

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

PAHUA AND THE SOUL STEALER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Pahua Moua has a bit of a reputation for being a weirdo. A lonely eleven-year-old Hmong girl with the unique ability to see spirits, she spends her summer days babysitting her little brother and playing with her best friend, a cat spirit no one else can see. One day Pahua accidentally untethers an angry spirit from the haunted bridge in her neighborhood—whoops. When her brother suddenly falls sick and can't be awoken, Pahua fears that the bridge spirit has stolen his soul. She returns to the scene of the crime with her aunt's old shaman tools, hoping to confront the spirit and demand her brother's return. Instead, she summons a demon.

Thankfully, a warrior shaman with a bit of an attitude problem shows up at the last minute and saves her butt. With the help of this guide, Pahua will have to find her way through the spirit worlds and rescue her brother's soul before it's too late. Little does she know she'll have her own discoveries to make along the way. . . . With its unforgettable characters, unique nature-based magic system, breathtaking twists and reveals, and climactic boss battle, this story based on Hmong oral tradition offers everything a fantasy lover could want.



CHARACTERS

In Order of Appearance

PAHUA—eleven-year-old Hmong girl with the ability to see and interact with spiritfolk

MATT—Pahua's younger brother

MIV—cat spirit and Pahua's best friend

ZHONG—shaman warrior apprentice from the School for Shamanic Arts and Spiritual Mastery

BRIDGE SPIRIT—spirit who haunted the bridge where she died after her parents abandoned her in the woods (p. 17)

SHAO—a hermit oracle granted immortality and the powers of an oracle and exiled to the Echo to help any traveler who sought his wisdom (p. 71)

SHEE YEE—the son of the Sky Father's youngest daughter, also the first and greatest shaman (p. 71)

NTUJ, AKA THE SKY FATHER—The eldest son of the very first man and woman. He created and rules the six realms. (p. 88)

XOV—The god of thunder, destruction, and wrath, he is the younger brother of Ntuj and father of the first demons. To escape the demons, he opened a gate between the realms, releasing them into the world along with illness and strife. He was eventually imprisoned by Shee Yee. (p. 88)

HUAB TAIS ZAJ, AKA THE DRAGON EMPEROR OF ZAJ TEB, THE LAND OF THE DRAGONS—Sky Father's son-in-law (p. 89)

XIAV—a dragon who took over as god of thunder after Xov's imprisonment (p. 89)

NHIA NGAO ZHUA PA—the shape-shifter goddess, known as a trickster by mortal men (p. 89)

GAO PA—Sky Father's youngest daughter, mother of Shee Yee (p. 110)

NPLOOJ—queen of the nature spirits in the forest in the Spirit Realm (p. 219)

NYOM—queen of the nature spirits in the hills around the Tree of Souls (p. 228)

SPIKE—Zhong's spirit horse (p. 235)

YENG—the arborist, protector of the Tree of Souls (p. 257)



PRE-READING DISCUSSION

With a partner or in a small group, discuss the Hmong people and their cultural beliefs and practices. Use the questions below to guide your discussions and research on the Hmong people.

1. Who are the Hmong?
2. What is religion? How do the Hmong practice religion?
3. What are traditional pieces of clothing the Hmong wear?
4. What are funeral traditions the Hmong practice?
5. What are food the Hmong eat?



PRE-READING ACTIVITY

During Pahua and Zhong's quest, they use multiple spiritual tools used by shamans to defeat evil spirits or as protection. Below is a list of common items used by shamans. Write down how each item might be used to help a shaman in the before column. While reading the book, revisit the list and describe how each tool is used in the after column.

