

# Duc Tho Le's Birthday Present



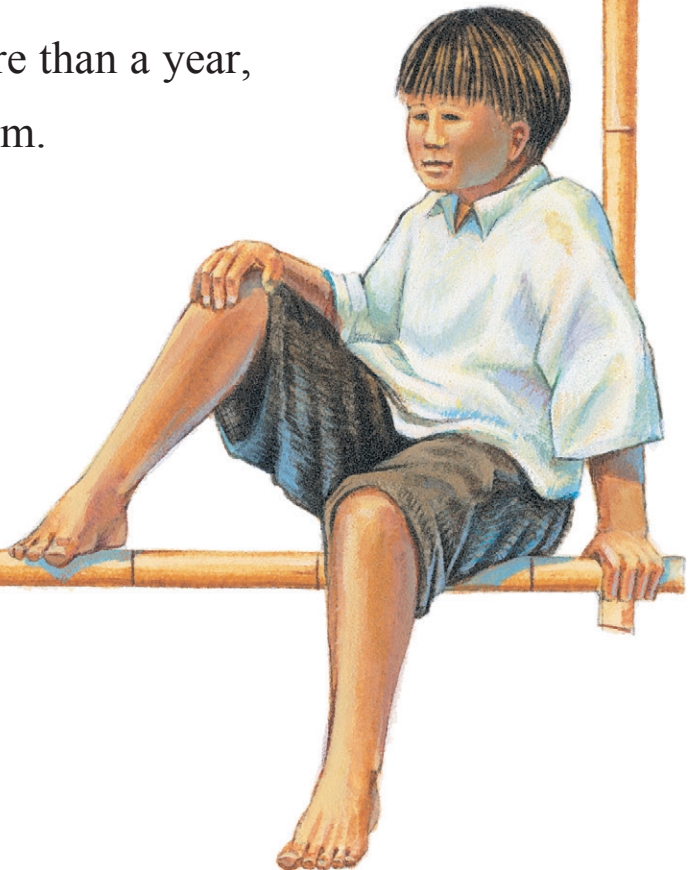
Written by Jo G. Bell  
Illustrated by Jeff Merrill

It was Duc Tho Le's birthday.

His American friends had parties and got gifts on their birthdays.

But there would be no presents for him because . . . he and Grandfather had left Vietnam with only the clothes they were wearing and Grandfather's bamboo seeds.

Even now, after more than a year, life was hard for them.











“Today I will help Grandfather  
in his bamboo garden,” thought Duc.  
“I will not think about my birthday.  
I know Grandfather cannot give me a present.”



Grandfather was in his garden,  
wearing the bamboo sun hat  
he had worn every day  
in the rice fields of Vietnam.

Grandfather's sun hat,  
like his bamboo garden,  
reminded him of home.



“May I help you,  
Grandfather?”

Duc asked. “I will step  
carefully. I, too, love your  
bamboo garden.”

“You need not work today,  
my grandson.

This is your birthday.”

Just then Duc’s friends, Sam and Rosa,  
entered through the gate.

“We knocked, but no one came to the door,” Sam said.

“So we came around to see if we could find you,”  
said Rosa.

Grandfather made a polite bow.

“I’m pleased that my grandson’s friends  
have come again to our home.

May I offer you tea and rice cakes?”

“I’d like a rice cake,” said Rosa.

“But no tea, thank you.”











“We can’t stay long,” Sam said. “We’re going fishing. We want Duc to go with us.”

“But I have no fishing pole,” said Duc.

“You can watch our lines,” said Sam.

