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A Cultural Program: Cultural Awareness Activities for American High School Students

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A CULTURAL PROGRAM:
CULTURAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES
FOR AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Teaching Degree at the
School for International Training
Brattleboro, Vermont

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This project by Susan Tomasello is accepted
in its present form

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Acknowledgments: To Nancy Marisseau, who got me going, and to my family,
who kept me going, thank you.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the planning, organization, and results of the Cultural Program that I presented to American, ninth grade, World Culture students. I specifically address pre-program activities, the Program itself, and post-program activities. The activities focus the students' attention, create interest, and arouse their curiosity about other cultures. Cultural information on Southeast Asia is given to provide students with background knowledge prior to the Cultural Program. The program itself has three components: A slide show, dancers, and a panel discussion. Follow up exercises include a post-program questionnaire and an awareness writing activity. The format of this paper allows for a complete novice to read from beginning to end in a sequenced order of events. A reader who has more experience planning cultural programs can check the table of contents for the chapter addressing a specific component. To assist the reader who is planning a program, materials are included in the appendix that may be copied. There are basic program planning criteria that apply to similiar kinds of programs, therefore, this paper is to serve as a guide for planning a cultural event.

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Introduction

Providing opportunities for cultural awareness is an integral part of second language teaching. My responsibility, as a junior high school teacher, lies not only in imparting my Southeast Asian students with knowledge of American cultural ways, but to offer American students the opportunity to become aware of the culture of our most recent immigrants and learn why they have come to the United States.

Seeing a local need to provide information about Southeast Asia to American students, I decided to prepare a Cultural Program for Oakmont High School in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. I selected this school since there are no Asian students enrolled, yet the two bordering city school systems have large populations of Southeast Asian students. As I got acquainted with students and teachers there, it became apparent to me that the American teenagers at Oakmont High School were unaware of their neighbors and had no access to learn about peers who had come here from halfway around the world.

This paper describes the planning, organization, content, and results of the Cultural Program that I presented to one hundred and forty-eight American World Culture students at Oakmont High School in the fall of 1985.

Although any program that is developed must meet the unique and specific needs of its audience, there are basic program planning criteria that apply to similar kinds of programs. In this paper I address pre-program

activities, the program itself, and post-program activities. The structured activities that preceded and followed the Cultural Program were essential in assuring that the Program achieved its purpose of heightening cultural awareness. It is my intent that the format I describe be used as a guideline by anyone planning a similar cultural program.

The activities that I chose are by no means the only ones to be considered. Pre-program activities are necessary in order to focus the students' attention, create interest, and arouse their curiosity about other cultures. These activities may be in the form of a questionnaire (such as the one I wrote) or an awareness activity led by a knowledgeable facilitator in the classroom.

Background information prior to a cultural program is vital to a student's understanding and allows for a deeper awareness of American culture as well as the cultures being presented. The cultural information that I compiled and the pre and post-questionnaires may be photocopied or altered for personal use. Post-program activities may vary according to time constraints and the number of students involved. It is important to note that the questionnaires that I developed may be distributed to any group of students and certainly not limited to World Culture classes. It is my belief that students who become involved before, during, and after a program will maximize their potential awareness of cultural diversity.

I firmly believe that distrust and misunderstanding arise due to lack of knowledge. Through opportunities to learn about other cultural groups, students are more likely to increase their awareness and develop better understanding. Through this learning and awareness process, American students may experience a shift in attitude and ultimately reduce feelings of prejudice. Once they are more knowledgeable these young people will

hopefully help raise conscious awareness in their families and their community.

I witnessed attitudinal shifts of American students who participated in pre and post-program exercises. Knowing that opportunities for becoming more culturally aware are an important part of teaching, I put together this paper for your use and encourage you to prepare a similar program.

This paper is divided into six parts. Part I describes the three-part Cultural Program and the pre and post-classroom activities. It also includes a schedule of the people involved and the sequence of events.

Part II explains what I did before the program. It includes how I set it up, whom I talked to, the purpose and results of the pre-program questionnaire and the rationale for the cultural information that I prepared.

Part III describes the three components of the Cultural Program: the slide show, the dancers, and the panel discussion.

Part IV details the purpose and results of the post-program questionnaire, describes a five step awareness writing activity, and includes a summary of the results.

