



2024

Book Review of Drawn Together by Minh Lê and Dan Santat

Simon Boonsripaisal
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, simonb3@illinois.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea>

 Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#), [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#), and the [South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boonsripaisal, Simon (2024) "Book Review of Drawn Together by Minh Lê and Dan Santat," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*. Vol. 19 : Iss. 1, Article 6.

DOI: 10.7771/2153-8999.1327

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea/vol19/iss1/6>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).



Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

Vol. 19 Iss. 1 (2024)

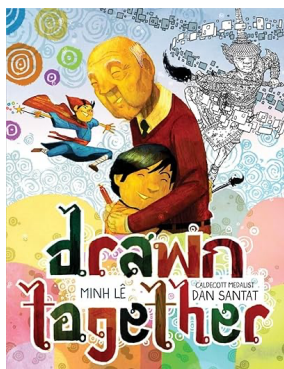
www.JSAAEA.org

Book Review: Lê, M., & Santat, D. (2018). *Drawn together* (1st ed.). 40 pp. Little, Brown and Company. ISBN: 9781484767603

Reviewed by

Simon Boonsripaisal

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Drawn Together written by Minh Lê and illustrated by Dan Santat, depicts the story of a grandson and grandfather spending time in the afternoon together. Lê and Santat's shared experiences and cultures influence the picturebook's construction. The greatest strength in *Drawn Together* is the inclusion of family in the creation process. Lê's meaningful words and phrases complement Santat's colorful and energetic illustrations. The setting is in the grandfather's house and away from the site of Thai restaurants and Thai Buddhist temples, to which most of the existing research on Thai Americans hones it on (Bao, 2015; Padoongpatt, 2017). *Drawn Together* is a humanizing experience for readers to witness the developing relationship between the grandfather and grandson. The two have nothing in common, speak different languages, and find a connection through drawing. This book review discusses the cultural and lingual ties that make reading *Drawn Together* worthy of critique.

Santat includes both the Thai and English languages and cultural practices in building the bond between Thai and Thai American traditions. The font on the cover and title page is creative, as the English letters resemble Thai consonants and a Thai vowel. For example, the English letter "n" closely resembles the consonant "น" (gor gài), "w" resembles a fusion of the consonants "พ" (por phan) and "ฟ" (for fun), and "t" closely resembles the Thai vowel known as "ใ" (ai) (Smyth, 2014, pp. 12-13, 16). The title on the cover and title page is readable in English and helps readers realize the beauty of the written Thai language in the English language they may be familiar with. Once opened, peritext elements on page four stand out as dedications are found to respect Lê's grandfather and Santat's grandmother (Pantaleo, 2022). The middle of page four contains English translations with page numbers when Thai is spoken. The story also begins on the bottom of page four before the title page as the mother drops off the grandson and he walk towards the grandfather's house and rings the doorbell. The grandfather with a smile opens the door and they both greet each other with the Thai traditional greeting known as the *wai* (Bao, 2015, pp. 121, 134-136). The grandson's back is lowered and his palms for his *wai* are slightly higher than the grandfather's *wai* to show respect. The grandfather welcomes the grandson in for a meal, but the grandson is not excited to be there.

There is a minor grammatical error in the grandfather's first Thai phrase when he speaks with his grandson at the dinner table. The awkward silence shared by the two leads the grandfather



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement*, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or **JSAAEA**.

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement, Vol. 19, Iss. 1, (2024) ISSN: 2153-8999

