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Read Brave 2021

Community and Educational Curriculum

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For **Saint Paul Public Library** and **Read Brave**

Community and school engagement

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Book for Ages 6-8: “Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania



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About Read Brave

Read Brave Saint Paul is a new twist on the traditional city one-book program.

Rather than a single book, the program revolves around a common theme relevant to our city. All readers — from our youngest children to our elders — are encouraged to engage in the program through reading, discussion, programming, and action. The 2021 Read Brave theme is “*Owning Our Stories: Rising Together for a Better Saint Paul.*”

Grade Levels: 1 to 3, Elementary (Beginning Readers and Read Aloud Groups in-class and online.)

Ages: 6-8

Question and Answer Session with the Author from *New Readers Rock!*



Meet V.T. Bidania: Author of *Astrid and Apollo!*

How long have you been writing?

I've been writing for as long as I can remember, ever since I learned how to hold a pencil, form letters and spell. My most vivid memory of writing was when I was in kindergarten and completed my first story all by myself. It was one sentence long and included an illustration I created and I was so pleased! I'll never forget that feeling of pride and accomplishment. To get published, I've been writing for decades now.

What did you do before you became an author?

I've worked as a copy editor, production editor, graphic artist, and school media specialist assistant (one of my most fun jobs!). At the moment, I run the Writing Center at a college during the day and write in the evenings and on weekends.

What is your favorite thing about being a writer?

I have so many things I like about writing. I enjoy coming up with stories, creating characters, and imagining worlds for the characters to live in. I'm also glad knowing that my books will help fill the gaping hole of diverse books in kidlit.

What inspired you to write this book?

My book is about eight-year-old second-generation Hmong American twins Astrid and Apollo Lee. I was inspired to write this by the many beautiful Hmong children in my life, from my relatives to the students I met while working in the local elementary schools. These children deserve to not only see themselves represented, but to also see themselves as the stars of books, just like other children get to be. Equally so, their non-Hmong peers need to see Hmong children as stars too. I'm so excited that this series--which I've planned in my head for years--is finally coming out.

What type of book are you writing? What draws you to this category?

ASTRID AND APOLLO is an early reader chapter book series. I love chapter books because they bridge the gap from picture books to novels and allow emerging readers to become independent readers. Chapter book series also give readers the opportunity to experience more than one adventure with characters they enjoy, which is one of the reasons why I like them so much.

What would you like potential readers to know about your book?

Because Hmong people are rarely included in mainstream literature, I hope *ASTRID AND APOLLO* will give readers a more authentic and updated representation of my community. I hope readers will learn a little about Hmong people, food, and language but more importantly, I hope young readers of all backgrounds will see that Hmong American children are like any other children who just love to play, laugh, and have fun!

Tell us one interesting fact about yourself!

My full name is hard to spell and harder to pronounce, so I've always gone by my nickname "Vong," which is a shortened version of my given name. Vong is a common Hmong boy's name, however, and this has led to many instances of mistaken identity for me throughout my lifetime!

A Fun Book to Read Aloud!

Only 17% of parents of kids ages 9–11 read aloud to their children. Yet 83% of kid's ages 6–17 say being read to is something they either loved or liked a lot. ([Scholastic's "Kids & Family Reading Report™"](#)). This Read Brave curriculum is designed to be used in grades 4-6 reading book clubs, assigned reading, and choice reading as a guide to higher order thinking (HOT), discernment, and to create curious research-ready scholars and reading-ready community book clubs that seek out knowledge to become lifelong learners via the written text.

Enduring Understandings (Grades 1-3 with Vertical Alignments for Grade 4)

- ★ Questions to ask scholars in grades 1-3.
- ★ **Book:** "Astrid & Apollo and the Starry Campout" by V.T. Bidania
- ★ Reading expands understanding of the world, its people and oneself.

Reading Strategies Readers use strategies to construct meaning

- Why do people read?
- What do people read?
- What are the benefits of reading?
- How does reading affect your life?

Reading Strategies Readers use strategies to construct meaning.

