



# Children of the Mist

## DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



**This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Kim Rott, librarian at Sentinel High School in Missoula, MT, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary House Made of Splinters.**

## **Contributors**



### **Kim Rott, MLIS**

Kim Rott is a longtime English teacher and Librarian at Sentinel High School where she urges her students to read broadly, think deeply, and research wisely. As a “Speaker in the Schools” for Humanities Montana, she teaches media literacy skills to students around Montana. She has a M.Ed. in library and information technology from Mansfield University in Mansfield, Pennsylvania.

### **DELVE DEEPER PRODUCERS:**

Jordan Thomas, POV | Education Assistant  
Courtney B. Cook, POV | Education Manager

# ADULT NON-FICTION

**Syrett, Nicholas L. *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States*. UNC Press Books, 2016.**

Most in the United States likely associate the concept of the child bride with the mores and practices of the distant past. But Nicholas L. Syrett challenges this assumption in his sweeping and sometimes shocking history of youthful marriage in America. Focusing on young women and girls--the most common underage spouses--Syrett tracks the marital history of American minors from the colonial period to the present, chronicling the debates and moral panics related to these unions. Although the frequency of child marriages has declined since the early twentieth century, Syrett reveals that the practice was historically far more widespread in the United States than is commonly thought. It also continues to this day: current estimates indicate that 9 percent of living American women were married before turning eighteen.

By examining the legal and social forces that have worked to curtail early marriage in America--including the efforts of women's rights activists, advocates for children's rights, and social workers--Syrett sheds new light on the American public's perceptions of young people marrying and the ways that individuals and communities challenged the complex legalities and cultural norms brought to the fore when underage citizens, by choice or coercion, became husband and wife.

**Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of Two Cultures*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.**

When three-month-old Lia Lee arrived at the county hospital emergency room in Merced, California, a chain of events was set in motion from which neither she nor her parents nor her doctors would ever recover. Lia's parents, Foua and Nao Kao, were part of a large Hmong community in Merced, refugees from the CIA-run "Quiet War" in Laos. The Hmong, traditionally close-knit, have been less amenable to assimilation than most immigrants, adhering steadfastly to the rituals and beliefs of their ancestors. Lia's pediatricians, Neil Ernst and his wife, Peggy Philip, cleaved just as strongly to another tradition: that of Western medicine. When Lia Lee entered the American medical system, diagnosed as an epileptic, her story became a tragic case history of cultural miscommunication.

Parents and doctors both wanted the best for Lia, but their ideas about the causes of her illness and its treatment could hardly have been more different. The Hmong see illness and healing as spiritual matters linked to virtually everything in the universe, while medical community marks a division between body and soul, and concerns itself almost exclusively with the former. Lia's doctors ascribed her seizures to the misfiring of her cerebral neurons; her parents called her illness, *qaug dab peg*—the spirit catches you and you fall down—and ascribed it to the wandering of her soul. The doctors prescribed anticonvulsants; her parents preferred animal sacrifices.

Anne Fadiman's compassionate account of this cultural impasse is literary journalism at its finest. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* moves from hospital corridors to healing ceremonies, and from

the hill country of Laos to the living rooms of Merced, uncovering in its path the complex sources and implications of two dramatically clashing worldviews.

**Hillmer, Paul. *A People's History of the Hmong*. Minnesota Historical Press, 2015.**

Over the centuries, the Hmong have called many places home, including China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and most recently France, Australia, and the United States. Their new neighbors, though welcoming, may know little about how they have come to these places or their views on relationships, religion, or art. Now, in *A People's History of the Hmong*, representative voices offer their community's story, spanning four thousand years to the present day.

"This was the life of our Hmong people," remembers Pa Seng Thao, one of many who describe farming villages in the mountains of Laos. Others help us understand the Hmong experience during the Vietnam War, particularly when the U.S. military pulled out of Laos, abandoning thousands of Hmong allies. Readers learn firsthand of the hardships of refugee camps and the challenges of making a home in a foreign country, with a new language and customs. Drawing on more than two hundred interviews, historian Paul Hillmer assembles a compelling history in the words of the people who lived it. - Minnesota Historical Society

**The Hmong American Writers' Circle. *How Do I Begin: A Hmong American Literary Anthology*. Heyday, 2011.**

Hmong history and culture can be found in the form of oral stories, oral poetry, textile art, and music but there is no written account of Hmong life, by a Hmong hand, passed down through the centuries. As an undergraduate, Burlee Vang experienced this void when he received valuable advice from his English professor: "Write about your people. That story has not been told. If you don't, who will?"

*How Do I Begin?* is the struggle to preserve on paper the Hmong American experience. In this anthology, readers will find elaborate soul-calling ceremonies, a woman questioning the seeming tyranny of her parents and future in-laws, the temptation of gangs and drugs, and the shame and embarrassment of being different in a culture that obsessively values homogeneity. Some pieces revisit the ghosts of war. Others lament the loss of a country. Many offer glimpses into intergenerational tensions exacerbated by the differences in Hmong and American culture.

