

Stealing buddha's dinner essay sample

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The foreigner's perception of America has an array of strange customs, traditions and products that many American born people don't see. Immigrants tend to find their sense of belonging and identity through paths. These paths usually follow an outsiders perspective of how America is stereotyped. The novel, *Stealing Buddha's Dinner*, by Bich Minh Nguyen, shows Bich's attempt to believe that she fits into American society. When Bich moved from Vietnam to Grand Rapids, Michigan, she had the intention of becoming American. Her father marries Rose, a new mother-figure to Bich, who Bich feels holds her back in her quest to feel more American. Throughout the book, Bich keeps bringing up the term "missing-ness" when she talks about her past, and her thoughts about where she is today. Bich Minh Nguyen found her belonging through the foreigners stereotypes of America such as food, money, and names.

Fitting into American has been a major topic for my English courses for the last 3 years. From an inside perspective, it doesn't seem very hard to be able to fit into a country where just about anything is acceptable. Known as "the melting pot" of different cultures, America should be welcoming to non-Americans. The father describes a dramatic moment in their immigration process when he says, "We are people without a country, until we walk out of that gate, and then we are American" (Nguyen, 10). The family is lost, a free agent before they take their first steps on American soil. A powerful experience that they will surely never forget. Seeing all the American people, Bich describes her first moments unwelcoming, saying, "Come on in. Now Transform. And if you cannot, then disappear" (Nguyen, 11). Facing a crown

that seems unfriendly, Bich turns to other different ways to belong in America.

Food in America is distinctly different from that of food in other countries. We have many options, and from ones couch an American can even order food that derives from an array of other countries. To Bich, fitting in meant food, and “ food meant American burgers and fries” (Nguyen 48). The saying ‘ you are what you eat’ is a metaphor that applies to this situation, since Bich’s desire is to be American. To achieve this goal, she is choosing American foods and she believes this will make her a part of the United States. Bich’s quest for new foods is described when she says, “ I wanted to savor new food, different food, ‘ white food’. I was convinced that I was falling far behind on becoming American, and then what would happen to me? I would be an outcast for the rest of my days” (Nguyen, 52). She believes that she needs to fit into her new country, and thinks that by not eating American food, she doesn’t belong.

The repetitiveness of the food they ate was a problem as well. Bich blames a lot of her identity problems on Rose. Bich describes the way Rose chose food when she says, “ She also had clear preferences, like olive loaf instead of bologna, orange Faygo instead of Crush, raisin cookies instead of chocolate chip. She sprinkled wheat germ on grapefruit and bought maple sugar oatmeal over peaches and cream. These small differences accumulated within my growing stockpile of shame and resentment, as if Rosa herself were preventing me from fitting in and being like everyone else” (Nguyen, 52). Bich wants to choose her own connection to her new country, she wants to be eating the same things that her classmates are eating. She want to be <https://assignbuster.com/stealing-buddhas-dinner-essay-sample/>

able to live freely like she thinks that all Americans do. Throughout the book she becomes agitated, at one point going on strike against Rosa. “ I was sick and tired of eating the same things — pho and stir-fries, sopa and rice -and I was going on strike until we started eating better food.” (Nguyen, 127). Bich is pursuing an American identity and Rosa is holding her back by not letting her experience the American food she wants.

The idea of American food is what feeds Bich's quest to discover her identity as an American schoolgirl. Rosa holds Bich back by not letting her eat the foods that all the other school girls are eating. Bich does not find a solution to her feelings of “ missing-ness”, although she does discover that she still has ties to Vietnam and her previous life. The “ missing-ness” was a fire being fed by her inability to fit in class, in the lunch room, and on the streets. This book brings light to the misconceptions of America as an immigrant, and what life is like trying to blend two cultures together.

Work Cited.

Nguyen, Bich M. *Stealing Buddha's Dinner: A Memoir*. New York: Viking, 2007. Print.