



Children of the River

by Linda Crew

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

The story opens April 17, 1975 in the Cambodian village of Réam. Soka, wife of Tep Naro, has given birth to a daughter. The couple already has a six-year old son named Ravy and a younger boy named Pon. Their thirteen-year-old niece Sundara has come from Phnom Penh to help.

Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces, under Communist leadership, overthrow the country's government and seize control of Cambodia. The family flees for its life. Sundara leaves behind her parents, her brother and sister, and Chamroeun, the boy she has loved since she was a child. Sundara and her aunt's family spend three weeks at sea.

Chapter 2

Four years have passed and the family now lives in Williamette Grove, Oregon. Sundara is seventeen years old. Her English teacher Mrs. Cathcart reads her poem aloud, to Sundara's shame, for she has written a painful description of her family's exile from their homeland. After class, she joins her family picking crops for a farmer named Mr. Bonner. Today, it's tomatoes. Naro's mother considers such work beneath them and dreams of returning to Cambodia, but the rest of the family realizes that their old way of life is gone forever. The family works very hard and sacrifices a great deal.

Chapter 3

Sundara and Ravy work at the Saturday produce market. Sundara gives nearly all her money to the household, saving just a bit for a warm winter jacket. Sundara's handsome classmate Jonathan McKinnon approaches her stall and they chat.

Sundara is drawn to the handsome, kind young man, but a proper Cambodian girl never dates; she waits for her family to arrange her marriage to a Cambodian boy.

Chapter 4

Sundara struggles to fit in at her Oregon high school and still be "a good Cambodian girl" at home. Sundara attends her first football game. She is drawn toward Jonathan but realizes that her classmate Cathy, a cheerleader, appears to be his girlfriend.

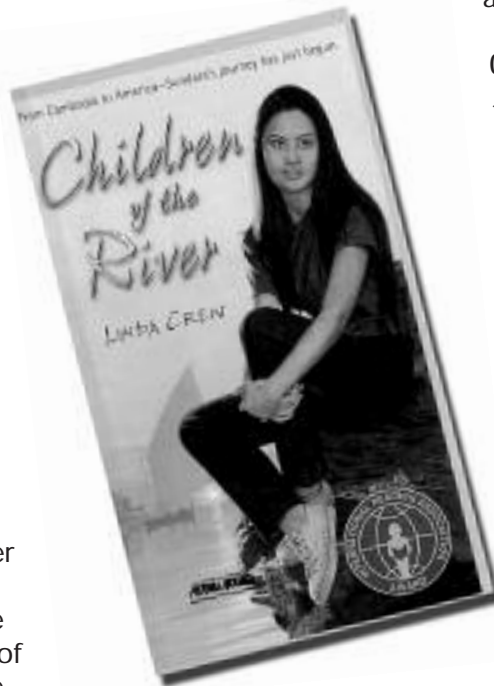
Chapter 5

Jonathan interviews Sundara about Cambodia for a school project. She tells him the story of their departure and all the beloved people left behind. Jonathan is deeply touched by the hardships that Sundara has endured. His father is the pediatrician who treated little Pon when the family arrived in America. In part because of Dr. McKinnon's kindness and skill, Sundara wants to be a doctor.

Chapter 6

The family has company and Sundara is especially glad to see Moni, her friend. Unlike Sundara, Moni has no family in America

at all so there is no one to arrange her marriage. She likes Chan Seng, but he is looked upon with some suspicion because he was arrested by the Americans for killing and eating birds from the park, not realizing that such behavior is not customary in America. Sundara worries about her future and asks Naro about it. He tells her to worry about school and becoming a doctor instead. She nods and goes off to bed in the damp, unheated garage.



After the death of her infant daughter on the ship, Soka had decided not to have any more children and has been sterilized.

Chapter 7

Jonathan asks Sundara on a date and she explains that she is not allowed to date, as it is not part of her culture. He has trouble accepting the custom which forbids Cambodian girls from dating and dictates arranged marriages. Haunted by grief for her lost family and for the life left behind, Sundara longs to be with him. At the same time she wonders whether her hopes for happiness and a new life in America are disloyal to her past and her people. Torn, Sundara finally agrees to meet Jonathan for a date.

Soka is not kind to Sundara. She works the teenager very hard and is cold. Sundara is convinced that Soka blames Sundara for the death of her daughter, a blame she feels is totally justified.

Chapter 8

Sundara's friend Kelly says that everyone knows Jonathan has a crush on her. Jonathan, meanwhile, questions the football culture of winning at all costs. He also tells Sundara that everyone's suspicions are correct: he is smitten with her. Cathy, the cheerleader who has been going out with Jonathan for years, warns Sundara to stay away from him.

Chapter 9

For their date, Jonathan takes Sundara sailing with his parents on their boat, the *Bonnie Lass*. Sundara is very impressed by their huge home, decorated in impeccable good taste. She recognizes the difference in quality between the items in the McKinnon home and in Soka's home. The McKinnons are kind and compassionate people who treat Sundara well. She learns that the McKinnons were both very idealistic and planned to change the world when they were teenagers and young adults, but have settled into a middle-aged complacency.

