

Learning with the Irrawaddy 9

To accompany December 2005 Issue of Irrawaddy Magazine

Teacher's Notes

Here is the ninth issue of 'Learning with the Irrawaddy', a monthly educational supplement to the Irrawaddy Magazine. It is designed for reading, English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools on the Burma border.

With each issue of Irrawaddy magazine, we select one article and design some learning activities for it. We recommend that you use these exercises with students who have an **Intermediate level of English**. You don't need to use all activities suggested here – choose those that are most appropriate for your students.

In this issue we have included:

- this teacher's guide
- some copies of Irrawaddy magazine
- a class set of photocopies of the article
- a class set of worksheets.

Selected article:

Faces of Burma 2005: General Than Shwe and Kyaing Kyaing, pages16-17

Activities to do Before Reading

Activity 1

What do you know?

What do you think you know?

What do you want to know?

- a) Tell students they are going to read an article about General Than Shwe. Copy the chart onto the board, and get a few students' ideas.
- *Things they know* are facts that they are quite sure about, (e.g. Than Shwe is a general)
 - *Things they think they know* are things they are unsure of.
 - *Things they want to know* are things they are interested in finding out.

General Than Shwe		
Things I know	Things I think I know	Things I want to know

- b) In groups or individually, students fill in the chart:
There are no right or wrong answers in this activity.

Activity 2

Prediction: Describing People

- a) This article describes two people: General Than Shwe, and his wife Kyaing Kyaing. What sort of information do students think will be in the article?
Read through the types of information below. Students choose which of these topics are likely to be in the article.

1. Their jobs
2. Their favourite colours
3. Their parents' names
4. The economic situation in Burma
5. Their opinions of other political people
6. The writer's opinion of them
7. Burma's relations with Thailand
8. Their past history
9. Their opinions about modern music

- b) What other information do they think might be there?
Write students' ideas on the board.

After students have done activity 2, give them the article.
Students read the article, and check what information is there.

Answers to a)

1. yes 2. no 3. no 4. no 5. yes (they both dislike Daw Aung San Suu Kyi)
6. no 7. no 8. yes 9. no

Ask students if any of the ideas from **b)** were in the article. Check this on the board.

Activities to do During Reading

Activity 3

Paragraph Summaries

- a) Students read the first six paragraphs of the article, and decide which paragraph matches each summary below. There is one paragraph not summarized.

1. *Two women are influential over General Than Shwe.*
2. *Than Shwe is very important in Burma.*
3. *Perhaps he wants to transfer his power to a high position in civilian government.*
4. *Some people think that General Than Shwe has mental problems.*
5. *Although he does not appear in public much, he still has a lot of political power.*

- b) Students decide which paragraph is not summarized, and write a summary for that paragraph. Ensure that the students discuss which tense the paragraph should be written in first. (It should be written in the present tenses.)

Answers:

- a) 1. paragraph 6 2. paragraph 1 3. paragraph 3 4. paragraph 2
5. paragraph 5

- b) **Example answer:**

paragraph 4: Than Shwe is staying in Rangoon, but he wants helicopters to take him to the new capital if necessary.

Activity 4

Key vocabulary

- a) Students scan the text and underline any words they don't know.
- b) In groups, encourage them to identify the meanings of these words in their dictionaries.
- c) Here are some words from the text. Students use them to fill the gaps in the sentences.

principally	abandon	reluctance	persistent	
acumen	icon	hearsay	consistent	sentimental
mob	extravagant	extortion	crony	honorary

1. He is very _____ - although he always fails his exams, he keeps trying again and again and again.

2. She gave the job to her _____, although he didn't have the right qualifications..
3. The villagers had to _____ their village, because it was too dangerous.
4. We don't know if the story is true, it is only _____.
5. The large _____ attacked the police.
6. Her _____ to continue her education was because she wanted to help her family.
7. The gang used _____ to get the money – they said if we don't pay, they will beat us.
8. Mahatma Ghandi of India is an _____ for the peace movement.
9. Aung San Suu Kyi has many _____ degrees – universities give her degrees because they admire her, even though she has not studied the courses.
10. My mother has a lot of business _____. She sells a lot of things.
11. I like watching _____ movies, although they sometimes make me cry.
12. The house is very _____, it has gold mirrors and diamond taps.
13. I want to learn English _____ to help me with my work.
14. His job is _____ with his beliefs – he always wanted to help people, so he has become a nurse.

