

The Curriculum Project

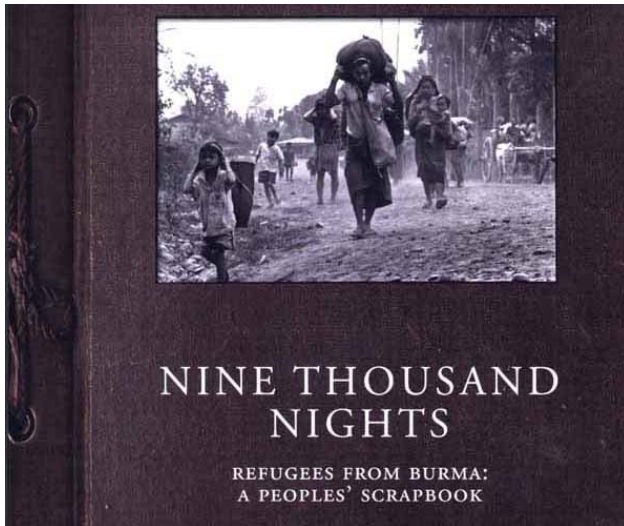
Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 43

To accompany the August 2010 issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: **Dignity in Distress**

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Predict: What is the article about?



Look at the picture. What is it a picture of?

What does it tell you about the article?
What does 'Nine thousand nights' mean?

What information do you think this article will have in it?

Activity 2 Vocabulary

- Check your understanding of some words in the article, by answering this quiz.
√ Tick the correct answer

Word or phrase

1. Scrapbook (*n*)

2. Umbrella organisation (*n*)

3. Amputee (*n*)

4. Disarming modesty

5. Reminiscences (*n*)

6. Resilience (*n*)

Meaning

a) a book made of cloth

b) a personal journal

c) a collection of different stories

a) a protective organisation

b) a network of organisations

c) a company that makes umbrellas

a) mine victim

b) missing arm or leg

c) centre for disabled people

a) likeable humility

b) giving up weapons

c) smiling kindly

a) small drawings

b) small stories

c) memories

a) flexible strength

b) staying silent

c) returning home

B. Activities during reading

Activity 3

True or False?

Here are some statements. Are they true or false?

If a statement is false, write a true statement about the topic.

1. Gil Loescher wrote the book Nine Thousand Nights.
2. The book marks the 25th anniversary of the centre for amputees.
3. The book documents 25 years of refugee experiences.
4. The book is called 'a people's scrapbook' because it is cheaply produced.
5. There is one chapter for each of the ethnic groups Karen Shan Karenni and Mon.
6. The book has descriptions of brutality committed by Burmese government troops.
7. Refugees are depressed because they are dependent on charity.
8. Gil Loescher is an amputee.

Activity 4

Book review

This article is a book review. When someone reviews a book, they tell you a bit about it. They also tell you whether they like the book. Fill in the chart below, with information from the review article.

Title	
Author:	
Topic:	
Summary of content:	
The book's message:	
Reviewer's opinion:	Does the reviewer like the book? How do you know?
Your opinion:	Do you think the book sounds interesting? Why / why not?

Activity 5 Vocabulary

Write down 5 words you do not know as you read the article. For each word, write down the part of speech (e.e. noun verb adjective). Use the context to guess its meaning. Write down your guess, then check using a dictionary.

Word	Part of speech	Meaning from context	Dictionary definition

Activity 6 Ask and answer questions

Write five comprehension questions and answers for this passage. Swop with a partner. Give your partner your questions. Don't show them the answers. Write the answers to your partner's questions. Now mark each other's work.

C. Activities after reading**Activity 7 Write one person's story**

Write a short story of at least 50 words about someone's experience as a refugee leaving Burma.

Do **either** a) or b)

- a) Write the story of someone you know (do not use their real name)
- b) Look at this picture. Imagine this boy's story, and write it.

Activity 8 Make a class scrapbook, year-book or magazine

A scrapbook is a book in which someone collects paper records of significant events. These are usually related to their own life, or to historical events. It is like a photograph album, and often has photos in it. However it also has other kinds of paper reminders of events, for example newspaper articles.

A year-book is a scrap-book that celebrates a school class: for example 'the class of 2010'.

As a class make a class scrapbook, year-book or magazine, celebrating your class events and achievements. Each person makes one contribution. This could be an article, interview, story, poem, song or drawing. You can have articles on sports events; music or dance events; religious holidays – anything that tells something about the life of the class and the school.

Dignity in Distress

By Jim Andrews

AUGUST, 2010 - VOL.18 NO.8

1

Two and a half years after losing both legs in the August 2003 attack on UN offices in Baghdad, Gil Loescher visited a camp for Burmese refugees in Northern Thailand—and found the inspiration to continue coping with his severe handicap.

2

The camp, near Mae Hong Son, has a center for helping amputees. “I was inspired again by meeting these refugee amputees,” he wrote in a handsomely presented publication issued by the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) to mark its 25th anniversary.

3

The TBBC is an umbrella organization that cares for more than 140,000 refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Burmese border.

4

The impressive publication marking a quarter century of TBBC work, titled “Nine Thousand Nights,” describes itself as “a people’s scrapbook,” which sums up with disarming modesty its 180 pages of contemporary reports, reminiscences, photographs, art work and poetry gathered since refugees began to arrive in Thailand in significant numbers.

5

Six chapters cover the history of the refugee crisis, its causes, the appalling suffering of the uprooted Karen, Shan, Karenni and Mon, their new lives in the Thai-Burmese border camps, their hopes, dreams—and nightmares. One section is devoted to the students who fled the 1988 oppression and continued their struggle in the jungles of eastern Burma.

6

The publication’s text and illustrations yield a complete picture that is often difficult to contemplate—descriptions of torture, rape and other documented acts of brutality by soldiers of the Burmese armed forces.

7

One contributor was seven years old when his village was attacked by Burmese government troops. His father was forced to swallow three live bullets and left to drown in a puddle of water, his head serving as a stepping stone for the departing soldiers.

8

One documentary filmmaker wept as he heard an account of how a child soldier had died, while a hardened team leader of the Free Burma Rangers relief group was moved almost to tears by the helplessness of a 97-year-old blind woman who was hiding in the jungle.

9

Heartache and anger are the natural reactions of many relief workers. One wrote of watching film coverage of the violent suppression of the 1988 uprising and experiencing a “fire in me that still burns.”

10

Yet the scrapbook is also full of uplifting stories and accounts of incredible stoicism and resilience displayed by refugees who lost everything they possessed after being forced to flee to the safety of Thailand.

11

“Dignity” and “resilience” are ever recurring words in the scrapbook. Homeless, destitute and reliant on charity, refugees have generally retained these two characteristics, which no oppressor can take from them.

12

“You’ve got generations of families whose lives have been acted out in the camps—and yet there is this sense of order that comes out of the dignity of the people,” wrote Roy Hasan of Christian Aid. “I have always been inspired by the incredible resilience of refugees in the face of hardship,” wrote Gil Loescher after his visit to the handicap center at the camp near Mae Hong Son. “In fact, their example has been very important to me in my own recovery these past several years.”