to state, “สบายดีหรือ?” (Lê & Santat, 2018, p. 9). This phrase intended to be pronounced, “*Sa bai dee ler?*” and translated as, “How are you doing?”. Simultaneously, the grandson in English states, “So...what’s new, Grandpa?”, but the illustrations and conversation indicate the language barrier (p. 9). The correct spelling of “*Sa bai dee ler?*” is “สบายดีหรือ?” without the Thai vowel “ะ” (er), but both spellings hold the same meaning (Rattanakhemakorn, 2022, p. 11; Smyth, 2014, p. 16). The two move to the sofa to watch a movie that shows a superhero speaking in Thai and charging lightning between his palms and shooting a lightning bolt towards a dragon. The grandfather notices his grandson’s disinterest and states, “อยากจะทำอย่างอื่นไหม?” (Lê & Santat, 2018, p. 11). This phrase is pronounced, “*Yuk ja doo yung urn mai?*” and translated as, “Would you like to watch something else?”. The grandson responds in English with, “Can we watch something else?”, but the language barrier leaves the same movie playing (p. 11). However, it is common in the Thai language if the grandfather’s phrase is spelled, “อยากจะทำอย่างอื่นมี?” (Rattanakhemakorn, 2022, pp. 11, 47; Smyth, 2014, pp. 12-13, 15-16, 18). The “อ” (consonant or əhng with vowel ueh) from Lê and Santat’s spelling of the phrase would need to include the mái àyk tone and be spelled as “อู่”. The vowel “ไ” (ai) and the high tone from “มี” would need to be deleted while the consonant “ม” (mor máh) would be rewritten as “มู่”. Finally, the consonant “ย” (yor yúk) would be written at the end of the phrase. The grandson would not understand.

Santat’s Thai culture illuminates as the grandson stops watching the movie and walks over to a table, pulls markers from his backpack, and draws a wizard avatar of himself. This amuses the grandfather, and he quickly grabs and shares his ink, paint brush, and sketchbook that starts their connection. The grandfather draws a *yahk* which is a protector of the Thai Buddhist temple *sala* or hall from spirits with bad intentions (Padoongpatt, 2017, p. 126). Their avatars explore an imaginary world with colorful mountains and vegetation that is interrupted when a towering, fiery, and violent dragon whips their avatars into the air. The grandfather stunningly outlined and painted the inside of the dragon’s mouth, eyes, and fins in black. Meanwhile, the grandson fills the dragon with a red tongue and lips, yellow horns, yellow reptilian belly, and green and yellow scales. In addition, Santat’s dragon with the horns resembles the northern Thai mythological serpent creature known as the Naga (Moonkham, 2021). Back in the imaginary world, the avatars land on opposite sides of a river which is a metaphor for their disconnect. The dragon swimming emerges to strike again and the two use their drawing skills to morph the dragon into a bridge indicating their intention to build familial and emotional connections. The avatars cross the bridge to reunite and in real life the grandfather and grandson hug while their drawings are taped on the room’s wall before the mother picks up the son. The mythological figures make the picturebook enjoyable for readers familiar with Thai culture.

Drawn Together is an excellent picturebook covering the generational gap, language barrier, and shared experiences of Asian Americans. Readers of all ages may learn there are more ways to connect with people after reading this with family and friends. Instead of solely relying on language, *Drawn Together* shows readers drawing is an important communicative method that can be powerful for forming bonds.

References

Bao, J. (2015). *Creating a Buddhist community: A Thai temple in Silicon Valley*. Temple University Press.

- Moonkham, P. (2021). Ethnohistorical archaeology and the mythscape of the Naga in the Chiang Saen Basin, Thailand. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional & National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 9(2), 185–202. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2021.3>
- Padoongpatt, M. (2017). *Flavors of empire: Food and the making of Thai America*. University of California Press.
- Pantaleo, S. (2022). An investigation of the functionality of peritextual elements in graphic novels. *Children's Literature in Education*, 53(4), 507–525. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-021-09462-9>
- Rattanakhemakorn, J. (2022). *Reading and writing Thai: A beginner's guide to the Thai alphabet and pronunciation*. Tuttle Publishing.
- Smyth, D. (2014). *Thai: An essential grammar* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

About the author

Simon Boonsripaisal is a PhD student in Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

Vol. 19 Iss. 1 (2024)

www.JSAAEA.org

Editor

Dr. Wayne E. Wright
Purdue University

Associate Editors

Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Dr. Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Book Review Editor