Answers:

1. *persistent* 2. *crony* 3. *abandon* 4. *hearsay* 5. *mob* 6. *reluctance*
 7. *extortion* 8. *icon* 9. *honorary* 10. *acumen* 11. *sentimental*
 12. *extravagant* 13. *principally* 14. *consistent*

Activity 5

Idioms and phrasal verbs

Here are some excerpts from the article. Students locate the phrase in the text, and choose the best synonym or definition for the underlined words.

1. ...*believe that the junta chief has grown increasingly out of touch with affairs of state...* (paragraph 2)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. unreasonable about c. afraid of 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. unaware of d. interested in
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2. ...*but Than Shwe is staying put in Rangoon* (paragraph 4)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. remaining c. sleeping 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. running away from d. hiding
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3. *She clearly displays signs of delusions of grandeur...* (paragraph 12)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. thinking she is very important c. liking expensive jewelry 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. wanting expensive things d. feeling unhappy
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4. *Government and military appointments also have to meet with her approval...* (paragraph 15)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. give her presents c. visit her 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. say nice things to her d. be liked by her
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5. He reportedly stepped in when his wife asked army officials to deliver her a huge quantity of luxury goods... (paragraph 20)
- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. got angry | b. complained |
| c. intervened | d. came home |

Answers:

1. b 2. a 3. a 4. d 5. c

Activity 6

Kyaing Kyaing's Influence

In the article there are several examples of ways that Kyaing Kyaing has influenced her husband. Students list examples of this influence.

1. *She has blocked her husband's desire to retire from public life* (paragraph 7)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Answers: Students can choose from any of these examples.

- *She asked Than Shwe who would take care of his grandson's future.*
- *She may have been involved in the attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003.*
- *She oversees preparation of her husband's meals.*
- *Nobody meets her husband unless she agrees.*
- *She has to agree to government and military appointments.*

Activity 7

Comprehension Questions

1. What do people in Burma think of General Than Shwe?
2. Do people see Than Shwe very often?
3. Does Than Shwe want Russia and China to intervene in Burma?
4. What happens when Than Shwe gets information about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi?
5. How accurate is the information about Kyaing Kyaing?
6. How did Kyaing Kyaing persuade Than Shwe to stay in office?
7. When did Than Shwe finally stop Kyaing Kyaing's behaviour?
8. What does Kyaing Kyaing do now?

There are no exact answers to many of these questions.

Example answers:

1. *They think he is mentally unstable and doesn't know what's happening in Burma.*
2. *No, he rarely makes public appearances.*
3. *No, he doesn't want interference from any nation.*
4. *He gets very angry (the mention of her name sends him into paroxysms of rage).*
5. *Not very accurate – mostly based on rumour or hearsay.*
6. *By persuading him he had to take care of his grandson's future.*

7. *When she tried to get the army to deliver her confiscated goods.*
8. *She's honorary patron of the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation.*

Activity 8

Identify the main point

Students identify the main point of this article.

1. Burma has so many problems because Than Shwe is a bad leader.
2. Than Shwe and Kyaing Kyaing have a very strong marriage, which helps them to rule Burma together.
3. Kyaing Khaing is very corrupt, and uses her position of power to get many expensive things.
4. Kyaing Kyaing is a very influential person in Burma, because her husband listens to her ideas and opinions.

