

1. There are many major historical events featured in the novel. How much did you know about these events before you read *The Mountains Sing*? Did the story show you a new side to any events you were already familiar with?

2. Many of the characters in *The Mountains Sing* experience terrible things, and some of them must make difficult choices. Each of them handles their experiences differently. Te Son ca helps Huong on her journey. What other objects, memories, people, or conversations help each character to endure and recover?

3. How does Grandma Dieu Lan help her children after their return? What might her relationships with her children reveal about family relationships in Viet Nam?

4. War stories are often told from a male perspective. In *The Mountains Sing*, Huong and Grandma Dieu Lan take turns narrating their stories. How might the novel differ if it had male narrators? Why do you think the author chose to have women and girls tell the story instead?

5. Which character did you feel the most sympathetic toward? Te least? Is that different from which character you like the most and least, and if so, why?

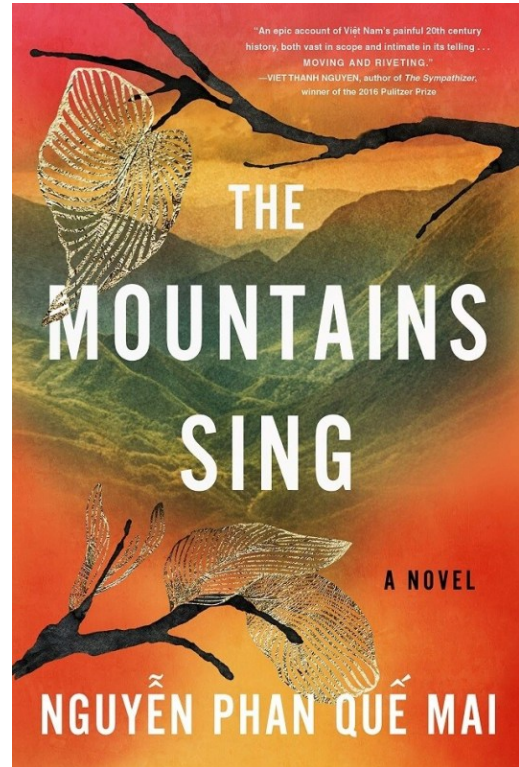
6. "I was determined to sing on. I learned then that as long as I have my voice, I am still alive," says Grandma Dieu Lan. Give examples of music and poetry that are represented in the novel. How important do you think music and poetry are in the Vietnamese culture? How important are they in your own culture?

7. In addition to descriptions of war and pain, *The Mountains Sing* features many descriptions of gorgeous landscapes, interesting city sights, and delicious foods. Were there any locations that you would like to visit or have visited? Any foods you would like to try or have tried?

8. According to Huong, proverbs are the essence of Vietnamese wisdom, passed orally from one generation to the next, even before the written Vietnamese language existed. Two examples are Trongcai rui co cai may (Good luck hides inside bad luck) and Ac gia ac bao (Cruelty dispensed, cruelty returned). Do these proverbs ring true for you? Were there other proverbs that resonated with you as particularly true or meaningful?

9. In *The Mountains Sing*, Vietnamese names and words appear with their full diacritical marks. For Vietnamese speakers, these marks are necessary to interpret meaning: for example, the words ma, mã, má, mà, mạ, and mã all have separate meanings (ghost, grave, mother, but, young rice plant, and horse, respectively). Nonetheless, it is unusual for an American novel to include the marks. Did their inclusion affect your reading experience? How?

10. Huong thinks that if people are willing to learn about other cultures, there will be no war on



earth. Do you think Huong feels differently about America and American people because of her reading? What books have made your world bigger?

11. Grandma says, "If our stories survive, we will not die, even when our bodies are no longer here on this earth." *The Mountains Sing* is inspired by some of the experiences of the author's family. What stories from your own family can be written into a novel? Do you know of any fictional stories that remind you of your own family story?

12. Had you previously read other books from or about Viet Nam? How is the Viet Nam portrayed in *The Mountains Sing* similar to or different from the Viet Nam you already knew?