takes place before dawn. To maintain the quiet mood the setting evokes, keep your voice soft and slow.

As you read, pause to answer any questions students may have. Ask questions that will require students to use higher level reading strategies, such as inferring, comparing and contrasting, predicting, and analyzing.



Always ask:
What does the picture tell you about how the little boy is feeling?
How do the pictures help you understand the words you are reading?

BEFORE READING

• Ask students if anyone has moved from another country, or has family members who have done so. Discuss what it would be like to move far away with very little, and to try to make a new life for yourself. Allow volunteers to share their experiences learning a new language and new customs, or teaching family members the same.

• Read the title aloud, and allow them to analyze the book's cover. Ask students to describe the setting by asking questions like: *What time of day is it? What is the weather like? How can you tell?* (Night, chilly, the dark sky and coats give it away). Next, point out the expressions of the characters, and have students describe what they are doing and how they may be feeling. Ask: *Why do you think that?* Point out that all of their answers have been based on clues the art offers.

• Then, relate the title to the art and ask students to predict who the people featured on the cover are, and what the book might be about.

• Open the book and point out the art on the inside leaves. Have students name the objects they recognize (stuffed bunny, sneakers, etc). *Which of these objects are like objects in your home? Which are not?* Point out that these drawings are a peek inside the home of the main character.

• Before beginning, tell students that the author of this book is also the little boy on the cover—the story is based on his own childhood experience with his father. Let them know they will learn more about the author's experience after reading this story. An essential element of this story is the love that bonds this family, despite their struggles and their very different upbringings. When at all possible, draw students' attention to this. Tips are offered on how to do so in the *While Reading* section.

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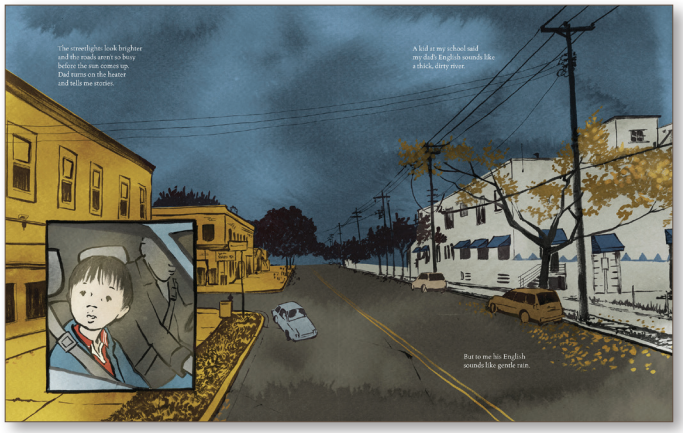
WHILE READING

• As you begin reading, establish that the text moves from the left page to the right, as later pages will have more panels and text spread across them.

• When you have finished reading both pages, ask students what time of day it is (night). Ask them to analyze text and picture clues to get their answer (It will be hours before the sun comes up; everyone is still sleeping except his father, the boy wiping the sleep from his eyes, to night sky outside). If you have advanced readers, guide them to see that pictures offer clues for determining the meaning of unknown words. For students not yet reading, explain that they, too, can often use pictures to gain an idea of what the book is about.

• Explain to students that looking closely at illustrations can reveal more details about the story. Invite inference: *What can you tell about the author's life by looking around his home?* (He shares a bed with his parents; they have a single bulb hanging from the ceiling instead of something with a cover. They may not have a lot of money). Point out that art can also reveal more about a setting than text. Say, *In this case, the calendar on the wall in the kitchen tells us it takes places in 1982. The leaves fallen on the ground tell us that it's fall or early winter, and the location is northern, where leaves fall from trees.*



• On the next spread, point out the small image of the boy looking out his windows, and the background image of the wide street. *Compare the two images. Why might the artist have decided to include both?* (One shows the boy gazing out his window, and the larger photo shows what he is seeing.) Invite students to describe the scene the boy is seeing (empty streets, dark sky, quiet.) Challenge students to place themselves in the boy's seat. Ask, *What is the mood of this scene? How does it make you feel?* (Answers will vary: tired, sleepy, peaceful, calm.)

• Next, reread aloud both sentences about his father's English. Ask, *Why do you think the kid would say that? What can you tell about his father?* (He doesn't speak English very well, or it's not his first language.) *What does the boy think about his father's voice? How do you think he feels around his father?* (He thinks it sounds like gentle rain. He likely feels very comfortable in his presence.) Tell students that writers often use descriptive words to set a feeling or mood. Ask a volunteer to explain how a *thick, dirty river* evokes different feelings than *a gentle rain*.

