

### **The Struggles of a Refugee: Ha and her Family**

In, *Inside Out and Back Again*, Thanhha Lai describes the life of refugees Ha and her family. Like many refugees, Ha and her family are forced to leave South Vietnam due to a ravaging war between North and South Vietnam. Ha, and her family ultimately had to choose from leaving the country and abandoning their possessions, life, home, and any hope of seeing their captured father or staying in the country and risking their lives. After they ultimately decide to leave the country, they now have to face the hardships of trying to get out of the country while also looking for a new home. Ha, and her family ends up moving to Alabama where they now have to adapt to their new homes and a new language while also suffering from hard discrimination and racism. The novel illustrates the struggles and challenges of being a refugee by showing how Ha and her family have had their lives turned, "inside out", and the challenges that came with their new life.

Like many other refugees, Ha and her family make the tough decision to abandon Vietnam in fear of the war between North and South Vietnam which seems to be inching closer each day to their home of Saigon. There are constant bombings around Ha's home that are close enough for Ha's family to hear, close enough for Ha to describe the chaos around and say, "Red and green flares explode like fireworks," and these firework-like bombs are close enough to make Ha's family fear if they're next. This fear of being killed in bombings like many other in South Vietnam cause the family to leave Vietnam. In, "Inside out", it's mentioned that there is a war coming closer and closer to Ha's home and with the war also comes along the dangers of battle including bombings, these bombings become apparent in, "Saigon is Gone", where after

Ha and her family made the decision to leave, "...The communists are dropping are all the bombs they have left." It's clear that staying in South Vietnam will result in Ha's family being killed by bombs or being captured like their father who served in the army, like many other refugees they had to make the decision to leave to avoid the death that lurks around at every corner, and when they do leave the fate that they would have if they had stayed becomes clear when Saigon falls to the communist. Additionally, the food situation in Vietnam is a crucial factor in Ha's mother's decision to leave Vietnam as the war in Vietnam caused food to become scarce. In the poem, "Eggs", Mother claims that the food situation is so horrendous that the price of eggs is the price of rice which is the price of gasoline which is the price of gold, food is so expensive that in the poem, " Quiet Design ", Ha has to save half a bite of sweet potato and this is where her mother makes the decision to leave Vietnam saying, "You deserve to grow up in a country where you don't have to worry about saving half a bit of sweet potato." If Ha and her family stay in Vietnam then not only do they have to worry about being bombed, they have to worry about having enough food to feed themselves, and with the prices of basic food such as eggs and rice being raised significantly Ha's family had no other choice but to leave the country for a place where they don't have to worry about saving every last bit of food.

When Ha and her family have to leave Vietnam and set on a journey to go to the United States they still face the hardships of escaping a country illegally while the communists are trying to stop them. When Ha and her family are able to escape Vietnam through navy ships they still have to endure hardships, in, "Floating", the refugees that we're able to escape Vietnam and make it to the navy ship live, "...Without lights, Without cooking, Without bathrooms", and they're only allowed to take sips of water only when it's absolutely necessary for survival. Like many others who are trying to escape their country, Ha and her family have to endure the harsh

and barbaric living conditions in the boat in order to have a chance at survival, they have to live in the dark, they can't cook anything, and they can't use the bathroom in order to stay hidden from the communists, they have to preserve every resource they have while in the ship in order to make it out of South Vietnam, this even includes water leaving many thirsty and only drinking water when it's absolutely vital. Moreover, the family's journey to escape Vietnam to search for a new home also means that they all have to sacrifice things dear to them. In the poem, "Last Respects", Ha notices that her Brother Khoi has his dead chick that he's been trying to hatch every since they were in Vietnam in his hands and after seeing this she throws away her doll, her only personal possession from Vietnam and throws it into the sea with her Brothers dead chick in a white bundle, but immediately afterward she claims that, "I regret not having my doll as soon as the white bundle sinks into the sea." The doll symbolizes the last memories that Ha had of Vietnam, the journey to escaping Vietnam meant sacrificing her doll with Brother Khoi's chick effectively getting rid of both Ha's and Brother Khoi's last physical item to remind them of their life in Vietnam. Like many other refugees, Ha had to sacrifice her possessions and memories of their previous home in order to move on from it and focus on building a better life for themselves in a new country.

When Ha and her family manage to make it to Alabama and start a new life they still face the challenge of overcoming the language barrier and discrimination/racism they face for being refugees. In Alabama Ha and her family have to go through the universal refugee experience of learning a new language, in the poem, "Feel Dumb", Ha is learning the basics of English, and reasonably, she thinks it's difficult and claims that, "Whoever invented English should learn how to spell" out of frustration while also getting treated like she's dumb by the rest of her peers and gets patronized by her classmates and her teacher and in response to that Ha says, "So this is

what dumb feels like. I hate, hate, hate it.” Ha is being treated like she’s worse than everyone else although she’s just adapting to a new environment and learning a new language, she’s just as smart as her classmates and just as qualified as them but still gets treated worse because of the language barrier between them and herself. This instance between Ha and her classmates symbolizes the experiences that most refugees face when trying to adapt to a new country and its culture/language, many refugees are just as smart as others and are qualified to earn jobs or enter schools but the language barrier makes it seem like they aren’t as qualified and causes refugees to be patronized and treated differently than others. Furthermore, in the poem, “Neighbors”, Ha’s neighbors are clearly discriminating against her family as when they try to meet them they all shun her away and close their doors to Ha’s family. This interaction between Ha and her neighbors highlights the discrimination that refugees face when moving to a new home as in this poem she is treated like an outcast by all her peers at a time where she needs help the most. Refugees are treated as if their different from everyone else by the people around them in the time of their life when they need dire help as they had to abandon their home, find a new home, and learn a new language, getting treated like their worse than everybody else is a sad reality that refugees have to face when finding a new home and this is made clear when Ha’s family gets shunned by her neighbors.

Around the globe, refugees face many hardships and challenges and those arduous experiences are illustrated and captured by the experiences of Ha and her family. The article, “Refugees, who, where, and why”, explains that refugees are, “...Also people just like us: grandparents, mothers, fathers, children, students, secretaries, store clerks, teachers, accountants, and doctors.” Refugees are the same people as us and yet they face challenges and hardships that most people would never go through, they were normal people like us until their home was taken

from them and their lives turned inside out. What Ha and her family experienced when fleeing their home illustrates what all refugees go through, their decisions to leave South Vietnam, the treacherous journey to escape their country, and having to face a language barrier and deal with discrimination is a universal experience for refugees. Ha's family's decision to leave Vietnam for a better life turns their life inside out with their family having to deal with the hardships that came with that decision.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	4	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	3	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	4	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	3	10

<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	<b>4 – 10</b> <b>3 – 9</b> <b>2 – 8</b> <b>1 – 7</b>	4	10
<b>Total:</b>			100

<b>Student Reflection</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
I am most proud of... the evidence and the explanation I provided to explain how His experience illustrates the hardships of refugees around the world.	Glow: Excellent, first-rate analysis! You clearly address the task and use evidence to analyze the novel in-depth.
I struggled with... organizing the essay to make it as clear as possible as well as using transition words to make the essay flow smoothly.	Grow: Proofreading to be more concise is always a good idea but your essay is excellent regardless.

### Inside Out And Back Again: The Refugee Experience

A refugee is a normal person who is forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. When they flee their country, they leave behind many things that hold importance to them, their home, family members, and friends. After leaving refugee camps, they have to resettle in a new country, as most can't return to their homes, which will be very challenging. In the novel, *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, the protagonist, Ha grew up in South Vietnam during a time of war. Afraid of how the war will break apart their family, Ha, her mother, and three older brothers make the difficult decision to flee their homeland. They leave behind many memories as well as possessions that they hold dear to their hearts and make the arduous journey to find a foreign but hopefully safe place called home. Ha and her family will have to start over from square one, rebuilding their lives in the new, hostile environment. Just like the fortune teller predicted, their lives twisted "inside out" like many refugees worldwide.

Due to all kinds of dangerous events happening in South Vietnam, many people desperately fled the war-ridden country, becoming refugees. This decision can cause them to be turned "inside out" mentally. In the article, "Refugees: Who, Where, Why," the author explains that refugees flee their home, "because they are afraid to stay... and the number one reason is due to war." Similarly, war was the reason why Ha and her family left. In the poem "Current News" Ha said that even in school, all that the teachers and students talk about is, "how close the Communists have gotten to Saigon, how much prices have gone up since American soldiers left, and how many distant bombs were heard the previous night..." (39). People can barely afford food anymore, and the war is getting so close to the capital of South Vietnam that even bombs

could be heard in the distance from Ha's home. All these showed that South Vietnam was too dangerous. Furthermore, Mother fears the things that are going to happen if they stay. "I've lived in the North. At first, not much will happen, then suddenly Quang will be asked to leave college. Hà will come home chanting the slogans of Ho Chí Minh, and Khôi will be rewarded for reporting to his teacher everything we say in the house. Her brows twist so much we hush" (75). She can predict what's going to happen if they stay. The family will break up, each with their own conviction, and betray each other, brainwashed into what others believe. The final straw that cemented the whole family's decision to leave was when "bombs explode like thunder, slashes lighten the sky, gunfire falls like rain. Distant yet within ears, within eyes" (81). Seeing the battles come closer and closer to the point, it was visible to the naked eye, Mother was determined to keep the family safe and together no matter what.

