

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 33

To accompany the **December 2008** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *Heroes of the Cyclone*

TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 33rd 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

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Discussion

Write 'Heroes of the Cyclone' on the board. Ask the class what they think the article is about. Which cyclone do they think the article is about? (**Answer:** Cyclone Nargis)

Ask them what the word 'hero' means.

Possible Answer: *Heroes are people who do great things to help others. The cyclone was a horrible natural disaster where many people needed help. The heroes of the cyclone tried to help the victims of this natural disaster.*

Ask them who they think are the heroes of the cyclone.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 2 Match the vocabulary

- a. Students go through the article and underline words they don't understand.
- b. Students match the words and definitions.

Answers:

1. b 2. g 3. a 4. c 5. k 6. i 7. j 8. l 9. d 10. f 11. h 12. e

Activity 3 Gap-fill

Students use some of the words from Activity 3 to fill the gaps.

Answers:

1. People should not have to suffer **harassment** by the police.
2. The supplies were delayed because the trucks got stuck in the mud **en route**.
3. Ban Ki-Moon's visit was **significant** because it helped to allow aid workers into Burma.
4. The government was accused of **negligence** because they did not help the people.
5. Many people are hungry because their food supplies are **inadequate**.
6. The government imprisoned the **dissident** because she argued against their policies.
7. Now that we have more money we can **expand** our school.
8. The dam was built to **divert** the water onto the rice fields.
9. The **operation** was completed successfully without any problems.
10. When he killed his goat, Kyaw Kyaw **distributed** pieces of meat to his family.

Activity 4 True or False?

Students determine if the answer is true or false based on the article. If the answer is false, have them explain what the correct answer is or why the question is false. Their explanations do not have to be the same as the ones below, but the meaning must be similar.

Answers:

1. False. Many volunteers from all walks of life helped the victims of the cyclone.
2. False. The Burmese government refused to allow foreign aid workers into Burma for several weeks.
3. True.
4. True
5. False. After Ban Ki-Moon's visit, Burma's highest authorities agreed to an expanded role for foreign aid workers.

Activity 5 Phrases in context

Students look at the context of the sentence and choose which they think is the most accurate meaning for the underlined phrase.

Answers:

1. *The volunteers came **from every walk of life**...* (Paragraph 2)
c. from many different backgrounds
2. *Their efforts **earned them no official recognition**...* (Paragraph 4)
b. were ignored by the government
3. *...aid workers gathered in neighbouring Thailand, waiting for **a green light** to enter Burma...* (Paragraph 8)
d. permission
4. *Finally, **under the auspices of** the Tripartite Core Group...* (Paragraph 11)
c. with the support and guidance of

Activity 6 People and organisations

Give students 15 minutes to select two or three names of people and organisation mentioned in the article and write some brief information about them.

Elicit one answer from different students in turn and check agreement with the rest of the class.

Answers:

People: *Ashin Nyanissara* – a monk who organized many relief supplies in many areas.
Zarganar – Burmese comedian who organized volunteers to distribute aid and was arrested.
Zaw Thet Htwe – assistant of Zarganar and was also arrested.
Ohn Kya – from the opposition, tried to help in the delta but was arrested.
Aye Kyu – assistant to Ohn, gave medical treatment and provided information to news organizations.

NGO's: *Médecins Sans Frontières* – has been in Burma since 1992.
Save the Children – the largest INGO in Burma.
Merlin – UK charity, new to Burma.
Free Funeral Services – suffered harassment for helping families bury their loved ones who were victims of the cyclone.

C. Activities after reading

For these activities, it is probably better if students are allowed to use their first language as well as English, or whichever language is most easily spoken and understood by all the students in the class.

Activity 7 Discussion

In this article we read about people and organizations that were stopped and sometimes imprisoned for trying to help. Why do you think the Burmese government did this?

Put students into pairs and give them to discuss this. Then elicit answers from different groups in turn and discuss with the rest of the class.

Here are some possible reasons. The students may have other ideas.

Answer: *The Burmese government was worried that:*

- 1) *the people of Burma would realise the seriousness of the problem and how little the government was able / willing to help*
- 2) *the foreign media would learn about lack of response of the Burmese government*
- 3) *other people, instead of the government, would be able to take credit for helping the cyclone victims*
- 4) *that controversial political figures like Zarganar and NLD representatives, would be able to gain support by helping cyclone victims*
- 5) *they would not be seen to be in control of the situation.*

Activity 8 Discussion

“The volunteers came from every walk of life, monks, business people, ordinary citizens, celebrities, intellectuals, dissidents and members of religious charities.” (Paragraph 2)

Put students into groups of 3-5 and give them 5 minutes to think about reasons why this was important for the relief effort. The elicit answers from different groups in turn and discuss with the whole of the class.

