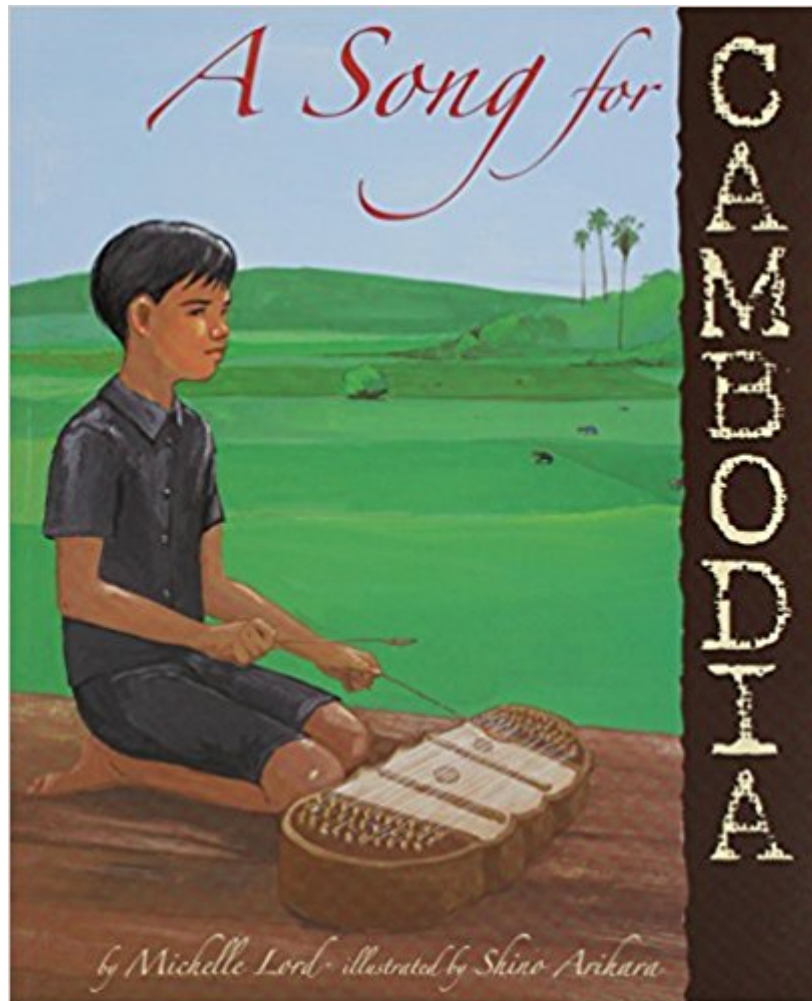




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A Song For Cambodia



Synopsis

When Arn was a young boy in Cambodia, his days were filled with love, laughter, and the sweet sounds of music. That all changed suddenly in 1975 when Arn's village was invaded by Khmer Rouge soldiers and his family was torn apart. Nine-year-old Arn was taken to a children's work camp, where he labored long hours in the rice fields under the glaring eyes of threatening soldiers. Overworked, underfed, and in constant fear for his life, Arn had to find a way to survive. When guards asked for volunteers to play music one day, Arn bravely raised his hand taking a chance that would change the course of his life. *A Song for Cambodia* is the inspirational true story of Arn Chorn-Pond. His heartfelt music created beauty in a time of darkness and turned tragedy into healing.

Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 11 years

Grade Level: 1 - 6

Customer Reviews

Prewar Cambodia offered an almost idyllic boyhood to Arn Chorn, but the Khmer Rouge turned his world upside down, separating him from his family and sending Arn to a work camp. He survived the camp by learning to play the khim, a traditional Cambodian instrument. Sent to fight the Vietnamese, Arn fled to the jungle, fell ill, woke up in a refugee camp, nearly drowned in a flood, and was rescued and brought to the U.S. by Reverend Peter Pond, who adopted him. Through music, Arn slowly adjusted to his new country but promised to return to Cambodia. An afterword describes

his subsequent efforts to assist war survivors and revive traditional Cambodian arts and music. Filled with drama and tragedy, this picture-book biography skillfully telescopes Arn Chorn-Pond's tumultuous boyhood. Realistic gouache illustrations depict the terrors of war but refrain from showing graphic violence. Amazing and inspiring, this biography is an excellent choice for multicultural studies. Grades 3-5. --Linda Perkins --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"A sensitive reconstruction . . . [A Song for Cambodia] effectively captures the terror and tension of life under the Pol Pot regime. Arihara crafts somber scenes in broad brushstrokes to illustrate this important story of devastation and rebuilding in Southeast Asia."Kirkus Reviews"[A Song for Cambodia] offers an age-appropriate view of a subject rarely visited in children's books."Publishers Weekly"Gouache paintings underscore the changing mood of Chorn-Pond's story. The beginning scene depicts him playing with his siblings against a light blue sky. Later, the colors turn darker, underlining the horrors of the prison camp. The final spread shows Chorn-Pond smiling in a bright room, playing the khim for his new American family. . . . Use this solid picture-book biography with Jen Bryant's *Music for the End of Time* (Eerdmans, 2005), another story about triumphing over suffering with the help of music."School Library Journal"Prewar Cambodia offered an almost idyllic boyhood to Arn Chorn, but the Khmer Rouge turned his world upside down, separating him from his family and sending Arn to a work camp. He survived the camp by learning to play the khim, a traditional Cambodian instrument. Sent to fight the Vietnamese, Arn fled to the jungle, fell ill, woke up in a refugee camp, nearly drowned in a flood, and was rescued and brought to the U.S. by Reverend Peter Pond who adopted him. Through music, Arn slowly adjusted to his new country but promised to return to Cambodia. An afterword describes his subsequent efforts to assist war survivors and revive traditional Cambodian arts and music. Filled with drama and tragedy, this picturebook biography skillfully telescopes Arn's tumultuous boyhood. Realistic gouache illustrations depict the terrors of war but refrain from showing graphic violence. Amazing and inspiring, this biography is an excellent choice for multicultural studies." "Booklist --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I enjoyed reading this book to my 6-year-old son. I knew Arn-Chorn Pond's adoptive father and was pleased by this simple story, told from the point of view of the refugee child. It inspired my son to ask many questions about Cambodia and I believe he learned something important. The illustrations are magnificent.

