



Dogtag Summer

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Twelve-year-old Tracy-or Tuyet-has always felt different. The villagers in Vietnam called her con-lai, or "half-breed," because her father was an American GI. And she doesn't fit in with her adoptive family in California, either. But when Tracy and a friend discover a soldier's dogtag hidden among her father's things, it sets her past and her present on a collision course. Where should her broken heart come to rest? In a time and place she remembers only in her dreams? Or among the people she now calls family? Partridge's sensitive portrayal of a girl and her family grappling with the complicated legacy of war is as timely today as the events were decades ago.

Dogtag Summer Details

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Author : Elizabeth Partridge

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From Reader Review Dogtag Summer for online ebook

Amanda says

Awards and Recognition: [Kirkus review, Notable Social Studies Trade Book 2012], Ages: 9-14

“Have you ever known absolutely for sure that some piece of you was missing?”

Tracy is looking forward to spending long, lazy summer days with her best friend, Stargazer, before they head to 7th grade in the fall. However, when they discover an old ammo box from her father’s war days in Vietnam, they unlock more than his personal belongings -- they unleash ghosts of tragedies past from which both Tracy and her father had been hiding.

Dogtag Summer by Elizabeth Partridge jumps back in forth in time – showing us a young Tracy’s memories of her shattered childhood growing up in war-torn Vietnam. Though she’s been in America for five years, some of the more horrible memories are starting to resurface, and both she and her father must reconcile with the past, and each other.

Winner of the Notable Social Studies Trade Book (2012), this historical piece of fiction would work well in an interdisciplinary unit which could be referenced for content, used as a read-aloud or literature circle book, or even with a lesson on sequencing and author’s purpose.

Dogtag Summer brings to light some uncomfortable truths, but in a way that is accessible to middle grade readers, making it an important addition to conversations on friendship, trust, and the brutal effects of war.

Abby Johnson says

Tracy has been in America for five years now, but she still doesn't fit in and lately has been having flashbacks of the life in Vietnam that she can't quite remember. Tension from the Vietnam War permeates her family, too, as her adoptive father struggles to deal with his own army nightmares. When Tracy and her best friend Stargazer find dogtags in her father's tool shed and her father freaks out about it, she wonders if the dogtags might be a key to her hidden past. This dogtag summer will be a time of change for Tracy, just turning twelve years old and about to start Junior High, and for her entire family.

Lush descriptions of the California coast meld with lush descriptions of the Vietnamese jungle as Tracy alternates between her present (1980) and her memories of the past. The tension between Vietnam veterans and war protesters is shown in Tracy's friendship with Stargazer and her relationship with his hippie parents. There are lots of issues throughout the book, but they're woven seamlessly together and never felt like too much.

While the book might need some scaffolding about the Vietnam War, this is a poignant story that teens will relate to. It's about coming of age and feeling in-between in so many ways. I'd not only recommend this to fans of similar stories like Home of the Brave by Katherine Applegate, Shooting the Moon by Frances

O'Roark Dowell, and Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai, but I'd also recommend it to girls devouring Judy Blume's coming of age stories.

Mary Ann says

Who am I? Where do I belong? Who can I trust? These are questions that all children ask as they grow older, but for twelve-year-old Tracy these questions haunt her. In the moving story Dogtag Summer, Tracy knows that her mother was Vietnamese and she was adopted when she was six, just after the Vietnam War ended. But her parents won't share any other real information with her. So she is left with a hole in her heart, an empty place inside her.

Tracy's summer between 5th and 6th grade was supposed to be filled with lazy days swimming in the river and building a project with her best friend Stargazer. But when the two of them find an old ammo box and a dogtag inside it, Tracy's world starts cracking around her. She knows the story of how she was adopted, but there are so many unanswered questions - so many missing pieces that it "left an empty, scooped-out place" inside.

Her father - a Vietnam War vet - buries himself in work, his cocktails and the nightly news, refusing to answer any questions. "It wasn't long until my dad came back in the front door. In the stillness, the quiet rooms of our house echoed with secrets." Her mother tries to answer her questions, but she can barely communicate with her husband, much less really understand Tracy's longings or help her fill in the missing pieces.

