



## Sophal Ear: Escaping the Khmer Rouge

*"We live in the age of the refugee, the age of the exile."*

- Ariel Dorfman

TED Fellow Sophal Ear shares the compelling story of his family's escape from Cambodia under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. He recounts his mother's cunning and determination to save her children.

Sophal Ear leads research on post-conflict countries -- examining the effectiveness of foreign aid and the challenge of development in places like his native land, Cambodia.

### Level:

- Upper Intermediate or Advanced

### Themes/Context:

- Refugees and illegal immigration
- War and genocide
- International responses to war

### Grammar Aim:

- Discourse Markers
- Past perfect revision
- Vocab

### **Warm up/Discussion**

Begin with brief discussion on the nature of war and how the world handles refugee problems

- What are some examples of current conflicts in the world today? Why do you think they are happening, and what could be done to solve them?
- Where are refugees from these conflicts going? Is the global situation bad or good? Can you think of any examples?
- Does your country have a large immigration or refugee program? What are some other reasons people would have for immigrating to another country, apart from war?

## Video

Students to watch video. Discuss what they might know about the Khmer Rouge or other Communist / Stalinist regimes and give brief background if possible.

NB: Some background vocab pre-teaching might be required for students who are not sure about this aspect of history or who Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were, etc.

## Comprehension Checking

### T/F Questions

1. The Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia during the 1980s.
2. The United States bombed Cambodia during the Vietnam War.
3. The Khmer Rouge believed money was the most important part of society.
4. Ear and his family immigrated to Vietnam illegally by pretending to be Vietnamese.
5. The Khmer Rouge refused to use children as soldiers during the war/revolution.

## Vocabulary

### Word Matching – Synonyms or Definitions

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Rebuild                 | A. Equal  |
| 2. Encroach                | B. In spite of, nevertheless, despite.  |
| 3. Utopia                  | C. A group of people living together and sharing resources and responsibilities.      |
| 4. Notwithstanding         | D. To be destined to be executed.   |
| 5. Equivalent              | E. To build something again after it has been destroyed.                              |
| 6. Commune                 | F. When the government is removed from power.   |
| 7. "Headed to the gallows" | G. To move beyond the acceptable limits; to advance gradually on another's territory. |
| 8. Revolution              | H. An imagined place where everything is perfect.                                     |

## Gap Fill

Bombing      Conflict      Notwithstanding      Munitions  
Nuclear      Believe      Equivalent      Banned

So, \_\_\_\_\_ the 1970s narration, on April 17th 1975 we lived in Phnom Penh. And my parents were told by the Khmer Rouge to evacuate the city because of impending American \_\_\_\_\_ for three days. And here is a picture of the Khmer Rouge. They were young soldiers, typically child soldiers. And this is very normal now, of modern day \_\_\_\_\_, because they're easy to bring into wars.

The reason that they gave about American bombing wasn't all that far off. I mean, from 1965 to 1973 there were more \_\_\_\_\_ that fell on Cambodia than in all of World War II Japan, including the two \_\_\_\_\_ bombs of August 1945. The Khmer Rouge didn't \_\_\_\_\_ in money. So the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Federal Reserve Bank in Cambodia was bombed. But not just that, they actually \_\_\_\_\_ money. I think it's the only precedent in which money has ever been stopped from being used. And we know money is the root of all evil, but it didn't actually stop evil from happening in Cambodia, in fact.

## Suggested Grammar

### Discourse Markers

- As a result
- Therefore
- So
- Because of

### Clauses of Contrast

- Although
- Even Though
- Despite / In spite of
- Notwithstanding

## Tense changes in narration and storytelling

- Past perfect
- Simple present
- Simple past

And my mother's Vietnamese was so bad that to make our story more credible, she'd given all the boys and girls new Vietnamese names. But she'd given the boys girls' names, and the girls boys' names. And it wasn't until she met a Vietnamese lady who told her this, and then tutored her for two days intensively, that she was able to go into her exam and -- you know, this was a moment of truth. If she fails, we're all headed to the gallows; if she passes, we can leave to Vietnam. And she actually, of course -- I'm here, she passes. And we end up in Hong Ngu on the Vietnamese side. And then onwards to Chau Doc. And this is a picture of Hong Ngu, Vietnam today. A pretty idyllic place on the Mekong Delta. But for us it meant freedom. And freedom from persecution from the Khmer Rouge.

## **Discussion/Debate**

Students to attempt to use appropriate discourse markers and phrases of contrast/comparison during discussion or debate. Work sheets and/or board work for reference.

### **Possible Topics:**

- The borders of every country in the world should be completely open to free immigration, especially concerning refugees. War is so common that this kind of law is necessary for people to have good lives.
- Stories like Sophal Ear's are the exception – most refugees are only a financial burden on their host countries and should eventually be repatriated (sent back to their home country) once the conflict or other problems there are resolved.
- Communism is the best form of government – Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge are an unfortunate exception to the rule. More countries should embrace communist practices and ideology.

### **Questions:**

1. Do you know anybody who has had the same experience as Sophal Ear? Is it common in your country?
2. How could your country help people like Sophal? Should your government do more to help?
3. Is it always possible for people who escape places like Cambodia or other regions experiencing conflict to achieve the same kind of success as Sophal? Does it matter?
4. Can you think of any other places in the world that are currently or have experienced conflict in the past that have generated a lot of refugees? Where did they settle? What happened in that case?
5. How would you solve the problem on a worldwide scale? Do you think organisations like the United Nations do a good job?
6. Is it acceptable for people to immigrate illegally in these kinds of cases?
7. Is illegal immigration a common problem in your country? How is it dealt with? How would you deal with it?
8. Do you think it should be easier or more difficult to immigrate from one country to another?