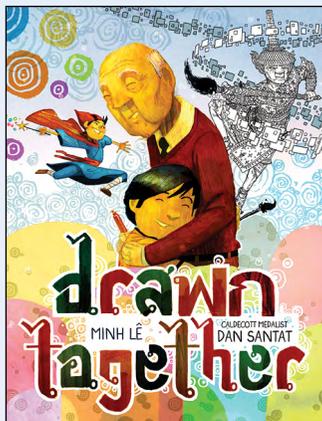


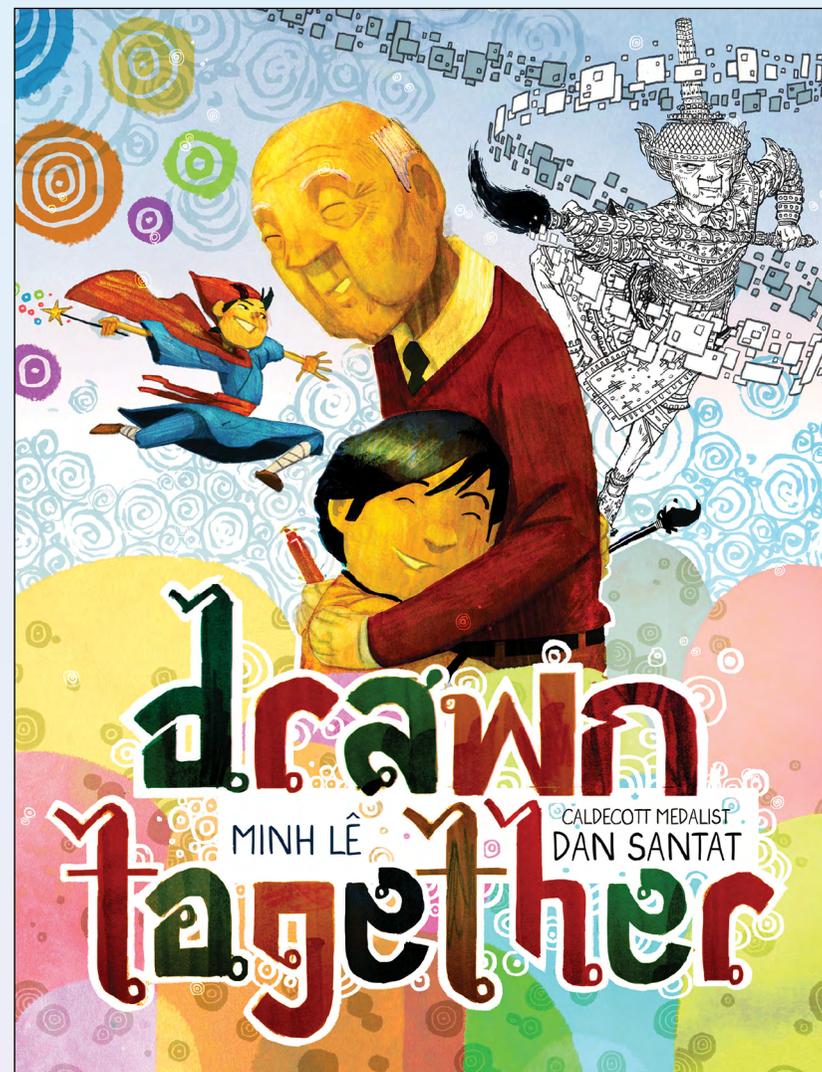
This guide was written by Minh and Aimée Lê. Minh is a national early childhood policy expert and received his master's in education from Harvard University (he also happens to be the author of *Drawn Together*). Aimée is the deputy director of the Strongheart Group and has developed curricula for innovative global initiatives on subjects spanning health care to human rights. She holds an M.A. in International Training and Education from American University. Minh and Aimee are married and live with their two wonderful sons just outside of Washington, D.C., in Takoma Park, Maryland

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DISCUSSION GUIDE
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About the Book

When a young boy visits his grandfather, their lack of a common language leads to confusion, frustration, and silence. But as they sit down to draw together, something magical happens—a shared love of art and storytelling enable the two to form a bond that goes beyond words. With spare, accessible text by Minh Lê and luminous illustrations by Caldecott Medalist Dan Santat, this stirring picture book about reaching across barriers will be cherished for years to come.