Shaman Tools	Before	After
Incense		
Gong		
Shaman sword		
Paper talisman		
Protection charm		
Joss paper		
Red cloth mask		

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare Miv with human spirits. (*Chapter 1*)
2. *All spirits, even good ones like house spirits, have dual natures.* (p. 5)
What does Pahua mean by spirits having dual natures? (*Chapter 1*)
3. Identify different spirits Pahua encounters in her daily life. (*Chapter 1*)
4. Pahua knew the bridge by the wood was haunted and her mother had warned her to stay away, but why did she go with June and the other girls anyway? (*Chapter 2*)
5. *My mom had told me that people should never speak to human spirits outside of a shamanic ritual.* (p. 23)
Explain why Pahua's mother gave her this advice. (*Chapter 3*)
6. List three reasons why Pahua refused to tell her mother the truth about her ability to see spirits. (*Chapter 3*)
7. Describe the purpose of the gong and sword used by shamans. (*Chapter 4*)
8. Pahua usually cannot feel the presence of human spirits. Explain how the bridge spirit can be felt by Pahua and even regular people. (*Chapter 4*)
9. *Water spirits are nothing like earth-based nature spirits.* (p. 42)
Identify characteristics that are unique to water spirits. (*Chapter 4*)
10. Why might Pahua feel especially hurt by the scornful look from the girl who just saved her life at the bridge? (*Chapter 5*)
11. *Becoming a shaman was what my mom described as a "calling."* (p. 51)
Explain what Pahua's mother meant by this. (*Chapter 5*)
12. According to dab neeg (traditional Hmong folktales), tiger spirits were associated with evil. How did they gain this reputation? How are poj ntxoog associated with tiger spirits? (*Chapter 5*)
13. Explain what happens when an evil spirit takes the soul of a mortal into the spirit realm. (*Chapter 5*)
14. List the duties of shaman warriors. (*Chapter 5*)
15. Describe a qeej. What are they used for? (*Chapter 6*)
16. Pahua and Zhong traveled into the Echo to seek Shao's wisdom. Why is it called the Echo? Who lives in the Echo? (*Chapter 6*)
17. *"It's really pitiful how uneducated most Hmong people are about our own stories," Zhong continued. "For centuries everything was passed down orally, and almost nothing is recorded in writing."* (p. 70)
How did Pahua relate to Zhong's statement? Can you relate to this? Why? (*Chapter 6*)
18. Explain why poj ntxoog are obsessed with mortal fashion. Why does Pahua sympathize with them? (*Chapter 7*)
19. Why does Zhong warn Pahua to never lie down in the Bamboo Nursery? (*Chapter 8*)
20. *Every Hmong person with the same last name is considered family, regardless of whether they actually share any blood.* (p. 89)
Explain why the Hmong practice this belief. (*Chapter 8*)
21. Identify and summarize the members of the Council of Elder Gods. (*Chapter 8*)
22. According to Hmong folktales, Shee Yee was a hero. Who is he? What were his abilities? (*Chapter 9*)
23. What relationship does Pahua share with Shee Yee? (*Chapter 9*)

