

EAST COAST PREMIERE

ARTWORK BY JOSHUA LIPTON



STUDY  
GUIDE

# LETTERS FROM HOME

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY **KALEAN UNG** DIRECTED BY AND DEVELOPED WITH  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY **CHINARY UNG** **MARINA MCCLURE**

STUDY GUIDE BY **ALLISON BACKUS**

DESIGNED BY **EMILY BOYER**

**JANUARY 18-FEBRUARY 5**



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE  
WWW.MRT.ORG | 978.654.4678



PRESENTS

# LETTERS FROM HOME

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY  
**KALEAN UNG\***

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY  
**CHINARY UNG**

DIRECTED BY AND DEVELOPED WITH  
**MARINA MCCLURE+**

FEATURING  
**KALEAN UNG\***

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**MARK KANIEFF**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**YAO CHEN^**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**CHU-HSUAN CHANG**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**CHRIS PORTER^**

VIDEO PROJECTION DESIGNER  
**HSUAN-KUANG HSIEH**

STAGE MANAGER  
**JORDAN E. MOORE\***

STAGE MANAGER (1/30-2/5)  
**SUSAN L. HUDSPETH\***

DIRECTED BY  
**MARINA MCCLURE+**

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Sarah Rachel Katz ..... Production Assistant  
Kennis Yin-Mor ..... Traditional Costume Consultant  
Tess Beckwith ..... Costume Design Assitant

**JANUARY 18-FEBRUARY 5, 2023**

**WWW.MRT.ORG/LETTERS**

FOR THE FULL *LETTERS FROM HOME* PROGRAM WHICH INCLUDES  
COMPREHENSIVE SHOW CREDITS, CAST AND CREW BIOS, AND MORE!



\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors  
and Stage Managers in the United States.



+Member of the Society of Stage Director and Choreographers, a national  
theatrical labor union.



^The Scenic, Costume, Lighting, and Sound Designers in this production  
are represented by United Scenic Artists (USA) Local USA-829, IATSE.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications  
Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre operates under agreements between the  
League of Resident Theatres (LORT), a consortium of regional theatres  
throughout the nation, and AEA (Actors' Equity Association), SDC (Stage  
Directors and Choreographers Society), and USA (United Scenic Artists).

# LEARNING STANDARDS

## INTERVIEWS

### GRADES 6-12

Theatre Arts – *Responding*  
T.R.07, T.R.08, T.R.09  
English Language Arts – *Reading Literature*  
RL.7  
Visual Arts – *Responding*  
V.R.07, V.R.08  
Media Arts – *Responding*  
F.M.A.R.07, F.M.A.R.08

## TRACKING COMMUNISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE

### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Science – United States History II,  
World History II  
USII.T3.10, WHII.T2.03, WHII.T4.05,  
WHII.T4.06, WHII.T5.04 WHII.T7.01

## SLOGANS OF THE KHMER ROUGE

### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Science  
WHII.T7.01  
English Language Arts – *Reading Informational Text*  
RI.1, RI.5, RI.6, RI.8

## CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE

### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Science – *World History II*  
WHII.T7.01

## BEYOND COMMUNISM: OTHER INFLUENCES ON THE KHMER ROUGE

### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Science – *World History II*,  
*US History II*  
WHII.T7.01, USII.T3.12,

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS & TIMELINE

### GRADES 9-12

History and Social Science – *World History II*,  
*US History II*  
WHII.T7.01, USII.T3.12, USII.T3.10,  
WHII.T2.03, WHII.T4.05, WHII.T4.06,  
WHII.T5.04  
English Language Arts – *Writing, Speaking and  
Listening, Reading Informational Text*  
WCA.2, WCA.9, SLCA.1, W.1, W.2, W.7, W.8,  
W.9, RI.1, RI.5, RI.6, RI.8,

## TEXTS AND CONTEXTS: KALEAN'S SHAKESPEAREAN HEROINES

### GRADES 8-12

English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening*,  
*Language*  
SLCA.1, SL.1, L.5  
Theatre Arts – *Responding, Connecting*  
T.R.07, T.R.08, T.R.09, T.Co.10, T.Co.11, T.T.R.07

## CONNECTIONS: THE POETRY OF MONICA SOK

### GRADES 8-12

English Language Arts – *Reading Literature, Speaking  
and Listening, Language*  
RL.1, RL.3, RL.4, RL.10, SL.1, SL.2, SLCA.1, L.5

## ACTIVITY: IDENTITY CHARTS

### GRADES 6-10

English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening*  
SL.1, SL.2, SLCA.1  
Visual Arts – *Creating*  
V.01  
Comprehensive Health – *Emotional Health*  
SEH.05.14

## ACTIVITY: IDENTITY PLAYLISTS AND CLOSE READINGS

### GRADES 8-12

English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening*,  
*Writing, Reading Literature, Language*  
SL.5, W.1, W.2, RL.1, RL.5, RL.10, L.5  
Music – *Responding, Connecting*  
M.R.07, M.R.08, M.Co.10, M.Co.11  
Visual and Media Arts – *Connecting, Creating*  
V.Co.10, V.Cr.02, MA.Cr.01, MA.Cr.02, MA.Co.1

## ACTIVITY: FAMILY INTERVIEWS

### GRADES 8-12

English Language Arts – *Speaking and Listening*  
SL.1, SL.2, SLCA.1

## IDENTITY ESSAY PROMPTS

### GRADES 6-12

English Language Arts – *Writing, Language*  
W.1, W.2, W.3, W.4, W.5, W.10, L.1, L.2, L.6

LETTERS  
FROM HOME

# SYNOPSIS

*“LETTERS FROM HOME is inspired by the moment five years ago when my father, composer Chinary Ung, shared with me a trove of letters from family members in Cambodia suffering through the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. Our family’s history was embedded on thin sheets of cheap paper, inside of air-mailed envelopes, buried in a box deep inside his closet.”*

- KALEAN UNG

## AT HER DESK,

Kalean examines a taxidermied moth. She admits that she has always been “obsessed with little creatures,” and that they often populate her dreams. She shows an old picture of her father, Chinary Ung, the year he immigrated to America. Kalean becomes her father, who talks about coming to America from Cambodia, adjusting to life in New York City, and studying at the Manhattan School of Music. He graduates with a master’s degree in clarinet.

Eager to continue his music education with a doctorate from Columbia, Chinary writes a letter to John D. Rockefeller III. He explains that his greatest desire is to “infuse the rich traditional cultural heritage of Cambodia into the modern creativity of the Western orchestra.” He writes asking for scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation, and is granted one. Kalean says that she and her sister would not exist if not for the letter to Rockefeller. Upon returning Cambodia, her father would have been killed as a western educated man under Pol Pot’s regime.

Transforming into her eight-year old self, Kalean asks her father why he never taught her Khmer. Her mother explains that her father had



a lot of painful emotions regarding the country and language of his birth. Nevertheless, Kalean and her sister feel severed from their Cambodian roots. Back in the present, Kalean recounts her decision to learn Khmer before her wedding. She begins Khmer lessons, and asks her father to help her practice. In time, these practice sessions end up encouraging her father to share stories of his home village in Cambodia and his childhood.

While acting as Marina in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, Kalean is visited by the ghosts of young Cambodian girls who beg her to “re-write” their story. Instead, Kalean “releases their hauntings” nightly through the words of Shakespeare. Haunted by these ghosts, Kalean approaches her father, telling him that she wants to write a play, and that she’s curious about how her Cambodian relatives escaped the Khmer Rouge and settled in America. Her father hands her box of letters.

Kalean explains that during the years of the Khmer Rouge, her father anxiously awaited to hear from his family in Cambodia, worrying after their safety, and wondering who was still living. After he discovers that much of his family is living in refugee camp on the Thai border, Chinary and Kalean’s future mother borrow



money from wherever they can. They convert the money to gold before sending it to Buddhist monks, who forward the money to bounty hunters. Together they successfully bring over 30 members of Chinary’s family to the United States. During this time, Chinary spends his time recording, listening, and document Cambodian music, intent on preserving Cambodian musical tradition for refugees and future generations. After 11 years, Chinary begins to compose, trying to merge the beauty and complexity of both Khmer and Western music.

At 16 years old, Kalean visits Cambodia. It is her first time visiting the country, and her father’s first time back since the genocide. Visiting the temples is free for Cambodians, but not for “white skins.” As a biracial individual, Kalean is questioned by the guards. Even after being let go, Kalean questions her identity. Back in the present, Kalean recalls a nightmare she had when first learning Khmer. Hundreds of white cocoons begin to burst, and moths and butterfly’s free themselves.

Kalean transforms into her Aunt Helen, a fierce, impeccably dressed “dragon lady” whose husband, a vice-governor was immediately executed when the Khmer Rouge came to power. Back in Cambodia, 16 year old Kalean is told by her cousin Bou-Bou that her Aunt Helen was so weak when fleeing to Thailand that he had to drag her “through the jungle on a bamboo mat.” He says Loatian monks walked through landmine infested jungles, sacrificing themselves so that refugees like him and his mother could safely pass. Kalean marvels at her aunt’s strength.

Kalean recalls her father telling her of the dream that inspired his symphony: He dreamed he was back in Cambodia, walking along a dirt road with others in a funeral procession. The mourners sang a song not of mourning, but a curse, a suicide letter set to music by a girl heartbroken over

her war-torn country. Kalean remembers her father telling her of an aunt whose husband was killed by the Khmer Rouge when a servant accused him of rape. Her aunt sang songs from her childhood for three days before committing suicide. Kalean plays her father’s composition, “Song of Compassion.” She returns to Shakespeare, this time recounting her time playing Desdemona in *Othello*. A recording of Desdemona’s strangulation plays. She admits she is haunted by dreams of being strangled.

Chinary finally tells Kalean about his brother, Sirath. Kalean reads a letter from a former work camp prisoner, who informed her father of his brother’s death by starvation. Kalean says that her father’s dream of the funeral procession inspired him to write his symphony, *Inner Voices*, which was written the year she was born. With the last letter translation absent, Kalean writes a myth that reflects all she has learned about her family’s suffering. She reads snippets of letters to her father, all desperate, and begging for help. The women from Kalean’s myth speaks; she begs for her lost husband and children. Kalean becomes Shakespeare’s heroines, Marina, Queen Margret, Queen Elizabeth, and Desdemona. Marina speaks of history and identity, Margret and Elizabeth of anger, curses and tyranny, and Desdemona of grief. As herself, Kalean merges lines from all these heroines to thank and honor her father.

In the last minutes of the play, Chinary Ung’s *Inner Voices* plays. Kalean recounts her dream of cocoons littering her walls and ceilings. Moths and butterflies hatch, bursting forth. She says she had a dream last night where a giant moth flew from her closet. She and the moth gazed at each other.





# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH KALEAN UNG

Kolean Ung is an award-winning actress, playwright, singer, and interdisciplinary artist. Ung's performance work has included, Shakespeare, opera and experimental theatre. *Letters from Home* is her first solo play.

## WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL WHEN WRITING ABOUT PERSONAL IDENTITY?

The most freeing part about writing about your personal identity or journey is that there is no right way or right "form." Often times I begin writing in stream of consciousness and let it guide me into what it wants to be. The writing can turn into a poem, a letter, an essay or even turn into a myth or a partially fictional story. Sometimes I'm aware that the voice wants to be spoken out loud or realized physically and visually, like in theatre.

Regardless, I try to purposefully be messy and arrange the chaos later. My first job is to just follow myself into the unknown.

**THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY OR RIGHT "FORM" ... MY FIRST JOB IS TO JUST FOLLOW MYSELF INTO THE UNKNOWN.**

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT COME WITH SHARING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY THROUGH ACTING VS SHARING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY THROUGH WRITING?

I have the complex challenge of acting words I wrote which is deliciously fun but requires different hats, knowing which hat you're wearing at one time, and when to switch. Bringing words to life as an actor requires a three dimensional translation that takes experimentation, play, and intention. I am also going moment to moment while I am acting, and approaching the text as if it's new each time I encounter it. I am delighted when my writer-self has given me an inspiring text that flows out easily, but when it's challenging, I get to grapple with that and decide if I need to "solve" this as the actor or as the writer. Sometimes my actor-self is frustrated at my writer-self that she created a challenge that is not immediately intuitive. These moments are always potent, as both actor and writer have different needs, but the tension of this can be really incredible and I love solving this with my director and design team.

**SEEK OUT TEACHERS, MENTORS, AND CHAMPIONS ... I BELIEVE FINDING A COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT SINCE MUCH OF WRITING IS SOLITARY.**

## WHY DID YOU FEEL IT WAS SO IMPORTANT TO SHARE THIS STORY? WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE STORIES ABOUT FAMILY HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN GENERAL?

I was discouraged by the lack of Asian, specifically Cambodian-American, stories and representation in my field. I've dedicated the last several years to writing my own stories that highlight the first and second generation experience. These stories explore themes of intergenerational trauma and the hope inherent to immigrant and refugee stories, which so many Americans today can identify with.

I am interested in exploring how to tell the stories of Cambodian elders, who are only now beginning to find the ability to talk about the trauma of the genocide. Is it the responsibility

of the generation who has suffered a trauma to heal itself or is it the next generation's role to take that weight and begin the process of healing? My goal for my work moving forward is to engage in this question. There are challenges in writing and performing lived experiences of real people, people that I know and love. This maneuvering is delicate, but the need for these the stories is urgent; I am continually disturbed by many political leaders' views on immigrants, refugees, and people fleeing the countries because their homeland has been destroyed.

## DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR YOUNG WRITERS?

We all have imposter syndrome, and that may never go away. Write anyway, and continue your pursuit in what feeds and inspires you. As for me, I wrote

*Letters From Home* from a place of need. The story jumped out of my body and soul. That doesn't mean it came out pretty. It took years to translate the initial purge of words and emotions and that was the hard part. When I was at my wit's end, I tried to come back to the charge of creativity I had initially. I trusted that there was something really deep and beautiful in there and that it would take time to uncover.

Everyone is different, so I find solace in listening to what works for other people, while knowing that that might not be for me. I'm on a life-long journey to find my artistic practice and I'm allowed to transform and change and so are you. Seek out teachers, mentors, and champions. This can be in a class setting or amongst friends who you trust. I believe finding a community is important since much of writing is solitary.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE THIS A ONE-PERSON PLAY?

I have always been fascinated by the art form and interested in the virtuosity it demands. I love watching an actor grappling with such an immense feat! For me, the story of *Letters From Home* felt so overwhelming for both the writer and actor parts of myself, so there is also a layer of dramatization that

is really exciting to play with as part of the theatrical experience.

### WHAT IS MOST CHALLENGING ABOUT WRITING A SOLO PLAY?

The most challenging thing is that you need to develop both internal and external stimuli for your character to “react” to on the page in order to make the story active and theatrical. There are many interesting ways to solve this in a solo play, but regardless, it’s challenging to create a script so that the actor can conjure up the “reveals” and “discoveries” in an exciting and dynamic way all by themselves.

### WHAT IS MOST REWARDING ABOUT WRITING A SOLO PLAY?

The most rewarding thing about writing a solo play is that you realize that you can use every and any theatrical device you wish to get you there! I played with the characters being aware of needing and using props and costumes as tools to help the character of myself understand. As the play progresses, the world of the play takes over. A light turning on brings her to another part of the stage and leads to a memory, or a video projected across the space gives her the feeling of being small, etc. The most important stimuli that I used in this play was sound. Sound and the dramaturgy of sound is threaded through the play for the character as an emotional and dramatic heartbeat.

### HOW HAS YOUR FATHER’S MUSIC INFLUENCED YOU?

As the daughter of classical musicians, I have always been surrounded by sound; it was a cocoon for me. As a child I took naps underneath my father’s drawing board while he composed. He spoke through notes, not words. I believe it was the only way for him to process

our family story that he rarely spoke about. In hindsight, it feels inevitable that I would pursue training in classical voice and opera and in avant-garde theatre.

When my father gave me the letters he told me, “Kalean, I am only a composer, you are an actress. I do not know how to work with words, but you do.” Being a performer first and foremost, I hadn’t understood myself as a “creator” of words yet, only as a translator of words. But through the need of understanding him, my family history, and myself, I knew that I was on the pursuit to

verbalize his pathos-filled “sound,” into my words. The result was this intergenerational collaboration.

**I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SURROUNDED BY SOUND; IT WAS A COCOON FOR ME. ... [MY FATHER] SPOKE THROUGH NOTES, NOT WORDS.**

KALEAN UNG



[WWW.KALEANUNG.COM](http://WWW.KALEANUNG.COM)



[/KALEAN.UNG](https://www.facebook.com/KALEAN.UNG)



[/CAMBOCOMBO](https://www.instagram.com/CAMBOCOMBO)



[/KALEANUNG](https://twitter.com/KALEANUNG)

## AN INTERVIEW WITH HSUAN-KUANG HSIEH



Hsuan-Kuang Hsieh is a Los Angeles-based Taiwanese filmmaker and multimedia artist. Her films, projection art, and photography have been showcased at film festivals and galleries all around the world.

### WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN DESIGNING THIS PLAY?

The biggest challenge was working with a huge amount of historical material. We have letters and family photos from Kalean’s family as well as the historical archive of the Khmer Rouge. Most of the subject matter is tragic and heavy, so we felt we had to be respectful and selective with the material we used. A lot of consideration was taken as we decided what to show and what not to show. Additionally, I have abstracted and manipulated the materials in the hope that the difficult subject matter will be taken in easier by the audience. I think this helps serve the storytelling of the play better.

### WHAT DID YOU FEEL WAS MOST CRUCIAL WHEN DESIGNING FOR THIS PLAY?

With the projection, I wanted to strike a good balance between representing historical events while also enhancing the theatrical experience. That way the audience can understand the flow of events and become immersed in Kalean’s journey. In the end, even with the chaos involving the Khmer Rouge, this is the play about the legacy of Kalean and her father, Chinary. The piece speaks to the artists

**THE PIECE SPEAKS TO THE ARTISTS WHO NEED AND USE ART TO MOVE ON AND HEAL.**

**ART HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM TRAGEDIES INTO SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND HOPEFUL**

who need and use art to move on and heal. Art has the power to transform tragedies into something beautiful and hopeful.

### WHAT DO YOU WANT THE PROJECTION DESIGN TO EVOKE?

Projection is like a magnifying glass – it gives the viewers a closer look into specific historical events and the personal documents tied to the story. But projection also transforms the physical materials into a beautiful imagery, that

can emotionally impact the audience. To me, the materials in this play can be painful to look at, and yet they can be powerful and beautiful, too.

### WHAT WAS THE COLLABORATION PROCESS LIKE BETWEEN THE OTHER DESIGNERS, THE DIRECTOR, THE PLAYWRIGHT?

I think the biggest difference from this collaboration compared to other productions is that this is a show based on a real story; the characters are real people. We’re working with both Kalean and Chinary very closely, they’ve been involved throughout the entire process. It is an amazing feeling to dive into the characters’ world at such an intimate level. It’s inspirational and helps me look at the story from multiple angles.

# KALEAN'S SHAKESPEAREAN HEROINES

**"I COULDN'T RE-WRITE THEIR STORIES. BUT EVERY NIGHT I RELEASED THEIR HAUNTINGS THROUGH SHAKESPEARE'S WORDS."**

—KALEAN UNG

In *Letters From Home*, Kalean explores themes of grief, betrayal, family, and anger through the words of the Shakespearean heroines she has previously played.

**Who are these characters?**

**How do they help to shape the narrative?**

## QUEEN MARGARET AND QUEEN ELIZABETH FROM *RICHARD III*

One of Shakespeare's most notorious villains, Richard III is a character riddled with ambition, cruelty, and deceit. The play follows the conniving Richard as he cheats, kills, and seduces his way to the English throne. While *Richard III* is most often staged by itself, the play is the last in a tetralogy of history plays. The three previous plays; *Henry VI Parts 1, 2, and 3* follow the English Wars of the Roses, a series of English wars that disputed the rightful line of kings.

Richard wrongs many people throughout *Richard III*, and the plays that precede it. Among his victims are Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Margaret. Queen Elizabeth, Richard's sister-in-law, lost both her sons to Richard's tyranny. Wanting to remove his nephews from the line of succession, Richard has the two princes confined to the Tower of London before having them killed. Queen Margaret, though far from innocent herself, was similarly wronged

by Richard, who murdered her son and her husband, the former King Henry VI. Nearly all of Margaret's lines in *Richard III* are made up of rages and curses. Language is the only weapon at Margaret's disposal, but her use of this weapon is brutal and scathing. So much so, that Queen Elizabeth, who is on the opposing side in the War of the Roses, begs her to teach her how to curse. Both Margaret and Elizabeth are united in their rage, despite their past of violent opposition.

QUEEN ELIZABETH, DUKE OF YORK (RICHARD III) (ILLUSTRATION). ARTIST: E M WARD RA | ENGRAVER: H ROBINSON ORIGINAL VICTORIAN STEEL ENGRAVING, PUBLISHED CIRCA 1860, LONDON VIRTUE & CO © RETROIMAGES | MEDIA ID 15502391 | 186868022, RICHA (FINEARTSTOREHOUSE.COM)



QUEEN MARGARET. ILLUSTRATOR: J. W. WRIGHT ENGRAVER: B. EYLES (SHAKESPEAREILLUSTRATION.ORG)



## MARINA FROM *PERICLES*

One of Shakespeare's less-frequently performed tragicomedies, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* tells a winding tale of Pericles, whose travels lead to adventure, misfortune, and eventually family reunion. While contemporary scholars believe that Shakespeare co-wrote the play with another playwright, the play's second half is believed to have been written almost entirely by the Bard himself.

This part of the play focuses heavily on Pericles' daughter Marina. Left on Tarsus to be raised without her grieving and widowed father, Marina becomes a beautiful, eloquent, and virtuous woman. Angry that Marina's charms far surpass those of her own daughter, the wife of Marina's guardian tries to have her murdered. Marina escapes the murder plot, but is kidnapped by pirates and then sold to a brothel. Nevertheless, Marina remains chaste by charming and convincing brothel costumers to amend their ways and forsake all "bawdy houses." Elsewhere, Pericles learns of Marina's supposed death. Devastated, he plans to mourn for the rest of his life.



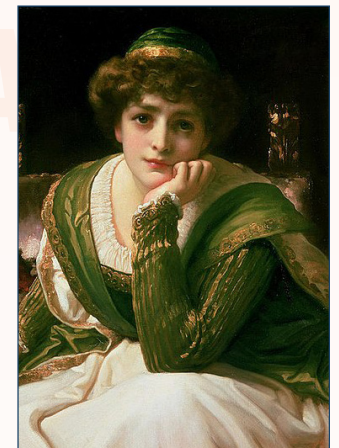
H.M. PAGET'S ILLUSTRATION OF PERICLES AND MARINA BEING REUNITED. (SHAKESPEAREILLUSTRATION.ORG)

The play ends happily when Pericles and Marina—each believing the other dead—are reunited. Even Pericles' wife, Thaisa, believed long dead, is found to be alive and well by the play's end. Marina weds Lysimachus, a former brothel costumer she had redeemed. Like many of the women in Shakespeare's late tragicomedies, Marina is a more complex character than some of Shakespeare's earlier heroines. Her cleverness and extreme eloquence are perhaps unparalleled in the Shakespearean canon.