• On the next spread, make sure students notice you read the top panel before the bottom one; guide them to understand that this is the sequence in which the events happen. Point out the dialogue in the top panel. Ask *Is this the father and son's first fishing trip? How can you tell?* (The bait man knows the father; the son knows that the store is always open.) *Why didn't the father wait until his son woke up to go fishing?* (He is starting a second job and will be working later.) Invite students to predict whether they are fishing for fun, or necessity. Guide them to use the clues in the text (the second job, waking so early) to determine their answer.

• Allow students to carefully observe the art on the next spread of the father and son walking down the hill to the pond as you read. Ask students, *Are there any text or picture clues you can use to confirm or deny your prediction?* (Yes; the father explains they must fish because everything is expensive, even though he has a second job. There is a sign that indicates they are trespassing, but they fish there anyway.)

• On the next spread, allow students to study the boy's expressions in each of the pictures. *Do you think the boy minds his father waking him so early to fish? Why or why not?* (No, because they are laughing and smiling like they enjoy each other's company.) Point out the lines, *"This time it is just me and my dad"* and guide students to notice that it is set apart, alone, in the center of the page. Explain that placement of a text can be a conscious decision an author makes. In this case, putting that statement alone causes the reader to pause before and after reading it. Tell students, *Being alone with his dad is important to him. It's something he is pleased about.*

• Explain to students that authors use many devices to help a reader form a mental picture of an event or setting, or to get to know a character better, or to evoke a certain feeling in the reader. One of those devices is *simile*, in which a comparison is made between two unlikely things, using the words like or as. Ask for a volunteer to find the simile on this page *(… faint stars like freckles).*

• The next spread shows a step-by-step series of illustrations of the boy making the fire. Make sure students understand the chronology by challenging them to explain the steps in sequential order, using transition words like *first, next, then, etc.*

• Students may be surprised to see the boy is allowed to make and light a fire on his own. This is a good opportunity to explain the existence of cultural differences and parenting styles changing over time: some cultures assign responsibilities at younger ages than others. Invite student volunteers to share some of their own chores and discuss the differences among them. Close the discussion by pointing out similarities between shared chores.

• Have students analyze the illustrations. Ask: *What can you infer, or tell, about the boy using illustrations and text as hints?* (He likes being helpful; he is patient and takes pride in a job well done.) Then have students look at the last panel, the close up of his face. Say, *Look at his expression. Who is he looking at? How does he feel? Why does he feel that way?* (He feels proud. He is looking at his dad, who nodded at him for only needing one match.) You may also use this opportunity to again illustrate how art can reveal unwritten details about a text: The bridge and city beyond show that they live in an urban area.

• On the next page, students may giggle at the boy's face when his father offers him the minnow. Ask, *Why does his father ask if he wants to put the minnow on the hook?* (He knows that his son likes to help.) *What generalization about his personality can you make based on his refusal?* (He has a kind, gentle heart.) Allow students to study the art of the father and son fishing along the banks with the moon in the water. Ask, *What feeling do you get looking at this illustration?* (Answers will vary—love, comfort.) *What kind of relationship do you think this father and son have? What clues did you use to make this decision?* (They have a good relationship. He isn't afraid to tell his father he doesn't want to help; his father isn't upset and smiles at his son. They hold hands as they fish in quiet comfort.)

• Turn the page, and read the father's warning to his son about the "spicy stuff." Guide students to see that his father is taking care of him in big and small ways, and that they sit in happy quietude while they fish.

• Focus on the last paragraph when reading the next page. Ask students to infer what happened to the father's brother. (He died in the war.) Invite analysis for clues about what each is thinking and feeling. (His father looks away and is likely remembering the past and his brother. The son is eager to hear more of his story.) If time allows, remind students that the father in this story has had a very different life from the one he lives now. Invite students to share stories told by any family members about growing up in other countries. During the discussion, point out similarities, rather than just differences, in life experiences.

• You may expect to hear some giggles on the next page, so begin by telling students that "crappie" is a kind of fish. Ask, *Why does the boy make a funny face?* (Because he doesn't like the way the fish feels.) Challenge students to connect this feeling with an earlier one: *When have you seen him make that face before?* (When his father asked him to hook the minnow.)

