CAMBODIA CULTURE GUIDE

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WHY STUDY CULTURES?

For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulious, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we’re studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.¹

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established International Outreach as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 gratis cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. CultureGuides derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty iMAC, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

CultureGuides share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try and “make culture real.”² Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that CultureGuides will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

**Traditions**

**Buddhism and the Wat**

*Wat* [vwawt] is the Cambodian word for a Buddhist temple. In America, a *wat* is commonly called a *pagoda*. These temples can be found in every Cambodian city and village, and are the center of traditional and modern Cambodian life. By serving as the site for community events, celebrations, and religious services, these temples are a place for Cambodians to express their beliefs and values.

**Starting Points**

1. Ask the students what Asian religions they have heard of. If Buddhism is mentioned, ask them what they know about the religion. Ask them if they know what a *wat* is. Explain to them that the *wat* is where all of the elements of Buddhism come together.

2. Ask the students what they think of when they hear the word *church*. Some may think of a building; others may think of a specific religion. Ask what they think a typical Cambodian *church* would be like. Explain that in Cambodia, a Buddhist *church* building is a *wat*, and unlike most American *churches*, much more than religious services happens there.

3. Show the students a picture of a *wat* (see Traditions Visual 1). What does it resemble? A few students may venture to say that it is a temple. Ask them if they know what kind of temple it is. Explain what a *wat* is.

**Information**

**Buddhism in Cambodia**

Many cultures have either a physical or figurative center of daily religious life. Cambodia is no different. In Cambodia, there are Buddhist temples, or *wats*, that serve this purpose. *Wats* are Theravada Buddhist temples; Theravada Buddhism is the national religion of Cambodia.

Theravada Buddhism is what many consider to be the purest form of Buddhism—the form closest to what the Buddha taught. Buddhists believe that there are many Buddhas who live in different worlds, but “the Buddha” refers to Gautama the Buddha, who was born in India in the sixth century B.C.E. He was the most recent Buddha to be reincarnated in this earthly life to save human beings from suffering.

Another form of Buddhism, commonly called Mahayana Buddhism, is the adaptation of Buddhism that was introduced to Vietnam, China, and Japan. One obvious difference between the two forms of Buddhism is that Theravada Buddhist monks practice what may appear to be begging for food. However, they do not knock on doors or verbally beg for food; the monks walk along the streets and take whatever is given to them by followers of Theravada Buddhism.
Understanding Buddhism is vital to understanding Cambodian culture. Cambodian Buddhists believe that suffering is caused by desire; if you don’t want to suffer, you need to get rid of desire. They believe in an eight-fold path that expresses some specific teachings of the Buddha. Buddhists also believe in reincarnation. They believe that if you live a good, righteous life, you will be born into a better situation in your next life. However, if you live wickedly, you will be born into a worse situation, possibly even as an animal. The goal is to continually be born into better lives until one finally reaches a state of nirvana. Nirvana is a state where peace and nothingness prevail, a state of mind that the Buddha reached. Another common Buddhist belief is the importance of having reverence toward one’s ancestors. This reverence inspires many Buddhists to pray to their ancestors.

Celebrations at the Wat
Cambodians go to wats on special holidays. Many of these holidays are religious and national holidays, similar to Christmas in the United States. Christmas is a religious holiday, but it is not always celebrated religiously. This is similar to some holidays in Cambodia. The Cambodian New Year celebrates the new lunar year. Cambodia follows the Buddhist calendar, which started with the birth of the Buddha. Thus, each Cambodian New Year indicates how long it has been since the Buddha’s birth. However, most Cambodians focus more on enjoying themselves during this holiday period than on thinking about the birth of the Buddha. Similarly, Pchum [pah-joon] Ben is a holiday that reverences ancestors, but not all Cambodians think about their ancestors when they celebrate the holiday.

Every waning or waxing crescent moon constitutes a holy day in Cambodian Buddhism. On these days, all Buddhist followers come to the local wat to give offerings to the monks and listen to religious services.