## DESDEMONA FROM *OTHELLO*

The character of Desdemona in *Othello* suffers perhaps the most explicit, and unjust death in all of Shakespeare's plays. Desdemona falls in love with Othello, a Black man and an accomplished military general. Despite her father's disapproval, Desdemona marries Othello. However, their happiness is short lived. Iago, a comrade of Othello's whose hatred and villainy know no bounds, seeks to destroy Othello's life by ruining the love he has for his new wife. Over the course of the play, Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him. Innocent, loving, and faithful to the end, Desdemona is ultimately strangled to death by her husband who believes her guilty of infidelity.

Desdemona's most poignant scene comes just before her death. As she readies for bed with the help of her attendant (and Iago's wife,) Emilia, Desdemona, sensing her doom, contemplates love and grief and powerlessness. She recalls a maid of her mother who was forsaken in love, and the mournful song she used to sing. The song, today referred to as the "Willow Song" contains perhaps Shakespeare's most famous lyrics.



DESDEMONA BY FREDERIC LEIGHTON. (WIKIPEDIA)

**DISCUSS**

1. How is Desdemona's song and story about her mother's maid similar to a story told by Kalean in *Letters From Home*? <sup>A</sup>
2. Despite previously being on opposing sides, Shakespeare's Margret and Elizabeth become bonded over their suffering at the hands of Richard. Does this happen in real life? What sort of previously opposed people might have bonded when being faced with the Khmer Rouge's brutality?
3. Marina gets a happy ending in *Pericles*. Still, what traumas might she carry with her?
4. Othello kills Desdemona because of Iago's lies and manipulations. If Desdemona represents victims of the Cambodian Genocide, and Iago represents the Khmer Rouge, how might we view Othello? Who might he represent?
5. Margret and Elizabeth are largely powerless against Richard's tyranny. Nevertheless, they curse him again and again. What does this suggest about the power of language? What does this suggest about language's ability to harm? To heal?
6. Directly following his reunion with Marina, Pericles hears music no one else can hear, and follows into a trance that eventually leads him to the discovery of Thaisa. Read the excerpt below, and connect it to *Letters From Home*.

**Pericles:**

O heavens bless my girl! But hark, what music?  
 Tell Helicanus, my Marina, tell him o'er  
 Point by point, for yet he seems to doubt,  
 How sure you are my daughter.

**Helicanus**

—But what music? My lord, I hear none.

**Pericles:** None?

The music of the spheres!—List, my Marina.

**Lysimachus:**

It is not good to cross him. Give him way.

**Pericles:**

Rarest sounds! Do you not hear?

**Lysimachus:** Music, my lord? I hear—

**Pericles:** Most heavenly music.

It nips me unto list'ning, and thick slumber  
 Hangs upon mine eyes. Let me rest.

*(He sleeps.)*

<sup>A</sup> ANSWER: *Connections between Loss, Madness, and Music: One of Kalean's Aunts lost her husband to the Khmer Rouge after he was accused of rape. Chinary tells Kalean that before committing suicide, his aunt went mad, and reverted to singing the songs of her childhood.*



CONNECTIONS  
**THE POETRY OF  
 MONICA SOK**

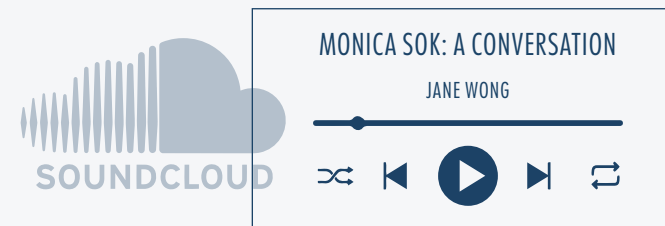
Monica Sok is a Khmer-American poet. She is a first generation American, and her parents settled in Lancaster, Pennsylvania after surviving the horrors of the Cambodian Genocide. Like Kalean Ung's *Letters From Home*, Sok's poetry deals with themes of identity, family, and intergenerational trauma.

(WWW.MONICASOK.COM)

**LISTEN**

Have students listen to this Monica Sok interview from 2017. Here, she discusses how she merges the narratives of her family's trauma into her poetry.

[SOUNDCLOUD.COM/JANE-WONG-932585275/MONICA-SOK-INTERVIEW](https://www.soundcloud.com/jane-wong-932585275/monica-sok-interview)



*A suggested cut of the interview runs from the beginning until 15:20.*

**DISCUSS**

1. What similarities were there between Kalean Ung's father and Monica Sok's father's stories regarding the their pasts? Why do you think this is? <sup>A</sup>
2. What other similarities are there between Ung and Sok's respective father's? <sup>B</sup>
3. In *Letters From Home*, Kalean mentions that the moths that inhabit her dreams "also appear... in the moments when [she] needs them the most. Like when [her] heart breaks or in the silence between the sentences [she] writes. How does silence affect Sok's work? Is it the same, or different?
4. Both Kalean Ung and Monica Sok often reference small bugs; moths for Ung, mosquitos, ants, and spiders for Sok. Why do you think they are drawn to these creatures? Do they make poignant metaphors?
  - a. What do the moths represent for Ung?
  - b. What do the mosquitos represent for Sok?

**DISCUSS** *continued*

5. What is the function of myth-making in Sok's work? <sup>C</sup>
  - b. Consider Kalean's myth about the women and the alligators in *Letters From Home*, do you think this myth serves a similar purpose? Why or why not?
6. Sok says that despite the trauma in her family and in her culture, she believes that the best way to tell these stories is often through tenderness, love, beauty, and sometimes levity. Does Ung's play suggest something similar? How so?

**WRITE**

Have students read the poem, "Nocturne" by Monica Sok (*see page 15*). Have each do a close reading of the poem and discuss their findings with a partner or small group when they've finished.

*Note: the word "krasang" refers to a sour fruit/fruit tree native to Cambodia.*

**CLOSE READING QUESTIONS**

1. Who is the narrator in the poem?
2. What is the tone of the poem? What is the mood?
3. What is the effect of repetition in this poem?
  - a. What does the repetition of "tell me" suggest?
  - b. What does the refrain, "World, throw off [your mosquito net]" suggest? Why is this refrain altered as the poem continues? What does this suggest?
4. What do the last three lines suggest about the writer's world view?
5. What role does the natural world play in this poem? Why does the writer reference the animals/surroundings she does?
6. Are the terms "brother" and "sister" used literally or figuratively? How do you know?
7. How is safety portrayed in this poem? Hint: Examine the first three lines of the second-to-last stanza.
8. What metaphors do you find most effective in this poem? Why?

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS BY SOK**

- "[On Fear, Fearlessness and Intergenerational Trauma](#)" (personal essay)
- "[Remains](#)" (poem)
- "[Cambodia](#)" (poem)
- "[The Weaver](#)" (poem)
- "[The Weaver In My Poems: A Remembrance of Em Bun](#)" (personal essay)

<sup>A</sup> ANSWER: time 2:58 on the recording.

<sup>B</sup> ANSWER: Both intellectual and well educated – they were/would have been targets during the reign of the Khmer Rouge.

<sup>C</sup> ANSWER: time 7:55 on the recording

**ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS****PAGE 34****ACTIVITY IDENTITY CHARTS****PAGE 35****ACTIVITY IDENTITY PLAYLISTS****PAGE 36****PROJECT FAMILY INTERVIEWS****PAGE 37****PERSONAL ESSAY PROMPTS**

SEE PAGES 34-37 FOR ACTIVITY &  
PROJECT DETAILS & INSTRUCTIONS

SEE PAGE 32 FOR  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**NOCTURNE**

By Monica Sok

World,  
throw off your mosquito net  
and tell me the time.  
Tell me the day.  
Ask my face for news of my heart.  
Wolf spiders break through clouds.  
Fire ants dig below the lava strip.  
Bullets run in the rubber tree forest.  
Bending, they paint the grass  
an orange-yellow sap.

World,  
throw off your mosquito net!  
Tell me the time!  
Tell me the day!  
My brother's hands are pinned to rock  
so he becomes a mountain.  
In the mass graves across the lake  
broken teeth protest  
above dirt  
above skulls  
below a hundred moths, fluttering.  
And the krasang holds my sister's leaves,  
so I caress the krasang  
to touch her cheek.  
I will float down the stream  
until it ends.  
Until it ends, the mines avoid me.

Tell me time is a strangling fog.  
Tell me the day is an elk drinking carefully  
from the crocodile's river.  
But you are safe inside your mosquito net.  
Inside your mosquito net,  
you are safe.

World,  
throw it off then! Throw it!  
It doesn't matter what covers you when the sky sleeps.  
In the light you are a dangerous place.  
No matter the time, no matter the day,  
I live in the hole  
of your mosquito net.