24. What did Pahua and Miv discover about Zhong? (*Chapter 10*)
25. To earn the blessing of the school's guardian spirit, what must Zhong successfully do? (*Chapter 10*)
26. Thread and Needle was the name of the poj ntxoog's trap. How did this help Pahua and Zhong determine who the poj ntxoog worked for? (*Chapter 10*)
27. Shamanic rituals are performed by shamans to guide mortal souls into the Spirit Realm for reincarnation. The bridge spirit was able to cross realms without this ritual. Explain how this happened. (*Chapter 10*)
28. Spiritual energy is required to pass between realms. Neutralizing spiritual energy allows mortals to cross realms without freezing. What protected Zhong from freezing when crossing to and from the Echo? (*Chapter 11*)
29. While escaping the Bamboo Nursery, Zhong lost a couple of her pins. What were the significance of the pins, or badges, on her jacket? (*Chapter 11*)
30. Zhong initially said she would perform a ritual to project her and Pahua's spirits into Dab Teb while their bodies are watched by Miv and the house spirits. However, Zhong later decided it would be safer for them to cross over physically. What changed Zhong's mind? (*Chapter 12*)
31. Explain why Pahua and Zhong needed to wear a cloth mask to travel into Dab Teb. (*Chapter 12*)
32. Why do shape-shifters wear cloaks or relics while in their mortal form? (*Chapter 13*)
33. Define the term niam tais. Why did Pahua address the horned woman as Aunt Chan? (*Chapter 13*)
34. Why were the guardian spirits of the Crossroads turned into stones? (*Chapter 13*)
35. What incident led Pahua to avoid learning how to swim? (*Chapter 13*)
36. How did Pahua and Zhong manage to pass the cross guards without a permit and survive the eagle spirit? (*Chapter 14*)
37. Retell the story of the frog cursed by Nhia Ngao Zhua Pa. What is he responsible for in the Spirit Realm's waiting room? (*Chapter 15*)
38. According to Pahua's mother, the ability to become a shaman is not an inherited thing. What determines if someone has the ability to become a shaman? (*Chapter 16*)
39. Describe how Pahua felt when they came closer to the tunnel covered in elephant-head designs. What did Pahua discover? (*Chapter 16*)
40. *The ground beneath me trembled as the beast closed the distance between us. Without thinking it through, I scooped up the tree spirit and draped them around my neck, hoping they would know to hold on, and lunged behind a tree trunk.* (p. 216) How did Pahua's act of bravery and kindness earn Nplooj's help? (*Chapter 17*)
41. How did Pahua learn to feel her spiritual energy? (*Chapter 17*)
42. During Pahua's nightmare, an unknown entity yanked her to her feet, waking her from her sleep. Predict who this entity might be. (*Chapter 17*)
43. After a night of scouting the area, what news did Miv share with Pahua and Zhong? (*Chapter 18*)
44. How do shamans travel in the Spirit Realm? (*Chapter 18*)
45. How did joss paper help Pahua and Zhong in the Spirit Realm? (*Chapter 18*)
46. Riding Spike reminded Pahua of one of her favorite memories. What memory did she recall? (*Chapter 19*)
47. How do mortals lose their souls? Where do lost souls go, and how can they be retrieved? (*Chapter 19*)

48. Explain why Zhong feels inadequate in her abilities as a shaman apprentice. (Chapter 19)
49. What were the voices Pahua heard at the Tree of Souls? (Chapter 20)
50. Who is the arborist? What are the arborist's duties? (Chapter 20)
51. *Yeng snorted and then abruptly stiffened. She tilted her head, listening. Her dark braid fell over her shoulder. Slowly, she lifted her hand and pulled from the air a thin strip of white cloth. It glowed a little, casting her brown fingers in soft light. She caressed it with her thumb, nodding and whispering something under her breath.* (p. 259)
What does the appearance of a white cloth indicate? (Chapter 20)
52. Why did Yeng give her locket to Pahua? What was inside of it? (Chapter 20)
53. Retell the story of how the Hmong ended up in Southeast Asia. (Chapter 20)
54. Shee Yee's soul was never meant to reincarnate. How did Yeng lose Shee Yee's soul? (Chapter 20)
55. Explain the cycle of reincarnation. Why did this convince Zhong the ax would be found in the door named cag ntoo? (Chapter 21)
56. Retell the story of Shee Yee and Xov. How did Shee Yee insult Xov? (Chapter 22)
57. Shee Yee destroyed Xov's demon children, but why might he have saved Xov's last child? What punishment did the last child receive? (Chapter 22)
58. *"Bound in ivory, silver, gold, the god of wrath will prison hold. By victor's hand the gate undone when sky bridges earth for love of sun."* (p. 279)
Interpret the first seal of binding. (Chapter 22)
59. How did Pahua pick up the habit of pretending to be someone or something else during times of difficulty? (Chapter 23)
60. *If our roots are who we are, everything we've been and done, then wouldn't cutting out such an important piece, even if it was a bad one, hurt the whole tree?* (p. 290)
Pahua's worst memory is of her father leaving her, and his absence has left her feeling unworthy. Explain why Pahua might have refused to give her worst memory to Cag. (Chapter 23)
61. What has helped Pahua to cope with the absence of her father? (Chapter 23)
62. Why would the Thunder Dragon, Lord Xiav, want the lightning ax? (Chapter 24)
63. Explain why Pahua failed to hold the ax on her first attempt. What helped her to successfully pull the ax? (Chapter 24)
64. *"She took off the moment she sensed the dragons."* (p. 314)
Why did Spike leave Pahua and Zhong behind? (Chapter 25)
65. After death, mortal souls report to the Tree of Souls for reincarnation. The bridge spirit did not do that, but the arborist felt her slip between the mortal realm and spirit realm many times. Why is that? (Chapter 25)
66. How did Pahua convince the poj ntxoog to take them to their camp? (Chapter 26)
67. Why do poj ntxoog eat mortals? (Chapter 27)
68. *The lightning ax hummed through my gloves, but the part of me that had Shee Yee's instincts told me not to use it.* (p. 337)
What forced Pahua to shove her instincts aside and use the lightning ax? (Chapter 27)
69. Describe the effects of the lightning ax after Pahua struck the ground. Explain how she felt about her actions. (Chapter 28)
70. What gift did Pahua give Nyom to fix her mistakes? How did this gift restore the forest? (Chapter 28)