Monkhood at the Wat
An important function of the wat is to serve as a Buddhist monastery. Monks, young and old, live at the wat (see Traditions Visual 2–3). They live a strict, disciplined life. Monks generally enter monkhood in their early teens. They can serve for a few months, a few years, or for the rest of their lives. Cambodians believe that all males should enter monkhood for some period of time. This service brings honor to families while helping the young men develop self-discipline to overcome worldly desires.

Monks live by specific rules and vows. For example, monks are not allowed to touch women, even to shake hands. This is seen as the ultimate expression of a commitment to chastity. Money is considered a corrupting influence, so many monks will not touch it. Monks typically start their day by walking around a local neighborhood collecting offerings from followers. The offerings may include food, pantry items, or clothes. Buddhists are obligated to provide these gifts every day when the monks make their daily walk. The monks take these offerings in satchels. Some Buddhists give monks money instead, and the monks come prepared with a plastic collection bag so they do not have to touch the money. These gifts provide monks with food for their two meals of the day. Monks are allowed to eat breakfast and one other big meal, which must be before noon. On celebration days, these meals are
The tradition of giving material items to monks shows the obligation Buddhists feel to support their religion.

Wats are also living quarters for monks. The monks’ quarters are usually separate from the main temple structure, but they are still in the wat complex. Monks live in these quarters for the length of their service. There is also a school in the wat, where monks learn more about Buddhist doctrine and the ancient Pali and Sanskrit languages. Monks can be quite young; any teenager is eligible to be a monk. If there are younger monks living in the wat, an older monk typically supervises them.

Monks also participate in other aspects of Cambodian life. They preside at events such as weddings and funerals. These services often take place at the wat. They can also be teachers at the wat.

Civic Uses
Wats are also centers of secular community life and can have civic uses. In Cambodia, wats have served as stations for election, registration, and voting. Most wats have schools. Monks are typically the teachers, and the subjects taught tend to focus on Cambodian language and culture. In times past, wats were major centers of learning for children in Cambodian communities. This was true especially in the countryside, where either there were no formal schools or children’s parents were too poor to send them to such schools. Wat schools were often a child’s only option for an education. Today, most Cambodian children no longer attend school at wats because there is an abundance of formal schools—even in the countryside. However, some children still attend wat schools if they live too far away from a formal school or if their parents are very poor. In Cambodian communities in Vietnam or in other countries, such as the United States, wat schools may be the only place where Cambodian children learn about their language and culture.

The wat is an important part of Cambodian culture. Many aspects of daily and religious life are centered in these temples. Cambodians hold many traditional values and beliefs, and wats are where these values are openly taught and manifested.

Activities
1. Organize a role-play of a typical holy day at a wat. Pick three or four volunteers in advance to be monks. For the whole day, they must follow the rules of monkhood as closely as possible. They can follow standard rules of monkhood such as being forbidden to touch females or money. Assign some students to bring in food for the designated monks. Others can prepare short essays on Buddhist subjects. The “monks” can read these essays to the class as their sermons. If desired, these monks could also wear traditional orange robes for the class period. Emphasize to the students that many Cambodian males their age or younger regularly enter monkhood.

2. Plan a field trip to a local Cambodian Buddhist Wat. Wats can be found in every major city throughout the United States (see Additional Resources). For example, there is one in Oakland, California (see Traditions Visual 4). Contact wats for the dates and times of upcoming celebrations and holy days. The workers at these wats would be happy to show their temple to visitors and explain more about
their religious beliefs. However, remember that the wats in the United States can be slightly different from the ones in Cambodia. Sometimes there is not enough land to build a large temple structure and a typical house has to suffice. Nevertheless, Buddhists go to great lengths to make their wats in the United States as authentic as possible, and the wats still portray the same cultural ambiance. If the field trip is scheduled during a period of religious celebration, the class could join in on the celebration with the devotees. Going during a period of celebration would be an excellent opportunity to try some Cambodian cuisine.

3. After showing the students pictures of wats, have them draw a picture of a wat and the layout of the temple complex (see Traditions Visual 5). Make sure that all aspects of the complex are included, such as the worship area, monks’ living quarters, school, and offices.