LETTERS  
FROM HOME

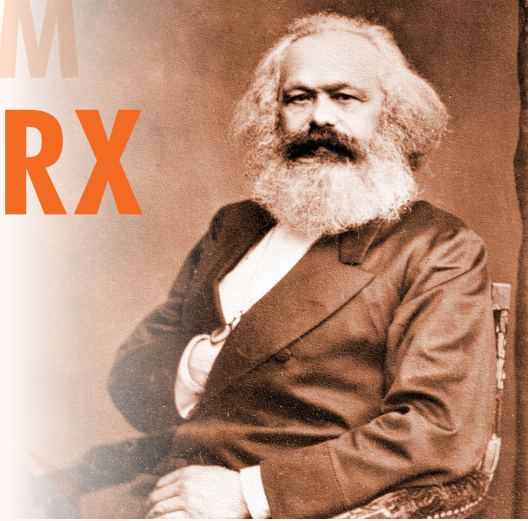


## TIMELINE

- 1942 Chinary Ung is born in Takeo, Cambodia.
- 1949 The Republic of China becomes a communist country under the leadership of Mao Zedong.
- 1950 Khmer communists form an alliance with the Vietnamese against the French colonists.
- 1953 Cambodia gains independence from France. The exiled monarch, Norodom Sihanouk returns from exile to rule the country.
- 1954 Vietnam is split between the American backed Republican South, and the Soviet backed communist north.
- 1956 The United States Army begins training the South Vietnamese troops.
- 1958 Chairman Mao launches the Great Leap Forward, leading to famine and the death of millions.
- 1964 Chinary Ung comes to the United States to study music at the Manhattan School of Music.
- 1965 The United States begins bombing the eastern border of Cambodia and Vietnam. Pol Pot becomes the leader of the Khmer Communist Party, he visits with Chairman Mao in the Republic of China.
- 1966 Mao's Cultural Revolution begins in China. Millions of scholars, teachers, doctors, and middle class professionals are sent to the countryside to be "re-educated."
- 1967 The Cambodian Civil War begins: the communist Khmer Rouge against the government forces of the Kingdom of Cambodia
- 1969 **OPERATION MENU BEGINS:** Under president Nixon, the United States Air Force drastically escalates the bombing of the Cambodian border with Vietnam. Nixon hopes to decimate the Viet Cong armies hiding in the Cambodian jungles and keep the Khmer communists at bay. Thousands of Khmer civilians die.
- 1970 Sihanouk is removed from power. The Khmer Republic is formed under Lon Nol, whose Republican government is supported by the United States.
- 1973 The United States Congress calls for a halt of bombings in Cambodia. Khmer support for the Khmer Rouge continues to rise.
- 1975 **"YEAR ZERO"** -- The Khmer Rouge takes control of the country. People living in cities are relocated to the country and forced into labor camps. The educated middle class people are tortured and executed, and religion is banned. Millions die of starvation, disease, and execution over the course of four years. In Vietnam, the South surrenders to the Northern Viet Cong. The last American troops are evacuated, ending the Vietnam War.
- 1976 Pol Pot becomes prime minister, and Cambodia is renamed Democratic Kampuchea. Mao Zedong dies in China, bringing the Cultural Revolution to an end.
- 1977 The Cambodian Genocide rages. Cambodia launches military attacks on its borders with Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Thousands of civilians die. Chinary Ung's brother, Sirath dies in a Cambodian labor camp.
- 1978 The cruelty of Pol Pot's regime leads to a rebellion in the east of Cambodia. The rebels are defeated and they retreat to Vietnam, seeking aid.
- 1979 The rule of the Khmer Rouge ends. Vietnamese troops occupy the capitol of Phnom Penh. Pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin, is made Prime Minister of Cambodia. The Cambodian-Vietnamese War begins, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge flee to the Thai border.
- 1980 Chinary Ung's surviving family members arrive at Khao I Dang, a refugee camp on the Cambodian-Thai border. From there, many eventually immigrate to the US with Chinary's help.
- 1986 Chinary Ung composes *Inner Voices*. Klean Ung is born.
- 1989 Vietnam forces exit Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge tries to wrangle back political control.
- 1993 General elections for the State of Cambodia are boycotted by the Khmer Rouge, who attack government forces.
- 1994 The party of the Khmer Rouge is outlawed in Cambodia.
- 1998 Pol Pot dies while under house arrest. In his final interview he declares that his "conscience is clear," and that everything he did, he did for his country.

## COMMUNISM THEORY & PRACTICE:

# KARL MARX



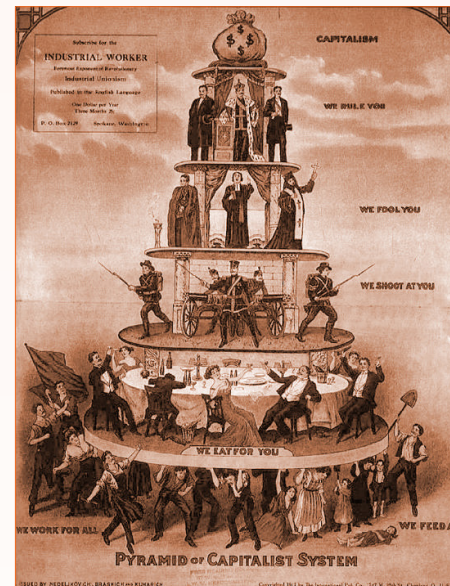
KARL MARX, PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN MAYALL, 1875. (WIKIPEDIA)

**COMMUNISM** was first theorized by the German philosopher and economist, Karl Marx. Living during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Marx witnessed the effects of the **Industrial Revolution** first hand. Many countries in western Europe had been socially and economically transformed by technological advancements. The **Industrial Revolution**, **capitalism**, and centuries of growing international trade resulted in what Marx called **surplus labor**. Manufacturing had become advanced enough to produce a permanent surplus of goods, but this surplus of products posed a problem: these extra goods and services were never equally distributed among the social classes. The smaller wealthy and middle classes, or the **bourgeoisie**, always exploited the larger lower and working classes. The bourgeoisie controlled the means of production, owning and overseeing factories and work forces, and setting prices for goods and services. In order

to maximize profit, the **bourgeoisie** applied **surplus-value** to these goods and services, setting the buying price high, while the cost to make the product itself was relatively low because the **bourgeoisie** paid the working classes as little as possible.

The **capitalist** European economies depended on the surplus of goods and services and the **surplus labor** that produced them. This **surplus labor** was provided by the lower working class, called the **proletariat**. The **proletariat** was made up of poor workers who lived in industrial urban centers. These individuals were overworked and underpaid, and they were subjected to dangerous and unsanitary living and working conditions. The **proletariat** was the largest class of people in industrial Western Europe, and the national economies were reliant on their labor. However, these individuals rarely owned land, and they held little-to-no political power. **Capitalism**, Marx said, always resulted in the exploitation of the **proletariat** by the **bourgeoisie**, and this was an injustice: it was unfair for the minority to have such power and wealth while the lower classes suffered and toiled.

Furthermore, the capitalist system would eventually result in its own downfall. Capitalist economies sought to always make a profit by overproducing commodities and services, which resulted in a surplus of products, not all of which could be sold. Thus, the value of these goods and services



1911 AMERICAN POLITICAL CARTOON CRITICIZING CAPITALISM. PUBLIC DOMAIN. (KHANACADEMY)



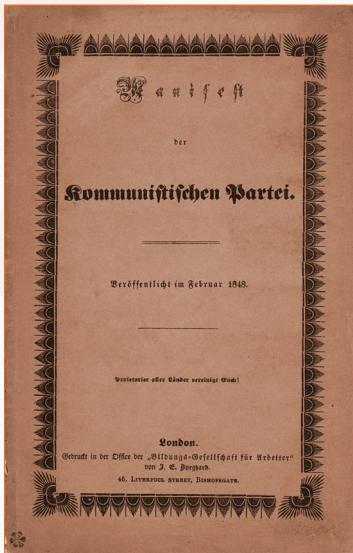
A POLITICAL CARTOON CALLED "THE CONDITION OF LABORING MAN AT PULLMAN." CHICAGO LABOR NEWSPAPER, PUBLIC DOMAIN. (KHANACADEMY)

was always destined to fall, leading to economic crisis and recession. Marx called this phenomenon **crisis theory**. When prices fell and economic strife arose, the **proletariat** would always be hit the hardest. In time, Marx said, this suffering and strife would lead to a **proletariat revolution**. With no means of true political power, the **proletariat** would eventually be forced to overthrow the ruling classes; seizing the **means of production** from the **bourgeoisie**, and replacing **capitalism** with **communism**.

Marx characterized communist governments in the *Communist Manifesto*, which he wrote with his friend and colleague, Friedrich Engels. Communist governments would see

to the abolishment of private property, inheritance, and the class system. The land and resources would be equally distributed among the people, and everyone would benefit from a higher standard of living. Education would be free, child labor would be abolished, and land and the **means of production** would be publicly controlled. Marx theorized that the first successful **proletariat revolutions** would occur in the countries like England and Germany – countries that had industrialized before the rest of Europe; countries at the most advanced stage of **capitalism**.

Marx believed that the fall of **capitalism** and the rise of **communism** was inevitable, but was less sure of what the transition from one economy to the other might entail. In the *Manifesto*, he briefly described a "**dictatorship of the proletariat**," which is often misconstrued as a recommendation of authoritarianism. Marx believed that following revolution, the **proletariat** would have to serve as the ruling class temporarily in order to properly quell the rebellions from the **bourgeoisies**. However, Marx provided few details about how his imagined classless society would come to replace the **dictatorship of the proletariat**.

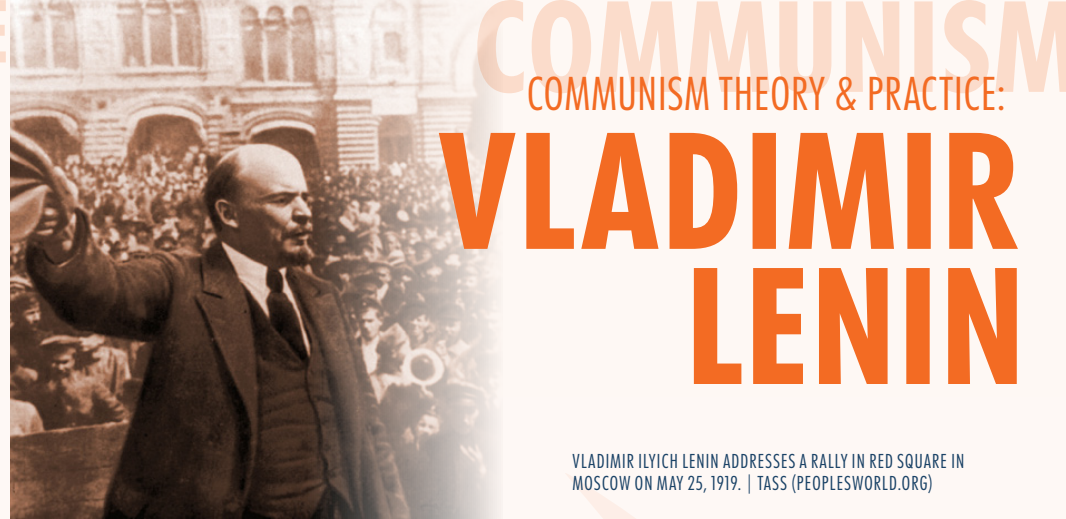


A COPY OF MANIFEST DER KOMMUNISTISCHEN PARTEI (1848; THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO) BY KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS. THE BRITISH LIBRARY—PUBLIC DOMAIN. (BRITANNICA)

**TERMS TO KNOW**

- MARXISM
- INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
- PROLETARIAT
- BOURGEOISIE
- SURPLUS LABOR
- SURPLUS VALUE

- MEANS OF PRODUCTION
- CAPITALISM
- COMMUNISM
- CRISIS THEORY
- PROLETARIAT REVOLUTION
- DIKTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT



# VLADIMIR LENIN

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN ADDRESSES A RALLY IN RED SQUARE IN MOSCOW ON MAY 25, 1919. | TASS (PEOPLESWORLD.ORG)

When Marx theorized on where the first proletarian revolutions and subsequent communist governments would arise, Russia was not among the nations listed. There were multiple reasons for this omission. The economy of the Russian Empire relied on agriculture and the exportation of natural resources. As late as the 19th century, the farms and mines were tended by **serfs**, individuals bound and obligated to work on the land of the upper classes. Throughout the majority of Europe, **serfdom** had been abolished for centuries, but in Russia, **serfdom** wasn't abolished until 1860. With the emancipation of the serfs, many people relocated to cities, and the government began a more serious effort to industrialize and modernize. However, industrialization was hindered by constant foreign wars, an unpopular monarchy, and a drastically unequal distribution of wealth. Furthermore, the physical size of the Russian Empire proved to be a hindrance to modernization. With huge swathes of farmland and countryside between cities, industrialization, resources, and workers was unevenly dispersed, and until the completed railroads, there was little to connect them.

was not a country ready for communism by Marx's standards. This truth posed a problem for Vladimir Lenin. Lenin and his fellow communists took power following the **Russian Civil War** that began after the fall of the monarchy. A dedicated Marxist, Lenin wanted desperately to see the Russian Empire transformed into a successful communist state, but he understood that by Marx's standards, Russia was by no means ready for such a shift.

By the time he took power in 1923, Lenin was prepared to address this issue. His solution had been penned years before, in 1901 when he published *What Is To Be Done?* In this political pamphlet, Lenin explained that the Russian proletariat was too oppressed, too uneducated, and too burdened by work to plan or carry out a proletarian revolution, or to see the creation of a successful communist state. The solution, Lenin wrote, was to divide the revolution into stages. In the first stage a political party of "**revolutionary socialist intellectuals**," a "**vanguard**," would educate the Russian working classes on **Marxism**.

