

# Angkor Relief Arts

## HEart activity Cambodia



### Objectives

To introduce students to the criteria required for a building or location to be listed as a World Heritage site and to increase knowledge of the stories depicted in the reliefs and about Khmer history. This exercise also fosters heritage appreciation in students and teaches them to value, preserve and protect Angkor.

### Activities

#### 1. Warm-up question and answer session

Inspire interest in the topic by asking the students to get into groups and together discuss what they think the answers are to the following set of questions:

- Where is Angkor?
- When was Angkor built?
- Who built Angkor?
- Why was it built?
- How was it built? Did the builders have machinery?
- Who lived at Angkor? What was the society like?
- Why was Angkor abandoned?
- Look at the World Heritage Convention. What criteria does Angkor meet?

Give each group a map of Cambodia and reference material (see example on page 3: "Angkor: World Heritage Site") so that they can look up the answers. These questions will make the students think about Angkor, its history and the reasons why it is listed as a World Heritage site. After 15 minutes bring the whole class back together and go through each question, getting ideas from the students and providing answers to the questions they could not answer.

## 2. Learning from the stories depicted in the relief artwork

Ask the students to look at one of Angkor's relief panels (or a picture of one if students cannot visit the site in person). Ask the students to think about the society that existed when the relief artworks were created and whether the artwork shows what life was like back then. Ask the students to discuss in their groups the story that is depicted in the relief panel and what message the story is trying to convey. Then each group should report back to the rest of the class.

## 3. Bringing the stories depicted in the relief artwork to life

Ask each group of students to turn one of the scenes from the relief artwork into a skit or roleplay (approximately 10 minutes long) by making up dialogue to go with the scenes. Each student should take the role of one of the characters depicted in the reliefs (for example: the king, cook, soldier, horse, etc.).

## 4. Role-playing

Each group of students should perform their skit or role-play in front of the rest of the class.

### Synthesis

After each group has given their performance, the students should discuss each of the skits and how they relate to the relief artwork they have seen.

### Materials

- Background information on Angkor - text and pictures
- Detailed information about the reliefs - explaining the story behind each relief, and photographs of the relief artwork.
- Map of Cambodia
- Video/DVD documentary about Angkor (if available)

## Angkor People and Society

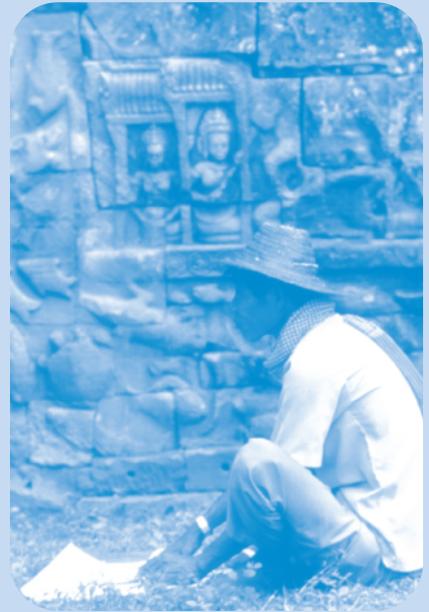
In ancient times, Angkor society was hierarchically-organized. The majority of the population was made up of farmers but there were also several noblemen, who owned slaves. There were also many stone-masons, builders and craftspeople who were responsible for creating the imposing stone temples of Angkor and the relief artwork.

## Angkor: World Heritage Site

Angkor, one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia, is located in north-western Cambodia and is where Khmer kings established their capital (between the ninth and twelfth centuries). Angkor was a highly developed civilization, as demonstrated by its stone temples, sculptures and bas-reliefs, as well as its elaborate irrigation system. Today, Angkor is an extensive archaeological site. More than 100 temples can be seen there. Civilian houses, including palaces, which were built in timber and other impermanent materials, no longer exist

Stretching over some 400 square kilometres, including forested areas, the Angkor Archaeological Park contains the magnificent remains of the different capitals of the Khmer Empire. They include the famous temple of Angkor Wat and, at Angkor Thom, the Bayon Temple with its countless sculptural decorations.

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992, Angkor is a site of outstanding value to humanity and one of the most significant sites representing the cultural diversity of Southeast Asia, i.e. the coexistence of original Khmer culture and the influence of Indian and Chinese civilization. While Angkor is a symbol of the traditional culture of Cambodia, it could also be a key for interpreting the cross-cultural background of Southeast Asia.



### Threats to the Site

In 1992 the site of Angkor was inscribed simultaneously on the World Heritage List and on the List of World Heritage in Danger. While being a site of great World Heritage value, it was clear that the site was seriously threatened by the civil conflict occurring in Cambodia at that time, which involved armed groups invading and plundering the site - with many sculptures and fragments of sculptures removed for sale outside of the country. Today, the relative political stability means that such civil conflict is no longer such a threat. Looting still occurs but a major threat to the site today is the impact of tourism. Tourism has the potential to cause great harm to the site if it is not managed carefully. In order to protect the site the following measures are required: protective legislation; an adequately staffed national protection agency; well planned tourism management strategies; permanent boundaries with meaningful buffer zones and regular monitoring; and co-ordination of international conservation efforts.

# Angkor Relief Art Works

These art works provide clues about the history of the Angkor site and beliefs of its people. The reliefs depict scenes from myths as well as scenes from everyday life, and tell interwoven stories with a common theme of good versus evil. Many reliefs feature stories about a hero-king and are very dramatic with the message that the king (and goodness) will always prevail over evil in the end. In these reliefs the Angkor king is often depicted as a god and is often seated atop a winged god.

Reliefs also often depict famous fables. One relief tells the story of the "Churning of the Milk Ocean", a Hindu creation story, in which the gods and demons battle for the elixir of immortality. Another relief tells the story of the Mahabharata, an Indian epic in which there is a huge battle between brothers which destroys the world. The famous Ramayana story is depicted on another relief. Yet another relief tells the story of the god Krishna's battles and ultimate victory over evil demons, while another relief depicts the exploits of King Suryavarman II, the king who built Angkor Wat. At the same time as portraying these dramatic struggles, the reliefs also show everyday life - depicting ordinary people fishing, walking and playing games.

For further information see the following publications

- **Safeguarding and Development of Angkor, UNESCO Paris Declaration**  
[http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=18343&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=18343&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- **A History of Cambodia by Chandler, David P., Westview Press, 2000**  
<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=9975103>

Useful internet sites:

- [www.unesco.org/whc](http://www.unesco.org/whc)
- [http://whc.unesco.org/ab\\_conve.htm](http://whc.unesco.org/ab_conve.htm)
- [www.historychannel.com/classroom/unesco/angkor/index2.html](http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/unesco/angkor/index2.html) [www.theangkorguide.com](http://www.theangkorguide.com)
- [www.nara.accu.or.jp](http://www.nara.accu.or.jp)
- <http://www.vwam.com/vets/angkor/introduction1.htm>

## **World Heritage in Young Southeast Asian Hands**

Second Sub-Regional Workshop: Introducing the Arts for Teaching on the Historic Environment  
**Heritage Education art Activity Sheets**



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