Love this!

A Song for Cambodia is a children's picturebook about serious matters - war, human cruelty, and the power of music to kindle hope in one's darkest hour. A simplified biography of the childhood of real-life humanitarian Arn Chorn-Pond, A Song for Cambodia tells of how Khmer Rouge soldiers murdered Arn's family and sent him to a children's work camp, where he labored for long hours on the brink of starvation. When the guards requested volunteers to play music, Arn dared to volunteer - receiving his only chance for survival. He learned to play a traditional Cambodian musical instrument, as his life literally depended upon it; his teacher and several fellow students were later executed. Music was the one thing that gave Arn hope and comfort through his trying ordeal of escape, sickness, and survival at a refugee camp. An American volunteer saved his life and adopted him; adjusting to life in America was not easy. An afterword tells of Arn's award-winning humanitarian work with survivors of war, and his efforts to reclaim and spread knowledge of Cambodian music. Though A Song for Cambodia covers somber subject matter, it does so in a tasteful and respectful fashion; the result is a high-quality picturebook strongly recommended especially for public library children's collections.

Every now and then, I come across a story of survival that is truly amazing and defeats all odds. Arn Chorn-Pond's story as told in A Song for Cambodia written by Michelle Lord and illustrated by Shino Arihara is one of them. Arn had a happy childhood full of music, love, and laughter in his small Cambodian village until Khmer Rouge soldiers invaded his village in 1975 and tore his family apart. A brief history of Khmer Rouge's invasion on Cambodia in the 1970's is included in the foreward. Led by Pol Pot, the intent was to turn Cambodia into a communist country, but the Khmer Rouge used violence and terror in their attempt and ultimately killed 1.7 million men, women, and children during their 4 year reign. Arn Chorn-Pond was one of the lucky children who survived, but it was not an easy feat. When he was separated from his family, he was sent to a children's work camp. With no shoes and little to eat, Arn was forced to work in the rice paddies. When the soldiers asked for volunteers to join a musical group, Arn volunteered and learned to play the khim, a wooden string instrument. He luckily had a talent for this instrument which ended up saving his life in the camp. Without giving too much away, Arn managed to escape the camp, and through even more adversity, ended up surviving and was adopted by a missionary who brought him to the United States. The afterword tells how Arn used his good fortune to give back to Cambodia and help rebuild and bring music back to a war-torn country. Without going into graphic details, Michelle Lord tells the

true story of the horrors Arn and many other Cambodians faced. Ms. Lord masterfully tells the story in a way that is appropriate for and not condescending to children, yet she doesn't sugar coat the facts. We see Arn and his mother tearfully clinging to each other as the soldiers invade their village; we see children being led into a forest to be killed; we see Arn struggle with adapting to a new culture and experience nightmares and sadness for the loss of his family. The reader is left with no doubt that something terrible has happened. Shino Arihara's gouache illustrations are mostly done in muted earth tones, depicting the dark and sad tone of the story. We see brighter colors at the beginning of the story before the invasion and again at the end when Arn plays music in his new home. At the back of the book is a photograph of Arn Chorn-Pond, smiling and standing in front of a house he's building in Cambodia, and a comprehensive list of sources demonstrates the thorough research Michelle Lord conducted to write Arn's story. *A Song for Cambodia* is a touching and inspirational story full of discussion opportunities, making it an excellent addition to a child's home library or a social studies classroom.

The book begins with the happy and relatively carefree days of Arn Chorn-Pond and his family in a rural Cambodian village, with descriptions of a thriving open-air market and the sounds of music and laughter. This way of life quickly changed for Arn when, like they did across Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge soldiers destroyed Arn's village, split up his family, and sent him to a children's labor camp. Arn may have succumbed to the atrocious conditions at the labor camp were it not for his volunteering to join a musical group meant to entertain the guards. When Arn was sent to fight as a child soldier, he escaped to the Thai border and ultimately was adopted by a volunteer clergyman. In his new American home, Arn used his music to heal on the inside as his nightmares slowly turned into dreams of returning to Cambodia to help others who had survived the pain and suffering. Michelle Lord and Shino Arihara take on this dark topic with skill and subtlety, yielding a story that is both insightful and moving. The book, appropriate for children who are mature enough to handle such a tough subject, ends with a hopeful tone. Similarly, the illustrations have a realistic but gentle quality. The author provides a detailed afterword about the inspiring humanitarian work that Arn Chorn-Pond has pursued in his adult years in an effort to revive Cambodia's classical arts and music. What a contribution that this man's story, which has been told in leading U.S. newspaper, radio, and television outlets, is now accessible to children in this carefully written and illustrated book.

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