While fleeing South Vietnam, Ha and her family undergo many hardships. Ha and her family were always living in fear that they might run out of supplies, get caught by the Communists, not be rescued, or run out of fuel. When the ship they were on suddenly stopped, everyone panicked, afraid of the consequences of being caught. Ha states, "Mother hugs me, hearts drumming as one. If the Communists catch us fleeing, it's a million times worse than staying at home" (135). This shows how dangerous it was even after leaving South Vietnam and the constant fear that refugees had to live under. "After many shouts and much time the ship moves forward with just one engine. Mother would not release me. The commander says, 'Thailand is much farther on one engine. We escaped bombs but missed the rescue ships'" (135-136). Even if they're not caught by the Communists, the conditions were still very dangerous as one engine broke and they missed the rescue ships. Food is also rationed: half a clump of rice only in the morning and night, with one cup of water all day, since they missed the

rescue ships while avoiding the bombs and have to travel to Thailand on one engine. In addition, there is absolutely nothing to do on the ship and it seemed as if they've been on the water forever, "making me think land is just something I once knew." Like the captain said, "it's impossible to predict how much longer we will be floating." Ha's circumstances are similar to the experience of other refugees. One of the many heartbreaking stories of refugees was recorded on a cassette by Mr. Hughes Dolye who was the Chief-Engineer of the USS Kirk back then. The USS Kirk was supposed to shoot down any North Vietnamese jets that try to stop U.S. helicopters from evacuating people from Saigon however when their mission was about to change, they saw South Vietnamese helicopters, "like bees flying all over the place,... crammed with family and friends and flown out to the South China Sea... Some of them were very low on fuel and some of them would crash in the water, and many Vietnamese refugees were lost in all that." Many people were willing to risk their lives escaping despite all the dangers and what-ifs. Some refugees even dropped their babies and young children towards the outstretched arms of strangers they've never met before out of desperation, hoping that the sailors would catch them. Luckily, Ha and the other refugees on the ship were rescued before they ran out of fuel or food. They would continue to face more obstacles on their journey to their new home.

Arriving in Alabama, refugees face many challenges such as the language barrier and persecution. There would be a lot of racist attacks and hate directed towards them such as the blatant bullying Ha went through. "They make fun of [her] name, yelling ha-ha-ha down the hall, they ask if [she] eat dog meat, barking and chewing and falling down laughing, they wonder if [she] lived in the jungle with tigers, growling and stalking on all fours" (253). In school, she faces horrible bullying from classmates she never even met before. Even though she is obviously being bullied, other kids don't help her or anything, instead, they laugh which encourages the

Pink Boy to continue to bully her in the future. Ha wants to stand up for herself and fight back however since she is defenseless, she is forced to walk away. Even her teacher, Miss Scott underestimates Ha's intelligence. "MiSSS SScott points to me, then to the letters of the English alphabet. I say A B C and so on. She tells the class to clap. I frown. MiSSS SScott points to the numbers along the wall. I count up to twenty. The class claps on its own. I'm furious, unable to explain I already learned fractions and how to purify river water" (236-237). Due to the language barrier, Ha cannot explain that she has already learned beyond what other students have and is forced to endure the anger of being thought to be dumb. The teachers and classmates even made fun of her for not knowing a lot of English. Whenever she tries to speak, Ha has to "match every noun and verb, sort all the tenses, remember all the articles, set the tone for every s," (372) because she is afraid that other people will laugh at her. So, when she faces bullies, she doesn't have the time to remember all the rules in English causing her to not be able to speak back to them since she's afraid it'll give them more leverage to bully her. Ha adapts by practicing English when she has time so she can communicate better. She also takes lessons with Miss Washington after school and self-defense lessons with Brother Vu. These lessons came into use when Ha confronted Pink Boy while he was preparing to punch her. This shows how Ha, like many other refugees around the world, tries her best to adapt to life in her new country.

All refugees fleeing their country, no matter what reason, face many difficulties that force them to change themselves. As a result of all the challenges that Ha had to face throughout her journey, she developed from being a childish, rebellious 10-year-old to a mature 11-year-old. At the beginning of the novel, Ha did things like not following the traditions of Tet, where her brothers rose first since only male feet could bring good luck. Moreover, she didn't understand the struggles of saving money even though the price of food increased significantly. Mother

trusted Ha to buy food at the market alone, yet Ha disappoints that trust by buying less food and using the money saved to buy snacks for herself. However, after Ha arrived in Alabama, she started to become more mature, adjusting to the new life, and fighting back when necessary. One example of this is when Ha devises a plan with Brother Khoi to escape being beaten up by the cousin of her classmate that bullies her all the time. Instead of panicking and crying as she might have if this happened earlier in the book, she cleverly tried to avoid a confrontation with bullies that could get her in trouble. *Inside Out And Back Again* clearly shows the challenges of being a refugee, from the decision to the resettlement, and how they adapt to obstacles.

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<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	<b>4 – 10</b> <b>3 – 9</b> <b>2 – 8</b> <b>1 – 7</b>	4	10
<b>Total:</b>		98 (?)	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of how I connected to “Forgotten Ship,” in my second body paragraph.	Glow: Excellent job. I really enjoyed reading your essay. You fully address and analyze the novel with varied evidence and make important connections to the universal refugee experience.
I struggled with gathering my thoughts about what to use as evidence since there was way too much textual evidence.	Grow: Never a bad thing to be more concise and proofread for repetition, but it’s not a big problem by any means...

### Inside Out & Back Again Essay

Kim Ha is the main protagonist of the novel *Inside Out & Back Again*, which is written by Thanhha Lai. Ha's family has to flee South Vietnam to escape from the Communists and the many dangers of war. Mother takes the risks of fleeing, which eventually makes her and her children become refugees. Thanhha Lai uses her novel to illustrate the challenges and hardships refugees have to face on their journey by describing Ha's experiences in her poems. After finally fleeing to America, or more specifically Alabama, Ha's family tries to find a place to call home once again. Ha and her family's lives were turned "inside out" just like how other refugee's lives would be. *Inside Out & Back Again* is a good reference for how life would be as a refugee.

Ha and her family resided in South Vietnam and it was their home. Mother only decided to leave South Vietnam when she decided that it was no longer safe for her and her children to stay in the country. The war was coming closer to home and in the poem "Early Monsoon," it states "In the distance bombs explode like thunder, slashes lighten the sky, gunfire falls like rain. Distant yet within ears, within eyes. Not that far away after all" (81). In Vietnam, there was too much danger nearby and Mother decides it's better to flee into America for safety purposes. Other than that, Mother thinks that her children should "deserve to grow up where you don't worry about saving half a bite of sweet potato" (79). In America, her children would be able to live more comfortably without needing to worry as much. For Ha's family, fleeing South Vietnam would overall provide a better life.

After making the decision to flee South Vietnam, Ha and her family boarded a navy ship. The challenge that Ha and her family have to face was the journey itself. In the poem "Floating,"

it states “Our ship creeps along the river route without lights without cooking without bathrooms. We are told to sip water only when we must so our bodies can stop needing” (114). On the ship, the living conditions were quite harsh and everything was limited. Life onboard the navy ship was more lacking than Ha’s life was on land. In addition, there was also constant danger. In the poem “One Engine,” it states “If the Communists catch us fleeing, it’s a million times worse than staying at home. It was risky to take the river route. We escaped bombs but missed the rescue ships...it’s impossible to predict how much longer we will be floating” (135-136). Fleeing South Vietnam was risky since the Communists were still around. People on the ship had to be constantly alert for possible danger while waiting for a rescue ship to come.

Eventually, a rescue ship did come and all passengers were sent to waiting camps. The food was not ideal and there was a long wait for a sponsor. After finally securing a sponsor, Ha’s family moved to Alabama. In their Alabama home, "Eggs explode like smears of snot on our front door. Bathroom paper hangs like ghosts from our willow. A brick shatters the front window, landing on our dinner table along with a note" (245). Ha's neighbors were prejudiced against Ha's family as they were quite unwelcoming and did things like throw eggs at their front door. In addition to the discrimination, there was also a language barrier. Ha did not speak English well and she got bullied for it. In school, “MiSSS SScott points to me, then to the letters of the English alphabet. I say A B C and so on. She tells the class to clap” (236). Ha’s classmates and even her teacher make fun of her for knowing little English. Though Ha is an intelligent person, she speaks Vietnamese, not English, and therefore needs to constantly learn and improve her English.

