

# Pacific Lutheran University

## Common Reading Discussion Guide 2021

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



As you read *The Best That We Could Do*, we encourage you to use this reading guide to assist you in thinking deeply and critically about the book. This will help you prepare for the small group discussions with you Writing 101 faculty member and peers.

**To be prepared and organized** for class you should **take notes** on ideas, concepts, and themes of particular interest to you, **including noting page numbers** so that you can easily

**Please consider the following questions and prompts as you start and continue to read the book.**

1. The title of this book is *The Best That We Could Do*. We first hear the title referred to on pg. 55 when a doctor says these lines to Thi Bui's mother following the death of her first child. Why do you think Bui used this as the title for her book?

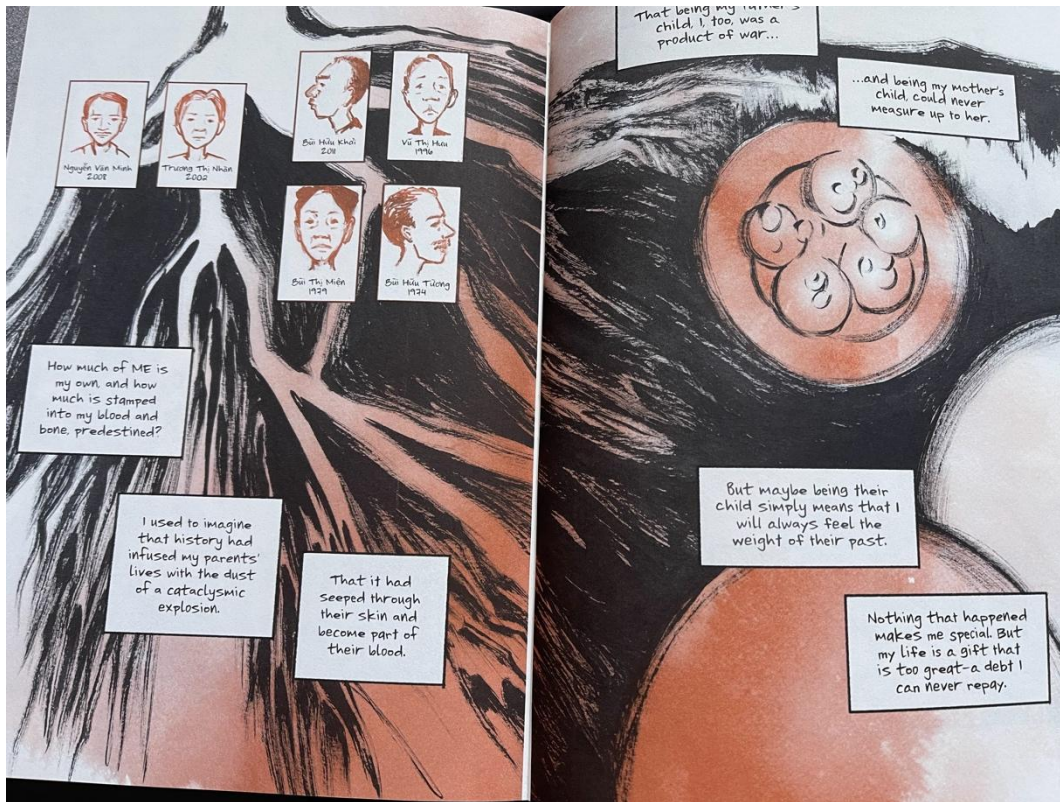
2. This book tells multiple stories about what it means to be an immigrant and refugee both *from* a home country and *to* the United States. On page 36 (image left) and page 211 (image right), Bui expresses a sense of loss when talking about the experience of being a child of immigrants or refugees and/or being an immigrant or refugee. Explain and interpret how Bui communicates that sense of loss through the images on both pages and how are those images connected to the broader themes of being an immigrant and refugee she highlights throughout the book.



3. Thi Bui provides an intimate story about her family and her role in it. The Vietnamese language is inextricably part of that story. To what extent is her narrative of her family and her role in it similar to the stories you and your family tell about your family and your role in yours? Additionally, what role does language, either through the way stories are told (e.g. commonly understood anecdotes) or the specific language by which those stories are told (e.g. Vietnamese, Spanish, Cambodian, Mandarin), play into what those stories have become over time?

4. Thi Bui depicts ways racism, power, and privilege have impacted her and her family's lived experiences several times throughout the book. Choose 1-2 examples where you see each (e.g. racism, power, and privilege) in the book and describe how you see those scenes playing into the broader narrative of the book.

5. Thi Bui see herself moving between the Vietnamese culture of her parents and the culture of the United States and she speaks about this numerous times in the book. Most strikingly, on pages 324 and 325 below, Bui seems to come to some understanding of how she's connected to her Vietnamese culture and parents. What do you think that understanding is, to what extent do you think it gives her solace, and how does the imagery on the pages below support your opinion?



6. To what extent does Bui draw out dynamics that are in play in your family and that align with your experience?