

What is Southeast Asia?

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I. Introduction

A. Background

Southeast Asia is a land that can be best characterized by one word: diversity. From its indigenous history, through its long period of colonization, to its present struggle of self definition, Southeast Asia remains a world of striking differentiation.

There are eleven independent countries that divide the landscape of this vast region. However, one must keep in mind that these nation states highlight geographic boundaries and do not necessarily encapsulate or bound distinctive cultural features or ethnic groups in a larger region.

Within the entire region, it is best to think of two areas: the nations that lie in either "insular" (or "island" Southeast Asia) and those that lie in "mainland" (or "continental" Southeast Asia). *Insular* Southeast Asia is composed of the following six countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines. *Mainland* Southeast Asia is composed of five countries: Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Within each country, one can usually make divisions between "highland" and "lowland" peoples. These are areas of low population and high population, respectively. These are also areas of high economic activity and low economic activity; and areas of present governmental stability and areas of little to no governmental stability. However much one may wish to classify and characterize this part of the world in simple ways, they will be unsuccessful. It cannot be done.

B. Target Grades:

Ninth - eleventh grades (but could be adjusted/ applied to other age groups)

C. Goals:

After the completion of this lesson, the student should be able to:

- 1.) Know where this region is in relation to the rest of the world
- 2.) Identify the eleven Southeast Asian countries on a map
- 3.) Be familiar with the colonial history of each country
- 4.) Name one interesting cultural feature about each country
- 5.) Understand the effect geography has had on this region
- 6.) Realize the present day condition of these countries.

D. Purpose:

To educate high school students from a cultural perspective on:

- 1.) why it is important to have knowledge about this region

2.) how Southeast Asia is influencing the world today

E. Approach:

Considering the age group of the students, this lesson *must* be teacher-guided, but student-led. Participation is imperative and discussion is the driving force behind it. Students will not retain information on an area that, most likely, has never been introduced to them unless they have a drive to actively participate in the lesson.

II. The Lesson

A. Introduction - Day 1

Goal: to grab their attention...and keep it!!!!

1. Put unlabeled maps of five different geographic regions on the board. Have students pick out which one they *think* is Southeast Asia.

Example maps: Middle East, China, Latin America, Russia, Southeast Asia, Europe

2. Put a *large* map of Southeast Asia on the board (one that can be written on) and call a student to come up and *outline* and *label* each country with a brightly colored marker. Afterwards, the instructor should give a *short* background and one interesting cultural feature of that country. Repeat for all eleven countries.

example: Thailand

Centrally located in continental Southeast Asia, but has access to sea trade off of the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. One interesting feature is that it is the only Southeast Asian country that was not formally colonized by a European country.

example: Burma (Myanmar)

Located on the western edge of continental Southeast Asia, but has access to sea trade off the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Its borders cross with the People's Republic of China (including Tibet), Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India. One interesting feature is that the country has vast amounts of forested land, in contrast to most Southeast Asian countries where timber reserves are fast becoming depleted.

example: Philippines

Located off to the east of continental Southeast Asia, and composed of 7,000 islands, the Philippines had limited contact with Hinduism or Indian trade, and no documented trade or exposure to Buddhist countries. Its location made it heavily involved in trade with present-day Indonesia and China. The Spanish conquest of the country in the 1500s brought Roman Catholicism, and one interesting feature is that the Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in all of Asia today.

example: Indonesia

Located in the southernmost area of Southeast Asia, and north of Australia, Indonesia is the fourth largest country (in terms of population) in the world. It is composed of 13,000 islands, the largest of which are Borneo (Kalimantan), Sumatra, and Java. The eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago is famous historically for its spices, which made it a major trading entrepot and exporter to India, China, and later the Middle East and eventually Europe. Indonesia is also the world's largest Islamic country in the world (in terms of population) today.

example: Brunei

Located on the northwest side of the large island of Borneo, the ancient but currently small state of Brunei was once a sultanate in charge of the entire island of Borneo and the Sulu islands of the southern Philippines. One interesting fact is that the standard of living in the current Sultanate of Brunei is among the highest in all of Southeast Asia because of the rich oil deposits; nearly 3/4 of the country's population are employed in the oil industry.

example: Singapore

Located on the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula, Singapore is a city-state that is only about 3/4 of a mile wide. It is one of the most important ports and high-technology, banking areas of Southeast Asia. It also has the highest standard of living in the region, owing to the fact that it is entirely urban. One interesting fact is that this is the only country of Southeast Asia where the Chinese population is dominant numerically.

example: Laos

Located inland between the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma, Laos is the only landlocked country (with access to the sea) in Southeast Asia. A very mountainous country, the Laotian population numbers less than 5 million. One interesting (but tragic) fact is that Laos is historically the most bombed country in modern history, owing to the Indochina wars of the 1970s.

example: Vietnam

Vietnam lies on the eastern edge of continental Southeast Asia. It was a country influenced as much by China as by India, and a country where both France (as a colonial ruler) and the United States (as an anti-communist defender of democratic South Vietnam) fought bitter wars. One interesting fact is that Vietnam is perhaps the only country where the U.S. lost a major war.

example: Cambodia

A relatively small country surrounding the important lake of Tonle Sap, where the Khmer civilization built a great and early empire owing to the well-watered delta of the Mekong River. Devastated by war and genocide in more recent decades, Cambodia is the ancestral home of one of the largest religious structures ever built - the temples of the empire of Angkor.

example: Malaysia

Located south of Thailand and north of Singapore, the country of Malaysia is one of the most ethnically plural in all of Southeast Asia. Slightly more than half of the country is ethnically Malay; the rest are Chinese and Indian populations descended from the years of British colonial rule, when large numbers of immigrants were brought in to work the tin mines, rubber plantations, and other industries. One interesting fact is that Malaysia has made many great strides as a country in reaching "developed country" economic status--more than any other agriculturally-based country in Southeast Asia.

