

Photographer for the Khmer Rouge

Level: Intermediate & Up

Objective: Reading for specific info
To use past modals of deduction & 3rd conditional structures
Review of passives
To pose an ethical dilemma and generate discussion

Procedure: For this lesson there will need to be some background given on the Khmer Rouge. You can turn it into a listening or have students research it before or during the lesson. A basic background is given below.

Explain to the class about the Khmer Rouge and how they forced the entire population of Phnom Penh to leave the city and begin working in the fields. Explain that they eradicated money and killed anyone who was educated, spoke more than one language, worked for the old Lon Nol Regime, or wore glasses. Explain that the society was divided into the old people and the new people, that the regime was incredibly suspicious of the new people, that starvation was a constant threat, and that the new people worked from sunrise to sundown constantly while being guarded by soldiers under threat of death.

The attached pictures can be used to help draw the students into the lesson or prompt questions.

Now tell the students that they will read an article about a photographer who worked in the most infamous prison during the time where over 14,000 people were tortured and killed. His job was to photograph all new prisoners as they came in. Have the class discuss the answers to these questions:

- 1) Why did he work there?
- 2) How did he feel?
- 3) What were job conditions like?

A speaker should be chosen and the groups ideas should be presented to the class.

Another option is have them paint a picture of what life must/might have been like for the new people. They should describe people's family, work life, feelings, and worries. The purpose for either activity is to use past modals of deduction and other similar structures to explain a situation that they did not experience directly.

After the groups present their ideas to the class have them read the article and answer the questions. As a class discuss if their ideas were true or false.

Alternative 1 - Now tell the students that they will have to give a presentation. They must

imagine that they had been in Nhem's place. If they had been in the same situation, what would they have done. Factors to consider are survival, threat/protection of your family, personal ethics, requirements of the job, possible actions (i.e. escape, live and suffer, be happy you have a job, are safe, and not in the fields, etc.). Be sure to remind the students that the majority of the speech should be in the 3rd conditional.

Alternative 2 - Hold a debate on whether or not the photographers actions were justifiable. There will be a lot of use of the 3rd conditional here. Students often have trouble with this, so prompting correct usage throughout can be helpful.

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Oct. 25 — He had a job to do, and he did it supremely well, under threat of death, within earshot of screams of torture: methodically photographing Khmer Rouge prisoners and producing a haunting collection of mug shots that has become the visual symbol of Cambodia's mass killings.

"I'm just a photographer; I don't know anything," he said he told the newly arrived prisoners as he removed their blindfolds and adjusted the angles of their heads. But he knew, as they did not, that every one of them would be killed.

"I had my job, and I had to take care of my job," he said in a recent interview. "Each of us had our own responsibilities. I wasn't allowed to speak with prisoners."

That was three decades ago, when the photographer, Nhem En, now 47, was on the staff of Tuol Sleng prison, the most notorious torture house of the Khmer Rouge regime, which caused the deaths of 1.7 million people from 1975 to 1979.

This week he was called to be a witness at a coming trial of Khmer Rouge leaders, including his commandant at the prison, Kaing Geuk Eav, known as Duch, who has been arrested and charged with crimes against humanity.

The trial is still months away, but prosecutors are interviewing witnesses, reviewing tens of thousands of pages of documents and making arrests.

As a lower-ranking cadre at the time, Mr. Nhem En is not in jeopardy of arrest. But he is in a position to offer some of the most personal testimony at the trial about the man he worked under for three years.

In the interview, Mr. Nhem En spoke with pride of living up to the exacting standards of a boss who was a master of negative reinforcement.

"It was really hard, my job," he said. "I had to clean, develop and dry the pictures on my own and take them to Duch by my own hand. I couldn't make a mistake. If one of the pictures was lost I would be killed."

But he said: "Duch liked me because I'm clean and I'm organized. He gave me a Rolex watch." Fleeing with other Khmer Rouge cadres when the government was ousted by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979, Mr. Nhem En said he traded that watch for 20 tins of milled rice. Since then he has adapted and prospered and is now a deputy mayor of the former Khmer Rouge stronghold Anlong Veng. He has switched from an opposition party to the party of Prime Minister Hun Sen, and today he wears a wristwatch that bears twin portraits of the prime minister and his wife, Bun Rany.

Mr. Nhem En's career in the Khmer Rouge began in 1970 at age 9 when he was recruited as a village boy to be a drummer in a touring revolutionary band. When he was 16, he said, he was

sent to China for a seven-month course in photography.

He became the chief of six photographers at Tuol Sleng, where at least 14,000 people were tortured to death or sent to killing fields. Only a half dozen inmates were known to have survived. He was a craftsman, and some of his portraits, carefully posed and lighted, have found their way into art galleries in the United States.

Hundreds of them hang in rows on the walls of Tuol Sleng, which is now a museum, their fixed stares tempting a visitor to search for meaning here on the cusp of death. In fact, they are staring at Mr. Nhem En.

The job was a daily grind, he said: up at 6:30 a.m., a quick communal meal of bread or rice and something sweet, and at his post by 7 a.m. to wait for prisoners to arrive. His telephone would ring to announce them: sometimes one, sometimes a group, sometimes truckloads of them, he said.

“They came in blindfolded, and I had to untie the cloth,” he said.

“I was alone in the room, so I am the one they saw. They would say, ‘Why was I brought here? What am I accused of? What did I do wrong?’”

But Mr. Nhem En ignored them.

“‘Look straight ahead. Don’t lean your head to the left or the right.’ That’s all I said,” he recalled. “I had to say that so the picture would turn out well. Then they were taken to the interrogation center. The duty of the photographer was just to take the picture.”

Aux. vocab. – a mug shot, to extract, a blindfold, to oust, an invasion, a trial, jeopardy, interrogation, caprice, communal, a portrait, to torture, methodically

Answer Key – Passives (13)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/26/world/asia/26iht-cambo.1.8068021.html>

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Questions:

1. What were the details of Nhem En's job?
2. What are Nhem's feeling about his old position?
3. Why do you think he did the job?



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DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA'S NATIONAL ANTHEM
17 APRIL, THE GREAT VICTORY

**Glittering red blood which blankets the towns and
countryside of the Kampuchean motherland!
Blood of our splendid workers and peasants!**

**Blood of our revolutionary youth!
Blood that was transmuted into fury, anger and vigorous struggle!
On 17 April, under the revolutionary flag!
Blood that liberated us from slavery!**

**Long life 17 April, the great victory!
More wonderful and much more meaningful than the Angkar era!
We unite together to build up Kampuchea and a glorious
society, democratic, egalitarian, and just;
Independent-master; absolutely determined to
defend the country, our glorious land;**

**Long life! Long life!
Long life new Kampuchea, democratic and gloriously prosperous;
Determine to raise up the revolutionary red flag to be higher;
Build up our country to achieve the glorious Great
Leap Forward!**