Praise for *Drawn Together*

- “A beautifully told and illustrated story about a grandson and grandfather struggling to communicate across divides of language, age, and culture.”—Viet Thanh Nguyen, Pulitzer Prize winner for *The Sympathizer*
- ★ “Santat’s work dazzles with layers of color, exquisitely worked traditional designs, and ambitious scale. With the grandfather drawing in his idiom and the boy in his, the two defeat the dragon of difference that separates them and discover that they do not need to be able to speak in order to communicate.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- ★ “Lê’s compelling storyline is propelled forward by Santat’s illustrations, each capturing both the universal longing to connect and the joy of sharing the creative process.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- ★ “Highly accessible emotions; concise, strong storytelling; and artistic magnificence make this a must have.”—*Booklist* (starred review)

Pre-Reading Questions

Before reading the book to your class, use the questions below to introduce students to the book’s themes.

- 1 Have you ever had trouble communicating with someone? How did that make you feel?
- 2 Look at the cover. What do you think the book is about?
- 3 What do you think the title *Drawn Together* means? Do you notice anything interesting about the letters in the title?
- 4 Other than using words, how do you express yourself?
- 5 Think of someone you visit who is important to you. How do you feel when you are getting ready to visit that person? What is it like when you are there? Is there anything special that you do together? Any interests that you have in common?



Critical Reading Questions

Use these questions to explore Text, Art & Design, and Story/Themes.

Text

- 1 The opening scene doesn't have any words. Why do you think the author made that choice?
- 2 During and after dinner, the grandfather speaks in Thai. What do you think he's trying to say?
 - The translation of the grandfather's Thai appears on the dedication/copyright page. It shows that the boy and grandfather are actually trying to say the same thing to each other. Was that what you expected?
- 3 What does it mean that the grandfather and grandson "see each other for the first time"?
- 4 In the story, when the grandfather and grandson are separated, the text says "that old distance comes roaring back." What do you think "the old distance" refers to?

Art & Design

- 1 What does the boy use to draw? What does the grandfather use?
- 2 How do the two characters' artistic styles differ? How do their personalities show in their art?
- 3 On the page that says "and we build a world that even words can't describe," what parts of the art are the grandfather's and what parts are the boy's? How can you tell?
- 4 Why do you think the grandfather is drawn in black and white while the boy is in color?
 - At the end, the characters switch and the grandfather is drawn in color while the boy is in black and white. How and why do you think this happened?

Story/Themes

- 1 How does the boy feel at the beginning of the visit? How does the grandfather feel? How can you tell how they are feeling if there are no words?
- 2 Spot the difference: On the page that shows what the two are having for dinner, list all of the differences between the grandfather and the grandson's meals.
 - What do these differences tell you about the characters and their relationship?
- 3 What do you think the dragon symbolizes? When is the first time you see the dragon? How many times does the dragon appear in the story?
 - Can you find the dragon on the page where the grandfather and grandson are running toward each other (the page that says "we can make our way across")?
- 4 At the end when the grandfather and grandson hug, what do we see on the walls?
- 5 How do the characters feel at the end of the story? How is that different from when the boy is dropped off at the beginning of the book? What has changed?
 - Why do you think the mother is also happy when she picks up her son?
- 6 What are the grandfather and grandson holding when they wave good-bye? Why is this important?



Storytelling & Comprehension Activities

Story Mapping: Have students map out what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Also, ask students to think about what happens next.

Beginning	Middle	End

Your Turn to Be the Author: The beginning of the story doesn't have any words. Pretend you are the author. What words would you put in each illustration/panel to tell the story?

Joint Storytelling/Collaboration Project: With a partner, pick a common fairy tale or familiar story. Work together to retell that story in your own voices (you can even use different styles & materials if you want to illustrate the story together). Share this story with your class/family.

Reflection & Family Connection Activities

Essay Ideas/Discussion Topics: Have you ever had trouble talking to someone? Have you ever felt misunderstood or unheard? What was it like?

- Did you find a way to bridge that gap? If not, what could you do next time?
- What interests do you have (hobbies, etc.) that other people might not know about? Have you asked the people in your life (family, friends) what their hobbies/interests are? Anything in common?
- Does your family speak another language at home? What are some words or phrases in that language that you wish you could say? (Find someone to help you learn those words and phrases.)
- How do you like to express yourself, other than by words? Share a little bit about how that makes you feel.

Family History: Ask a family member or other special person in your life to tell you an interesting story from their past.

- Work with that person to retell that story together. For example, they could tell you a story and you could draw the pictures or even turn it into a song or a play!



Creative Expression Activities

A World Beyond Words: This is a story about two people finding a way to communicate without using words, so play Pictionary and/or Charades to have readers figure out how to express themselves without words.

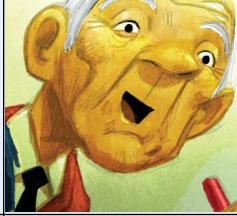
Expressing Yourself: How does a favorite piece of art (poem, song, painting, etc.) make you feel? Express that feeling through another form of art (drawing, dancing, etc.)

