

Learning with the Irrawaddy 14

To accompany October 2006 Issue of Irrawaddy Magazine

Teacher's Notes

Here's the fourteenth 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: *Freedom Blues*, page 12-13

Activities to do Before Reading

Activity 1

What does 'freedom' mean to you?

Write the word *freedom* on the board and ask the students what it means to them.

Guide the discussion by asking these questions:

- *Do you and your friends have freedom? If not, why not?*
- *If you had complete freedom what would you do?*
- *In which countries are people free to do what they want?*

Activity 2

Political prisoners

Explain to the students that they are going to read an article about political prisoners in Burma. Ask them:

- What is a political prisoner?
- Can you name any political prisoners in Burma?
- What about former political prisoners around the world?

Some political prisoners in Burma are *Aung San Suu Kyi, Min Ko Naing, U Win Tin* and *Ko Ko Gyi*.

Around the world answers (historical and modern) could include *Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Emmeline Pankhurst* and the *Suffragettes* (an international movement of women demonstrating for the right to vote).

Activity 3

Title

- Ask students to identify the title: *Freedom Blues*
and the subtitle: *Former political prisoners Attempt to adjust to life on the outside*
- Students guess what the article is about. Get them to infer the meaning of 'blues'.
Blues means bad feelings, unhappiness, depression

Activities to do During Reading

Activity 4

Match the vocabulary

- a) Students go through the article and underline the words they don't know.
- b) Students use the article to match these words with their definitions.
Don't let them use a dictionary.

Answers:

Pressure - *something in your life that makes you worry*

temper - *to make something less difficult*

pile up - *increase in number*

unique - *one of a kind*

initiate - *to start*

vouch - *to trust someone because of your experience of them*

adapt - *to change your behaviour*

subtle - *difficult to understand, not clear*

selfless - *care about other people more than yourself*

bearable - *a situation that is difficult but can be accepted*

overlook - *not realize that something is important*

strain - *worry caused by problems in your life*

solace - *something that makes sadness disappear*

depression - *an illness related to feeling sad*

rehabilitate - *to help someone live a normal life again*

Activity 5

Main Point

- a) Students read the article, and decide on the main point. After they decide on this, put them in pairs, and get each pair to agree on the main point. Then put pairs into groups of four, and get them to agree to the main point. After this, discuss this as a class.

If they are struggling, point out that the word 'pressure' appears in paragraphs 1,5,9,12,14. Tell them to read these paragraphs and think some more.

Answer:

Political prisoners face many pressures and problems when they are released from prison.

b) In pairs, students to re-read the article in pairs and make a list of all the difficulties Zaw Min, Bo Kyi and the other prisoners faced when they were released from prison.

Possible answers could include: *keeping silent and out of trouble, changes of colour and sound, family members, relationship breakdowns, employment, illness, alcohol, studying. There are many others, too.*

c) In pairs, students to make a list of all the pressures they face in their daily lives. Make a class list on the board. Are they similar to the prisoners?

Stress to the students that they can only speak English during this activity.

Activity 6

Crossword

D	E	P	R	E	S	S	I	O	N			A	A	P	P
I			E						O					R	
S			L						N					E	
B	L	U	E						S	T	A	R	T	S	
E			A	F	T	E	R		E					S	
L			S		B				N					U	
I			E					U	S					R	
E				A				P	E	S	C	A	P	E	
F	A	M	I	L	Y			R						O	
				C				I						L	S
				O				S	S					I	H
	A	U	T	H	O	R	I	T	I	E	S			T	O
		R		O				N	L					I	R
		G		L				G	E					C	T
	H	E							N			J	A	I	L
				A	R	R	E	S	T	E	D		L		Y

Activity 7**True or false?**

Students use the article to decide whether the following statements are true or false. They have to explain their choice in their own words using evidence from the text.

Answers

- 1) *F – Paragraph 2 says ‘the only problems we had to deal with there were the authorities and lack of freedom’*
- 2) *T - Paragraph 3 says ‘Stop the nonsense, stop what you’ve been doing.’*
- 3) *F - Paragraph 4 says ‘His anger was tempered by the recognition that his family and friends didn’t want him in jail again because of his political views.’*
- 4) *F - Paragraph 8 says ‘White and Khaki are the colours of prison life.’*
- 5) *T – Paragraph 9 says ‘the strains of maintaining contact with their jailed relatives ...are not to be overlooked.’*
- 6) *F – Paragraph 12 says ‘ But family pressure is making me turn away from politics.’*
- 7) *T – Paragraph 13 says ‘handicapped by the reluctance of the employers to attract the attention of the authorities by employing a former political prisoner.’*
- 8) *F – Paragraph 18 says ‘The previous authoritarian government exercised the same policy.’*
- 9) *T – Paragraph 19 says ‘ That’s one of the factors that makes prisoners depressed because they can’t continue their intended career.’*

Activity 8**Say it again**

a) This exercise focuses on the quotes that the article is structured around. Explain to the students that there are many ways to say the same thing and that they are going to look at some quotes from the article and rewrite them in their own words. After they have finished rewriting them, ask them to read some of their new quotes to the class. If they look like they are struggling, use some simple examples to get them going, i.e. for no. 1:

“The pressures of life outside jail are greater than those within”

You could say:

- *Life is more difficult outside jail than inside jail.*
- *There are more problems on the outside of jail.*
- *Inside jail, there are less pressures than when you get out. Etc.*

Don’t worry a lot about correct grammar for these sentences – focus on the meaning.

Example answers:

2. *Although prison is bad, the only problems we faced there were that we were not free, and the prison authorities.*
3. *You must not continue to do the same foolish things you did before.*
4. *My family helped me and gave me everything I needed while I was in jail for eight years.*
5. *My family are persuading me to give up politics.*
6. *There are many reasons why political prisoners are unhappy, this is one of these reasons.*
7. *We should help political prisoners, then they can be useful to the country.*

Activities to do After Reading

Activity 9

Roleplay

Ask the students to imagine they are political prisoners in Burma. Tell them that everyday they are allowed 10 minutes to meet with the other prisoners. Split them into small groups and ask them what they would talk about.

If they need some encouragement then you could suggest the following:

- *Why they were arrested*
- *Conditions inside the prison*
- *Advice for new prisoners*
- *Family/girlfriend/boyfriend etc.*
- *What they would do if they were released*
- *Planning an escape*

Once they have a list of topics to discuss, split the class into small groups and ask them to prepare a roleplay of their imaginary conversation. Give them time to prepare then ask some of them to present their roleplay to the class.

Activity 10

Writing

Tell the students that they are going to be released next month and will have their freedom back after 7 years in prison. They have to write a letter to their family telling them the good news. Ask them to think about what they would do first, what they would want to eat, where they would want to go etc. Also, ask them to think about what they would be afraid of if they were about to be released from prison.