
The Collin College
Book-In-Common Committee
Presents

A Teaching Guide to Accompany

Loung Ung's

*First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia
Remembers*



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Cambodian Buddhism

Cheryl Wiltse

Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is believed to have lived from 623-543 B.C. He was born Prince Siddhartha, heir of a ruling family, who gave up his royal position to search for an end to all suffering. There are three basic types of Buddhism, and Cambodians practice Theravada Buddhism. Theravada is a tolerant, non prescriptive religion that does not require belief in a supreme being. Its precepts require that each individual take full responsibility for his own actions and omissions. Buddhism is based on three concepts: **dharma** (the teachings of Buddha, his guide to right actions) **karma** (the belief that one's life now and in future lives depends upon one's own deeds and misdeeds; karma follows you), and **sangha** (the Buddhist community within which man can improve his karma). The fundamentals of Buddhist dogma are the **Four Noble Truths**:

- suffering exists
- desire is the cause of suffering
- release from suffering can be stopped by ending all desires
- enlightenment – buddhahood – can be achieved by following the **Noble Eightfold Path** (right views, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration)

Buddha once said that happiness is quite simple: “The secret is to want what you have and not want what you do not have.” At the center of dharma teachings is the belief that suffering and dissatisfaction come from the way your mind responds and reacts to life's situations. In other words, it is not what happens to someone, it is how he or she reacts to it. So, what goes on inside you, is much more important in determining whether you are happy or miserable than any of the outer circumstances of your life. Buddhism says that you have a choice in the way that you experience your life. It is all a matter of perception. Additionally, many Buddhist traditions teach their practitioners to actively foster love and compassion for others.

Examples of how Ung Develops Buddhist Traits/Behavior in Her Characters

Chou – It is not that Chou is just naturally quiet, passive; in reality, she is a good Buddhist practitioner. Whenever Loung picks a fight, Chou forgives her. Loung says, “I know the fight was my fault, and yet Chou is not angry with me. For her, the fight is over . . . I know she will always love and forgive me” (91-92). Chou practices the Buddhist tenet of actively fostering love and compassion. We see this again and again in her behavior.

Loung – Even as a young child, Loung understands karma. After stealing some uncooked

rice, she knows there will be a consequence. “. . . bad people will come back in the next life as snakes, slugs or worms. At six years old, I know I am bad and deserve whatever low life-form I will be reincarnated as in the next life” (90). Loung also struggles with the atrocities she sees on a daily basis, yet she can still see beauty. After the death of her father, Loung thinks, “. . . the world is still somehow beautiful even when I feel no joy at being within it. It is still dark and the shimmering sunset of red, gold, and purple over the horizon makes the sky look magical” (102). Loung, though fallible, follows the Buddhist path.

Pa – When the Khmer Rouge tells him that some of his children are going to be sent off to other work camps, you would expect a protective father to scream “No!” However, Pa responds to the news by saying, “It is good for the family to be separated” (75). Pa had once been a monk and knows that clinging to something you cannot control will only cause suffering. Instead, he chooses to see the good in separation.

Glossary of Terms

Ancestor worship – The practice of showing respect to one’s ancestors in the form of prayers or offerings and the belief that one’s ancestors can help you in this life.

Angkor Thom – It is a quadrangle of defensive walls totaling 12 kilometers that once protected the Khmer capital of the same name (Angkor Thom means "Great City"). Built in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, the walls are divided by two axes running north-south and east-west.

Angkor Wat – It is a temple complex built in the 12th century located 314 kilometers from Phnom Penh, often called one of the seven wonders of the world.

Buddha – The word literally means the “awakened” or “enlightened” one.

Dragon/Monkey – The Chinese zodiac consists of a 12-year lunar cycle with 12 animal symbols, having unique characteristics that correspond to the year you are born. The symbols are rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig respectively.

Gods – Cambodians have a pantheon of gods, many Taoist deities, and many more directly associated with Buddha. These incarnations, avatars, or manifestations of Buddha seem confusing. However, if you think of the Catholic religion with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as “manifestations” of the one God, then it is easier to understand.

Hungry Ghost – It is one of the six levels of existence in Buddhism, dooms to frustration, thwarted desires, and unsatisfied cravings even in the next life because of past transgressions, the Scrooges of the world.

Karma – The belief that one’s actions determine prosperity or suffering in this life and the next life.

Sangha – The word means Buddhist community

Possible Assignments Relating Buddhism to the Novel

- Brief individual or group oral presentations on the significance and history of ancestor worship.

- Paper assignments:

Discuss the idea of “karma” as it relates to one or more characters in the novel.

Analyzing Pa, discuss how he follows the Eight-fold path in the novel.