Overall, from the beginning of the novel to the end, we can see that Ha really grew up and wasn’t as childlike and rebellious as she was before. Through her journey, Ha faced many

challenges and hardships that caused her to become more mature. Though you can say that Ha was mature for her age at the beginning of the novel, she still did things like tapping her toe on the floor before her brothers and buying snacks with Mother’s money. These actions prove that Ha is defiant and is still thinking like a child. However, after arriving and living in America, Ha seemed to be more intelligent and gained a better mindset. She has faced many challenges but still got through them and continued to strive. As she matured, you can definitely say that Ha has become an admirable character. *Inside Out & Back Again*, truly shows how refugees like Ha can overall change.

### Essay Rubric

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<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	30	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	30	27
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	18	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10

<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	<b>4 – 10</b> <b>3 – 9</b> <b>2 – 8</b> <b>1 – 7</b>	4	10
<b>Total:</b>		98	97

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of... I think that I used good details and gave a decent explanation for each body paragraph topic.	Glow: Your essay is well organized and addresses the task with support from multiple points in the story.
I struggled with... I should use more vocabulary and have better transitions for each paragraph.	Grow: Explaining your evidence more thoroughly.

*Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai

Ha is living a great life in Saigon until rumor spreads that the Communists are coming to take over the country. Ha's life turns inside out and she has to flee to Alabama as a refugee where it takes a long time for her to adjust to everything there. Thanhha Lai's "Inside Out & Back Again" expresses many ways of which it is difficult to be a refugee. The main character Ha and her family are challenged by a language barrier where they barely understand English. With many struggles along the way, Ha has to find a way to adjust to it.

Ha and her family were forced to leave Saigon because the communists were taking over, planting bombs everywhere and starting a war. In "Early Monsoon", Ha says that "In the distance, bombs explode like thunder, slashes lighten the sky, gunfire falls like rain... Not that far away after all" (48). Everything happening in Saigon started getting extremely dangerous so Ha and her family had no choice but to flee and move to a new country. Unfortunately, fleeing to a country isn't so easy because hundreds and thousands of people are trying to leave at the same time. From a first person perspective, Ha talks about how "Bodies cram every centimeter below deck, then every centimeter on deck... the piles of bodies that keep crawling on like raging ants" (63). Planes were all booked, ships were extremely cramped, and exits were few. Many people offered everything they had to help their family members flee to a safe spot. In the article "Panic Rises in Saigon, but the Exits Are Few", a young American-trained economist asked an American friend to marry his wife and take her to the United States, with an offer of ten thousand dollars. The reason why he offered such a large sum of money was because under South Vietnam's stringent emigration law, about the only legal way for a citizen to go abroad is to be

married to a foreigner. People were panicking left and right wondering if they would even make it out alive.

Along the journey, Ha's family had an extremely low shortage of food and had to treasure every small portion of food that they got. The commander of Ha's ship had to make sure that they had enough food for a long time, not knowing how long it would take for them to find safety. In "Rations", Ha talks about how "Morning, noon, and night we each get one clump of rice, small, medium, large, according to our height, plus one cup of water no matter our size" (77). The low amount of food made Ha constantly hungry, and the lack of water kept many of their bodies dehydrated. This is a common problem that many refugees run into. For example, in the article "Refugees: Who, Where, Why", Catherine Gevert writes about how other countries such as Ethiopia have experienced crop failures and livestock loss causing thousands to flee into neighboring countries in search of food and water.

After a cowboy looking man decides to sponsor Ha's family to Alabama, they realize that they don't know English well at all and since English is the main language in Alabama, she has a hard time communicating with other people and gets made fun of at school. At school, Ha talks about how almost every child makes fun of her for her culture or by her appearance. "They chase me. They yell "Boo-Da, Boo-Da" at me. They pull my arm hair. They call me Pancake Face. They clap at me in class" (215). Everyday, Ha has to go to school and get bullied over and over again. She tries not to say anything about it, but she realizes that nothing is going to change if she doesn't find a way to stop it. Kids at school find a way to threaten her, discriminate her, and make fun of her in any way possible. Unfortunately, many refugees run into the same problem for things that they can't control such as their cultural background or the tone of their skin.

Ha realizes how difficult it is to be a refugee and how hard it is to adapt to a new country

all the way across the globe where their lifestyle is a lot different especially because they speak a completely different language. At the beginning of the story, Ha has a lot of hope for her future especially because of her papaya tree. However, after she moved to Alabama, she lost a lot of hope because it feels like the bullying is never going to stop and she will have to deal with that for the rest of her life.

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<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4	10
<b>Total:</b>		17	100

<b>Student Reflection</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
I am most proud of... My punctuation, spelling, and grammar	Glow: Excellent analysis supported by evidence and thoroughly explained.
I struggled with... Finding good evidence to back up my claims especially from the book. I feel like I definitely could've found better information from the book.	Grow: Always a good idea to proofread for concision.

One Girl Represents the Universal Challenges and Triumphs of Refugees: a Literary Analysis of *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai

As the Vietnam war draws closer to ten year-old Ha's family's home in South Vietnam, the family makes the difficult decision to flee the country, abandoning all things familiar. Boarding an overcrowded ship in the midst of chaos, the family slowly "creeps" toward safety as they face severe hunger, thirst, loss, and grief over the fall of their country. Arriving in a Guam refugee camp, Mother selects America to be their new home, and they transfer to another camp in Florida, awaiting a sponsor. When a sponsor, whom Ha calls "the cowboy", based on her stereotypical perception of Americans, finally selects the family, they move into Alabama, where they face prejudice, language barriers, and social isolation, which they must overcome to successfully establish a new life.

*Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai, illustrates the challenges and hardships of being a refugee through the chronological portrayal of the universal refugee experience: the difficult decision of whether or not to flee to safety, the challenges faced while migrating to a new, safer place, and the adversity that comes with adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language, and rebuilding their lives. Ha's family contemplates the risk of leaving their MIA father forever, the shame of "abandoning their own country and begging towards the unknown where they will begin again at the lowest level of the social scale (79)", and if potential safety is worth leaving everything familiar behind.

Mother decides the answer to the latter question drawing on her experiences in living in North Vietnam, which was overtaken by the same Communists South Vietnam ultimately

succumbs to, and the rationale behind the family fleeing. She tells her children, “at first, not much will happen (45)”, but the Communists will slowly control every aspect of their lives. Brother Quang and Brother Khoi feel horrified by the unpatriotic act of leaving their country, but ultimately board a Navy ship with their family. Refugees globally, from all parts of history, including Ha’s family, experience their lives turning “inside out” when they leave all behind but also come “back again” as they rebuild their shattered lives. Most of all, the title is significant because it represents the fact that “adversity does not build character, it reveals it”; the challenges of having one’s life uprooted reveal the true internal character -- the “inside” -- of a person, much like a pandemic reveals the true colors of all. This cautionary wisdom is applicable not only to Ha’s family’s reactions to losing so much and starting at the lowest social level in a new country, but also to the people they encounter, such as Ha’s peers and the family’s neighbors and sponsors. There is contrast rooted in racism between their two sponsors: the welcoming “cowboy” and his wife, whose “arms, lips, eyes contort into knots (115)” at the sight of people who have endured unimaginable horrors but whom she blindly deems lesser.

Once the family settles into their new home, their neighbors commit hate crimes against them, smashing their windows and leaving notes with racial epithets. Those in a slightly unusual or new situation show less humanity and civility than those who traveled around the world to escape certain death from a violent army occupying their country. Ha, perhaps naively, assumes the best of her bullies, believing they are just “curious” about someone different than them as opposed to targeting her for her identity. Mother tells Ha there are times she must fight, but “preferably not with (her) fists” (216). Brother Vu gives martial arts lessons on the family’s front lawn to the very people that, racially motivated, bullied him and his sister relentlessly. With positive character, Ha’s family rebuilds their lives, shaken but persistent in the face of adversity.

Universally, refugees make the agonizing decision to leave their homes behind due to safety threats such as persecution, natural disasters, and war. This decision is also the first challenge as a result of being a refugee, though those who chose to flee face other challenges already that influence their decision. Ha's family is no exception and they flee South Vietnam as the North Vietnamese Communists draw closer to their home of the city of Saigon, indicated by persistent bombings. Consequently, South Vietnamese President Thieu resigns, food prices rise, Ha's school closes, and fear and uncertainty pervade Saigon. They fear the outcome of the war is forgone and the Communists will soon occupy their country and retaliate against their enemies. The decision to flee is painful and difficult and brings shame to Ha's brothers, who feel disingenuous learning English on the ship and later, assimilating to a new culture. Mother is ambivalent about abandoning everything familiar, telling her Brother-in-Law who yearns to leave in pursuit of safety, "I will not risk fleeing with my children on a rickety boat" (42). She is uncertain leaving is any safer than staying, acknowledging, "If the Communists catch us fleeing, it's a million times worse than staying at home" (87). However, Mother is ultimately swayed by her devotion to her children's safety. As she contemplates, her daughter Ha expresses an unnatural pride for "saving half a bite of sweet potato (47)" so that the family's food supply will last longer. "I help Mother peel sweet potatoes to stretch the rice. I start to chop off a potato's end as wide as a thumbnail, then decide to slice only a sliver. I am proud of my ability to save until I see tears in Mother's deep eyes" (47). This is where Mother makes her final decision, though it is not explicitly stated. The following poem, "Early Monsoon", validates Mother's determination, when we learn that bombs "not that far away...fall like rain (48)," providing harrowing evidence of the jeopardization of the family's safety.