Activity 9 Roleplay

Divide the class into four groups of equal size (or as equal as possible). Give each group the following roles:

- Group 1:** Villagers whose villages have been destroyed by the cyclone
- Group 2:** Burmese citizens and foreign aid workers who want to help the cyclone victims
- Group 3:** Burmese government officials who do not want to allow Group 2 to visit the cyclone area
- Group 4:** The United Nations who want to try and persuade the Burmese government to change its mind

Present the following scenario to the class:

It is the two days after Cyclone Nargis. The Burmese government is refusing to allow Burmese citizens or foreign aid workers to reach the cyclone area to help the victims.

Together each group must discuss the following things among themselves for about 10-15 minutes:

- Group 1:** what their most immediate needs are
- Group 2:** why the government should allow them to visit the cyclone area
- Group 3:** strategies to prevent many people from visiting the cyclone area, and good reasons to defend these decisions.
- Group 4:** how to persuade the government to change its mind and allow Burmese citizens and aid workers to visit the cyclone area

Then create groups of four with one member of each group in it. Each member of the group must give a one-minute presentation of their position, and then the group can hold a free discussion. Is it possible to reach any kind of agreement?

At the end of the activity, ask each group of four people to summarise quickly to the class.

THE IRRAWADDY

Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

COVER STORY

Heroes of the Cyclone

DECEMBER, 2008 - VOLUME 16 NO.12

MANY Burmese individuals risked harassment, arrest and imprisonment by joining the operation to bring relief to the victims of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. Their involvement was a significant factor in helping to make up for the criminal negligence displayed by the regime in providing inadequate aid for the more than 2 million victims of the disaster. 1



Ashin Nyanissara (Illustration: Harn Lay/The Irrawaddy)

The volunteers came from every walk of life—monks, business people, ordinary citizens, celebrities, intellectuals, dissidents and members of religious charities. 2

One leading monk, **Ashin Nyanissara**, also known as Sitagu Sayadaw, organized relief supplies, including shelters and mobile clinics, for more than 1,300 monasteries and about 900 villages in six townships. 3

Burma's best-known comedian, **Zarganar**, assisted by **Zaw Thet Htwe**, set up a group of about 400 volunteers who traveled through the cyclone-devastated region, distributing aid. Their efforts earned them no official recognition—only arrest and imprisonment. Zarganar was sentenced to 59 years in prison, and Zaw Thet Htwe was given a 19-year sentence. 4

Ohn Kyaing of the opposition National League for Democracy was also arrested after traveling with a group of relief workers into the Irrawaddy delta. His assistant, **Aye Kyu**, gave medical treatment to victims and also provided information about the post-cyclone situation to Burmese news organizations in exile. 5

Among the charities who gave valuable help was the **Free Funeral Services Society**, which also suffered harassment from the authorities.

There was also an important international dimension to the relief effort.

For several weeks after Cyclone Nargis struck, hundreds of aid workers gathered in neighboring Thailand, waiting for a green light to enter Burma, while others made their way into the country on tourist visas, only to be turned back at military checkpoints en route to the disaster area.

Meanwhile, a handful of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) already present in the country diverted resources from established projects in a bid to provide much-needed assistance to survivors of the cyclone in the Irrawaddy delta.

It was only after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a high-profile visit to the junta's capital of Naypyidaw in late May that Burma's highest authorities agreed to an expanded role for foreign aid workers.



Top: Zarganar (left) and Zaw Thet Htwe
Below: Aid workers from MSF distribute rice.

delta, where 95 of its 550 community health workers were killed by Cyclone Nargis.



Buddhist monks played a crucial role in coordinating relief efforts and distributing aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. (Photo: AFP)

Finally, under the auspices of the Tripartite Core Group, consisting of representatives of the UN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Burmese regime, INGOs began to operate in the region on a larger scale.

A number of well-established INGOs continue to play a major role in the relief effort. **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)**, which has been in Burma since 1992, said it planned to remain in the delta until the end of the year, while **Save the Children**, the largest INGO in the country, said that its operations would be needed for years to come.

Some INGOs, such as UK-based medical charity **Merlin**, are relatively new to Burma. Merlin has been in the country since 2004, working mainly in the Irrawaddy