Compare the characteristics of the Chinese zodiac “dragon,” the most auspicious of all zodiac signs, to Loung’s characteristics.

Literary analysis:

Using the idea of bildungsroman (the journey of innocence to knowledge), discuss how Loung changes over time.

Using Loung as an example, demonstrate how she is really an anti-hero (anti-Buddhist) in many ways.

Websites of Interest

- <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/48.htm> (Library of Congress)
<http://www.kambodscha-botschaft.de/buddhism.html> (Royal Embassy of Cambodia)
<http://britannica.com/ebc/art-82639> (Encyclopedia Britannica & video)
<http://www.angkorwat.org> (Angkor Wat)
<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/angkor/angkorthomindex.htm> (Angkor Thom)

Collin Library Resources

General catalog:

- Beth Osnes: *Acting: An International Encyclopedia* (2001)
Rudolph Wurlitzer: *Hard Travel to Sacred Places* (1994)

net.Library:

- Stephen C. Berkwitz: *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (2006)
Karma Lekshe Tsomo: *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (1999)
Nancy J. Smith Hefner: *Khmer American* (1999)
Aihwa Ong: *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees * Citizenship * The New America* (2003)

Articles:

Scott Simon: Interview “Loung Ung, author of *First They Killed My Father*,” discusses her book and atrocities that took place under the Khmer Rouge regime.”
Academic Search Premier

“Loung Ung” Literature Resource Center

Jon Swain: Interview “I always knew I’d find my sister again.” InfoTrac

Other Resources

- Clare Griffiths: *Insight Guides: Laos & Cambodia* (2006)
Ian Harris: *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (2005)
Jonathan Landaw and Stephan Bodian: *Buddhism for Dummies* (2003)

Cambodian Culture

Betty Bettacchi

Architecture

The architectural jewel of Cambodia is located in Angkor, the capital of the Khmer Kingdom from the ninth century. Built in the first half of the twelfth century, it is the largest religious building in the world, and the most famous temple (wat) in Cambodia.



Angkor Wat is the Khmer's attempt to represent the universe in architectural form. The temple is surrounded by a moat over 200 yards wide. Its five towers are meant to resemble Mt. Meru, the home of the gods.

Today, a combination of neglect, structural weakness and the invasion of strangling trees, threaten the survival of the temple. (Izu)

Field Trip

Believe it or not, you can see a replica of the temple right here in Dallas. A member of Cambodia's royal family has spent more than a year recreating the temple, using 500 to 1,000 year old stones and statues imported from Cambodia. The temple is located at 5701 Crystal Lake Blvd. in southwest Dallas.

Possible assignments:

Discuss architectural materials used in building the temple

Discuss Theravada Buddhist religion

Compare Angkor Wat to another famous religious examples of architecture

RELIGION

Most Cambodians today practice Theravada Buddhism. The ultimate goal of Theravada Buddhism is nirvana or extinction of all desire and suffering to reach the final stage of reincarnation. By feeding monks, giving donations to temples and regular worship at the local wat, Buddhists hope to acquire sufficient merit to reduce the number of rebirths.

Every Buddhist male is expected to become a monk for a short period in his life-- usually between the time he finishes school and starts a career or marries.

The monks shave their heads, wear yellow robes, bare the right shoulder and go barefoot. They take vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. They depend on the kindness of others for their food and clothing.

Although the monks are highly regarded as religious leaders, they are also instrumental for helping those in need. Through the Buddhist Leadership Initiative, UNICEF works closely with the government and international partners to train monks to support the special needs of people affected by HIV. Working in harmony with the Buddhist principles of self-discipline, wisdom and compassion, UNICEF and its partners are helping monks to be more than just advocates for orphans, children or families affected with HIV/AIDS. They are now at the forefront of HIV awareness in Cambodia.



Possible Assignments:

Research what other community activities the Buddhists in Cambodia are engaged in.
Research Theravada Buddhists in Texas.

LITERATURE

"The Khmer word, *aksarsastra*, generally defined as "literature," comes from the base, *aksar*, meaning letter or script. In addition to what we would think of as literature, the study of texts, the word also has the connotation of the study of writing, of "letters." Thus studies of *aksarsastra* generally begin with the study of Khmer stone inscriptions. The earliest of these were written between the 16th and 19th century." However, the stylized language, along with the use of complex rhyme schemes and archaic language makes these works difficult to read. Many of the texts were memorized by professional storytellers who would travel around giving performances.

During a renaissance of classical Khmer literature in the mid 20th century, scholars began to collect and study and then publish some of the best known Khmer works. Although the advent of printing enabled production of a large amount of classical literature, buying books, even attending school, was available to only a very limited portion of the population. Radio was a major factor in disseminating the stories across the country.