Chapter 10

Soon after, Soka goes out and leaves Sundara home shucking corn. Jonathan drops by and Sundara knows that she will now get into serious trouble with her aunt for violating their cultural norms. Soka arrives and is polite, but the huge cultural divide is evident when Jonathan doesn't understand the trouble he's gotten Sundara into.

Chapter 11

The minute Jonathan leaves, Soka begins to berate Sundara. Moni arrives and announces that she is marrying Chan Seng. Sundara recalls saying goodbye to Chamroeun. In a tender scene, he had promised to return to her when the war ends. Sundara decides to break off her relationship with Jonathan and wait for Chamroeun.

Chapter 12

Sundara does indeed break off with Jonathan, explaining the importance of following her aunt's wishes and remaining true to her heritage and culture.

Chapter 13

Sundara runs into Jonathan's mother and tells her what has happened; Mrs. McKinnon did not know but now understands why Jonathan is so upset. Moni has a beautiful, traditional Cambodian wedding. Meanwhile, the genocide in Cambodia is becoming so critical that even Sundara's sheltered and self-absorbed classmates are becoming aware of it. Sundara arrives home to find that news has come from Cambodia: Chamroeun is dead.

Chapter 14

Sundara tells Jonathan about Chamroeun. He asks her if she has cried for her beloved, and Sundara replies that if she ever started crying, she would never stop.

Chapter 15

Jonathan suffers a concussion at the football game. Sundara visits him at the hospital. Jonathan realizes that he's changed: he no longer has the shallow values of his high school classmates. Now, Jonathan is much more interested in world affairs and helping others. Jonathan asks Sundara to ask him if he loves her.

Chapter 16

Jonathan quits the football team and the coach pressures Sundara to get him to rejoin. Jonathan has a huge fight with his parents because he believes they are not committed enough to helping others.

Chapter 17

Sundara is becoming more Americanized, as evidenced when she expects the boys at home to help her with the chores. Soka and Naro quarrel

over Sundara, because Naro feels that Soka is too hard on Sundara. Sundara visits Moni on the way to the dump. At the dump, Sundara sees a broken doll, all her memories of Soka's baby well up, and she has a breakdown. She cannot stop crying. Wisely, Grandmother realizes that Sundara must be allowed to express all her grief. Soka breaks down as well and vows to treat Sundara better.

Chapter 18

Dr. McKinnon has decided to travel to the Cambodian refugee camps to help the people there. He asks Sundara to teach him Khmer. She teaches him customs as well as some useful phrases in the language. Soka and Sundara welcome a newcomer from Cambodia to Oregon. Soka's actions reveal that she has changed a great deal: she no longer feels that she must debase herself before those who were a higher social class in Cambodia. Now she regards herself as an equal, as Americans do. At the family's Thanksgiving feast, Soka learns that her sister Valinn is coming to America, to everyone's great joy. Soka absolves Sundara for any responsibility in her baby's death and thanks Sundara for working so hard to help save them all.

Chapter 19

Sundara gives Dr. McKinnon a plaque she has made, with Dr. Schweitzer's words painted on it. Later, Jonathan and Sundara kiss.

Chapter 20

Valinn arrives at the airport, greeted by forty friends and family. Moni reveals that her husband's first wife and two children are alive in Cambodia, so Moni will divorce him.

Chapter 21

Sundara gets word that her younger sister Mayoury is alive and well. She rushes to Jonathan, with Soka's permission, and they have hope.

Timeline of Modern Cambodia

- 1959 Vietnam War begins
- 1965 U.S. sends combat troops into South Vietnam.
- 1968 North Vietnamese Army retreats into Laos and Cambodia.
- 1969 American B-52s launch secret bombing raids over Cambodia.

- 1970 Cambodia's pro-American General Lon Nol deposes Prince Sihanouk, who then aligns with the Communist Khmer Rouge. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invade Cambodia.
- 1971 U.S. continues its air strikes in Laos and Cambodia.
- 1972 The Khmer Rouge army grows to 50,000 soldiers, many of whom joined to retaliate for the U.S. bombings.
- 1973 Vietnamese and Americans sign the Paris Peace Agreement. Vietnamese begin to withdraw their troops from Cambodia. Last remaining American troops withdraw from Vietnam. U.S. stops its bombing campaign on Cambodia, in which nearly 540,000 tons of bombs were dropped.
- 1975 Fall of South Vietnam; reunification of North and South. Khmer Rouge come to power in Cambodia. Approximately 34,000 Cambodians flee toward Thailand to escape the government-sponsored genocide, which results in the murder of nearly one quarter of the population.
- 1978 Vietnamese invade Cambodia in response to border attacks, depose the Khmer Rouge, and install a Vietnamese-backed government. Hundreds of thousands of Cambodians escape into Thailand. Cambodian refugees begin to arrive in the U.S.
- 1979 Refugee camps open in Thailand to house some 160,000 Cambodian refugees.
- 1988 Vietnamese begin gradual troop withdrawal from Cambodia.
- 1991 Formal ceasefire is adopted. United Nations begins repatriating over 350,000 refugees from the camps in Thailand.
- 1994 U.S. Trade Embargo lifted against Vietnam.