- How do readers prepare for reading?
- What are readers thinking about as they read?
- What can a reader do when they don't understand?
- What impact does fluency have on comprehension?
- Why are strategies important?

Responses to Literature Authors write with different purposes in mind.

- How does reading influence us?
- Why do we need to evaluate what we read?

Readers develop a deeper understanding through reflection of text.

- How do readers reflect and respond?
- What connections do readers make?
- How might being able to recognize literary features help in appreciating literature?

Video Introduction and News about the Author

- ["Astrid & Apollo and the Starry Campout" by VT Bidania - 2020](#)
- [Astrid and Apollo tells stories for Hmong children | kare11.com](#)

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Benchmarks and Standards 2020 English Language Arts (ELA) Grades 1-3

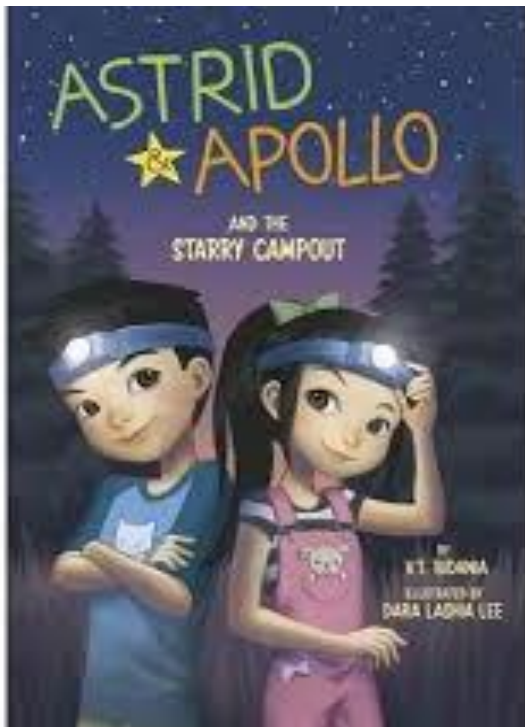
Anchor Standard (Reading Grade 1-2)

- **1.1.1.3** Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words:
a. Know the spelling-sound correspondences for the common consonant digraphs and blends. b. Decode regularly spelled one-syllable words including final e and vowel teams, consonant digraphs and diphthongs, and inflectional suffixes and two-syllable words that follow six syllable types, demonstrating both accuracy and automaticity. c. Read high-frequency words, in and out of context, demonstrating both accuracy and automaticity.
- **2.1.1.1** Demonstrate understanding of spoken words syllables and sounds (phonemes): Identify, blend, segment and manipulate syllables in multisyllabic words and sounds in 5-phoneme words, including consonant blends.

Grade 3 for Virtual Alignment for Grade 4

- **3.1.3.1** Choose and read texts that address the purpose (e.g., personal interest, enjoyment, academic tasks), representing perspectives and identities of historical and contemporary Dakota and Anishinaabe people.
 - **3.1.4.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of both literal and nonliteral language in a text referring explicitly to the texts as the basis for the answers; summarize the text.
 - **3.1.4.2** Identify the central idea or argument in fables, folktales, and myths, explain how it is supported by key details, and describe the connection between details.
 - **3.1.4.3** Describe how details about characters, setting, conflict, resolution, and events work together to develop the plot of a literary text.
 - **3.1.4.4** Describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or steps in a procedure, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect, in informational text.
- ★ Please review the following [Minnesota English Language Arts Standards Draft #3 August 2020 \(Commissioner Approved\)](#) to set pace and sequence for your project for grade 1-3 scholars.

Introduction to the Read Brave book



“Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania

“**Astrid** is afraid of the dark and doesn't want to go on her family camping trip. But her twin brother, Apollo, is excited. When they encounter scary things such as crawly bugs and the creepy dark, Apollo helps his twin through them. And when they encounter the scariest thing of all, Astrid might just be the one to save the starry campout.”