*How Do I Begin?* signifies a turning point for the Hmong community, a group of people who have persevered through war, persecution, and exile. Transcending ethnic and geographic boundaries, it poignantly speaks of survival instead of defeat.

**Horii, Hoko. *Child Marriage, Rights and Choice: Rethinking Agency in International Human Rights*. Routledge, 2021.**

In international campaigns against child marriage, there is a puzzle of agency: While international human rights institutions celebrate girls' exercise of their agency not to marry, they do not recognize their agency to marry. Child marriage, usually defined as 'any formal marriage or informal union where one or both of the parties are under 18 years of age', is normally considered as forced – which is to say

that it is assumed that are not capable of consenting to marriage. This book, however, re-examines this assumption, through a detailed socio-legal examination of child marriage in Indonesia. Eliciting the multiple competing frameworks according to which child marriage takes place, the book considers the complex reasons why children marry. Structural explanations such as lack of opportunities and oppressive social structures are important, but not exhaustive, explanations. Exploring the subjective reasons by listening to children's perspectives, their stories show that many of them decide to marry for love, desire, to belong to the community, and for new opportunities and hopes. The book, then, demonstrates how the child marriage framework – and, indeed, the human rights framework in general – is constructed on too narrow a vision of human agency: One that cannot but fail to respect and promote the agency of all, regardless of gender, race, religion, and age.

This book will be of interest to scholars, students, and practitioners in the areas of children's rights, legal anthropology, and socio-legal studies.

**Lemmon, Gayle Tzemach and Lynn S. ElHarake. *Child Brides, Global Consequences: How to End Child Marriage*. Council of Foreign Relations, 2014.**

*Child Brides, Global Consequences* is a collection of two previously published CFR Working Papers on child marriage: "High Stakes for Young Lives" and "Fragile States, Fragile Lives."

In "High Stakes for Young Lives," Senior Fellow Gayle Tzemach Lemmon and Research Associate Lynn S. ElHarake examine the social, economic, and cultural factors driving child marriage in order to help policymakers and civil society leaders curb, and eventually eliminate, child marriage. Since no single strategy will end the practice, Lemmon and ElHarake argue for a combination of legal frameworks, education policies, enforcement standards, attitude shifts, and economic incentives.

"Fragile States, Fragile Lives" hones in on the correlation between child marriage and state fragility. Many of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage are found on the top of lists such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) list of fragile states and the Fund for Peace's Failed States Index, yet there is a wide gap in data that assesses the degree to which fragile contexts perpetuate child marriage.

Lemmon writes that closing this gap will help produce more effective and targeted interventions to assist the youngest and most at-risk members of communities in crisis, and improve the future prospects of all members of the next generation in some of the most challenging corners of the world.

**Moua, Mai Neng. *The Bride Price*. Minnesota Historical Society, 2017.**

When Mai Neng Moua decides to get married, her mother, a widow, wants the groom to follow Hmong custom and pay a bride price, which both honors the work the bride's family has done in raising a daughter and offers a promise of love and security from the groom's family. Mai Neng, who knows the pain this tradition has caused, says no. Her husband-to-be supports her choice.

What happens next is devastating, and it raises questions about the very meaning of being Hmong in America. The couple refuses to participate in the tshoob, the traditional Hmong marriage ceremony;

many members of their families, on both sides, stay away from their church wedding. Months later, the families carry out the tshoob without the wedding couple. But even after the bride price has been paid, Mai Neng finds herself outside of Hmong culture and at odds with her mother, not realizing the full meaning of the customs she has rejected. As she navigates the Hmong world of animism, Christianity, and traditional gender roles, she begins to learn what she has not been taught. Through a trip to Thailand, through hard work in the garden, through the birth of another generation, one strong woman seeks reconciliation with another. -- Minnesota Historical Society

**Syrett, Nicholas L. *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States*. UNC Press Books, 2016.**

Most in the United States likely associate the concept of the child bride with the mores and practices of the distant past. But Nicholas L. Syrett challenges this assumption in his sweeping and sometimes shocking history of youthful marriage in America. Focusing on young women and girls--the most common underage spouses--Syrett tracks the marital history of American minors from the colonial period to the present, chronicling the debates and moral panics related to these unions. Although the frequency of child marriages has declined since the early twentieth century, Syrett reveals that the practice was historically far more widespread in the United States than is commonly thought. It also continues to this day: current estimates indicate that 9 percent of living American women were married before turning eighteen.

By examining the legal and social forces that have worked to curtail early marriage in America--including the efforts of women's rights activists, advocates for children's rights, and social workers--Syrett sheds new light on the American public's perceptions of young people marrying and the ways that individuals and communities challenged the complex legalities and cultural norms brought to the fore when underage citizens, by choice or coercion, became husband and wife.

**Vang, Pa Der, Editor. *Staring Down the Tiger: Stories of Hmong American Women*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2020.**

Tsov tom, or tiger bite—an insult in Hmong culture—means you were stupid enough to approach a tiger and get bitten. In this remarkable new book, Hmong American women reclaim that phrase, showing in prose and poetry that they are strong enough and brave enough to stare down the tiger.