Author Sketch

Linda Crew was born in 1951, in Corvallis, Oregon. A fourth-generation Oregonian, Crew began her college career at Lewis & Clark College, which she attended from 1969 to 1970. She completed her education at the University of Oregon, graduating in 1973 with a B.A. in journalism.

Crew enjoyed writing in elementary school and even won a Jaycee-sponsored essay contest on "What My Country Means to Me" in middle school. Nonetheless, she wanted a far more glamorous career. "I wanted to be an artist or maybe a folksinger," she remembered. "Peter, Paul, Mary, and Linda is the sort of thing I had in mind. It only took me two or three years of strumming on the old guitar to figure out that I couldn't sing!" Crew then decided to become an actor.



But this goal shifted rather abruptly during Crew's second year in college. Crew recalled the incident that made her realize that she was not likely to become a professional thespian. "The fall play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the fairies were to be topless. As a potential fairy, this did not appeal to me! ... I took the bus home and told my parents I thought I should change my major. Unfortunately, I didn't have a clue as to which program I should pursue." Based on her mother's suggestion, Crew switched her major to journalism. Nonetheless, by the time Crew graduated from college in 1973, she knew she was wanted to write fiction.

In 1974, she married a farmer named Herb Crew and the couple settled down on a small farm in the town where she, her mother, and her grandmother had all been born and raised. Between helping to manage the farm, raising her children, and working on home remodeling projects, it was rarely easy to find time to write. "But," Crew once remarked, "being a writer has certainly fit into all of this better than being an actress would have!"

Crew's first novel, *Children of the River*, was inspired by events in her own life. Crew and her husband had become acquainted with Asian culture in 1980, when a Cambodian family came to help harvest fruit and vegetables on the family farm. The Crews were impressed by the Cambodians' strong family values, work ethic, and resolve. Crew did research and interviewed many Cambodian refugees and their families.

Crew's following books were drawn, for the most part, from her personal experiences. *Someday I'll Laugh*

about This has its roots in her childhood and memories of holidays spent at her grandfather's beach on the Oregon coast. *Nekomah Creek* and *Nekomah Creek Christmas* are most closely based on Crew and her family. Crew's 1997 novel *Long Time Passing* is also partially autobiographical.

But regardless of publication, writing will always be part of Crew's life. "For me, it's a way of trying to make sense of life," she once commented.

Critic's Corner

Children of the River has won several national and international awards, including a Golden Kite Honor Book designation, Michigan Library Association Young Adult Honor Book designation, Best Book for Young Adults citation from American Library Association (ALA), and Children's Book Award for older readers, International Reading Association, all in 1989.

Reviews for *Children of the River* were quite positive. *Publishers Weekly*, for instance, said: "The resolution comes smoothly and plausibly, offering a moving look at the way in which a survivor of great tragedy faces young adulthood." The *School Library Journal* critic said, "The novel touches upon issues of culture, history, gender, and race wrapped around an engaging romance."

Praising Crew's first work of fiction for "its strong storytelling and thorough characterization," Roger Sutton noted in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* that while the character of Jonathan is somewhat idealized, *Children of the River* "is neither sentimental nor sensational: both the horror and the romance are real." Mark Jonathan Harris, writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, found "Sundara's efforts to remain a 'good Cambodian girl,' loyal to her past and family and, at the same time, create a new life for herself in this country is a moving story about the immigrant experience that also provides a fresh perspective on our own culture."

Commenting on *Children of the River* in *Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers*, essayist Suzanne M. Valentic praised the book for highlighting "how the struggle for power often results in the senseless destruction of a people, and how we, as Americans, have learned to take freedom for granted, allowing many of the values we once held dear to disappear."

Other Books by Linda Crew

Someday I'll Laugh about This (1990)
Nekomah Creek (1991)
Ordinary Miracles (1992)
Nekomah Creek Christmas (1994)
Fire on the Wind (1995)
Long Time Passing (1997)
Brides of Eden (2001)
Brides of Eden: A True Story Imagined (2003)
A Heart for Any Fate: Westward to Oregon (2005)

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Publishers Weekly, June 8, 1990, review of *Someday I'll Laugh about This*, p. 55; October 30, 1995, review of *Fire on the Wind*, p. 63; July 21, 1997, p. 202; December 18, 2000, p. 80.
School Library Journal, February, 2001, Joel Shoemaker, review of *Brides of Eden*, p. 117.

