

Comprehension and Discussion Activities for the Movie

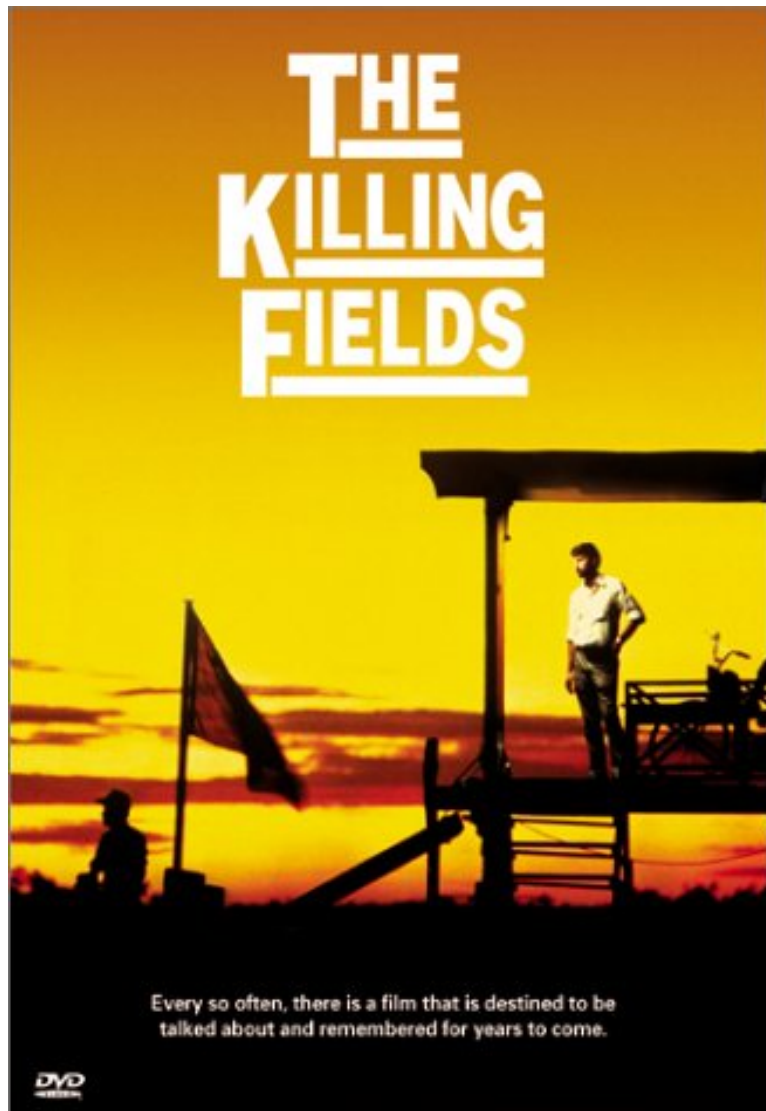
The Killing Fields

This module has been designed to accompany the film *The Killing Fields* (1984).

The Killing Fields is based on real characters and events that took place in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime during the 1970s. The film follows the story of *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg and his translator, Cambodian journalist Dith Pran.

The module consists of teacher's notes and two handouts that you can copy and give to your students. If you don't have access to a copier, you can write these on the board.

You might like to do many of these activities in students' first language. It is important that they understand the ideas behind the story, and this is easier in their own language.



1. Before You Watch

1.1: Useful Vocabulary

Here are some useful words and phrases to help students understand the movie:

*bribe evacuate execute mass grave invade re-education
civilian casualties reunited sanitise negotiate*

Write them on the board, and get students to look them up in their dictionaries. (A *mass grave* is a place where many people are buried at the same time.)

1.2: Background

Ask students what they know about Cambodia. Write their ideas on the board.

Give copies of the **Worksheet: Background Information** to your students, or explain this information to them.

2. While You Watch

2.1: Covering the Story 00.00 – 23.35

Give copies of **Worksheet 2: While You Watch** to your students, or write the questions for 2.1 on the board. Play the film to 23.35.

