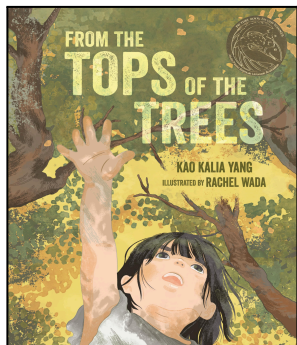


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## Discussion and Activity Guide



**Book Title:** *From the Tops of the Trees*

**Written by:** Kao Kalia Yang

**Illustrated by:** Rachel Wada

**Publisher:** Carolrhoda Books, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group

**Year:** 2021

**ISBN #:** 9781541581302

**Age Range:** 5–9

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### About the Book

In this book, Kao Kalia Yang tells of an early memory with her father at the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Thailand. After asking her father about war, he helps her discover that there is a vast world outside of the camp, which is all she knows. This moment symbolizes the vast possibilities ahead of her, inspiring her to hold onto hope and dream of a future beyond the camp. Both lyrical and poetic, this story highlights the power of imagination to see beyond the dark realities of war and displacement and into a future full of beauty, hope, and love.

Hmong people are an ethnic group without a country of their own who have traditionally lived in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and China. Following the Vietnam War, in which many Hmong fought alongside the U.S., Hmong people were forced to abandon their homes to escape persecution by the communist Vietnamese government. Many sought refuge in Thailand. The Ban Vinai Refugee Camp was on the Thai/Lao border and operated until 1992. At its peak in 1986, Ban Vinai had 42,868 residents. Many Hmong refugees began coming to the U.S. during the 1970s, and there are over 300,000 Hmong in the United States today.

### Note for Educators

You may need to give more details about what it means to live in a refugee camp before reading this book. Additionally, some children may find it unsettling or have questions about the men with soldiers with guns depicted on the pages about war. Watch carefully to determine your students' understanding, allow them to ask questions, and address any misinformation or pre-prejudice they may share.

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## Essential Questions for Courageous Children

- What does the word courage mean to you?
- How can courage show up in everyday life experiences?
  - What are some ways that children show courage?
- Think about a time when you or someone you know showed courage.
  - How did that experience feel for you?
  - What were you able to learn from that experience?

## Before Reading

### Activities to Engage Students Before Reading

#### Introduce the book to students

*This story, based on the author's own experiences, tells of an early memory with her father at the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp where they lived because her family was forced to leave their home in Laos during war. After asking her father about war, he helps her discover there is a vast world outside of the camp, which is all she knows because she was born in the camp. Listen to find out how Kao Kalia Yang discovers the vast world that exists outside of the camp and how important it is to dream.*

#### Introduce key vocabulary

- **Refugee:** a person who has been forced to leave their home because of danger, like war or violence
- **Refugee camp:** a temporary place where people who have had to leave their homes because of danger, like war or violence, can stay
- **Hmong:** an ethnic group who have traditionally lived in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and China. The name "Hmong" means "free."
- **Ration:** An allowance of food or supplies meant to last a certain amount of time

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## Engage students in reflective writing using these Journal Prompts

1. Think about a time when you experienced something new that made you nervous or afraid. What helped you be courageous? What did you learn from that experience?
2. Imagine a world completely different from where you live. Describe what that world looks, sounds, and feels like. How might that world be a better version of the world you live in?
3. Write about an important lesson you've learned from a friend or family member. How has that lesson stayed with you? When has it helped you?

## During Reading

### Questions to Foster Discussion During the Read Aloud

1. The book begins by telling us the setting – Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, Thailand, 1985. What does the scene on the first page tell us about what life is like in the camp?

**Note:** Show students where Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam are located on the map. Use the map in the back of the book to show where Ban Vinai Refugee Camp was located. You can even pull it up on Google Maps to show an aerial view of the landscape.

