

Cambodian Experience

A Marist Asia-Pacific Project

A unit of work for the Religious Education classroom, designed to stimulate awareness of and involvement in the work of Marist Asia-Pacific in Cambodia and other places.

Published by Marist Asia-Pacific Solidarity
www.maristoz.edu.au/maps

© Copyright 2003 Leonie Flynn.

Contents

Contents.....	2
1 Introduction to Cambodia.....	3
2 History of Cambodia.....	4
3 Religion.....	5
4 Daily Life in Cambodia	6
5 The Work of the Marist Brothers.....	7
6 A day in the life of La Valla	10
7 What can we do?	14

Resources 15

Introduction to Cambodia

Introduction

Explain to the students that as a class they are about to learn of an important Marist work. This work is being done in a school called La Valla, in Takmao Province in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. As a way of learning about this work, the class will work to understand what life is like in Cambodia. This means that information about the environment, culture, history and religion of the people will provide understanding for students in Australia about their Marist family in Cambodia.

Activity 1: What do you know about Cambodia?

1. Make a list of points on the board in response to the question “What do you know about the country of Cambodia?”
1. Give students work sheet “General Facts about Cambodia”. Work through this sheet discussing any points of interest.
2. Students may like to research some of these facts .

Activity 2: Where is Cambodia?

1. Students examine the map of the world (OH1) as well as the map of South-East Asia (OH2)
2. Discuss Cambodia’s proximity to Asia and to Australia in particular and the implications of this.
3. Students view the map of Cambodia (OH3)
4. Complete the worksheet “Map of Cambodia” by using the displayed overhead.

Lesson 2

History of Cambodia

Activity 1: History of Cambodia

1. Students read the worksheet “History of Cambodia”
2. Write 5 points which interested them about Cambodian History.

Activity 2: Angkor Wat

Students may know very little of Cambodian history. The fact that the Temples of Angkor Wat are on the Cambodian flag makes it a significant exercise to learn about this important period of Khmer history.

1. Students discuss the historical worksheet they looked at for homework.
2. View the PowerPoint presentation on the temples of Angkor Wat.
3. Students complete worksheet.

Activity 3: Pol Pot regime

Looking at the recent history of Cambodia provides students with an understanding of why the people of Cambodia are greatly in need of the support of the Marist international community.

The following activities are designed to heighten awareness of the cruelty, suffering, loss and chaos which has been a part of recent Cambodian history

1. Go to the Website www.mekong.net/cambodia
2. Click “Oral Histories” on the menu and find a selection of first hand accounts of the Pol Pot regime.
3. Students select one of the oral recounts and write a newspaper article or radio interview featuring the speaker.

Activity 3: Khmer Rouge

1. Older students may wish to read extracts from *The Killing Fields* by Christopher Hudson or the autobiography *First they Killed my Father* by Loung Ung
2. Look at Power point presentation on Tuol Sleng. Tuol Sleng was used by the Khmer Rouge as a place of torture where up to 17,000 Cambodians were tortured and then taken to the Killing Fields of Chenuk. This may be disturbing for some students.

Activity 4

Students research a particular aspect of the Pol Pot regime and present findings to the class via multimedia presentation, speech, photo essay etc.

Lesson 3

Religion

As has already been identified the vast majority of Cambodians are Buddhist. They also observe practices reflecting their worship of Animism. From the first century to the fourteenth century, Hinduism flourished. In the thirteenth century, Buddhism was introduced and was the state religion until 1975. Between 1975 and 1979 the vast majority of Cambodia's Buddhist monks were murdered by the Khmer Rouge and more than 3000 of the countries temples were damaged or destroyed.

Activity 1

View the PowerPoint presentation on religion and complete the activities on the worksheet.

Students studying Studies of Religion may like to pay close attention to the information on Angkor Wat as this material may assist in their research for their Interest Study Project. Students who study Environmental Ethics and Buddhism may also glean some important information from this presentation.

Activity 3

Students find meanings to the following words (write a Cambodian religious dictionary!)

Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Thervada, Monks, Wat, Muslims, Temple

Students could research these communities in Cambodia.

