

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Decades After Cambodian Genocide, Khmer Rouge Leaders Face Trial

03/27/09

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june09/cambodia_03-27.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. Where is Cambodia?

2. What is the Khmer Rouge?

3. Why was the United States involved in that area of the world?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. What is the happening now with the Khmer Rouge?

The first of five Khmer Rouge leaders will appear before a tribunal next week for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.

2. What is Kaing Guek Eav accused of?

The first trial will begin next week for Kaing Guek Eav, former leader of the Khmer Rouge's largest torture center Tuol Sleng, where at least 14,000 people were killed. Four other senior Khmer Rouge officials are currently detained and under investigation.

3. Who did the Khmer Rouge claim to defend?

The Cambodian communist party Khmer Rouge rose to power in 1975 by positioning themselves as defenders of the peasant class and in opposition to American involvement in Southeast Asia and Vietnamese occupation of parts of Cambodia.

Under the leadership of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge extolled the virtues of the rural farming classes while objecting to any group that they associated with capitalist class ideology – including people from the cities, teachers, and working professionals.

4. Why did the Khmer Rouge forcibly move people to the countryside?

Dreaming of a utopian farming society, the Khmer Rouge moved much of Cambodia's urban population to the countryside to work in agricultural labor camps where many people died from exhaustion, starvation and sickness.

5. What were the 'Killing Fields'? What is Choeung Ek?

"Killing Fields" are sites where mass executions took place.

One of the most infamous sites is Choeung Ek, where thousands of people were executed with pickaxes and buried together in large graves. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, almost 9,000 bodies were discovered at Choeung Ek.

6. What toppled the Khmer Rouge?

In an invasion from the Vietnamese in 1979, the Khmer Rouge lost power but remained in tact as a fringe group until 1996, when Pol Pot formally disbanded the group.

7. Why has this court case taken so long to get started?

Economic troubles and political wrangling delayed the arrangement of a court to try the perpetrators of the Cambodian genocide. The Cambodian government finally approved a mix of local and United Nations judges to oversee the tribunal in 2006, three decades after the Khmer Rouge's crimes took place.

8. Why has this been criticized by human rights groups?

Human rights groups have criticized the length of time it has taken to prosecute the accused, worrying that the Khmer Rouge officials will die before they can be brought to justice. The Khmer Rouge's most notorious leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Most of the Khmer Rouge leaders were middle-class graduates of foreign universities yet they hoped to turn Cambodia into a classless society. What do you make of that?

2. There are fewer communist governments around the world today than there were in the 1960s and 1970s? What are the factors that make this true?

3. The members of the Khmer Rouge are now very old. Do you think that will affect their treatment in the courts? Does it change your opinion of them?

4. Other courts have been set up around the world - in Rwanda, in Germany, in Guatemala etc. Do some research on these tribunals and compare and contrast why they did or did not work. What do each of these courts say about justice in that country?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.