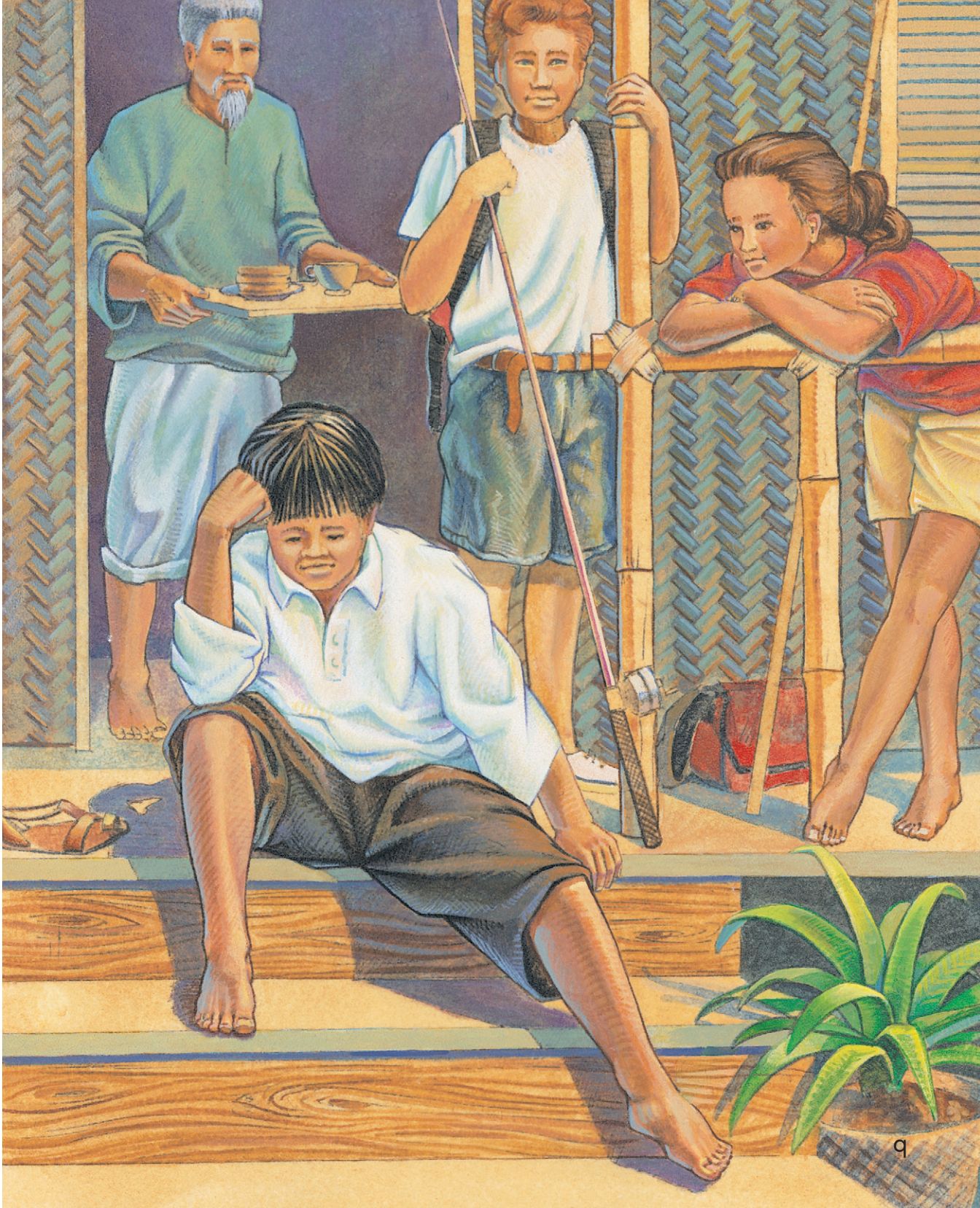
“When a fish starts to pull, you can tell us, just like you did last time.”

Duc did not know what to say.

He wanted to be with his friends,  
but it was no fun just to sit and watch.

If only he had a fishing pole of his own!









“Do you not want to go fishing with your friends?” asked Grandfather.

“Oh, yes, Grandfather!” said Duc.

“But I have no pole.”



Grandfather smiled.

