

# Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 34

To accompany the **January-February 2009** issue of the Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *The Battle's Not Over*, pages 10-17.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 34th 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

Have students work in pairs or groups to discuss this question. Then have each group share their ideas.

#### Activity 2

##### Discussion

In their pairs, ask students to think about these questions for five minutes. Then elicit some ideas from different pairs. Write their main points on the board.

#### Activity 3

##### Describe the Pictures

Students work in groups. They look at the pictures, and write one of two sentences about each one.

## B. Activities during reading

### **Activity 4** 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. to embrace (v.)     | e. to hug                 |
| 2. appalling (adj.)    | h. frightful, horrifying  |
| 3. atrocities (n.)     | d. horrible act           |
| 4. comrades (n.)       | b. friends, companions    |
| 5. hideous (adj.)      | 1. shocking, very ugly    |
| 6. tumultuous (adj.)   | a. disorderly, disturbing |
| 7. to muster (v.)      | f. to gather              |
| 8. to interrogate (v.) | j. to question            |
| 9. to spearhead (v.)   | g. to organize, lead      |
| 10. previously (adv.)  | c. before                 |

### **Activity 5** Gap-fill

Students fill the gaps with the appropriate words from exercise 3b.

1. When he returned home, he saw all his old childhood **comrades**.
2. Often in war, people commit horrible **atrocities**.
3. The young man **mustered** up all of his strength to speak in front of the crowd.
4. The earthquake did **appalling** damage to the town.
5. He **previously** thought he could never go to university, but now he has the opportunity.
6. Although he knew nothing, the police **interrogated** him violently.
7. The soldier returning home **embraced** his mother.
8. The burn left a **hideous** scar on his cheek. (**appalling** is OK too)

### **Activity 6** True or false

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

1. *False. Myo Myint did not agree with the atrocities the army committed and told other people about this.*
2. *True*
3. *True*
4. *False. Myo Myint's brother and sister are alive and in America.*
5. *True*

### **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? Elicit one answer from each group in turn, and check agreement with the rest of the class.

#### **Possible answers:**

1. *He came from a military family and respected people in uniform.*
2. *Myo Myint saw many horrible things in the frontline of battle including death and hideous wounds, atrocities, rape, and torture of civilians. These things made him feel guilty even though he did not do any of them.*
3. *While in battle, a shell exploded next to him in a minefield and he lost an arm and a leg.*
4. *He spoke at an ant-government protest in 1988 in front of a large crowd of protesters and soldiers.*
5. *He was interrogated, tortured, and beaten by the authorities.*
6. *He knew there would be no future in the refugee camp, and his brother and sister already live in the USA.*

### **C. Activities after reading**

#### **Activity 8** Check your predictions

Students work in the same groups they were in for Activity 3. They read over their descriptions of each picture, and decide if they want to change them or not. If you like, you can tell them the Irrawaddy captions for each picture.

- a. *Myo Myint in Umpiem refugee camp in June 2008*
- b. *Friends and other well-wishers say farewell to Myo Myint before he leaves for the US.*
- c. *Myo Myint's first time in an airplane--a 17-hour flight from Thailand to the US.*
- d. *Myo Myint reunites tearfully with brother Ye Naing, sister Thin Thin Aye and his young niece at Fort Wayne Airport, Indiana.*
- e. *A pro-democracy activist once more: Myo Myint joins demonstrators outside the Chinese embassy in New York.*

#### **Activity 9** Discussion

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.

***Scarred and disillusioned—A Burmese Army vet continues to fight on a different front***

1. IN June 2008, 46-year-old Myo Myint walked through the gates of Umpiem refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border, travelled to Bangkok airport and boarded an aircraft for the first time in his life, for a journey of 19,000 km (12,000 miles) to the United States. Many hours later, on a humid Indiana evening, he embraced a brother he hadn't seen in almost 20 years.
2. The emotional reunion marked the end of one chapter in an extraordinary life and the beginning of a new one. For Myo Myint is no ordinary refugee.  
  