Part V assesses the entire program.

Part VI, the appendix, includes copies of the pre and post-questionnaire, schedules of appointments and events, cultural background information on Southeast Asia, a transcript of the panel discussion and samples of student writing from the writing activity.

This paper can be used by anyone who is interested in presenting a cultural program. To the complete novice, I suggest that he/she read from beginning to end in order to understand the scope of the program and the sequence of events. Having a basic understanding of the specific compo-

nents of a program will enable a reader to begin to clarify his/her objectives for planning a similar program. I recommend that the reader begin with the overview to become oriented to the overall purpose of each part of the program and then continue reading the chapters in the order that they are presented. Reading chapters one through five will better prepare the reader to understand the materials in the appendix and be knowledgeable of the purpose of each.

A reader who has had some experience planning or presenting a cultural program can consult the table of contents to choose the appropriate chapters to read depending on his/her prior program experience and present planning needs. If a reader is looking for pre or post-program activities I suggest he/she first read the chapter detailing that component and then refer to the table of contents for the appendix listings of the supporting materials.

The materials in the appendix may be photocopied or amended to fit the needs of the reader's program. The sequence of events that I outline will provide the base to begin preparation for a similar program. A reader may need to modify the questionnaires and activities or develop a variation of the three-part Cultural Program that I presented.

The effects of the Program were far reaching. For the Southeast Asian students, it was an opportunity to share part of their cultural heritage with American peers. Most of the American audience had not had prior exposure to forms of dance or dress of other cultures and found the performance fascinating. The panel discussion seemed to bridge cultural gaps and provided the forum to become more aware of cultural similarities and differences. For the students as well as the teachers who participated, it was an enjoyable and self-enriching program.

Chapter I

Overview

The entire Cultural event consisted of three stages: 1) Pre-Program, in which the Program was arranged and students went through preparatory activities; 2) the Program, held at Oakmont High School; 3) Post-Program, which consisted of follow-up activities for students.

Before the Cultural Program, I wanted to find out how much typical ninth grade American students know about Southeast Asia so I developed a pre-program questionnaire. This also served as a stimulus for student awareness.

My plan was to provide background knowledge as a learning tool to be used in the classrooms by the World Cultures teachers prior to the program.

I compiled a list of thirty-six social and cultural customs of Southeast Asia. I specifically chose to highlight facts that I believed would be of high interest to an American teenager. I also summarized information about the history, language, and people to help students better understand the way of life in Southeast Asia. Having this cultural information, the American students had the opportunity to make a personal investment in the program by contributing questions that would be asked of a panel of Southeast Asians peers from the two neighboring cities.

The Cultural Program was arranged in three parts: a slide show, dancing, and a panel discussion. Beginning the presentation with a slide show enabled the audience to immediately focus their attention. Prior to the

program, students had been given cultural background information which allowed them to more fully understand the audio commentary. Following the slides, three Hmong girls did two dances in their native dress. Two Laotian sisters then performed traditional dances which differed from the Hmong routines. The final part of the program was a question-answer panel with the five dancers participating plus one Laotian and one Vietnamese teenage boy. The questions had been submitted by the American audience which served to heighten their interest and desire to carefully listen to each panelist's response.

Each of the three sections of the program took approximately twenty minutes. The entire presentation lasted eighty minutes which included my opening and closing remarks.

Following the event the American students completed a post-program questionnaire in their classrooms. The primary function was to heighten cultural awareness. I also planned a special writing task with one class to help them reflect and further develop their thoughts, allowing for shifts of any negative attitudes held towards Southeast Asian people.

Outline of the Sequence of Events

Pre-Program

1. Meet with the history department head, World Cultures teacher to discuss the outline of a Cultural Program.
2. Provide the principal at Oakmont High School with a program outline and statement of purpose.
3. Contact Southeast Asian girls willing to dance in the Program and Southeast Asian boys who would join the girls on a panel.
4. Reserve the slide show and projection equipment.
5. Check with Oakmont's audio-visual department head for microphone set ups and the music teacher for stage lighting instructions.
6. Request a professional day off (teaching in a public school).
7. Review the program outline with the World Culture teachers and give them information packet.
8. Pick up the questionnaires and questions that the World Culture students want to ask Southeast Asian peers.
9. Contact newspaper correspondents.
10. Meet with the Southeast Asian students to review the program and go over the questions that the American Students submitted.
11. Arrange for transportation for the Asian students to get to and from Oakmont High School.
12. Notify the Asian students' principals of their program participation requiring a half day absence from school.