Answers to 2.1

*Exercise A: 1. journalist 2. translator, Cambodia 3. Vietnam
4. civil war, Khmer Rouge 5. reporting*

Exercise B: 6, 1, 5, 2, 4, 3

Exercise C:

- 1. He bribes the army to send them on a boat.*
- 2. Khmer Rouge soldiers.*
- 3. Because they were taking photographs.*
- 4. That the story of the bombings will change so that the American army looks better.*

Exercise D: 1. T 2. T 3. F 4. F 5. F

2.2: Cambodia in Crisis 23.35 – 58.35

Play the film to 58.35. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.2

Exercise A: 1. c 2. a 3. a 4. b 5. c

Exercise B:

- 1. The KR have black uniforms and are wearing red scarves. The KR have better weapons.*
- 2. Sydney needs Pran to help report the story. Pran's wife is afraid for him, and wants him to come with the family to safety.*

Exercise C: 1. tank 2. scared 3. guns, shout 4. executed 5. free, negotiations

2.3: Leaving Phnom Penh 58.35 – 1.22.10

Play the film to 1.22.10. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.3

Exercise A: 1. c 2. c 3. d

Exercise B:

- 1. The French Embassy*
- 2. Foreigners with passports*
- 3. An extra English passport*
- 4. A photograph of himself*
- 5. The photograph isn't good enough, so the authorities don't accept the passport*
- 6. He doesn't know if he will survive and see his family again*
- 7. Because he encouraged Pran to stay when his family left*

2.4: The Killing Fields 1.22.10 – 1.46.45

Play the film to 1.46.45. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.4

Exercise A: 3, 6, 2, 5, 1, 4

Exercise B:

- 1. tomato plants, eating lizards and drinking cow's blood*
- 2. they are executed*
- 3. to encourage people to believe in the Khmer Rouge plan of hard work, agriculture and obedience*
- 4. because he recognises Pran as the man who gave him the Mercedes car decoration back in 1973*

2.5: Journalism Award 1.46.45 – 1.54.13

Play the film to 1.54.13. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.5

Exercise A: 1. organisations, photograph 2. believe 3. award 4. blames 5. accuses

Exercise B: 1. F 2. T 3. T 4. F 5. T

2.6: Escape 1.54.13 – 2.13.00

Play the film to the end. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.6

Exercise A: 1. a 2. b 3. d 4. b

Exercise B: 4, 1, 3, 7, 5, 2, 6

Exercise C:

- 1. Phat hears Pran listening to an English language radio programme.*
- 2. Because he tries to stop the Khmer Rouge soldiers killing each other.*
- 3. In his office in New York.*
- 4. No. When Sydney asks for forgiveness, Pran says 'There is nothing to forgive.'*
- 5. 4 years. The Khmer Rouge take over in 1975, and he reaches the camp in 1979.*

3. After You Watch

3.1: Whose point of view?

In *The Killing Fields* we see the situation from the point of view of two people: Dith Pran and Sydney Schanberg. In groups, students choose another person from the film. Some suggestions are:

- Sarun, Pran's driver
- Al Rockoff
- The young soldier who said 'Mercedes number one'
- Ser Meoum, Pran's wife
- Phat

In groups, students decide what is their point of view.

- What were they doing before the Khmer Rouge took over?
- How did they feel when the Khmer Rouge took over?
- What did they do during the Khmer Rouge time?
- What did they do after the Khmer Rouge fell?

This information is not part of the film, so students will have to use their imaginations.

3.2: Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge

The Killing Fields ends in 1979. At the end of the film, we are told that there are still a lot of Cambodian refugees living in camps. This was in 1984. Do the students know what has happened in Cambodia since then? Get students' ideas about recent Cambodian history, and write them on the board.

Here is a very brief summary of Cambodian history since the Khmer Rouge. You can explain this to your students, or get them to research it themselves and write a short essay or paragraph about it.

The Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, following Khmer Rouge attacks on Vietnamese villages. For ten years Cambodia was ruled by a Vietnamese-backed government, while different groups continued fighting. These groups included the Khmer Rouge, the supporters of the King, and the Vietnamese-backed Cambodian government. In 1991 the United Nations got all sides to agree to a peace plan, disarm, and hold elections. 22,000 UN military and civilian staff went to Cambodia to supervise the elections, and bring the refugees home from the border (between 1979 and 1989 150,000 refugees resettled to the US). The elections were held in 1993. A tribunal (court) has been set up to bring senior Khmer Rouge leaders to trial on genocide charges. Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge, died in 1998.