4. Have the students write a journal entry as if they were a monk living in a wat. This could be written for a normal day or for a holy day. What would a monk do at different times of the day? What would a monk’s feelings be about the rules he has to live by? Details about the importance of the wat should be included.

Discussion Questions

1. How does understanding the wat help us to understand Cambodian culture?

2. Compare a wat to a church in your community.

3. How would you feel if you were a monk living in a wat?

4. How would Cambodian culture be different today if there were no wats?
Judge Rabbit is a mythical character of Cambodian folklore who appears in many Cambodian folk stories. He is a lively, helpful character who uses his skills to help people solve their problems. These tales are entertaining, but their greatest value lies in the information they share about Cambodian culture.

Starting Points
1. Read the book *Judge Rabbit and the Tree Spirit: A Folktale from Cambodia* (see Additional Resources). Ask the students what they like about the story.
2. Ask the students what folktales they know. Read the Judge Rabbit tales and see how they are similar to or different from folktales in American culture.
3. What value do folktales have? Ask the students to think about how folktales can teach us about a culture.

Information
Folklore often contains information about a culture. Cambodian folklore is no different. One character in Cambodian folklore is Judge Rabbit. Judge Rabbit appears in many different stories. He is a lively, helpful, and sometimes mischievous rabbit. Most Judge Rabbit stories have an intriguing dilemma that needs to be solved, and Judge Rabbit always solves that dilemma insightfully.

One Judge Rabbit story is *Judge Rabbit and the Tree Spirit*. In this story, a man is called to go to war but is hesitant to leave his wife behind. When he leaves, a spirit that lives in a tree turns into a person who looks exactly like the husband. The wife is fooled and believes that the spirit is her husband. Eventually, her real husband returns, but no one can tell who the real husband is. Judge Rabbit devises a plan to solve this mystery. He says that the real husband could fit inside a small bottle. Of course, only the imposter could fit inside a bottle, because he is just a spirit. When the spirit enters the bottle, the real husband is identified and the mystery is solved.

This story by itself does not identify any outstanding values or practices that can be classified as Cambodian. However, the story and setting of this tale have great value, because they teach what Cambodian life and culture are like. For example, the humble dwelling of the couple depicted in the story teaches how Cambodians live (see Folklore & Language Visual 1). Another aspect of Cambodian culture is the husband leaving for war. Cambodians have faced a long and turbulent history of war with their neighbors, and more recently, among themselves.

There are other Judge Rabbit stories, such as *The Trial* (see Additional Resources). This story is about a young man who wants to marry a girl but first had to show his loyalty to her parents. The parents of the bride-to-be decide that the young man must be
bound and submerged in water for several days. He cannot move to warm himself. If he can survive such an ordeal, he is worthy to marry their daughter. After two days and two nights, the man sees a fire on a distant hill and raises his hands toward the flames. The parents see this and accuse him of trying to warm himself. They refuse to let him marry their daughter. The young man takes the matter to court. At the trial, the parents give gifts to the judge, but the young man is too poor to give the judge anything. Not surprisingly, the judge upholds the parents’ right to deny their daughter’s hand in marriage. Eventually, Judge Rabbit helps solve this problem. He helps prepare a feast for the judge, but he doesn’t salt the soup. The confused judge asks why the soup was not salted. Judge Rabbit replies by saying that just as the flames were too far away from the young man to warm him, the salt was too far away from the soup to salt it. The judge is embarrassed and reverses his decision.

This plot, common in many other Cambodian stories, speaks volumes about Cambodian culture. In Cambodia, parents are often very strict about who their daughters marry. Usually, to be considered eligible for marriage, bachelors must be wealthy and of a good social class. This cultural standard exists even today.

Another aspect of life in Cambodia is the corruption in the government. Bribes are commonplace, whether they are given to policemen or to the prime minister. The bribe given to the judge in this story shows this facet of the Cambodian social system.

Judge Rabbit stories are entertaining and educational. They help us understand more about Cambodian culture, either through the storylines or the settings. Judge Rabbit stories are an excellent medium to teach us more about Cambodian culture.