General Objectives

1. To understand why Sundara has been sent to stay with Soka and Tep Naro in April 1975
2. To analyze the political situation in Cambodia in 1975
3. To sympathize the family's terrifying escape from their homeland
4. To trace how the family comes to live in Oregon
5. To probe the meaning of the novel's title
6. To analyze the symbolism in the novel
7. To recognize the novel's theme
8. To describe the novel's plot
9. To identify Sundara's cultural dislocation
10. To understand the novel's ending

Specific Objectives

1. To appreciate that Sundara's parents anticipated danger and sacrificed to save her life
2. To understand the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia in the 1970s
3. To appreciate how hard the family works to establish themselves in America
4. To compare and contrast differences between modern Cambodian and American culture
5. To understand the relationship between Jonathan and Sundara
6. To explore the symbolism of the river, the doll in the dump, and the coat that Sundara puts on layaway
7. To probe why Soka is so hard on Sundara
8. To explore Sundara's guilt over the death of Soka's baby
9. To understand why Sundara defies her aunt and uncle to date Jonathan
10. To determine how Sundara has changed during her four years in America

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Linda Crew's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Symbolism: occurs when an image stands for something other than what was expected. The ocean, for example, may be said to symbolize "eternity" and the phrase "river to the sea" could stand

for “life flowing into afterlife.” In most instances the symbol does not directly reveal what it stands for; rather, the meaning must be discovered through a close reading of the literary work and an understanding of conventional literary and cultural symbols. For example, we realize that the “stars and stripes” stands for the American flag. We know this because we are told it is so, for the flag itself in no way looks like the United States. Without cultural agreement, many of the symbols we commonly accept would be meaningless. In *Children of the River*, the main symbol is the river itself. On a literal level, the Cambodian people have close ties to the Mekong River. On a symbolic level, the metaphor of a river expresses the Cambodian philosophy of life: roads take you on one path, but rivers flow together in varied paths and then begin all over again.

Flashback: is a scene that breaks into the story to show an earlier part of the action. Flashbacks help fill in missing information, explain the characters’ actions, and advance the plot. *Children of the River* has several flashbacks to fill in holes in the plot. For instance, Chapter 11 has a flashback in which Sundara recalls her last evening with Chamroeun before she left Cambodia. Their emotional parting helps readers understand her grief at learning of his murder.

Style: is an author’s distinctive way of writing. Style is made up of elements such as word choice, sentence length and structure, figures of speech, and tone. An author may change his or her style for different kinds of writing and to suit different audiences. In poetry, for example, an author might use more imagery than he or she would use in prose. In *Children of the River*, Crew uses everyday diction, short sentences, and short words to make her story easy to read. She also tries to capture the cadence of Sundara’s speech.

The Importance of Setting

The story has two settings: the fictional town of Willamette Grove, Oregon, and the real country of Cambodia. The American setting is far less important than the Cambodian one, for the latter setting is where the novel’s heart lies.

Cambodia’s recent history is a complicated one, marred by years of terror and violence. In the 1960s, during the Vietnam War, the country served as a transport route between North and South Vietnam. Because of Cambodia’s proximity to Vietnam, the Vietcong army set up bases there. Although Cambodia remained neutral during the war, the presence of these bases caused American military forces to bomb the country heavily, launching secret bombing campaigns beginning in 1969. *MSN Encarta* estimates that the number of bombs dropped on Cambodia during the war exceeded the number dropped on Europe during World War II.

In 1975, communist forces known as the Khmer Rouge seized control of the weakened country, initiating one of the most radical refashionings of a society ever attempted. The Khmer Rouge believed in creating an agrarian utopia, dubbing their first year in power “Year Zero.” Within days, entire cities were evacuated and destroyed, money and property was deemed worthless, and hundreds of thousands were executed immediately in what are now called “the killing fields.” Led by Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge murdered more than 1.5 million Cambodians—15 to 20 percent of the country’s population—over the next four years, in one of the



most brutal and disastrous regimes in modern history.

When the Vietnamese army invaded in 1979, many Cambodians fled the country. In the chaos, many escaped to refugee camps in Thailand. More than 100,000 refugees later relocated to the United States, where approximately 175,000 people of Cambodian descent live today. This is where *Children of the River* picks up.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

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 Borton De Trevino, *Juan De Pareja*
 Joyce Hansen, *The Gift-Giver*
 Mingfong Ho, *The Clay Marble*
 Wei Jiang, *Legend of Mu Lan*
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DVDs/Videos

Sacred Waters of Cambodia
Raising the Bamboo Curtain - Emerging Burma and Cambodia
Lost Spirits of Cambodia
In the Shadow of Angkor Wat
The Living Edens: Thailand: Jewel of the Orient

Audio

Children of the River

Internet

Linda Crew Official Website
www.lindacrew.com/
 Author Profile: Linda Crew
www.teenreads.com/authors/au-crew-linda.asp
 Linda Crew @Web English Teacher
www.webenglishteacher.com/lcrew.html
 Books at Random House of Canada - Author
 Spotlight: Linda Crew
www.randomhouse.ca

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Linda Crew's *Children of the River* should include these aspects:

Themes

- cultural differences
- death
- dislocation
- friendship
- grief and loss
- guilt
- love
- loyalty
- rebuilding one's life
- war

Motifs

- being torn from one's home
- coping with the death of a child
- dealing with cultural differences
- working in the fields and on farms
- falling in love
- learning to defy cultural values
- traveling to a war-torn nation to help out
- overcoming fear
- setting admirable goals
- wanting to fit in with your peers