- 71.** *"We didn't get this far because of Shee Yee. It's because you, Pahua Moua, try to see the truth of people. It can be a little annoying when I just want to fight whatever's attacking us and you're trying to reason with them, but even so, it seems to be working okay."* (p. 347)
Recall instances where Pahua's tactic helped the girls to escape attacks. (Chapter 28)
- 72.** How did Nyom modify the celestial lightning ax? What did it transform into? (Chapter 28)
- 73.** Why did the tree spirit offer Pahua and Zhong a mango? (Chapter 29)
- 74.** Once Zhong completes her quest, how will she be recognized as a shaman warrior? (Chapter 30)
- 75.** What did Pahua discover about Matt's spirit when she found him in the bridge spirit's tunnel? (Chapter 30)
- 76.** How did Zhong subdue the child spirits without harming them? (Chapter 30)
- 77.** How did Xov trick Pahua into breaking the first seal? (Chapter 31)
- 78.** Identify Miv's true identity. What behaviors or signs from Pahua's journey revealed Miv's identity? (Chapter 31)
- 79.** Interpret the meaning of the last line in the first seal of binding: *When sky bridges earth for love of son.* (p. 374) (Chapter 31)
- 80.** On multiple occasions, Pahua smelled a sweet scent of jasmine. Who or what did this scent belong to? How has it shown up during trials in Pahua's quest? (Chapter 32)
- 81.** You're not Shee Yee, *Miv had told me back at the Tree of Souls.* You're Pahua Moua. (p. 386)
Recalling Miv's words of encouragement, what realization gave Pahua strength to defeat Xov? (Chapter 32)
- 82.** How did the memento Cag gave Pahua give her an advantage over Xov? (Chapter 32)
- 83.** Why did the bridge spirit target Zhong's charm? (Chapter 33)
- 84.** The bridge spirits energy was strengthened by a thread tied around her ankle and Xov's prison. Pahua knew she had to destroy the bridge spirit to stop her control over the child spirits. Why did Pahua not strike the bridge spirit with the lightning ax? What did she do instead? (Chapter 33)
- 85.** *She released a shaky breath. Then she closed her eyes and leaned into me. I hugged her again, and she squeezed back, her head tucked against my shoulder. Finally she dissolved into mist, leaving nothing behind but a gleaming strip of white cloth. After a second, that vanished, too.* (p. 398)
What does the appearance of a white cloth indicate as the bridge spirit vanished? (Chapter 33)
- 86.** Miv was the last child of Xov, cursed to be his father's prison guard for eternity. How did he take the form of a cat? (Chapter 34)
- 87.** What did Xov send Miv out to do? What did he successfully do? (Chapter 34)
- 88.** *"Xov said you should have taken me to him when I was younger. Why didn't you?"* (p. 405)
Explain why Miv did not take Pahua to his father after seeking out Shao's wisdom and meeting her. (Chapter 34)
- 89.** Pahua finally asked her mother about the pin Aunt Kalia had given them. What did her mother reveal to her about the pin and Aunt Kalia's intentions? (Chapter 34)
- 90.** Why was there a small flower tucked behind the pin Zhong gave Pahua? (Chapter 34)