As a young man, he joined the Burmese army, witnessing appalling atrocities and losing an arm and a leg in battle. In 1988, he became an activist, appealing to his former comrades to join hands with those calling for peaceful democratic change. He was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for 15 years for his participation in the popular uprising.
3. Myo Myint came from a military family. His father was a soldier and the young boy, like so many others, looked up to men in uniform. They looked smart and commanded respect. "Back then, I didn't know the difference between people showing respect and people acting out of fear," he said.
4. Myo Myint enlisted and after training in Maymyo, he was sent north to join frontline units in a large offensive against Communist insurgents. There, amid the din of battle, he witnessed the reality of army life in Burma.
5. He saw comrades die around him or fall with hideous wounds. "I began to think I should never have joined," he said.
6. He saw his own unit force villagers at gunpoint to act as human mine-sweepers and saw many of them blown to pieces. He stood by as his comrades carried out summary executions, raped local women and tortured civilians.
7. "I feel guilty, as though I was responsible for these things," Myo Myint said. "But I never committed any atrocities."
8. In one battle, a shell exploded next to him as he made his way through a minefield, tearing off one of his arms and a leg.
9. No longer of use to the army, 25-year-old Myo Myint was discharged with a small pension.
- 10.

11. He opened a bookshop and became interested in world literature, reading Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and biographies—including the life of one of his heroes, Abraham Lincoln.
12. He also thirsted to understand Burma's history and its conflicts.
13. In the tumultuous days of 1988, after attending Aung San Suu Kyi's speech at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda, he joined her party, the newly formed National League for Democracy, and met her on several occasions.
14. Supported by crutches, he stood on a podium outside Rangoon's Mingladon military base in Rangoon and addressed a crowd of several thousand anti-government protesters about the horrors of the civil war. Armed soldiers were also present and he aimed much of what he said directly at them.
15. "I'd been thinking that it is one thing for an ordinary civilian to talk to a soldier, but as a former soldier, disabled, if I spoke it would have greater effect," he recalled.
16. "I was very scared to talk," Myo Myin confessed. "If the soldiers started firing, I would be the first one to be shot."
17. Instead of opening fire, about 100 soldiers joined the protestors and more followed in the days after. "The people were happy to have soldiers join them. Most were demonstrating in uniform."
18. The heady optimism of those days was to be short-lived, however. Gen Ne Win mustered his forces and sent them in to break up the demonstrations.
19. Myo Myint escaped the massacre but was tracked down by the authorities. He was interrogated and tortured for days on end, accused of being a traitor to his country.
20. "Why are you, a former soldier, turning people against the army?" yelled his accusers. They took away his crutches and forced him to stand for long periods of time on his one leg, with no other support.
21. "They swore at me, kicking me, hitting me in the face, shouting, 'You were a soldier. Why are you so ungrateful to the army? Why have you betrayed the army?'"
22. While Myo Myint was in prison, his brother, Ye Naing, fled to the Thai border and joined the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), whose members were remnants of the student movement that had spearheaded the 1988 uprising. They were armed and supported by ethnic Karen and Mon insurgents.

23. There, on Burma's eastern frontier, Ye Naing learned to fight the very army his brother and father had once served. After years in the jungle, he left for the US, where he and his wife now work in a factory outside Fort Wayne, Indiana.
24. After serving 15 years in Burmese prisons, Myo Myint was released and also made for the Burmese-Thai border. He crossed to Thailand and worked for a while with the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners—Burma.
25. He later entered the Umpiem refugee camp, which shelters 19,000 refugees who have fled the scorched earth policies of the Burmese military, and from there he was resettled in the US.
26. "To be honest, I don't want to go to America," Myo Myint said as he packed his belongings in the camp and prepared to say farewell to friends and comrades in the democracy movement, many of whom had shared the hardships of Burmese prison life with him.
27. "It's only because my brother and sister are there and my mother told me to go that I'm leaving."
28. Myo Myint's sister, also a former NLD member and wife of a former political prisoner, settled in the US several years ago. She has just given birth to her first child.
29. "I'd rather stay and continue working in politics here," Myo Myint said—but he knew there was no future in a refugee camp in Thailand. "I know that America has given a lot of support to the people of Burma. I hope to continue the struggle from there."
30. A reunion with his brother and sister "could be the happiest moment of my life," he said on the eve of his departure.
31. The reunion took place on June 24, 2008. Weeks later, in August, he and his brother and sister travelled to New York to join anti-regime protesters commemorating the 1988 uprising.
32. It was the first time the two brothers had been on a demonstration together since the Rangoon uprising 20 years previously. This time, however, they had no fear of arrest or of being shot.