Lesson 4

Daily Life in Cambodia

Much of Cambodia's cultural heritage survived the Khmer Rouge's 'clean slate' approach to history. Along with the estimated two million Cambodians who died, millions of artefacts, statues and books were destroyed, but famous examples of Angkorian-era architecture like Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom emerged relatively unscathed. The country's most tangible link with its glorious past is its highly stylised royal ballet, traditionally linked to the dance of Thailand, Java and India. Dance was also threatened by the Pol Pot years, with only one seamstress surviving to pass on the ancient techniques of costume design.

Khmer is the official language . English is fast becoming the dominant second language, overtaking French, which is still spoken by many people who grew up before the 1970s.

In general, Khmer cuisine is similar to Thai, but with fewer spices. A Cambodian meal almost always includes a soup, and fish is the nation's mainstay - grilled freshwater fish, wrapped in lettuce or spinach and dipped into a nutty fish sauce, is a particular speciality. 'Salad' dishes are flavoured with coriander, mint and lemongrass - three flavours which find their way into many Cambodian dishes. The French influence is best seen in the daily-baked bread. Sweet dishes include sticky rice cakes and jackfruit pudding.

Activity 1

1. View the power point presentation on the daily life of the Khmer.
2. Complete the related worksheet

Activity 2

Students research the following justice issues, focusing mainly on Cambodia

- Poverty
- Undetonated landmines
- Deforestation
- Child labour
- Child slavery
- Rights of the disabled
- The AIDS epidemic
- Refugees

Lesson 5

The Work of the Marist Brothers

The best resources for this area of study would be the Marist sites listed below. A whole lesson could be spent researching this topic. Students could respond to the information in the following formats:

- Write a report on the work of the Marist Brothers in Cambodia.
- Write a series of letters written over the period of establishing and then running the school in Cambodia
- Create a poster promoting the work of the Marist Brothers in Cambodia
- Write a story
- Write an article for an Australian magazine about La Valla School.

Marist Sites featuring Cambodia:

- www.maristoz.edu.au/maps
- <http://www.fms-sydney.org.au/schools/education/lavalla/2001june/page16.html>
- <http://www.maristoz.edu.au/brothers/maristfamilynews/2001august/page3.html>
- <http://globaled.ausaid.gov.au/secondary/casestudy/cambodia/1/cambodia-school.html>
- <http://www.parish-without-borders.net/edit/mm-camb/partners/mmp-marist.html>

Facts about the history of Cambodia

- Archeological evidence has established that prior to 1000 BC Cambodians subsisted on a diet of fish and rice and lived in houses on stilts, as they still do today.
- From the 1st to the 6th centuries, much of Cambodia belonged to the South-East Asian kingdom of Funan, which played a vital role in developing the political institutions, culture and art of later Khmer states.
- The Angkorian era, beginning in the 8th century, transformed the kingdom into an artistic and religious power.
- Ayudha, the Thai king invaded and sacked Angkor in 1431 which led to rivalries between dynasties and continual warfare with the Thais for a century and a half. The Spanish and Portuguese, who had recently become active in the region, also played a part in these wars until resentment of their power led to the massacre of the Spanish garrison at Phnom Penh in 1599. A series of weak kings ruled from 1600 until the French arrived in 1863.
- In 1863, Cambodia became a protectorate of the French and in 1884 King Norodom was forced to sign another treaty which virtually turned his country into a French colony.
- This was followed by a period of relative peace.
- In 1941 the French installed 19-year-old Prince Sihanouk on the Cambodian throne, on the assumption that he would prove suitably pliable. This turned out to be a major miscalculation as the years after 1945 were strife-torn, with the waning of French colonial power aided by the proximity of the Franco-Viet Minh War that raged in Vietnam and Laos.
- Cambodia became an Independent nation in 1953 with King Norodom Sihanouk dominating national politics as leader for the following fifteen years. He was then overthrown by the army.
- In 1969 the United States carpet-bombed suspected communist base camps in Cambodia, killing thousands of civilians and dragging the country unwillingly into the US-Vietnam conflict.
- American and South Vietnamese troops invaded the country in 1970 to eradicate Vietnamese communist forces but were unsuccessful; they did manage, however, to push Cambodia's leftist guerillas (the Khmer Rouge) further into the country's interior.
- Savage fighting soon engulfed the entire country, with Phnom Penh falling to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975
- Over the next four years the Khmer Rouge, under Pol Pot's leadership, systematically killed an estimated two million Cambodians (targeting the educated in particular) in a brutal bid to turn Cambodia into a Maoist, peasant-dominated agrarian cooperative.
- Currency was abolished, postal services were halted, the population became a work force of slave labourers and the country was almost entirely cut off from the outside world
- Responding to recurring armed incursions into their border provinces, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, forcing the Khmer Rouge to flee to the relative sanctuary of the jungles along the Thai border. From there, they