**Activities**

1. Divide the students into groups to discuss the cultural implications of Judge Rabbit stories. Discuss whether some of these cultural traits exist in our culture.

2. Ask the students to use the illustrations in the first Judge Rabbit story as a guide to make illustrations for *The Trial*. Be sure they include typical Cambodian scenery, dress, etc. *(see Folklore & Language Visuals 2–3).*

3. Have students act out a Judge Rabbit story of their choice. You may want to invite people from outside the class to watch the performance.

4. Assign the students to compose an original Judge Rabbit story. Be sure they pay close attention to the the cultural compatibility of the piece.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is your favorite American folktale? How is it similar to or different from a Judge Rabbit story?

2. Judge Rabbit always solves difficult dilemmas. What does this teach us about finding a solution to our own challenges?

3. How does a culture’s folklore help us better understand the people of that culture?
FOOD

FRUIT

Cambodians enjoy a wide variety of delicious cuisine, but one thing that is always constant is their love for fruit. Cambodians often boast of the abundant fruit in Cambodia that can be plucked from trees without cost. The Cambodian people are blessed with an abundance of delicious fruit, and they enjoy eating it prepared in many ways.

Starting Points

1. Have the students make a list of all of the fruit that they can think of. Identify which fruits are Cambodian and which are not.

2. Show pictures, or if possible, buy samples of Cambodian fruit (see Food Visuals 1–4). Let the students sample the fruit.

3. Ask the students to give examples of different ways to eat fruit. Ask them if they like smoothies. Tell them that people in Cambodia make a delicious fruit smoothie that is not found anywhere else in the world.

Information

Common Cuisine

Cambodian cuisine is a unique blend of many traditional Southeast Asian foods. There are many staple foods such as rice and fish. Meat and vegetables are also regularly eaten. Often, Cambodians enjoy stir-fry dishes. A favorite breakfast is a bowl of rice noodle soup. And don’t forget hot peppers—Cambodians love to spice up their food.

The Cambodians’ Love for Fruit

In Cambodia and Southeast Asia there are many different kinds of fruit, some of which are not found anywhere else in the world. Cambodians love fruit, and it is sold everywhere. However, sometimes Cambodians don’t even need to buy fruit because it grows naturally all around them. Even in cities, there are coconut, mango, and banana trees everywhere (see Food Visuals 1–3). During the time of the Khmer Rouge, life was very difficult and food was scarce. The communists would not allow people to pick fruit from the fruit trees. This was very difficult for the Cambodians. However, that situation no longer exists, and Cambodians once again enjoy the fruits they love.

There are many fruits in Cambodia that also grow in the United States, such as bananas, mangos, pineapples, coconuts, and oranges. They also have fruit that many Americans have never seen. Some of these fruits include mangostines, rambutans, lychees, guavas, Asian pears, papayas, jackfruit, and durian (see Food Visual 4 and Additional Resources).
Cambodians eat fruit in many different ways. However, Cambodians almost never eat a fruit’s skin, even on apples. Cambodians also love to make fruit smoothies. Street vendors sell smoothies throughout the country. They add various fruits and vegetables, a spoonful of Ovaltine, canned milk, and shaved ice. Sometimes they add a raw egg for extra froth. The result is a unique and delicious smoothie. These delicious smoothies can be found in any Cambodian city, and generally sell for only fifty to seventy-five cents per glass.

**Bok Lhong Recipe**

One of the many fruit dishes that Cambodians like to eat is called *bok lhong*, or literally, “smashed papaya.” In English, this food is commonly called papaya salad. Papaya is a favorite fruit of Cambodians. However, this food uses unripe papaya! Cambodians eat this dish with rice. It is prepared using a large clay pot and a wooden rod. These materials can be found in any Asian store (see Food Visual 5).

**You will need:**

- 1 unripe papaya
- garlic
- tomatoes
- lime juice
- hot chili peppers
- fish sauce

**Preparation**

1. Cut and slice the unripe papaya into little strips. Place the strips into the clay pot.
2. Add tomatoes, hot chili peppers, garlic, lime juice, and fish sauce into the pot. There are no specific measurement for these ingredients. If you want a stronger flavor of one food or another, add more. If you do not like spicy food, do not add too many peppers!
3. Once all of the ingredients are added into the pot, smash them with the rod. The result is a flavorful, spicy papaya salad that Cambodians love.
4. Serve this dish with rice.

