Hmong

A Resource Guide for teachers

By Andrea Gorrilla,
Nathan Schultz,
And Randy Rothmeier

Hamline University
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Welcome to our Resource Guide

Our guide is an *introduction* to Hmong culture, and is not to be taken as presenting a definitive edition of what it means to be Hmong. Our hope is that this guide drives you to delve deeper into the Hmong story, and to come to a better understanding of Hmong culture. Whether the history of how the Hmong came to the U.S. or their unique cultural practices intrigue you, this guide will provide you with resources that will aid you in your journey as a teacher of Hmong students.

We want you to come away with a sense that Hmong is not a universal, one-size fits all, culture. Hmong people are individuals, and do not all represent their culture in the same way. The stereotypes that are out there can be devastating. As we go through our guide, we hope that we inform those who may have very little experience with the Hmong culture, and educate future teachers to better accommodate their students. Our focus on giving resources for aspiring teachers may be our niche audience, but the resources, lesson plans, and other information will be a benefit to all who wish to learn more about our new neighbors.

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History of the Hmong

The story of the Hmong is one of almost constant fighting, broken by short periods of peace. Through it all, their strength and endurance allowed them to thrive, and they never allowed their culture to diminish or disappear. Fighting to live in peace, the Hmong endured the wrath of the Chinese, the Communist Laotians and Vietnamese, and they struggled to survive in the countries to which they were forced to migrate. The Hmong story continues today and its recent history includes the United States, and Minnesota in particular.

The Origins of the Hmong

The Hmong (meaning “Free People” or “Human Beings” in Hmong) have many different ideas of where they originated. They migrated to the Yellow River Basin in China around 3000 B.C.E. but the original area they came from is still debated by many historians. Since Hmong history is oral and the only records are Chinese, the interaction between these two cultures are guessed to be between 3000 B.C.E. and 1200 B.C.E. The Hmong were referred to by the Chinese as Miao, a designation that still causes friction to this day. The conflicts between the Hmong and the Chinese lasted for over two millennia, slowly pushing the Hmong south until some passed into Indochina.

Conflicts with the Chinese

Since they would not accept assimilation, the Hmong remained an enigma to the Chinese. The Chinese could not accept that the majority of Hmong would not be "civilized," and be assimilated into Chinese culture. As the Chinese population grew, space became more precious and tensions grew. The records of this period begin in the Shang Dynasty, roughly 1600-1280 B.C.E., when the leaders of the Shang were at almost constant war with their tribal neighbors, including the Hmong (Quincy, 1995, p. 41). The Shang were centered in the middle of China in Hunan province. Hunan was bordered by the Yellow River on the north, the farthest north the majority of the Hmong ever settled. These territorial conflicts continued into the next dynasty, when the Hmong sided with the Chou in 1028 B.C.E. to overthrow the Shang. Unfortunately, this union proved disastrous for the Hmong, since the Chou soon forced them to move further south into the mountains. These early conflicts helped shape the Hmong into a people who never gave up and fought against great odds for their right to live by themselves.

Map of Laos

The Hmong Kingdom

The Hmong, through hard work and strong leadership, eventually formed a small kingdom in China. This land stretched from south of the Yellow river in Hunan province, into the province of Kwangsi. A king, but not an absolute monarch ruled the kingdom. Because the Hmong had many democratic tendencies, citizens retained much of the political power in their kingdom. While only men who could fight were part of the political process, it was better than if the Chinese authorities governed them. This kingdom survived a few hundred years and in the end Hmong made another migration, this time toward Indochina.

Each Hmong town had a head person, who answered to a district leader. If they had legitimate complaints about the head of the village, the voting population had access to this district leader. This political structure evolved into the clan leaders that the Hmong developed as they made their way to northern Vietnam and Laos.

Hmong in Indochina

By the late 18th century, the Chinese had succeeded in driving some Hmong out of China and into Tonkin (North Vietnam). Hmong who did not submit to Chinese administration had fled there hoping to live without Chinese interference. Settling in North Vietnam and Laos, the Hmong met resistance from the Vietnamese and Laotian populations, but not to the degree they had from the Chinese. In Laos, the Hmong were a small minority in the high mountains, and the lowland peoples ignored them. After the Taiping Rebellion and Miao Rebellion in China, more Hmong migrated to Indochina.

Touby Lyfoung

France and the Hmong

Touby Lyfoung was central to Hmong History of the Twentieth Century. The Laotian government had ignored the Hmong as much as possible; however, the French wanted to control all of Laos. Touby was an Hmong leader who was educated in a French University in Vientiane. During WWII, after France was overrun in 1940, Touby helped the French resist Japanese control of Laos. As a result of the Hmong community's respect for Touby, many of them joined the French after they regained control of Laos in . This alliance set the stage for the coming conflict with the communists.

Communists and the Hmong

As the French began to battle with the communists in Indochina, they looked for whatever help they could find. Communist China had given North Vietnam Chinese troops to aid in the overthrow of the French in Northern Vietnam. In turn, the North Vietnamese communist forces helped the Laotian communist party, the Pathet Lao, overthrow the Laotian monarchy. Although these conflicts were the start of the war known to Americans as the Vietnam War, the Hmong had been fighting in this war since the late 1950's. The French, and later, American, governments wished to fight the spread of communism. To that end, they enlisted the help of the Royal Laotian Army (RLA). Ineptness, corruption, and failure were becoming standard until the French and Americans allied with a young military Hmong leader named Vang Pao.

Vang Pao and the Laotian War

Vang Pao was a noncommissioned officer in the RLA and was a very effective leader. Being the only Hmong officer in the RLA, he was not well respected by the Laotian elite, but his strategies worked so they did not interfere. While the RLA began to bog down in the fighting, Vang Pao's tactics continued to succeed. At the same time, General Phoumi, head of the RLA, was proved a poor leader. By 1961, the U.S. government had seen enough of General Phoumi's

bungling to conclude that the RLA was unable to hold back, let alone defeat, the communists (Quincy, 1995, pg. 189).

Vang Pao

Vang Pao was soon receiving most of the resources that the Americans were supplying in the fight in Laos, and Vang Pao's Hmong were the only forces useful to the U.S. in its battle against the spread of communism. Vang Pao and the Hmong soldiers under his command fought for over 14 years to keep the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese communists from taking control of Laos. Almost half of Hmong men over age 15 perished during the final two decades of fighting as well as countless thousands of Hmong civilians.

