

**Cambodian American Studies Model Curriculum**  
**California Department of Education**  
**Cambodian Popular Music**  
**Grades: 9–10**

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**Area of Study:** Cambodian Diaspora

**Compelling Question:** What is the Cambodian diaspora and refugee experience?

**Lesson Question (Supporting Question):** How is music a form of resiliency and community building?

**Lesson Materials:**

Supplies:

- Rubric

Videos:

- *Ugly History: The Khmer Rouge Murders*

Various Songs from Popular Cambodian artists (1950s-present)

- *Archives khmer folk and pop music vol. 1.*
- *Dang by Chun Vanna*
- *Cambodian rocks [full album, 1996. Compilation]*
- *Cambodian old school music videos from the 1980s.*
- *Vannda - time to rise feat. master Kong Nay*

**Lesson Objective:** Students will listen to music as sociopolitical testimonies to analyze genocide—not only as physical violence, but also structural and cultural violence on a whole community.

**Ethnic Studies Theme:** This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *reclamation and joy* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students explore the ways that communities reclaim histories through art, cultural expression, and counternarratives.

Students will explore how Cambodian American music became an avenue for cultural identity.

For additional guidance around ethnic studies implementation, refer to the *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum* (2022) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>.

**Standards Addressed:**

CCSS.ELA.RI.9–10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA.W.9–10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Lesson Assessment:**

Students will choose from one of the following creative writing options:

- Song lyrics or (spoken word) poem
- Criteria for creative writing assignment

**Suggested Amount of Time:** 90 Minutes

**Lesson Background:**

Cambodian popular music experienced a huge rise during the mid twentieth century. Western musical influences including jazz and rock ‘n roll combined with traditional Khmer music to bring about new popular musical styles and musicians. Singers like Sinn Sisamouth gained great popularity during this period. This rise of popular music took a dark turn in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge came to power and began to persecute musicians during the Cambodian Genocide.

**Lesson Procedures:**

Note to teacher: The goal of this lesson is to humanize survivors, refugees, and refugee families by demonstrating Cambodian American agency, resiliency, and power. It is to contextualize historical events in contemporary settings to show the ongoing impacts of mass atrocities and structural violence. It is also to learn about history and current events with different forms of knowledge products outside of traditional history textbooks.

**I. Cultural Energizer**

- Teachers should begin the lesson by asking students to reflect on one of their favorite songs that is school appropriate.
  - Students should look at the lyrics for the song and find a reference to something in society.
  - Ask students to get in pairs and share with a partner what someone might learn about current issues from the song they selected.

**II. Tapping into Prior Knowledge**

- Review the historical and sociopolitical background of Cambodia in the 1950s to early 1975 to provide context for the music produced during the time period.

- Discuss the Cambodian Genocide (1975–1979) and its effects on cultural art forms; music during this time period were revolutionary songs in which we need to be sensitive about due to its potential in eliciting trauma, particularly amongst survivors.
- Teachers can utilize the lesson background to review or this video source: *Ugly History: The Khmer Rouge Murders*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8\\_TYFfk\\_1U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_TYFfk_1U)

III. Interaction with first source: Khao I Dang - Chun Vanna & Cambodian music video from 1980s-early 1990s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLFKcSv8k2E>

- As a class, watch the video and lyrics two or three times.
- Discussion Questions:
  - What does this song tell us about refugees, their families, and life making practices?
  - How does this (contemporary) song pay homage to traditional and earlier popular music?
  - What is the message the artist is trying to convey?

IV. Interaction with second source: VannDa - Time to Rise ft. Master Kong Nay  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvje5oblLw>

- Independently, students will watch this second music video and answer the same questions.
- Discussion Questions:
  - What does this song tell us about refugees, their families, and life making practices?
  - How does this (contemporary) song pay homage to traditional and earlier popular music?
  - What is the message the artist is trying to convey?
- Once students have finished listening and answering questions, have them discuss with a partner. Then, have a whole class discussion to check for understanding and compare answers.
  - If time permits, teachers can have students compare and contrast the two songs.

V. Assessment: Creative Response

- Students will choose from one of the following creative writing options with the topic of 20th century Cambodian history.
  - Song lyrics or (spoken word) poem
    - Criteria for creative writing assignment
      - Theme - The writing should reflect Cambodian history or culture and be respectful
      - Accuracy - The content should be historically and culturally accurate, utilizing reliable sources

- Creativity - Encourage students to use literary devices such as symbolism, metaphors, storytelling techniques
- Structure and Form - The writing should follow a desired structure (i.e: rhyming scheme, stanza length) or form (i.e: free verse, ballad, sonnet)
- The final writing product can be typed, handwritten, or recorded.
- Allow for opportunities to share and present to peers
  - The teacher can host an open mic and invite students to read their creative writing to the class
  - Students can record themselves reading their writing and post it onto a website platform such as Flipgrid

### **Scaffolding:**

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
  - Provide prompts that guide learners in when and how to ask peers and/or teachers for help
  - Display the goal in multiple ways
- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
  - Provide multiple entry points to a lesson and optional pathways through content (e.g., exploring big ideas through dramatic works, arts and literature, film and media)
  - Provide written transcripts for videos or auditory clips
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
  - Provide scaffolds that can be gradually released with increasing independence and skills (e.g., embedded into digital reading and writing software)

For additional ideas to support your students, check out the UDL Guidelines at CAST (2018).  
<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

### **Multilingual Learner Supports:**

- **Emerging:** Consider the following method to support with emerging students:
  - Writing: Require vocabulary notebooks with non-linguistic representations or L1 translations
    - During integrated ELD, teachers may sometimes offer strategic primary language support for EL students who are newcomers or at the earliest level of Emerging proficiency.

- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
  - Writing: Provide rubrics and exemplars to scaffold writing assignments
    - Students investigate how authors of stories invite readers to make inferences about characters by showing what the character does instead of simply telling how the character is feeling.
- **Bridging:** Consider the following method to support with bridging students:
  - Writing: Require academic writing and the use of target academic vocabulary
    - Apply domain-specific vocabulary and general Academic vocabulary in open sentence frames to perform functions, like describing or explaining, that target specific grammatical structures.

For additional guidance around scaffolding for multilingual learners, please consult the following resources:

- *English Learner Toolkit of Strategies*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ujkdc2xp1dqjzrlq55czph50c3sq1ngu>
- *Providing Appropriate Scaffolding*  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-to-olkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>
- *Strategies for ELD*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/dcp15ymah51uwizpmmt2vys5zr2r5reu>
- *ELA / ELD Framework*  
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-framework>
- *California ELD Standards*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/vqn43cd632z22p8mfzn2h7pntc71kb02>

### **Enrichment Opportunities:**

- Student led self-reflections.
- Contextualizing the history and experiences of the Cambodian genocide and diaspora relationally to American and world history through popular music.
- Creating music as a power and resilience practice.
- Opportunity for large and small class discussions.

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### **Supplementary Sources:**

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