**Fried Bananas Recipe**

Cambodians also eat fruit for dessert. A popular treat is fried bananas. Although not an authentic variation, fried bananas taste good with vanilla or coconut ice cream.

**You will need:**

- 1/2 C flour
- 2 T sugar (optional)
- 1 banana per serving
- 1 T oil
- 1 T water

**Preparation**

1. Place the water, oil, and flour into a dish and mix. Add sugar if desired.
2. Slice the banana into convenient sizes.
3. Roll the banana slices in the flour mixture until all sides are covered.
4. Fry the slices in a frying pan until golden brown. Best served hot.

Believe it or not, Judge Rabbit stories also show the love Cambodians have for fruit. Many stories include the rabbit’s love of bananas. One of these stories shows Judge
Rabbit’s mischievousness as well. When he sees a lady with a basket of delicious, ripe bananas, Judge Rabbit wants to eat the bananas, but he does not know how to get them. He devises a plan and decides to play dead on the road. When the lady sees Judge Rabbit on the road, she places him on top of the bananas in her basket, thinking that he will make a nice dinner. Once Judge Rabbit is in the basket, he begins to eat all of the bananas until nothing but the peels are left. Judge Rabbit’s love for fruit reflects the Cambodians’ love for fruit.

Fruit is a major part of the Cambodian diet. It has always been popular and probably always will be. Cambodian markets are packed full of fruit stands, each visited by many eager buyers. While many cultures consider fruit to be a nice side dish or a healthy snack, Cambodians consider fruit to be much more important. It is an essential part of their daily diet.

Activities

1. Go on a field trip to a local Asian market. Look in the yellow pages for a store near you. Once in the store, examine the different kinds of fruit and buy some. Fruit goes in and out of season, so you may want to check ahead of time to see which fruits are available.

2. Plan a field trip so the class can attend a celebration at a local Cambodian wat. The Cambodian New Year or Pchum Ben are the best times of the year to catch such a celebration. Cambodian cuisine is served at these celebrations, and students can write a report about the food they tried (see History and Holidays and Additional Resources).

3. Have the class make either bok lhong or fried bananas. The food can be prepared individually, in groups, or as a class.

Discussion Questions

1. What does a typical Cambodian diet consist of? Why do you think Cambodians have become accustomed to this type of diet?

2. Why is fruit so important to Cambodians?

3. What fruits are popular in America and Cambodia?

4. How do Cambodians eat fruit?
Often considered one of the architectural wonders of the world, Angkor Wat is a massive twelfth-century temple located in Cambodia’s jungle. It is the largest religious structure in the world and was once the epicenter of the massive Khmer Empire. Now that the world is starting to rediscover Cambodia after years of war, Angkor Wat is a cultural landmark that Cambodia can share with the world.

Starting Points

1. Ask the students if they have ever seen an Indiana Jones movie. What would it be like to walk around dark passageways in ancient structures? Ask them if they think that there are still places like that around the world.

2. Ask the students to name some of the wonders of the world. Ask them if they have ever heard of Angkor Wat, one of the architectural wonders of the world.

3. Show the students a picture of Angkor Wat (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1). Have the students try to guess where and what it is. You could also show the scenes in the movie Tomb Raider that were filmed at Angkor Wat.

Information

In the ninth century, the Khmer (Cambodian) Empire was first established. During the twelfth century, the kingdom reached its greatest power and influence. The Khmers led massive conquests throughout Southeast Asia and captured most of modern-day Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and southern Vietnam. Cambodia became the dominant power of all mainland Southeast Asia at the time. During this period, the Khmers built Angkor Wat. Angkor Wat was a symbol of the Khmer’s rule, and continues to be a symbol of Cambodia today.