By 1973, American aid ended and the Pathet Lao and the Laotian monarchy signed a truce. This truce was soon broken and the communists took control of Laos in 1975. Vang Pao was forced to leave Laos with as many supporters as could be flown out of his headquarters, and he begged the Hmong to denounce him and prepare for the worst. The Hmong were identified as the main cause for the long delay in the communist takeover. Those who were not bullied into staying in Laos, made their way to Thailand, where they hoped to meet up with Vang Pao and have him lead them to safety.

The Hmong and their Present-day Struggle

Thailand opened its borders to Hmong refugees, but soon saw that if they stayed, it would allow the communists to exploit grievances and become a huge social and economic burden. As a result, Hmong were put in crowded and disease-ridden refugee camps. The exodus to the Western world soon followed, but many Hmong are still in Laos and Thailand, waiting to either resettle or for political and social conditions to change in Laos. This is a current issue for thousands of immigrants who have escaped to America, concerned about leaving loved ones behind in a dangerous situation.

Famous Hmong

Choua Lee – She was the first Hmong woman elected to a government position in the United States. Only 23 when she was elected in 1991 for the St. Paul School board, she worked as a liaison between the schools and the Hmong Community. She was recently hired as Principal for Homecroft Elementary, and is the first Hmong principal in the St. Paul School District.

Cy Thao – Minnesota Representative for district 65A. He has authored bills that focused on issues for Hmong, including recognition of Hmong veterans in Laos during the Vietnam War.

Lee Lue - Famous Hmong T-28 Bomber pilot during the secret war in Laos. He began training for the bombers in 1967 after Vang Pao put out the call for Hmong Pilots. Until he was shot down in 1969, it is guessed he flew over 5,000 missions in Laos. A popular saying attributed to him is "Fly 'til you die!"

Mai Neng Moua – Editor of Paj Ntaub Voice, a Hmong literary journal, Moua also edited Bamboo Among the Oaks, a collection of creative writing and essays written by Hmong artists and thinkers. This anthology is the first of its kind.

Mee Moua – A newly elected Minnesota State Senator, recently on her 2nd term in District 67.

Tou Ger Xiong – A popular comedian-storyteller-rap artist and speaker in the Midwest, Xiong gives presentations on Hmong culture and tells his personal stories.

Touby Lyfoung – A Hmong leader who worked with the French during WWII. Working within the Lao government, Touby helped the Hmong people and represented the Hmong in the government.

Vang Pao - A great Hmong leader who was enlisted by the French and Americans to help overthrow Communists in Southeast Asia. After fighting for the CIA for many years, he was relocated to the U.S. with many of his people.

Zhang Xiu Mei – Hmong leader in the "Miao" Rebellion in Guizhou provience (1851- 1874). He fought against the Manchu imperials, w ho were known to be cruel to their subjects.

Lee Lue

Mee Moua

Tou Ger Xiong

Cy Thao

Choua Lee

Traditions and Celebrations

The Hmong culture is rich with tradition and celebrations; however, the West has limited knowledge of these traditions because resource material is limited or unavailable.

Language

Hmong language in Laos was wholly oral until 1953, when French and American missionaries introduced a written form of Hmong. Although the written form uses the Roman alphabet, Hmong is a tonal language and several final letters stand for tones instead of sound, resulting in Hmong words that are phonetically different than they look. Additionally, there are dialects of Hmong: Green or Blue Hmong and White Hmong. For Laotian Hmong the dialects are mutually intelligible but differ considerably. Since 1905, when the Chinese developed a written form of Hmong, many new forms of written Hmong have emerged.

> There has been no "Hmong" language for centuries. Due to 5000 years of movement in China, it is now divided into three main dialects: Eastern (in Hunan province), Central (in Guizhou), and Western (in Yunnan). Core vocabularies are similar, but geographical distance and barriers, and difficult communications have lead to many local sub-dialects developing over the centuries. The Hmong in Laos and resettled refugees mostly speak two dub-dialects of Western Hmong. There are Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, English, French, Spanish, and other language influences on Hmong, depending on where Hmong live. In the United States there is now a heated debate about making "Hmoob" (White Hmong sub-dialect of Western Hmong) or "Moob" (Blue/Green Mong sub-dialect of Western Mong) the "official" language. In my opinion this is like the hairs on the dog's tail wagging the dog, because 300,000 US Hmong are trying to lead 10,000,000 Chinese Hmong and almost 2,000,000 Southeast Asian Hmong in reinventing a "Hmong" language. (Heise, M. November 2003)

Many older Hmong do not read the written Hmong language, which makes it more difficult for them to learn English and communicate with those who do not speak Hmong. An important recent source of Hmong history is the Paj Ntaub, or story cloths, which visually represent Hmong history and folklore. This tradition developed in the 1970's, probably in refugee camps.

Paj ntaub illustrating escape from Laos

New Years

The only official holiday in Hmong culture is New Year. Traditionally this holiday falls in December, when the moon is darkest and the rice harvest is complete; however it is celebrated for several months across the United States toward the end of the year. The celebration is held to thank all the gods and ancestors who have helped throughout the year. Everyone participates in the New Year. Games, dancing, courting, and feasting are all part of the celebration.

The ball toss game is a courting game played by eligible boys and girls during the festivities. They line up by gender and dissimilar clans and toss a soft ball between them. The ball is thrown so that the players can catch it with one hand. The girls may hold an umbrella in their other hand over their heads to shade themselves. If a player drops the ball, he or she sings a song to the other or gives a token of silver, a bracelet, or another object of personal value that he or she removes from his or her New Year costume. If the token is not returned, it indicates that the boy can court the girl. Boys and girls of the same clan cannot marry and so do not toss balls to each other.

The story of Hmong New Year is that the shaman Siv Yis (Shee Yee) defeated evil spirits that ate Hmong. The New Year celebrates the survivors coming out of hiding and their newfound freedom.

Courting and Marriage

Family is the most important aspect of Hmong life. Hmong treat marriage very seriously and many strict rituals and traditions surround it. Hmong marriage is focused on traditional life in Laos and may seem antiquated or inappropriate to Westerners. Hmong girls traditionally had arranged marriages, or the groom negotiated with the parents for the bride. Girls were married very young, and there was no taboo against polygamy. Youthful marriage was for economic reasons in the Hmong rural, semi-nomadic culture. The sooner you were married, the sooner your family would reap the benefits of the additional members. Once a girl marries, she officially leaves her family and joins her husband's family. The husband makes promises to the bride's family about how well he will care for her and takes responsibility for the girl's happiness as well as any infidelity that she might commit. The bride becomes part of the husband's household.