conducted a guerilla war against the Vietnamese-backed government throughout the late 1970s and 1980s.

- In mid-1993, UN-administered elections led to a new constitution and the reinstatement of Norodom Sihanouk as king. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the elections, rejected peace talks and continued to buy large quantities of arms from the Cambodian military leadership.
- In the months following the election, a government-sponsored amnesty secured the first defections from Khmer ranks, with more defections occurring from 1994 when the Khmer Rouge was finally outlawed by the Cambodian government.
- The uneasy coalition of Prince Ranariddh's National United Front and Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party fell violently apart in July 1997, and Hun Sen assumed sole leadership of Cambodia.
- Elections in mid-98 returned Hun Sen to this position, despite opposition candidates complaining about dodgy electoral practices. Hun Sen has brought a relative stability to the country.
- Pol Pot's death in April 1998 from an apparent heart attack was greeted with anger (that he was never brought to trial) and scepticism (he has been reported dead many times before). It's expected that the surviving 'top level' Khmer Rouge leaders will finally be brought to trial at the end of 2001, through the auspices of a tribunal assisted by the UN and overseen by a mixed team of Cambodian and foreign prosecutors.
- Hopes for justice are clouded by the fact that former Khmer Rouge loyalists still hold positions of power in Cambodia, and only a small handful are currently in custody
- The international standing of Cambodia is reliant on these trials being held. Cambodia relies on foreign aid as it has an extremely shaky economy.

Taken from Lonely Planet website. www.lonelyplanet.com.

Lesson 6

A day in the life of La Valla

Teachers are invited to use the PowerPoint presentation as a stimulus for discussion on the issues confronting the children at La Valla school.

A Day in the Life at La Valla – presentation notes

- SLIDE 1: La Valla is a school operated by the Marist Brothers in Takmao Province, 14km from Phnom Penh. The brothers and lay teachers strive to educate approximately 100 disabled students. They work to complete six years of primary education in three. It is very difficult for the disabled to gain work in Cambodia.
- SLIDE 2: An education is very important for them if they are to gain any financial independence. The disabilities afflicting the students include polio, cerebral palsy, birth defects, and disabilities caused through land mine and industrial accidents.
- SLIDE 3: Approximately half of the students live at the school. Each morning the school jeeps drive out into the country side to collect the other children and teaching staff from the city and the surrounding villages. When all the children have arrived, a hearty breakfast (usually of rice and fish soup) is served to staff and students.
- SLIDE 4: At 8am the school community gathers to begin the school day. At the beginning of every week there is a flag raising ceremony and the national anthem is sung. Two senior students raise the flag on behalf of the whole school.
- SLIDE 5: The Principal, Br. Terry welcomes everyone back to school.
- SLIDE 6: The students line up in a very orderly fashion waiting to enter the classroom. They are very polite and have a great relationship with the teachers at the school.
- SLIDE 7: The day begins. The children work very hard because there is so much content to get through. They sit external exams and must work very hard to pass these exams.
- SLIDE 8: The children have to overcome their physical disabilities to learn. Some find it very difficult to hold a pen, to sit at desks to name a few things. However the students know that doing well at school is very important if they are to build bright futures.
- SLIDE 9: There are about 15 students in each class. They learn a range of subjects. They take every opportunity to learn English as it is fast becoming the second language in Cambodia and many believe it is important for future success.
- SLIDE 10: The students have access to computers and systematically work through a range of programs- including English programs. Br. Daryl has done a great deal of work to get this program off the ground.
- SLIDE 11: Access to computers is limited however as the school has electricity for only one to two hours per day. It has its own generator which enables the electricity to run.

