

Learning with the Irrawaddy, No. 32

To accompany the **November 2008** issue of the Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *Capital Blues*, pages 10-19.

TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 32nd issue of 'Learning with the Irrawaddy', a monthly educational supplement to the Irrawaddy Magazine. It is designed for English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools and adult education classes on the Thailand-Burma border (with high pre-intermediate to intermediate level English). With each issue of the Irrawaddy magazine, we select one article and design some learning activities for it.

NOTE: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO ALL OF THE ACTIVITIES LISTED IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE. YOU CAN CHOOSE WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE MOST APPROPRIATE DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE, AND THE LEVEL OF ABILITY OF YOUR STUDENTS.

In this issue we have included:

- ★ Teacher's notes including the article
- ★ A class set of student's worksheets including the article.
- ★ Some copies of the Irrawaddy magazine

REMEMBER: It is NOT important that students understand EVERY word of the article. The important thing is that they learn to understand the MEANING of the article, and learn to deduce the meanings of words from the CONTEXT (and using a dictionary where necessary).

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1

Discussion

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a few minutes to think about what the word 'blues' might mean. Then elicit ideas from different pairs.

Answer:

In English, the word 'blues' means unhappiness, depression, and feeling low. The expressions in English 'I'm feeling blue' or 'I've got the blues' mean 'I'm feeling unhappy'. So 'Capital Blues' means unhappiness in the capital city.

Activity 2

Discussion

In their pairs, ask students to think about these questions for five minutes. Then elicit some ideas from different pairs and write keywords from what they say on the board.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 3 Match the vocabulary

- a) Give students 10-15 minutes to read through the article and underline words they do not understand.
- b) Give students 10 minutes to read the article again and try to match the word and its meaning by looking at the context. Then ask them to compare their answers in pairs. Finally, elicit an answer from each pair in turn, and check agreement with the rest of the class.

Answers:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. imposing (adj.) | e. grand, impressive |
| 2. backwater (n.) | i. an isolated, undeveloped place |
| 3. eerily (adv.) | b. strangely, mysteriously |
| 4. curfew (n.) | h. when nobody is allowed into the streets |
| 5. entice (v.) | j. to attract |
| 6. to be overheard (v.) | o. when someone hears what you are saying |
| 7. wary (adj.) | a. careful, concerned about danger |
| 8. prohibit (v.) | l. to forbid, make illegal |
| 9. makeshift (adj.) | k. temporary and quickly done |
| 10. scarce (adj.) | n. not enough, rare |
| 11. interrupt (v.) | f. stop, break |
| 12. decree (n.) | g. order, command |
| 13. radical (adj.) | c. extreme |
| 14. commandeer (v.) | m. to take over by force |
| 15. contemplate (v.) | d. think about, consider |

Finally, divide the class into pairs. Ask each pair to identify three extra words in the article which they don't understand. Can they guess the meaning of these words from the context? Give them 5 minutes to do this. Then elicit one word from each pair in turn, and their meaning, and check agreement with the rest of the class. If they are incorrect, give them the correct answer, or ask them to look it up in a dictionary in the class.

Here are some other words and phrases, and their meanings, which students might not know:

Para 2	crisscross (v.)	to pass back and forth across
Para 2	undulating (adj.)	wavy, hilly
Para 3	spectacular (adj.)	amazing
Para 3	illuminate (v.)	light up

Para 3	power-starved (adj.)	lacking electricity
Para 5	transition (n.)	change
Para 6	reportedly (adv.)	apparently, according to reports
Para 6	crack a joke (v.)	make a joke
Para 7	monitor (v.)	watch, survey
Para 12	equivalent (adj.)	having the same value
Para 13	suspend (v.)	stop (usually temporarily)
Para 14	free-spending (adj.)	spending a lot of money
Para 15	struggle to keep above water	struggle to survive
Para 17	concealed (adj.)	hidden
Para 18	barbecue (n.)	cooking grill
Para 19	reopen (v.)	open again
Para 24	compensation	money received if you have been unfairly treated
Para 22	means	ways
Para 24	gaze	look for a long time
Para 25	twilight	moment between day and night
Para 26	afford	give (in this context – it means ‘to have enough money’ in Para 16)

Activity 4 Gap-fill

Fill the gaps with the appropriate words from exercise 3b.

