

## **The Whispering Cloth**

by Pegi Deitz Shea

illustrated by Anita Riggio

stitched by You Yang

Boyd's Mills Press, 1995

ISBN 1-56397-623-4

Mai and her grandmother live in Ban Vinai camp in Thailand, waiting to come to America. While they wait, Grandmother teaches Mai how to embroider pa'ndau, Hmong story cloths. *The Whispering Cloth* is a story of a child's hope in the midst of confinement and war.

### **Classroom Activities Grades 3-8**

What does the title *The Whispering Cloth* mean? **Discuss** why in your opinion this is/is not a good title. Brainstorm other titles for this book.

**Discuss** what life is like inside Ban Vinai refugee camp. **Compare** your life to Mai's. How might it feel for each of you if you were to switch places?

**Locate** Vietnam and Cambodia on the globe. Locate Laos and Thailand. Find the Mekong River and Ban Vinai. **Discuss** the Foreword. **Learn the words** in the Glossary.

**Compare** the needlework in *The Whispering Cloth* to the needlework in *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco and *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold. How is needlework important to each story?

**Read and discuss** other picture books about refugee or displaced people: *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, *The Silver Path* by Christine Harris, *The Always Prayer Shawl* by Sheldon Oberman, *How Many Days To America?* by Eve Bunting.

**Make a pa'ndau** of your own life. Start by making a line drawing on paper. Tape the paper to a window or a light box. Cover the drawing with a piece of broadcloth or muslin. A clean handkerchief will work too. Tape the fabric in place. Carefully trace your drawing onto the fabric. Remove the fabric, and thread an embroidery needle with colorful embroidery thread or floss. Carefully fill in your drawing with tiny stitches "the length of a grain of rice". **Write the story** depicted in your cloth and display it next to your pa'ndau for all to see.