Renang Preng, folktales, have been told for centuries. Some of the stories may have been written as early as the fifteenth century on palm leaf and then recopied, but were not generally written until the early 20th century. These stories were usually committed to memory by storytellers. A collaboration of French and Buddhists collected the stories and published them between 1967 and 1971. These folktales show how clever animals-particularly monkeys and hares-can outwit slower, more powerful animals like elephants and crocodiles. The tales, *Tmenh Chey* is the most famous, show adventurers surviving hardship and humiliation by using their wits. (Chandler)

Most of Cambodia's literature is tied in with Buddhism or myth and legend. The first novels written in prose appeared in the late 1930's, with many of the works published as series in newspapers. Between 1950 and 1975 approximately 1,000 novels were published.

There are several memoirs from the Cambodian Diaspora, tales of death and near death. To get a taste for other types of Cambodian literature, material written before

and after the Khmer regime, there is *In the Shadow of Angkor, Contemporary Writing from Cambodia* edited by Sharon May and Frank Steward. It contains short stories, essays, poems, interviews, folktales and even rap lyrics

Possible Assignments:

Discuss the similarities/differences between Khmer folktales and those of other countries.

Compare/contrast Khmer folktales concerning clever animals with tales of clever animals in US literature.



Dance

Cambodian dance follows a thousand year old tradition, drawn originally from Indian models, and has always been associated with the royal palace. Dances depict scenes from Cambodian folklore and from Indian myths like the *Ramayana*.

In classical Cambodian dance, women, dressed in brightly colored costumes with elaborate headdresses, perform slow, graceful movements accompanied by a percussion ensemble known as the pinpeat. These pinpeat include drums, gongs, and bamboo xylophones.

The Royal Ballet in Phnom Penh specialized in classical, highly stylized dances. In the countryside other dramatic genres and folk dances were performed at festivals and weddings by wandering troupes. The national classical ballet was reconstituted in the early 1980's by a few surviving dancers. The Royal University of Fine Arts has been integral to the resurrection of Cambodian classical music and dance following their virtual extermination in the 1970's. (Britannica)

[for hand gestures:

<http://www.folkloreproject.org/programs/education/dance/hands.cfm>]

Possible Assignments:

Compare/contrast Cambodian Royal Ballet with American ballet.

Compare/contrast Cambodian dance of the 1980's and that of today.



MUSIC

Cambodian music has a long tradition. The bas-reliefs on some of the monuments in the Angkor region depict musicians and *apsara* holding instruments similar to Khmer instruments of today. Traditionally, music accompanied a performance which had religious significance.

Pin peat is a musical ensemble which is played at religious and entertainment functions. To listen to a elements of a virtual *pin peat* ensemble, log onto www.research.umbc.edu/efhm/cambodia/pinpeat.htm.

After the war Khmers in America developed a pop industry which was later exported back to Cambodia, where it is extremely popular.

In 2001, Prach Ly, a Cambodian-American who left Cambodia when he was four years old, made a CD of Cambodian rap, titled *The Khmer Rouge*. He did it, he states in an article, because, "I had aunts and uncles who were killed. My parents almost died, too, and they remind me of that every day" (AsiaWeek)

Possible Assignments:

Research pin peat instruments and compare to US instruments.

How did Khmer music begin?

What are the earliest references to Khmer music?

What is the difference between early music and contemporary music?





ART

The civilization of the ancient Khmer in Cambodia is renowned for its extraordinary art and architecture of the sixth to the sixteenth centuries. The three chief periods of Khmer civilization are defined as pre-Angkor (before the 9th century), Angkor (9th-15 century) and post-Angkor (after the Thai invasion in 1431). The Khmer empire created one of the world's most glorious traditions of sculpture and architecture. The hundreds of Hindu and Buddhist temples constructed at Angkor and throughout Cambodia reflect the strong influence of the culture and religions of India. (NGA)

Today, Cambodian artists who have lived abroad often absorb both Asian and Western influences. Artists, such as Monirith Chhea and Emmanuel Nhean express the pain of the killing fields in their contemporary work, while other artists, like Narath Tan and Svay Pithoubandith continue in the traditional Khmer style.

Possible Assignments:

Research biographies of Cambodian artists working in the US and in Cambodia.
Discuss the various styles of Khmer art.



