

Discovering the Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand

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Project Summary:

Using printed and technology resources, students will research a facet of daily life of one of the six cultural groups, known as hilltribes that live in northern Thailand. Working in cooperative groups, they will prepare a multi-disciplinary project on the history and traditional way of life of the identified group.

Grade Level: Grades 6-8

Essential Questions:

- How did the hilltribes come to settle in Northern Thailand?
- What characteristics are unique to each particular “hilltribe”?
- What are some challenges faced by these people?
- What impact is regional development having on the lives of the hilltribes?

Background Notes:

In the land and mountains of northern Thailand live people belonging to six different cultural groups, or “hilltribes”. Most have come to settle in this area within the last 150 years, and many since the American War in Vietnam. Although many of these people no longer live in the hills, they have been identified by the Thai government as “chao khao”, which translates literally to “mountain people”.

These hilltribes, the Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Akha, and Lisu, each have their own language, traditional dress, history, beliefs and rituals. While each may be somewhat scattered geographically and lack tribal organization, they are identified by shared cultural characteristics. Each group is a cultural minority in a country where 84% of the population is Thai. They face many of the same issues as ethnic minorities face in other countries. Driven from their homelands of China, Laos, and Burma, these people strive to preserve their traditional lifestyle amid the crush of development and the curiosity of the outside world.

Washington State Essential Learnings Addressed:

1. Inquiry and Information Skills:

1.1.2b The student will identify key words, develop search strategies; locate appropriate and varied information sources; distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

1.1.2e The student will take notes, paraphrase, summarize, enter data.

1.1.2f The student will create a product that uses social studies content to support findings; present product in appropriate manner to a meaningful audience.

2.1 Understand and use interpersonal and group process skills required by citizens in a democratic society:

2.1.2b The student will participate in delegating duties, establishing rules, planning, making decisions, taking action in group settings.

3.1 Understand and apply critical thinking and problem solving skills to make informed and reasoned decisions:

3.1.3c The student will compare advantages and disadvantages, suggest alternate solutions; predict probable consequences, provide evidence to justify best solution.

Objectives:

- 1) Students will understand some of the difficulties faced by people forced from their homelands.
- 2) Students will research independently, take notes, and organize research findings.
- 3) Students will work in groups to develop a multi-media project to effectively present their findings to the class.
- 4) Students will answer a series of questions requiring critical thought relative to their research topic.
- 5) Students will write a brief reflective essay, evaluating their learning.

Materials:

- Access to public library resources
- Internet access
- Writing supplies, index cards, pens, paper, word processing capability
- Multi-media supplies including, but not limited to PowerPoint, Word, art supplies, craft supplies

Strategies:

Before beginning this unit, students should have an understanding of your expectations for a cooperative, tolerant classroom. This should be reinforced with a role-playing exercise. A list of norms should be posted. They should have practiced moving their desks into the configuration required for the day's activities in order to expedite set up and clean up for each class work period.

Preview:

- 1) Began by asking the students to work in pairs to write a paragraph (at least 4 sentences) describing what the word "home" means. Do not clarify by saying "just your house" or "your hometown". They should discuss it and define the question themselves. Have several students share their descriptions.
- 2) Lead a short discussion of common elements, prompting with questions that lead the students to "home" is a place that is familiar and where they feel safe, but other peoples "homes" may not necessarily feel like "home" to them.

Introduce Key Concept:

- 1) Have students move desks arranged around an open space in the center of the room. Using masking tape, tape a 6' x 6' square on the floor in the center of the room.
- 2) Select 6 students in your class to role play. Give each a Case study card.
- 3) Explain that the taped area is a country that has agreed to accept refugees. Discuss the meaning of the term "refugee". Only a limited number of people will be allowed into the country. They will be allowed to live there, but will not be guaranteed the rights of citizenship. Also, students must keep in mind that this is a foreign country with a strange language, different customs, unfamiliar foods, and a lifestyle different from their own.

