

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 40

To accompany the **November 2009** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article : **No Good Options, Only Less Bad Ones**

TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 40th issue of 'Learning with The Irrawaddy', a monthly educational supplement to The Irrawaddy magazine. It is designed for reading/writing, English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools and adult education classes on the Burma border. With each issue of The Irrawaddy, we select one article and design some learning activities for it. The language level in this month's article is intermediate.

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 LEARNERS.

In this issue we have included:

- ★ this teacher's guide
- ★ a copy of the student worksheet
- ★ a copy of The Irrawaddy magazine
- ★ a copy of the article from The Irrawaddy magazine

A. **Activities before reading**

Activity 1 Discussion (prompted by photograph)

These discussion question is designed to get your class warmed up, speaking English and thinking about some of the key issues in having free and fair elections. You could suggest students discuss this in pairs or small groups, and then report the thoughts from their group to the whole class. This will help to get all students involved in the discussion. The teacher can use prompt questions if necessary (eg – should people know how you have voted? How can we be sure that the result that is announced is the true result)

Activity 2 Vocabulary: matching exercise

Answers: 1.d. 2.f. 3.i. 4.b. 5.g. 6.h. 7.a. 8.c 9.e.

Activity 3 Vocabulary Practice:

Answers: The political parties face a dilemma in this election. They have to decide whether to participate, or boycott the election. If they do take part, that may make the election results more credible to the outside world. But if they refuse to take part, then they will have no chance of winning. This is why they need a strategic approach. Everyone is a stakeholder in this election. The results will give the winners the mandate to confirm or change the Constitution. The 92% vote in favour of the Constitution in 2008 was an implausible result, which called into question the legitimacy of the process.

Activity 4 More vocabulary practice

Answers: The party-leader spoke to the party-members: "We need to have a strategic approach to this election. Should we participate in the election or should we boycott it? This is the dilemma we face. If we take part, it may make the election seem more credible to the outside world, when actually we don't believe in the legitimacy of the process.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 5 Paragraphs 1-6 Comprehension

1. The referendum was flawed, and 92% is so high that it is an unlikely result
2. It guarantees a leading political role for the military
3. Three reasons given are: leading opposition figures remain in prison; politically motivated arrests have increased; the regime has increased military activity ('moving against its armed opponents')
4. Two changes are: current leadership retires, and new military leaders will take their place; the Constitution establishes new political institutions
5. Three groups are: the Burmese people; opposition parties; ethnic organisations.
6. Three possible responses to the election: Boycott; participation; 'mixed strategy'.

Activity 6 Paragraphs 7-12 Comprehension

Answers

Pro – arguments for an action	Con – arguments against an action
<u>Boycott:</u> ~ stakeholders register disapproval ~weaken credibility of result	<u>Boycott</u> ~ easier for regime to get result it wants ~reduces need for regime to manipulate results in order to avoid a victory for the opposition ~ so the result can be presented as genuine
<u>Participation:</u> ~ would force regime to manipulate results, and this would be obvious to observers ~ parties can participate and still be critical of process	<u>Participation:</u> ~ participation could be interpreted as agreement with the process ~ NLD would have to give up its demand that 1990 result is acknowledged
<u>'Mixed strategy':</u> ~ a way to avoid the dilemma by refusing to participate and establishing new political parties which can participate	<u>'Mixed Strategy':</u>



Bonus Question! This question is for the quicker student who finishes ahead of others

It asks for students to use their own words so there is no single correct answer, but the likely answer would say something like:

The writer supports the 'mixed strategy'. You know this because he does not have any arguments against it. He thinks the mixed strategy allows parties both to participate, and to boycott, at the same time.

C. Activities after reading

Activity 7 Discussion or debate (this activity can be conducted in the language decided by the teacher)

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group one argument to support: one group must support participation; one group must support boycott; and one group must support the mixed strategy.

Each group, must think of all the reasons to support the position they have have been asked to support.

Then each group in turn presents their arguments to the whole class.

Note: this method develops the capacity of students to formulate arguments to support a case (the skills of debating). It also means that no-one has to identify their own position in this discussion.

Activity 8

Class vote: to boycott or participate? (this activity can be conducted in the language decided by the teacher)

Arrange a class vote on whether opposition parties should participate in or boycott the election. The voting method needs to make sure that:

- It is clear what people are voting about
- No-one knows how anyone else has voted
- No-one can vote more than once
- The system for counting the votes can't be mis-used or manipulated
- The results that are announced are the true results

Divide the class into small groups of 4-6 students to discuss how to do this. Give them enough time to form their ideas on the bullet-points above.

Each group can address just one of the bullet-points, or, if you devote most of one session to this activity, groups can think about all of the points. Ask each group to share their ideas in the whole class

Draw out the best suggestions, and write them on a board or flip-chart, so you have a class agreement about how to carry out the vote, meeting the criteria in the bullet-points

Conduct the vote, count, and announce the results.

Ask the class if they thought they developed a good system. Were there points where the system could be manipulated?

Activity 9

Free writing: What is needed to make an election fair and free

This is free writing so there is no single correct answer. However some of the points that are raised by the bullet-points in activity 8 should be represented in the answer, and there may be others too such as 'no-one can vote on behalf of someone else'