1. My friend never listens to what I say. He always interrupts me when I am speaking.
2. We are not allowed to leave the house after 8pm. There is a curfew.
3. There are a lot of snakes near my house so I am wary when I walk outside.
4. The ancient temples in Bagan are very big and imposing.
5. Some of the students have very radical opinions. They don't want to compromise.
6. The factory near our village uses a lot of water, so now water is scarce.
7. Last year the government prohibited smoking in restaurants. Now people have to go outside if they want to smoke.
8. When the refugees arrived in the camp they were given makeshift accommodation until proper houses were ready.
9. Yesterday, pirates commandeered a ship in the Andaman Sea and stole its cargo.
10. The ghost floated eerily across the room and disappeared.

Activity 5 True or false

Decide whether the following statements are true or false by looking at the article. If they are false, correct the statement.

1. **People are allowed to walk on the streets of Naypyidaw at all times.**
False. There is a curfew at 11pm.
2. **Most Naypyidaw residents interviewed in the article are not happy living there.**
True.

3. **The army gave farmers enough compensation for their land to construct a new house.**
False. They received less than half the cost of constructing a new house.
4. **People can use the internet without worrying.**
False.
5. **The authorities frequently prohibit journalists from taking pictures of buildings.**
True.

Activity 6 Identify the problems

Put students into groups of 3-5. Give them 10-15 minutes to read the article together, and identify the problems faced by these different groups of people. Ask them to write these problems down in their **first** language in note form.

Write the four groups of people on the board in four columns. Then elicit one idea from different groups in turn about each different group, and check agreement with the rest of the class. Write correct answers in note form in first language in the correct column for that group. Here are some suggestions for answers:

1. Labourers / construction workers

Work under severe conditions. Live in bad housing. Have poor food and water. Get paid very little. Now many don't have work because construction companies have moved to Rangoon and the Delta. Often have to take out loans to survive.

2. Ethnic Chinese

The government discriminates against them. They close down Chinese businesses, and the owners have to bribe the authorities to reopen them. They are afraid they will be forced to leave Naypyidaw.

3. Students

Undergraduates must leave Naypyidaw in the second year and follow practical courses of study in the countryside. Students don't want to interrupt their studies. Think that the government wants to limit the number of students in Naypyidaw.

4. Shopkeepers

Not making enough money. Only senior government officials have money to spend. Most are struggling to survive. Many can't afford to pay the rent on their shops and are planning to leave Naypyidaw.

Activity 7 Comprehension

Give students about 10-15 minutes to complete the answers. When they have finished, put them into groups of 3-5 and ask them to compare answers. Do they agree? Finally, elicit one answer from one group in turn, and check agreement with the rest of the class. Write the correct answers on the board.

These are some suggested answers. The students may use slightly different vocabulary.

1. How was the building of Naypyidaw financed?

It was financed by income raised by exports of such resources as gems, teak, natural gas and even opium.

2. Why is it dangerous to crack jokes about Naypyidaw?

It is dangerous because people have reportedly been arrested and jailed for it.

3. Who do business owner rely on to make a living?

They rely on well-paid, free-spending senior government officials and their families.

4. Why have many construction companies suspended their operations in Naypyidaw?

They have suspended their operations in Naypyidaw to move to cyclone-devastated areas of Rangoon Division and the Irrawaddy delta.

5. What happened to one visitor from Rangoon when he used the internet?

A government agent ordered him to hand over his memory stick to be checked for possible anti-government content.

C. Activities after reading

Activity 8 Discussion

'...it's a city without a heart' (Paragraph 1)

Put students into groups of 3-5. Give them 5 minutes to discuss the meaning of this phrase. The elicit ideas from groups for a discussion.

Activity 9 Discussion

Give students a few minutes to think about this. Then elicit ideas from individual students. If necessary prompt students with questions like:

Does Naypyidaw help the government to increase control over the people of Burma? Why?

What do you think Naypyidaw says about the relationship between the government and the people of Burma? Why?

Activity 10 Article of the future

This is a good homework exercise. Students can write this in English or their first language, depending on what you think is most appropriate. The length depends on which language students write in. 150-200 words is probably suitable if it is in English.

ARTICLE

Capital Blues

By MIN KHET MAUNG

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Naypyidaw, now three years old, was designed and built to serve as the seat of Burma's military government. For the ordinary Burmese who have to live and work there, it's a city without a heart

NAYPYIDAW — BROAD avenues lined by imposing public buildings crisscross an undulating landscape where bamboo forests and sugar cane plantations once stood. This is Naypyidaw, three years after the military regime moved its capital here from Rangoon.



Multimedia (View)

The contrast between then and now is spectacular—even more so at night, when street lamps and the lights that bathe the government offices illuminate the black sky that covers an otherwise power-starved country. The streets are eerily quiet, however, and an 11 p.m. curfew empties them altogether.

By day, at least half a dozen large markets draw crowds of shoppers, while off-duty military officers play rounds of golf on one of the courses that have sprung up around the new capital. Tourists are enticed to visit the new city by such attractions as a zoo.

Most residents aren't so impressed by the transition of this former central Burmese backwater into the nation's new capital, financed from the income raised by exports of such resources as gems, teak, natural gas and even opium.

"This place may be Naypyidaw for them [the ruling generals], but it's 'lock-up land' for us," said one local resident, looking around to make sure he wasn't overheard. People have reportedly been arrested and jailed for cracking jokes about the generals and their "Royal City"—the English meaning of Naypyidaw.

Most residents are wary about using the Internet for fear they're being monitored. Mobile phone service is unavailable in Naypyidaw for security reasons.

One visitor from Rangoon told me that while he was using the Internet a government agent ordered him to hand over his memory stick to be checked for possible anti-government content.

Naypyidaw-based journalists working for local publications complain of a lack of cooperation by the authorities, who frequently prohibit them from photographing government buildings.

Security officers are reportedly instructed to keep a close eye on the movements of visitors and

journalists.

Most residents I interviewed said their lives had not improved in the three years since the seat of government moved from Rangoon to Naypyidaw. 11

Laborers drawn from many parts of the country who are still engaged in building the new capital, work under severe conditions for the equivalent of US \$1.50-\$2 per day, housed in makeshift huts and existing on poor food and well water. 12

Most construction companies working on completing the public buildings of Naypyidaw have had to suspend operations there and move to the cyclone-devastated areas of Rangoon Division and the Irrawaddy delta. Construction workers receive no compensation for the days lost, and many of them have to take out loans at 20 percent interest in order to survive. 13

Money is scarce in Naypyidaw, where business owners have to rely on well-paid, free-spending senior government officials and their families to make a living. 14

As Naypyidaw grew to attain a population estimated to number 1 million, local business people hoped the expansion would bring prosperity. It didn't—and many who moved to Naypyidaw in the expectation of making a good living are now planning to leave. Most of those who chose to remain are struggling to keep above water. 15

"I'm now thinking of closing my shop because I can no longer afford the rent," said a jeweler at Naypyidawmyoma Market. 16

There's another reason why she is thinking of leaving Naypyidaw—she's Chinese and a victim of scarcely concealed official racial discrimination. 17

"The authorities have said Naypyidaw must be cleansed of the Chinese," said a Sino-Shan barbecue restaurant owner. 18

"My place was closed down twice," he said. "We had to bribe the authorities to let us reopen." As he talked, a group of military officials chatted, laughed and ate heartily at a nearby table. 19

Naypyidaw is no place for young people, either. Undergraduates at its Yesin University of Agriculture have been told that after their second year they must leave and follow practical courses of study in the countryside. 20

"We don't want to interrupt our studies," said one student. "We want to continue and complete our fourth year at university." 21

Many students see the government decree as a move to limit the number of politically radical young people living in Naypyidaw. 22

"The authorities are afraid of an uprising occurring one day if there are too many students on the 23

university campus,” said one student. “They know we hate them.”

Naypyidaw also has its homeless—hundreds of families left without a roof over their heads after their villages were commandeered by the army. They received compensation equivalent to between \$1,000 and \$2,000, less than half the cost of constructing a new house. Many farmers lost their means of making a living when the army ordered them to leave their land. 24

“The name Naypyidaw leaves a bitter taste in my mouth,” said one woman, contemplating her half-completed house. 25

Lower-ranking civil servants are as unhappy as most locals about life in Naypyidaw. “I miss my family, but I don’t want to bring them here,” said one woman civil servant, gazing sadly at a water fountain playing in the evening twilight. 26

“This place can’t afford my family any warmth as long as it’s the capital of the country’s rulers. I want my children to grow up in a capital of the people.” 27

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