

Sweet and Sour Smells

By Annabel Taylor - Walt Whitman High School

Rice fields teem with fatigued, bent over workers
Laboring through the stifling days – hot and sticky like xoi rice

At the orphanage, salty tears sting young eyes
Men and women with yellow hair visit
They come from lands far away to give them toys, pens, books and hugs
Then they leave, for they do not know our story

Tourists look down from high perched balconies,
Oblivious at what lies beneath the beauty
They bask on our beaches
Where the driftwood is weathered and yellow like the skin of plantains
Where the peppercorn sand is raw and black

Humid nights are sunken in despair
A country drunken in hot air
The sunsets are sanguine red,
an artist's canvas of rouge pigments – and blue for the gushing riverbend

The war, now fought in memory, melds into the landscape
We watch our dreams ripen, then rot
But we return to our gardens every spring and sow new seeds under the soggy earth

Those who could, fled
Those who couldn't continue to breathe the smells of Vietnam
The sweet and the sour