Angkor Wat: Construction and Design

Angkor was the center of the massive Khmer nation. The giant wat structure was built during the twelfth century under the direction of King Suryavarman II. The king believed that the size of the temple he commissioned to be built was a reflection of the greatness of his rule. For this reason, he organized a labor force to build what would become the largest religious structure in the world today. It was built with slave labor in a very curious manner. It is difficult to tell how it was built by simply looking at the structure. The massive walls were created by piling large amounts of dirt. Elephants hauled stones to the top of the dirt piles. Even today, you can see the marks on the stones where they were hauled by elephants. When the stones were arranged, the dirt was removed and the structure was finished.
The quality of work on the temple is excellent. Even today, engineers marvel at how each spire is just millimeters different in height. Within the structure there are ingenious moats and drainage systems. These drainage systems helped to collect water during the rain season and store it for the coming year’s water needs. Breathtaking works of ancient stone art are everywhere. The art is predominantly bas-reliefs of ancient Hindu mythology and carvings of angels called *apsara* (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 2–3). The structure has rightfully been labeled an architectural wonder of the world.

Angkor Wat has an interesting and symbolic design. The structure was originally built as a Hindu temple, because the Khmers were followers of Hinduism. Hindu symbols abound within the structure. The large, middle tower represents Mt. Meru, the dwelling place of the mythological Hindu god Siva. The other spires represent other mountains. There are statues of Vishnu, the god believed to be the preserver of the universe, and bas-reliefs of other characters of ancient Hindu mythology. The stairs leading up to the higher levels are so steep that one cannot look up and climb the stairs at the same time. This is a symbol of humility before God, because you cannot look up at Him. Later, as Cambodians started following Buddhism instead of Hinduism, the structure was converted to a Buddhist temple.

After its period of glory, the Khmer empire began to wane in power. The Chams, Vietnamese, and Thais began to harass the Khmers on every front. Eventually the Khmers were forced to abandon Angkor for a new southern capital. Their once dominant country began to shrink on every side as the Thai and Vietnamese contested for power. Angkor Wat rotted in the jungle for hundreds of years until a French explorer named Henri Mouhot was led to it in the 1860s. By this time, vines and roots had grown over and through the ruins. However, the French, who were the colonial rulers of Cambodia at the time, were determined to restore the structure. Because of their preservation efforts, tourists can see the remnants of Angkor today.

**Preservation of Angkor Wat**

Today, Angkor Wat is the symbol of Cambodia to the world. Since the end of Cambodia’s civil war, tourism has become a leading industry for Cambodia (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4). This is mainly due to Angkor Wat and other surrounding temple ruins. Visitors come from all around the world to see this famous structure. The influx of tourists has created thousands of jobs in the needy Cambodian economy. More jobs are expected to follow. Hopefully, continued restoration of the ruins can take place to preserve Angkor for generations to come (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5). As Cambodia enters an era of peace and opens up to the world, tourists are flocking to Angkor Wat to experience Cambodian history and culture.

Cambodia has many other temples like Angkor Wat, but sadly, many are being looted by thieves. Ancient statues and carvings are being stolen and sold on a regular basis. This is mainly due to the economic hardships Cambodian citizens face. Angkor Wat is now protected from looting, but many other temples in the country are not (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 6–8).
Angkor Wat truly is a symbol of Cambodia. An image of the temple is even on the nation’s flag (see Flag of Cambodia). This structure is important to all Cambodians because it symbolizes an era when their country was at the pinnacle of its glory, a time when Cambodia was the major power of all Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, Cambodia is now one of the poorest and most destitute countries in the region. Years of war have taken their toll. Despite modern Cambodia’s problems, Angkor Wat shows all Cambodians—and all of the world—the magnificence of Cambodian culture. It represents a time when Cambodia was strong, and it gives the citizens the desire to make their country strong again.

Activities

1. Show a video about the ruins of Angkor Wat (see Additional Resources). Have the students write their thoughts about it.
2. Have the students write a letter to their congressman or other elected representative urging him or her to help sponsor legislation to protect world monuments like Angkor Wat from looting.
3. Have the students draw a picture of Angkor Wat. Students can draw either the temple itself or the Cambodian flag, which has a picture of Angkor Wat on it.
4. Divide the students into groups and give them the assignment to build a model of Angkor Wat (see Additional Resources). It could be made from materials such as building blocks or popsicle sticks.