• The mood of the story changes slightly on the next page. It begins with an image of his father smiling, and a description of his father's teeth illustrating again the hard life he has endured. Ask: *What makes the father smile?* (He knows they will have food to eat tonight.) *What can you infer about other nights in his home, based on this statement?* (They do not always have food on the table at night.)

• Point out that the boy wants to know more about his father's upbringing, because he doesn't remember Vietnam. You can also use this as an opportunity to point out small details that reveal their comfort, such as the two of them holding the pail together; sharing soap.

• The next page shows the two of them heading home. Students may not recognize what the man with the shopping cart is doing. Let them know that he is collecting pieces of metal from various junkyards to sell for money. Use this opportunity to point out that there are many people who have less money than others. Fishing for one's own food and collecting metal to sell require very early hours and are resourceful ways to help make ends meet.

• Lead students to look at the picture of the father and son being greeted at home. Say, *The boy describes his mother as looking tired; how do you think she looks? How do the other family members look? Why?* (They look happy. They are happy because they have fish for dinner.) Point out that it isn't only the fish that keeps this family happy: it's love that holds them together. Challenge students to find picture evidence of the love between family members. (They are all smiling at each other; his mother has made lunch for his brother. His mother puts her arm around her son, and he looks up proudly.) Students may ask who the other people in the picture are, or what they're doing. Let them know, these are probably his siblings or other extended family; and his brother is heading out to work for the day.

• Ask students: *How does his father's expression look now, compared to when they are fishing? Why do you think that is?* (He looks sad now. He is probably tired after fishing. He probably also enjoys fishing with his son more than working.)

• Point out that helping his mom clean the fish is another chore he has. Invite students to discuss: *When you are asked to help around the house, do you feel proud, or annoyed?* Then ask: *How does the boy in this book feel? How can you tell?* (He feels proud. His mom and dad compliment him on a job well done. The expression on his face is proud.) *Why does he think, "I'm not a baby…I helped catch dinner?"* (His mom asks his brother and sister to look after "the baby," meaning him. Catching dinner and being a helper makes him feel grown up. Babies can't help fishing.)

• As you read on, ask students: *What new facts did you learn about his family on this page?* (He has more than one brother and more than one sister; his mom works, too. He is the youngest.)

• On the next page, connect the text to math: have students look at the table and ask, *How many brothers does he have? How many sisters?* (2 and 2); How can you tell? (Because he is sitting with his dad and next to his mom. There are two boys and two girls at the table. He says his brothers and sisters are telling funny stories.) Explain that the recipe the boy describes is a traditional Vietnamese one. Invite students to share traditional recipes from their culture or family. Then ask: *Does anyone help their family prepare dinner?* If students answer yes, ask how it makes them feel to see their family enjoying the food they brought home. Connect their personal experience to the boy's experience by pointing out his father saying, "Good fish."

• The last page shows the boy falling happily to sleep and dreaming of fish. *How does the last line explain the title of this book?* (The father and son are probably dreaming of different ponds—each from their own childhood.) Instruct students to study the illustration closely. Remind them that the boy wondered what the pond from his father's childhood looked like. *Which pond do you think this picture shows? How do you know?* (It shows his father's childhood pond. The one they were fishing in didn't have lily pads or fish that looked like these.) If students have a hard time answering, encourage them to look back at drawings of the pond where they fished, and make comparisons.

AFTER READING

• Allow time for questions and answers students may have about the text.
• Break the plot into its elements: rising action, climax, and resolution. Explain each: First, the father takes his son fishing; the climax occurs when they catch their fish; the resolution occurs as the son goes to sleep and describes his dreams. Have students point out which picture in the text best illustrates each of those moments.
• Encourage students to determine the themes, or overall messages, in the book. Ask: *What is the author saying about family?* (That with family, even difficult times can be fun.) Lead students to understand the author's message about cultural traditions and differences by asking: *What does the title of the book mean? What does the father have in common with his son?* (It refers to the two different ponds—the one they fish in now, and the one his father fished in as a child. Both fished as children.) Point out that the father grew up in a different country, far away. *What is the author saying about cultural differences?* (That no matter how different we are, we are also alike and those differences shouldn't set us apart from each other.) If students are up for a challenge, guide them to see how the author uses the pond as a metaphor for this theme.
• Once students have discussed theme, have them turn to the *Note from Bao Phi*. Read it aloud. *How does knowing these details about Bao's life affect your understanding of this story?* (It makes sense that this was based on his own experience.) *Why did Bao feel like he needed to write about this experience now?* (He is a father and wanted to honor all the struggles his parents endured.) Many students may not be aware yet of the Vietnam War. Depending on what is appropriate for your students, you may want to describe the effects it would have had on Phi's family: the prejudice they likely faced; the way American soldiers were treated upon their return; that the war changed the way wars were fought.
• Now, share the *Note from Thi Bui* with students. Invite students to find the items she mentions throughout the pages of the book. Ask: *If you were going to illustrate a book that included items from our life now, what would you include?*