- SLIDE12: The staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are also disabled. They are highly professional and enthusiastic. They truly bring a sense of community through the care and concern they show each student. They provide excellent role models for the students.
- SLIDE13: The children and teachers share their meals in the main dining area. This is a large covered outdoor area. The meals are hearty and healthy.
- SLIDE14: The students all take responsibility for clearing the dining area. There is no roster, yet the work is evenly shared.
- SLIDE15: There is lots of time to play through out the day. The children enjoy ball games and chasing games. Soccer and basket ball are particular favourites. Everyone joins in and there is a great deal of laughter to be heard during these fun times.
- SLIDE 16: The children often retreat from the very hot midday sun into the school library. There are a range of books for all reading levels , along with puzzles and very popular board games.
- SLIDE17: Sometimes there are adult volunteers who visit the school and assist with various jobs around the school. People have helped out by making curtains, building shelves, painting, accounting, doing physiotherapy etc. They may also try to pass on some of their own skills to the children. Crafts such as needlework have been taught to the students
- SLIDE18: At the end of the week, the school community once again gathers together. Br Terry thanks everyone for working so hard and the students sing the national anthem before they go off to play or back to their homes and villages.
- SLIDE 19: The jeeps line up yet again and the weekend begins.
- SLIDE 20: Br Daryl uses this motor bike to get around. Here he transports one of the volunteers . He also uses the bike to transport one of the students to High School.
- SLIDE21: The children enjoy sharing time together. They dance and sing songs. They are thrilled if Br Terry allows them to have a disco on a Friday night. This is a combination of Western and Khmer music.
- SLIDE22: The children at La Valla belong to one big family. They look after each other and care to meet each other's needs . The older children take great responsibility for the smaller children. They are a wonderful example of the concept of the Marist family.

Daily Life in Cambodia – presentation notes

- SLIDE 1: Cambodia is a country which is struggling to get on its feet after years of war and devastation. There are many problems facing Cambodians. Life at times seems quite chaotic as the country goes about the business of rebuilding.
- SLIDE2: Cambodia is a Buddhist country , yet many of the monks were killed during the dictatorship of Pol Pot. Gradually there is an increasing number of monks present in the temples and on the streets of Cambodia.
- SLIDE3: The market places are bustling. They are filled with food stalls selling cooked and fresh produce. Many Khmer delicacies are to be found, such as caramelized spiders! It is common to negotiate the prices of goods. Tourists can find many beautiful items such as silver, silk, wood carvings and other trinkets of interest.
- SLIDE 4: Children work very hard in Cambodia. Apart from going to school , they are expected to contribute to the family's livelihood.
- SLIDE5: Children commonly become beggars at very early ages. This country is very poor. Unfortunately, many of the children belong to begging syndicates run by unscrupulous adults. The children rarely see the money they get through begging.
- SLIDE6: The villages are often situated in areas where water is contaminated by pollution.
- SLIDE7: Many children become souvenir sellers. They are very persuasive as they approach Western tourists.
- SLIDE8: There are many disabled adults in Cambodia. Their disabilities have often resulted from their experiences whilst Cambodia was at war and under the Pol Pot Regime. They can often be found begging in the markets or , as was the case with this group , performing in a band. All band members are war veterans and either blind, amputees or have other physical disabilities. There is no social security system to financially cater for the needy in Cambodia. This work is left to the various Non-government organizations – Church (such as the Marist Brothers) and Secular groups who help as much as their resources allow.
- SLIDE9: Cambodians have suffered greatly from the dilemma of unexploded landmines which are scattered throughout the country side. Though they are gradually diminishing, death and injury is greatly feared by Cambodians . As many as 40,000 people have lost limbs due to land mines and they still claim 75 victims per month.
- SLIDE 10: Even the smallest of children know the importance of selling their souvenirs to the tourists.
- SLIDE11: Tourism is gradually becoming a growing industry. Guides are very knowledgeable people who work hard to promote the positive aspects of Cambodian culture and history.
- SLIDE12: The souvenir sellers often speak English quite competently. This child indicated that she had learned English from the tourists she approached each day.