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<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/cambodia>

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www.einaudi.cornell.edu/SoutheastAsia/outreach/resources/CambodiaWebUnit/folktales.html

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UNICEF. http://unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia_39935.html

Filmography

Carolyn Perry

Nice Hat! 5 Enigmas in the Life of Cambodia, dir. David Brisbin, 2006

Holy Lola, dir. Bertrand Tavernier, 2004

Le Papier ne peut pas envelopper la braise, dir Rithy Panh, 2007

Les Artistes du Théâtre Brûlé, dir. Rithy Panh, 2005

S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge, dir Rithy Panh, 2003... aka S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine (International: English title) ... aka S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine (USA: festival title)

Les Gens d'Angkor, dir. Rithy Panh, 2003 ... aka The People of Angkor (International: English title)

Que la barque se brise, que la jonque s'entrouvre, dir. Rithy Panh, 2001

La Terre des âmes errantes, dir. Rithy Panh, 2000... aka The Land of the Wandering Souls (International: English title)

Un soir après la guerre, dir. Rithy Panh, 1998... aka One Evening After the War (USA)

Bophana, une tragédie cambodgienne, dir. Rithy Panh, 1996

Neak sre, dir. Rithy Panh, 1994... aka Gens de la rizière, Les ... aka Reisfeld, Das (Germany) ... aka Rice People

Cambodia, entre guerre et paix , dir. Rithy Panh, 199

History

Meredith Martin

Discussion Questions:

1. Define the terms politicide, autogenocide and genocide. Are these terms interchangeable? Of the three, which most closely describes the events in Cambodia from 1975-1978? Are such terms synonymous with 'ethnic cleansing'? Explain your opinion.
2. What internal and external influences and factors led to the war in Cambodia? Explain Prince Sihanouk's policy of neutrality?
3. How did this book increase your appreciation of civil rights and personal freedoms? Has this book changed your respect for the rule of law and due process? Explain how?
4. How has this book increased your understanding of the importance of effective governing? Explain why or why not?
5. What ideological rhetoric or process of indoctrination was used by the Khmer Rouge to try and give Cambodians a new sense of national identity? How did they blend Maoist Communism and Cambodian culture? Why did this regime detest Western influence and fear/loath the outside interlopers? Why was there such a fear of infiltration by the CIA, KGB or Vietnamese operatives?
6. Are there any similarities to be drawn between Andrew Jackson's Cherokee Removal, Adolf Hitler's Final Solution and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime? Explain.
7. Do you think Americans were oblivious or naive concerning the problems in Southeast Asia from 1975-1978? Research this question.
8. How did the war differ for families living in urban areas versus rural areas? Educated versus uneducated? Explain the different experiences during the war because of gender?

9. Explain the term 'assimilation'. Is this term often used in association with genocide and ethnic cleansing? Think of different periods in U.S./World History when the same practice was applied. Was resistance futile for the Ung family?
10. Did you sympathize with Ung's eventual desire to assimilate into American culture? Why? Was this desire a betrayal of her family and her culture? Explain. (Question from publisher, Harper Collins)
11. Explain the statement, "war turns men (generic man) into ghastly agents of terror." Does this statement apply to both the Khmer Rouge and the author? Explain your opinion.
12. Ultimately, Cambodia was liberated with the help and assistance of what nation? Explain using specific detail. Does this fact change your views on U.S. intervention or interference? Explain why?
13. What role, if any, do citizens of humanity and their governments have in trying to end violent regimes who commit acts of racial cleansing and genocide?
14. Over the course of history, are civilians ever 'fair game' during a time of war? Explain.
15. Did the Khmer Rouge employ the same interrogation tactics as other rouge regimes or legitimate global powers? Did their method of division and terror mirror any of activities undertaken during the interrogations at Abu Goraib and Guantanamo Bay? Is this methodology ever acceptable? Explain your opinion?



Suggestions for Additional Reading and Reflection

David Chandler. *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

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Pran Dith, compiler and Kim DePauler, ed. *Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs of Survivors*, New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series, 1997.

Chanrithy Him. *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing up under the Khmer Rouge*. New York: Norton, W. W. & Company, 2001.

Ben Kiernan, ed. *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*.

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Khmer Rouge, New Haven: Yale, 1996.

Henri Locard. *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar*. Foreword by David Chandler. Chang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005.

Michael Mann. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, eds. *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention*. New York: Basic Books, 2001

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<http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/photos.htm>

Dith Pran Holocaust Awareness Project

www.dithpran.org

Killing Fields Museum

<http://www.killingfieldsmuseum.com/news/news1.html>

NGOs Forum on Cambodia

<http://www.ngoforum.org.kh/index.htm>

UN Charter

<http://www.uichr.org/>

UN Bulletin of Human Rights, *Human Rights in Action*

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/countries/field/docs/terrain.pdf>

UN Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/>

UN TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITY IN CAMBODIA (UNTAC)

http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/untac.htm

University of Iowa Center for Human Rights

<http://www.uichr.org/>

University of Maine Witnesses to Horror:
Killing Fields Survivors Oral History Project

[http://www.usm.maine.edu/mcr/currents/nov02/witness to horror.html](http://www.usm.maine.edu/mcr/currents/nov02/witness_to_horror.html)

Literary Autobiography

Delores Zumwalt

“Language creates illusions that tell the truth. . .All autobiographies create the illusion of the past coming to life . . .When formulated in words, autobiographical creation is literary art” (Mandel 63).