At the start of the 20th century, capitalism and industrialization in Russia were only just beginning, and the urban proletariat class had only just emerged. Russia

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: CROWD SCATTERED BY GUNFIRE IN PETROGRAD, 17 JULY 1917, DURING THE "JULY DAYS" (A PERIOD OF UNREST IN PETROGRAD, RUSSIA—BETWEEN 16–20 JULY 1917—CHARACTERISED BY SPONTANEOUS ARMED DEMONSTRATIONS BY SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS ENGAGED AGAINST THE RUSSIAN PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT). (WIKIPEDIA)



# VLADIMIR LENIN

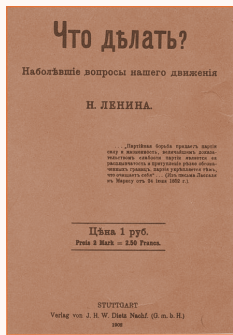
continued

In the meantime, the **vanguard** would act on behalf of the proletariat, leading the revolution and seeing to the dissolution of the capitalist state. Lenin saw his two-stage plan as an expansion of Marx's concept of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The state, led by the Marxist **vanguard** would protect and shape the proletariat. They would seize and control the means of production, see to collectivization, and create a single party state that would eventually pave the way for the communist society Marx had imagined.

This two-part plan became the foundation for **Marxism-Leninism**, a merging of Marx's philosophy and Lenin's practice. **Marxism-Leninism** became the basis for the new communist nations that emerged during the

20th Century, including the Soviet Union, East Germany, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Afghanistan. With his "**vanguard**," Lenin set a precedent: he provided a road map for other nations who, like Russia, were eager to form communist governments, despite not being at the advanced stage of capitalism Marx had deemed necessary for revolution.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? BURNING QUESTIONS OF OUR MOVEMENT BY VLADIMIR LENIN, ORIGINAL COVER. (WIKIPEDIA)



## TERMS TO KNOW

- MARXISM
- SERFDOM
- VANGUARD
- MARXISM-LENINISM

- REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST INTELLECTUALS
- RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR
- BOLSHEVIKS

# COMMUNISM THEORY & PRACTICE: MAO ZEDONG

After years of war with Japan, and internal civil war between Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists, the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. Under Chairman Mao Zedong, China became a communist nation. Like Russia, China had not industrialized to the extent of western Europe. After years of war, internal political conflict and imperialist oppression, the Chinese economy continued to rely heavily of agriculture. In Russia, Lenin had sought to turn the new urban working class into a revolutionary proletariat. Even more industrially underdeveloped than Russia, and with no true proletariat to speak of, Mao looked to the millions of peasants living in the Chinese countryside.



MAO ZEDONG IN 1959. (WIKIPEDIA)

# MAO ZEDONG

continued



MAO ZEDONG ADDRESSING A GROUP OF HIS FOLLOWERS IN 1944. FOX PHOTOS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES. (BRITANNICA)

Lenin had viewed peasants as uneducated and largely useless in matters of revolution. Mao, however saw the peasantry's lack of education as an advantage. Likening the peasants to "blank slates," Mao believed that the peasantry had great revolutionary potential. He also believed them to be unrefined and naturally violent, making them a powerful fighting force. Ultimately, Mao embraced Lenin's concept of a vanguard, and a two-step revolution, but instead of educating the proletariat on communism, Mao sought to revolutionize and educate the peasantry, a class he called the **popular masses**.

In the Soviet Union, Lenin's successor, Josef Stalin, set in motion a number of Five Year Plans; national goals to further industrialize the Soviet Union. While Mao advocated for Marxism-Leninism, he veered away from Stalin's tactics. Mao had less interest in heavy industrialization, he focused instead on farm **collectivization**, the process of forcing individual farmers to give up their private property and work on collective farms and communes. He also looked for innovative methods of industrialization that would utilize massive amounts of potential human labor, instead of simply replacing man-power with machines.

Like Lenin had adapted Marxism to suit the socio-economic situation in Russia, Mao adapted Marxism-Leninism to suit the socio-economic situation in China. He believed that as an Asian country that had suffered invasions from numerous imperialist nations, China's road to communism had to be different from the Soviet Union's, and different from what Marx had envisioned in Western Europe. Mao's brand of communism was heavily **nationalistic**, and he wrote openly about the "**Sinification**" of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.

In 1958, Mao launched an initiative called the **Great Leap Forward** with the goal of turning China into a thriving communist society. This campaign had dire effects on the Chinese population. Mao exaggerated the productivity and yields of farmers, and collective farm workers struggled to meet the government's demanded quota of grain, rice and other harvests. Afraid of admitting they couldn't meet the quotas, officials began to lie about how much was harvested. In order to feed the country and evenly distribute goods, the government then seized a proportion of the crops. The amount of crop taken reflected the amount that farmers had reported, but this number was vastly exaggerated out of fear for the new government. With nearly all food being taken from the countryside, famine and disease ripped through China leading to the death of over 20 million people.

With a national crisis on his hands, Mao stepped back from power in 1962. When he returned to the head of government in 1966, he attempted to centralize his power by launching the **Cultural Revolution**.

Mao announced that remnants of capitalism continued to plague China, and that if left unchecked, the bourgeoisie would once again seize control. Mao called on the children of the



A 1958 PICTURE SHOWING PEASANTS TOILING DURING THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD. COPYRIGHT: KEYSTONE-FRANCE (ALPHAHISTORY)

# MAO ZEDONG

continued

country to help him, and **Red Guards** were formed all around China. These child guards were encouraged to report family members, friends, and neighbors of any suspected anti-communist sentiment, and they sought to destroy the “old” institutions and traditions of China. They destroyed historical and religious artifacts, temples and shrines, art and books.

Many of the people reported and punished were scholars, doctors, scientists and teachers; people deemed the intellectual elite who were seen as extensions of the bourgeoisie. With a rise in **anti-intellectualism**, these individuals were killed, tortured, and humiliated publicly. Millions were sent to the countryside where they were subjected to hard labor in order to

be “**re-educated**” on how to be good Chinese communists. The **Cultural Revolution** lasted until Mao’s death in 1976.



MAO'S RED GUARD. HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES. (THOUGHTCO.COM)

## TERMS TO KNOW

**MAOISM**  
**MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT**  
**SINIFICATION**  
**POPULAR MASSES**

**COLLECTIVIZATION**  
**THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD**  
**THE RED GUARD**  
**ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM**

**RE-EDUCATION**  
**CULTURAL REVOLUTION**  
**NATIONALISM**

# COMMUNISM THEORY & PRACTICE: POL POT

POL POT, 1980. (IMDB)

In the 1950s, Saloth Sar, a Cambodian student studying in Paris read French translations of Mao Zedong’s writings. Mao may have been heavily influenced by Marx and Lenin, but this was nothing in comparison to the ways in which Mao influenced the man who became known as Pol Pot.

In 1965, Sar visited the People’s Republic of China. He connected deeply with Mao’s ideas surrounding the “Sinification” of Marxism, and he believed that as a formerly colonized Asian country, Cambodia’s path to communism



# POL POT

continued

would look similar to China’s. Furthermore, like China’s hostile relationship with Japan, Cambodia faced a similarly tense relationship with Vietnam. Inspired by Mao, Pol Pot’s application of Marxism-Leninism was deeply nationalistic. He left China with Mao’s collected writings in hand. In 1977, Pol Pot wrote to a magazine:

*After assessing the specific experience of **Kampuchea** and studying a number of instances of world revolution, and particularly under the guidance of the works of Comrade Mao Zedong, we have found an appropriate line with China’s specific conditions and social situation for the realities of **Kampuchea**.*

Once in power, Pol Pot took many of Mao’s ideas to the extreme. Inspired by the Cultural Revolution and Mao’s campaigns for re-education, Pol Pot didn’t just send people deemed a threat to the countryside, he cleared every urban center and city in Cambodia, sending people to collective farms where they were often worked to death.

While Mao’s Red Guards had destroyed religious shrines and temples, the **Khmer Rouge** outlawed Buddhism and Islam, and persecuted anyone of religious faith. More than 90% of Khmer Buddhist texts and artifacts were destroyed over the course of four years. Anti-intellectualism also rose far beyond what it had in the People’s Republic of China, and it led to the torture and death of anyone who had ever been educated in a western country. Doctors, lawyers, scientists, teachers, and other intellectuals were targeted, as were people wearing glasses, or people able to speak a foreign language. In Mao’s China and even Stalin’s Soviet Union, families of believed traitors were watched carefully, though not always punished for their association. Targets of the **Khmer Rouge**, however, were tortured and killed, and to avoid potential revenge plots, Pol Pot’s regime almost always killed their victims spouses and children, too.



POL POT (HISTORYTODAY)

Mao had preached the value of the collective over the individual, but Pol Pot took this farther; Anything that distinguished one individual from another was deemed dangerous. All citizens were forced to wear the same simple black clothing, and jewelry and other adornments were strictly forbidden. Marriages had to approved by the CPK

(Communist Party of Kampuchea) and children were told to renounce their mothers and fathers and view the party as their single parent figure.

Like Mao, Pol Pot favored poor peasants and children, believing them to be the most moldable citizens. The **Khmer Rouge** organized the Cambodian population into a series of three classes. The first class, called pénhsét or “Full Rights” consisted of the poorest members of the peasantry, and the lower-middle and middle-middle peasantry. The second grouping was triem, or “Candidates;” a grouping made up of the upper-class peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. The third grouping was the phnae, or the “Deposittees;” capitalists, foreigners, and minorities. However, these groupings were not definitive. Anyone who was living in an urban area after April 17, 1975, (whether they had fled there or resided there) was immediately deemed a deposittee regardless of their social or economic status. These individuals were seen as traitors and cowards, enemies of the rural utopia the CPK was trying to build.

## TERMS TO KNOW

**DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA**  
**KHMER ROUGE**  
**ANGKAR**  
**YEAR ZERO**  
**THE KILLING FIELDS**  
**THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE**  
**IMPERIALISM**  
**NEW PEOPLE**

# SLOGANS OF THE KHMER ROUGE



CAMBODIANS PULLED CARTS OF THEIR BELONGINGS BACK TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES AFTER THE FALL OF THE DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA REGIME, IN JANUARY 1979. (COURTESY OF THE DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA ARCHIVES) | (VOACAMBODIA.COM)

Both before and during their years of power, Lenin and Mao had written swaths of manifestos, and essays. Both men left behind them a trail of texts, detailing how they had

re-designed Marxist ideology to serve their own purposes. Pol Pot was a voracious reader of communist texts, Mao's writing in particular, but he did little political writing of his own.

Perhaps the greatest insight to Pol Pot's version of communism can be found today in the book, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar*. First published in 2004, this book which was compiled and researched by scholar Henri Locard, contains hundreds of short political slogans. These slogans served as Khmer Rouge propaganda, and they provide invaluable insight into one of the world's most ruthless dictators and his regime. In the forward to the anthology, historian David Chandler reiterates how and why these sayings were weaponized in an effort to erase thousands of years of Khmer history and culture:

*...a favored method for undermining [Cambodian] institutions was one that was already deeply rooted in Cambodian culture. This involved the oral transmission of edifying sayings, rhymes, and proverbs. Before the revolution these short, commonsensical texts had provided generations of Khmer men, women, and children with diversion and moral guidance...For thousands of years they had furnished the thought-worlds of ordinary Khmer. They lay at the heart of Cambodian culture.*

Traditional Khmer sayings that preached wisdom and advice were replaced with brutal reminders to self-criticize and put the Party (Angkar) above all else; reminders to inform on your neighbors, to work harder, and to abolish individual thought; Reminders that the CPK and

the Khmer Rouge were always watching. These sayings and slogans were so often repeated that survivors of the Cambodian Genocide carried them in their memories years and years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

## SLOGANS PRAISING THE REGIME

"Democratic Kampuchea is clean and pure: there is no corruption."