All the Things We Could Never Say: In the story, the boy and grandfather learn to communicate through art, but before then there was so much they could not say to each other. Is there something you wish you could tell someone important to you? Write that person a letter, or paint a picture, or create an art piece of any kind to tell that person how you feel.

What Kind of Hero Are You? In the book, the boy imagines himself as a wizard, and the grandfather imagines himself as a traditional Thai warrior. What kind of character are you? Draw that character and write a bit about it, including whether or not the character has any historical, mythological, or familial roots.



Reading Expressions: In the book, so much of the characters' emotions are conveyed through the illustrations, not the words. Describe the characters' expressions below:

How does the character feel? Describe in each box below.	
	
	
	
	
	
	
Can you remember a time when you felt any of the emotions above? Tell us about it.	

About the Author

Minh Lê is a writer, but, like his grandfather, he is a man of few words. He is a national early childhood policy expert and the author of *Let Me Finish!* (illustrated by Isabel Roxas), and has written for the *New York Times*, the *Horn Book*, and the *Huffington Post*. A first-generation Vietnamese-American, he went to Dartmouth College and has a master's in education from Harvard University. Outside of spending time with his beautiful wife and sons in their home near Washington, D.C., Minh's favorite place to be is in the middle of a good book. Visit Minh online at www.minhlebooks.com or on Twitter @bottomshelfbks.



Q&A with the Author

- 1 At the beginning of the book you write, "For my grandparents and everything we left unsaid. . . —M.L." Can you explain why this story is meaningful to your experiences with family?

Drawn Together is inspired by my relationships with my grandparents, especially my paternal grandfather. We loved each other so much, but he spoke mostly Vietnamese and I speak mostly English, so we never quite figured out how to communicate beyond a few scattered words here and there. In that way, our relationship was very much defined by what we couldn't say to each other. This book is my small tribute to the love that existed between us, which was very real . . . even if it existed mostly in a "world beyond words."

- 2 The book is written with many illustrations and few words. Why did you choose to tell the story through that medium?

Since the story is about "a world beyond words," I felt that the story had to be told mostly through the pictures. When the grandfather and grandson finally connect, it's through their mutual love of art, so it seemed

fitting that the story lives and breathes through the illustrations.

Also, with the opportunity to work with an all-time great illustrator like Dan Santat, my goal as the author was simple: Tell the story in as few words as possible and then get out of the way to let Dan work his magic. He took the story to a place that I couldn't have possibly imagine—but at the same time it's exactly the book I had in mind. So the book really is a dream come true for me.

- 3 The art designed by the grandfather and grandson reflect different styles. When you wrote the book did you envision similar visual designs and contrast between the characters?

I did imagine there would be a strong contrast in styles but had no idea what that was going to look like on the page. The boy had his markers and the grandfather had his paintbrushes, but it was up to Dan to come up with the boy's playful style and the grandfather's more technically advanced brushwork—and the way he shows the two styles merging makes for a very special scene.

But perhaps the most special part of the story for me is when the grandfather picks up the boy's marker and the grandson picks up his grandfather's paintbrush. That is the moment when they truly form a connection across cultures, allowing them to bridge the daunting gap that separated them at the beginning of the book.

- 4 What do you want children to learn as they read the storybook? How can they apply this lesson in their own lives?

My hope is that the book helps children (but actually readers of all ages) realize that it can take work to truly see the person in front of you—even if that person is someone you love. This book is about two people finding a creative way to connect, even when the distance between them seems too great. If our book can help inspire even one reader to discover a deeper connection with someone in their lives, then my heart will be completely full.

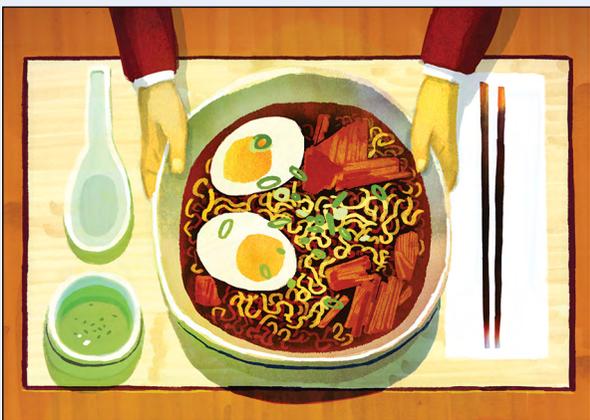
- 5 What do you enjoy most about teaching? Why did your former students call you Mr. Rogers?