Contributors celebrate the power of bonds between daughter and mother, sister and sister, and grandmother and granddaughter. Only after climbing a mountain in Nepal can Kia M. Lor finally understand her mother's life. Pa Xiong provides a recipe for squirrel stew, remembering in telling detail the gender roles that mark each step—and how her mother broke those rules. Kao Kalia Yang sketches the extraordinary everyday achievements of a Hmong leader, her older sister, Dawb. Contributors to this volume bring life and character to the challenges of maintaining identity, navigating changes in gender roles, transitioning to American culture, and breaking through cultural barriers.

These pieces were brought together through the work of Hnub Tshiab: Hmong Women Achieving Together, an organization founded in St. Paul to be a catalyst for lasting cultural, institutional, and social change to improve the lives of Hmong women.

# YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

**Ali, Nujood and Delphine Minoui. *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced: A Memoir*. Broadway Books, 2010.**

Nujood Ali's childhood came to an abrupt end in 2008 when her father arranged for her to be married to a man three times her age. With harrowing directness, Nujood tells of abuse at her husband's hands and of her daring escape. With the help of local advocates and the press, Nujood obtained her freedom—an extraordinary achievement in Yemen, where almost half of all girls are married under the legal age. Nujood's courageous defiance of both Yemeni customs and her own family has inspired other young girls in the Middle East to challenge their marriages.

Hers is an unforgettable story of tragedy, triumph, and courage.

**Yan, Kao Kalia. *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. Coffee House Press, 2008.**

In search of a place to call home, thousands of Hmong families made the journey from the war-torn jungles of Laos to the overcrowded refugee camps of Thailand and onward to America. But lacking a written language of their own, the Hmong experience has been primarily recorded by others. Driven to tell her family's story after her grandmother's death, *The Latehomecomer* is Kao Kalia Yang's tribute to the remarkable woman whose spirit held them all together. It is also an eloquent, firsthand account of a people who have worked hard to make their voices heard.

Beginning in the 1970s, as the Hmong were being massacred for their collaboration with the United States during the Vietnam War, Yang recounts the harrowing story of her family's captivity, the daring rescue undertaken by her father and uncles, and their narrow escape into Thailand where Yang was born in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp.

When she was six years old, Yang's family immigrated to America, and she evocatively captures the challenges of adapting to a new place and a new language. Through her words, the dreams, wisdom, and traditions passed down from her grandmother and shared by an entire community have finally found a voice.

# YOUNG ADULT FICTION

**Lee, Lori M. *Pahua and the Soul Stealer* (A Pahua Moua Novel Book 1). Rick Riordan Presents, 2017.**

Pahua Moua has a bit of a reputation for being a weirdo. A lonely eleven-year-old Hmong girl with the unique ability to see spirits, she spends her summer days babysitting her little brother and playing with her best friend, a cat spirit no one else can see. One day Pahua accidentally untethers an angry spirit from the haunted bridge in her neighborhood—whoops. When her brother suddenly falls sick and can't be awoken, Pahua fears that the bridge spirit has stolen his soul. She returns to the scene of the crime with her aunt's old shaman tools, hoping to confront the spirit and demand her brother's return. Instead, she summons a demon. Thankfully, a warrior shaman with a bit of an attitude problem shows up at the last minute and saves her butt. With the help of this guide, Pahua will have to find her way through the spirit worlds and rescue her brother's soul before it's too late. Little does she know she'll have her own discoveries to make along the way. . . . With its unforgettable characters, unique nature-based magic system, breathtaking twists and reveals, and climactic boss battle, this story based on Hmong oral tradition offers everything a fantasy lover could want.



# BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

**Bidania, V. T. *Astrid and Apollo* - Series of 8 Books. Picture Window Books, 2022**

Meet Hmong American twins Astrid and Apollo Lee, stars of their very own chapter book series! Follow along as Astrid and Apollo go camping, fishing, to the Hmong New Year Festival, the July 4th Soccer Tournament, and more!

**Xiong, Kha Yang. *Who Are the Hmong People?* Hmong Children's Books, 2019.**

Who are the Hmong people? Where are they from? What country has the largest population of Hmong? What language do they speak? Is it true that Hmong people will greet strangers as their brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles? This book gives a general overview of the Hmong people. A brief history of the Hmong people, especially the Hmong from Laos will be reviewed. The book also discusses aspects about the Hmong people and their culture, including topics of language, clothing, clans, families, religion, traditions, and food.

**Yang, Kao Kalia. *A Map into the World*. Carolrhoda Books, 2019.**

As the seasons change, so too does a young Hmong girl's world. She moves into a new home with her family and encounters both birth and death. As this curious girl explores life inside her house and beyond, she collects bits of the natural world. But who are her treasures for?

**Yang, Sheelue. *The Brothers* (Discover Graphics: Global Folktales). Picture Window Books, 2022.**

In this Hmong folktale, two brothers venture into a remote jungle, hunting food for their hungry family. But the jungle is full of dangerous wild animals. The older brother vows to keep his younger brother safe . . . or die trying. With clever text and easy-to-follow panels, Discover Graphics: Global Folktales are perfect for graphic novel fans new and old.