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "Get out! Get away! The Communists! The Khmer Rouge! They've taken Phnom Penh and they're coming here!" (Chapter 1, p. 3)
(When the violent Communist-backed Khmer Rouge seize Cambodia, Sundara and her family realize they must leave at once or all be killed. They take little more than the clothing on their backs and run for their lives.)
2. "We are the lost, we are the lonely/ So far from our beloved land/We are the children of the Mekong/Who will not see that mighty river again." (Chapter 2, p. 10)
(This is the opening of the poem that Sundara writes for her English class. It expresses her sorrow at leaving her homeland four years previously. Although so much time has passed, Sundara's pain is as fresh as it was when she first became a refugee. We admire her even more for having suffered so long without sharing her feelings.)
3. "That's not surprising. You'd need a powerful dream to sustain yourself through all that time in the camp." (Chapter 6, p. 64)
(In this scene, Moni and Sundara discuss a fellow refugee who married her husband only because it looked like he would get sponsored to come to America. Now, although the couple has indeed come to America, the man has become mean and cruel. Life in America is not what she was expecting. This scene shows the other side of the immigrant experience. Children of the River deals largely with the issue of cultural dislocation, not the problems of refugees who experience the dark side of relocation.)
4. "I just stopped by to see if Sundara wanted to go for a drive." (Chapter 10, p. 112)
(In his ignorance of Khmer customs, Jonathan does not understand that Sundara is not allowed to go for a drive with him; she is not allowed to date at all. This scene, and the entire relationship between Jonathan and Sundara, shows one of the most serious difficulties that many immigrants face: significant differences in courtship, dating, and marriage customs.)
5. "Someone you knew named Chamroeun is dead." (Chapter 13, p. 140)

(Sundara and Chamroeun had been as good as betrothed and had loved each other. He is killed over a scrap of food. His death is important for the plot because it frees Sundara to give her heart fully to Jonathan.)

6. HERE, "AT WHATEVER HOUR YOU COME YOU WILL FIND LIGHT AND HELP AND HUMAN KINDNESS." –ALBERT SCHWEITZER
(Chapter 15, p. 152)
(Sundara sees this inscription over the doorway in the hospital and it fills her with peace. She later paints this on a plaque for Dr. McKinnon. In a larger sense, the motto comes to stand for the welcome the Cambodians receive from the Americans, who open their heart to the refugees.)
7. "Sundara, what are you talking about?" Moni peered down into the rubble again. "It's not a baby. It's a doll. Can't you see that?" (Chapter 17, p. 176)
(In the dump, Sundara mistakes a doll for Soka's baby. Sundara is tortured with guilt for letting Soka's baby die during the family's horrible escape from Cambodia. Sundara is sure that Soka is cruel to her because she blames Sundara for the baby's death. Sundara does not realize that she was heroic in working so hard to save the infant under such horrific conditions. Soka does not blame her for the child's death; Soka is dealing with her own guilt, sorrow, and adjustment to America.)
8. "Do you know what that means, Niece? We will become American citizens, and American citizens don't have to make themselves low to anybody!" (Chapter 18, p.187-188)
(In Cambodia, Soka was very aware of the social order. She knew her place and acted accordingly. She comes to realize one of the glories of America: everyone is equal. America confers the power of equality, a power that emboldens the previously-meek Soka. She is proud to be a citizen of the country.)
9. Maybe their mistake was in feeling they had to choose, fearing they couldn't be American without giving up being Khmer. Why couldn't they be both? In the end, after all, what was more American than coming from someplace else, bringing another culture with you? (Chapter 18, p. 188)
(This is the novel's theme: being an American means melding your birth culture with the larger American culture. Once she realizes this, Sundara is able to adjust to all the new experiences and feelings she is having.)
10. "If you love somebody, you just better let them know while you can." (Chapter 21, p. 213)

(Sundara tells Jonathan this. She has grown as a result of her experiences and realizes now that you never know what the future will bring. She never had a chance to say goodbye to her parents or tell them that she loved them. She will not make that mistake again with those she loves—like Jonathan.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place?
(The story opens in Cambodia in 1975 and then flashes forward to a middle-class town in Oregon four years later.)
2. Why have Sundara and her family left their home in Southeast Asia?
(The Communist Khmer Rouge has seized power and intends to remake society, eventually killing more than a million people.)
3. What happens to Soka's infant daughter?
(She dies while the family flees Cambodia. She lacks clean water and sufficient food.)
4. Why won't Sundara date Jonathan?
(She is forbidden by Cambodian culture to date. Traditional Cambodian marriages are arranged marriages, not love matches.)
5. How does Chamroeun die?
(The Khmer Rouge soldiers kill him while he is foraging for a bit of food.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. How are American and Cambodian marriage customs different?
(Cambodian marriages are arranged by the couple's parents. The parents look for potential mates who have similar interests, socioeconomic status, social standing, and education. Love is not a factor. American marriages, in contrast, are rarely arranged by parents. They are usually based on mutual attraction and love.)
7. What does the river symbolize?
(It represents life and eternity.)