Much like how the boy and grandfather in the story connect, what I enjoy most about teaching is the connection you can make with a student. Education is a process of discovery, and it's a privilege to develop a relationship with a student as you try to help them along their journey.

And, ha, my students used to call me Mr. Rogers because I was always wearing a cardigan to class. But my little secret is that, while I love Mr. Rogers, he isn't the one whom I took fashion cues from. It was actually my grandfather who also wore cardigans all the time. Without realizing it, I guess I modeled my wardrobe after him. It's funny how the people you love can influence in so many different ways, both big and small.

- 6 In the book, when it's time for dinner the grandfather makes a bowl of soup for himself and a hot dog for his grandson. So, our last question for you is: Soup or Hot Dog?

That's easy: SOUP. I grew up eating both (and still do), but if I had to choose, I'll choose soup every time . . . especially if it's my mom's famous *bún bò* (a spicy and savory noodle soup from Central Vietnam).



About the Illustrator

Dan Santat is the author and illustrator of the Caldecott Award-winning *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend*, as well as *The Cookie Fiasco*, *After the Fall*, and others. He is also the creator of Disney's animated hit *The Replacements*. Dan lives in Southern California with his wife, two kids, and two dogs. Visit him at www.dantat.com.



Q&A with the Illustrator

- 1 You are an award-winning illustrator with many notable accomplishments. Were you always a talented artist? How did your interest in art develop? What advice would you give to young artists?

I always tell kids that drawing is like riding a bike. You aren't born knowing how to ride a bike; you have to practice every day until you learn how to balance, and eventually you'll be doing tricks and wheelies and stuff. Drawing is like riding a bike. Some folks may grasp the concept faster than others, but in the end you only improve with lots of practice. I think I had a quicker knack for visualizing things in three dimensions than most other kids and I could communicate it in art, which is what lured me to art in the first place. My advice to any kid is that if you want to draw you just have to practice every day. Like you were riding a bike.

- 2 In your dedication at the beginning of the book you write, "For my grandmother—D.S." Can you explain why this story is meaningful to your experiences with family?

I had a very similar experience with my grandmother to that of this kid in this book. There was a time when my grandmother came to live with us for a year, and I couldn't speak a word of Thai. I could understand maybe 75 percent of it, but speaking the language escaped my puny

little brain. I could tell my grandmother loved me because she showed me lots of affection with hugs and kisses, but there was this wall of silence that really divided us in terms of getting to really know each other. In *Drawn Together*, the boy and his grandfather communicate through art. My grandmother and I communicated through food. She would feed me amazing food, and I would just eat it and get fat.

- 3 The drawing adventure features many different artistic styles, which is amazing to watch unfold in the story. Did you do any research prior to designing the illustrations for *Drawn Together*? What inspired the images for each superhero in the adventure?

I removed myself from how I typically draw things in my daily life and I tried to embody the drawing habits of the characters, so what I hope you see isn't Dan Santat drawing a book about a boy and his grandfather, but rather you are seeing the story of a boy drawing in his own style to communicate with his grandfather, who is communicating in a completely polar opposite style that is also unique to himself. The art style identifies their personalities. Kids draw with markers, and watercolors, and color pencils and are not afraid to make mistakes, color outside of the lines, or use really saturated colors. The grandfather shows that he has had experience in his hands. He uses a more classic artistic medium of brush and ink. His perspective and proportions are precise and interpret things the way that they are. In the dream sequence in the book, the boy is depicted as a Western culture wizard whereas the grandfather is an Eastern culture spiritual protector (the closest thing to a type of wizard in Eastern culture). The attire he wears is what you would see in the traditional garb of Buddhist spirit guardians surrounding temples. They are very ornate, detailed, and simply breathtaking to see in real life.

- 4 You create both books and animation for Disney. How does your experience creating animation affect your book illustrations? Or vice versa? How would you describe your personal artistic style?

Animation doesn't really influence my art style except in terms of gestures.

I tend to exaggerate facial and physical expressions to a point of silent film degree, but other than that, my style is my own. In animation, the work is somewhat homogenized so that everyone at an animation company can imitate it, while in book art I get to interpret things however I feel is suitable. I would say that I don't have a style. I'm amorphous. I like to look at a project, and I try to address my art to what best suits the feel and tone of the story.

- 5 What do you enjoy most about visiting a library? Why do you think it is important for children to explore libraries?

I love that it's quiet. Kids need to understand the value of libraries not just as a place where you can find books, but as an invaluable public resource for everything! It's your community putting forth their assets to contribute an effort to enlighten the entire community regardless of race, color, or creed.

Inside the Illustrator's Process

Watch this video to get an inside look into Dan Santat's process for making the artwork and bringing *Drawn Together* to life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpNR28w6cN4>