Discussion Questions

1. If you were Cambodian, why would Angkor Wat be important to you?
2. What is the best way to stop the looting of temples?
3. How can Angkor Wat be preserved for the future?
4. What monuments in the United States represent our country and culture?
**Facts About Cambodia**

**Official Name:** Kingdom of Cambodia  
**Capital:** Phnom Penh  
**Government Type:** multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy established in September 1993  
**Area:** 181,040 sq km  
**Land Boundaries:** 2,572 km  
**Climate:** tropical; rainy, monsoon season (May to November); dry season (December to April); little seasonal temperature variation  
**Lowest Point:** Gulf of Thailand 0 m  
**Highest Point:** Phnum Aoral 1,810 m  
**Natural Resources:** timber, gemstones, some iron ore, manganese, phosphates, hydropower potential  
**Natural Hazards:** monsoonal rains (June to November); flooding; occasional droughts  
**Population:** 13,124,764 (July 2003 est.)  
**Nationality:** Cambodian  
**Ethnic Groups:** Khmer 90%, Vietnamese 5%, Chinese 1%, other 4%  
**Religions:** Theravada Buddhist 95%, other 5%  
**Languages:** Khmer (official) 95%, French, English  
**GDP:** $20.42 billion (2002 est.)  
**GDP Per Capita:** $1,600 (2002 est.)  
**GDP Composition By Sector:** agriculture: 40%, industry: 20%, services: 40% (2001 est.)  
**Labor Force:** 6 million (1998 est.)  
**Unemployment Rate:** 2.8% (1999 est.)  
**Industries:** garments, tourism, rice milling, fishing, wood and wood products, rubber, cement, gem mining, textiles  
**Agricultural Products:** rice, rubber, corn, vegetables  
**Exports:** $1.38 billion (f.o.b., 2001) timber, garments, rubber, rice, fish  
**Imports:** $1.73 billion (f.o.b., 2001) cigarettes, gold, construction materials, petroleum products, machinery, motor vehicles  
**Trade Partners:** U.S., Germany, U.K., Singapore, Thailand, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Vietnam (2002)  
**Currency:** riel (KHR)  
**Exchange Rate:** 3,912 riels (KHR) = $1 U.S. (2002)
**TIME LINE**

802 C.E. The Khmer (Cambodian) Kingdom is founded and united by its first king, Jayavarman II, on the top of Phnom (Mt.) Kulen

1100s Angkor Wat is commissioned by King Survyavarman I; Angkor Kingdom at its height of glory

1431 Angkor is sacked by the Thai; period of decline begins

1600 Khmer kingdom is weak and seeks assistance from the Thai and Vietnamese

1864 Cambodia becomes a French protectorate

1944 Cambodia comes under the control of the Japanese during WWII

Jan 1953 Norodom Sihanouk is crowned king of Cambodia

9 Nov 1953 Cambodia declares independence from France

1969 The Vietnam War reaches Cambodia with U.S. bombing missions

1970 Sihanouk is dethroned in a coup by Lon Nol

1970–1975 War rages as Lon Nol’s republican government fights the communist rebel Khmer Rouge

17 Apr 1975 Phnom Penh falls to the Khmer Rouge

1975–1979 The Khmer Rouge assumes power and rule by genocide; approximately 1.7 million innocent Cambodians die from torture, starvation, and murder

25 Dec 1978 Vietnam invades Cambodia to “liberate” it from the Khmer Rouge

7 Jan 1979 Khmer Rouge is defeated, Vietnamese-backed government is implemented

1979–1990 Civil war—the Vietnamese-backed government faces resistance

Sep 1989 Vietnamese troops withdraw from Cambodia

Sep 1990 Paris Peace Accord is signed, calling for all factions to disarm and to hold national elections under the supervision of the UN

25 May 1993 Cambodia’s first general election in decades is held, the resistance faction FUNCINPEC, backed by Sihanouk, wins; Sihanouk is restored as king

