

Books by the Stack



***The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui**

A moving look at one family's journey from a volatile Vietnam in the 1970s to the daunting struggle to rebuild a life from scratch in America.

Why you'll like it: *Expressive art. Family saga. Reflective.*

About the Author: Thi Bui was born in Vietnam three months before the end of the Vietnam War, and came to the United States in 1978 as part of the "boat people" wave of refugees from Southeast Asia. Her debut graphic memoir, *The Best We Could Do* has been selected as both an Indies Introduce and Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers title, and a Junior Library Guild Selection. She is also the illustrator of *A Different Pond*, a children's book by Bao Phi (Capstone, 2017). Thi taught high school in New York City and was a founding teacher of Oakland International High School, the first public high school in California for recent immigrants and English learners. She currently teaches in the MFA in Comics program at the California College of the Arts. She lives in Berkeley with her son, her husband and her mother.

Questions for Discussion

1. "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into" (p. 21) What does the author mean by this statement? What is the difference between "created" and "born into"? What is similar?
2. Bô' states, "You don't have a sister named Bích anymore. She is dead to us" (p. 27). What events caused Bô' to say this about his daughter? If you were Thi or Tam, how would you interpret this statement?
3. When visiting their early childhood home in Vietnam as an adult, the narrator finds herself "documenting in lieu of remembering" (p. 180). By the end of your reading of *The Best We Could Do*, do you have a sense of the difference between "documenting" and "remembering"? Do either of these terms adequately capture the achievements of *The Best We Could Do*, to your mind?
4. The author desires to be closer to her parents as an adult and realizes "proximity and closeness are not the same" (p. 31). What is your definition of proximity? Closeness? How do these two words differ? Which of the two words would you rather use to describe your relationship with your parents?
5. Describe the various authorities that the Buis encounter during their refugee experience. Who are they and from where do they derive their power to make decisions about refugees? Consider our national discussion on refugees today. How is it similar to the Buis' experience? How does it differ?
6. What factors contributed to Bô's decision to leave North Việt Nam in 1954? What would you have done if you were in his position?
7. What genre would you classify this book as and why? What does it mean to be Asian American, according to this book? Why do you think Bui chose the graphic novel to tell her story?

8. Think about how racial/national/gender difference is visually depicted in this book? How do the text and images work together?

9. Must history, intergenerational suffering, and familial/intimate expectations determine a life from the outset, or can outcomes be changed through conversation, reflections, and willed rewriting (however difficult)?

(Questions provided by scribd.com and the University of Oregon)



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