



**Prompt:**

**The novel is titled *Inside Out & Back Again*. Think about just the first phrase in that title: “inside out.” How does phrase “inside out” relate to the universal refugee experience of fleeing and finding home? In what ways is Ha’s mother’s experience a specific example of this universal experience?**

Refugees are everyday people who are forced to flee their homes because they are afraid to stay in their home country. When they flee, they may leave behind family members, friends, a home, a job, and special possessions. Fleeing home and trying to find a new home can make them feel like their lives are being turned inside out. In the novel *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, Ha’s family lives in a country at war. Ha’s mother is raising four children alone in this dangerous country, and it is more and more difficult for her to provide for their needs. When the war brings fear and hardship to the family, Mother decides to take her family and flee their home of South Vietnam. She is afraid of the dangers communism may bring to her family. Once Mother decides to flee, she and her children become refugees who try to find a new place to call home. Mother’s life feels like it is being turned “inside out” in the same way other refugees all over the world feel.

Many refugees feel scared and worried when war comes to their home country, just like Ha’s mother. In “Children of War” (Brice 25), all four of the refugee children talk about being separated from one of their parents because of war. Amela’s father went to work one day but never returned home. Later, she learned he had been killed (Brice 26). She says, “Before the war, I really enjoyed life, but after I found out about my father’s death everything seemed so useless. I couldn’t see any future for myself” (Brice 26). In Part One of *Inside Out & Back Again*, Mother is separated from Father because of the war. In “Missing in Action,” Ha writes, “Father left home on a navy mission on this day nine years ago when I was almost one. He was captured on Route 1 an hour south of the city by moped. That’s all we know” (Lai 12). Mother misses father terribly. In “Birthday Wishes,” Ha writes about how she is hopeful her father will return home soon because Mother is so sad: “Mostly I wish Father would appear in our doorway and make Mother’s lips curl upward, lifting them from a permanent frown of worries” (Lai 31). All around the world and throughout time, wartime has separated families, and brought sadness and worry to parents and children.

When refugees make the decision to flee, they often have to take risks in order to get their families to a safer place, which can turn them emotionally “inside out.” In the novel, Mother decides to take her family and make a risky escape to flee their home of South Vietnam. She knows they may never return home. In the article “Refugees: Who, Where, Why,” the author writes, “Most refugees hope to return to their homes.” She also writes that “some refugees cannot return home” (Gevert 1–2). This decision twists Mother inside out. In “Should We,” Ha writes that her mother gathers the family together and asks them if they should leave. Ha can see the conversation is upsetting for Mother. She writes, “Mother twists her brows.... Her brows twist so much we hush” (Lai 45). Mother knows this decision will twist their lives inside out. Once the family has escaped and is on the ship, Mother realizes that everything in her life has changed now. To try to comfort herself and her family, she says, “At least the moon remains unchanged” (Lai 89). By this, she means that their lives are all changed, sort of like inside out, but at least there are some things in life that are still the way they should be. This feeling of having life be turned inside out because they may not be able to return to their home is something that many refugees experience.

Refugees around the world have faced challenges when they flee their homes in search of finding a new home. In the article “Refugees: Who, Where, and Why,” the author writes, “Since early times, large groups of people have been forced to leave their homelands because of persecution and the devastation of their lands” (Gevert 2). Life is not easy living in a country at war, but fleeing home and finding a new home brings its own challenges that can make a refugee feel like his or her life is being turned inside out. In *Inside Out & Back Again*, Mother made the decision to flee South Vietnam to find a safer home for her family. This difficult decision would turn her life and her children’s lives inside out, just like the first half of the title says.

### Works Cited

Arthur Brice, “Children of War,” *Scholastic Update*, March 25, 1994. 25–26.

Catherine Gevert, “Refugees: Who, Where, and Why,” *Faces*, 19.1 (2002). 6–8.

Thanhha Lai, *Inside Out & Back Again* (New York: Harper, 2011).

- In the introductory paragraph, what is the essay writer’s claim to connect the universal refugee experience with the novel of the title? Underline this claim in the essay.

- How does the writer support the claim? What evidence is used to support the claim?

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- In the first body paragraph, how does the writer support his or her claim that “Many refugees feel scared and worried when war comes to their home country, just like Ha’s mother”?

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- In the second body paragraph, what claim does the writer make about Ha’s mother in relation to the title of the novel? Underline this claim in the model essay.

- What evidence does the writer use to support this claim?

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- How does the writer conclude the essay?

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