

October 12, 2010

Dear Colleague,

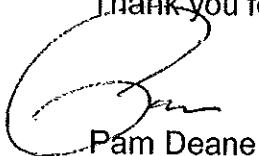
I would like to ask you to consider joining an adoption committee and consider if MDUSD should add *First They Killed My Father* to its adopted reading list. This book is approved and adopted by the California State Department of Education. I am proposing this be added to our 9th grade reading list.

Reading this book in 9th grade gives us, not only a chance to study history, but to also study literature. This novel covers many areas of Social Science, such as colonialism, the Cold War, Vietnam War, and genocide. This book shows how a society can change when books are banned, education is outlawed and the uneducated become the ruling class. I know some of our students might think that this sounds like a great idea.

First They Killed My Father shows one families experience of trying to survive and understand what was happening. The narrator in the beginning is five and we get her five year old view. However as she ages into her teens, she becomes more savvy and understanding. This is great for our students, as she processes what is happening, and tries to understand, students are able to begin with no prior knowledge and come up to speed as the protagonist does. The protagonist has to be clever and cunning to survive and survive she does, and triumphs. The words are simple and the story is very accessible. The story is powerful, rich with irony, foreshadowing, juxtaposition, symbolism and many other aspects that make a piece of literature meaningful.

The protagonist endures many traumas as a young child and I think many kids we work with can identify with those traumas. Her whole family and extended family are involved in the narrative. It is a great example of a memoir. It is a wonderful example of a piece of literature with a teenage girl as the protagonist. I am writing to ask if you would consider reading this book, filling out a review and meeting to offer your opinion as to whether or not you feel this would be a good addition to the adopted reading list for Mt Diablo High School and MDUSD.

Thank you for your consideration,



Pam Deane

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CORE AND EXTENDED CORE LITERATURE ADVOCACY FORM

6-12

Title of Book: First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

Author: Loung Ung

Publisher: Harper Perennial

Year of Publication: 2000

Major Theme(s): Struggling with personal tragedy; the importance of family; the depths of determination for survival; man's inhumanity toward man; the celebration of looking out for one's fellow man; the struggle to understand where you've come from (personal and family history).

Suggested Grade Level: 9

Your Name: Dan Reynolds

Check One: Teacher: Parent: Administrator: Student:

Brief Summary of the book: Loung and her family live a life of relative luxury in Cambodia... until the Khmer Rouge take over. Then, jobs are lost or abandoned, homes must be evacuated, friends, relatives, and acquaintances are assassinated. The family has to flee the city. They pack what they can, and move out into the country –attempting to pass as country people to avoid the hatred and violence aimed at city people. The violence increase. The family moves from one village to another attempting to stay safe and alive. They fragment, some must stay behind, others are sent off to work camps, some are killed. Life gets worse and worse. Loung and her sisters struggle to stay together, keep from starving, keep from having their spirits broken, and to stay alive.

Reasons why I think this book should be considered:

This book, unlike any other book I have ever read, captures the way of thinking and of speaking of a five year old. The **narrator** speaks in a five year old voice, and we, as the audience only learn things as she learns them, and if they are beyond the understanding of a five year old, we don't get to understand them either – I find this a **brilliant writer's device**, and was enthralled to **participate as a reader**. I kept wanting to know why things were happening, and wanting more information, and the not knowing, but having to wait kept me **interested and turning the pages**. I also feel that this style makes the book and the story **easier to access for student readers, including reluctant or below grade level reader**. The content is **historically important**, with **connections to world history**, and the study of **late 20th century Asian history** as well as the study of **genocide**. This book is a telling of the events of 's life, as such it **breathes vitality into the study of biography**.

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Suggested Grade Level: 9

Your Name: Dan Reynolds

Check One: Teacher: X Parent: _____ Administrator: _____ Student: _____

Themes or ideas you recognized in this book:

Struggling with personal tragedy; the importance of family; the depths of determination for survival; man's inhumanity toward man; the celebration of looking out for one's fellow man; the struggle to understand where you've come from (personal and family history).