Ritual kidnapping and buying of brides was commonplace in Laos and also happens (though rarely) outside of Laos. The groom gets an indication from the bride that he may court her and he kidnaps her to marry her. She must protest, but not too much. Her family must also protest. It must seem as if she loathes leaving her family, and her family will be devastated without her. This protest elevates the value of the girl in relation to her family and forces the groom to provide a higher bride price in order to prove that he is good enough to marry her. The bride price ensures that the family

gets compensation for the loss of one of its members. If the prospective bride or her family protests too much, it may convince the groom's family that the bride does not think their family good enough, and may engender ill will toward her in the future. Sons were and still are perceived as more valuable than daughters because they will eventually bring a wife into the household, increasing the workforce of the family and providing more children. Many of these practices have changed since the Hmong left Laos.

In the past, marriage by capture was allowed and so was the betrothal of small children by parents who are friends or relatives by affinal ties, especially in the case of a brother's son and sister's daughter. However, such marriages are becoming the exception since nearly all parents have now begun to take more account of their children's wishes rather than their own. It is today left to the sons and daughters to choose their own marriage partners so long as the latter are of acceptable personal and social standing. Parents will interfere mainly when a son or daughter decides to marry someone who is considered a bad risk such as an opium addict, a person of loose character or lazy disposition, a married man, a widowed or divorced woman, a spinster or a man whose male relatives have a reputation of using violence on their wives.

The most acceptable marriage process for a Hmong man begins with the courting of a girl, preferably one with an industrious nature. This must be done in the least conspicuous way, particularly towards the girl's relatives. This means that young people are free to meet or court the opposite sex mainly in the evenings in the dark of the night after each day's work. The procedure seems to vary from one region to another, and to some extent from one generation to the next. In the old days when many Hmong lived in isolated pioneering small villages, a young man would have to travel a few hours each evening by himself or with some friends before reaching the girl's hamlet.

From time to time, such a group might take enough food supplies with them to stay for a few days with relatives in the girl's village or in the bush in order to court her at night. Courting also took place when boys and girls spent time working in the neighboring fields away from home when it was inconvenient to return to their own villages during intensive farming periods. Much of this tradition is still carried on by the present generation, except that young men today do not travel a long way each evening to see their girlfriends, thus having to return home the next morning for another day's work on the family farms. Of course, some may say court in their own village individually or as a group.

Once the courting has been done long enough (from a few days to a few months as the case may be), the girl may agree to marry the young man who will then have to ask permission for the marriage from his parents. This is necessary because the parents or guardians have to help pay part or all of the bride price and wedding costs. If the girl consents to the marriage, her parent's permission does not have to be obtained beforehand. A mediator is used to negotiate with the girl's parents only when she herself has not agreed to the marriage or when the prospective couple do not know each

other well enough. Today, parents are reluctant to force their daughters to marry and will try first to persuade them to agree to a marriage, because the parents wish to avoid being blamed in case the marriage proves unsuccessful. The groom and his relatives are also apt to treat the bride and her parents with respect if the latter do not consent to her marriage too readily.

If a girl is willing to marry, the man will take her to his home quietly, then send a messenger to inform her parents. If the man does not live too far away, the girl's mother may go there to claim her back and may even use violence on her and her intended husband to show her displeasure. This verbal and physical abuse has to be accepted without retaliation, and has to be manifested even when the girl's parents secretly approve of her match in order to demonstrate their reluctance to hand over their daughter so that her husband will take better care of her, knowing how highly they valued her. The man and his relatives will, on their part, lavish verbal promises or money gifts on the mother and in the end, she will return home without her daughter to await the day when the marriage will be celebrated.

Another variation of this procedure is for the man and a handful of male relatives to "abduct" the girl at a prearranged place, often with her full knowledge and consent. She will then scream for help, and her mother will come to her rescue, again full of verbal abuse and brandishing a stick. If the daughter indicates that she is unwilling to be carried off for marriage, the mother will rain blows upon her abductors and ask her for release. On the other hand, if the girl shows willingness to go with the men, the mother's blows will be on her for being too eager to get married.

It should be noted that at this stage of the marriage process, no male relatives of the girl are involved in her so- called rescue from her husband-to-be and his helpers. They have no roles to play until the wedding when they take full charge of all negotiations and tasks related to it. Abduction is still deemed preferable to elopement, even when the girl has no objection to marrying her boyfriend, because elopement is seen as worthy only if those girls without self-esteem or respect for their family members. Abduction is also regarded as a face-saving protection for both the girl and her family should the marriage fail, as she will then be able to say that she was uncertain about the prospect all along and her family, too, can claim that they were not responsible for the failure.

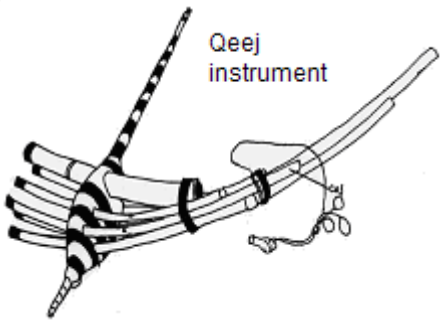
Once the "abduction" or elopement has occurred, the young man's parents send a message to the girl's relatives asking for a convenient date to celebrate the wedding. The wedding itself is a costly procedure, consisting of: (a) the bride price (b) fines (c) miscellaneous expenses for pigs, food and alcohol. Thus the Hmong wedding is [very costly] For this reason, few young Hmong are able to pay for their wedding immediately. Sometimes, the date set by the bride's parents may not be convenient to the groom if he and his relatives have not found enough money on time to cover the wedding expenses, and a new date may have to be arranged. (Lee, G.Y. 1988)

Marriage is both a joining of two individuals and a joining of two families and clans. As a part of the marriage ceremony, representatives of both families go through long negotiations to make sure there are no problems between the two families and insure the success of the new couple. Marriage taboos include not marrying someone in the same clan as yours or in another clan whose members are considered "brothers and sisters." Although most Hmong in America are monogamous, some still practice polygamy. In these cases the first marriage is official; subsequent ones are unofficial "Hmong marriages". Christian Hmong are completely monogamous. Divorce is rare in Hmong families and the Hmong see it as an insult to their ancestors.

Due to educational opportunities and the economic stability of the United States, more Hmong girls complete high school and college before marrying and starting families. However, because of strong family support systems, marrying young and starting a family while still finishing their education is much easier for a Hmong girl to do than girls from other backgrounds.