As Tracy searches for her identity, a sense of home and where she belongs, she remembers bit by bit more of her childhood. Each chapter begins with a brief snippet of a memory, almost like a fragment of a dream, of Tracy's childhood in Vietnam. She remembers living with her grandmother, having her mother visit her, and running away from the bright lights of an American jeep. She remembers the villagers calling her con-lai, or 'half-breed', because her father was an American GI. But she can't remember enough to put all the pieces together, to fill the longing in her heart.

Partridge conveys Tracy's emotional struggle realistically, showing how this young girl is torn by the secrets stifling her home, and yet how she is unable to really articulate what it is she needs to understand. Her writing is both accessible and full of wonderful images. I can't wait share this with students.

Marathon County Public Library says

Tracey (Tuyet) is "con lai", half breed; she has been told that she has the face of the enemy. Half Vietnamese and half American, her father was an American soldier serving in Vietnam. Adopted by an American family in California, she is not sure where or how she fits in. With the help of her best friend Stargazer she begins searching. When they discover an old ammo box in the garage containing a dogtag and a pair of boots, her Dad yells at them. She really does not understand and her adopted father, also a Vietnam War veteran, becomes even more angry, sullen and silent. With flashbacks to Tracey's earlier life in war-torn Vietnam, this excellent tween novel is a search for identity and understanding involving a war that no one wants to remember or discuss.

Sharyn H. / Marathon County Public Library
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Donna says

Dogtag Summer offers additional perspective on the vast impact the Vietnam War had on lives around the world. Partridge does a good job bringing history to life through the experiences of Tracy, a young girl who has been adopted from Vietnam by an American soldier and his wife. As experienced through brief flashbacks that interrupt Tracy's languid summer days between elementary and middle school, the reader learns her story and the trauma she endures living as a child during the Vietnam War. This story includes the unique challenges and dangers faced by children who had a Vietnamese mother and an American soldier for a father. I appreciated the exploration of identity through Tracy and the difficulty depicted for her to find a sense of home. However, some of the main storyline involving her father and a found dogtag were overly dramatic and distracted from the work the author had done to solidly establish characters and setting. Despite this element, particularly with the notes at the end of the book, I found this story to be a valuable and effective introduction or enhancement to the Vietnam War and would have given it 3 1/2 stars if I could.

David says

Dogtag Summer by Elizabeth Partridge follows 12 year old adopted Vietnamese-American Tracy over a summer of discovery as she uncovers, amid returning memories, her personal history back in Vietnam during the war.

When Tracy and a friend discover a soldier's dogtag hidden among her father's things, she grapples with suddenly returning dreams and memories of her days in Vietnam during the War and questions about being adopted and whether she belongs in America with her present family. Tracy's need to investigate her past clashes with her family's wishes and her father's memories from the war. Both Tracy and her adoptive Father struggle with post traumatic stress disorder, but her father tries to resist memories while Tracy searches for the truth from her past. Chapters of this historical novel set in 1980 begin with brief snippets of memories that are returning to Tracy followed by present day events. The novel ends with an appendix with questions and answers focusing on the novel and the Vietnam era and the War that can spur discussions or research.

There's a lot of introspection in this emotional, poignant look at a family coming to terms with their lives during the Vietnam War. The theme of belonging versus feeling alone dominate for Tracy as a con-lai or halfbreed Vietnamese American. The relationship between Tracy and her best friend Stargazer and his family helps Tracy as she struggles with her feelings of not belonging. I did find it a bit odd that Tracy-Tuyet does not seem to focus more on what happened to her mother. I appreciate the discussion questions at the back of the book that will help readers who were not alive as I was during the war to put the novel's events into historical context. There is one scene involving Tracy and a knife that could upset sensitive readers.

I recommend this novel for school and public library collections. This could be used in historical fiction units or units on the Vietnam War.

For grades 5 to 8, Vietnam War, family dynamics, adoption, post-traumatic stress syndrome, identity, belonging, mixed races, and fans of Elizabeth Partridge.

Sherry says

"Have you ever known absolutely for sure that some piece of you was missing? A piece you buried deep inside and didn't even know was there? Then something cracked open and that missing piece flew out and left an empty, scooped-out place in you, and your heart beat with a longing so strong it sounded like a drum in your ears.

I have."