Worksheet 1: Background Information

Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge

Cambodia is a country in Southeast Asia, bordered by Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. Cambodia has experienced different kinds of invasions and wars over its long history. From 1863 to 1953, Cambodia was a colony of France.

In 1953, Cambodia gained independence. Soon after this, civil war broke out in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese were Communist, supported by China and Russia. South Vietnam, on the other hand, was supported by anti-Communist governments like the United States and France. Cambodia decided to be neutral in this conflict.



In 1973 the US military secretly attacked Cambodia because the North Vietnamese military operated from the Vietnam-Cambodia border. The US also bombed suspected Khmer Rouge sites. As a result of these bombings, thousands of Cambodian civilians were killed. The Khmer Rouge, who had many supporters in the remote mountain regions, became more popular because of this. The Khmer Rouge fought to gain control of the Cambodian government. In 1975, Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge leader, became the country's ruler.

The Khmer Rouge believed in an extreme type of Communism. They made private property and money illegal. They also believed that people with a high level of education should be killed. All things from the past, such as knowledge and art, were to be erased. The Khmer Rouge government declared it 'Year Zero' when they took office. Under Pol Pot's leadership between one and two million Cambodians died, or 15-20% of Cambodia's population. They were either killed by the government, starved to death or died of diseases. The Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia for four years before Vietnamese forces invaded in 1979.

The Film

The Killing Fields is based on real characters and events that took place in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge time. It follows the story of *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg, and his Cambodian colleague and translator, Dith Pran.

The film, made in 1984, is based on Schanberg's book *The Death and Life of Dith Pran*.



Dith Pran and Sydney Schanberg
2008

Worksheet 2: While You Watch

Characters in the Film

Sydney Schanberg
American journalist



Al Rockoff
American photographer



Dith Pran
Cambodian journalist and translator



Jon Swain
British journalist

Phat: *Khmer Rouge leader in second village*

Phat's son

Sarun: *Dith Pran's driver*

Bob: *American Consul*

Major Reeves: *American Military Attaché*



Ser Moeum
Dith Pran's wife

2.1: Covering the Story 00.00 – 23.35

Exercise A: Complete the following sentences with the words from the box.

journalist translator Cambodia civil war Vietnam Khmer Rouge reporting

1. Sydney is a _____ for the New York Times.
2. Dith Pran is a _____ from _____.
3. There is a war in neighbouring _____ against the Americans.
4. The Cambodian government is fighting a _____ against the _____.
5. Sydney and Pran are _____ the story of the war in Cambodia.

Exercise B: Order these events.

1. Sydney arrives late at the airport.
2. Sydney and Pran meet amongst the chaos after the explosion.
3. Sydney and Pran bribe the police to take them to the bombed town by boat.
4. Major Reeves stops Pran and Sydney from going to the bombed city by helicopter.
5. Sydney and Rockoff are eating breakfast when there is an explosion.
6. Pran waits for Sydney at the airport but leaves.

Exercise C: Answer these questions.

1. How does Pran get Sydney to the bombed city?
2. Who are the prisoners in the army truck?
3. Why are Sydney and Pran detained?
4. What does Sydney mean by 'sanitising the story' when the other journalists arrive?

Exercise D: Are these statements true or false?

1. There are many wounded and dead people in the village.
2. While arrested, Sydney wants cigarettes and wants to go to the bathroom.
3. The guard allows Sydney to use the toilet.
4. Sydney and Pran went home on a helicopter.
5. The US military wants people to know the real situation about the bombed town.

2.2: Cambodia in Crisis 23.35 – 58.35

Exercise A: Choose the correct answer.