Answer: 4

Activity 9

Making claims

- a) Read the quotes, and encourage students to identify the difference between them. Explain the quotes and the following explanation, if necessary.

'The junta chief has grown increasingly out of touch with affairs of state, mentally unstable and extremely paranoid.'

'Many people in Burma believe that the junta chief has grown increasingly out of touch with affairs of state, mentally unstable and extremely paranoid.'

The first quote states Than Shwe's state of mind (how he thinks) as a *fact*. The second quote says that some people think that this is true.

In the second quote, the writer thinks this might be true, but does not know exactly, and can't prove it. Therefore he or she can claim that other people think this – making claims like this conveys the same ideas. However, the writer cannot be proved wrong. This is a way the writer can say something *indirectly*.

- b) Throughout the article, the writer says other things indirectly. Find these claims in the article. How does the writer express them?

1. *Than Shwe was responsible for the government moving to Pyinmana.*
2. *Than Shwe told UN officials that he doesn't want interference from the UN.*
3. *Kyaing Khaing's influence is very strong.*
4. *Kyaing Khaing's influence stopped her husband from retiring.*
5. *Kyaing Khaing's first husband died in action.*
6. *Kyaing Kyaing, like her husband Than Shwe, is very superstitious.*
7. *Kyaing Kyaing hates Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.*
8. *Kyaing Khaing's spending habits are worrying to her husband.*
9. *Than Shwe intervened when his wife tried to persuade the army to deliver confiscated goods to her.*
10. *Kyaing Kyaing has obeyed her husband, and retired from public life.*

Get students to read through the article, and copy the sentences that make these claims.

- c) Which word or phrase in the article sentence means that the sentences above cannot be quoted as fact?

Get students to underline these words or phrases.

Answers:

1. *It is also believed that he was principally responsible for the bizarre decision to relocate key government ministries to Pyinmana.* (paragraph 2)
2. *He is reported this year to have told high-ranking UN officials that he wants no interference from the UN or any nation.* (paragraph 5)
3. *Her influence is apparently so strong ...* (paragraph 7)
4. *...that she is said to have blocked her husband's wish to retire from public life.* (paragraph 7)
5. *He is reported to have died in action.* (paragraph 7)
6. *Kyaing Kyaing is said to share her husband's superstitious ways.* (paragraph 12)
7. *She is said to harbour a strong hatred for National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.* (paragraph 13)
8. *Kyaing Kyaing's cupidity – partly assuaged by shopping jaunts to Singapore with her daughter – appears finally to have alarmed her husband.* (paragraph 20)
9. *...alarm bells reportedly rang at the top and Than Shwe intervened and countermanded the situation.* (paragraph 21)
10. *Kyaing Kyaing seems to have taken her husband's rare display of authority to heart.* (paragraph 22)

Activities to do After Reading

Activity 10 Describe Than Shwe and Kyaing Kyaing

Students make two lists of adjectives that you can use to describe Than Shwe and Kyaing Kyaing.

In pairs, they select eight adjectives for Than Shwe and eight for Kyaing Kyaing.

Put students in groups of five or six to decide on group lists of eight adjectives for Than Shwe and eight for Kyaing Kyaing.

Compare adjectives as a class. Does each group have the same ones? Discuss why some groups think some adjectives are more appropriate than others.

Activity 11 Discussion

Discuss these ideas with the class:

- 1) In paragraph 3, it says that perhaps General Than Shwe would exchange power in a military government for power in a civilian government. This means he is happy to end Burma's military rule, as long as he is in charge.

What is your opinion of this idea? Do you think it would be better than now, worse than now, or no real change?

2) Paragraph 7 compares Kyaing Kyaing to Lady Macbeth, a character from a play named 'Macbeth', written by Shakespeare..

Lady Macbeth wanted power. She persuaded her husband to murder people so he could become king. After he became king, she controlled him, telling him what to do.

How much do you think Kyaing Kyaing controls Than Shwe?

Do you know any other examples of women in history like this?