Great beginnings promise a great book, and "Dogtag Summer" delivers. Partridge follows this introduction with a compelling war story - historical young teen fiction that touches the surface of the Vietnam war, inserting the armed conflict within the context of a California girl's struggle to learn her true identity, to feel comfortable in her own skin. Tracy/Tuyet, a shy young girl on the verge of adolescence, is a self-described con lai, or half-breed (half American, half Vietnamese). She comes to us in 1980, five years after her traumatic exodus from Vietnam, airlifted on the last flight out of Nam along with other orphans and con lai who were likely to have been killed had they remained in their homeland. Now a resident of a small coastal community, daughter to an American Vietnam veteran and his wife, she and her adoptive father struggle with hidden ghosts. Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, they deal with it in opposite ways: her dad suppresses his past, while Tracy attempts to bring her past to light. Their histories are connected, but Tracy doesn't know the details.

"Dogtag Summer" is light on violence and heavy on introspection, so you'd expect it to be a good choice for female readers. However, my sixth-grade son devoured this book and told me I should read it. That's probably in part because it's about war, which is a favorite among pre-teen boys. Tracy also has a young male friend, a neighbor who is her schoolmate and confidant.

I did think the author omitted something at the conclusion by not having Tracy muse about the fate of her mother. When Tuyet left Nam, it wasn't completely clear whether her mother abandoned her, whether she was forced to abandon her, or her mother was murdered. Regardless of which scenario it was that the author imagined, I felt Tracy should have had some thoughts about her Ma's fate at the end of the book, when she was able to piece together her father's tale and put the rest of her identity into perspective. Other than that, the book was plausible, and its strengths are that it offers young readers an introduction to the complexities and dilemmas of the Vietnam War era, and makes familiar a foreign culture and race. An excellent reader's discussion guide, in "Q & A" format, completes the book.

Samantha says

A historical fiction novel that takes place in 1980 in California and consists of memories that take place in 1975 in Vietnam. Tracy is blindsided by memories of her life in Vietnam and spends the summer trying to sort out her past and make sense of the present. The plot thickens when she and her friend Stargazer find an ammo box and a dogtag amongst her dad's things. Tensions soar as Tracy tries to investigate her old life and encounters resistance from her parents, especially her dad who was a soldier in Vietnam and is struggling to

deal with his own ghosts. An engaging fast read, but one that I would recommend for older elementary students (grades 4-6) due to the content. There is one scene involving the main character in a scene of violence (threatened w/ a knife) that might bother some readers. The author includes an appendix with questions relating to the content of the book and the time period in which the story takes place, which makes for good discussion. All in all, a thought-provoking, informative read that explores identity and family dynamics set against a backdrop rich with history and politics.

Maddie S says

Dogtag Summer, written by Elizabeth Partridge, is an exciting book about an orphan from Vietnam who gets adopted by a family in America. Publishers Weekly describes the book as, “gripping...powerful,” and that is exactly what it is. Tracy, and her best friend, Stargazer, have big plans and adventures for the summer before middle school. They are exploring in Tracy’s garage when they find a mysterious ammo box and dogtag. Suddenly, she starts discovering things that begin to uncover her unique past. She vaguely remembers old memories in war torn Vietnam when the “ghosts” come back to haunt her.

At the start of every chapter, the book goes back in time when Tracy is a baby in Vietnam in the year of 1975. This book keeps you on the edge of your seat, with unexpected, intriguing twists and turns. This piece of writing is humbling and exemplifies loyalty and honesty. For example, the author tells the reader what it is like in Vietnam- we should realize how lucky we are here and not take things for granted. I enjoyed learning about Vietnam and how things worked in the people's everyday life. The parents and kids face many opportunities to be dishonest when it comes to their past. The book teaches you no matter what doubts people have, you can achieve it and don't judge a kid by their age. Tracy and Stargazer are smarter than you think.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anybody who enjoys learning new things, seeks curiosity, and is interested about war in the late 1900s. This read will take you for a wild ride.

Phyllis Rowberry says

This is billed for teens, but is a wonderful book for adults as well. It hits on so many levels; adoption, the effects of war on children, the stigma of being a 'half-breed', and more. I can't improve on this review from Amazon...

"Who am I? Where do I belong? Who can I trust? These are questions that all children ask as they grow older, but for twelve-year-old Tracy these questions haunt her. In the moving story Dogtag Summer, Tracy knows that her mother was Vietnamese and she was adopted when she was six, just after the Vietnam War ended. But her parents won't share any other real information with her. So she is left with a hole in her heart, an empty place inside her.