Genre and setting, time period:

Memoir/ Autobiography. Genocide narrative.

Connections that can be made to other curricular areas:

Strong connections to late 20th century Asian history, and the history of the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian genocide. Connections can also be made to the development of literary forms.

Areas of caution and suggestions for handling:

The story focuses on the ways that the Khmer Rouge systematically worked to exterminate their political enemies during the latter part of the 20th century. This issue is very volatile for a number of different people. The story does not shy away from the violence perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. Our study of history and of genocide MUST address these atrocities. If we ever shrink from the ugly events of these times we betray the memory of those who died, and we betray all current and future victims of genocide by turning a blind eye to such behaviors, paving the way for their continuance. We MUST address these events with honesty, with understanding, with a mind toward the preservation of humanity, and with some strong sense of historicity.

Recommend X

Not Recommend _____

Summary of Book

Loung Ung was five years old in Cambodia at the start of the Pol Pot Regime. Her father was a wealthy government worker and a prime target for the Khmer Rouge. Loung, her parents, and her many siblings had to flee their home, setting out with no warning and no destination. They had to leave everything behind and pretend to be a farming family to avoid capture, but were eventually sent to a work camp. After a string of work camps, Loung and her family almost grow use to the constant hunger and tiredness, the fear of and separation from every other member of their villages, and to hiding their emotions so as to not appear weak. Loung's teenaged brothers, Khouy and Meng and sister, Keav, are sent away to a different work camp. Keav dies shortly thereafter. Then Loung's father is taken away and killed. Loung's mother forces Loung, her sister Chou, and her remaining brother Kim to run away, leaving herself and the baby Geak behind. Loung and Chou, too afraid to split up as they had been ordered, arrive at a child work camp where they stay together until Loung was sent to a different camp to be trained as a child soldier. Ma and Geak are assumed to be dead, because the soldiers "took them away." Eventually, Loung and Meng, escape to Vietnam, then Thailand, then finally to America.

Reasons why I think this book should be considered:

This is a harrowing, compelling story. I taught it in previous school districts in Oregon. Students find it difficult to put down, and the text is easy to understand. It speaks to students who are ESL, because in the end Loung immigrates to the US, and becomes successful. It is a story of living in a difficult environment, poverty and constant fear. It is a Kafkaesque world-her childhood robbed by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The family is forced to experience mass murder, starvation and disease that claims half her family. In the end the horror of the Cambodian genocide is matched only by the Loung's indomitable spirit. I think the story resonates with students who have difficult lives. It gives them insight into how children and young adults overcome adversity to become successful adults.

I am endorsed in English and Social Science. There are few books that address the origins of the Vietnam War and I have found students have a difficult time understanding the Cold War concept. As students read this book they see how Loung and her family become caught in the cross fire of the US and China as Cambodia becomes the Superpower's proxy for war. Students remember Loung's story, and thus remember the history of Southeast Asia and the US. When students take US history they will have prior knowledge that can be activated.

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER

Site Literature Committee

School: MT DIABLO HIGH SCHOOL

Date: 10-8-10

Facilitator/chair: PAM DEANE / DAN REYNOLDS

Members

Name	Position
<u>LEE GRIFFIN</u>	<u>PARENT</u> ✓
<u>DREW GRIFFIN</u>	<u>STUDENT</u>
<u>Rivka Liu</u>	<u>Administrator</u> ✓
<u>Dan Reynolds</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
<u>J Dietsler</u>	<u>Teacher</u> ✓
<u>Liane Cisrowski</u>	<u>Teacher</u> ✓
<u>Pam Deane</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>

CORE AND EXTENDED CORE LITERATURE ADVOCACY FORM
6-12

Title of Book First They Killed My Father
Author Loung Ung
Publisher Harper
Year of Publication 2006
Major Theme(s) Survival, immigration, poverty, politics
Suggested Grade Level 9-12
Your Name Joe Sequeira
Check One:

Teacher Parent Administrator Student

Brief Summary of Book:

A memoir of the protagonist's experiences during the brutal Cambodian genocide of the 1970s under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The protagonist must survive these brutal circumstances and escape to a refugee camp in Thailand.

