

The Curriculum Project

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 44

To accompany the **June 2010** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: **Kyaw Thu: A Well of Compassion**

A. Activities before reading

1. Celebrity to Activist

With your partner, make a list of celebrities that have also become active with charity work and helping others (both in Burma and overseas).

Discuss the following questions:

- What have these celebrities done to help others?
- Why do you think some celebrities want to help?
- Is this good, or are the celebrities only trying to become more famous?

2. Guess the Questions

Read the description of the man interviewed in this month's Irrawaddy. In your groups prepare 5 questions you would like to ask him.



Kyaw Thu, the founder of the Free Funeral Services Society, is one of Burma's best-known actors and philanthropists¹. Besides running a funeral service and free clinic for the poor, he also played a prominent² role in spearheading³ private relief efforts for victims of Cyclone Nargis, and more recently has come to the aid of people in drought-stricken⁴ areas of Rangoon Division.

(1. giver to charity; 2. significant/important;
3. leading; 4. affected)

3. Vocabulary

Match the following words connected to the water crisis in Burma to their definitions:

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|-------------------|---|
| 1. breed (v) | a) keep something for the future |
| 2. confiscate (v) | b) take away something by legal power |
| 3. distribute (v) | c) when there is not enough rainfall |
| 4. drill (v) | d) large container for liquid or gas |
| 5. drought (n) | e) need something or someone |
| 6. donor (n) | f) give or spread something |
| 7. rely on (v) | g) raise or produce, as a farmer does with chickens or pigs |
| 8. store (v) | h) make a hole |
| 9. tank (n) | i) someone who gives money or supplies to support a project |

4. Grammar Review – Present Perfect

Below are some sentences using the present perfect. Some of the sentences are grammatically incorrect. Find and correct the mistakes.

1. There haven't been enough water in ponds and wells this year.
2. The government hasn't done anything last year to help the people.
3. We have gone to Pegu a few days ago.
4. Kyaw Thu has set up a water delivery service to help people.
5. Many volunteers have came to villages outside Rangoon to help.

5. Guess the Activity

Work in pairs. Write 5 sentences describing 5 ways that you **have used** water today. Use the present perfect. Then, without speaking, act out the actions to another pair: they will try to guess the action using complete sentences.

B. Activities during reading

6. Match the Questions and Answers

Work with a partner. Each pair has an answer and around the classroom are the questions. Walk around the room with your partner and find the question that best fits your answer.

7. Vocabulary

List all of the words in the article that are items that hold water.

8. Comprehension

Answer the following questions:

1. What has happened to many lakes and wells?
2. What do the USDP want donors to do?
3. Has Kyaw Thu seen how this shortage affects people outside Rangoon?
4. Who is working with Kyaw Thu to help people affected by the water shortage?
5. Will he start a long-term project to help provide solutions for water shortages? Why or why not?

9. Analysis

Answer the following questions:

1. Has the arrival of the rainy season solved the problem? Why or why not?
2. How can Kyaw Thu see how deadly the drought is? Give an example from the interview.
3. What are two possible problems that Kyaw Thu's organization faces?
4. How has Cyclone Nargis changed the way Kyaw Thu helps people now in the water crisis?
5. Why do you think the USDP wants donors to put their flag on their trucks?

C. Activities after reading



10. Interview Skills and Sympathising

Write on a slip of paper one question that you would like to ask the people in the picture.

Stand up and ask another student your question. They choose one individual in the picture and answer like they were that person. Think about the age of that person, their family, the weather, and their emotions. How would these things influence what they say? After both of you have asked and answered each other's questions, swap questions and find a new partner.

11. Conserving Water

Does your community have water shortages? Do you think some people waste water? Working in groups, create an action plan to help lower your water use. Create a list of at least 5 easy things people in your community can do to lower their water use, even by a small amount.

12. Free Water Debate

Many countries around the world provide free water for their citizens. In groups of 3-4 prepare at least 5 reasons why water should or shouldn't be free. Then after you have prepared, present your reasons in a debate.

Kyaw Thu: A Well of Compassion

1 QUESTION: Water shortages happen almost every year. How is this year different from previous years?

ANSWER: Water shortages usually last just a few days. But this year, the temperature is extremely high and as a result lakes and wells have dried up completely.

2 Q: So the worst affected areas are those which rely on lakes and wells?

A: In some areas, they have no deep wells, so they depend on lakes for drinking water. When those lakes dry up, there is no more drinking water. In some areas, governmental organizations have confiscated lakes to breed fish. But when the weather is very hot, they cannot breed the fish there, and at the same time, the water is not clean enough for drinking.

3 Q: Which villages suffered the most in the drought?

A: I haven't been to the worst-hit areas, so I can't tell you how badly they have been affected. My wife has been to some of those places, though. I have to stay here all the time to take care of the funeral services. If I went into the areas affected by the drought, there could be problems with the local authorities. I don't want the authorities to think that I'm trying to make a political issue of the problem, so I stay away.

4 Q: There have been reports that the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) forced water donors to fly its flags on their trucks. Have you experienced this?

A: No, we haven't. Some of my colleagues have just gone to Dala Township. I don't know what we will hear from them. When we went to Pegu to donate water, we didn't have any problems like that. Our trucks were marked 'Free Funeral Services Society (Rangoon).' We would not have agreed to put USDP flags on our vehicles.

5 Q: It has started to rain in the Rangoon area. Are you still donating water?

A: Well, things are not getting better yet in some areas. We went to Pegu a few days ago, then to Waw and Thetkala villages. The rain did not last long. We had many problems, too. The villagers who received water from us didn't have enough containers—big jars, buckets and so on. So now we are thinking about building some brick ponds for them. First, we need to check how many streets there are in each village, and then we can build the brick ponds. That way, when the rain comes, they can store the rainwater.

In some areas, we can't even dig wells or drill deep wells because the groundwater is salty.

6 Q: Do you know how many people have died or fallen ill because of the water shortages and high temperatures?

A: I don't know about the situation in faraway townships, but in Rangoon, our funeral volunteer group is helping with nearly 80 funerals a day right now. Normally, there would

be around 40 or 50 funerals a day at this time of year. I think the higher temperatures are responsible for many deaths, especially among the elderly. Ko Bala [actor Thu Maung] had a liver-related disease—he died because of the high temperature. Painter Than Myint Aung also died because of the extreme heat.

7 Q: What are some of the challenges you face when helping people affected by the drought?

A: At the moment, we're not having too much trouble with our water donations. We bought some 2,500-gallon water tanks. When we go to the villages around Dala, we first go to water donors in the town of Dala. After we fill the tank with water, we distribute it in the villages. Sometimes, when we don't have water donors in Dala, we have to get the water in Rangoon and transport it to the Dala area. That makes our work more difficult.

8 Q: Do you still have many local water donors?

A: Yes. For example, in Pegu there are local people cooperating with us.

9 Q: After Cyclone Nargis, many volunteers assisted the survivors of that disaster. Do you see large numbers of volunteers helping in the water crisis?

A: I have seen quite a few people. But they are working under very tight controls. We learned a lot from the Cyclone Nargis relief work. There are both volunteers and ordinary people trying to help out in any way they can. The most important thing is their desire to help needy people. After Cyclone Nargis, I wasn't able to go to every village affected by the storm, so I sent some volunteers there to take food, clothing, even money. Some misused those things and money that we received from different donors. That's why we put the tight regulations in place this time.

10 Q: You said that you will build reservoirs and drill deep wells for long-term use. Do you have any other plans to deal with the possibility of another drought next year?

A: Actually, we don't have the capacity to carry out big projects. That is the responsibility of government. As you know, our main job is helping with funerals and running a clinic. I think the state should cooperate with experts and go into the field immediately and find out what they can do for the people.