- SLIDE13: This community live in house boats on the Mekong River in circumstances that would shock many . They are Vietnamese refugees who peacefully work, mostly fishing the river and selling produce at market.
- SLIDE14: The cities of Cambodia are quite chaotic . Traffic goes in all directions and vehicles range from the very popular motor bikes (with multiple passengers) to ex-army trucks and cars.
- SLIDE15: Sport is very popular and kick boxing is certainly a favourite.
- SLIDE16: Amongst the chaos and rebuilding is situated the Royal Palace. This is a beautiful set of buildings of which Cambodian citizens are very proud. King Sihanouk resides in the Palace with his Queen. They are very popular with the Cambodian people and bring some stability to a war ravaged country

Lesson 7:

What can we do?

Discuss with the students possible ways of becoming involved with the works of Marist Asia-Pacific. Possible directions could include:

- Fundraising
- Making the social justice issues raised during this unit a focus for the school's social justice group
- Inviting guest speakers who have been to La Valla to speak to a class group or school gathering
- Writing to the children at La Valla – establishing contacts within the Marist family, along with helping their development of English skills.
- Researching further any issue which has taken the interest of the students
- Organising a visit to Cambodia from your school.

General Facts about Cambodia

Full country name: Kingdom of Cambodia

Area: 181,035 sq km

Population: 12 million (growth rate 2.2%)

Capital city: Phnom Penh (pop one million)

People: 94% ethnic Khmers, 4% Chinese, 1% Vietnamese

Language: Khmer, English and French

Religion: 95% Buddhist, Cham Muslim and Roman Catholic

Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of state: King Norodom Sihanouk

Prime Minister: Hun Sen

GDP: US\$3 billion

GDP per head: US\$300

Annual growth: 4%

Inflation: 4%

Major products/industries:

Timber, rubber, shipping, rice milling, textiles and fishing

Major trading partners:

Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, USA, Hong Kong, Taiwan.



CAMBODIAN FLAG

Cambodia is bounded on the west by Thailand, on the north by Laos, on the east by Vietnam and to the south by the Gulf of Thailand. It's about half the size of Vietnam or Italy. Topographically, the country is dominated by the mighty Mekong River, which cuts a swathe through the country from north to south; the fish-filled Tonlé Sap (Great Lake); the Elephant and Cardamom mountains in the southwest; the Dangrek Mountains along the Thai border; and the Eastern Highlands in the northeast. Most Cambodians live on the fertile central plains of the Mekong-Tonlé basin.

The biggest threat to Cambodia's natural environment is the logging frenzy which reduced the country's forest coverage from 75% in the mid-1960s to just 49% in mid-1993 - and with the government constantly strapped-for-cash, there's little reason to believe that the stripping of such assets will come to a halt soon. The number of national parks is slowly growing, but with illegal logging as rife as legal concessions, no tree in Cambodia is safe. The parks include Bokor, on the south coast; Ream, near Sihanoukville; Kirirom, outside Phnom Penh; and Virachay, bordering Laos and Vietnam. A number of endangered species which are elsewhere extinct are thought to be hidden in the more remote habitats, including elephants, tigers, leopards, rhinos, gibbons, bats and crocodiles. The most commonly found fauna are varieties of butterflies, snakes and birds such as cormorants, cranes and ducks.

Cambodia's climate is governed by two monsoons: the cool, dry northeastern monsoon from November to February, and the humid southwestern monsoon from May to October. Monsoon rains fall mostly in the afternoon, and account for 70 to 80% of annual rainfall. Average annual temperatures vary from 21 to 35°C (70 to 95°F), often reaching 40°C (105°F) in April, the hottest month.

OH3



www.geography.about.com



Any representation is not
 solely authoritative. Names
 them are shown without
 and made.

Worksheet: Map of Cambodia



Complete the map by doing the following:

- Fill in the missing labels identifying significant places in Cambodia.
- Colour the masses of water blue
- Colour the country of Cambodia in green
- Colour Laos, Vietnam and Thailand in colours of you choice.