Dr. Vichet Chhuon
University of Minnesota

Creative Works Editor

Bryan Thao Worra
Lao Assistance Center

Journal Manager

Vikrant Chap
Purdue University

Editorial Review Board

Dr. Steve Arounsack
California State University, Stanislaus

Dr. Varaxy Yi Borromeo
California State University, Fresno

Dr. Virak Chan
Purdue University

Dr. George Chigas
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Dr. Loan Dao
University of Massachusetts Boston

Dr. Changming Duan
University of Kansas

Dr. Sothy Eng
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Dr. Carl L. Bankston III
Tulane University

Dr. Sovicheth Boun
Salem State University

Dr. Phala Chea
Lowell Public Schools

Dr. Linh Dang
National Education Association

Dr. Hien Duc Do
San Jose State University

Dr. Sophal Ear
Thunderbird School of Global Management

Dr. Lee Her
Lehigh University

- Dr. Vincent K. Her**
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire
- Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger**
University of Pennsylvania
- Dr. Peter Nien-Chu Kiang**
University of Massachusetts, Boston
- Dr. Yvonne Kwan**
San Jose State University
- Dr. Ravy Lao**
California State University, Los Angeles
- Dr. Jonathan H. X. Lee**
San Francisco State University
- Dr. Jenna Leubner-Cushing**
University of Wisconsin Whitewater
- Dr. Jacqueline Mac**
Northern Illinois University
- Dr. Bic Ngo**
University of Minnesota
- Dr. Leakhena Nou**
California State University, Long Beach
- Dr. Giang Pham**
University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Dr. Linda Marie Pheng**
University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Dr. Karen Quintiliani**
California State University, Long Beach
- Dr. Angela Reyes**
Hunter College
City University of New York
- Dr. Fay Shin**
California State University, Long Beach
- Dr. Christine Su**
College of San Mateo
- Dr. Alisia Tran**
Arizona State University
- Dr. Monica M. Trieu**
Purdue University
- Dr. Khatharya Um**
University of California, Berkeley
- Dr. Linda Trinh Vo**
University of California, Irvine
- Dr. Yang Sao Xiong**
The University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Dr. Vicky Xiong-Lor**
University of Wisconsin Whitewater
- Dr. Jeremy Hein**
Sylvan Learning
- Dr. Peter Tan Keo**
Rapid Research Evaluation
- Dr. Kevin K. Kumashiro**
Hofstra University
- Dr. Ha Lam**
Independent Scholar
- Dr. Khanh Le**
The City University of New York
- Dr. Stacey Lee**
University of Wisconsin, Madison
- Dr. Monirith Ly**
American University of Phnom Penh
- Dr. Sue Needham**
California State University, Dominguez Hills
- Dr. Max Niedzwiecki**
Clark University
- Dr. Mark Pfeifer**
Hmong Cultural Center
- Dr. Loan T. Phan**
University of New Hampshire
- Dr. Malaphone Phommasa**
University of California Santa Barbara
- Dr. Kalyani Rai**
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Dr. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials**
University of Connecticut, Storrs
- Dr. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner**
Boston University
- Dr. Yer J. Thao**
Portland State University
- Dr. Kim Tran**
University of California, Los Angeles,
Glendale Community College
- Dr. Silvy Un**
Saint Paul Public Schools
- Dr. Melissa Vang**
San Diego State University
- Dr. Zha Blong Xiong**
University of Minnesota
- Dr. Soua Xiong**
California State University, Fresno

Doctoral Student Editorial Review Board

Diana Chandara

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Bao Diep

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Nielson Hul

Cornell University

Cherry Lim

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Vanessa Sovanika Na

University of California San Diego

Hoa Nha Nguyen

Boston College

Latana Thaviseth

University of California Los Angeles

Thong Vang

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Kassandra Chhay

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Annie BichLoan Duong

San Joaquin County Office of Education

Nikki B. Khamsouksay

California State University, Sacramento

Dung Minh Mao

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Khoi Nguyen

George Mason University

Thien-Huong Ninh

University of Southern California

Krissyvan Truong

Claremont Graduate University

Mai Vang

University of Massachusetts Boston