STORY MAP

While reading, with a partner or in a small group, complete the story map graphic organizer. After reading, discuss each important element and fill in with missing details from the story.

Characters	Setting	Plot	Conflict	Theme
List and describe the characters.	Identify when and where the story took place.	Describe the events of the story.	Summarize the main problem of the story.	Describe the message or moral of the story.
		Introduction: What is the problem?		
		Rising Action: Actions leading to the climax		
		Climax: Turning point of the story		
		Falling Action: Resolution		

POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING PROMPTS

1. *"We don't have to kill everything that attacks us. We can survive by bargaining with something they want. We just have to figure out what that is."* (p. 181) Discuss instances in which this approach helped Pahua and Zhong to escape deadly encounters with spiritfolks in the Spirit Realm.
2. *"The souls of dead mortals are supposed to be met by an elephant guide when they cross between realms. But that doesn't seem to have happened with the bridge spirit."* (p. 222) Explain why the bridge spirit was not met by an elephant guide and ended up in one of the tunnels under the Spirit Realm.
3. What reoccurring theme is seen throughout the story? In what events at the beginning, middle, and end of the story do we see this theme?

POST-READING PROJECT

With a partner, interview a shaman in your local community using the questions below. Add two additional questions of your choice in the space provided. Share your findings with another pair of students.

How did you discover your calling to be a shaman?	
What challenges did you face at the beginning of your journey as a shaman?	
What tools or support have allowed you to grow as a shaman?	
What is your most memorable event as a shaman?	

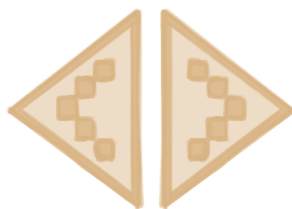
POST-READING ACTIVITY

With a partner or in a small group, retell Pahua and Zhong's quest to save Matt in the Spirit Realm by designing a map using each of the locations below. Describe what significant event or persons the girls encountered at each location.

1. The Echo
2. Thread and Needle clothing store
3. Bamboo Nursery
4. The Crossroads
5. Spirit Realm's waiting room
6. Spirit Realm: Equestrian Rentals
7. Tree of Souls library
8. Tree of Souls garden
9. Tunnels under the Spirit Realm

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lori M. Lee has been writing stories since the third grade and earned a bachelor's degree in creative writing. She specializes in science fiction and fantasy and has two YA series to her name: *Gates of Thread and Stone*, and *Shamanborn*. She's also a contributor to several anthologies, including *A Thousand Beginnings and Endings* and *Color Outside the Lines*. Lori was born in a village in the mountains of Laos, which her family was forced to escape when she was just an infant. They relocated to a refugee camp in Thailand for a few years and moved permanently to the United States when she was three. Now she lives in Wisconsin with her husband, kids, and excitable shih-tzu. Her Twitter handle is @LoriMLee.