8. Why does Jonathan quit the football team?
(His values shift and he realizes that the pursuit of a victory in sports at any cost is shallow and a waste of time. He would rather devote his time and energies to helping people, especially the Cambodian refugees.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What parts of the novel did you find especially realistic? In what ways?
(Students are likely to say that the desire to fit in and the yearning to fall in love are especially realistic. Most teenagers feel this way.)
10. *Children of the River* was turned down by seventeen publishers until it was finally accepted for publication. Theorize what reasons the publishers might have given for rejecting the novel.
(Possible responses: the writing is pedestrian, the characterization shallow, and the dialogue trite. The ending seems a bit too pat, as well, a traditional happy ending that does not necessarily follow from the action.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Draw or paint a portrait of Jonathan and Sundara.
12. Working with a partner, role-play a dialogue between Cathy Gates and Sundara, in which they try to resolve their differences.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. In Chapter 2, Sundara writes an emotional poem about her family's exile from Cambodia. Write a poem in which Sundara expresses her feelings about America.
2. Sundara teaches Dr. McKinnon some useful phrases in Khmer. List at least 25 words and phrases that a newcomer to America would need to know immediately.
3. Imagine that you are Soka. Write a letter of apology to Sundara. Explain your feelings and why you treated Sundara as you did.
4. Sundara's speech changes when she is in a family setting among her fellow Cambodians. Analyze and explain how.

5. Imagine that you are Dr. McKinnon and you have arrived in Cambodia. Write a postcard to your family back home in which you explain an important experience you had in the refugee camp.

Drama

1. Traditional Cambodians believe in arranged marriages. This custom is common in other parts of the world as well, including among many people from India. Debate the advantages of arranged versus love marriages.
2. Improvise a scene in which Sundara is reunited with her younger sister.
3. Crew paints a rosy picture of the welcome her fellow Oregonians give the Cambodians. In a roundtable discussion, decide whether or not the novel provides a realistic picture of the way refugees would be treated today.
4. Debate the issue that Moni and Sundara discuss: it is better to be abandoned by your husband or to be stuck with a husband you don't like?
5. Perform a brief skit to show how to welcome a refugee to your school.
6. Imagine that you are Sundara. Give a speech in which you explain how you have changed since you have been in America.

Art/Music

1. Design a poster for a movie version of *Children of the River*.
2. The novel is set in Oregon, a state known for its beautiful scenery and relaxed attitude. Make a travel brochure for Oregon to encourage others to visit the beautiful state.
3. Sundara and her family feel strongly about America's national anthem and sing it with great pride and respect. Report on the history of "The Star Spangled Banner." Learn to sing all the verses.
4. Create a new cover for the novel. Be sure that your cover captures the novel's themes.

5. Write a song about the events in this novel. Your song can be any form you wish, such as a ballad or rap song.

Culture

1. Sundara and her family eat Cambodian food. Make some food from your cultural heritage to share with the class.
2. Sundara is appalled when Jonathan pats Pon on the head because such a gesture does not carry the same meaning in Cambodia as it does in America. List three Cambodian customs or beliefs you learned from this novel. Then list three American customs that a Cambodian new to America would not be likely to know.
3. Soka's actions reveal that she has changed a great deal: she no longer feels that she must debase herself before those who were a higher social class in Cambodia. Now she regards herself as an equal, as Americans do. Explain the social class system in America.

Geography and History

1. Jonathan is the star of the football team, which gives him an important status in high school. Trace the history of football and explain its rules.
2. Find out why so many Cambodian refugees settled in Oregon and other parts of the Pacific Northwest.
3. *Children of the River* is a mix of fact and fiction. For instance, the Khmer Rouge did indeed seize control of Cambodia and execute thousands of Cambodians. However, Jonathan, Sundara, and the other characters are fictional. On a chart, show six fictional elements in the novel and three factual ones.
4. Mrs. McKinnon volunteers for the League of Women Voters. Find out what this organization does. Also include information on its history and membership statistics.
5. Sundara quotes Albert Schweitzer. Who was he and why is he famous? Answer these questions by writing a brief biography of Albert Schweitzer.

Science

1. Everyone on Sundara's boat is seasick. Describe different methods for conquering sea-sickness.
2. Sundara wants to be a doctor. Find out the education and training needed to become a general practitioner.
3. Jonathan suffers a concussion at the football game. What is a concussion? Research the causes of a concussion, its symptoms, and treatments. What makes concussions so dangerous?
4. Find out what health precautions, if any, a visitor must take when traveling to Cambodia today.

Math

1. Sundara puts a jacket that she wants to buy on layaway. Explain how layaway works.
2. The novel is set in Oregon and Cambodia. Calculate the distance between Oregon and Cambodia and the travel time.
3. Make a bar graph showing the number of refugees who have come to America from any ten countries, including Cambodia.
4. Sundara does so much housework: cooking, cleaning, and laundry, to name just some of the chores. Find out how much time the average woman spends on housework in a day, week, month, and year. Show the results on a visual display.

Alternate Assessment

1. List the top five Cambodian names for boys and for girls. Then choose one name from each column and explain its meaning.
2. Take Jonathan and Sundara ten years into the future and describe what their lives are like. Has Sundara become a doctor, for instance?
3. Improvise a dialogue between Sundara and her mother, in which Sundara's mother explains why she sent Sundara to stay with Soka.
4. Draw or paint a mural showing the main events in the plot.
5. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.

