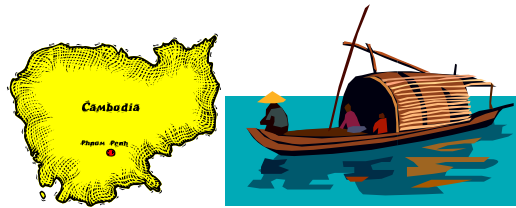


# Cambodian Genocide Literature Circles



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(Developed in conjunction with the Genocide and Human Rights Summer Institute for Teachers,  
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## Unit Overview:

**Goal 1:** After completing this unit, students will be aware of the events, causes, and outcomes of the persecution of the victims of the Cambodian genocide. After considering recent examples of man's inhumanity to man, students will realize that unrecognized mistakes are often repeated. Students will also learn about the role of tolerance in a multicultural world.

**Goal 2:** Students will experience appropriate primary sources, literature, poetry, music, art, media, and drama as vehicles of authentic learning. Comparisons will be made to previous studies of genocide.

**Goal 3:** Students will be able to relate the experiences of persecuted persons to their present day experiences and current events by examining human behaviors of obedience, conformity, silence, courage, integrity, martyrdom, empathy, caring, cruelty, collaboration, and other positive and negative behaviors in relation to personal relationships. This unit teaches that examples of genocide are not just distant events in history, but serve as a warning of the ongoing personal vigilance and courage required in order to resist the pull of peer pressure and the push of fear and intolerance.

## Illinois Language Arts Standards Addressed:

**STATE GOAL 1: Read with understanding and fluency.**

**C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.**

**1.C.3c** Compare, contrast and evaluate ideas and information from various sources and genres.

**STATE GOAL 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.**

**B. Read and interpret a variety of literary works.**

**2.B.3c** Analyze how characters in literature deal with conflict, solve problems and relate to real-life situations

**STATE GOAL 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.**

**C. Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.**

**3.C.3b** Using available technology, produce compositions and multimedia works for specified audiences.

**STATE GOAL 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.**

**A. Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.**

**5.A.3a** Identify appropriate resources to solve problems or answer questions through research.

## **Illinois Social Studies Standards Addressed:**

**STATE GOAL 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.**

**E. Understand United States foreign policy as it relates to other nations and international issues.**

**14.E.3** Compare the basic principles of the United States and its international interests (e.g., territory, environment, trade, use of technology).

**STATE GOAL 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.**

**A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.**

**16.A.4a** Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

**Grade level:** 8<sup>th</sup>, adaptable to grades 9-12 with proper modifications

### **Rationale:**

The intent of this unit is to go beyond complying with state learning standards. Ultimately, students will be guided to become better and more active world citizens by analyzing history's tragic past and the links to the present in order to prevent future human rights violations and genocides. Students will have learned about current genocides in Rwanda and Darfur as well as the atrocities of the Holocaust during World War II. Attempts will be made to connect and compare the genocides previously studied as they contrast with the autogenocide committed in Cambodia. The following books will be used in order to provide students with engaging choices at various reading levels:

- *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge* by Chanrithy Him
- *First They Killed My Father* by Loung Ung
- *Children of the River* by Linda Crew

These books will help students develop a basic framework for understanding Cambodian history while providing students insight from a survivor's perspective. Theme: Courage is the habit of doing the right thing, despite the obstacles in the way or how we feel at the time. It requires us to moderate our emotions and impulses so that we are neither cowardly nor reckless. It may involve risk, but it has a purpose other than just a thrill. Courage develops over time. People are heroic in their daily lives by doing ordinary things in extraordinary ways and by doing good in spite of obstacles and difficulty.

The issues discussed in this unit are difficult and may cause distress for some students if not properly prepared. It is strongly advised that the teacher send home a parent permission slip before implementing this unit in order to involve the parents in helping students process the themes involved.