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together, to fill the longing in her heart.

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M. says

Tracy, a half-Vietnamese, half-Anglo war orphan, was placed in a Saigon orphanage when she was 6, transported to the US as part of Operation Babylift after the Vietnam War, and adopted by a loving couple in Northern California. During the summer before 6th grade, she and her best friend find a soldier's dogtag and Tracy begins a journey of slowly remembering her life before America, her Vietnamese mother, her grandmother, her village, her war. She realizes that her adoptive father has his own memories of being a soldier in Vietnam, memories he's tried to forget. She learns, and her adoptive parents learn, that bringing memories out into the open can foster all sorts of emotional growth.

Good book, historical fiction, probably 4th or 5th grade and up. This is going to be complicated reading for kids who aren't aware of the Vietnam war so parents, teachers, be ready to answer questions.

Deb says

This is historical fiction set in 1980, flashing back to Vietnam 1975. The books many topics include: adoption, the effects of war on children, the stigma of being a 'half-breed', adults struggling with the after-effects of war, friendship. The following review from Amazon sums it up great:

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Barbara says

The Vietnam War was such an important part of our nation's history that I am often dumbfounded when students today have no awareness of that volatile time. This book will surely kindle some curiosity about that time period in today's readers. It's the summer of 1980, and 12-year-old Tracy [her Vietnamese name was

Tuyet] and her best friend Stargazer plan to build a replica of a Viking ship during their summer vacation. In search of tools to aid them in the project, they stumble upon an ammo box that contains clues to Tracy's past in Vietnam and her father's PTSD. As Tracy begins to remember the events of 1974 and 1975, she grows increasingly insistent on having her questions about her past answered. The passages in which she and her grandmother try to eke out a living and avoid capture and her long, lonely wait for her grandmother to return home are particularly powerful and allow readers to understand how Tracy still longs for the language, family, food, culture, and even the name she had to leave behind when she came to California. Although the fate of the rest of her family is only hinted at and her adopted family cherishes her, this book raises many questions about the high prices and far-reaching conflicts of war and the treatment of children born to American and Vietnamese parents. Pair this one with *Inside Out & Back Again* and *All the Broken Pieces*, both vivid reminders of how conflict touches the lives of the young.

Erica says

I really enjoyed this book about a young Vietnamese-American girl, adopted by a U.S. couple after the Vietnam War. The story is told in first-person from the perspective of the main character, Tracy. Due to this, she is the character that is the most well-developed and the reader gets a good understanding of her feelings & motivations. However, through her interactions with secondary characters, you also get a sense of who they are, including characters that are no longer living.

My connection to this story is of a more personal nature. My father is a Vietnam vet, and while he served in the Navy and did not see active combat, his younger brother was on the frontlines and suffered the consequences. I never knew my uncle, but have heard stories growing up, and it hasn't been until recently that I've learned of the extent of what he went through while serving overseas.

I think this book would make for a good introduction for young readers who do not know what the Vietnam War was like, especially since it focuses on the experiences of a child who survived the war, not the stories of a soldier who fought in the war. I also think it would make a good catalyst for discussions about the war, whether in a classroom, or amongst families.

Beverly says

All tweens and teens at times feel as if they don't fit in or belong. Tracy feels that way all of the time because she really doesn't fit in. Set in the early 80's, *Dogtag Summer* is a sweet coming of age story. Tracy is an orphan of the Vietnam War. Her father was an American soldier. She doesn't know what happened to her extended Vietnamese family. Her adopted American parents are loving and supportive, but Tracy feels like she can't talk to them about her feelings of loneliness and doubt. She also knows her parents are keeping secrets, and she fears the secrets are about her. As Tracy's memories of her life during the war begin to surface, she pulls away from her parents and best friend. Author, Elizabeth Partridge, does a good job of showing the impact of the war through the eyes of a child who doesn't understand the war, but lives with the suffering it causes. Partridge also does a good job of showing the strong feelings Americans had about the war. Tracy sees the hostility some people have towards vets. She also sees how vets are honored and respected. These conflicting points of view add to her confusion and feelings of isolation. I appreciated that Partridge does not neatly wrap up all of the conflicts for an unrealistic happily ever after ending. But Tracy, and her parents, do learn that keeping secrets does not heal emotional wounds. And Tracy learns that a true

friend will forgive you if you ask.
