

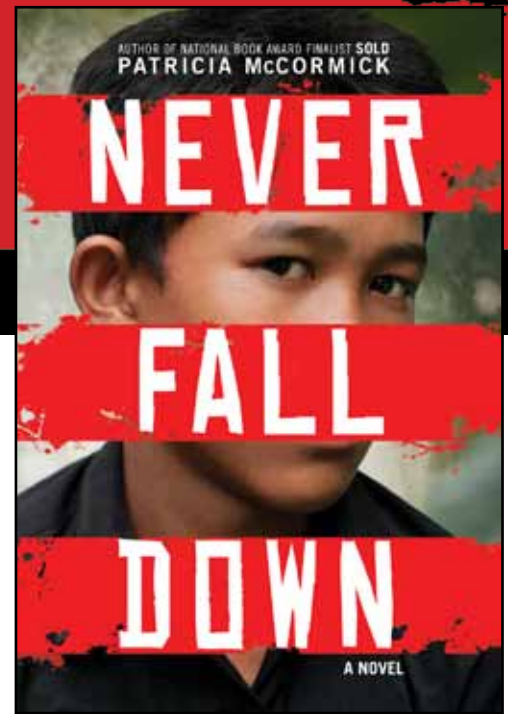
NEVER FALL DOWN

By PATRICIA McCORMICK

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Based on the life of Cambodian advocate Arn Chorn-Pond, *Never Fall Down* is the story of how one Cambodian boy survived the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime. Only eleven when the Khmer Rouge invaded his hometown, Arn is forced into slave labor, and his life for the next four years (1975–1979) is a nightmare of suffering, deprivation, and death. National Book Award finalist Patricia McCormick has seamlessly interwoven fact and fiction to create a powerfully unforgettable story of war and survival.



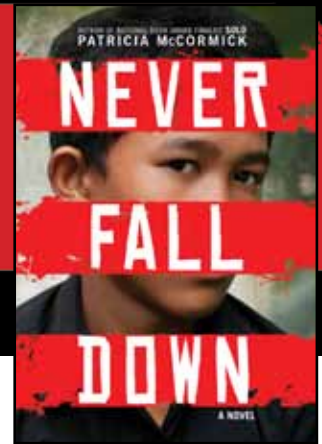
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Early in the book Arn says, “Music is like air, always there” (p. 3). How does music affect his life? Would he have survived without it?
2. What was the Khmer Rouge and why does Arn say, “Be invisible around these Khmer Rouge guys” (p. 21)? Does he manage to do that? How?
3. Arn’s aunt tells him, “Be like the grass” (p. 37). What does she mean? Does Arn follow her advice? Why or why not?
4. Arn says, “They [the Khmer Rouge] kill everyone who used to be rich or high ranking” (p. 29). Why would they do that? Suppose you were a teacher. How would you try to survive?
5. The “head guy” tells the kids, “Angka is your family now” (p. 40). Who or what is the Angka? What does it mean to say the Angka is your family?
6. The Khmer Rouge soldiers say, “This is Year Zero” and “You must be like the ox” (pp. 43–44). What do they mean? Does Arn obey them?
7. Arn says, “Death is just my daily life now” (p. 45). Why did the Khmer Rouge starve people and kill them or let them die? How could people be so cruel?
8. Mek says, “To live with nothing in your stomach and a gun in your face, is that living or is that dying a little bit every day?” (p. 61). Which do you think it is? If you were Mek, how would you survive?
9. Who is Sombo and why is he “good inside” (p. 95)? How do Arn’s feelings about him change throughout the story?
10. Arn says, “And I know then I have power” (p. 80). What kind of power does he have? How does he get it, and how does he use it?
11. The phrase “a little bit famous” recurs throughout the book. What is its significance not only in Cambodia but also when Arn comes to the United States?
12. When Arn comes to the United States he says, “After all the thing I been through, now being rescue is something I also have to survive” (p. 195). What does he mean?
13. This book is about how Arn survives. But *why* do you think he does? Did he find purpose in his survival?

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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. The author says that the Cambodian atrocity is “the worst genocide ever inflicted by a country on its own people” (p. 1). Investigate other genocides. How do they resemble that of Cambodia? How do they differ? Report your findings to the class.
2. Pol Pot is not specifically mentioned in this book, but his actions are central to Arn’s suffering. Who was Pol Pot? Research his life and write a brief biography of him.
3. *Never Fall Down* is what is called a “nonfiction novel.” What is meant by that phrase? How does the author integrate nonfiction and fiction? Would the book have been more effective simply as a novel or as a work of nonfiction? Why or why not?
4. Arn says, “I don’t know what this is, this Revolution” (p. 24). Write a letter to Arn answering his question.
5. Arn tells the story in his own highly individual voice. How would you describe it? Select a passage and rewrite it in your own voice. Which is more effective?
6. As an adult, Arn founded two organizations, Children of War and Cambodian Living Arts. Partner with one of your classmates to investigate these two organizations and report your findings to the class.
7. Imagine that you, like Arn, are a recent immigrant to this country. Write a brief essay describing the problems you might encounter in your school.
8. Partner with one of your classmates for a role-playing exercise. Pretend one of you is Arn and the other is Sombo. Have a conversation discussing your feelings for each other and how they impact your lives.
9. Arn was forced to become a soldier when he was only about thirteen years old. Research other instances where children are kidnapped or recruited as soldiers. How do these children heal? How are they reintegrated into their communities?

ABOUT ARN CHORN-POND



Photo from the documentary film *The Flute Player*, courtesy of Jocelyn Glatzer.

Arn Chorn-Pond has dedicated his life to humanitarian causes around the world, and he has received several human rights awards for his work. He founded Children of War, an organization that aids children held hostage by war and violence. He is the founder of Cambodian Living Arts, a group that helps preserve the traditional arts of Cambodia. He also started Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development, which provides education and computer and job skills to those in need. Arn lives in Cambodia and spends part of the year speaking in the United States.



Roberto Ligresti

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia McCormick is a former journalist who has won much acclaim for her compassionate approach to hard-hitting subjects. Her most recent book, *Purple Heart*, was a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 2009, and her book *Sold* was a National Book Award

finalist. Other seminal books she has written are *Cut* and *My Brother’s Keeper*. She lives in New York with her family. You can visit her online at www.pattymccormick.com.

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