Source: Publisher



More about the Author

V.T. Bidania was born in Laos and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. She spent most of her childhood writing stories and now that she's an adult, she is thrilled to be writing stories for children. She has an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from The New School and is a recipient of the Loft Literary Center's Mirrors & Windows Fellowship. She lives outside of the Twin Cities with her family. The *Astrid and Apollo* series of chapter books are among very few representations of Hmong American kids in

mainstream children's literature. Hmong people are rarely included in mainstream literature and are often left out of the Asian American experience. When we are visible in popular media, the representation is often negative or inaccurate. Or it tends to be a sad and struggling refugee/immigrant narrative. Many Hmong American children today are second-, third-, or even fourth-generation and might not relate to those stories and experiences. While we want Hmong children to understand our history as war refugees and know about the many, many hardships our people have faced, it's also important for them to see themselves in happy stories. They shouldn't have to associate being Hmong only with pain. This is why I wrote the series, so Hmong children can see themselves represented accurately and authentically. I'm excited for Hmong kids to read my books and finally see themselves having fun—playing, joking, laughing, participating in activities that kids usually participate in—and just being regular kids (because they are)!

I don't think I could have published this series ten or even five years ago. For a very long time, I dreamed of writing realistic fiction chapter books starring Hmong children. But when I first started submitting my work, the response I received was often the same: There was no place in the market for my writing because no one would read Hmong stories. Everywhere I turned, this was the message I was given. At one point, I tried writing books not centered on the Hmong experience, but this didn't feel entirely authentic to what I wanted to do. Eventually, I became so discouraged that I stopped querying. Then, because of organizations like We Need Diverse Books, the long-overdue shift for diverse representation began to take shape and more diverse books were published. About two years ago, I tried again and finally, found a publisher and an agent who saw value in my stories. I've been writing for Hmong children for as long as I can remember and now I can share my books with readers at last. Furthermore, in light of what is happening in the country and around the world at this very moment (Black Lives Matter protests, hate crimes against Asians from COVID-19, children being stolen from families at the border, injustices against Native peoples, Islamophobia, and more), diverse representation is more important than ever. All classrooms should have these books so that children will be able to read about characters from all backgrounds and who are not the blue-eyed blonde, forest animals, and fire trucks they are used to seeing (Leary).

More titles by this Children's Book Author



Text Pairings for this Book

Other Authors and Culture dynamics in the United States

A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America is a book by Ronald Takaki. It received an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 1994. *(Recommended for teacher to read)*

A Map Into the World by Kao Kalia Yang, illustrated by Seo Kim

“As the seasons change, so too does a young Hmong girl’s world. She moves into a new home with her family and encounters both birth and death. As this curious girl explores life inside her house and beyond, she collects bits of the natural world. But who are her treasures for? A moving picture book debut from acclaimed Hmong American author Kao Kalia Yang.” from publisher [picture book, ages 5 and up]

A Sticky Mess by Nor Sanavongsay

A Sticky Mess is the comedic origin story of one of the most beloved folk heroes of Laos. A young monk keeps getting in trouble with the head of the monastery who thinks the boy can’t do anything right. Finally, the young boy decides to turn the tables with the help of a chicken and a little bit of a sticky snack called mieng. What happens next has become the stuff of legend for over 600 years! This is the hilarious tale of cleverness and ingenuity. [picture book, ages 4 and up]

Mali Under the Night Sky: A Lao Story of Home by Youme Landowne

This is the true story of Laotian American artist Malichansouk Kouanchao, whose family was forced by civil war to flee Laos when she was five. Mali lived an idyllic life in the country with her family until the war began. Forced to flee, Mali and her family are arrested for not having a

home in this country. With her childhood memories to sustain her, Mali tells stories of home to her fellow refugees. [picture book, ages 5 and up]

A Different Pond by Bao Phi, illustrated by Thi Bui

A Hmong man is included in this story as a side character so I've included it in this list. This is a gentle story that touches on more serious subjects. A boy and his father go on an early morning fishing trip but they fish for dinner, not for sport. The boy asks his father why they need to fish since his father works two jobs. Fishing also reminds his father of his brother, another sad subject touched on since his brother who fought by his side in the Vietnam war never returned. This quiet story is like the pond itself, tranquil on top but teeming with possibilities including life or death underneath. [picture book, ages 4 and up]