### **Unit Disclaimer:**

This unit on the Cambodian Genocide has been compiled using a variety of sources including, but not limited to: the Internet, academic works, oral history compilations, maps, and other varied sources. The sources used have been cited in every instance however copyright permission has not been obtained from individual sites, authors, or institutions. Anyone wishing to use this unit on Human Rights and the Cambodian Genocide in any way, shape, or form must obtain copyright permission from the appropriate entities before doing so.

## UPSTANDER WEBQUEST:

Students will predict and examine reasons why people don't often resist or break free of the accepted norm or status quo and why others do. They will consider risks and consequences people face in standing up for what they believe to be right (physical, social, emotional, political). In the process of wrestling with that big idea, they will learn features of information text, encounter and use primary source documents, use secondary source documents, make connections with historical text and their experience today, and participate in a Socratic Seminar. Final project choices include writing a "This I Believe" essay, creating an award nomination, submitting a proposal for change, or creating a biographical sketch of an upstander.

(Author: Heather Baker, [Utah Education Network](#), 2008)

### **Prereading Activities**

- A. Journal entry prompt:** You live in a safe community in a time when you believe that the likelihood that the United States will be attacked is highly unlikely. However, there is a nuclear power plant approximately 45 minutes away from our community. Although we assume that we would have advance warning of a potential attack due to the technology available to us, I want you to imagine what would happen if all of the electricity is off and phone lines are down. All TV and radio signals suddenly go silent. Computers are useless and cell phone towers are inaccessible. Portable devices are also rendered useless. Suddenly you are cut off from the rest of the world that you typically have at your fingertips. The last message you are able to decipher on the radio is an announcement that there is now a new government beginning immediately, then a terse exchange, then static. *What would you do? Write your ideas about whether you would stay in your current location or leave, where you would go, and how you would get there.* Next, imagine that people are rushing past your location, screaming that you need to run for your life. Your family is not with you and you do not have time to locate them. You must leave immediately if you want to have a chance to survive. You rush to the local airport where you see panic and chaos while everyone is trying to cram into any available plane. You are herded along, then get shoved into a plane with virtual strangers. *Now what? Write your predictions about what will happen next. Who are you with? Who did you leave behind? Where might you be heading?* Your plane finally lands and you have managed to survive with a few familiar faces. You discover that you have landed in a country that doesn't speak English. Pretend you can't return to the U.S. because the government has been overthrown and anyone supporting the former government is being killed. You don't know what happened to the family and friends you left behind. Think about what your life was like before and how you will have to change. *Write about how your life will change. What do you value that people in your new home may not understand? Consider food, clothing, religion, family, education, careers, money, government, and daily living routines.* Share your thoughts from each section with a partner. Volunteers may share with the class.

**B.** Go to <http://www.lindacrew.com/work3.htm>, <http://www.loungung.com/>, or <http://www.chanrithyhim.com/> to discover the author's inspiration for writing the chosen title. Keep in mind that the fictional experience you have just written about is similar to what the people of Cambodia experienced as they lived with political upheaval while engulfed in poverty.

**C. Background Knowledge:**

**Where is Cambodia?** *Show on a map/globe.*

**Who were the Khmer Rouge?** *A group of Cambodian Communist parties that ultimately ruled from 1975 to 1979, but fought for many years of war involving French, China, Vietnam, and the U.S. before and after that, including in western Cambodia until the nineties.*

**What happened during the time the Khmer Rouge were in power?** *People were forced out of their homes and into the fields. Mass killings were responsible for the deaths of approximately 2 million people from both direct killing and policies that led to starvation. Famous for government position that "To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss."*

**What is Khmer?** *Khmer refers both to the historical, native peoples of Cambodia, and the Mon-Khmer language of the Khmer people that is the official language of Cambodia.*