The abnormality of their lives makes leaving tempting, but the family had always hoped

things in Saigon itself would improve, rather than them having to flee to an unknown destination with little to no possibility of returning. In the poem “Inside Out,” Ha reveals that she hopes “soldiers will no longer patrol our neighborhoods, I can jump rope after dark, maybe the whistles that tell Mother to push us under the bed will stop screeching (4)”, reflecting on the burdensome precautions they must take as a result of bombings, which is also what leads to her school’s closure. The poem’s title, which protagonist Ha also clarifies *she writes* to express her outlook, is significant due to the fact that it demonstrates the Vietnamese conflict has turned the family’s lives “inside out” even before they flee. In the weeks culminating in Mother’s decision to flee with her children, the family faces overt poverty. “People barely have money for food anymore (15),” Mother regretfully informs her only daughter Ha because “the war is coming closer to home” (4). Mother works tirelessly so the family has multiple sources of income, yet the family still doesn’t have money for adequate food: “*On weekdays*, Mother’s a secretary in a navy office, *at night*, she stays up late designing and cutting...*on weekends*, [we go] to the market stalls, trying to collect on last week’s goods.” (14 emphasis added). The family is forced to ration eggs and stretch every dong since “the price of eggs [is] the price of rice, and the price of rice [is] the price of gasoline, and the price of gasoline [is] the price of gold.” (17). The war has decimated South Vietnam’s economy as well as the ability to make a living; it is not merely Ha’s family that doesn’t have “enough (rice) to last until payday.” (37). The broader national struggle caused by the devastating Vietnam war is responsible for plunging the everyday family into poverty. Ha even reveals the family has “*become poor* (11)”, their bleak economic status intensified increasingly by the ongoing conflict. It’s essential to distinguish that the family flees not due to their own poor luck or individual situation, but as a result of a seemingly endless conflict many of Ha’s friends and neighbors are similarly desperate to flee: “Ong Xuan has sold twelve leaves

of gold to buy twelve airplane tickets. Ba Nam has a van ready to load twenty-five relatives towards the coast” (44). These stories of anguish and desperation, and the fact that people are willing to give up their valuables and familiar lives may also influence Mother’s ultimate and very difficult decision.

Another challenge is the shame and disgust with their “lack” of patriotism deuteragonists such as Brothers Quang and Khoi experience as they “scramble away like rats, without honor, without dignity, when everyone must help rebuild the country” (44). The divergent response to Mother’s decision, rooted in fervent patriotism, is not unwarranted; feeling tumultuous abandoning everything familiar is characteristic of the universal refugee experience. Mother knows the risks of leaving everything behind and likely feels similarly to her sons, but her devotion to her family outweighs her still strong devotion to her country.

Perilous journeys are not an aberration within the universal refugee experience. Ha and her family continue to face severe thirst, hunger, and grief on their very crowded and miserable journey aboard a ship first to Guam, then to Florida, and then finally an airplane to Alabama. The fall of their country enrages and dispirits all aboard the ship, with some threatening suicide because of their extreme devotion and patriotism. Ha reflects that the ship is squalid, with “hordes (65)” of people living “crammed every *centimeter* below deck, then every *centimeter* on deck” (63). Thousands have “stormed the port (50)” to board ships to unknown safe destinations, leading to an environment of “putrid, hot air made from fermented bodies and oily sweat” (83). Overcrowding also leads to severe food rationing due to chronic shortages as well as the fact that even the captain of the ship doesn’t know how long they will have to travel to seek safety and evade bombs. Even as the ship “creeps” (67) along the ocean away from Saigon, bombs haunt them and passengers fear they are being pursued by Communists, leading to chaos and panic.

“We escaped bombs but missed the rescue ships. The commander decides the ration is now half a clump of rice only at morning and night, and one cup of water all day. *Sip*, he says, *and don't waste strength moving around because it's impossible to predict how much longer we'll be floating*” (88). The journey becomes incessant and uncomfortable, the passengers' plight amplified by their uncertainty. Ha expresses that she is “dying of thirst (73)” and yearns for her old life, the thought of which torments her because it is something inaccessible and of the past. All refugees experience separation trauma when they leave behind everything established and familiar, save their families and a few belongings. Everything habitual in their lives is uprooted, and Ha faces this trauma perhaps even more intensely compared to characters such as her Mother, who has *already* experienced moving and loss in her life.

The journey to Guam is also particularly intense and painful for Ha, who feels “like a baby” (80) while “stranded on a ship” (81) because of Mother's concern for her safety. Ha loses her sense of time during the journey to their initial destination of a makeshift refugee camp in Guam, her misery escalated by her hunger and overall anxiety and uncertainty regarding the future. After arriving in “another tent city” (107) in Florida because Mother has chosen America to be their new home country, a life-altering decision Mother was forced to make in a matter of hours, the family struggles for weeks to find a sponsor that will accept “too huge a family by American standards” (107). In the weeks the family awaits a sponsor, their lives revolve around the possibility of this “saint” coming to save them because they cannot leave the refugee camp and enter America without one. “We wait and wait...Newcomers leave before us. Mother can barely eat...Then by chance Mother learns sponsors prefer those whose applications say “Christians”. Just like that Mother amends our faith” (108). This initiates a trend of survival-driven false assimilation, where the family is compelled to maintain their “act” of

Christianity by being baptized into their sponsor's church, leading to much-desired further communal acceptance. However, being baptized, like learning English and living anywhere but Saigon, feels disingenuous and Mother resumes praying like a traditional Buddhist immediately following the ceremony. Acceptance must be cultivated by the newcomers as opposed to naturally occurring. Miroslav Volf's reflections on cultural assimilation, "You can survive, even thrive, among us, if you become like us", are applicable to Mother's painful decision to *publicly* reject her beliefs, as well as the likewise painful decisions millions of refugees are forced to make globally to pursue success in new, exclusionary societies.

In Alabama, when the family finally "escapes hunger (93)", Ha faces social isolation, hate crimes, bullying, and a language barrier. Before moving into a modest home of their own, Ha's family "sits and sleeps in the lowest level of our cowboy's house, where we never see the wife ...The wife insists we keep out of her neighbor's eyes" (116). While this detail might be perceived as minor, the fact that the family resides in the "lowest level" with the cowboy's wife's intent that they will not then be seen metaphorically indicates the way many other Americans view and treat the family of refugees. Ha feels the harmful effects of prejudice due to her ethnicity and immigrant status in the months she first settles in Alabama.

English torments Ha but she knows she "must learn" (95) the language of her new home in order to succeed, *and* in order to express herself in a way both the friends and bullies she encounters will understand. She experiences pressure to immediately adapt and penetrate the language barrier, with her mother informing her that learning English takes precedence "above all" (116). She develops an enigmatic relationship with the task of learning the language: "I throw the dictionary down and ask Brother Quang", who already speaks English fluently, "I can't read a baby book. Who will believe I was reading Nhat Linh? But then, who here knows who he

is?” (129-130). Ha’s academic progress in Saigon is meaningless in America, and she feels like a cultural outlier with no chance of adapting. Her past hard work is invalidated by a new, unfamiliar, unwelcoming, and unaccepting culture. Ha wishes she “knew enough English to tell her to listen for the diacritical mark (140)” when her teacher, Miss Scott, mispronounces her name. Ha feels limited and trapped in a fishbowl due to the language barrier that prevents her from being able to communicate and express herself. Her vulnerabilities and inability to defend herself from bullies who taunt her are on full display if she makes a small grammatical error that acts, “as little microphones to tell the world whose English is still secondhand” (166). The sole accepting and kind neighbor of Ha’s family, Miss Washington, plays a significant positive role in Ha’s adjustment to Alabaman life and her English learning journey by tutoring her, and in Ha’s process of coming “back again” by successfully establishing a new American life. Miss Washington is frequently one of the only positive and present figures in Ha’s life, helping her to emotionally overcome social barriers particularly at school, which becomes a negative beacon of fear to Ha due to bullies.