Case #1: Your father fought fearlessly alongside the opposition during the recent war. When the war ended and a new government took over your country, the new government made things very difficult for your family and others like yours who had cooperated with the opposition. You have heard that the soldiers may even go so far as burn down your houses and kill your livestock. While your parents have not said you were in danger, you fear for the safety of your family. The decision has been made to leave your homeland and seek refuge across the border.

Case #2: The people of your village have been forced to move several times over the past 3 years. Twice, your crops have been nearing harvest and the military has swept in and forced everyone to pack up and start over again, elsewhere. This most recent evacuation has been especially difficult as winter is nearing and your family now struggles to find food and shelter. Your uncle has heard that across the border is a place where your people may be allowed to live and farm without persecution, but the journey will be difficult and you may be turned away at the border.

Case #3: A civil war has been raging in the hills around your village for months. You have been unable to sleep and your mother will not allow you or your sisters outside to play for fear of stray bullets. Your family has decided to try to escape their homeland to go to an area that is safer.

Case #4: You live in a small village. Life has always been hard for you, but lately there is talk of people, some only a year or two older than you and some older than your grandparents being taken away and forced into long hours of backbreaking labor, for which they are not paid. Some return ill or injured. Others never come home. You have decided to cross the border and leave your homeland before any of your family members are forced into labor, even though you do not know what awaits you on the other side of the border.

Case #5: You and your fellow villagers frequently face discrimination. Men and women are unable to get good jobs in the city. Their children are denied an education, beyond the village school. When you go into the city, the city people give you dirty looks or move away, because you wear different clothes and speak a different language. Sometimes they ignore you, as if you weren't even there. With no hope for a future, your family has decided to take their chances by leaving their homeland and going across the border.

Case #6: You have a job moving logs across the border, using an elephant. A new government has taken over your country. They are gradually taking control over every aspect of daily life, making it more and more difficult to earn a living or get an education, and for you and your family to build a life for yourselves. Your parents are worried about what this new government will do next. They decide your family must escape to another country.

- 4) Allow each of the students selected to take a few moments to read their cards, but instruct them not to let anyone else see them. Ask them to stand at the front of the classroom.
- 5) One by one, ask each student to step into the taped area and explain why they decided to leave their country. Prompt them to explain their situation and feelings with questions such as, "Who did you come over with?", "What did you bring with you?", "You were farmers in your homeland, will you farm here, too?", "Are you afraid?" .
- 6) Once all six "refugees" are in their new country, ask questions about their new homes and how they like living there. They may need guidance to describe the uncertainty and longing for home mixed with relief that must go along with being a refugee. Remind them that there are refugees from six different groups all together in one place, now. How do they feel about this? Allow the class to take part in this discussion.
- 7) Send the "refugee" students back to their desks and briefly explain the history of the hilltribes of northern Thailand. Pictures, either in a PowerPoint, color transparencies, or in a book can enhance the lecture.
- 8) Once the students have discussed their feelings and made the connection to the real people that live in Thailand, today, ask them to write about the experience.
 - What feelings did the "refugees" have when they fled to the new country?
 - What factors made them feel they had to leave their homeland?
 - What expectations did they have for their new life?
 - What problems do they think the refugees might encounter?

Research Project:

- 1) Prepare a list of students, grouped heterogeneously, either by ability or aptitude. You will need six groups when they began their research projects.
- 2) Provide each student with a copy of the project packet and explain that they will be working in groups that you have picked and that they will be randomly drawing a hilltribe they will be researching, as well as a research subject. They may not change groups and may not trade research subjects. Obviously, if any students belong to one of the ethnic groups being researched, they may have a preference to either research their own heritage or not. Read over the instructions with the class, answer questions and remind the class of the rules for cooperative, tolerant groups.
- 3) It may be helpful to schedule days in the computer lab and library to facilitate research, as well as several days of class work periods. At least one day toward the end of the project should be set aside for a response group activity on the challenges faced by the hilltribes.

Wrap Up:

After all of the groups have presented, have students write a response to the following questions:

- What did you learn about the hilltribes, in general?
- How do you think it feels to start over in a strange land?
- What obstacles must be overcome?
- What did you learn about working in a group?