**What were the "killing fields" in Cambodia? What happened to the families who remained in Cambodia?** *Under the Khmer Rouge human institutions in Cambodia were shut down, all of the population were working in the fields for long days and many were either killed directly or starved in the fields. Later, mass graves of bones were uncovered in many of these fields. Families who remained in Cambodia were devastated through work, starvation, deaths and torture. At least 30% of the population died during this four year period.*

**D. Southeast Asia Timeline:** Explore how the conflicts and politics in Southeast Asia and neighboring Vietnam, as well as United States policies, affected Cambodian history in the past 50 years at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newyearbaby/timeline.html>

**E. Literature Circles:** Students will rotate the roles in the literature circles after reading their assigned portion (approximately every 3 chapters). Roles include: discussion director, word wizard, literary luminary, artful artist, literature critic, and summarizer

## Questions for classroom discussion:

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?

What impact did the narrator's child's voice have on your experience as a reader?

How would you characterize the transformation that takes place in her narrative voice throughout the story?

How did it affect your reading of the book that you were aware of a family member's impending death long before the narrator was?

Would you describe the main character as a feminist?

How did the experiences of the family members differ during the war because of gender?

What was your impression of the final separation, both geographic and cultural, that the narrator had with her surviving family?

Did you sympathize with her eventual desire to assimilate into American culture, or had you expected her to be more aggressive about pursuing her family relationships earlier on?

Each narrator saw herself as a "strong" person, as did many other people in the book, and some were eventually drafted into a soldier training camp as a result. What are the qualities of a survivor?

How does one reconcile compassion with a will to survive? What qualities enabled a gentle family member to survive as well?

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 *First They Killed My Father* author's current campaign against the use of landmines?

Are there other tools of war that you believe should be broadly banned?

## Culminating Activities:

1. Show the documentary [New Year Baby](#). This film is directed by a Cambodian-American woman who was born on Cambodian New Year in a Thai refugee camp. Her parents never shared information about the past. It depicts a search for the truth about how her family survived the Khmer Rouge genocide and why they buried the truth for so long.
2. Students may either individually or in teams research the demographics of Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, and other population groups in the United States. They might start with the U.S. Census Bureau, at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Then have the students prepare distinctive graphs showing key demographic statistics such as locations, population numbers and distribution, age distribution, economic status, etc. for each group. Display the graphs in a prominent location and invite discussion with other classes.
3. Conduct a class discussion of the various issues surrounding immigration to the United States, and have the students record their opinions and attitudes. Then have them compare their findings with articles and reports in the current media. What conclusions may be drawn from the comparison? Alternately, using newspapers, magazines, broadcast transcripts, and Web sites, have the students research the various aspects and issues involved in the present debate over immigration, particularly illegal immigration and the status of illegal immigrants in the United States. Prepare summary statements of the key arguments and a set of formal recommendations, and send the summaries and recommendations to your senators and representatives and your state legislators.
4. Imagine that you were a reporter covering the Khmer Rouge revolution and the resulting genocide, and write an article informing your readers about the causes of the revolution and its objectives. You should report on the Who, What, When, Where, and Why appropriate to specific events.
5. Research and report on the continuing dangers of landmines throughout the world and efforts to reduce or remove that danger (for example, in Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, and Congo).
6. Examine the traditions of the Cambodian New Year at <http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/Byrnes-celebrations/camb.n.y.html>. Compare and contrast these traditions with other cultures.
7. To tie the themes of the Holocaust and the Cambodian Genocide together and further explore the question of what explains man's inhumanity to man, students can complete a webquest at <http://www.kn.att.com/wired/fil/pages/webgenocidecl.html>. Students take on the role of investigators of people, content, or outcome. The culminating activity is to send a persuasive letter to the United Nations in an effort to give feedback on what can be done to prevent future genocide. This

would be composed by group members after discussing their understandings and coming to a consensus about what could be done in the future.

8. Read one of the books listed below, or another book about growing up as an immigrant or survivor in America, and prepare a report comparing and contrasting that book with one of the books read in the literature circles.

