

# Hmong and Hmong American Titles For Grades 4 - 5

## **Fiction:**

**Brown, Jackie.** *Little Cricket*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2004. 252p. Grades 4-7.

Kia is 9 when war comes to her family's village in Laos. She escapes with her mother, brother, and paternal grandparents to a refugee camp in Thailand where they live for 3 years, waiting to come to America. When the passes finally arrive, however, only 3 passes have been sent instead of 5. Kia, Xigi, and Grandfather will move to America, while Mother and Grandmother must wait behind. In Minnesota, Kia tries to learn English and make friends while she worries about how Grandfather and Xigi are adjusting. Although the main character is a girl, boys should also enjoy the story, especially if it is shared as a classroom read-aloud.

**Gerdner, Linda and Sarah Langford.** *Grandfather's Story Cloth/Yawg Daim Paj Ntaub Dab Neeg*. Walnut Creek, CA: Shen's Books, 2008. 32p. Grades 2-4.

10-year-old Chersheng knows that Grandfather sometimes forgets where he is or what he is doing, but the time that Grandfather doesn't recognize his grandson is very upsetting. Chersheng's mother shows him the story cloth that Grandfather made during his time in a refugee camp in Thailand, and he asks Grandfather to explain some of the pictures to him. The next time that Grandfather forgets, Chersheng makes him a "story collage" of photos and drawings of Grandfather's life since coming to America. The author's notes include a page about Alzheimer's disease and another about the Hmong and story cloths. The story and author's notes are all bilingual, English and Hmong.

## **Folktales:**

**Coburn, Jewell Reinhart and Tzexa Cherta Lee.** *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella*. Arcadia, CA: Shen's Books, 1996. 32p. Grades K-6.

A poor man's wife chooses to become a cow for a time in order to help her family. After the man becomes prosperous, however, he remarries instead of returning his wife to human form. The cow dies of a broken heart, and all Jouanah has left of her mother is a piece of cowhide (which later turns out to be magical and retain some essence of her mother.) Traditional elements include a bamboo instrument called the qeng (*more commonly spelled qeej, but pronounced keng*) and the New Year celebration, complete with new clothes and the ball toss game during which young men and women met and mingled.

**Jaffe, Nina and Steve Zeitlin.** "The Bird Lovers." In *The Cow of No Color: Riddle Stories and Justice Tales from Around the World*, 59-69. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998. Grades 4-6.

This Hmong tale of reincarnation begins in the spirit world when Orphan Boy and Yer vow to love each other for eternity. When it is time to be reincarnated, however, Orphan Boy is always too impatient and jumps into the spirit pool before Yer so that they come out as incompatible creatures. On the third try, both come out as birds, but when a fire enters their forest, Yer stays on

her eggs while her husband panics and leaves his wife. Many lifetimes pass by, and the daughter of a great chief refuses to speak a word. A man known only as Poor Man recognizes Yer and tells her a story of two birds and a fire. When he changes the events of the story, he tricks her into speaking and wins her as his wife. This tale comes from Hmong refugees of Laos, and includes an introduction, source notes, and a description of a musical instrument called the xim xaus.

**Livo, Norma J. & Dia Cha. *Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1991. 135p.**

This collection is intended for adults or teens, but several of the stories may be told to children. In particular, “A Bird Couple’s Vow” and “Ngao Nao and Shee Na” may be interesting as they are alternate versions of “The Bird Lovers” and *Jouanah* (see above). The introduction includes 14 pages of cultural explanation and history and 16 pages of color photographs of traditional Hmong attire and Pa Ndau (traditional needlework). A pronunciation guide is not included, so storytellers will need to consult appropriate sources for some of the Hmong names (ie: Ntxawm) before telling the stories.

**Xiong, Bliia. *Nine-in-One, Grr! Grr! : A Folktale from the Hmong People of Laos*. San Francisco: Children’s Book Press, 1989. 30p. Grades K-5.**

This “why” tale from Laos explains why there are so few tigers on the earth. In the beginning, the first tiger and her mate have no children, so Tiger goes to the great god Shao to ask how many children she will have. Shao promises her nine cubs every year as long as she remembers his words. In order to remember, she makes up a song to sing on her way back home, “Nine-in-one, Grr! Grr!” The Eu Bird hears her singing and goes to Shao to ask what Tiger’s song means. When Bird hears Shao’s promise, she is horrified, but she comes up with a plan to trick Tiger. Bird disturbs Tiger’s song, and when Tiger admits she has forgotten her song, Bird substitutes the words “One-in-nine, Grr! Grr!” A note about the story, author, and artwork is included.

## **Nonfiction:**

**Barr, Linda. *Long Road to Freedom: Journey of the Hmong*. Bloomington, MN: Red Brick Learning, 2005. 64p. Grades 4-8.**

Short chapters tell about the origins of the Hmong people, the secret Hmong army and the effects of the Vietnam War, life in refugee camps, and adjusting to life in America. Traditions, beliefs, story cloths, and an introduction to the Hmong clans are also included. Each chapter begins with information about the Chang family who fled Laos and lived in a refugee camp in Thailand. Some of the family moved to America; later the American immigrants went back to Thailand to visit the son who had stayed behind.

**Cha, Dia. *Dia’s Story Cloth: The Hmong People’s Journey of Freedom*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 1996. unpag. Grades 3-6.**

The author’s aunt and uncle embroidered a “story cloth” to send to Dia and her mother in America. It tells the story of the Hmong people’s journey from China to Laos to Thailand and (for many) to the United States. As Dia shows the cloth, she tells of her own journey that involved war, the loss of her father, death, fear, years in a refugee camp, and moving to a foreign country. Dia indicates that needlework and story cloths are still created by many Hmong women. The back matter of the book includes a cultural explanation from a curator of the Denver Museum of Natural History as well as photographs and a bibliography.

**Millett, Sandra. *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 2002. 48p. Grades 4-6.**

This title focuses on the Hmong people still living in Southeast Asia. Hmong in Thailand, Laos, and the United States are mentioned in smaller captions and depicted in photos, but the main focus is on the Hmong living in Vietnam. The format is similar to that of the Eyewitness books, with a main subject paragraph on each spread as well as many colorful photos with smaller captions. Topics are brief but thorough, addressing many important customs and facts. The book includes a glossary with pronunciation of Hmong place names, an index, and a list of recommended books, websites, and cultural organizations.

**Murphy, Nora. *A Hmong Family*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1997. 56p. Grades 4-6.**

This story of a Hmong American family focuses on 10-year-old Xiong Pao Vang, but also gives details of the lives of his parents and grandparents. Xiong's parents tell about their previous lives and their escape from Communist persecution; both Toua and Kao were from Laos, but met at the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand, where Xiong and Xia were born. Xiong has lived in the United States since he was 3. Today he is bilingual, but he struggled to learn English when he started kindergarten. Xiong's parents and grandmother are helping him to appreciate Hmong traditions as well as the advantages that America offers, and he works hard at school so that he can someday become a doctor. An index, suggested further reading, a Hmong folktale, and a pronunciation guide for names of people and places are included.

### **Additional Recommendations for Younger Readers:**

Edwards, Michelle. *Pa Lia's First Day*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1999. 50p. Grades 1-3.

Giraud, Herve. *Basha: A Hmong Child*. Farmington Hills, MI: Blackbirch Press, 2005. 24p. Grades 2-4.

Rendon, Marcie R. *Farmer's Market: Families Working Together*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 2001. 48p. Grades 3-5.

Shea, Pegi Dietz. *The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 1995. 32p. Grades 2-4.

### **Additional Recommendations for Older Readers:**

Omoto, Susan. *Hmong Milestones in America: Citizens in a New World*. Evanston, IL: John Gordon Burke, 2002. 64p. Grades 6-9.

Shea, Pegi Dietz. *Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story*. New York: Clarion Books, 2003. 236p. Grades 7-9.

**Not recommended:**

Mathews, Peggy B. *Farmer Boy/Chàng Nông*. Covina, CA: Pacific Asia Press, 1994. (*Perhaps the Vietnamese translation is better than the English, but the English text is mediocre and dull. A better version is found in Folk Stories of the Hmong.*)

McGuire, William. *Southeast Asians*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1990. (*A text that only describes Hmong beliefs as: "They believe in magic spells and evil spirits," is grossly oversimplified and condescending.*)

**Useful Websites:**

<http://www.hmongcc.org>

<http://www.hmongdictionary.com>

<http://www.hmongstudies.com/LearnaboutHmongwebsite.html>