1. Where do the Khmer Rouge soldiers come from?
a. America b. Vietnam c. Cambodia d. Thailand
2. The American citizens and Pran's family are evacuated by
a. helicopter b. truck c. truck d. aeroplane
3. The Americans evacuate because they believe Cambodia is
a. too dangerous b. too hot c. too wet d. too political
4. Pran decides to stay with Sydney because
a. he doesn't like his family b. he wants to report the situation
c. he doesn't like the USA d. he wants to die in Cambodia
5. When the fighting is over, who controls Phnom Penh?
a. the people b. the Vietnamese
c. the Khmer Rouge d. the Americans

Exercise B: Compare and contrast.

1. What are the differences between the Cambodian soldiers and the Khmer Rouge soldiers that you can see in the fighting scene?
2. When Pran says that he will stay in Cambodia and not go to America, Sydney is happy and Pran's wife is sad? Why is this?

Exercise C: Complete the following sentences with words from the box.

executed tank scared negotiations guns shout free

1. The journalists leave the hospital and are almost run over by a _____.
2. The journalists are _____.
3. The soldier's point _____ and _____ at the journalists.
4. Some prisoners are _____.
5. Pran helps _____ the journalists through his _____.

2.3: Leaving Phnom Penh 58.35 – 1.22.10

Exercise A: Choose the correct answer.

1. Where are all the people going?
a. to Thailand
b. to Phnom Penh
c. to the countryside
d. to America
2. How do the people leave Phnom Penh?
a. by bus
b. by car
c. on foot
d. by plane
3. Which people are evacuating Phnom Penh?
a. medical workers
b. foreigners
c. the Khmer Rouge
d. city residents

Exercise B: Answer the questions.

1. Where do the journalists and Pran go for safety?
2. What people are allowed to stay in the Embassy?
3. What does John have that could help Pran?
4. What doesn't Pran have that Rockoff tries to make?
5. Why does Pran have to leave?
6. Why is Pran afraid?
7. Why are the other journalists angry with Sydney?

2.4: The Killing Fields 1.22.10 – 1.46.45

Exercise A: Put these events in order.

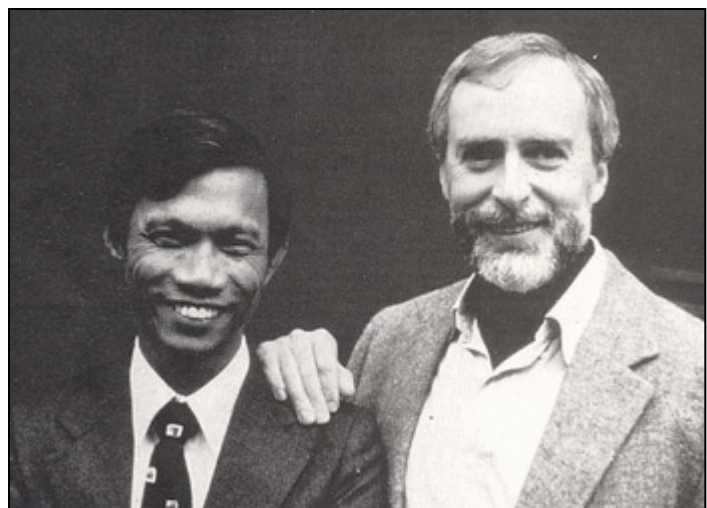
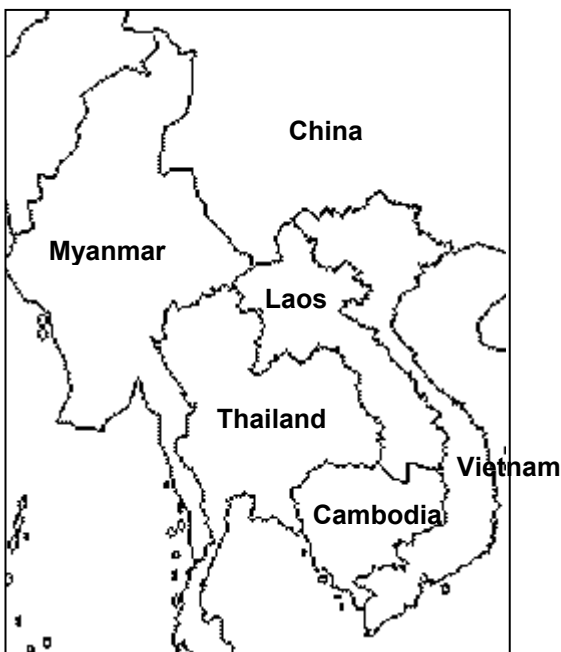
1. Pran escapes from the paddy field by hiding in the water.
2. Pran is caught drinking cow's blood, beaten, and tied to a tree.
3. The Khmer Rouge have a re-education class for the workers.
4. Pran falls into a mass grave and discovers the Killing Fields.
5. A soldier recognises him from before, and lets him go.
6. The educated people are taken away and executed.

