



# Curriculum Connections

## *Year of the Rabbit*

by Tian Veasna

Translated by Helge Dascher

Drawn & Quartered, 2020

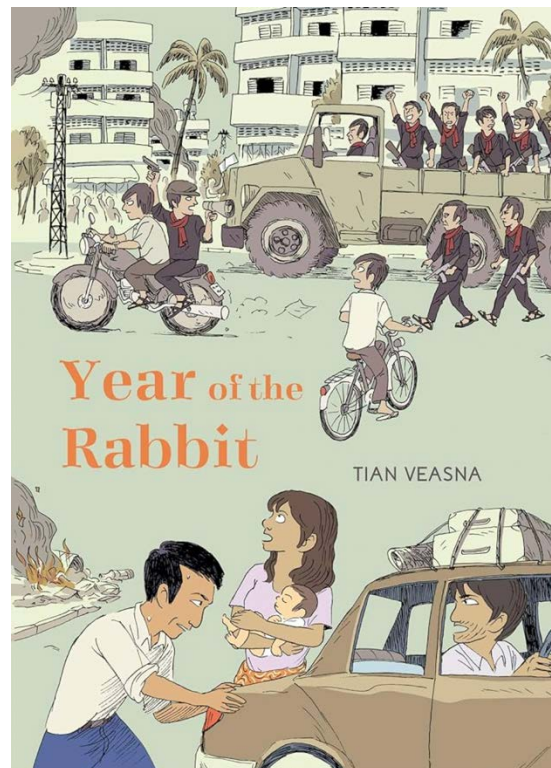
Non-Fiction, set in Cambodia

2020 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/High School Literature

In *Year of the Rabbit*, Tian Veasna recounts his life during the reign of terror in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. Told from the perspective of one family, the book describes the brutal policies that all Cambodians endured under the Khmer Rouge regime. *Year of the Rabbit* focuses on some of those who escaped.

### Connections to Literature

Teachers of literature may choose to use this graphic novel in conjunction with other texts about leaving home or as cross-curricular material to explore the topic of genocide in a history class. One text that might be used alongside *Year of the Rabbit* is *Night* by Elie Wiesel, which highlights Wiesel's own experience during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Additionally, *Year of the Rabbit* provides new insights into a part of history not usually covered in textbooks.



### Isolation

To be able to isolate and kill without feeling the horror of what they're doing, persecutors will label their victims as "other" and isolate them.

### Refugee Experiences

This text explores the hardships and tragedy that result from having to leave everything to survive, and how such decisions can affect one's fate. In *A Long Walk to Water*, author Linda Sue Park shares the tale of Salva and his survival during the Sudanese civil war, and the decisions his family had to make in their war-torn country. *We Are Not from Here* by Jenny Torres Sanchez focuses on three young men at the U.S.–Mexico border. It shows the struggle to survive and make a better life.



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### **Grade Levels**

This book is recommended for upper-middle and high-school students (grades 8–12), for use in humanities, world history, psychology, and Asian studies. The subject matter highlights the extreme violence that occurs during genocide, which could be too intense for younger readers.

### **Suggestions for History, Social Studies, and Humanities**

This text shares the ways some people can be misled by political leaders, believing the “strong man” will free the people and solve issues the country faces. This is how many in Phnom Penh felt. The visual maps in each chapter are helpful for readers and connect to the National Social Studies Standards.

### **Refugee Experiences**

This text shares the story of those who were part of the Republic being forced out of the city. They were told they were being evacuated to protect them from American bombing, which was a lie. Students explore refugee stories in world history, U.S. history, and European history courses; teachers could make various connections to, for example, the displacement of Native Americans as settlers moved west, and the vast number of displaced persons (DPs) after World War II.

### **Racism and Xenophobia**

*Year of the Rabbit* describes the struggle of refugees to find a new home after being driven from their community. They leave with hopes for safety and freedom, only to be judged and labeled “other” in the places they arrive. Loss of the familiar and the effort to find oneself are relatable ideas for teens, and they connect to the National Social Studies Standards of Individual Development and Identity and Culture.

### **Experiential Learning Activities**

A family tree is provided at the beginning of the book, and at the end, readers can see who survived. Students could complete a family tree of their own family or of someone who survived persecution using research skills found in National Social Studies Standards of Global Connections and Individual Development and Identity.



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Students can explore the Cambodian genocide in the Case Studies portion of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/cambodia>

Cambodia Genocide and Continuing Effects by Colgate University Peace and Conflict Studies (14-minute podcast video):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BXvThs8FqQ>

Refugee Timeline: <https://refugeehistory.org/timeline-refugee>

### Readings and Resources

- Anti-Defamation League. "Pyramid of Hate." 2018.  
<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/pyramid-of-hate.pdf>
- Association for Asian Studies. "Teaching Cambodian Genocide Through Film," Education about Asia: Online Archives, Fall 2021.  
<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/teaching-cambodian-genocide-through-film/>
- Park, Linda Sue. *A Long Walk to Water*. HarperCollins, 2011.
- Salinger, J. D. *Catcher in the Rye*. Little, Brown, and Company, 1951
- Sanchez, Jennifer Torres. *We Are Not from Here*. Viking Books, 2021.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Hill and Wang, 2006.

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