Death and Funerals

Death is the most important ritual time for the Hmong. Traditionally, an elaborate three-day ceremony takes place. The qeej (kheng), a bamboo wind instrument, and a drum are played almost continuously, while the souls of the deceased journey from the coffin, back through their life, to the realm of the spirit world. This ceremony is called "Showing the Way" *(Kab Ke Pam Tuag)*. It must be performed in order to return the soul of the deceased to its ancestors' home, to prepare the soul for its next journey into life, and to make way for those still living and those yet to be born.



Burial is an important event and the whole community participates. The cost of providing food two or three times daily to a large number (sometimes hundreds) of people, as well as the usual costs of the western funeral is about $6000 or more per funeral. Normally a collection is taken up from all participants to help families pay. A problem facing the Hmong community in some cities is its relatively small numbers and the consequent lack of full clan representation at significant times such as birth, marriage and death. An equally difficult problem is finding a location to accommodate the large number of cars of the attendees.

Students with relatives who die may be out of school several days for a funeral. In addition, the sacrifice of animals in both funeral and shamanic rituals constitutes a major problem for Hmong who live in urban areas.

When an old person [is about to die] in the family, all the neighbors come in the home to do everything possible they can to save the person. If all are sure that the person is [dying], then they need a person who is well trained to blow the "kheng" [qeej]. The Hmong people believe that the only way to talk to someone who is dead is to blow words through this kheng. Therefore, this person blows some mournful notes into the kheng to talk to the dead's spirit. We call this "qeej tu siav."

A few minutes after a person dies, the blower finishes his job. This family must kill a pig to cook for the neighbors. After the visitors finish this meal, they hang the dead body on twin-racks and tie it up against the wall, which must be on the North side of the house.

The next day more and more relatives keep coming to this house. One more instrument is required for the funeral and this is the drum we call the "nruas tuag." We only use this drum for funerals and it is not being used for fun at all. We need a person to beat this drum while the other person is blowing the kheng. Both must do their jobs at the same time for a ceremonially day.

[While] the drummers and blowers are doing their jobs, the younger children must hold burning incense on their hands and worship the older person who is dead. This worship means that the dead will leave his luck to all those who ask for it. They have to kneel down and raise this burning incense above their heads. The family keeps killing chickens and pigs for meals for those helpers. The third or either fourth day of the ceremony is the final day of the dead and it's the day most of the relatives will come for a last visitation. We take the dead person to hang outside the home down on a wide field on it's original racks on top of two cross-like wooden poles for the last view. On this day the family will ceremonially ax some cows and buffaloes to death. There are two reasons Hmong kill cattle during a funeral. The Hmong believe these cattle will go with the dead body to his or her home after death and when he or she gets home, he or she will trade others and himself. The second reason to kill cows and buffaloes is for food for the visitors. Some visitors can go home with beef. During the days of the dead person hanging outside, many people are having mournful words and other conversations. You hardly hear the noise of the drum being hit by the drummer and noise of the six pipes flute being blow by a person "txiv qeej." It's the saddest day for the family which we call the "tshwm tshav,....chuw crag." It's not a fun day for them; it's not a party time for all and it never sounds any good to them, but it's just a nervous mix of painful feelings for the family because the dead will never resurrect to be our uncle again. The best time to take the dead person to the graveyard is about 4:00 PM, so these people take the dead to bury underneath the ground with his suit still on. Remember! Hmong people never operate any dead body at all except in the United States where Hmong have no choice and no freedom to stop from cutting their dead cousins. Hmong believe that even if the person is dead, the spirit is still alive and can eat things like human beings. Therefore, the spouse every morning brings food and fruits to the grave and says: Get up and eat it.....with mournful words again like: "I know you must be very hungry." The spouse must do that at least three times before he or she forgets the rest. (Xiong, P. 1997)

We Are Hmong

By Suzanne Strauss

Our roots lie deep in the rich fertile soil of the
Loatian hills
Where our soul was one with the spirits of the
earth.
Gently, over the years, verdant growth took place
As we created quiet villages
Among whispering brooks
And our self-sufficiency made us strong.

The stalk of our growth was hearty,
Well planted and tended with care.
We were a quiet, peaceful nation...
A nation unto ourselves.

Then came the distant thunder of war.
We awoke to the sounds of crying...
Our babies,
Our wives
Ourselves.

A furious band of angry men
Torn down our villages
Raped our women
And killed our children.

We desperately departed our loving roots
Escaping into the night...
Jungles and heat
starvation and brutality.
The Mekong River swallowed our loved ones,
Babies could not cry or they would die,
As we lie hidden in a tangled jungle hideaway,
Our roots dangling weakly behind us.

We stumbled and fell and fought
Our way out.
Only to be hoarded into refugee camps,
Half dead, families torn to shreds...
We waited and waited
For our destiny.

One day, big silver planes
Came gliding into our lifes
As we shipped plane load after
Plane load of our people
Into the beckoning skies,
Our roots still wrapped around our feet.

Weary and weeping we climbed out of
Our World into Your World.

Great stretches of cement
Replaced our verdant fields;
Our quiet hamlets supplanted by bustling cities.
Noise assaulted our senses...

Now, our children leave us each day
To enter a different world.
Tov move further away from our culture...
Our roots.

And as our country was taken away,
We felt more pain than ever.
Our culture
Our life
Our homes,
All destroyed.

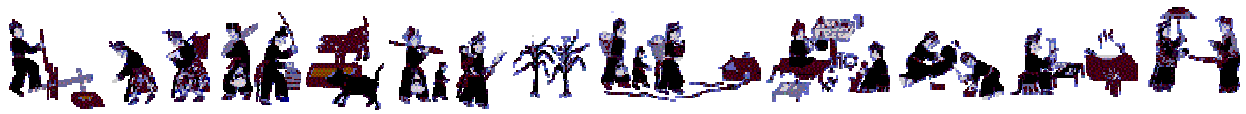
We hesitate to speak
We try to relate, but...
Our children now grow their roots in foreign soil.
Yet we cannot shake the Laotian soil from our feet.
We want to go home
We want to be left alone.

WE ARE HMONG

Innocent victims of a cruel war
Our roots do not grow well here
But we must fertilize it
With new ways
New customs
New traditions...

Yet our souls still return
To the Laos of our birth.

WE ARE HMONG



Religion and the Shaman

Before Christian conversion began (about 1900 in China and 1950 in Laos), all Hmong shared an animistic religious background. They believe that all things, living or inanimate, have souls or spirits that impact human lives. Therefore, there are innumerable spirits that the Hmong must acknowledge and avoid offending. These spirits include ancestor spirits, nature spirits, evil spirits, and house spirits. Because one soul of each ancestor who has died comes to live with his or her descendants, it is important that they have had a proper burial and the prescribed annual ceremonies in their honor. Otherwise, these ancestor spirits may cause illness or misfortune in the descendant's family. This illness is a way for the ancestor spirits to communicate with the family and tell them they have not properly acknowledged their ancestors.