Jul 1997 Hun Sen launches a government coup, removes Norodom Ranarridh from power

26 Jul 1998 Second general election is held, Hun Sen and his Cambodian Peoples’ Party (CPP) win

25 Dec 1998 All Khmer Rouge guerillas defect to the government

Aug 2001 Legislation passed to try former Khmer Rouge leaders for genocide

Feb 2002 First local elections are held in Cambodia since Sihanouk Era; CPP wins majority of seats
HOLIDAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan</td>
<td>New Year’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Mar</td>
<td>International Women’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–17 Apr</td>
<td>Cambodian New Year Celebration</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 May</td>
<td>Labor Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Jun</td>
<td>International Children’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Sep</td>
<td>Constitution Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Pchum Ben Celebration (actual date varies; celebrated to show reverence for ancestors)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Oct</td>
<td>Paris Peace Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Oct–1 Nov</td>
<td>King’s Birthday Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Nov</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Water Festival (actual date varies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Dec</td>
<td>UN Human Rights Day</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CAMBODIAN EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES
4530 16th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20011
Phone: (202) 726-7742, Fax: (202) 726-8381
Web site: http://www.embassy.org/cambodia/

MINISTRY OF TOURISM
No. 3 Monivong Blvd
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

BOOKS
Huffman, Franklin E. Intermediate Cambodian Reader, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1972.

FILM

INTERNET SITES
Angkor Tourism:
http://www.angkorwat.org/

Angkor Wat:
http://www.cambodian.com/angkorwat.asp

Asia for Visitors:
http://goseasia.about.com/library/weekly/aa111000a.htm

Asian Recipes:
http://asiarecipe.com/cambodia.html

Asia Tourism:
http://www.asiatour.com/cambodia/content1.htm
Cambodia:
http://members.aol.com/cambodia/

Cambodian-Angkor Wat:
http://www.cambodianbuddhist.org/watkhmer/index.shtml

Cambodian Buddhist Society:
http://www.cambodian-buddhist.org/

Cambodian Folktales, Food:
http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/SoutheastAsia/outreach/resources/CambodiaWebUnit/cambodia.html

Cambodian Music:
http://www.cambodianmusic.com

Children’s Book Press:
http://www.cbookpress.org/ob/judge.html

CIA World Factbook:
http://www.cia.gov/cia/Publications/Factbook/geos/cb.html

CRW Flags:
http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/kh.html

MUSIC

*Sraaem Dong Stung Sangkae:* CD#105. Angkor Wat Productions. n.d.
Traditions Visual 1: Rural Cambodian Wat
Traditions Visual 2: Monk in Battambang City, Cambodia
Traditions Visual 5: Floor Plan of a Typical Wat Structure

City Street

Outer Fence

Front Gate

Open area for gathering, parking, etc.

Tree

Temple Worship Area

Wat School, area for civic use

Monks' Quarters

Monks' Quarters

Monks' Quarters

Tree

Tree

Tree
Food Visual 1: Coconut Tree
Food Visual 4: Smelly Durian Fruit Forbidden in Some Hotels
Food Visual 5: Clay Pot and Wooden Rod
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1: Inside the Outer Gates of Angkor Wat
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2: Carving of an Aspara Statue Inside Angkor Wat
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 6: Isolated Temple of Banteay Chmaar, Vulnerable to Looting
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 7: Pediment on Eleventh Century Buddhist Temple
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 8: Endangered Wat Nokor in Kâmpóng Cham
FLAG OF CAMBODIA

The flag has three horizontal bands of blue, red (double width), and blue, with a white, three-towered temple representing Angkor Wat outlined in black in the center of the red band. The color blue represents royalty, red the nation, and white the religion.
Map of Cambodia

- Phnom Penh
- Krâchéh
- Khalông Chhnang
- Kâmpong Cham
- Sisôphon
- Stoeng Trêng
- Batdambang
- Siemréab
- Kâmpong Chhnang
- Tonlé Sap
- Krong Kong
- Saom Kâmpong
- Krong Kaôh
- Gulf of Thailand
- Mekong
- Laos
- Thailand
- Vietnam