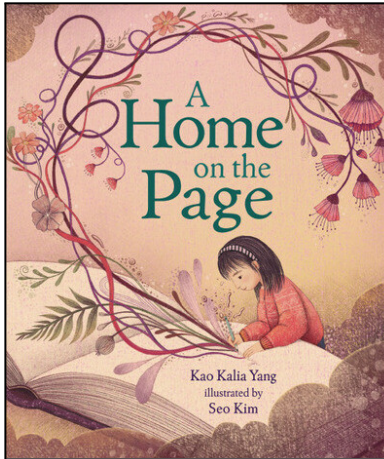


A Home on the Page

written by Kao Kalia Yang
illustrated by Seo Kim

Discussion and Activity Guide for Educators and Caregivers



Book Title: *A Home on the Page*

Written by: Kao Kalia Yang

Illustrated by: Seo Kim

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Recommended Ages: 5 and up

About the Book

Nou loves her family, and she likes the brown house where they live, surrounded by trees with sheltering branches. But the young Hmong American girl's sense of safety and belonging is shattered after she wakes one day to find a hateful message spray-painted on the family's mailbox: "Asians Go Home." So Nou asks her parents if they can leave.

Nou's question leads her on a journey to discover where each member of her family finds home. For her father, it is in his songs. For her mother, it is in the garden. In a world that doesn't always welcome her, where can Nou find home?

This extraordinary story from author Kao Kalia Yang and illustrator Seo Kim tenderly explores how a young girl navigates racism and ultimately turns to writing, creating a home for herself on the page—and in the world.

Notes for Adults Reading With Children

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 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 before resettling in other countries, such as the United States. Many Hmong refugees began coming to the U.S. during the 1970s, and there are over 300,000 Hmong in the United States today. Minnesota is home to over 63,000 Hmong.

For more information about Hmong history and culture, check out these resources:

- “Hmong-Americans in Minnesota.” Minnesota Historical Society, <https://libguides.mnhs.org/hmong>.
- Yang, Nancy. “10 Things: Hmong Culture, Food and Language.” MPR News, MPR News, 1 Mar. 2015, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/03/01/10-things-hmong>.
- “About Us.” Hmong Cultural Center, 2018, <https://www.hmongcc.org/about-us.html>.

In the book, Nou’s father says he’s found home in his songs. Author Kao Kalia Yang’s father, Bee Yang, is a poet of Kwv Txhiaj, a type of Hmong song poetry. [Watch this video](#), featuring the book’s author, Kao Kalia Yang, and her father, to learn more about their family’s story and how Bee Yang’s song poetry inspired Kalia’s love of language.

Nou’s grandmother says she finds home in the embroidered cloths she sews, or *paj ntaub*. A story cloth tells a story with pictures embroidered and bordered by geometric shapes. They were created in the refugee camps in Thailand in the 1970s to share stories and stay connected to their home and loved ones left behind. To learn more about *paj ntaub* and see some examples, [check out this video from Twin Cities PBS](#).

The back of the book contains a helpful glossary with descriptions and English pronunciations of the Hmong words found throughout the book. Be sure to review these with children as you read. Additionally, be sure children understand what it means to be a

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refugee (a person who has been forced to leave their home because of danger, like war or violence).

Reflection Questions for Adults

Before you read this book, think about:

- Looking back to your childhood, when did you realize that language and words could be used to hurt people, especially regarding their identities? What impacts have hurtful words had on you and your sense of identity, safety, and belonging?
- How do you define home? How has the concept of home changed or evolved over your lifetime?

Introduce the Book to Children

In this book, Nou and her family live in a brown house that she loves. They are Hmong refugees who came to the United States from a refugee camp in Thailand. One day, Nou finds a hurtful message painted on their mailbox in front of the house that reads, “Asians go home.” Nou wonders where her home is. It seems everyone in her family feels at home in different ways, and Nou questions whether she will ever find her home, especially as she experiences and witnesses racism in her own community. One day, she opens her notebook, and she finally discovers where she belongs.

Journal Prompts

- Write about a time when you felt a sense of belonging. What helped create that sense of belonging that you felt? Describe the moment/place in as much detail as you can, including any significant people and their actions.
- Read and think about the following line from the book. What does this line mean to you, and how it connect to your life?

“When a child opens their mouth, what comes out is not words in one language or another, but the light that lives in the heart.”

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Discussion Questions

Before Reading:

1. Ask children to think about what the word home means to them and which words or phrases come to mind when they hear the word “home”. As they share, write down all the words or phrases they come up with. Save this list for later.

During Reading:

2. Why do you think some people don’t like that Nou’s family lives in their house?
3. When Nou asks her family members where their homes are, each person has a different response. Why? How did her dad build a home in song and her mom in the garden?
4. In the book, some of the words her peers say weigh her down. What does that mean? What words have you heard that could weigh a person down?
5. How does the mistreatment of Asians in Nou’s community affect her? How do you think she feels?
6. How does Nou begin to find her home? How does seeing her family at home in their different ways begin to inspire her rather than discourage her?

After Reading:

7. Go back through the book with children, looking closely at the illustrations. How do the illustrations show how Nou is feeling? How did the illustrator capture Nou’s emotions throughout the story?
8. Return to the list of words and phrases children used to describe home that was compiled before reading the book. After hearing and discussing the story, what words or phrases would you like to add to this list? It may help to have children reflect on the following first:
 - a. What does home feel like in your body?
 - b. When do you feel safe to be yourself?
9. Read the Author’s Note and Illustrator’s Notes in the back of the book.
 - a. How does writing help free the author from racism?
 - b. Why did the illustrator find a home by illustrating this book?

Additional Activities for Deeper Connection

- **“Home is...” Poems** – Invite children to write a poem about what home is for them. They can refer back to the list of words and phrases collected earlier if they wish. Some questions that might help them with ideas include:
 - Write down everything you know about your home.
 - What do you love about your home?
 - What don’t people understand about your home?
 - What is difficult about your home?

For younger children, providing [a template may be helpful](#). One idea is to have them choose one word to describe home, so they can use the word to create an acrostic poem.

For older children, take this activity further by asking them to think about how they could decorate their page using flowing lines like the illustrator in the book did. For example, some pages used flowing lines of thread, stems/vines, music staff, waves, and wind to symbolize the different ways Nou’s family found their homes. Ask children to consider how they could use similar symbolism in their own poem.

- **Rewrite the Moment** – Have children (or small groups) revisit a hurtful moment from the story. Ask them to rewrite what could have been said/done instead.
- **Words that Feel Like Home** – Ask children which words and phrases make them feel safe, seen, or welcome, creating lists under the following categories:
 - Words That Welcome
 - Words That Show Curiosity
 - Words That Support
 - Words That Repair Harm

Next, invite groups to practice by role-playing a situation in which they use the words/phrases.

- **Compare and Contrast** – Check out the book [A Map Into the World](#), also written by Kao Kalia Yang and illustrated by Seo Kim. Create a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences between the two stories, including their themes of home and belonging, illustrations, characters, etc.

Connections to Anti-Bias Education and Social-Emotional Learning

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) tenets touched on in *A Home on the Page*:

- 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 touched on in *A Home on the Page*:**

- 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

About AmazeWorks

The mission of [AmazeWorks](https://amazeworks.org) is to champion equity and belonging for all. We believe that everyone should see their families, identities, and lived experiences reflected in positive mirrors and windows into the lives of others who are different from them. AmazeWorks is happy to partner with Kao Kalia Yang to offer this discussion guide because we all believe in the power of stories to inspire, educate, and connect us all.