"The Angkar has not only liberated you all, comrades, but liberated our territory, liberated our riches, liberated our liberty, gaining complete independence, and it has equally freed you from the very notion of class."

"The Angkar is the master of the waters, master of the earth."

"Long live the correct and incredibly clear-sighted Communist Party of Kampuchea!"

## SLOGANS ON THE GLORY OF LABOR

"The Angkar only favors those who are indefatigable"

"While alive, you must work!"

"There are no Sundays, only Mondays."

"If you do not complete your task during the day, you will complete it by night."

"Dear comrade, let's fight [work] until our last drop of blood."

## SLOGANS INSPIRED BY MAO

"The wind from the East always vanquishes the wind from the West."

"With the Angkar, we shall make a Great Leap Forward, a prodigious Great Leap Forward."

"When pulling out weeds, remove them roots and all."

"Completely get rid of the castoffs from imperialistic, feudal, and reactionary days."

"Everyone must know how to do self-criticism and conduct criticism of one another."

"The spade is your pen, the rice field your paper."

## SLOGANS ON ENEMIES OF THE STATE

"The sick are victims of their own imagination."

"He who protests is an enemy; he who opposes is a corpse!"

"Better to kill an innocent by mistake than spare an enemy by mistake!"

## SLOGANS ON SURVEILLANCE AND INTERROGATION

"The Angkar has the many eyes of a pineapple."

"Comrades, the Angkar already knows your entire biography."

"The Angkar never repeats the same question twice."

"Report everything to the Angkar!"

## SLOGANS ON THE DISSOLUTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

"Give up all personal belongings: renounce your father, your mother, all your family."

"Do not harbor private thoughts!"

"The Angkar is the people's brain."

# FUNDING PROVIDED, IN PART, BY

BARR-KLARMAN MASSACHUSETTS ARTS INITIATIVE

GREATER LOWELL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION—RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION GRANT

LOWELL CULTURAL COUNCIL

MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL

NATHANIEL & ELIZABETH P. STEVENS FOUNDATION

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

RAMSEY MCCLUSKEY FAMILY FOUNDATION

RICHARD K. & NANCY L. DONAHUE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION

This program is also supported in parts by grants from local cultural councils, local agencies which are supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

# THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE

APR 17, 1975 – JAN 7, 1979

When the Khmer Rouge took power, they began their rule by murdering the officials of the former government and military personnel. In a matter of days, urban areas, including the capital city of Phnom Penh, were emptied. Schools, banks, businesses, and even hospitals were closed and destroyed. Seen as enemies of the rural agrarian utopia Pol Pot sought to create, city dwellers, labeled as “New People” were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to the country. Those who refused were killed, as were those who lagged behind. On the long treks from city to country, many individuals were told that the cities were being emptied in order to protect the citizens from American bombings.

Many of these victims, particularly the sick, disabled, and elderly, died on the way to the countryside. Those left were immediately put to work in labor camps and farming communes where they were overworked, underfed, and beaten. Families were separated, and communes were divided up by age and gender. Unauthorized meetings with family were forbidden and resulted in execution. Living conditions were poor, and rations were



AN EXHUMED MASS GRAVE IN CAMBODIA YIELDS SKELETONS OF THE EXECUTED. OCTOBER 10, 1981. —DAVID ALLEN HARVEY/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (USHMM—UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM)

small; many forced laborers starved to death, and others perished or suffered from diseases like malaria, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, intestinal worms, and infection.

While many toiled to death in the countryside, other individuals were deemed too large a threat live. Intellectuals and professionals were targeted and branded as “capitalist imperialists.” They were tortured and executed along with their families. Religious individuals of various denominations were targeted and killed, Buddhists and

CAMBODIAN REFUGEES WAIT IN LONG LINES FOR FOOD RATIONS OF EGGS AND RICE INSIDE A CAMP ON THE THAILAND/CAMBODIA BORDER IN 1979. PHOTO BY JAY MATHER. (COLORADO.EDU)



LONG LINES OF REFUGEES ON THE MOVE SOME 17 KILOMETERS FROM THE CAPITAL IN CAMBODIA IN 1975. BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES. (TIME.COM)

Christians among them. However, it was the Cham Muslims who were particularly singled out; nearly 80% of the Cham population in Cambodia was eradicated during the Khmer Rouge’s reign.

In political prisons like the infamous S-21 (Tuol Sleng), prisoners were interrogated and tortured with waterboarding, hosing, sleep deprivation, suffocation, and various forms of maiming. Bodies piled up by the thousands, and unable to bury bodies quickly enough, individuals were marched to mass graves, today known as “Killing Fields,” where they were beaten to death. Western medicine was considered a product of capitalist-imperialism,



CAMBODIANS TOIL AT AN IRRIGATION PROJECT IN KOMPONG THOM PROVINCE IN 1976. DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA. (USHMM—UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM)

and was no longer practiced. With nearly all doctors imprisoned or executed, the regime relied on child medics who were encouraged to perform medical experimentation without anesthesia on political prisoners. There are only 12 known surviving prisoners of the S-21 prison.

The rate of killings spiraled as the Khmer Rouge became more paranoid. Frustrated that food production wasn’t being met by the forced labor, the Khmer Rouge looked for scapegoats at every turn: the intellectuals, the monks, the petty bourgeoisie, the individualists, the New People and the secret capitalist-imperialists, all sought to undermine their rule and return Cambodia to the days before the “glorious revolution”. By the end of the reign, the increasingly paranoid Khmer Rouge had begun executing members of the party. Officials were killed for failing to meet impossibly high harvest demands or for failing to find and punish any number of imagined traitors.

By the time the Khmer Rouge was removed from power, between 2 million and 3 million Khmer citizens had died by execution, starvation, over-work, and disease. **Nearly 25% of the Khmer population had been wiped out in less than four years.**

# OTHER INFLUENCES: THE KHMER KINGDOM

While the Khmer Rouge was shaped by communist ideology, the extent of their influences spanned beyond Maoism and Marxism-Leninism. Nationalism permeated Pol Pot's regime, and spurred by anti-colonial and anti-western sentiment, the Khmer Rouge sought to return Cambodia to the days of the Khmer Kingdom, when the Khmer people had been at their most prosperous and powerful.



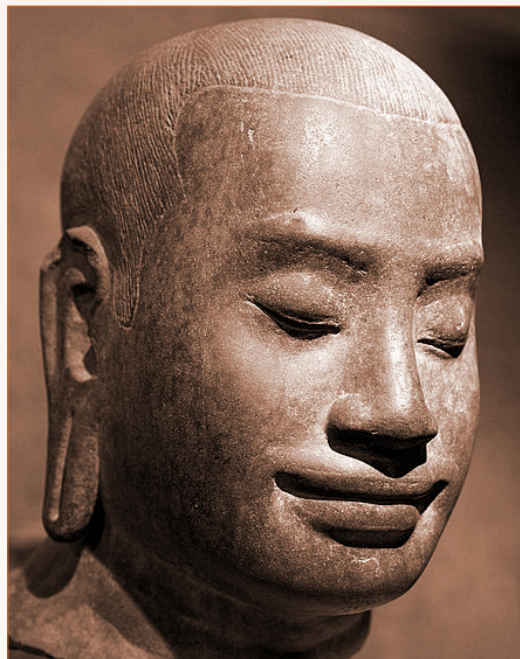
ANGKOR WAT HAS A MASSIVE MOAT SURROUNDING THE CENTRAL TEMPLE COMPLEX—SEEN FROM THE AIR, THE ENTIRE SITE IS REMARKABLE FOR ITS PRECISE 90-DEGREE ANGLES (CREDIT: ALAMY). (BBC.COM)

Ruling from around 800 C.E. to 1430 C.E., the Ankorian Empire spanned across southeast Asia, covering what is today Cambodia, Thailand, Southern Vietnam, and Laos. King Jayavarman II founded the empire after returning to what is today Cambodia from the court of Java (Indonesia). After declaring himself monarch, Jayaraman II build his Southeast Asian empire by organizing political marriages, by receiving land grants, and by emerging victorious in a number of military campaigns. The empire continued to thrive under the rule of Yasovarman, who undertook numerous building projects, and constructed large reservoirs, called barays. These barays and their stemming canals provided a steady water supply for the irrigation of rice fields and other crops. The barays and canals of the Ankorian Empire caused a boom in both agriculture, population and trade.

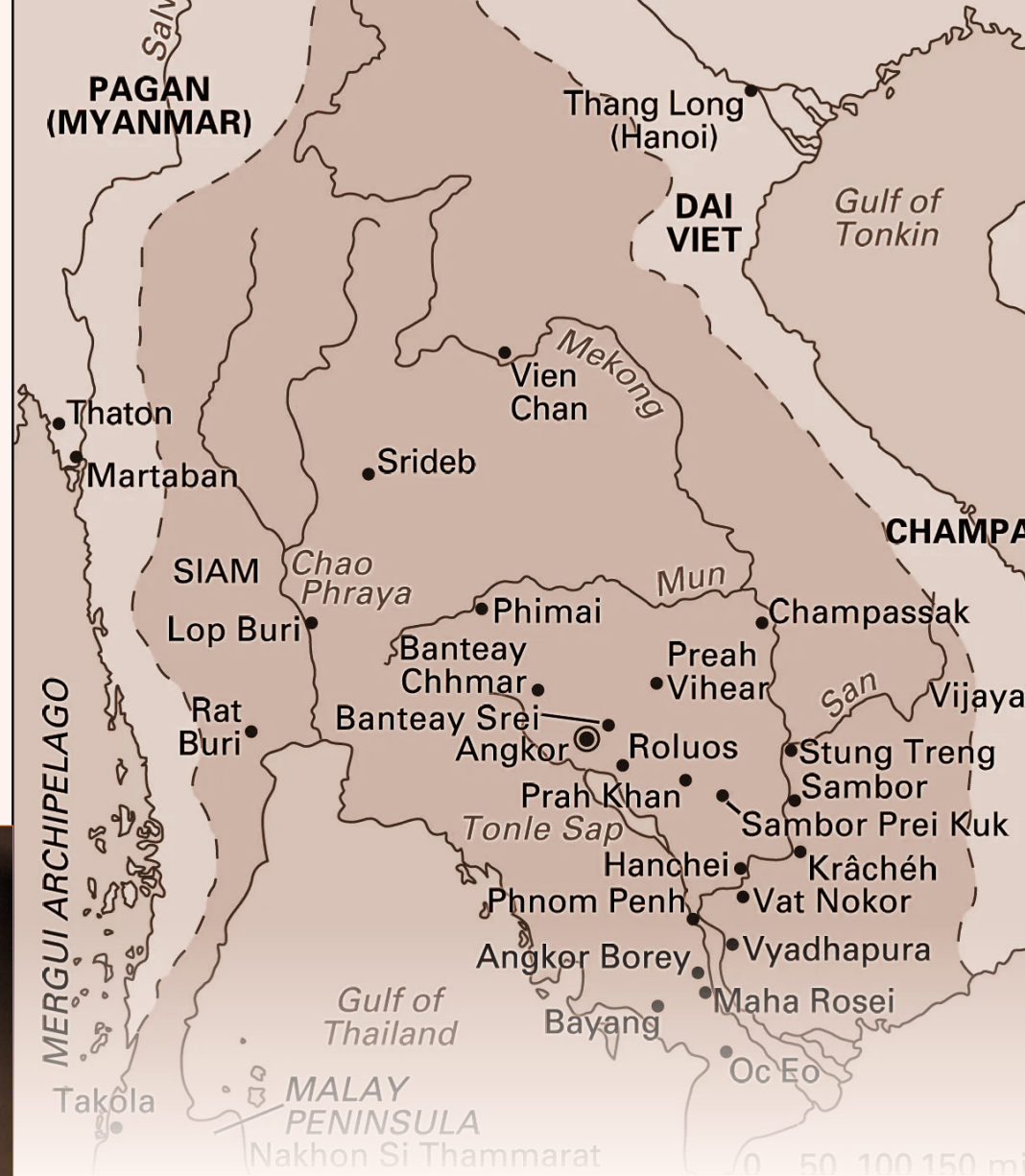
The 12th century saw the reign of Jayavarman VII, who after years of war and strife, led the Khmer people to victory against the Cham Muslims of Champa, who had taken

the capital of the Khmer Kingdom years before. After 20 years of war, Jayavarman VII successfully pushed the Cham back east, and the rest of his reign was marked by relative peace and prosperity.