Ha is a target of bullying solely because she is different from her peers, and becomes a punching bag for antagonists such as her classmate the “Pink Boy” due to her perceived vulnerability: “He pokes my cheek. Howls from everyone. He pokes my chest. I see nothing but squeezed eyes, twisted mouths (146) ...They pulled my arm hair. They threw rocks at me. They promised to stomp on my chest (151)...The pink boy and two loud friends follow me home...Not that I care to understand what Pink Boy says [when he shouts at Ha], but I have to if I’m to laugh back at him one day (147-148)”, when she “masters” English. Ha faces sadistic bullying she never contended with in Saigon because she experienced validating social acceptance and her identity offered no source for targeting. This changes in Alabama, where Ha is “the only straight

black hair on olive skin (142)”, and, “a ten year old in the fourth grade, when everyone else is nine.” (137). Ha is also subjected to humiliation by her teacher, Miss Scott, who knows she can’t defend herself in English and dismisses her intelligence because she can’t communicate in the same language, patronizes her, and instructs her peers to clap for Ha when she completes a simple task. Ha spends her lunches in hiding like Cady Heron, the blueprint of the “social outcast”, in school hallways and bathrooms, out of *fear* of peers *younger* than her. Why does the refugee so frequently assume this social role? Ha initially feels obligated to act as the “bigger person”, perhaps fearing acting or speaking out of turn because, like Mother suggests when she informs Brother Quang immigrants are limited to less Freedom of Speech: “Those living on other’s goodwill can’t afford political opinions (125). She is in a more fragile or delicate political and social position in exchange for asylum from the horrors of war. She internalizes these experiences and the negative and degrading message she comprehends clearly even if she can’t understand her bully’s every word, leading to a decline in Ha’s self-esteem, believing she is truly “dumb”, and even assuming responsibility and harboring guilt for every negative event in her life due to the fact that *she* once bullied others when she experienced a different social dynamic in her native Saigon. Brother Vu experiences the same bullying on the basis of race and identity, and realizes, like many immigrants, that America, or any new homeland, falls short of his expectations of “the ground where Bruce Lee walked” (45). Brother Vu was the most certain of leaving Saigon behind yet faces the same challenges as his siblings and other refugees.

Unfortunately, social torment experienced by the family is not limited to school and their *neighbors* become perpetrators: “Eggs explode like smears of snot on our front door...Bathroom paper hangs like ghosts from her window...A brick shatters the front window, landing on our dinner table along with a note (that) Brother Quang refuses to translate. Our cowboy calls the

police, who tell us to stay inside” (162-163). The prejudice that terrorizes Ha at school culminates in legitimate hate crimes from which negligent authorities fail to adequately protect the family because they do not even remotely make an effort to do so. Reacting to the sight of Ha’s family, “a bald man closes his door. Next to him a woman slams hers...shouts reach us behind a door unopened. Redness crawls across my brother’s faces” (164). In relieving contrast, Mrs. Washington “throws up her arms and hugs” the family, offering them help adjusting to Alabama. Ha reveals she is “*startled*” (164) by her kindness, a feeling not reserved to the situation, but whenever she encounters another American. Ha comes to *expect* the prejudice of others: When “two students run into class”, Ha “firms (her) muscles, ready for the giggles to explode into laughter” (184). She anticipates the hostility of strangers due to the fact that many of her experiences with American peers *have* been negative and degrading. Instead, these two students, Pem and Steven, offer her the most positive experience Ha has yet shared with a classmate and add to the short list of generous people, including Miss Washington, who help Ha establish a successful and happy life in her new home, something she still determines to accomplish in spite of the challenges she faces.

Ha ultimately defends herself from those who do torment her, violating her Mother’s guidance that she rather not fight with her “fists.” However, her greatest defense is being impervious to the judgement of immature and ignorant classmates; Ha realizes her own indifference is contagious when she comically and unintentionally wears a nightgown to school, gets mocked for her sartorial selection, and chooses to disregard their criticism. This marks a departure from Ha’s original nerves and mentality when interacting with her classmates; the mere thought of school once made “made dragonflies do somersaults in (Ha’s) stomach” (181). Throughout *Inside Out and Back Again*, Ha matures socially and emotionally, and the family

makes peace with the events of the war, importantly accepting the death of Ha's father, whose absence had tormented them for so long, allowing their hopes to linger and consider possibilities of his survival. This liberation from this burden proves healthy for the family, allowing them to move on following nearly a decade of hopefully pondering an alternative fate to his inevitable death in the Vietnamese War.

Significantly, the Teller of Fate informs the family in the poem "Inside Out", that the family's lives will indeed twist inside out. This prophecy comes true as foretold. However, the Teller of Fate fails to include any details about the reestablishment of their lives, demonstrating the lack of optimism and overall bleak attitude Ha and her family held about their new lives. They could not foresee the positive experiences, including kind people and unique opportunities for the future, that came with ultimately stabilizing once again and beginning their lives where, "they don't have to worry about saving half a bite of sweet potato." (47) Moreover, Ha serves as a representative of refugees from all corners of the Earth and throughout all time periods. She personally chronicles the challenges of making the decision to flee, the journey to a new home, and the reestablishment of an interrupted life. Ha's intimate and nuanced recollection puts humanity behind the statistics provided by the UN and human rights organizations.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	30	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	30	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	30	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Total:</b>		100	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of... the way I introduced and integrated quotes and evidence; tone; evidence selection	Glow: Undoubtedly one of the best student essays I've ever received. Your analysis, insights, word choice, and complex demonstration of the key issues raised by the text is next-level. Bravo!
I struggled with... connecting all of my ideas; maintaining a chronological text structure	Grow: The one thing I did was break up large chunks of text into smaller paragraphs that are nonetheless related to each other. This breaks up the text for the viewer to make it easier to read.

### Ha's Life As a Refugee

In the novel, *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai describes a little Vietnamese girl named Ha, and how the Vietnamese War had affected her life. Lai writes for the first part of the book what it was actually like in Vietnam when the war was just beginning, and later progresses onto what happens when Ha and her family leaves the war ridden country for America. The novel illustrates the challenges and hardships of being a refugee, and although the character, Ha, is a little girl and could mean that whatever was written was nothing like adult life, the things Lai included into Ha's life applies and illustrates the universal hardships every refugee might have to face.

When Ha and her family decided to leave Vietnam, the country had already started to crumble. The prices of food started to skyrocket, making it harder and harder for families to purchase their necessities in order to survive. From the poem, "Quiet Decision," Mother states, "you deserve to grow up where you don't worry about saving half a bite of sweet potato." As Ha's family was far from wealthy, the increased prices of food had not helped their situation and had even resorted to rationing out their food in order to survive another day. Refugees had a variety of reasons to leave a place to escape to a new life, one of which was due to the country unable to support them anymore; just as Vietnam cannot protect its citizens and provide essentials for all. Furthermore, Mother was also thinking about their future and what would happen if the communists did manage to take over Vietnam. In the poem, "Should We?" Mother states, "I've lived in the North. At first, not much will happen, then suddenly Quang will be asked to leave college. Ha will come home chanting the slogans of Ho Chi Minh, and Khoi will be rewarded for reporting to his teacher everything we say in the house," as the family was

considering and weighing out the pros and cons of leaving their home country. The brothers argue that they shouldn't leave Vietnam, like rats scrambling away from their honor, and should wait because there was always a chance of their father returning home, just to see that his family has left him. However, when mother brings up the possibilities of what the communists would have them do if/when they rule over them, the children quieten down. This is an example of how refugees sometimes had to leave due to persecutions of political thoughts. From Ha's side of the country, the South, it is a democratic government, whereas the North was a communist regime, which separates them with having two different political views on things. Thus, from what Mother has said, they would most likely try to suppress them from their own religion (being replaced with Ho Chi Minh) and even whatever political thing they said in the house, bringing her to finally make the decision of leaving.

Although they have finished deciding upon whether to stay or leave, Ha and her family then had to survive the actual trip out of their war torn country, to which they faced many hardships along the way. When the refugees first arrived onto the ship, they had to get it out of the dock as soon as possible in order for the communists to not spot them, leaving many cramped or stranded back on the dock. For a few days, the passengers had their own food and could live off themselves for quite a while until food started to slowly run out. As they eased out of the dangered area, food was rationed out and everyone fell into a routine. Unfortunately, the time of peace was interrupted by bombs being set off. In the poem, "One Engine," it states, "the commander says, *Thailand is much farther on one engine. It was risky to take the river route. We escaped bombs but missed the rescue ships.* The commander decides the ration is now half a clump of rice only at morning and night, and one cup of water all day." Although the passengers were safe from any danger, the captain had missed the rescue ships that were waiting for them

with new supplies, and therefore they had to starve and ration for a little longer. This is a similar depiction of what refugees have to go through while trying to safely leave their home country. The only difference is that instead of ships, people usually go through this scenario in the actual refugee camps. Based on the article, "Who, Where, Why," by Catherine Gevert, she states, "refugees share small huts that are made of tree branches, mud, and plastic sheeting. Food and water are provided, but they are rationed. A hospital and several clinics provide health care, but these are overburdened with many patients; most refugees are sick and malnourished when they arrive. Schooling is provided for children, but classes are very overcrowded. Refugee camps are not meant to be permanent shelters, but they do provide asylum and protection, and take care of the basic needs of refugees." Much like Ha's experience, other refugees too had badly rationed food, cramped areas, and minimal schooling, connecting Ha's circumstance with the entirety of what the usual refugee life is depicted as.

Moreover, when mother chose to go to America as their new home, they had to wait what seems to be forever to finally get a sponsor to get them into a state. In the poem, "Another Tent City," it states, "newcomers leave before us. Mother can barely eat, while Brother Quang picks the skin at his elbows... Then by chance Mother learns sponsors prefer those whose applications say 'Christians.' Just like that Mother amends our faith, saying all beliefs are pretty much the same." As refugees someone must go to the camp and sponsor them in order for them to leave, which is why Ha's family was so worried, even going as far as changing their own religion, basically the only thing tying them to Vietnam, just to earn a sponsor. Refugees around the world had been persecuted due to their religion, either being kicked out of their country or even just straight up killing them then and there, which the similarities show in Ha's experience; changing their religion in order to fit in, or else they won't be able to survive.