The Hmong also believe people have multiple souls – as few as two and as many as 32. The Hmong wear bracelets and necklaces to keep their souls with their bodies. All of a person's souls must be in harmony for the individual's health and happiness. Any illness, physical or psychological, is described as 'soul loss.' In soul loss one of the souls has either wandered off or been stolen by a malevolent spirit.

A shaman, or *Txiv Neeb*, is a person who acts as a bridge between the spirit world and the living world. The clan sees the shaman as both a religious and a medical leader. He has two primary responsibilities. The fist is to make the patient whole by bringing back the lost or wandering soul. The second is to take over his patient's fight for life by battling evil forces in the spirit world that have captured the patient's soul.

While performing a soul calling ceremony, the shaman enters an ecstatic trance, and balances on a beam that represents a flying spirit horse. While in this state, he will journey through the spirit world in search of the lost soul. Often, the shaman will need to trick or ransom the soul away from the evil spirit. When the shaman needs to ransom the soul, he may need to trade the soul of an animal, usually a pig or cow, for the soul of the patient. The ceremony for this entails tying the animal to the ailing person, binding the human and animal souls together. The shaman thanks the animal for sacrificing its soul and kills it. The carcass is cooked and eaten by relatives who have gathered to support the sick person.

Sometimes when an illness occurs, the spirits tell the shaman that ailing person is to become a shaman. The newly chosen person is trained by a shaman in shamanic arts. Although most shamans are male, occasionally a female is chosen to be a shaman.

The Hmong shaman has specific tools that are used while performing rituals. These tools include a black or red hood, which is placed over the shaman's eyes as he begins to go into the trance. The hood symbolizes the shaman's absence from this world and presence in the spirit world. The shaman uses a bench, which will become the spirit horse that the shaman rides into the spirit

world. He has a set of buffalo horns, which he tosses on the ground. He reads their positions to find the answers the spirits give to his questions. The shaman's assistant on a gong to allow the shaman to begin a trance and again to exit the trance. Finger bells are worn on the left index finger of the shaman, who also shakes a rattle made of an iron hoop with pieces of metal on it while riding his spirit horse. The bells and rattle are symbolic of harness bells worn by the horse.

hooded shaman performing ritual

The shaman's altar hangs on a wall in his or her house. The altar represents the first Hmong shaman, Siv Yis's cave near the top of a mystical mountain above a pool. Nearby the flower of immortality grows. There is a bowl of water on the altar that symbolizes this pool. The shaman's altar also has a bowl of rice and an egg, as well as incense on it. In the shaman's house, there are cotton threads running from the altar over the central rafter in the house and to the doorframe. This is the pathway for the shaman's spirit helpers to travel from the spirit world into the human world.

During a ceremony, the shaman burns a candle to light the way into the spirit world and will also burn spirit money to take with him on the journey. He will need this money to bribe or compensate the spirits met during the trip.

Aside from soul calling ceremonies that a shaman uses to treat an illness, bless a house, or appease spirits, the shaman performs a soul calling ceremony three days after the birth of a baby. This ceremony serves to establish the spiritual identity of the child and welcomes the soul of the new child into the family. During this ceremony, the shaman gives the child its first name.

Culturally, these ceremonies demonstrate the strong community support for an individual suffering from an illness. This support provides a powerful psychological component of the healing process. Many shamanistic rituals have fallen into disuse due to laws restricting animal sacrifice in the United States. (Adapted from Cole, 2000, p. 23-25)

Conversion to Christianity

Many Hmong have stopped practicing their traditional religion and become Christians since they immigrated. This is due partially to evangelizing by several Christian organizations. These organizations exert tremendous influence over the immigrant families they sponsor. SKY (a pseudonym for a Hmong writer living in St. Paul) explains that at the beginning of her family's life in the United States, her father, who is a clan leader, and her mother, attended worship twice a month at their sponsor's church. Initially they did this out of obligation as they considered themselves indebted to the church. The family continued to practice ua nenb (traditional practices) in their own home. (SKY, 34)

Eventually a Hmong church was founded, and the family truly converted to Christianity and ceased their traditional practices. Her parents decided to become Christians primarily because they could now practice Christianity with other Hmong. In a fashion, the church became a second clan. A secondary reason for their conversion was that the traditional rituals carried a heavy financial burden - the cost of animals for sacrifice, spirit money (paper pressed with silver and gold leaf), and food for the large group of family and clan members who attend ritual events (SKY, 2003, 34-5).

Bee Cha, in his article "Being Hmong is Not Enough," suggests that "[t]o be Hmong means that the concept 'I' does not exist. It means all our decisions need validation from the elders" (2003, pg.27). In contrast to Cha's more traditional view, Christianity, especially the Protestant religions, stress individual relationships with the divine. Christians directly address a single divine being who hears them without the mediation of a shaman (Vang and Vang, 11). Most Protestant communities make decisions based on their own interpretations of scripture and do not require authorization from clan elders.

The collision of the Hmong culture, in which reality is shaped by community, and the American culture, which places more importance on the individual, puts young Hmong in a situation where they are forced to constantly switch between competing modes of understanding. Switching modes like this leaves young Hmong with a sense that they do not belong to either culture.

The current generation of Hmong students, many whom have grown up in the United States, continue to walk a difficult line between the traditions of their parents' native culture and the culture of the society they live in. Dwight Conquergood, who has spent a lifetime studying Hmong culture, captures the essential conflict between Hmong culture, and the prevailing American culture.

> In a thousand ways, our separatist, individualistic ethic gets enunciated daily: individual place settings at meals, the importance of 'a room of one's own' even for children, advertising appeals and jingles such as 'Have it your way' and 'We do it all for you.' The enactment of Hmong culture, on the other hand, is like a symphony; every part plays the themes of returning, recalling, restoring, reincorporating, binding together, and reuniting separated parts into a collective identity. (Fadiman, 1997, p. 197)

Lesson Plans for Teachers

Learning about Asian Herbs

(http://ladb.unm.edu/retanet/plans/search/retrieve.php3?ID%5B0%5D=432)

This lesson is valuable as it acknowledges the contributions of Asian countries to the field of medicine. It fosters an understanding of the herbal medicine practices of people not able to access western medicine and the movement of western medicine back towards its roots in herbalism.