Ask some students to share their responses.

Assessment:

Scores for this project will depend on the quality of the individual component (50%) and the quality of the group component (50%). The individual component should be graded on completeness as well as your district's writing rubric. An individual student's contribution should be rated by the other members in his or her group. This score should be multiplied by the group presentation score to determine the individual's group presentation score.

The wrap-up writing assignment will determine if the students have gained the intended understanding.

The Hilltribes of Thailand

You will be spending the next several weeks developing a 2-fold project on a group of people that live in northern Thailand. This project is 2-fold because one part of it will be completed by your cooperative group and the other part will be completed by you as an individual. You may NOT switch groups and you may NOT trade subjects. You are expected to follow the class norms for working in a cooperative group.

Group Project:

My group members are: _____ (me)

The hilltribe we will be researching is (check the one you are assigned):

- Akha Hmong Karen Lahu Lisu Mien

Members of your group will be researching different aspects of daily life for this tribe. Your topic is (check the topic you are assigned)

- tribal government, laws and economic activities
- traditional clothing and crafts
- traditional houses and villages
- traditional courtship, weddings and rituals
- mythology, legend and folk stories

My group role is (check the job you are assigned):

- Facilitator – keeps group on task and on time
- Recorder – keeps written record of group's ideas & decisions
- Speaker – acts as interface with the teacher, primary presenter
- Mediator – smoothes over disagreements, restates ideas for clarity

Additional Topics - In addition, your group project must include the following:

- A map that shows from where your hilltribe emigrated
- A brief history that includes why they immigrated
- Challenges that are faced by this group and what is being done

- ❑ All members of the group will contribute to these topics, based on their own research.

What your group project will look like:

- ❑ The group will prepare a single multi-media presentation that showcases all group members' research. Examples include slide shows, PowerPoint presentations, display boards or 3-dimensional models.
- ❑ Each member of your group will take a turn explaining his or her topic, referencing the visual and using note cards – not reading their report!
- ❑ The entire group will collectively present the additional topics.
- ❑ Additional information may be permitted, such as music, artifacts and food.
- ❑ Time for questions will be allowed after each presentation.
- ❑ The entire group presentation must be no longer than 45 minutes, including set up and clean up.
- ❑ **Our group presentation date is _____!!**

Individual Project:

What you will turn in:

- ❑ Research notes on note cards (**due _____**)
- ❑ Rough draft showing visible edits (**due _____**)
- ❑ 500 word essay on your assigned topic in final draft form, typed, 12-pitch font, double-spaced on the topic that you were assigned. (**due _____**)
- ❑ Bibliography in MLA format with a minimum of 3 entries, at least one of which must be a book. (**due _____**)
- ❑ A minimum of two typed paragraphs, on a separate page, explaining some of the challenges your tribe faces and what assistance is available. (**due _____**)

Cooperative Group Norms

- 1. Arrange the desks correctly.*
- 2. Learn and use each other's names.*
- 3. Be helpful and friendly.*
- 4. Use positive body language.*
- 5. Use eye contact.*
- 6. Listen to others' ideas and contribute to the dialogue.*
- 7. Use only positive comments, encourage, and express appreciation.*
- 8. Disagree in an agreeable way.*
- 9. Stay focused on the task at hand.*
- 10. Be aware of your role within the group.*

Group Self-Evaluation

Honestly rate the amount of effort each group member put into your project. This evaluation is confidential. I will complete my own evaluation, based on my observations.