When Ha and her family finally get to Alabama, in courtesy of 'their cowboy' (sponsor), the problems start to pile up there as well. As a few refugees that had just arrived in a new country, it was obvious that they had to start from the bottom and get used to the environment. In the three poems, "American Chicken," "Out The Too-High Window," and "American Address," Ha states, "we are used to fresh-killed chicken that roamed the yard snacking on grains and worms... cement landes where no one walks.. Not a noise... the lotus-pot shower... what I don't love are the pink sofas, green chairs, plastic cover on the table, stained mattresses, old clothes, and unmatched dishes." Ha and her family are still adjusting to the new country, which goes for their food and overall surroundings. As different as this country was, Ha notes that Alabama is lonely and she doesn't like the furniture in the house, but she does enjoy some parts of it, like the shower and gas stove. Much like the other refugees, Ha and her family had to restart their lives in a completely different country with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and whatever else they've brought with them.

Additionally, there was an obvious language barrier between Ha's family and basically everyone else in the country, which leads to them being discriminated against. In the poems, "Second Rule" and "Third Rule," Ha states, "I practice squeezing hisses through my teeth... I am getting better at hissing, no longer spitting on my forearms... whoever invented English should be bitten by a snake." Ha begins to learn English, only to realize that it was much harder than she originally thought. She tries her best but the language has proven to be difficult, especially only learning it from her sibling and not from an actual school. The worst of it was that they were the only ones out of place in the whole neighborhood, which leads the people around them to start noticing and viewing Ha's family as different. According to the poem, "Neighbors," it states, "eggs explode like smears of snot on our front door...Bathroom paper

hangs like ghosts from our willow... A brick shatters the front window, landing on our dinner table along with a note. Brother Quang refuses to translate.” Kids started harassing Ha and her family, as they were the only family sticking out like a sore thumb compared to the others. The neighbors of Ha’s family slammed doors in their faces when they tried to introduce themselves, a clear message that they would not welcome immigrants. Relating this situation to other refugees, while they’re trying to find a new home to settle in, the citizens around them won’t accept them socially as one of their own. Therefore, restarting a life in a completely different area has proven to be hard and tiring.

The major change that I see in Ha is that she’s finally trying to make Alabama feel more like home. She even confessed to Mother all the things that she’s done wrong to get the weight off her shoulders. Ha now is learning English even more, making friends, and stopped getting bullied because of Brother Vu. Even her conscience is now free from the fact that she knows that her father isn’t going to come home, releasing her family from the days of yearning, wondering if he was even alive. Ha had grown up from the hardships of being alive during a war, and her experience is depicted in many of the other refugees around the world.

### Essay Rubric

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<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	4	30

<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	3	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	3	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4	10
<b>Total:</b>		18	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of... With my connection with the article “Who, Where, Why.”	Glow: Excellent analysis, varied use of evidence and details, written in an engaging voice that makes connections between Ha’s experience and other refugees.
I struggled with... Explaining things fully and to the point.	Grow: Perhaps one challenge may be focusing and tightening the paragraphs.

*Inside Out and Back Again*

In the novel, "Inside Out and Back Again," by Thanhha Lai, Ha and her family fled after Communists took over and Saigon fell. The conditions they were put through as they fled were quite harsh; limited space, supplies and not knowing what's happening around them. This affected the family negatively as they then had difficulty finding a sponsor and after moving to Alabama, dealt with racism and hatred. The novel illustrates the challenges and hardships of being a refugee using Ha's family as an example when they fled Saigon.

Ha and her family had a rough debate over fleeing and ended up leaving. Upon analysis of the poem, "The President Resigns," the president announced, "I can no longer be your president but I will never leave my people or our country." Here, the president is resigning which only causes more chaos. This is due to the fact that the president is suddenly quitting as the war is getting closer. Who will take control of the country and make the decisions? Additionally, in the poem, "Choice," Ha and her family are forced to only take one belonging. This was a hassle considering the fact that they had to leave all their belongings behind. Ha ends up taking her doll which represents strength although Brother Vu cuts down the papaya tree. This was the same as saying there's no more hope left for, "black seeds spill like clusters of eyes wet and crying." Black seeds spilled away just like how hope is spilling away. Hoping that everything will return to normal is spilling away and the best choice might just be to flee.

Ha and her family faced hardships on their journey to Alabama. According to the poem, "One Mat Each," it states, "Bodies cram every centimeter below deck, then every centimeter on deck." This displays that there was barely any room on the ship and many families had to cram

together in order for them all to fit. Imagine how uncomfortable they must have felt not being able to move around without interfering with another person. Moreover, they had trouble finding a sponsor. In, "Another Tent City," "Mother says a possible widow, three boys, and a pouty girl make too huge a family by American standards." Not only that, sponsors preferred those that are Christians. This just shows how much pressure looking for a sponsor caused. Sponsors had high expectations causing those who are desperate for a home to change their religion or fake information.

Ha faced various disputes while in Alabama. Like many other refugees, Ha and her family are looked at as outcasts and aren't treated the same due to their race and looks. As stated in, "More is Not Better," Ha claims, "I now understand when they make fun of my name, yelling ha-ha-ha down the hall when they ask if I eat dog meat, barking and chewing and falling down laughing when they wonder if I lived in the jungle with tigers, growling and stalking on all fours." This exhibits the fact that Ha isn't appreciated for who she really is. They are often making fun of her because of her lifestyle and religion. Likewise, in, "Someone Knows," Ha admits, "I eat candy in toilet," to Miss Washington. This proves that Ha is constantly being bullied forcing her to eat lunch in the bathroom. This also shows that she fears her classmates and having to interact with them knowing that they'll only make fun of her. She can't trust anyone except for Miss Washington who is like another mother to Ha.

In summary, refugees face consequences while and after fleeing. Refugees are referred to as outcasts and aren't welcomed. In less than a year, Ha went from bullying her classmate that sat next to her cry to being the one that her classmates bully. Moreover, according to the article, "Refugees: Who, Where, Why," it states, "The number one reason is war. Perceptions of unfairness, such as unequal treatment or denial of rights based on race, religion, economic status,

or political thought...” I believe that this relates to Ha and her family due to the fact that they fled due to war and disagreement towards the idea of communism.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	3-27	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	3-27	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	4-20	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	3-9	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4-10	10
<b>Total:</b>		93	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of... The conclusion that I typed due to the fact that I used an article to make connections	Glow: Your essay fully analyzes the prompt using multiple pieces of evidence from both the book and the articles we read.
I struggled with... Organization and incorporating different details from the novel	Grow: You could challenge yourself to use more sophisticated vocabulary?

### **Ha's Journey**

In the novel *Inside Out & Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai, a girl named Ha lives with her mother and her three brothers in the war-torn city of Saigon, South Vietnam. After much consideration, they decide that they have to leave their home and escape to a new country in order to get away from the war. Eventually, Ha and her family make it to America, where they have to adjust to the new culture, their new lives, and their racist community. The novel, *Inside Out & Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai, illustrates how refugees face many different obstacles when trying to leave their country, such as the problems in their home they're trying to get away from, the struggle of getting to a new country, and how they are treated when they finally get there.

Ha and her family leave Vietnam due to the war that is being fought in Vietnam. The Communists in North Vietnam are trying to take over South Vietnam, and they are getting closer to Saigon, which is where Ha lives. Mother does not want to lose her family to this war, and she also knows that even if they survive, their lives would be a living hell if they were to live under the Communist rule. While the family debates whether to leave or not in the poem, "Should We", Mother states "I've lived in the North... Quang will be asked to leave college. Ha will come home chanting the slogans of Ho Chi Minh, and Khoi will be rewarded for reporting to his teacher everything we say in the house" (75). Mother does not want her family to have their individuality stripped of them and become Communist spies, which is a likely outcome if they were to stay in Saigon. In addition, the war has reduced the majority of Saigon to poverty, including Ha and her family, due to the massive inflation that has taken place in the country. For example, in the poem, "Quiet Decision", when Ha is about to cut a wide piece of sweet potato

along with its end, she reminds herself to cut only a sliver off, since food costs so much more than it used to. Mother sees this and begins to cry, saying “you deserve to grow up where you don’t worry about saving half a bite of a sweet potato” (79). Clearly, Mother feels that her children deserve more prosperous lives than the one they have now, and that means fleeing their home.