“I have for you a  
*su’ngac nhiên.*”

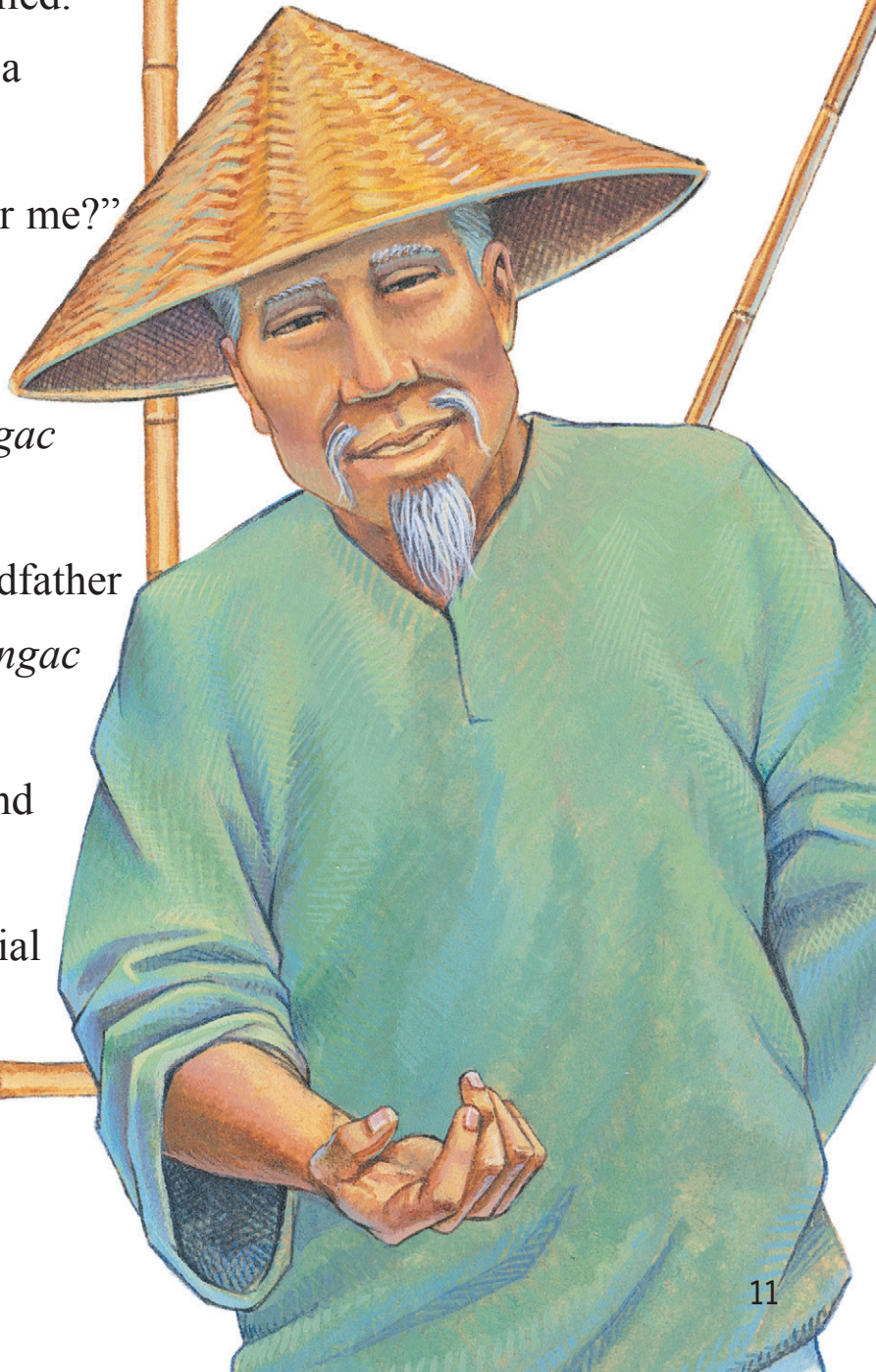
“A surprise? For me?”

“Yes,” said

Grandfather.

“A special *su’ngac  
nhiên* for your  
birthday.” Grandfather  
held out the *su’ngac  
nhiên.*

Duc and Sam and  
Rosa crowded  
around the special  
surprise.



Duc jumped up and down.

“Grandfather!

