

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Winning Words.** Have each student find five of the SAT words from Mai's mother. Have them create a graphic organizer for each word of a square divided into quarters. The quarters should contain the following: the word; the student's definition based on context; a dictionary definition; and the part of speech. Have the students decorate the squares and post them on a bulletin board of Winning Words. *RL.5-8.4*
2. **Vietnam Past and Present.** Drawing from the book, have your class brainstorm topics about Vietnam to research, such as geography, major cities, transportation, food, clothing, and different aspects of the war. Working in pairs, have them glean information from the novel and expand on what they find, using at least one print and one internet source. Have the pairs report back to the class using slides to enrich their presentation. *SL.5-8.4; SL.5-8.5*
3. **Says Who?** Have students choose one of the major characters other than Mai and create journal entries in that character's voice. They should write at least five entries about different scenes in the book. The entries should draw directly from those scenes but give a different viewpoint than Mai's. Have the students share their entries with each other in small groups. *W.5-8.3*



An Lai-Omer

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Discussion guide created by Kathleen Odean, librarian, author, and Common Core workshop presenter.

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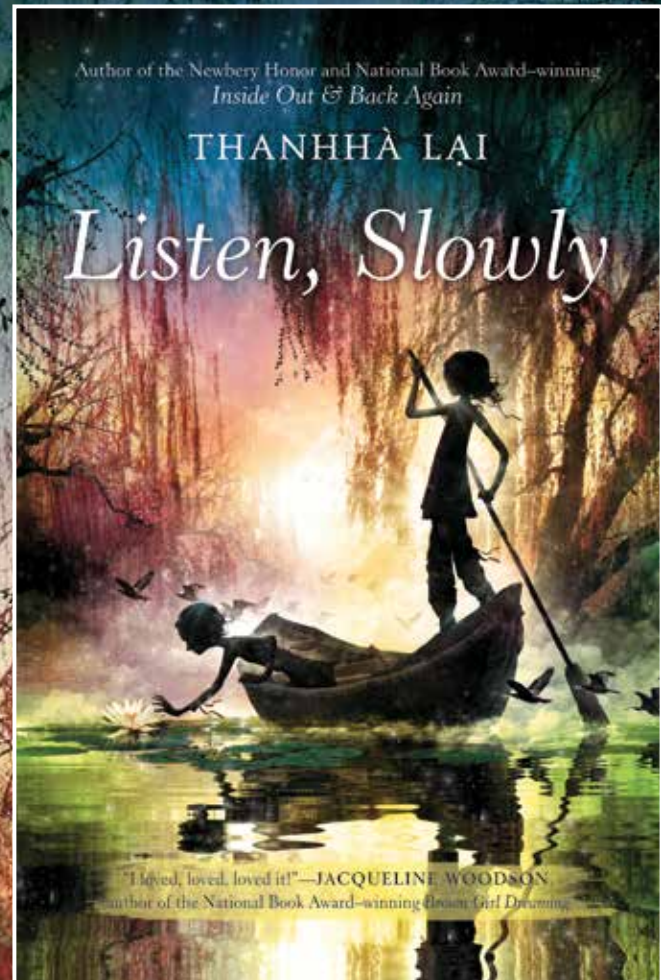
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Guided
Reading
Level W

Listen, Slowly

BY THANH HÀ LAI



ISBN: 978-0-06-238374-7

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Aligns with Common Core State Standards for grades 5–8

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Mai was finally supposed to take a break from being perfect and start taking some chances in her life. But what do her parents reward her with for all her straight As and countless extracurricular activities? An unwanted trip to a foreign country Mai has never been to—8,000 miles from home, her friends, and the life she always knew.

Mai's parents are sending her, along with her father, on a trip to Vietnam so she can learn more about her roots—and also help her grandmother figure out what really happened to Mai's grandfather during the Vietnam War. Since Mai barely knows the language or customs, she is desperately counting down the days until she can go back home. But the next few weeks are a life-changing experience. As time passes, Mai begins to have a change of heart, growing closer to her family and developing an understanding of a culture and an entire world that she never really knew about.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first three pages provide a lot of information quickly and convey a sense of Mai's character. Give details about what you learn and describe Mai's personality based on her narrative voice in those pages. *RL.5-8.1; RL.6-8.3; RL.5-6.6*
2. Mai refers to herself on p. 123 as "the new me." What does she mean? Compare what she's like at the beginning of the book and the end. What causes her to change? Point to dialogue, thoughts, and actions that reveal the transformation. *RL.6-8.3*
3. Bà doesn't speak English and Mai speaks very little Vietnamese, yet Bà has been very important in Mai's life. Describe how Bà has helped Mai over the years and what Mai has learned from her. How do they help each other in Vietnam? *RL.5-8.3*
4. Mai's friendship with Út develops slowly and comes to matter a lot to Mai. Compare and contrast their characters. Describe how they initially reacted to each other and what caused that to change. How does the friendship affect Mai's decisions? *RL.5-8.3*
5. Describe Anh Minh and the role he plays in Mai's visit to Vietnam. Why is education so important to him? Why does he feel obliged to work hard and succeed? Compare his attitudes about these issues to Mai's. *RL.5-8.3*

6. Even though Mai's mother isn't present in the story, her personality comes across clearly. What is she like? How does Mai feel about her? How does the author convey so much about an absent character? *RL.6-8.3*
7. Montana is also not present in Vietnam but she too is important. Describe Montana's personality. What is the history of Mai's friendship with her? What is their friendship like? How and why does it change over the course of the book? *RL.6-8.3*
8. Mai has two names, her American name of Mia and her Vietnamese name of Mai. Discuss the significance for her of having two names. Find other places in the story where names are important and talk about why they matter so much. *RL.5-8.1; RL.5-8.4*
9. Discuss the book's title, its meaning, and why you think the author chose it. On p. 254, Bà says to Mai, "I tell you of loss, my child, so you will listen, slowly, and know that in life every emotion is fated to rear itself within your being." Read the rest of what Bà says in that paragraph and discuss what you think she means. *RL.5-8.2; RL.5-8.4*
10. Even though this book has serious themes, it also has a lot of humor. How does the author use the topic of PBS documentaries to add humor? Discuss humorous scenes such as the thong sewing and analyze what makes them funny. *RL.5-8.1*
11. Mai and Bà go to Vietnam to find out what happened to Mai's grandfather, a mystery that drives some of the plot. Describe the mystery, the role of the detective, and how the issue is resolved. Discuss what Anh Minh says on p. 86 about the difference between death and acceptance. How does the mystery's resolution lead Bà to acceptance? *RL.6-8.3; RL.5-6.5*
12. Discuss these figures of speech and others in the text, noting the comparisons made and their impact. *RL.5-8.4*
 - "like a doomed fish on land" (p. 15)
 - "arrow-like raindrops" (p. 63)
 - "chomp like helicopter blades" (p. 119)
 - "as if we had been granted the sky" (p. 149)
 - "they sardined me" (p. 162)
 - "like captured moonbeams" (p. 209)
 - "like he's doing the cha-cha-cha" (p. 222)
 - "boulder on her chest" (p. 254)