Group Members:

Contribution:

Yourself: _____

_____ %

_____ %

_____ %

_____ %

_____ %

Total must add up to

100%

Extensions:

1. Read the novel Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story by Pegi Deitz Shea. Complete a book jacket style book report that includes illustrations, a summary of the story, the main conflict and resolution, descriptions of the protagonist and antagonist, and a paragraph on how the main character grew or changed throughout the story.
2. Read several folk stories of one of the hilltribes. Using these stories as inspiration, write and illustrate your own folk story in the form of a children's book, in the same style as the stories you read.
3. Research and report on historical and contemporary roles of women in the hilltribes society. Present your findings in PowerPoint presentation.
4. Develop a service learning project to benefit one of the hilltribe groups. Begin by looking at the website <http://www.mirrorartgroup.org>. Projects could include a new sock drive or school supply drive.
5. Research and report on opium trafficking in the Golden Triangle and its impact on the hilltribe people. Include efforts to divert involvement to legitimate economic endeavors.
6. Research daily life in a tribal village. Write a journal from the perspective of a 13-year old boy or girl living in that village. Include many sensory details – smells, tastes, colors, textures, temperatures, and sounds. Also include at least one ceremony or important event.
7. Attend the Hmong New Year celebration at Seattle Center in early November. Try some food – they sell sticky rice in banana leaves and sugar cane juice, for example, and watch some entertainment. Write a 3- paragraph review about your experience. One paragraph should be about what you liked, one paragraph about what you did not like, and the third about an element of the celebration that surprised you and why it surprised you.

Additional Resources:

Books –

Brittan, Dolly. The Hmong. New York : PowerKids Press, 1997.

Cha, Dia. Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom. Lee & Low Books and the Denver Museum of Natural History, 1994.

Chan, Sucheng. Hmong: Means Free Life in Laos & America. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1994.

Courtauld, Caroline. Burma (Myanmar). Hong Kong : Odyssey ; London : Hi Marketing, 1999.

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Goodman, Jim. Meet the Akhas. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus , 1996.

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Livo, Norma J. And Cha, Dia. Folks Stories of the Hmong: People of Laos, Thailand, & Vietnam. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1991.

Lucas, Alice (trans. By Ia Xiong). How the Farmer Tricked the Evil Demon: (English Hmong Edition). Pacific Asia Press, 1994.

Mathews, Peggy (trans. By Va Vang). Illustrated by Chau, Kayee. Farmer Boy (Hmong English Edition). Pacific Asia Press, 1994.

Moua, Mai Neng. Bamboo Among the Oaks. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002.

Murphy, Nora. A Hmong Family. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lerner Publications, 1997.

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Sea, Pegi Deitz. Illustrated by Anita Riggio. Stitched by You Yang. This Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story. Boyds Mills Press, 1995.

Shea, Pegi Deitz. Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story. New York, New York: Clarion Books, 2003.

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Torjesen, Hakon. The Gift of the Refugees: Notes of a Volunteer Family at a Refugee Camp. Eden Prairie, Minnesota: Garden, 1981.

.Walker, Anthony R. Mvuh Hpa Mi Hpa Creating Heaven, Creating Earth: An Epic Mit. Of the Lahu People in Yunnan. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1999.

Wolfe, Art. Tribes. New York : Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 1997.

Internet –

Chiang Mai Hilltribes – Thailand travel and tourism guide. Available: <http://www.members.chello.nl~p.kremers1/thailand/chiangmai-hilltribes.html> (September 12, 2004).

Hilltribes of Chiang Mai Northern Thailand. Available: www.wayfarersthailand.com/hilltribes.htm (September 12, 2004).

Hilltribes of North Thailand. Available: <http://www.asiatours.net/Thailand/info/hilltribes.html> (September 12, 2004).

Hilltribes of North Thailand ecotourism adventure travel. Available: www.innerjourneys.com (September12, 2004).

Hilltribes in the North. Available: www.welcome-to.chiangmai-chiangrai.com (September 12, 2004).

SAWADEE.com Thailand Tourism portal. Available: www.sawadee.com/thailand/hilltries (September 12, 2004).

Thai Hilltribes introduction and Lahu. Available: www.home.wxs.nl/~jemd3402/hilltribeseng.htm (September 12, 2004).

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Yang, Neng. “History and Origin of the Hmong”. Hmong Center – Multicultural Resources. Available: <http://www.hmongcenter.org/briefhisofhm.html>. (September 18,2004).