Grandfather's Story Cloth by Linda Gerdner and Sarah Langford, illustrated by Stuart Loughridge

"In ancient times, a tribe of people called the Hmong lived in China. During the 19th century, oppressed by the Han Dynasty, many of the Hmong migrated to remote areas of Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand in an effort to maintain their culture identity." A Lao boy's grandfather has Alzheimer's disease, but a story cloth that his grandfather made himself preserves his memories of his life in Laos. His story cloth includes the war and how he had to cross to Thailand to safety where he lived in a refugee camp. It was here that he made the story cloth. Chersheng, the grandson, uses his drawing skills to create his own story board that continues his grandfather's story of life in America. [advanced bilingual picture book in English and Hmong, ages 6 and up]

(Source: Lao and Hmong Children's Books on November 6, 2017 by Pragmatic Mom
<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2017/11/lao-and-hmong-childrens-books/>)

At-A-Glance Curriculum Guide

"Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout" by V. T. Bidania

MLA Citation: Bidania, VT. *Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout*. 2020. Print.

Book Themes

Children's book, Asian-American (Hmong) people and culture, Family, Collective power, Acting as an ally

Vocabulary

It is at the teachers discretion to pick HOT¹ words with students reading the book and remind them of the meanings of the words as they come up in the book.

¹ Higher Order Thinking

Part 1: Curriculum Guide (À la Carte)
Book Report Activities 1-3 (elementary/community book club)
“Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania

The book, ““Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania is a Hmong and mainstream children’s book. Here are some suggested activities for 1-3 classrooms and Youth Book Clubs.

1. Have you ever been camping or on a vacation?

- a. Grades 1-3 are asked to first write a short story about their camping experience or a vacation they went on.
- b. Grades 1-3 are asked to draw a picture or map of where they traveled to including if they took an airplane, car, or bus.
- c. Grades 1-3 are asked to share with their classmates, then give a presentation to the class about their experiences.

2. Book Review

Grades 1-3 are asked to read “Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania and then tell them they’ve been hired by YouTube (™) or Roblox (™) to record a review about the book and post it to their school’s LMS.

3. Original Title and Book Cover

Create a brand-new title for the book “Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout” by V. T. Bidania . Also, design a completely new and appropriate book cover for your book. You may illustrate the most exciting, funny, or emotional part of the book, or make your drawing more fun!

4. Protagonist/Hero Social Media Page

Identify the main character of the story, who the story is mainly about, or the hero. Create a detailed social media page for the protagonist, including five posts this character would share with his/her friends.

Resource: Teachers for grades 1-3 can create new and mastery-based lesson plans using this website: <https://myhero.com/TeachersRoom/LessonAddTemplate>

Part 2: Curriculum: Questions for Higher Order Thinking

Extension Activities Below are activities in which you can engage students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. *Learn about the Author*

Have students read the back pages about **Kelly Yang and her family's immigration story**.

Explain that students will be conducting more research about “**Astrid and Apollo and the Starry Campout**” by V. T. Bidania that includes a writing project at the end.

First, as a class, discuss possible things they want to know about her such as:

- where she grew up
- her inspiration/motivation for writing the book
- her cultural background and its relevance to the book
- other books she has written, interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Their research can include looking at her website
- The final project could include one of the following ideas: an extended “author bio” that would be on the back of her book, a letter to the author (use her website’s contact page) or a simulated interview between the author and a journalist.

Should Do

- Grades 1-2 school scholars should do their research on this book culminating in a project (*Drawing, Google Slides, Spoken Word presentation, timeline with photos/drawings, or a picture book that can be read to younger children*) Teachers and community book clubs can assign personal narrative essays for schools with diverse populations to tell their personal stories in a meaningful way.
- Also, any art work or spoken word presentations should be presented in a Gallery Walk format for other students and teachers to view.
- Lesson closure is based on discussions, essays, and student facing activities that check for understanding and mastery of the subject matter.

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