After five centuries, the kingdom fell in the 15th century when the army of what is today Thailand conquered the Ankorian Empire. Marked by prosperity, unity, and remarkable agricultural growth, it is not difficult to see why the Khmer Rouge longed to see Cambodia returned to the powerful state it had been before it was conquered by other Asian kingdoms, and later, Western imperialists. In examining the history of the Khmer Kingdom, it becomes clear that the persecution of Cham Muslims and other non-Khmer Asian nationals, was part of a long history of prejudice perpetuated by warring empires. Understanding the prosperity that came with the agricultural growth during the Ankorian Empire also illuminates the Khmer Rouge's obsession with turning back time. The



BUST OF JAYAVARMAN VII, GUIMET MUSEUM. (WIKIPEDIA)



A MAP OF THE KHMER EMPIRE (KINGDOM)—OR ANKORIAN EMPIRE—AT ITS PEAK, C. 1200. (ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, INC.)

urban-dwellers labelled “New People” faced a never ending list of horrors for embracing modernity. The peasantry, labeled the “Old People” faced less persecution because they were seen as being closer to the roots of the agricultural prosperity that marked the Khmer Kingdom’s rule.

There exist, of course, many ideological contradictions in the way the Khmer Rouge

wished to return to the days of old. As they were persecuting “New People” by the thousands, they were also shouting slogans that encouraged a complete rejection of the “old ways.” They sought to take Cambodia both back in time, while simultaneously launching the country into a utopic future with no remnants from the past.

# OTHER INFLUENCES: THE UNITED STATES' BOMBING OF CAMBODIA

By 1965, the United States was years into a losing conflict in Vietnam, supporting the Southern Vietnamese troops against the Communist Viet Cong to the north. Attempting, he claimed, to stay neutral, Cambodian Prince Sihanouk cut ties with the United States. He nevertheless allowed communist North Vietnamese troops to utilize Cambodian ports and take refuge in Cambodian towns and jungles. In retaliation, the United States under President Johnson, launched a number of covert targeted airstrikes along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Bombing increased drastically in 1969, and the United States began carpet bombing the mobile headquarters of the Viet Cong as they tracked them through the Cambodian jungles.

President Nixon ordered Operation Menu to be carried out. Operation Menu involved extensive carpet bombing deeper inside Cambodian territory, across both jungles and densely populated villages and towns. The extent of this operation was kept largely secret, for it blatantly disregarded Nixon's promise to Congress that the bombing in Cambodia would only occur thirty kilometers from the Vietnam border, and always avoid civilian towns by a minimum of one kilometer.

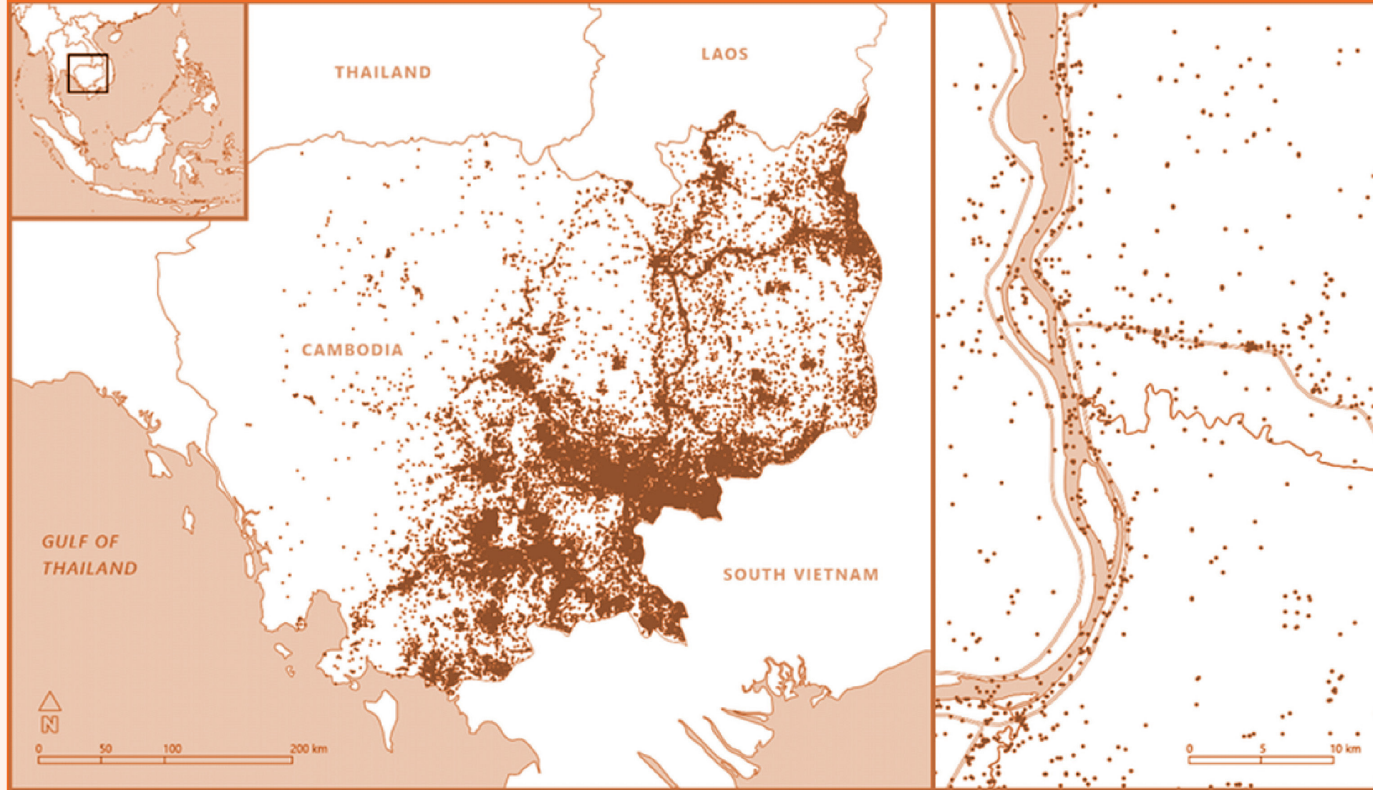
Between 1965 and 1973, the United States dropped 2,756,942 tons of bombs on Cambodia, a net weight larger than the total weight of bombs dropped by all the Allies in World War II. The result was the loss of hundreds of thousands of Khmer civilian lives. One Nixon Administration official stated years later: "We had been told, as had everybody...that those carpet bombing attacks by B-52s were totally devastating, that nothing could survive." The death and destruction brought forth by the United States attacks perpetuated anti-western, specifically anti-American sentiment among the Khmer people. The Khmer Rouge capitalized on this growing hatred and unease, shaping their propaganda tactics around American-induced devastation. Former Khmer Rouge officer Chhit

Do explained that it was common practice for the Khmer Rouge to lead civilians to the bombing sites:

*Every time after there had been bombing, they would take the people to see the craters, to see how big and deep the craters were, to see how the earth had been gouged out and scorched. . . . Terrified and half crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told. It was because of their dissatisfaction with the bombing that they kept on co-operating with the Khmer Rouge, joining up with the Khmer Rouge, sending their children off to go with them....*

By 1973, the United States Congress became aware they were being deceived about the extent of US military destruction in Cambodia. Congress ordered a halt on the operation, but by then the damage was irreparable; civilian lives had been lost, and

villages destroyed, and the Khmer Rouge had amassed an additional two-hundred-thousand troops. Two years, later the Khmer Rouge took the capitol of Phnom Penh, and Pol Pot's reign of terror began.



## U.S. BOMBING TARGETS IN CAMBODIA 1965-1973

EACH DOT REPRESENTS A SITE OF U.S. BOMBARDMENT (115,273 IN TOTAL). TARGETS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND LAOS NOT SHOWN.

## DETAIL ALONG MEKONG RIVER NEAR KRATIE

BOMBARDMENT FOLLOWED ROADS AND RIVERS, TARGETING STRUCTURES, VEHICLES, AND BOATS.

SITES BOMBED BY THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE 1965-1973. (RESEARCHGATE.NET)

(THE WEEK.COM)



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE BOMBING CAMBODIA. (COURTESY OF CRIME MAGAZINE | AP FILE | BLOGS.DICKINSON.EDU)

In 1970, a military coup removed Prince Sihanouk from power. Lon Nol, a Cambodian nationalist took power as prime minister, with support from both the United States and South Vietnam. In order to buy the increasingly unpopular Lon Nol government time against the encroaching Khmer Rouge, and in order to provide the retreating US troops with cover,



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How was Pol Pot influenced by Mao's Cultural Revolution?
2. Why did Pol Pot view Stalinism as Marxist "revisionism?"
3. What similarities exist between Stalin's reign in the Soviet Union and Pol Pot's reign in Cambodia?
4. Mao "Sinified" Marxism-Leninism to fit the socio-economic situation in China. How did Pol Pot "Kampuchanize" Marxism-Leninism?
5. Why were those in urban areas on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1975, immediately deemed "depositees?" Explore the anti-urbanism practiced by the Khmer Rouge.
6. How did a history of western imperialism shape Khmer Rouge ideology?
7. What led Vietnam to invade Cambodia and overthrow the Khmer Rouge? Explore Vietnamese/Khmer relations between 1960-1979.
8. What were the lasting effects of the Khmer Rouge's rule on education and literacy?
9. What is the political climate of Cambodia like today? How is this a reaction against the rule of the Khmer Rouge?
10. Why were ethnic and religious minorities so heavily targeted during the Cambodian Genocide? Explore the persecution of Cham Muslims, Buddhist monks, or the Vietnamese people living in Cambodia.
11. How did the Khmer Rouge's "Great Leap Forward" differ from the Great Leap Forward in the People's Republic of China?
12. How was the Khmer Rouge influenced by the ancient rule of the Khmer Kingdom? What contradictions came with this influence?
13. How did the US bombing of Cambodia affect Khmer politics? How did it pave the way for the Khmer Rouge's regime?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES | BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cheek, Timothy, "Mao and Maoism." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*. Oxford, England: Oxford Academic, 16 Dec. 2013 <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199602056.013.041>,
- "Chronology of Cambodian Events Since 1950." Genocide Studies Program, Yale University, 2022. Retrieved at <https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/cambodian-genocide-program/publications/chronology-cambodian-events-1950>
- Graphics and photos sources include, but are not limited to: shakespeareillustration.org, wikipedia, fineartstorehouse.com, monicasok.com, khanacademy.org, britannica.com, peoplesworld.org, alphahistory.com, soundcloud, historytoday.com, getty images, AP, VoaCambodia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Colorado.edu, time.com, bbc.com, nbcnews.com, rabble.ca, blogs.dickinson.edu
- Heilbroner, Robert L. *The Worldly Philosophers: the Lives, Times, and ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999.
- Locard, Henri. *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: Sayings from Angkar*. Thailand: Slikworm Books, 2004.
- Mann, Michael. "Communist Cleansing: Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot." In *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 318-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511817274.012.
- Owen, Taylor, and Ben Kiernan. "Bombs Over Cambodia." *The Walrus*, October 2006. Retrieved at [https://gsp.yale.edu/sites/default/files/walrus\\_cambodiabombing\\_oct06.pdf](https://gsp.yale.edu/sites/default/files/walrus_cambodiabombing_oct06.pdf)
- Quackenbush, Casey. "40 Years After the Fall of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia Still Grapples With Pol Pot's Brutal Legacy." *Time Magazine*, January 7, 2019. Retrieved at <https://time.com/5486460/pol-pot-cambodia-1979/>
- Schram, Stuart R. "Chinese and Leninist Components in the Personality of Mao Tse-Tung." *Asian Survey* 3, no. 6. California: University of California Press, 1963. 259-73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023518>.
- Sok, Monica. *Monicasok.com/writing.com* Accessed Aug. 2022.
- "Tuol Sleng and the Cambodian Genocide: S-21 Prison (Tuol Sleng)." Cornell University Library. Accessed July 2022. <https://guides.library.cornell.edu/c.php?g=968985>
- Mao, Zedong "On New Democracy." 1940. Retrieved at [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_26.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm)

## GROWING UP CAMBODIAN: CHILDHOOD AND CRISIS THREE DECADES AFTER THE KHMER ROUGE



Cambodia has the highest infant mortality rates in the region and only one birth in ten will have a skilled attendant present.