This lesson explores the content, themes and perspectives of a cultural group integrated into the structure of an already existing curriculum.

Grade Level: 7-12
Subject **Area:** Science, Social Studies, Botany

In our modern technological society, health care has become a big issue. The rising cost of adequate health care is making it impossible or nearly impossible for many people to receive medical treatment for illnesses. Those who can afford good medical attention are paying huge premiums and may eventually reach a point where they too will no longer be able to afford medical care. How has the current situation arrived at this point? Why has this situation never been such a huge problem in the past? Of course, there are many reasons for this dilemma and no easy answer is in sight. Nevertheless, one possible solution may be found by studying the use of medicinal herbs in Asia. Plants have been used for their medicinal values in Asia for thousands of years. The herbal plants in the Mountains and Lowlands of Asia, for example, hold the secret to thousands of remedies that are yet to be discovered. By studying the uses of herbal plants of the past and present in Asia we may develop keen insights into how civilizations have flourished in the past. Furthermore, we can learn how modern day uses of herbs are helping to sustain societies today where western medicine is not easily available.

Lesson Overview - This project can be divided into 5 parts.

Part one: General study of herbal plants; plant structures and functions from a scientific point of view.

Part two: Study of plant growth in different environments.

Part three: Finding out about herbs in Asia

Part four: Geographical study of herbs throughout Asia and herbs that come from the Mountains and Lowlands.

Part five: Cultural uses of herbs in Asia

Time needed: Approximately 5 weeks; one week for each part

Houses Around the World

(http://ladb.unm.edu/retanet/plans/search/retrieve.php3?ID%5B0%5D=432)

This is a useful lesson as it teaches children about other cultures and traditions that are different than what they are familiar with. It engenders understanding between students and fosters acceptance of each other's differences. Can be adapted and expanded for grades 2 – 12.

This lessons transformation approach changes the curriculum to include concepts, issues, and events as viewed from the perspective of various cultural groups. There will be a variety of cultural perspectives and student will compare and contrast other cultures' houses, clothes, and climates to their own.

Houses around the world can be used concurrently across several subjects or concentrated in one of the following: science, reading, social studies, art, or geography.

Overview

This lesson will help students develop an understanding how climate influences the type of homes a person builds and the way a person dresses. The material will show how different communities have different cultures.

Sample activity

Students' design appropriate clothing for a person living in one of the locations described in the story, *This Is My House* by Arthur Dorros. Creating clothing for a paper doll or a figure drawn on paper can do this. Students are able to explain orally or in writing why they designed the clothes the way they did.

Prerequisite Skills

Know about different climates around the world and the regions associated with them (Polar Regions are cold, tropical regions are hot); be able to locate regions on a world map with teacher guidance

Instructional Strategies

- Pre-reading - Have students share what their house is like. Discuss similarities and differences among students' homes.
- Read the story *This Is My House* by Arthur Dorros.
- Using small pictures of the homes found in the story, students paste them on that location on a world map.
- Discuss similarities among the houses found within a particular region. What makes them the same? Why are they built that way? What do you think the weather is like in that region? How does the weather affect how they built their house? How do you think a person would dress in that region, knowing the climate?
- Students design clothing for a person living in one of the regions from the book for the assessment.

Questions to ask students:

Which house would you live in (not want to live in) and why?
Why wouldn't you find an igloo in Florida?
Why wouldn't you find a thatched hut in Colorado?
How is your house different from a house in the story?

The Origin of Hmong New Year

This lesson can be used in Music, Theater, English, or Social Studies classes in grades 5-12. It is a Hmong folktale brought to life in a narrative, interpretive, creative manner. Materials needed are index card scripts and rudimentary costumes.

Narrator: This story illustrates that the nature of the Hmong people was to be survivors and to get out of tight spots. The New Years Celebration, which is happens at the end of November in the United States, celebrates the freedom represented by the escape of Shee Yee, who embodies the Hmong spirit of freedom.

Card 1. Narrator: Siv Yis (Shee Yee), who was the forerunner of today's shaman (txiv neeb/ tzee neng), was once ambushed by nine evil spirits (dab) who were brothers and who ate human flesh and drank human blood. The brothers lay in wait for Shee Yee at a mountain crossroads where nine paths led to every corner of the earth and where the rocks looked like tigers and dragons.

Card 2. When Shee Yee arrived, the brothers turned themselves into water buffalo to ambush him. Shee Yee also turned himself into a water buffalo.

Card 3. The brothers tossed Shee Yee on their horns, so he changed back into a man and chopped them into small pieces with his magical saber!

Card 4. Brothers: OUCH!!! Shee Yee: Take that!

Card 5. The spirit pieces came back together and the brothers came back to life. Shee Yee turned into a cloud and rose high in the sky in an attempt to escape the brothers. (CLOUD FLOATS AWAY FROM BROTHERS)

Card 6. The brothers became a strong wind (BLOW)

Card 7. Shee Yee became a drop of water to escape the wind (FALLING MOTION & crescendo aaaaaahhhhHHHHHHHHH)

Card 8. One of the brothers became a leaf so he could catch the drop of water (RUN TOWARDS SHEE YEE WITH LEAF)

Card 9. Shee Yee became a deer and started to run away from the brothers. The brothers became wolves and gave chase (HOWL AND RUN) until the sun was low in the western sky, hanging at the edge of the earth.

Card 10. Eight of the brothers became too tired to go on with the chase, but the oldest one kept running after Shee Yee.

Card 11. Shee Yee saw an abandoned rat's burrow and changed himself into a rat (SQUEAK)

Card 12. The oldest brother turned into a cat (MEOW) and waited at the entrance of the burrow.

Card 13. Shee Yee changed himself into a caterpillar with stinging fuzz and tried to escape the burrow. The cat pounced, but spit him out because of the stinging fuzz.(SPITTING SOUNDS)

Card 14. As Shee Yee waited in the burrow, he got angrier and angrier. "WHY CAN'T HE LEAVE ME ALONE?" he wondered.

Card 15. When the cat fell asleep, Shee Yee changed himself into a tiny red ant.

Card 16. Shee Yee quickly and fiercely bit the cat (OUCH!!!) which finally drove the brother away. Then Shee Yee went home to his wife (YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE THE DAY I HAD!)