## Books:

### Fiction

- Robert Olen Butler. *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, 1992. Paperback: Grove Pr, 2001.
- Terry Farish. *If the Tiger*, Steerforth Press, 1995.
- Minfong Ho. *Rice without Rain*, 1990. Paperback: Scholastic.
- Minfong Ho. *The Stone Goddess*, 2003. Paperback: Scholastic, 2005.
- Rosco Lo Bosco. *Buddha Wept*, GreyCore Press, 2003.
- Jamie Metz. *The Depths of the Sea*, St. Martin's Press, 2004.
- An Na. *A Step from Heaven*, 2001. Paperback: Puffin Books, 2003.

### Nonfiction

- Louis Braille. *We Shared the Peeled Orange: The Letters of "Papa Louis" from the Thai-Cambodian Border Refugee Camps 1981-1993*, Syren Books, Paperback, 2005.
- Sucheng Chan. *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States*, University of Illinois Press, Paperback, 2004.
- David P. Chandler. *A History of Cambodia, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, 1992. Paperback: Westview Press, 2000.
- Karen J. Coates. *Cambodia Now: Life in the Wake of War*, McFarland, Paperback, 2005.
- JoAn D. Criddle. *Bamboo and Butterflies: From Refugee to Citizen*, East/West Bridge, Paperback, 1998.
- JoAn D. Criddle. *To Destroy You Is No Loss: The Odyssey of a Cambodian Family*, 1987. Paperback: East/West Bridge, 1998.
- David M. Donahue, Nancy Flowers, Amnesty International, editors. *The Uprooted: Refugees and the United States: A Multidisciplinary Teaching Guide*, Hunter House, Paperback, 2002.
- May M. Ebihara et al, editors. *Cambodian Culture Since 1975: Homeland and Exile*, Cornell University Press, Paperback, 1994.
- Sharon Sloan Fiffer. *Imagining America: Paul Thai's Journey from the Killing Fields of Cambodia to Freedom in the U.S.A.*, Paragon House, 1991.
- Adam Fifield. *A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother*, 2000. Paperback: Harper Paperbacks, 2001.
- Jeremy Hein. *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, Twayne, Paperback, 1995.



- Henry Kamm. *Cambodia: Report from a Stricken Land*, 1998. Paperback: Arcade, 1999.
- Bree Lafreniere & Daran Kravanh. *Music through the Dark: A Tale of Survival in Cambodia*, University of Hawaii Press, Paperback, 2000.
- Sharon May & Frank Stewart, editors. *In the Shadow of Angkor: Contemporary Writing from Cambodia*, University of Hawaii Press, Paperback, 2004.
- Dith Pran & Kim DePaul, editors. *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs of Survivors*, 1997. Paperback: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Stephanie St. Pierre. *Teenage Refugees from Cambodia Speak Out (In Their Own Voices)*, Rosen, 1995.
- Sarah Streed. *Leaving the House of Ghosts: Cambodian Refugees in the American Midwest*, McFarland, Paperback, 2002.
- Molyda, Szymusiak. *The Stones Cry Out: A Cambodian Childhood, 1975-1980*, 1986. Paperback: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Carol Wagner, editor. Valentina Du Basky, photographer. *Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia*, Paperback, Creative Arts, 2002.
- Usha Welaratna. *Beyond the Killing Fields: Voices of Nine Cambodian Survivors in America*, 1993. Paperback: Stanford University Press, 1994.