Surviving birth, Cambodian children can expect a life expectancy of only 63 years whereas if they were born in neighboring Vietnam they could expect to live to 75.



Cambodia has as many as 24,000 street children and this rate increases by 20 percent each year.



Childhood mortality remains alarmingly high and according to UNICEF 14 percent of Cambodian children die before age five. In contrast, across the border in Thailand the under-five mortality rate is 1.3 percent.



The National AIDS Authority reports Cambodia has 80,000 orphans and vulnerable children as a result of the AIDS epidemic.

PHOTO ESSAY BY NATHAN WILLIAM MEYER | YALEJOURNAL.ORG

## IDENTITY CHARTS

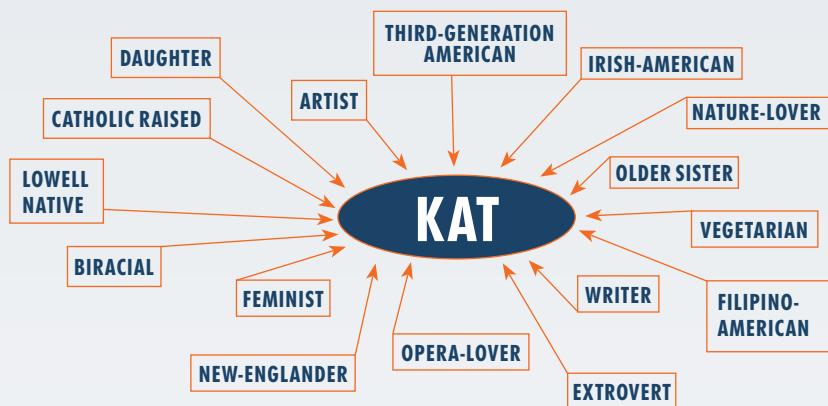
### WHAT IT IS

Identity charts and diagrams are a popular and effective way to get students to consider the nuances of personal human identity. This simple visual activity provides a basis for more complex projects on identity (See Identity Playlist, Family Interviews, Identity Prompts).

### INSTRUCTIONS

Begin by having a class discussion. Ask students to define the word “identity”. Why is it important? What are they most important aspects of your own identity? Jot down some aspects of identity the students mention; these could include: family relationships, nationality, sexuality, race, religion, community, hobbies, talents, beliefs, etc.

Provide each student with a piece of paper. Have them write their name in the center, and after reflecting on their own identities, have them write aspects of their personal identities springing forth from their name in the center of the page. An example can be seen below. When students have finished, have them reflect, either individually or in pairs.



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was the first thing you wrote? Why?
2. Of all your “identities,” which three are the most important to you now? Why?
  - a. Has this changed as you’ve aged? What was the most important aspect of you identity as a child?
  - b. What do you think will be the most crucial part of your identity as you get older?
3. Why are some aspects of identity subject to change while others are not?
  - a. What aspects of your identity could be changed?
  - b. Which one’s could not?
4. How much control do you think we have over our own identities? Is identity constructed by society, the individual, or both?

## IDENTITY PLAYLISTS

### WHAT IT IS

A creative project that encourages students to consider their identity through music while applying learned skills in textual analysis., merging close reading and personal reflection.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Begin with a brief class discussion about music and identity; explore what music means in the play both literally and figuratively is a good place start. Next, ask students about their own music tastes. Does music shape their identity? How so? What makes them love a song? What are the songs they’re most moved by about? Ask students if they’re familiar with the concept of album notes – the pages of lyrics and other material that often accompany the music with the purchase of a record or a CD. Explain that students will be creating a new version of album notes.

Students are to choose any four songs of any genre that they feel deeply connected to, and that they identify with. Examples include: songs they associate with their childhood/family/ culture, songs with mentioned experiences they can relate to. Students are to do a close reading of the lyrics, just as they would with a poem, or another textual excerpt. Encourage students to move beyond simply “I like it—” students should examine the figurative language in a song, the voice of the song’s narrator, and the mood and tone that the song evokes. While language should be the focus, students may also analyze the song musically if they possess the knowledge to do so. When finished, students can create and design a personal “album cover,” digitally or by hand.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. When did you first hear this song?
2. What memories do you have associated with this song?
3. What are the lyrics saying? What is the message or story of the song?
4. How does the song use figurative language (metaphors, alliteration, hyperbole, personification, onomatopoeia, imagery, etc.) ? What makes this figurative language effective?
5. Who is the narrator in the song?
6. What is the mood of the song? What is the tone?
7. What is the rhyme scheme like? Does it affect the mood or the tone? How so?
8. When was the song written? Is it similar to other songs written during this time? If yes, how so?
9. Is this song linked to a specific culture? Who do you think identifies most with this song? Why do you identify with it?

## FAMILY INTERVIEWS

### WHAT IT IS

An opportunity for students to conduct an interview with a family member of their choosing, to explore identity and family dynamics, and to find writing inspiration in their own lives.

### INSTRUCTIONS

In small groups, have students reflect on how family dynamics and relationships have shaped their identity. Referring to their Identity Charts or Identity Playlists is a good place to start, but students can also reference the guiding questions below. In their small groups, students should then discuss what they think makes a good interview question before making a list of at least ten questions to ask their chosen family member. Remind students that what they learn about their families need not be earth-shattering or surprising. The point of the exercise is to converse and reflect, to gather details from family members that might otherwise have been missed. Students should conduct and record (notes, audio recording) the interview in the following days. Sharing what they've learned in partners or groups is encouraged.

*Note: if time allows, conducting two interviews (one with two different family members) is encouraged so that students have options about what to write about later.*

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How has your relationship with members of your family informed who you are?
2. How has your relationship with your family shaped how you see yourself?
3. Who in your family do you think you're the most like? Who are you most different from?
4. What about your family members do you wish you knew, but don't?
5. What have you learned from you family? What have they learned from you?
6. Do you share the same beliefs (moral, religious, philosophical, political, etc.) as your family? If yes, why do you think that is? If not, why not?
7. Do you think your life experiences thus far have been significantly different from the experiences of your family members? Why or why not?

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEW QUESTION?

- Questions should be clear and easy to understand.
- Questions should be open ended (no yes-or-no questions).
- Questions should be specific and should encourage the interviewee to reflect on specific experiences/belief/memories.

## IDENTITY ESSAY

Students should use the previous exercises to generate potential personal essay topics. The prompts below are a guide. Personal essays allow students to creatively improve their writing, while prepping them for future assignments, including college applications, scholarship applications, and more.

1. How has your relationship with a member of your family changed in the last 5 years? Why is this? How does this make you feel?
2. What parts of your identity do you see in other members of your family? Does this bring joy? Does it put pressure on you? Does it bring you closer together?
3. What part of your identity is singular to you and not your family? How does this make you feel? How does it make your family feel?
4. Reflect on a story told to you from a family member about their life. How has it shaped your view of them?
5. Explore a childhood memory you have that you feel has influenced you and made you into the person you are.
6. Write about a piece of literature, music or art that you identify with. (*a book by an author who shares your culture, a painting done by your grandmother, who is an artist like you, etc.*). Why is it important to you? How can others understand you by viewing/listening/reading this piece of work you identify with?
7. Explore the intergenerational differences in your family. This could be you and your parents, grandparents, even you and a much older or younger sibling.
8. What sort of people do you feel the deepest kinship with? How are the identities of these people similar to yours? (*all disabled, all women, all people of color, etc.*).
9. Have you ever not been accepted due to a part of your identity? Why? How did this make you feel? How did it shape you as a person?
10. Reflect on a talent or hobby that has shaped who you are and your view of the world.
11. Are you bilingual? If so, how has knowing two languages/cultures shaped your identity and how you see the world?
12. Explore an event that caused a great amount of personal growth for you. How and why did you change?
13. What is a family, religious, or cultural tradition that you partake in? What does it mean to you?
14. Reflect on a time a part of your identity was questioned or challenged. Was this challenged by you, or someone else? What was the outcome?
15. What member of your family do you feel understands you the most? Why is this? How are you alike? How are you different?

THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

# RED RIDING HOOD



BY ALLISON GREGORY

APRIL 5-16, 2023

Wolfgang, the greatest actor in the world, is interrupted while performing his "one-man extravaganza" by a delivery person with a mysterious package. But the show must go on, and the two of them take on all the roles in this fast, funny, and surprising adaptation. The wolf may have dinner plans, but this Red is courageous, clever - and talented!

(Recommended for ages 5 and older.)

### TICKETS

ADULT \$34 | CHILDREN \$15



## MRT YOUNG COMPANY

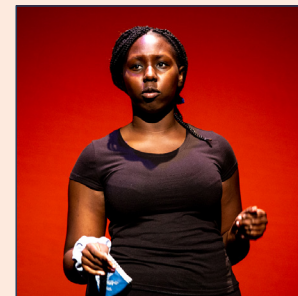
The MRT Young Company offers an educational theatre experience for students 14-18 years old. During our summer program, students participate in an intensive course of performance, scene analysis, and collaborative playwriting. Our generous funders guarantee admission through scholarships and grants.



## STUDENT MATINEES

More than 2,000 local students attend our student matinees each season. The matinees offer many students their first exposure to professional theatre and teaches them new ways to explore storytelling and literature. Our **Partners in Education** program keeps the program affordable for all.

CONTACT | Eve Foldan, Enterprise Box Office; [box\\_office@mrt.org](mailto:box_office@mrt.org) | 978.654.4678



Photos of Merrimack Repertory Theatre's Young Company and student matinees by MegPix/Meghan Moore.

THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

# RED RIDING HOOD



**STUDENT  
MATINEES ON  
SALE NOW!**

**MRT.ORG/  
STUDENT-MATINEES**

BY **ALLISON GREGORY**

**APRIL 5-16, 2023**



Wolfgang, the greatest actor in the world, is interrupted while performing his "one-man extravaganza" by a delivery person with a mysterious package. But the show must go on, and the two of them take on all the roles in this fast, funny, and surprising adaptation. The wolf may have dinner plans, but this Red is courageous, clever - and talented!

*(Recommended for ages 5 and older.)*