Fundamentally, autobiography is defined by literary critics as an organized narrative of the author’s life prepared for an audience with an emphasis on introspection. As the narrator becomes his / her own subject, this genre takes multiple forms ranging from intimate diaries, journals, and letters (usually not intended for public scrutiny) to formal autobiography, memoirs, and reminiscences intended for publication.

The highly subjective nature of the genre leaves it open to broad critical analyses. Most cite its genesis with Augustine’s *Confessions* (430 AD), while others consider some classical works by Hesiod, Plato, Ovid and Cicero as autobiographical. A few autobiographical works appeared in the Renaissance; a notable example is Margery Kempe’s *Book of Margery Kempe* (1432-1436).

The earliest instances of the use of the English term, “autobiography” occurred first in a review published in the British *Monthly Review* (1797) and in an article authored by Robert Southey in the *Quarterly Review* (1809). The use of the term coincides with a flourishing of the genre in the late eighteenth century, probably due to the Romantic emphasis on the individual and the individual’s role in society. Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1764-70), Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1793), and Gibbon’s *Memoirs* (1796) exemplify this movement. The term “autobiography” first appeared in a title with the 1832 edition of *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard*, a Puritan cleric who penned his life story two hundred years earlier under the title, *My Birth and Life*. In like manner, Franklin’s life story appeared first under the title, *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin*. Consequently, Charles Berryman asserts, “The invention of ‘autobiography’ as a critical term marks the birth of a genre—not in practice, of course, which goes back at least as far as Augustine, but in theory which has been called forth by the act of definition” (72).

Twentieth century autobiographical works expanded the distinctions and limitations of the genre as authors began borrowing modes of fiction to write their stories of life experience. The melding of fiction and personal experience—often written in the guise of fiction—is the hallmark of such works, as in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior* (1975). Writers of metafiction, like Kurt Vonnegut, further blurred the boundaries of fiction and autobiography with works like *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The critic William Spengemann views such works as mirroring “changing ideas about

the nature of self” (xii). He chronicles the evolution of the genre of autobiography in three broad stages he calls: history, philosophy, and poetry—the latter reflects the evolving nature of autobiography in the twentieth century as it assumes the symbolic characteristics of the novel.

Autobiographical works are often categorized as follows:

Thematic: *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, 1920 & *Mein Kampf*, 1925-1927

Religious: Augustine’s *Confessions*, 430 AD & John Cardinal Newman’s *Apologia*, 1864

Intellectual: John Stuart Mill’s *Autobiography*, 1873 & *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1907

Fictionalized: James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916 & George Santayana’s *The Last Puritan*, 1935

References: *A Handbook to Literature*, Holman & Harmon; *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams; and *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*

“Writing autobiography is one of the strategies human beings have developed to make life matter. The way in which the illusion of the past is presented is, finally, the meaning of the author’s life” (Mandel 64).

Suggested Class Activities and Assignments

Literature classes:

- **Group oral presentations** on assigned autobiographical works that represent key categories of the genre, such as: the **spiritual autobiography** (Augustine’s *Confessions* or John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*); **secular autobiography** (*The Education of Henry Adams*, or *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*); **autobiography of artistic identity** (Wordsworth’s *Prelude* or James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*); **autobiographical novel** (Kingston’s *Woman Warrior* or Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*); **autobiographical letters / journals not intended for publication** (Pepys *Diaries* or Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Journals*).
- **Group oral presentations** that focus on the examination of several examples of one particular type of multicultural autobiography, such as the slave narrative or immigrant memoirs.

- **Paper Assignment:** use one particular convention of literary autobiography (such as introspection or identity assessment) as the basis for a critical analysis of *First They Killed my Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*.
- **Paper Assignment:** compare *First They Killed my Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* and one other autobiography—ground the comparison in two or three literary elements presented in class.
- **Paper Assignment:** social / cultural context is central to the setting of most autobiographies; select one particular element of the social / cultural context of an autobiography (such as religion, war, or a particular political, social or environmental movement) and evaluate its impact on the narrator and his / her purpose in writing the life story. Social / cultural context can also serve as the basis for a comparison of another memoir to Ung’s.

