



Book Club Set

VI

By Kim Thuy

About the Author



Kim Thúy left Vietnam with the boat people at the age of ten and settled with her family in Quebec. With degrees in translation and law, the writer has worked as a seamstress, interpreter, lawyer and restaurant chef-owner.

Kim Thúy has received several awards, including the 2010 Governor General's Literary Award, and was one of four finalists for the Nobel Alternative in 2018. She is a knight of the National Order of Quebec.

His books, which have sold more than 850,000 copies worldwide, have been translated into 31 languages and 43 countries and territories. Kim Thúy lives in Montreal and devotes himself to writing.

Retrieved from: <https://www.kimthuy.ca/kim-thuy>

About the Book



My first name, Bào Vi, illustrated my parents' intention to "protect the littlest". If we translate literally, I am "Precious tiny microscopic". As in most cases in Vietnam, I did not know how to live up to my name. Often, girls named "White" or "Snow" have very dark complexions, and boys named "Power" or "Strong" fear great trials. As for me, I was constantly growing, far surpassing the average and, at the same time, projecting myself outside the norms.

The perfect complement to the exquisitely wrought novels *Ru and Mãn*, Canada Reads winner Kim Thúy returns with *Vi*, exploring the lives, loves and struggles of Vietnamese refugees as they reinvent themselves in new lands.

The daughter of an enterprising mother and a wealthy, spoiled father who never had to grow up, Vi was the youngest of their four children and the only girl. They gave her a name that meant "precious, tiny one," destined to be cosseted and protected, the family's little treasure.

Retrieved from: <https://www.kimthuy.ca/vi>

Discussion Questions



1. What did you think of Vi? Which aspects did you appreciate, and which aspects were most challenging?
2. The deep subject of Vi is what Thúy calls “the invisible strength” of women, especially Vietnamese women, whose men, during the war, made a more obvious display of strength as soldiers. Do you agree with the author? What aspects of the story made you see “the invisible strength” of women?
3. Has this book inspired you to think about the refugee narrative? For example in the media versus when you read this story about a family fleeing their home to make a home in Quebec?
4. What risks would you be prepared to take to save your life?
5. Gastronomy is present throughout the story. What do you think of the role and symbolism of cooking in this novel? Did it make you hungry for Vietnamese food?
6. The character of Vi has travelled a lot in this story. Which of the many places stood out to you the most, and how?
7. Why did the author have Vi travel to different places, including Vietnam?
8. What did you learn about Vietnamese history and culture?
9. What stood out about VI’s life in Quebec and her impressions?
10. What did you think were the most successful and least successful parts of this book?
11. What do you think of the ending? Did the beginning give you a sense of it?

Author Interview



Short but sweet

"I wanted to write a long, big, huge book, but I never [knew] how to! Maybe because I don't have enough vocabulary, even in French."

"My sentences are quite short. Every time I read and revise the text, over and over again, I always take away more than adding on."

"I simmer everything down, almost like a soup. All the flavours are concentrated. You don't have to eat a lot, but all the flavours would open up your mouth anyway, from a spoon of sauce. I try to give the reader nothing unnecessary."

Cultural awareness

At the beginning of *Vi*, I just wanted to talk about the two main characters, the young couple. But then somehow — maybe because it's culture — you can never talk just about one person without explaining where they came from.

In Vietnamese culture, we are in a chain. We are the result of who our ancestors had been. If they were good people, we would have a good destiny. If they're bad people, we would have a bad destiny. Even today, my parents' friends would come to me and say, 'Oh, of course you're having a good life, because your parents were good people,' — but they would never congratulate you for what you do. It's always because of the parents and the grandparents.

The power of being invisible

In the Western world, the strength of a person is someone who has a position and has an opinion — someone who would speak up. But in Asian culture, I would say there's a culture of how to be not only invisible, but unreadable as well. If you go back into

Japanese or Chinese paintings and look at the mouths of the women, they are shown with a small red dot, because that expresses the strength of the person to hold back her feelings or her reaction. So it's a very different culture. I wanted to express that — we think that invisibility or being small is a weakness, but not always.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/full-episode-aug-16-2021-1.5944385/kim-th%C3%BAy-reflects-on-how-her-family-and-culture-inspired-her-to-write-the-novel-vi-1.5944422>

Other Links and Resources

- Author Talks | Kim Thúy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HW9pWukFyc0&t=5s>

Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

| | | | | |
|------|---|--------------|-----------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ugh! | | It was OK... | Loved it! | |

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: