



Lesson Plan: Perspectives From the Perpetrators of Genocide in Cambodia

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will hear the points of view of people from various ranks of the Khmer Rouge who participated in the killing of nearly 2 million Cambodians during Pol Pot's regime, which lasted from 1975 to 1979. Students will then speculate in writing about how hearing the truth from the perpetrators might help Cambodians heal from the tragic events of that time period.

For more information on this period of Cambodian history, please see the [Resources](#) section of this lesson.

The clips used in this lesson are from the film **Enemies of the People**, a documentary project by a Cambodian journalist who sought to answer the question, "Why did nearly 2 million people die in the 'killing fields'?" Please note that much of the film is in Cambodian with English subtitles. Also, please be sure to preview the film if you plan to show all of it to your class, as many scenes are quite intense.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Analyze the perspectives and motivations of a number of people who committed genocide in Cambodia.
- Assess how accountable people from different ranks of the Khmer Rouge should be for the mass killings that took place.
- Speculate in writing about how hearing the truth from the perpetrators might help Cambodians heal from these tragic events.

GRADE LEVELS

9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

World History, International Studies, Geography, Social Studies, Language Arts, Current Events

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period

FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: “That Belongs To Us” (length :47)

The clip begins at 12:56 with the words “My father, he didn’t want to join...” It ends at 13:43 with the words “...by thrusting with knife.”

Clip 2: “I Want You to Know the Exact Place” (length 2:49)

The clip begins at 22:26 with a shot of the water and lily pads. It ends at 25:15 with the words “I want you to know the exact place.”

Clip 3: “We Had No Choice” (length 2:56)

The clip begins at 41:39 with the words “Khoun said he got the order from you...” It ends at 44:35 with the words “Me, too!”

Clip 4: “The Individual I Cast Aside” (length 2:55)

The clip begins at 59:08 with the words “You were saying you talked to Pol Pot about sweeping out traitors...” It ends at 1:02:03 when Nuon Chea says, “They must be solved first.”

ACTIVITY

Note: This lesson assumes that students already have some background in the history of Cambodia and the rise of the Khmer Rouge. If students require a stronger foundation for this period of history, please see the Extensions and Adaptations section of this lesson plan for a recommended activity.

1. Tell students that under the communist rule of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, an estimated 2 million people were killed because the regime considered them to be traitors in some way to its goal of establishing a pure, agrarian utopia in which there would be no private ownership or anything foreign or modern. One of those killed was the father of Cambodian journalist Thet Sambath. Sambath describes his father’s death in the clip “That Belongs to Us” (length :47). Show students this video clip and ask them to say in their own words why Sambath’s father was killed.
2. Explain that Sambath wanted to find out why so many people were killed by the Khmer Rouge and who ordered the killings. He spent more than a decade befriending members of the Khmer Rouge and coaxing them to tell the truth about what happened on video.

3. Give each student a handout and tell the students that you are going to show three video clips from interviews Sambath conducted with people from different ranks in the Khmer Rouge who talk about the killings. The first, “I Want You to Know the Exact Place” (length 2:49), shows two low-ranking men who go with Sambath to some rice farms that are referred to as “killing fields” because so many people died there. These men brutally executed a large number of people for the regime.
4. After watching the clip, discuss the questions for this video provided on the handout. After some discussion as a class, have students record their thinking on the handout.
5. Tell the class that the second video clip, “We Had No Choice” (length 2:56), is from an interview with a woman who gave orders to the men who did the killing. Explain that the Khmer Rouge killed many members of ethnic minority groups, because they were believed to be spies for the Vietnamese.
6. After watching this clip, discuss the related questions, and then have students record their thinking on the handout.
7. Explain that the third video clip is from one of Sambath’s interviews with Nuon Chea, known as “Brother Number Two.” In the Khmer Rouge hierarchy, Chea was second only to Pol Pot, the leader.
8. After watching this clip, discuss the related questions and then have students record their thinking on the handout.
9. Conclude the lesson with the writing activity provided at the bottom of the handout.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

1. Prepare for this lesson by helping students expand their knowledge of Cambodia and the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Show the class the location of Cambodia on a map and explain that under the rule of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979, an estimated 2 million Cambodians were killed in a brutal genocide. Then, use a KWL chart (<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/kwl.pdf>) to find out what students already know about Cambodia and this time period and what they want to learn. Help to identify knowledge gaps by asking the class questions, such as, “Who were the Khmer Rouge and how did they come to power?” or “What were the goals of the Khmer Rouge regime?” Once the first two columns of the chart are completed, assign topics in the “W” column for small student groups to research. A good starting point for their investigations is POV’s Background Information on Cambodia, but using a variety of resources is recommended. (The Resources section of this lesson provides a list of other helpful websites.) Ask each group to summarize what it learns in the “L” column of the chart and then explain its findings to the class, perhaps in a slideshow or with a class wiki. Have students also compare what they learned (column “L”) to their prior understanding of these topics (column “K”) and make corrections as needed.

2. Compare what happened in Cambodia to other 20th century genocides. Break students into groups and assign each group to research an instance of genocide, such as the Holocaust or the killing of various ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, Darfur, Iraq or Rwanda. Who were the victims? Who were the perpetrators? What was their motivation? What was the international response while the genocide was happening? Have the perpetrators been brought to justice? What has been done to encourage healing among those involved in the genocide? Then, have each group tell the story of its assigned genocide to the rest of the class and contribute its findings to a class table that allows for side-by-side comparisons. Discuss the similarities and differences among the genocides. Are there any patterns in the circumstances that led to the violence? Do those conditions exist anywhere today? Then, focus on what happened after the genocides by creating a report card that evaluates how effective efforts to achieve justice and healing have been in each case.

3. Explore other POV and PBS films that address genocide and related issues of justice and healing. Each film provides video, background information, and educator resources online.

- *The Flute Player* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/thefluteplayer/>) tells the story of a Cambodian musician who returns to his country to face the dark shadows of his worn-torn past and seek out surviving musicians.
- *Inheritance* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/inheritance/>) addresses the Holocaust from the perspective of a Jewish survivor and the daughter of a perpetrator.
- *Lost Boys of Sudan* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/lostboysofsudan/>) follows two young Sudanese refugees through their first year in the United States.
- *The Reckoning: The Battle for the International Criminal Court* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/reckoning/>) covers the International Criminal Court and its efforts to prosecute perpetrators of crimes against humanity.
- *Pol Pot's Shadow* (<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/thestory.html>), a 2002 film from **FRONTLINE/World**, includes an interview with Nuon Chea and illustrates how at that time Cambodians were not sure whether they wanted to confront their violent past or bury it.

4. Investigate the U.S. bombing of Cambodia in 1970. Begin by asking students to read *Caught in the Crossfire* (<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/tl02.html>), a brief summary of this invasion. Next, have them conduct further research to determine the campaign's goals and ultimate results. Students should then incorporate details from their research into persuasive essays that argue whether or not this campaign contributed to the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

5. Track the trial of Nuon Chea. First, have students research key events in Chea's life and his role in the Khmer Rouge and plot them on an interactive timeline using [Capzles.com](http://www.capzles.com) or a similar tool. Then, ask the class to bring in articles that report on developments in the United Nations-backed tribunal charging Nuon Chea with genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Students can get details about the trial from traditional news organization reporting and the [Cambodia Tribunal Monitor](http://www.cambodia-tribunal-monitor.com)

(<http://www.cambodiatribunal.org/>). After discussing each article, have students summarize the key points and update their Nuon Chea timeline.

RESOURCES

Enemies of the People. “Filmmakers’ Blog.”

<http://enemiesofthepeoplemovie.com/blog/>

Thet Sambath reflects on his investigation into the activities of the Khmer Rouge, the trial of Nuon Chea and more.

FRONTLINE/World. “Cambodia – Pol Pot’s Shadow.”

<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/tl01.html>

This page provides a timeline of events in Cambodia from 1953 to 2002. It explains how the Khmer Rouge rose to power, describes the genocide that took place and relates how the country has responded since that time.

Mekong.net. “Cambodia: A Photo Gallery.”

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

This extensive photo archive includes more than 1,100 images of Cambodia, including slideshows of images from the Khmer Rouge period and photos from more recent years.

Mekong.net. “Beauty and Darkness: Cambodia in Modern History.”

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

This page collects facts and figures about Cambodia, moving oral histories of the Pol Pot era and a collection of articles that discuss various topics related to the Cambodian genocide.

The New York Times. “Khmer Rouge.”

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/k/khmer_rouge/index.html

This up-to-date archive of news stories related to the Khmer Rouge provides a brief history of the organization, as well as slideshows and videos.

POV Background Information: Cambodia

www.pbs.org/pov/enemies/

This article provides a succinct summary of Cambodian history and the rise of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

Yale University. “Cambodian Genocide Program.”

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

This massive resource on the Cambodian genocide includes maps, photographs, details on the U.S. bombing of Cambodia and diplomatic relations, articles, papers, reports, databases and more.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments and technical processes.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Geography, Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Historical Understanding, Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

World History, Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world.

World History, Standard 45: Understands major global trends since World War II.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.