

BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. *Quiet As They Come* focuses on the lives of one extended family that has immigrated from Vietnam to America. What do their stories tell us about the two cultures that they straddle?
2. The book also straddles generations. Discuss the differing experiences between the parents' generation and that of the children. In particular, how do the children change from the first story in the book, where they are Vietnamese children in America, to the last, in which Elle returns to Vietnam for a visit? How do her Vietnamese relatives see her, and how does she see herself in this context?
3. The author has called this a book of "interlinked short stories." How does this genre differ from a novel, and how is it similar? Could each of these stories stand alone as a short story? What do they gain by their placement among the other stories?
4. Each of these stories is filtered through the point of view of one of the characters. What are the effects of these shifts in viewpoint? How do we see a character or a situation differently depending on who is looking? Choose a character and look at his or her depiction in several stories in order to tease out the effects of points of view. For instance, how do you see Kim in "The Pussycats" as compared to "Everything Forbidden" or "Arcade Games?"
5. The title of the book is taken from the impression Viet's co-workers at the post office have of him. Why might this title encapsulate not just his story, but the collection as a whole.
6. What is the role of food, both Vietnamese as well as so-called American foods such as pizza, in *Quiet As They Come*?
7. Many of the images and objects in the book have both a literal and symbolic meaning. Choose something in the collection that seems to have this kind of double meaning and unpack its symbolism. For example, in the final story, "Relief" there are multiple references--- which Elle refers to as a scatological obsession--- what might they mean, at a deeper level?
8. Chau is masterful at bringing her stories to a resonant conclusion. Study the final paragraphs of several of the stories in *Quiet As They Come* with an eye toward the different ways in which Chau constructs her endings.