#### Web Sites:

- The official web site of [Loung Ung: Activist, Author, Lecturer](#)
- [American Refugee Committee International](#): “. . . works for the survival, health and well being of refugees, displaced people, and those at risk . . .”
- [Andy Brouwer](#): Includes “An exclusive interview with Loung Ung,” links to “travelogues” of Andy Brouwer’s “many trips to Cambodia,” and other material.
- [Cambodia Tribunal Monitor](#): “The leading source of webcasts, news, information, and expert commentaries on the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. Cambodia Tribunal Monitor is a consortium of academic, philanthropic and non-profit organizations committed to providing public access to the tribunal and open discussion throughout the judicial process.”
- [Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association](#) founded “to provide services to Cambodians by helping them make transition into the American culture, economy, and environment.”
- [Cambodian Information Center](#) provides information about Cambodia and its people, acts as a communication medium, and includes links to current events relating to Cambodia.
- [Cambodian-American Heritage, Inc.](#) “The mission of the organization is the preservation of Cambodian arts and culture here in the United States.”
- [Cambodian View](#) includes a wealth of links to all aspects of Cambodian culture, history, government, organizations, and more.
- [Cambodian American National Council](#). “. . . a US-based grassroots, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to provide professional services for the promotion and support of leadership and development in the Cambodian communities, within and without the US.”

- [Cambodian American Resource Agency](#) includes numerous links to Web sites having to do with Cambodia, Khmer culture, and Cambodian Americans.
- [Cooperation Committee for Cambodia](#). “. . . operates as a . . . membership organization to promote the activities of NGOs for the benefit of the people of Cambodia . . .”
- [The CIA World Factbook](#), Cambodia
- [Cambodian Mine Action Centre](#): Saving Lives and Supporting Development for Cambodia
- [Clear Path International](#). “. . . serves landmine and bomb accident survivors, their families and their communities” in Cambodia and Vietnam and on the Thai-Burma border.
- [Documentation Center of Cambodia](#): “Since its inception, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has been at the forefront of documenting the myriad crimes and atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era. DC-Cam was founded after the U.S. Congress passed the [Cambodian Genocide Justice Act](#) in April 1994, which was signed into law by President Clinton.”
- [Embassy of Cambodia](#) in Washington, D.C.
- [Who Was Who in the Khmer Rouge](#)
- [Freedom Fields USA](#) is an organization of concerned Americans whose mission is “to help in the humanitarian demining of war torn countries.”
- [Human Rights Watch](#), World Report 2005, Cambodia
- [From Sideshow to Genocide](#): Stories of the Cambodian Holocaust, by Andy Carvin
- [International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Landmine Monitor](#) includes links to annual reports and to specific countries, including Cambodia, within those reports.
- [Idealist.org/Action Without Borders](#) provides links to the Web sites of 23 humanitarian organizations in Cambodia.
- [Khmer Institute](#) is a nonprofit organization founded to inform, educate, and promote in all areas relating to the Khmer people.
- [Adopt-A-Minefield](#): Clear a path to a safer world; “. . . a campaign of the United Nations Association of the USA, which engages individuals, community groups, and businesses in the United Nations effort to resolve the global landmine crisis.”
- [The Library of Congress](#) country study on Cambodia
- [Mekong Network](#) is “a volunteer project providing information on Southeast Asia.” The Cambodia section provides information on recent Cambodian history and culture.
- [New Year Baby](#) documentary
- [The NGO Forum on Cambodia](#) is “made up of local and international non-governmental organizations grounded in their experience of humanitarian and development assistance to Cambodia.”
- [Embassy of the United States](#), Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- [U.S. Department of State](#), Cambodia Profile
- [The United Nations in Cambodia](#)
- <http://www.teachgenocide.org/genocides/index.htm> UN definitions of genocide & human rights

- [USA for UNHCR \(The UN Refugee Agency\)](#) Teacher's Corner– refugee stories
- [UNICEF](#): Countries in Crisis, Landmines
- [United Planet](#) offers a wide range of “cross-cultural, humanitarian, and peace-building programs” in Cambodia and other countries.
- [USAID/Cambodia](#): United States Agency for International Development Mission to Cambodia
- [Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation](#) is “an international humanitarian organization that addresses the causes, conduct and consequences of war through programs of advocacy and service for victims of conflict around the world.