3. Explain to the students in a discussion format the purpose behind this lesson. Students respond better when you "level" with them. First *ask them* why they *think* it is important to know about this region and respond to their inquiries.

B. The Colonial History - Day 2-4

Goal: for the students to *understand* how colonization shaped what Southeast Asia is today.

1. This lesson must be broken up over a period of 3 days or else each country will "run together" in the minds of the students. However, an in-depth analysis of each country is not necessary for the purpose of this introductory lesson.

Materials: study guide/ worksheet for students to fill in as they go along (see worksheet at end of this module)

Day 1 -- British colonies:

Myanmar (Burma)

Malaysia and Singapore

Day 2 -- French colonies:

Cambodia

Vietnam

Laos

Day 3 -- Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and American colonies:

Indonesia (the Netherlands)

Philippines (Spain and the U.S.)

East Timor (Portugal)

2. As you brief the students in a lecture/ discussion format, they should be following along, filling in their study guides. Prompt students to ask questions!!!

Read the chapter entitled "The European Advance and Challenge" in the book by Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*, in order to review the features of colonialism for each country in Southeast Asia.

C. Geography - Day 5-6

Goal: for the students to be able to pick out the main geographical features and see how geography affects each country.

Materials: Unlabeled map of Southeast Asia for each student

Large scale maps to hang on *all* walls of classroom

1. Assign each student a country and have them pick out as many geographical features as they can in their country by walking around and looking at the different maps on the walls (each map should be different: topographical, demographical, etc.)

2. Regroup in ten minutes and share answers with students filling in the most important features on their study guides. As the class goes through each country, explain how geography affects each one: economically, linguistically, socially, etc.

example: Philippines

The student explains that it is located in *insular* Southeast Asia, that it seems to be comprised of three main sections (Luzon island, central Visayan islands, and the southern region of Mindanao, Palawan and the Sulu archipelago). There are also a few mountain ranges in the northern part of Luzon, known as the Gran Cordillera, and there are a lot of volcanoes.

The instructor explains the significant way in which the Philippines differs from other countries in Southeast Asia, e.g., because of its seaward location, it lay outside the spice trade of eastern Indonesia and outside the lucrative trade between the Middle East, India and China. As a result, it was never really affected by Hinduism and Buddhism. There are also significant differences between highland and lowland cultures in the Philippines.

D. Southeast Asia Today - Day 7(wrap up)

Goal: for students to be aware of the current situation in Southeast Asia and to make this information relevant to their lives.

1. Assignment: (to be assigned during the previous class period)

Two paragraphs on the current state of his/her assigned country.

Directions: Research on-line (or by other means) a current happening or event in a country of Southeast Asia and complete a two paragraph write-up that will be presented in front of the class.

2. Group the students up into their previously assigned countries and have them report their findings to the class. For example, the Myanmar students go first, then the Philippines students, etc. The instructor then explains in more detail the current geo-political, economic, etc. situation of each country after the students have shared their current events.

example: Cambodia

Student reports on the continuing problem of landmines in the Cambodian countryside as a result of their war-ravaged past. Teacher reports, in agreement, that it is one of the world's most heavily land mined countries with an estimated four to six million UXOs still in the ground, waiting to be detonated. Also, despite the decline in political tensions, violence and street crime are still serious problems owing to poverty in the country.

III. Recommended Readings:

Cambodia. Home page. 2002. Lonely Planet. 15 April 2002: www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_east_asia/Cambodia/

Dutt, Ashok, editor, *Southeast Asia: Realm of Contrasts*, 1985, Westview Press. See chapter by Allen G. Noble, "The Physical Environment", pgs. 36-40.

Osborne, Milton, *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*. (get newest edition). Boston: Allen and Unwin.

Neher, Clark, *Southeast Asia: Crossroads of the World*, 2000, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. (This introductory book is written in such a way as to be accessible to high school students and teachers).

STUDY GUIDES

SOUTHEAST ASIAN COLONIZATION

STUDY GUIDE

Directions: fill in blanks as per the class discussion

Hint: some countries will have more than one colonizer

Myanmar:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation_____

brief reason behind occupation_____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country_____

Thailand:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation_____

brief reason behind occupation_____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country_____

Laos:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation_____

brief reason behind occupation_____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country_____

Cambodia:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation_____

brief reason behind occupation_____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country_____

Vietnam:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation_____

brief reason behind occupation_____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country_____

Malaysia:

colonizer_____

dates of occupation _____

brief reason behind occupation _____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country _____

Indonesia:

colonizer _____

dates of occupation _____

brief reason behind occupation _____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country _____

Philippines:

colonizer _____

dates of occupation _____

brief reason behind occupation _____

brief description of influences colonial power had on the indigenous country _____

GEOGRAPHY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

STUDY GUIDE

Directions: fill in blanks as per the class discussion

Myanmar:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Thailand:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Laos:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Cambodia:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Vietnam:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Malaysia:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Singapore:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Indonesia:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country _____

Brunei:

Major geographical features _____

How do these features affect the country_____

Philippines:

Major geographical features_____

How do these features affect the country_____

East Timor:

Major geographical features_____

How do these features affect the country_____
