

ESL Lesson

We sat in rows, arms down
by our sides, feet firmly
on the floor, eyes wide, eager to be
Americans. We thought our teacher,
Mrs. Dabrowski, the most beautiful.
Her skin was ivory white, her hair
long, blond, wavy. She told us about
her older brother returning from
Vietnam, how he sat staring at the
turkey one Thanksgiving, then
vomited on the dining table, how his
muffled cries kept everyone awake
but no one said
anything the next morning,
how he killed himself
with a government-issued gun.

Mrs. D showed us how to conjugate
the verb to be: "I am the teacher.

You are the students. He is from
Cambodia. She is from Vietnam."
We smiled, nodded, not wondering
whether her brother might have met
some of our parents who fought on
the other side in the war.

-Bunkong, Schenectady