2. The author talks about the tree throughout the story. What are all the roles the tree plays? What are all the things the tree gives her family?
3. In the story, the author's father says, *"When someone falls, you have to pick them up and lift them higher than they were before."*
  - a. What does this statement mean to you?
  - b. Why would it be important to lift someone higher than they were before?
  - c. If you had to give advice to someone who was experiencing a challenge, what advice would you give and why?
4. One important theme in this book is the power of imagination. For example, *"We pretend we're eating hard candy and it's a very special treat."*
  - a. Why is imagination so powerful for the children in the story?
  - b. What is something you like to imagine or used to imagine when you were younger?

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5. Kalia's father had known a world outside of the camp. When she asked him what the world outside the camp was like, why didn't he have an answer for her?
  6. How do you think Kalia felt when her father climbed the tree with her on his back?
    - a. What details from the story helped you make that inference or guess?
    - b. How do you think her father felt?
  7. Why did the father think it was important to wear their fine clothes when they climbed the tree?
  8. The last page says, *"My father tells me to smile at the camera, but I can't because I now know the world is bigger than anything I had imagined. My legs will have to carry me far."*
    - a. Why might it be important to think about a world bigger than the one we live in?
    - b. Why do you think the author chose to end the book this way? What does it make you think or wonder?
  9. What do you wonder about the world outside of your community?
    - a. If you had the chance to visit a place outside of your community, where would you visit and why?

## After Reading

### Activities for Deeper Connection

#### 1. Journal and Reflect (all ages)

- a. Ask students to write about a place they hope to visit one day.
- b. Use guiding prompts and questions to support students' writing, such as:
  - i. What do you already know about this place?
  - ii. What is it about this place that interests you?
  - iii. What would you expect to see, hear, smell, and feel?

#### 2. Kalia's World (elementary students)

- a. Have students discuss what Kalia might have seen when she climbed to the top of the tree. Ask, *"Based on the details in the story, what do you think Kalia's world looked like when she climbed to the top of the tree?"*

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- b. Then have students work in pairs to create a drawing that represents the world Kalia might have seen. Encourage students to use their imagination, as well as details from the story, to create their drawing.

### 3. A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words (grades 5–8)

- a. Read the **Author’s Note** to students. *From the Tops of the Trees* is based on a real photograph of the author being held by her father at the treetops. Ask students to think of a picture of themselves from when they were younger that they can either remember or have heard the story of.
- b. Have students write the story of the photograph and include an important lesson they can take away from the memory or story they’ve heard. They can even create their own picture book or mini graphic novel.

### 4. Another Point of View (grades 3–8)

- a. Have students retell the story from another perspective. Options could include Kalia’s father, her mother, one of her aunts, or one of her sisters. Have them consider the following questions:
- Which parts of the story would the person whose perspective you’re telling from have seen and not seen?
  - What did they notice or wonder?
  - What were they feeling throughout?

## Connections to Anti-Bias Education and SEL Competencies *From the Tops of the Trees*

### Anti-Bias Education

- **Empathy and Understanding**
- **Healthy Complex Identities**
- **Respect Across Differences**
- Notice, Name, and Reject Bias
- Responsiveness and Action

### Social-Emotional Learning

- **Self-Awareness**
- Self-Management
- **Social Awareness**
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

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**What is Anti-Bias Education?** *“Anti-bias education is a critical approach to teaching and learning that...helps children strengthen their identities as capable and empowered human beings. Through anti-bias education, children identify issues and inequities in their lives, ask questions, consider multiple perspectives and think about their lives critically, growing to actively resist prejudice and discrimination.”* (Derman-Sparks et al. Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change. Teachers College Press, 2015.)

**The AmazeWorks Anti-Bias Education (ABE) model promotes:**

- Empathy and understanding for self and others
- Healthy and complex identity development
- Respect across and appreciation of differences
- The ability to notice, name, and reject bias
- Responsiveness and taking action against bias, prejudice, and discrimination

Infused within Anti-Bias Education is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). **Social-Emotional Learning Competencies are:**

- Self-awareness - Build awareness of one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- Self-management - Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one’s goals.
- Social awareness - Build awareness of one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- Relationship skills - Establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and effectively navigate diversity.
- Responsible decision-making - Make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior.

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**Find more lessons in the  
AmazeWorks Courageous Children  
book set, available here:**

<https://amazeworks.org/product-category/book-sets/>