Respond by Writing, Speaking, and Listening

RESPOND BY WRITING

• Recall what simile is and the example we used while reading (…stars like freckles). Make a list of other similes found in the story. Then, write a description of a scene from nature using a simile. (Scribe for younger children.) [Reproducible 1]
• Work with a partner. Choose a favorite illustration and describe it in detail on paper. Then, switch descriptions with another group and determine which illustration each chose to describe. Use descriptive words to make it easier to guess.
• Write a paragraph or illustrate a drawing that describes either a way you help around your house, or a favorite time you spent with an adult in your life. Include words or images that will help evoke for your audience the mood you felt. Organize your text in chronological order of events, as this book is organized. Before sharing your narrative with a partner, check for grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes, and edit to correct them.
• Think about Bao Phi's childhood experience. How was he fortunate? How did he struggle? Make a list of each. (He had a family that loved him and he was happy with them; they all worked hard as a team. He struggled because he didn't have a lot, sometimes not even food for dinner.) Finally, form an opinion on whether or not Phi had a happy childhood. Argue your point with reasons and evidence from the text.
• Bao Phi is better known as a poet than a writer of children's books. Write a poem using descriptive words about a stream, lake, beach, or other body of water you've visited. Write at least five lines, describing it from each of your five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. [Reproducible 2]
• Page through *A Different Pond* again. Looking at the images, notice that the plot unfolds in chronological order. With a partner, make a list of clues that the illustrations offer to show how time passes from the beginning of the story to the end. [Reproducible 3]

RESPOND BY SPEAKING AND LISTENING

• Pretend you are Bao Phi. Retell this story in your own words.
• Act out the story with each partner taking turns playing a different role.
• Imagine the conversations that might have occurred between Bao Phi and Thi Bui as they worked together to make the book. Choose classmates to play the roles of news reporter, Bui, and Phi. As the reporter interviews them on the process of making the book, listen respectfully. Take notes of questions you may have. After the interview is done, the reporter will allow you to ask your questions. Do so respectfully, speaking loudly and clearly, using words that your class can understand. When others ask questions, be respectful of their turn.
• Consider how this story would be different if it were told from another point of view. Page by page, retell the story from the father's point of view.
• What feeling did the story leave you with? Share your feeling and explain why with the class. Listen intently as others share theirs.

Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (Grades K-12)

Anchor Standards for Reading Literature: R.1-R.7, R.10
Anchor Standards for Writing: W.1-W.3, W.5
Anchor Standards for Speaking/Listening: SL.1, SL.2,
Anchor Standards for Language: L.1, L.2, L.5

REPRODUCIBLE 1

Similes in *A Different Pond*

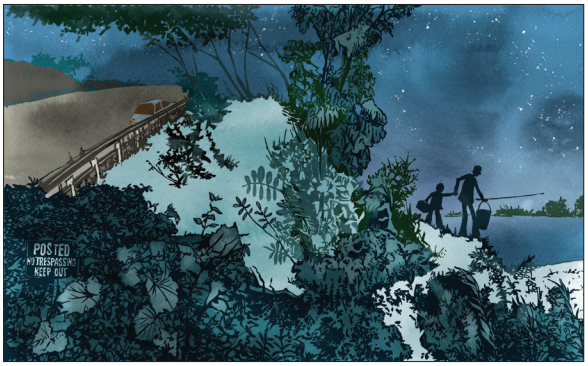
A **simile** is a comparison between two unlikely things, using the words like or as.
Find examples of **similes** in *A Different Pond* and list them below

Write a description of a scene from nature using a **simile.**

Writing a Poem

Write a poem using descriptive words about a stream, lake, beach, or other body of water you've visited. Use each of your five senses to describe it: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

REPRODUCIBLE 3

Sequencing for Comprehension

Cut out the images below. Which happened first? Which happened last? Use illustrative clues to sort them into chronological order. Glue them in order on a separate piece of paper. Share with your class which clues helped you.