“Augustine and Cowper, Rousseau and Montaigne—all of these writers disclose their sense of their own reality in their self-portraits. Because their (and our) reality is largely rooted in the shared assumptions of our culture, the written autobiography becomes a formal mode of maintaining the reality of reality” (Mandel 72).

Composition Classes:

- **Paper Assignment—Analysis:** profile Ung’s target audience; identify specific rhetorical devices she uses to appeal to that audience and evaluate her use of them.
- **Paper Assignment—Analysis:** consider the concept of voice as it relates to purpose; as an adult, Ung writes her memoir in the voice of a child. . .why? Avoid the obvious (she was a child at the time of the experience), and consider the effect of the child’s voice on her audience—how does this help her to achieve and communicate purpose? What specifically is her purpose in writing her memoir? A useful assignment to help students understand the necessary confluence of various rhetorical strategies in effective composition.
- **Paper Assignment—Argument:** research the landmine issue that is central to Ung’s activism; develop either a position or a policy (plan / solution) argument that relates to one **specific** element of the issue (such as the impact on a particular geographical region or demographic group); take care to narrow your argument to a topic that is manageable—avoid the fallacies of oversimplification and generalization

- **Paper Assignment—Argument:** how effective is personal memoir in shaping social / political policy? Are other modes, such as public dialectic (debates, forums, etc.), broadcast journalism, or special interest promotions better suited to the task? Take a position and support it with specific, research-based data

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"Readers turn to autobiography to satisfy a need for verifying a fellow human being's experience of reality. They achieve satisfaction when they feel strongly that the book is true to the experience of the author and when they are aware, to a lesser degree, that the book is an achievement of literary construction, making use of pretense as a way of highlighting its opposite, reality" (Mandel 58).

Political Science

Debra St. John

Discussion Questions:

What is ethnic cleansing and genocide? Why does ethnic cleansing and genocide happen? How might genocide be prevented?

The concept of ethnic cleansing is not new. Do you believe that it is becoming more common, or do you believe that the media has enabled to simply become more aware? Why?

Who are the Khmer Rouge? What fundamental problems existed in the Khmer Rouge's plan that caused the destruction of so many lives? Were there any values that the Khmer Rouge claimed to hold that you share?

Who was Pol Pot? How did he gain his political power?

Khmer Rouge, previously a weak guerrilla force run by disenfranchised leftist politicians, grew in the wake of the bombings, as each attack on Cambodian land legitimized their virulent hatred of Sihanouk. What country was responsible for the bombings? And what were the justifications for the action?

How much did the American presence (or lack thereof) influence key events in this book? What was the political/foreign policy role of the United States regarding Cambodia?

Who liberated the Cambodian people from the Khmer Rouge?

What are the challenges of justice related to convicting war criminals?

What does Ung's chapter "The Execution" tell us about the importance of justice? Was the execution just - why or why not, in your opinion?

What does Cousin Cheung's encounter with the soldiers who suspect her of being Khmer Rouge reveal about the political situation in Cambodia after the end of the war?

With armed struggle a reality of life for people all over the world both past and present, how does one draw the line as to which means are ethical and unethical for

coping with it, such as the author's current campaign against the use of landmines?
Are there other tools of war that you believe should be broadly banned?

How has the legacy of the Khmer Rouge shaped the country; its people and the political and economic institutions that govern Cambodia today?

List four examples of ethnic cleansing that has occurred in the 19th-21st Centuries.

What influence or the lack thereof has the U.S. Government had regarding ethnic cleaning in Bosnia? Darfur?

Sociology

Tracey Elliot

Discussion Questions:

1. Identify cultural elements throughout the book such as norms (folkways and mores), values, beliefs, and symbols.
2. Define social institutions. What social institutions were altered or destroyed by the Khmer Rouge? For what purpose?
3. What do we learn about deviance as a social construct from the book? What types of behavior were defined as deviant by the Angkar? Why? What forms of social control did the Angkar use?
4. Give examples from the book of forced assimilation, expulsion, cultural genocide, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination.
5. Describe the “ideal” society the Khmer Rouge claimed it wanted to create. Are there any values that the Khmer Rouge claimed to hold that you share?
6. In the new “classless” society, a system of stratification still existed. Explain and describe the structure of this stratification system. Include discussions of status value, base people, new people, how labor was divided, and how goods and resources were distributed.
7. Why did the Khmer Rouge consider people from the countryside to be model citizens? How did they see urban people?
8. What changes were made to the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in order to remove rank and status divisions? Give examples of language and dress norms.
9. Do you believe it is possible to have a classless society? Why or why not?
10. What was the significance of race/ethnicity throughout Ung’s story?