Short Introduction to Hmong Language

English	Phonetic Pronunciation	Hmong Spelling
Be quiet	Nyaw tu yu	Nyob twj ywj
Do you speak English?	koa pua pow hi loo Akee	Koj puas paub hais lus Askiv
Flower cloth (or story cloth)	pah ndau	Paj ntaub
Good bye	moo zhong	Mus zoo
Good job!	Zhong tsah daynew	Zoo txoj dejnum
Happy New Year!	Nyah zhong shong chia	Nyob zoo xyoo tshiab!
Hello, Hi	nyah zhong	Nyob zoo
Hmong	Hmong	Hmoob
Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	ee, ab, bay, blao, chi	ib, ob, peb, plaub, tsib
Old fashioned (slang) or "not hip" (lit. "Hmong from Thailand")	Hmong thai tay	Hmoob Thaib teb
Pipe instrument	kheng	Qeej
See you later	shee njee doo-ah	Sib ntsib dua
Shaman	Tzee nee	Txiv neng
Spirit	dah	Dab
Thank you	wah chow	Ua tsaug
Very good!	Zhong heng	Zoo heev
What's your name?	gaw loo nbay hoo lee jah?	Koj lub npe hu li cas?

Common First Names and their Pronunciations

Hmong Spelling	Phonetic Pronunciation	English meaning
Hua	Houa	Cloud
Maiv	Mai, My, May	Girl
Paj/Paaj	Pa, Pang	Flower
Pov	Pao	Protect
Tooj	Tong	Copper
Tswb	Chue	Bell
Xeeb	Seng/Xeng	Heart (in Chinese)
Tub	Tou	Son/Boy

Clan (Family) Names

Chang (Cha)	Kang	Pha
Cheng	Kong	Thao
Chue	Kue	Vang
Fang	Lee, Ly	Vue
Hang	Lor	Xiong
Her	Moua	Yang

We intended to include a list of slang that might be used by students in the classroom, but were cautioned that English speakers may not be able to correctly identify the meanings of Hmong words since their meaning depends in part upon the pitch with which they are spoken. Pay attention to tone of voice, and you may be able to identify students' intent.

Etiquette for interacting with Hmong by Hmong Cultural Center (2000)

The handshake is a new concept to the traditional Hmong person; this is especially the case among women. Traditional Hmong usually do not shake hands with women. Many Hmong women feel embarrassed shaking the hands of a male. Traditionally, handshakes do not occur. Persons greet one another verbally. Holding hands too tightly during a handshake will embarrass Hmong women.

When conversing with a Hmong family, always ask for the head of the household, which is usually the father.

When speaking to a less assimilated Hmong person whether through the telephone, in person, or through using an interpreter, one should use simple terminology. Many Hmong possess a limited vocabulary in English.

Hmong teach their children to be well behaved in the presence of guests. Typically, in cases where their children are interrupting or not behaving well in the presence of guests, Hmong parents do not send their children away or discipline them. Discipline is usually administered after the guests have left.

When talking to a Hmong person, he or she may not look directly at you or give eye contact. The person you are speaking to may look down or away from you. Traditionally looking directly into the face of a Hmong person or making direct eye contact is considered to be rude and inappropriate.

Traditionally, it is considered inappropriate for opposite genders to sit too close to one another when conversing. To avoid misinterpretation, a male keeps a distance between himself and a female in conversation or any type of encounter.

When entering a Hmong home, a seat or chair will be offered. If the visitor does not sit on the family's furniture, family members might assume that the visitor thinks that their furniture is messy, contagious with disease, or that the visitor assumes that he or she is of a higher status than they.

Most traditional Hmong elders, especially men, do not want strangers to touch their heads, or those of their children, due to their religious beliefs and personal values.

It is very common for Hmong families to visit one another without setting up an appointment. Sometimes a family will just show up at the door without warning, and expect a warm welcome. It is considered rude and inappropriate to tell the visiting party that you do not have time to visit with them.

Hmong people tend to be humble. They usually do not want to show or express their true emotions in front of others. Often, they will say: "maybe" or "I will try" instead of giving a definite positive or negative reply. Sometimes they might say "okay" or "yes" which actually means "no", when they feel pressured.

When it comes to decision-making, it might take Hmong persons a while to come up with a response to a particular situation. Usually the father makes most of the decisions for the family. But sometimes, the male head of the immediate household may involve relatives including uncles, cousins, or even clan leaders in important decisions. Before making a decision, most Hmong elders like to receive a second opinion. This is because they do not want to be held solely accountable for what might turn out to be a wrong decision.

when a Hmong person offers you a drink you should not simply decline it. This is considered to be impolite or rude. So as not to offend him or her, just take the drink or the offered object and hold it for a while before placing it back on the table or a nearby surface. The same goes for offered gifts. Refrain from quickly saying "No". Explain why the gifts cannot be accepted.

It is considered quite embarrassing and rude when outsiders assumingly label the members of a Hmong family as man or wife. If one does not know the family or the relationships between family members, one should ask.

Most traditional Hmong families do not enjoy hearing direct comments about their children, especially infants and babies. A comment such as "your child is cute" is not looked upon favorably. Hmong believe that if a bad spirit hears such comments, it might come and take the child's soul away.

There are many unusual physical marks that might be found on the body of a Hmong person. These are commonly the result of a home treatment for traditional healing and health problems such as colds and headaches. These marks may involve bruises or redness from cupping, spooning, or coining on the neck, shoulder, back, chest, forearms, and forehead.

Local and National Organizations

Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women
1518 E. Lake Street, Suite 209
Minneapolis, MN 55407
Phone (612) 724-3066 / Fax (612) 724-3098

Center for Asians and Pacific Islanders
3702 East Lake Street
Minneapolis, MN 55406
Phone (612) 721-0122 / Fax (612) 721-7054

Hmong-American Mutual Assistance Association
1209 Glenwood Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55405
Phone (612) 374-2694 / Fax (612) 374-5205

Hmong American Partnership
1075 Arcade Street
St. Paul, MN 55106
Phone (651) 495-9160 / Fax (651) 495-1699

Hmong American Partnership
1121 Glenwood Avenue
Minneapolis, MM 55405
Phone (612) 377-6482

Hmong American Services Center
3741 11th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55407
Phone (612) 724-7102

Hmong Arts, Books, & Crafts (Hmong ABC)
298 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55103
Phone (651) 293-0019

Hmong Language Institute of Minnesota
1088 Rice Street
St. Paul, MN 55117
Phone (651)

Hmong Minnesota Pacific Association
925 Payne Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone (651) 778-8937 / Fax (651) 778-2413

Hmong Nationality Archives
775 North Milton Street #109
St. Paul, MN 55103
Phone (651) 338-7443

Hmong National Organization
501 Dale Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55103
Phone (651) 290-2343

Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
503 Irving Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55405
Phone (612) 374-4967 / Fax (612) 374-4821

Lao Family Community of Minnesota
320 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55103
Phone (651) 221-0069 / Fax (651) 221-0276

Lao Family Community of Minnesota
1433 East Franklin Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55404
Phone (612) 870-1719

Lao Parent-Teachers Association (at Lao Cultural Center)
2648 West Broadway Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55411
Phone (612) 302-0948

Paj Ntaub Voice
2654 Logan Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55411
Phone (651) 214-0955

Southeast Asian Community Council
430 Bryant Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55405
Phone (612) 377-0240 / Fax (612) 377-2163

Women's Association of Hmong and Lao
506 Kenny Road
St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone (651) 772-4788 / Fax (651) 772-4791

Websites

http://ww2.saturn.stpaul.k12.mn.us/Hmong/studentshowcase/reports.html
Reports from Hmong students at the Saturn school about topics in Hmong life from food to history.

http://www.atrax.net.au/userdir/yeulee/index.htm
Dr. Gary Yia Lee's resource page. Includes links to history, current event topics, and non-Hmong links that have relevance to all Asians.

http://www.hmong.org/
Information on English language classes, job placements, and assistance for parents as well as youth activity ideas.

http://www.hmongabc.com
Hmong Arts, Books, and Crafts Bookstore website.

http://www.hmongcenter.org/index.html
An all ages site that includes citizenship help, bookstores, and links to art and photo exhibits.

http://www.hmongnet.org/
Hmong-related news, book suggestions, and links to general information on Hmong culture and history. This site also has links to Hmong language information and online discussion groups.

http://www.hmongnewyear.com/
Hmong New Year website for information on the yearly gatherings.

http://www.hmongonline.com/
A site about Hmong music, movies to preview, and other popular culture topics, including sports, education and general references.

http://www.hmongstudies.org/index.html
A scholarly site including census records, bibliographies, and articles on Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese cultures.

http://www.hmongtimes.com/
A community site with many articles on subjects important to the Hmong community.

http://www.hmoob.com/
A community site that deals with issues relevant to many different age groups; includes discussion groups geared towards teenage Hmong readers.

http://www.hndlink.org/
A national site that is geared towards including all Hmong into a larger, integrated, informed society.

http://www.laofamily.org/
A great local site for Minnesota Hmong families. Resources for those needing assistance with education, health, and language acquisition. Includes links on art, culture and life stories of Hmong.

http://www.neeg.org/
A site in written Hmong, helpful for those who are learning the language or proficient in it.

http://www.sacbee.com/static/archive/news/projects/hmong/timeline.html
A concise timeline of the Hmong from the Sacramento Bee newspaper.

http://www.socialstudies.esmartweb.com/HTMLbibs/Hmongbib.htm
An annotated website of books, videos, and articles about the Hmong. Divided up into children's books and teacher resources.

Annotated Resources

Books

Cole, Femi, & Mellen, Jo. (2000). Being Hmong Means Being Free. Green Bay:Northeastern Wisconsin In-School Telecommunications.
A companion to the Wisconsin Public Television production, this book provides a clear survey of Hmong culture, history, dating behavior, weddings, funerals; it also provides teachers with classroom activities.

English-White Hmong & White Hmong-English Dictionary. (2002).Saint Paul Public Schools

Fadiman, Anne.(1997). The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down. New York:Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
A Hmong family struggles with incongruities between their traditional way of life and Western medicine. This book recounts and explores how one refugee family adjusts to life in the West.

Johnson, Charles & Yang, Se (Eds). (1985, 1992). Myths, Legends and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos. St. Paul: Linguistics Department, Macalester College.
The largest anthology of Hmong oral tradition to date. This book presents traditional stories in both English and Hmong and includes explanatory notes on Hmong culture, customs and beliefs.

Moua, Mai Neng. (2002). Bamboo Among Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press.
This is the first collection of Hmong fiction and essays in book form. These writings reflect the best of Paj Ntaub Voice, a Hmong literary journal and provide readers with a sense of the contemporary issues of the Hmong community.

Quincy, Keith. (1988). Hmong: History of a People. Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press.
This book provides a thorough history of the Hmong people and culture from their early settlements in China to their resettlement following the Vietnam War.

Video

Littig, Eileen Kay (Director & Producer). (2000). Being Hmong Means Being Free. [Video]. (Available from NEWIST/CESA #7, 2420 Nicolet Drive, IS 1040, Green Bay WI, 54311).
This video follows the Vang family. Lia Vang narrates, telling the audience about her experiences as a teenager caught between cultures. The video provides footage of many Hmong rituals and is an excellent introduction to Hmong culture.

Journals

Bliatout, Bruce et al (Eds). Hmong Studies Journal [On-line]. Available: [http://members.aol.com/hmongstudiesjrnl/HSJv1n1_ContentsFr.html]
An academic journal that explores Hmong identity and how it has been transformed through interactions with Western culture.

Moua, Mai Neng (Ed). Paj Ntaub Voice. (Available from Paj Ntaub Voice, 931 Margaret St., St. Paul MN, 55106).
A Hmong literary journal that prints nonfiction and creative works by contemporary Hmong writers.

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Quincy, K. (1988). *Hmong: History of a People*. Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press.

SKY. (2003). My Religion. *Paj Ntaub Voice*, 8(2), 34-36.

Vang, M. & Vang, P. (2003). Photo Reflections. *Paj Ntaub* Voice, 8(2), 11-26.

Xiong, P. *Hmong Funeral Ceremony.* (1997). [On-line]. Available: [http://ww2.saturn.stpaul.k12.mn.us/Hmong/studentshowcase/reports/Hmongfunerals.html].

Walking Manifesto # 2 by Pacyinz Lyfoung

I once asked a Native Hawaiian woman
What she did for a living.
She paddles canoes
Because that's what her people do.
They live on islands
Between the immensity of the sky
Above them
And the immensity of the ocean
Between them.
They salute the sun
Every morning
And spend years
Learning to read
The shades of the sun
That tell them
The difference between
Safe and unsafe crossings.

These days, I too know
That if people were to ask me,
What am I doing in life?
My response is predestined
By the people I was born into:
I walk in life
Because that's what the Hmong people
Used to do.

Having crossed the ocean,
I still walk, for justice,
Because that's what my people need.
We live in Pan Asian villages
Between the Western world
Beneath us
And the immensity of the Western culture
Around us.
I salute the spirit of my communities
And am spending my years
Learning how to read
The shades of their dreams,
Shaping the wave
That will take us all
To a true American shore
Of peace, justice, and equality.