

Shortlisted Book for the 2022-23 Book in Common

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Thi Bui

The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir

Date: 2017

List price: \$20 paperback

Author website: <https://www.thibui.com/>

Book website: https://www.abramsbooks.com/product/best-we-could-do_9781419718779/

Publisher description:

An intimate and poignant graphic novel portraying one family's journey from war-torn Vietnam, from debut author Thi Bui.

This beautifully illustrated and emotional story is an evocative memoir about the search for a better future and a longing for the past. Exploring the anguish of immigration and the lasting effects that displacement has on a child and her family, Bui documents the story of her family's daring escape after the fall of South Vietnam in the 1970s, and the difficulties they faced building new lives for themselves. At the heart of Bui's story is a universal struggle: While adjusting to life as a first-time mother, she ultimately discovers what it means to be a parent—the endless sacrifices, the unnoticed gestures, and the depths of unspoken love. Despite how impossible it seems to take on the simultaneous roles of both parent and child, Bui pushes through. With haunting, poetic writing and breathtaking art, she examines the strength of family, the importance of identity, and the meaning of home. In what Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen calls “a book to break your heart and heal it,” *The Best We Could Do* brings to life Thi Bui's journey of understanding, and provides inspiration to all of those who search for a better future while longing for a simpler past.

This book is shortlisted for the 2022-2023 Book in Common because

- *It is engaging to students and to a broad audience.* The graphic novel format provides the opportunity to interact in fresh ways, and Bui's story of her family's diaspora and immigration experience is both intensely specific and also relatable to the journeys of many other families. At the center is a desire for familial connection, as Bui explains “I began to record our family history...thinking that if I bridged the gap between the past and the present, I could fill the void between my parents and me.”
- *It has broad appeal across disciplines.* In addition to social science and humanities courses that focus on South Asian history, culture, or migration, this graphic novel might also appeal to Child Development and Psychology, as well as to courses in the Arts and Media Arts, Design, and Technology.
- *It is relevant and timely.* Butte County is home to several thousand refugees from the Vietnam War, primarily but not exclusively Hmong refugees, and this Book in Common would affirm our university's commitment to learning about our communities, and from the wounds caused by the war and migration.
- *It relates to the university mission.* This story relates directly to the Strategic Priority of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion by centering Asian American experiences. In what will be the first full year of the Ethnic Studies requirement, this book would provide a rich anchor for important conversations on our campus.
- *It is conducive to year-long programming.* In addition to the focus on Asian American history and experiences, this book could focus on immigration issues and stories more broadly, a very timely and important topic in California.