**from *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places***

**by Le Ly Hayslip**

Le Ly Hayslip grew up in the rural village of Ky La in central Vietnam. In 1989 she published *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, one of the few autobiographical accounts of the Vietnam War from a Vietnamese point of view. In this excerpt from her autobiography, Hayslip shares her childhood memories of being indoctrinated by the Vietcong—Communist guerrillas backed by North Vietnam—into the children’s troop. How did the Vietcong encourage Hayslip to help their cause?

When the Viet Cong could not be found (they spent most of their time, after all, hiding in caverns underground with entrances hidden by cookstoves, bushes, false floors, or even underwater by flowing rivers themselves), the Republican soldiers took out their frustration on us: arresting nearby farmers and beating or shooting them on the spot, or carting anyone who looked suspicious off to jail. As these actions drove even more villagers to the Viet Cong cause, more and more of our houses were modified for View Cong use. The cadremen told us that each family must have a place in which liberation troops could hide, so my father dug an underground tunnel beneath our heavy cookpot which could house half a dozen fighters. While my father and other villagers worked on their tunnels, we children were taken to a clearing beyond the village graveyard, on the threshold of the swamp, where we were taught revolutionary songs. One of the first we learned was in praise of Uncle Ho—Ho Chi Minh—who, we were told, awaited news of our heroism like a kindly grandfather:

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| The full moon shines on our land,So that we can sing and danceAnd make wishes for Uncle Ho.Uncle Ho—we wish you a long life!We wish you a long beard that we can strokeWhile you hold us in your armsAnd tell us how much you love us and our country! |

We were also taught what we were expected to do for our village, our families, and the revolution. If we were killed, we were told we would live on in history. We learned that, like the French, men of another race called Americans wanted to enslave us. “Their allies are the traitorous Republicans of Ngo Dinh Diem!” the Viet Cong shouted. “Just as our fathers fought against the French and their colonial administrators, so must we now fight against these new invaders and their running dogs!”….

Although it was nearly dawn when I got home from the first meeting, my parents were still awake. They asked what I’d been doing and I told them proudly that I was now part of the “political cadre”—although I had no idea what that meant. I told them we were to keep an eye on our neighbors and make sure the liberation leaders knew if anyone spoke to the hated Republicans. I told my mother to rejoice, that when her son—my beloved brother Bon, came back from Hanoi, he would be a leader in the South, just as the leaders of our own cadre had been drained in Hanoi and now were helping our village gain victory over the invaders.

Although my mother was not sure that my involvement with the cadre was a good idea, she seemed happy that through them, somehow, Bon’s return might be hastened. My father, however, looked at me with an expression I had never seen before and said nothing. Although Ky La’s first big battle had yet to be fought, it was as if he had seen, in my shining, excited, determined little face, the first casualty of our new war.

**Activity Options**

1. ***Creating an Oral Presentation***. With several classmates, role-play a discussion between Hayslip and her parents after the first meeting of the political cadre.
2. ***Analyzing Bias***. Propaganda is the use of slanted information to further one’s own cause or to damage an opponent’s cause. What are two examples of propaganda the Vietcong used to persuade the children of Hayslip’s village to aid them in war?