Vocabulary

Write a synonym and antonym for each of the following vocabulary words from *Children of the River*. See how many words you can write. The first one is done for you as an example.

Story Word	Synonyms	Antonyms
ex. archaic	antiquated	new
1. indignant	_____	_____
2. sassy	_____	_____
3. audible	_____	_____
4. tirade	_____	_____
5. oblivious	_____	_____
6. listless	_____	_____
7. gnarled	_____	_____
8. ravenous	_____	_____
9. venerable	_____	_____
10. refugee	_____	_____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| A. Valinn | F. Chamroeun |
| B. Moni | G. Sundara |
| C. Tep Naro | H. Jonathan |
| D. Ravy | I. Dr. McKinnon |
| E. Cathy Gates | J. Mayoury |

- ___ 1. cheerleader who assumes that she is Jonathan's girlfriend
- ___ 2. handsome, popular white football player who loves Sundara
- ___ 3. Cambodian boy Sundara had assumed she would marry
- ___ 4. Soka's sister, believed lost in Cambodia
- ___ 5. Soka's son
- ___ 6. Sundara's friend who has no family in America
- ___ 7. beautiful Cambodian teenager struggling to adjust in America
- ___ 8. doctor who travels to Cambodia to help refugees
- ___ 9. Sundara's uncle, the head of the family with whom Sundara lives
- ___ 10. Sundara's younger sister

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- ___ 1. The novel opens in 1959 in the Cambodian village of Réam.
- ___ 2. Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces, under Communist leadership, overthrow the country's existing government and take political control of the country.
- ___ 3. The family flees for its life. Sundara leaves behind her parents, her brother and sister, and the boy she has loved since she was a child.
- ___ 4. Ten years pass and the family now lives in Williamette Grove, Georgia.
- ___ 5. The family doesn't work hard or make sacrifices because they plan to return home soon. They have a large house and great wealth back home.
- ___ 6. In part because of the way Jonathan's father acted when Sundara and her family came to America, Sundara wants to be a doctor.
- ___ 7. Chan Seng is looked upon with some suspicion because he was arrested by the Americans for killing and eating birds from the park, not realizing such behavior is not customary in America.
- ___ 8. Soka treats Sundara with great kindness, as she would treat her own daughter.
- ___ 9. For their date, Jonathan takes Sundara sailing with his parents on their boat, the Sea Ya.
- ___ 10. Ultimately, Sundara learns that while she may adapt to some American customs, welcoming new ways into her life does not mean that she is rejecting her Cambodian heritage.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

1. "Grandmother! Younger Aunt! Wake up! The Khmer Rouge are coming! Everyone's running away!"
2. O Kampuchea/The blood of our people/Has stained you./The bones of our people/Lies in unmarked graves./But the love of the ancient Khmer/Will live in our hearts/We will not forget you/Even from this new place/On the far side/Of the earth.
3. Soka forced another smile. "You too kind to my niece. We appreciate, but you too busy, have too many important things to do."
"No, no. I'm not too busy. I'd really like to take her."
So foolish. Couldn't he see that he was just making this worse. Sundara clasped her hands, ready to beg for the mercy she was going to need.
4. "She's gone crazy," Moni said. "It's about your baby, Soka."
5. Maybe their mistake was in feeling they had to choose, fearing they couldn't be American without giving up being Khmer. Why couldn't they be both? In the end, after all, what was more American than coming from someplace else, bringing another culture with you?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Reconciling American values with Cambodian traditions is difficult. Describe two American values that Sundara finds especially difficult to reconcile with Cambodian traditions.
2. Provide three details from the novel that make *Children of the River* seem to be nonfiction, even though it is really fiction.
3. Analyze how Sundara is different from the other girls in her school.
4. *Children of the River* is included on various bibliographies and as assigned reading in many schools. Explain why.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Choose the word or phrase that best completes each of the following statements.

1. The novel opens in **(1979, 1999)** in a small village in Cambodia.
2. **(Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge)** guerrilla forces, under Communist leadership, overthrow the country's existing government and take political control of the country.
3. Four years have passed and the family now lives in Williamette Grove, **(Oregon, Texas)**.
4. Sundara and Ravy work at the Saturday **(car wash, produce market)** to make extra money.
5. In part because of the way Jonathan's father acted when Sundara and her family came to America, Sundara wants to be a **(doctor, minister)**.
6. Sundara is convinced that Soka blames Sundara for the death of her **(mother, daughter)**, a blame she feels is totally justified.
7. For their date, Jonathan and his parents take Sundara for a day of **(skiing, sailing)**.
8. Jonathan suffers a **(concussion, broken leg)** at the football game
9. After this injury, Jonathan quits the football team and **(Coach, Jonathan's father)** pressures Sundara to get him to rejoin.
10. At the family's **(Christmas, Thanksgiving)** celebration, Soka learns that her sister is coming to America, to everyone's great joy.