Exercise B: Put these events in order.

1. Phat finds out Pran can speak English.
2. Pran reaches the Thai/Cambodian border refugee camps.
3. Phat asks Pran to look after his son.
4. Pran is found by some Khmer Rouge soldiers and taken to Phat's house.
5. Phat's son and another man step on a landmine and are killed.
6. Pran and Sydney are reunited.
7. Pran and the child escape with some other people.

Exercise C: Answer the questions.

1. How does Phat find out that Pran speaks English?
2. Why is Phat killed?
3. Where is Sydney when he receives the good news?
4. When they meet, is Pran angry with Sydney?
5. How long does Pran survive under the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia?



Plot Summary

In 1973 Dith Pran, a Cambodian journalist, and Sydney Schanberg, an American journalist, find out that an American plane has bombed a Cambodian town by mistake. They go to the town and find out that hundreds of people have been killed. Schanberg and Pran are arrested when they try to photograph the execution of two Khmer Rouge soldiers by Cambodian army officers. They are eventually released. Later Schanberg becomes very angry when the international media, influenced by the US Army, does not report the true story about the bombings.

In 1975 the international embassies are evacuated. The Khmer Rouge is about to take over the capital, Phnom Penh. It is very difficult for Cambodians to leave. Schanberg gets evacuation orders for Pran, his wife and their four children. However, Pran decides to stay and help Schanberg. Pran's family is evacuated with the international diplomats.

The Khmer Rouge move into the capital. Schanberg and Rockoff, a photojournalist, are arrested by the Khmer Rouge. They are taken to a place where prisoners are being held and executed. Pran negotiates with the Khmer Rouge leader to spare the lives of his friends. They go to the French Embassy. The Khmer Rouge demands that all Cambodian citizens leave the embassy. Rockoff and Schanberg are afraid that Pran will be imprisoned or executed. They try to make Pran a fake British passport, but the photograph is not good enough, so Pran is turned over to the Khmer Rouge.

Schanberg returns to the US, and tries to locate Pran. He stays in close contact with Pran's family in San Francisco.

In Cambodia, Pran has been forced to become a labourer under the new regime. The Khmer Rouge government declares that this year is 'Year Zero', and that Cambodia must return to the lifestyle of the past. Pran works in rice fields, and is watched by very young Khmer Rouge soldiers. He is also forced to attend 're-education' classes. Pran pretends to be very stupid, so the regime does not identify him as an educated person - the Khmer Rouge are killing all educated people. Pran escapes, and sees the 'Killing Fields', where the Khmer Rouge takes people to execute them.

Schanberg receives a journalism award for his coverage of the Cambodian conflict. At the acceptance dinner he tells the audience that half the award should belong to Pran. Rockoff accuses him of not doing enough to locate Pran and for using his friend to win the award. Rockoff says that the reason Pran remained in Cambodia was because Schanberg wanted him to stay to report the situation. Schanberg thinks about this. He worries that he put his own goals ahead of Pran's safety.

Pran collapses, and is found by some Khmer Rouge soldiers. He looks after the small son of Phat, a prison officer. The Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese soldiers have a battle in Pran's village. Pran discovers that Phat's son has American money and a map leading to safety. Phat is shot when he tries to stop the younger Khmer Rouge officers from killing several of his comrades. Pran, Phat's son and some other prisoners escape into the jungle. Phat's son and a prisoner are killed by a landmine. Eventually he reaches a Red Cross camp near the border with Thailand.

Schanberg calls Pran's family with the news that Pran is safe, and travels to the Red Cross camp. He asks Pran, "Do you forgive me?" Pran answers, with a smile, "Nothing to forgive, Sydney, nothing."