11. How are gender roles depicted in the book before and during the war? How did the experiences of the male and female Ung family members differ?
12. How does Ung's perception of herself change throughout the story? How does her cultural/ethnic identity develop?
13. Explain how Ung attempted to assimilate into American culture. How would you explain Ung's desire to assimilate into American culture and her disconnect from her family in Cambodia?
14. Using the sociological imagination, reflect on the similarities and differences in your childhood and that of Ung. How would your life, personality, choices, and beliefs be different if you were raised in a similar social situation as Ung?
15. Discuss how the Khmer Rouge trained children as soldiers. What methods were used to socialize the children as soldiers? Research other examples of the use of child soldiers in other parts of the world.
16. Research if the United States had any role in the Khmer Rouge's rise to power. What kinds of action did the U.S. government take before and during the Khmer Rouge Killing Fields campaign?
17. Research the Ottawa Treaty (also referred to as the Mine Ban Treaty or the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.) Explain the purpose of the treaty. What countries have signed the treaty? What is the U.S. position on the treaty?
18. Research the legal definition of "genocide." Did the Khmer Rouge commit genocide in Cambodia? What is "auto-genocide?" Have other Twentieth Century countries committed genocide? Which ones, when, and against whom?
19. Research recent news accounts to learn of the current situation regarding trials and punishment for those who took part in the Killing Fields. Should they be brought to trial? Why or why not?
20. Research the International Criminal Court (ICC). What is the United States position on ICC? Do you agree with this position? Why or why not?

Additional Sources for Discussion:

Yale University: Cambodian Genocide Program

<http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>

Original documents on U.S. involvement in Cambodia

Racial Discrimination in the Cambodian Genocide, by Liai Duong (GSP Working Paper No. 34, 2006)

<http://www.yale.edu/cgp/RacialDiscriminationInDK.doc>

Paper examining whether the Khmer Rouge implemented racially discriminatory policies towards Cambodia's minority groups. Focus is on the Vietnamese, Chams, and Chinese.

PBS Frontline World

<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/>

Includes historical analysis and stories from Cambodian-Americans.

Scott Erb blog (Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Maine at Farmington)

<http://faculty.umf.maine.edu/~erb/govern.htm>

Addresses questions of how societies should be governed. A good starting point to discuss the work of Marx as an ideal and applied reality.

“Neither Marx nor Rousseau would have countenanced big government communism, it denied the concern each had for individual liberation. Their insights were powerful and they remain relevant; the lesson brought by the way people tried to actualize Marx proves that the state and governmental power is not a way to solve the problems they identify. ... Just as communism was evil, it is evil for people to ignore the suffering and poverty of the third world. It is evil for people to rationalize the use of sweat shops out of some abstract goal of long term economic gain, dismissing the sanctity of the humans involved.”

Genocide Watch

<http://www.genocidewatch.org/>

Blue Scarves and Yellow Stars: Classification and Symbolization in the Cambodian Genocide by Dr. Gregory H. Stanton (Assistant Professor of Law and of Anthropology Washington and Lee University Lexington, Virginia and Founder and Director, The Cambodian Genocide Project)

<http://www.genocidewatch.org/bluescarves.htm>

Speech

Kim Parker

This year's Book-in-Common selection – Loung Ung's *First They Killed My Father* – can easily be tied in to a number of topics commonly discussed in Speech classes. The following sections will demonstrate some of the ways that the book can fit into our discussions of each unit, and will include sample questions and projects that might be used. These are only suggestions – please feel free to add – and share – your own ideas!

Perception and Self-Concept:

Loung is a child of five as the story begins. How does her perception of the Khmer Rouge takeover likely differ from that of the adults around her? How much might her story colored by the adult she has now become?

When Loung is eight, she is sent to a camp to be trained as a child soldier (pp. 129-164). Discuss the messages given to the children about the Khmer soldiers and the Vietnamese. How are the children's perceptions shaped? How does this affect their self-concept and ultimately their behavior?

Does Loung see herself as a Khmer soldier? What factors do you think help her maintain her self-concept? (i.e. strong family identity, feedback from particular others, ref. p. 183).

Discuss the many stereotypes presented in the book. What is the Khmer perception of educated people? People who live in cities? People who live in the country? What prejudices exist about people of other nationalities (Chinese, Vietnamese, American)? How are these images used to manipulate people's perceptions?

Verbal communication:

The Cambodians are given a new vocabulary of terms for addressing each other (p.60-61). What is the purpose of these new terms?

Loung and the other Cambodians are taught to call the Vietnamese the "Youns." Later, Loung discovers that this is actually a derogatory term (p.