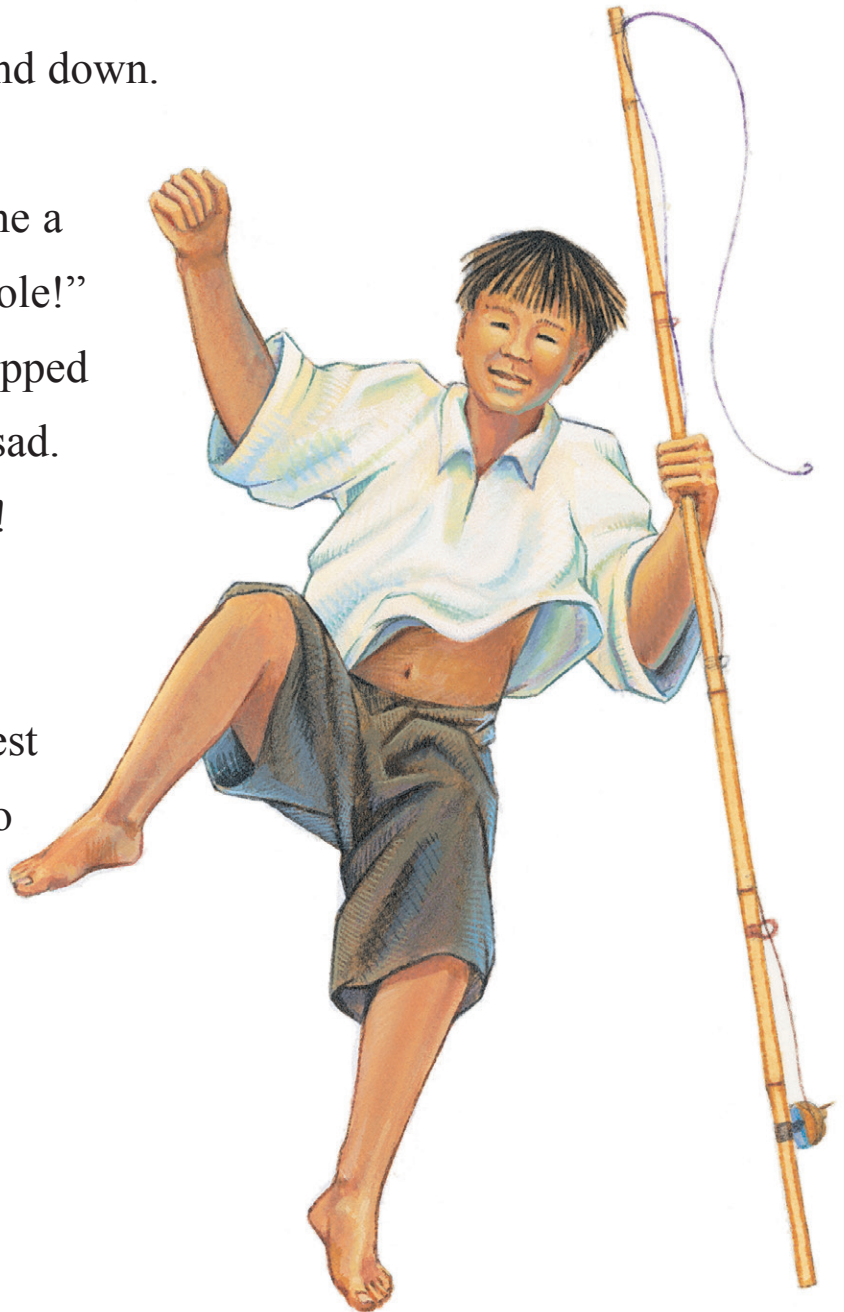
You have made me a  
bamboo fishing pole!”

Suddenly Duc stopped  
jumping. He felt sad.

“But Grandfather!

You love your  
bamboo garden.

You cut your tallest  
and finest bamboo  
to make me this  
fishing pole.”







“I love you, my grandson,” said Grandfather.

“And I wished to give you a special gift.”

Duc hugged Grandfather.

“This is a most splendid birthday present!

I will catch many fish today with this fine bamboo pole.

And I will give them all to you!”

# Reading

**Read-along** books are designed to be enjoyed together and to foster a love of reading. These books help children build comprehension skills and learn new vocabulary. It is helpful to develop these skills in any language!

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