Q & A with Lori M. Lee

- Q:** *Pahua and the Soul Stealer* is written around a very complex belief system about spirits and shamans. Did you have prior knowledge about this system, or did you have to do research before writing the book? What was the research process like? Who contributed to your knowledge about shaman beliefs and practices?
- A:** I grew up within the Hmong community, so I had a good base of information through lived experiences. I did have to do a lot of research, though, because it wasn't enough to build an entire world from, even a fantasy world. So I read a lot of research papers and essays, and I took advantage of the section in my local library devoted to Hmong culture and history—a benefit of having a robust local Hmong community. I also consulted with various family members and elders.
- Q:** How did your cultural background and upbringing influence the writing of the book?
- A:** The book is immersed in Hmong mythology and folklore, which was something I really wanted to emphasize because those were the aspects of my culture that I loved the most as a kid. Growing up as a minority, having lived with discrimination and racism from so young an age, I consciously separated myself—at least mentally and emotionally—from my Hmong roots because I hated that I didn't fit in. It's been a long and ongoing process to correct that, but our stories, our *dab neeg*, our traditional of oral storytelling are what stayed with me all throughout my life.

Q: Who or what inspired the stories behind each of your characters? Which of the characters do you identify with most? Why?

A: The characters aren't inspired by anyone in particular, but Pahua's situation does echo my own when I was her age. She's going through a lot in terms of who she is and where she fits, which is something a lot of kids can relate to, but particularly those from the diaspora. I guess in that way, I identify the most with Pahua, but she's considerably braver than I was at that age!

Q: Are the fun Hmong folktales and the gods woven into the book based on folktales that are told in the Hmong community or from your imagination? Where did you learn these stories?

A: Many of them are based on folktales that I have either heard or read. The creation story, the Sky Father and his brother Xov, the Crossroads, the eagle with the colorful tongues that could turn people into stone and many more—these are all things I pulled directly from stories I read in my research. I was able to get my hands on some rare books where our stories were actually recorded in writing, which was an invaluable resource. I did also make things up, though, such as the Tree of Souls and the Arborist, and I crafted the look of the spirits in a way that I felt made sense while still being whimsical and fun.

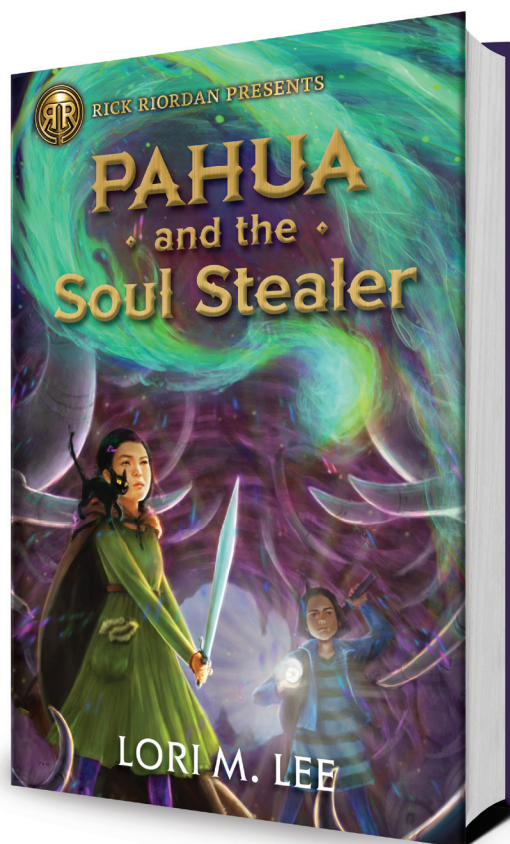
Q: What do you hope *Pahua and the Soul Stealer* will teach readers about the Hmong, especially young Hmong girls?

A: I hope readers get a glimpse of the rich and complex history of Hmong mythology, and that it inspires them to either learn more or simply open their hearts and their minds to kids who maybe don't look like them. For Hmong girls, I hope they see how powerful they are and how they are the protagonists of their own stories.



This guide was written by **Linda Thao**, a Hmong American school teacher.
Ms. Thao graduated from CSU, Fresno with a bachelor of arts in liberal studies and master
of arts in education with an emphasis in curriculum and instruction.

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PAHUA AND THE SOUL STEALER

Hardcover

978-1-368-06824-6

\$16.99 US

Disney • HYPERION
www.disneybooks.com