222) and is told to call the people among whom she now lives by the “correct” term. Discuss how language can shape and define our images of other people. Our texts emphasize the importance of names and of calling people what they want to be called. How does Loung’s experience reinforce this idea?

Nonverbal communication:

After the Khmer takeover, new rules are instituted about clothing (p. 58-60). What is the purpose behind this? Why are the people encouraged to dress alike? Is their style of dress really identical or do they find ways to emphasize their differences? If so, what types of differences are emphasized?

Village leaders destroy the Ung’s clothes, including Loung’s red dress. What does this dress symbolize to Loung? Discuss how clothing can reflect our culture and identity.

Interpersonal communication:

Conflict occurs in all interpersonal relationships. What types of interpersonal conflict occur in the Ung family? How much of the conflict is typical and how much can be attributed to the extreme circumstances they find themselves in?

Self-disclosure always carries with it some element of risk. Discuss why disclosure is especially risky for Loung and her family. What effect does the limited ability to self-disclose have on Loung’s ability to form relationships with others outside her family? (ref. p. 41-47, also Loung’s statement “We have all learned to be silent with our emotions.” P. 122)

Intercultural communication:

Loung and her family belong to one type of social community/co-culture prior to the Khmer Rouge takeover. What happens to that co-culture after the takeover? How does the loss of that part of their identity affect them?

Loung must learn to live in cultures and co-cultures very different from what she has been used to. How does she adapt to 1) life in the country with her uncles 2) life in the work camps 3) life as a refugee (in Vietnam and in the United States)? What resources does she have that help her adapt? What makes adapting difficult for her?

Gender Issues:

Gender roles are fairly rigidly defined in Cambodian society prior to the Khmer takeover. Describe those roles and discuss how they subsequently changed after the takeover. How did they remain the same?

How do the gender roles as they are defined affect Loung's relationship with her parents? With her siblings?

Group dynamics:

A number of small group projects could be based on the book. For example, groups could design a poster to advertise the book, or present a panel discussion on different elements of the book (see list of speech topics below for further ideas).

Media Literacy:

What did you know about the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia prior to reading this book? What helped you become aware of it? (i.e. movies, television news coverage, books)? In the United States, do we always have extensive media coverage of what is happening in other countries (i.e. wars, genocide, natural disasters)? Why or why not? (ethnocentrism)

Impromptu Speech:

Have the students "sell" the book. Possibly using the Motivated Sequence, students can explain to their peers why they should purchase and read the book and/or how the book will benefit them.

Informative Speech:

Have students research various aspects of the book – see potential topics below – and present their findings to the class for an informative speech assignment. (It might be best to have students choose from a list of topics so that there isn't too much duplication.) Once the speeches are completed, the class will have a much better understanding of the issues alluded to within the book and a much stronger appreciation for what Loung and her family endured.

Speech Topics Related to the Book (NOT an inclusive list!)

Khmer Rouge	Landmines	Thailand
Biography of author	Author's other books	Vietnam
Cambodian history	Cambodia today	Pol Pot
Child soldiers	Communism	Lon Nol
Angkor Wat	Genocide	Prince Sihanouk
Dysentery	Buddhism	
Chinese mythology	Chinese New Year	
Phnom Penh	Monsoons	
Chinese food	Angkar	
Malnutrition	Vietnam War	
Abused Women's Advocacy Project		
Campaign for a Landmine Free World		
Persuasive Speeches		

Potential topics related to the book include

- Landmines
- Genocide
- Rape (especially as a tool of war)
- Child soldiers
- Any issue related to refugees
- The need to become informed about international issues
- The dangers of ethnocentrism

It might be difficult to have all students do persuasive speeches that relate to the book as the topics are more limited, but they could certainly be given the option of doing so.



Additional Resources

Collin College Databases:

Go to the College home page at www.ccccd.edu. At the Quick Links drop down menu on the right of the page scroll down to Library (LRC).

Click on the Find Articles--Journals, Magazines, Newspapers, and more.

Project Muse can be found by clicking on the letter P in the alphabetical listing at the top of the page.

When in Project Muse – type in “Surviving the Peace” as a title search

Academic Search Complete: click the letter A in the alphabetical listing at the top of the page.

Click the Full Text box and type in "Coming to Terms with the Past: Cambodia"

Academic Search Complete:

Click the Full Text box and type in "Surviving the Killing Fields"

For a review of the movie; "The Killing Fields" go to :

<http://globalvillage.pepperdine.edu/k.htm>

Text Talk on the novel First They Killed My Father from The Age Education

<http://www.education.theage.com.au/pagedetail.asp?intpageid=1188&strsection=students&intsectionid=3>