On the journey to Alabama, Ha and her family face many different struggles, both on their ship, and even after they make it to land. While they travel on the ship, the family is forced to share the small deck with hundreds of other families all crammed together. In the poem, “One Mat Each”, Ha observes, “Everyone knows the ship could sink, unable to hold the piles of bodies that keep crawling on like raging ants from a disrupted nest” (101). The desperation that has taken hold of these citizens has caused them to overlook the fact that there is just too much of them on one small ship, creating a potential risk for the entire ship. Eventually, this resulted in a limited amount of food that has to be rationed, causing the already panic-ridden passengers to be restless and starving. In the poem “One Engine”, Ha states “The commander decides the ration is now half a clump of rice only at morning and night, and one cup of water all day” (136). This shows how even after leaving Saigon, Ha and her family can’t escape the lack of food and resources. They are still not out of the woods yet, since they need to survive on even less food than they had back home.

In Alabama, Ha has to overcome many different challenges as her whole world is completely changed. When she first comes to her sponsor’s home, she immediately has to deal with racism and violence from her neighbors, and even her classmates at school. In the poem, “Neighbors”, Ha’s neighbors disrespect her family by throwing eggs and bricks at their house. When Mother decides they should go out and meet the neighbors, Ha describes, “In the house to

our right a bald man closes his door. Next to him a woman with yellow hair slams hers” (246). These people are so inconceivably angry they pollute Ha’s house with eggs, yet they still have the audacity to slam their doors in their faces. In the poem, “Loud Outside”, Ha is at recess in her new school and she is physically assaulted by one of her peers. “He pokes my cheek. Howls from everyone. He pokes my chest. I see nothing but squeezed eyes, twisted mouths” (221). Her classmates are revelling in her dismay just because she is different from them, and the worst part of it all is that she has to be the bigger person and just walk away from these aggressors. Moreover, Ha struggles to learn english and can’t adapt to the American culture, making her frustrated and insecure. In the poem, “Wishes”, Ha wishes that she could “be invisible until [she] can talk back” (239), and that “English could be learned without so many rules” (239). Clearly, Ha just wants to be able to understand and talk back to the people bullying her, and show that she isn’t something to be poked at and ridiculed.

All throughout the novel, *Inside Out & Back Again*, Ha changes and grows as a person. In the beginning she is somewhat childish and selfish. This is shown in the poem “Birthday Wishes”, where Ha wishes for longer hair and less chubby cheeks, as well as that Father would one day show up in her classroom in his navy outfit, and impress all of her classmates. At this point, Ha wants her father back so that she will be seen as cool and impressive by her peers, which is a little selfish, but ultimately what a child would most likely want. However, after they leave Saigon and travel all the way to Alabama, Ha is the one to finally ask the question “what if father is really gone?” after they have all been holding out hope for so long. Ha has realized that it isn’t worth pretending to not realize what they all know is true, and at this point it is just important to honor Father and let him go. Clearly, Ha has grown up during this experience, and it shows.

### **Essay Rubric**

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	4	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	4	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	3	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	4	10
<b>Total:</b>		98	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of how I was able to find relevant information and explain how it supported my claims.	Glow: Excellent use of text evidence to support your claims and analysis of Ha's character as it relates to the universal refugee experience.
I struggled with starting my paragraphs with a clear topic sentence, as well as writing the conclusion.	Grow: Always a good idea to proofread to be more concise.

March 2021

*Inside Out & Back Again* Essay

The novel *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai follows Ha, a normal 10 year old girl living in abnormal circumstances, and her family in war-torn Vietnam. After some time, Ha's family makes the hard decision to flee their country on a small boat. The boat ride wasn't easygoing, but they managed through it to find a better life in Alabama. This novel succeeds in conveying the idea of refugees struggling on their journeys. Back in their country, Ha and her family risked getting caught while attempting to flee, and when they finally escaped their country, they faced prejudice and discrimination.

Ha and her family made the tough decision to leave Vietnam for good reasons. Ha's mother knows what it would be like to continue their lives in North Vietnam, and doesn't want her kids to go through that. In the poem, "Should We?", Mother says, "...suddenly Quang will be asked to leave college. Hà will come home chanting the slogans of Ho Chí Minh, and Khôi will be rewarded for reporting to his teacher everything we say in the house." However, they can't stay in Saigon. In the poem "Early Monsoon," Ha writes, "Distant yet within ears, within eyes. Not that far away after all," referring to bombs and gunfire. The communists are getting closer to Ha's home, and it's not safe for them to stay in Saigon. Therefore, Ha's family decides to flee Vietnam, which proves itself to be a good choice when the communists take over Saigon.

Ha and her family faced many undergoing hardships on their journey to Alabama. At most times, everyone on board the boat, including Ha and her family, had little to no food and water. In the poem, "Rations," Ha writes, "Morning, noon, and night we each get one clump of rice, small, medium, large, according to our height, plus one cup of water no matter our size." In

addition, Ha's family was constantly waiting. They had to wait on the boat, wondering when they would get rescued. They had to wait in tent cities for someone to sponsor them to America. In the poem, "Another Tent City," Ha writes, "We wait and wait, but Mother says a possible widow, three boys, and a pouty girl make too huge a family by American standards." Ha's mother changes Ha's family's religion to christianity in order to get sponsored.

In Alabama, Ha faces many challenges and prejudice. While in her new home, Ha struggles to learn English. In the poem, "Fourth Rule," Ha says, "Would be simpler if English and life were logical." This shows that Ha doesn't really understand English and thinks it is too complicated. Also, Ha has a tough time at school. Ha gets bullied at school, feels like she doesn't fit in, and she feels she isn't smart enough. At school, Pink Boy follows Ha home making fun of her because she is different. Ha had already known how different she was when she first arrived. When describing how her classmates look in the poem, "Rainbow," she writes, "I'm the only straight black hair on olive skin." Moreover, in the poem, "Feel Dumb," Ha writes, "I count up to twenty. The class claps on its own. I'm furious, unable to explain I already learned fractions and how to purify river water. So this is what dumb feels like. I hate, hate, hate it." Ha dislikes the way the rest of her class is making a big deal out of the small knowledge Ha has shown.

Ha changes throughout the book. When she was in Saigon, she wished for what any 10 year old girl would wish for, a sister, longer hair, etc. However, towards the end of the story Ha has more serious wishes. She wishes for Father to find warmth in his new home, Mother to keep smiling, and for Brother Quang to enjoy his studies. Ha matures as the book goes on. Throughout all of these challenges and hardships, Ha and her family always reacted and got through them together.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	29	27
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	29	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	20	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Total:</b>		98	97

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of...  My evidence supporting my ideas.	Glow: Great job addressing all parts of the task and citing evidence to support your analysis.
I struggled with...  The conclusion of my essay.	Grow: I really liked your conclusion about Ha changing from one Wishes to another... maybe that could be expanded upon? Also, you can show your thinking more in your explanations of evidence.

*Inside Out and Back Again Analysis*

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a refugee as “a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.” What the dictionary neglected to include is the fact that refugees are ordinary people who show unfaltering resilience and courage. The novel *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai, illustrates the challenges Ha and her family face when they live in a country riddled with war in the perspective of a 10 year-old girl living with her three brothers and mother in Saigon, Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The family’s life turns inside out, like the nearly 80 million refugees around the world, when Mother decides to flee Vietnam with her children to escape the effects of the Vietnam War and face the challenges that come with being foreigners in an unknown country.

Usually, when a person becomes a refugee, their native country is most likely dangerous. In Ha and her family’s case, they fled Vietnam, their home country, to escape the effects of the Vietnam War. In the poem, “Early Monsoon,” Ha writes, “In the distance, bombs explode like thunder, slashes lighten the sky, gunfire falls like rain, distant yet within ears, within eyes. (81)” This is a possible factor on why Ha’s mother chooses to escape Vietnam due to the fact that the bombs and gunfire can be heard and seen from Ha’s home. Another motive on why Mother chooses to flee Vietnam” is that prices of ordinary objects, such as various foods and gasoline, have risen to an exorbitant amount. According to the poem “Eggs,” Mother says, “. . . if the price of eggs were not the price of rice, and the price of rice were not the price of gasoline, and the price gasoline were not the price of gold, then of course Brother Khôi could continue hatching eggs.(36)” Another example of how prices are rising in Saigon could be found in the poem “Feel Smart,” where Ha states, “Now it takes two hundred dong to buy the same things [pork, spinach,

and tofu]. I still buy less pork, allowing myself just the fried dough.(41)” This statement supports the fact on why Mother chooses to leave Vietnam with her family due to the fact that before the war, Ha could have bought a little less pork, spinach, and tofu and the saved money could have bought a pouch of toasted coconut, a sugary fried dough, and two mung bean cookies. However, during the war, Ha still buys less pork, spinach, and tofu, but the saved money only bought one fried dough. The fact that bombs and gunfire could be heard from Ha’s home and that prices for ordinary objects are rising to an extortionate amount encourage Mother to leave Vietnam with her children.