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Mrs. Cathcart | A. Cambodian teenager struggling to adjust in America |
| ___ 2. Mr. Bonner | B. football player who loves Sundara |
| ___ 3. Chamroeun | C. farmer for whom the family picks crops |
| ___ 4. Sundara | D. Sundara's friend whose husband has a wife in Cambodia |
| ___ 5. Moni | E. Sundara's aunt, the woman with whom Sundara lives |
| ___ 6. Jonathan | F. Cambodian boy Sunata had assumed she would marry |
| ___ 7. Dr. McKinnon | G. doctor who travels to Cambodia to help refugees |
| ___ 8. Cathy Gates | H. Sundara's younger sister |
| ___ 9. Mayoury | I. cheerleader who assumes she is Jonathan's girlfriend |
| ___ 10. Soka | J. Sundara's English teacher |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the story.

1. the purple jacket
2. rivers
3. the *Bonnie Lass*
4. the broken doll at the dump
5. the plaque

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Do you think Sundara is a realistic character or is she too good to be true? Provide at least two examples to make your point.
2. Explain what the title means. Who are the "Children of the River"?
3. Compare and contrast Soka and Sundara. Show how they are the same and different.
4. What role does the novel's setting play in the story? Why is the setting so important in this novel?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Possible answers:

Story Word	Synonyms	Antonyms
1. indignant	incensed, provoked	calm
2. sassy	impolite, insolent	polite
3. audible	able to be heard	imperceptible, faint
4. tirade	harangue, diatribe	reticence
5. oblivious	unaware, unobservant	observant
6. listless	languid, lethargic	energetic
7. gnarled	twisted	straight
8. ravenous	very hungry	full, sated
9. venerable	old	young
10. refugee	expatriate, foreigner	native

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B |
| 2. H | 7. G |
| 3. F | 8. I |
| 4. A | 9. C |
| 5. D | 10. J |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

- When the violent Communist-backed Khmer Rouge seize Cambodia, Sundara and her family realize they must leave at once or all be killed. They take little more than the clothing on their backs and run for their lives.
- This is an excerpt from the poem that Sundara writes for her English class. It expresses her sorrow at leaving her homeland four years previously. Although so much time has passed, Sundara's pain is as fresh as it was when she first became a refugee.
- In his ignorance of Cambodian customs, Jonathan does not understand that Sundara is not allowed to go for a drive with him; she is not allowed to date at all. This scene, and the entire relationship between Jonathan and Sundara, shows one of the most serious difficulties that many immigrants face: significant differences in courtship, dating, and marriage customs.

- In the dump, Sundara mistakes a doll for Soka's baby. Sundara is tortured with guilt for letting Soka's baby die while the family fled Cambodia. Sundara is sure that Soka is cruel to her because she blames her for the baby's death. Sundara does not realize that she was heroic in working so hard to save the infant under such horrific conditions. Soka does not blame her for the child's death; she is dealing with her own guilt, sorrow, and adjustment to America.
- This is the novel's theme: being an American means melding your birth culture with the larger American culture. Once she realizes this, Sundara is able to adjust to all the new experiences and feelings she is having.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. 1979 | 6. daughter |
| 2. Khmer Rouge | 7. sailing |
| 3. Oregon | 8. concussion |
| 4. produce market | 9. Coach |
| 5. doctor | 10. Thanksgiving |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. G |
| 3. F | 8. I |
| 4. A | 9. H |
| 5. D | 10. E |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

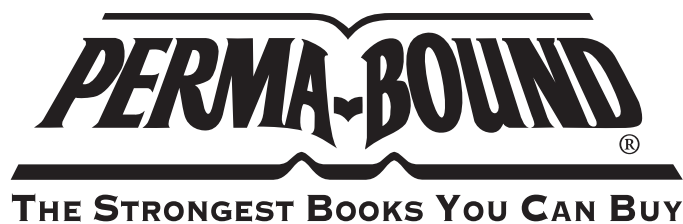
- Sundara saves her coins to buy a pretty purple winter jacket. She needs a warm jacket, but just as important, she wants something new and pretty that did not come out of the used clothing bin in church. This shows her struggle to fit in with her classmates and to be a typical American teenager.
- On a literal level, the Cambodian people have close ties to the Mekong River. On a symbolic level, the idea of a river expresses the Cambodian philosophy of life. Rivers become a metaphor for life: Roads take you on one path, but rivers flow together in varied paths and then begin all over again.
- The Bonnie Lass* is the McKinnons' sailboat, a symbol of refinement, culture, and social class.

Sundara does not understand the allusion in the name "Bonnie Lass," but she does recognize the McKinnons' high level of material comfort.

4. At the dump, Sundara sees a broken doll, and all her memories of Soka's baby well up. She has a breakdown, which allows her to recover from guilt over the death of Soka's child. It also allows Soka to explain that she does not hold Sundara responsible for the infant's death.
5. Sundara gives Dr. McKinnon a plaque with an inscription of a famous quote by Dr. Albert Schweitzer. In so doing, she links Dr. McKinnon with the great Dr. Schweitzer, a tremendous compliment.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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