Reasons why I think this book should be considered:

This book provides a rare and powerful primary source detailing one of the most tragic events in history. It is not only an excellent book to analyze in English classes, but has enormous cross-curricular value in history/ social science classes as well.

Book: First They Killed My Father
Author: Loung Ung
Publisher: Harper Year 2006
Your name: Joe Sequeira

PARENT/TEACHER EVALUATION - THE LITERARY STRENGTH

Appropriate grade level/comments: 9-12

Themes or ideas you recognized in this book:

Survival, immigration, poverty, politics.
The book focuses on the effects of the Cambodian genocide under the Khmer Rouge.

Genre and setting, time period:

1970s Cambodia under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.
The protagonist has to escape to a refugee camp in Thailand.

Connections that can be made to other curricular areas:

The book gives an important insight into events studied in World and US history.

Areas of caution and suggestions for handling:

Requires cultural understanding and maturity.

Recommend

Do not recommend

CORE AND EXTENDED LITERATURE SELECTION RUBRIC

TITLE First They Killed My Father
 AUTHOR Long Urey
 GENRE Memoir
 SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL 9-12

CATEGORY	DON'T KNOW	1/WEAK	2/AVERAGE	3/STRONG	4/EXCEPTIONAL
1. Represents universal themes					X
2. Has rich powerful language				X	
3. Portrays cultures authentically					X
4. Portrays cultures with sensitivity					X
5. Has multiple layers of meaning				X	
6. Has been considered a classic or has potential for permanency				X	
7. Is a strong example of a specific genre				X	
8. Content is compelling and encourages discussion of intellectual, social, and/or ethical values					X
9. Is relevant to a content-area curriculum, cross-curricular integration, and/or concept development					X
10. Is favorably cited or reviewed in recognized professional sources, such as educational or academic journals				X	

For teachers and administrators: Which English/language arts standards are addressed by this book?

CORE AND EXTENDED LITERATURE SELECTION RUBRIC

TITLE FIRST THE KILLED MY FATHER
AUTHOR LOUNG UNG
GENRE MEMOIR
SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL 9-12

CATEGORY	DON'T KNOW	1/WEAK	2/AVERAGE	3/STRONG	4/EXCEPTIONAL
1. Represents universal themes					X
2. Has rich powerful language			X		
3. Portrays cultures authentically				X	
4. Portrays cultures with sensitivity					X
5. Has multiple layers of meaning					X
6. Has been considered a classic or has potential for permanency				X	
7. Is a strong example of a specific genre					X
8. Content is compelling and encourages discussion of intellectual, social, and/or ethical values					X
9. Is relevant to a content-area curriculum, cross-curricular integration, and/or concept development				X	
10. Is favorably cited or reviewed in recognized professional sources, such as educational or academic journals				X	

For teachers and administrators: Which English/language arts standards are addressed by this book?

CORE AND EXTENDED LITERATURE SELECTION RUBRIC

TITLE FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER
 AUTHOR LOUNG UNG
 GENRE MEMOIR
 SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL 9-12

CATEGORY	DON'T KNOW	1/WEAK	2/AVERAGE	3/STRONG	4/EXCEPTIONAL
1. Represents universal themes					✓
2. Has rich powerful language					✓
3. Portrays cultures authentically					✓
4. Portrays cultures with sensitivity					✓
5. Has multiple layers of meaning					✓
6. Has been considered a classic or has potential for permanency					✓
7. Is a strong example of a specific genre					✓
8. Content is compelling and encourages discussion of intellectual, social, and/or ethical values					✓
9. Is relevant to a content-area curriculum, cross-curricular integration, and/or concept development					✓
10. Is favorably cited or reviewed in recognized professional sources, such as educational or academic journals					✓

For teachers and administrators: Which English/language arts standards are addressed by this book?

Lee Lopez