Ha and her family escape Vietnam on a ship, and must face unfavorable conditions on the ship, such getting used to a new life. One example of Ha getting used to a new life is in the poem “Once Knew,” which states, “Water, water, water. Everywhere making me think land is just something I once knew, Like napping on a hammock, bathing without salt, watching Mother write, laughing for no reason, kicking up powdery dirt and wearing clean nightclothes smelling of the sun.(127)” This is an example of Ha getting used to her life at sea, due to the fact that now she cannot nap on a hammock, bathe without salt, watch Mother write, laugh for no reason, kick up powdery dirt, or wear clean nightclothes smelling of the sun. The ship then lands in Guam, where Ha and her family stay for a while, and are then flown to Florida, where Ha and her family must gain a sponsor in order to leave Florida. However, most sponsors prefer families whose religion is Christian. Then, according to the poem, “Another Tent City,” ”Mother amends our faith, saying all beliefs are pretty much the same.(164)” Therefore, Mother changes her family’s religion on the form in order for her family to gain a sponsor.

Ha’s family gets sponsored by a man Ha calls the “cowboy” and then is flown to Alabama. Mother is going to work at a sewing factory, Brother Quang is going to work at

repairing cars, and Brother Vu, Brother Khoi, and Ha are to go to school, where Ha is constantly bullied. According to the poem "More is Not Better," it states, "when they ask if I eat dog meat, barking and chewing and falling down laughing when they wonder if I lived in the jungle with tigers, growling and stalking on all fours.(253)" This is an example of how Ha's classmates make fun of Ha because she is from a place her classmates have probably never heard before, therefore, they assume that she is a savage animal. Another event that poses a problem is that Ha's neighbors are prejudiced against her and her family. According to "Neighbors," it states, "Eggs explode like smears of snot on our front door. . . . Bathroom paper hangs like ghosts from our willow. . . . A brick shatters the front window, landing on our dinner table along with a note.(245)" The fact that the neighbors haven't even met Ha and her family, yet, the neighbors harass and are prejudiced against Ha and her family.

*Inside Out and Back Again* details the life of Ha, whose life had turned inside out when she had to flee with her family from Vietnam to America. This book narrates the causes to why Ha and her family have to move out of Vietnam. and the problems Ha and her family had to face during the journey to America and Alabama. In conclusion, Ha and her family had to endure while exhibiting courage and resilience.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	27	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	28	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	19	20
<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	9	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Total:</b>			100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of... The quotes I could find to answer the questions.	Glow: Excellent! You fully analyze important themes in the novel and support your claims with evidence.
I struggled with... Putting the information together	Grow: Being more organized to maintain a flow in your paragraphs.

### **Ha and Her Challenges as a Refugee**

Throughout “Inside Out and Back Again,” by Thanhha Lai, Ha and her family are faced with the challenge of living in a country of war and fleeing. The biggest challenge that Ha faced fleeing her home was leaving back her papaya. The papaya tree symbolizes hope and leaving it behind, meant leaving hope. Another hardship that refugees face to their new “home,” is the journey itself. In Ha’s case, this meant surviving days on a boat with very limited access to food and only a single cup of water per day. Refugees also have to leave back friends, family, and prized possessions that they cannot take with them. Ha’s family had to accept the fact that leaving Vietnam meant leaving Father behind, without the knowledge if he was alive or not. Ultimately, Ha’s life had been turned “inside out” when she became a refugee, just like thousands of other refugees from around the world.

Ha and her family leave Vietnam as Mother is afraid of the war that has been coming closer and closer to their house every day. The aspect of war meant that their home was not safe anymore. This relates to today's world where people become refugees for reasons like Ha (War). “In the distance bombs explode like thunder, slashes lighten the sky, gunfire falls like rain.(81)” Alongside war Mother also can't deal with the fact of Ha being raised in a country that is controlled by the communists and in Ha’s eyes being surrounded by the people who killed her Father. The war also caused restrictions on how much food Ha and her family can eat as the prices drastically increased. “But when we keep talking about how close the Communists have gotten to Saigon, how much prices have gone up...”(39) This allows mothers to realize that staying in the country is obviously not the right idea and they have to flee, “You deserve to grow

up where you don't worry about saving half a bite of sweet potato.(79)" This war that Ha is dealing with is a war that was started a long time ago when the French invaded Vietnam and tried to turn as many people as they could into Christians. This caused the country to be split into two, the North and the South. North being controlled by Ho Chi Minh and the South being controlled by a president that the U.S chose after they sided with the French. Ha lived in the South and Mother was against Communism. The North led a good resistance so "Rebel bands disturb the country everywhere. They appear from nowhere in large numbers, destroy everything, and then disappear into nowhere.(Vietnam Wars)" Ultimately the North regained control of the South which caused Ha's family to flee as her home since, "Saigon is Gone."

Ha and her family face many hardships on their journey to Alabama. One hardship is practically eating and drinking nothing. Due to the high numbers of people on board and limited supplies, Ha and her family are forced into eating rations. Additionally, the little food that was available was "hard and moldy,(117)" meaning it was unpleasant and unhealthy. Another hardship Ha and her family face is how crowded the ship was. "Bodies cram every centimeter below deck, then every centimeter on deck.(101)" While on their journey to Alabama, Ha and her family are told the hard hitting fact that "Saigon is Gone." To Ha that means that her childhood home is now gone forever and she can never return back to it. With feelings of sadness and emptiness, Brother Khoi took a chance with his love for animals and brought his chick onto the boat, however it ended up dying. To ease Brother Khoi's pain, Ha decided to wrap the chicken in her prized possession, her doll, and throw it off the edge of the boat. This shows Ha's love to her family and symbolizes self-sacrifice.

When one hardship is over for Ha, a new one begins. In her new home in Alabama, Ha faces many challenges, too. One of these challenges is adjusting to school and learning English.

“Whoever invented English should be bitten by a snake.(195)” In school Ha gets bullied by Pink Boy and laughed at by everyone in the class. Even the teacher would laugh at Ha’s name. Ha wishes that she can just tell them about her name and to listen for the diacritical mark. In addition to being made fun of, she also gets poked, pulled, pushed, etc. It becomes so bad that a principal gets involved and an apology is made by Pink Boy alongside his parents.

Unfortunately, this only makes the situation worse and after the last bell Ha is now “Leaning towards the door, legs bouncing, books left on the floor and runs.(326)” as she doesn’t want to deal with Pink Boy. Another challenge that she faces is eating food that she is not used to. When Ha and her family first moved into the Cowboy’s home, the Cowboy gave them a chicken. However, after eating it with dislike, Brother Quang explains to Cowboy how they are used to fresh-killed chickens. Another example of how the food is different and worse in America is when Miss Washington gave Ha papaya’s as a present for Christmas. When Ha eats the papaya, she describes it as “chewy, sugary, waxy, sticky,(340)” and out of frustration with the belief that adapting to Alabama is difficult, she angrily throws the papaya out. Ha throwing out the Papaya also shows how hope is lost again.

In conclusion refugees such as Ha and her family face many challenges when trying to flee to find a new home. A major change that I see in Ha from the beginning of the story to the end is how much she matures. Since she had to live the life of being a refugee, her thoughts and wishes changed from “longer hair and darker skin(56)” to “Father to find warmth in his new home, Mother to keep smiling more, Brother Quang to enjoy his studies, Vu Lee to drive me from and to school, and Brother Khôi to hatch an American chick.(380)” This shows a prime example of how becoming a refugee and dealing with all the challenges along the way can change who you are. As you can see Ha really wishes that the people around her have a happy

life, instead of wishing for things that only affect her. “The number one reason why people flee is war. Perceptions of unfairness, such as unequal treatment or denial of rights based on race, religion, economic status, or political thought, instigate war.(Refugees:Who, Where, Why)” This relates to Ha as her country was at war which is why Mother made the decision to flee. This article also mentions how refugees are “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.(Refugees Who, Where, Why)”

No doubt Ha and her family faced great deal of hardship as a refugee, but this can serve as an example to others of the sacrifices one is willing to endure to hope for a better tomorrow.

### Essay Rubric

Category Description and Goals	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Actual Points Earned
<b>Content and Analysis</b> – The essay conveys ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support an insightful analysis of the text, addressing all parts of the task.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	28	30
<b>Command of Evidence</b> – The essay is developed with relevant, well-chosen evidence and examples from the text. The evidence is varied and clearly supports your claims. Evidence is provided with context and explained thoroughly.	4 – 30 3 – 27 2 – 24 1 – 21	29	30
<b>Style and Organization</b> – There are topic sentences. The essay logically organizes ideas and uses appropriate transitions. The essay uses a formal language with sophisticated language and an engaging style of writing.	4 – 20 3 – 18 2 – 16 1 – 14	19	20

<b>Control of Conventions</b> – There are no spelling or capitalization errors. Punctuation is used correctly. Paragraphs are indented.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Publishing</b> – The final piece is in size-12, Times New Roman font, has a cover, title, and is double-spaced. The student assessment and reflections are complete.	4 – 10 3 – 9 2 – 8 1 – 7	10	10
<b>Total:</b>		96	100

Student Reflection	Teacher Comments
I am most proud of all the details and explanations I made in the body paragraphs of my essay.	Glow: Your analysis is well-organized, insightful, and supported by multiple forms of evidence.
I struggled with organization in the body paragraphs to make it make sense.	Grow: Always good to proofread for organization and to make your paragraphs more focused. But it's fine as is!