Program

13. Cultural Program is presented.

Post-Program

14. World Culture classes complete the post-program questionnaire and I facilitate a five-step awareness writing activity with one class.
15. Pick up all questionnaires and compile the results of each question.
16. Report the results to the World Cultures teachers.
17. Thank all those involved in the planning and participation of the Program by letter.

List of People to be Contacted

1. Superintendent of Fitchburg Public Schools - to approve my request for a professional day off in order to present the Cultural Program at Oakmont.
2. My building principal and vice-principal - to be aware that I would not be teaching on October 7, 1985 and why.
3. Oakmont High School principal and vice-principal - to approve the scheduling of the Cultural Program in the auditorium on October 7, 1985.
4. World Cultures department head - to get an overview of the World Cultures classes and provide him with an outline of the Program before making adjustments.
5. Three World Culture teachers - to clarify their roles in pre and post-program classroom exercises.
6. Audio-visual department head at Oakmont - to reserve microphone equipment and extension cords.
7. Music department head - to instruct me how to operate the stage lights and the curtains.
8. Fitchburg Library - to reserve the slide show, tape recorder, projection equipment, and speakers.
9. Parents of each Southeast Asian Program participant - to be aware that I would be transporting their child to Oakmont and returning him/her to school.
10. Principals of each building where the Southeast Asian student attends - to explain the students' involvement in the Program and to excuse their absence from school on the morning of October 7, 1985.

11. Newspapers - to arrange for a pre-program interview or coverage for the Cultural Program at Oakmont High School.
12. Each participant - to clarify his/her role in the Program.

Chapter II

Pre-Program Activities

To provide a well-balanced program it is essential to establish a clear objective. My program intent was to provide an opportunity for American students to become more culturally aware. To achieve this outcome, I prepared pre- and post-program activities to allow each student to assess his/her increase in awareness as a result of the program. Once I outlined a sequence of events I began the process of making contacts, getting faculty support, and clearing it through the administrators.

The initial preparations for the Southeast Asian Cultural Program began four months prior to the presentation. Scheduling the event in a public school required the permission of the building principal and the head of the history department. I chose to work closely with the department head, who teaches four of the seven World Cultures classes. This decision was wise since he helped facilitate the actual scheduling of the event.

During my first meeting with the department head, Mr. Joseph Von Deck, I was delighted with his interest and willingness to participate in the planning stages. I presented an outline of the program and discussed my intent to provide the seven World Cultures classes with information on Southeast Asia prior to the program. It was my desire to have all the ninth grade students, who were taking World Cultures, complete pre and post-questionnaires. Mr. Von Deck agreed that the pre-program worksheet should be distributed in each of the seven classes prior to exposure to the

should be distributed in each of the seven classes prior to exposure to the cultural information that I had prepared. The pre-worksheet served a dual purpose. First, it gave the World Cultures teachers and me a clearer perspective as to how much or how little the students in each class knew about the culture of the Southeast Asian people. Secondly, the questionnaire served to promote students' interest in the upcoming program. Students were asked several thought-provoking questions and were requested to locate Southeast Asia on a world map so they would start to search their minds for answers, thus beginning the process of becoming more aware. It was a disappointment for me that I could not personally provide cultural awareness activities for the World Culture classes. Since I was employed full time teaching ESL in a public school, I had to request professional days off. One day was granted, which I had to use the day of the Cultural Program. I therefore gave Mr. Von Deck three packets of social and cultural information to be used by the three World Cultures teachers. I spoke with each one personally and reviewed my main objective, which was to provide each American student with the opportunity for heightened cultural awareness and enrichment. Again, I was pleased with the favorable responses from the teachers.

The teachers and I agreed that ten days prior to the program the pre-questionnaire would be distributed to all the World Cultures students. The teachers decided to present the background information on the following day in a lecturette. In their background information packet I supplied copies for each student to read a one page legend written in Laotian. My suggestion to the classroom teachers was that they ask the students to read it without offering assistance or explanation. The teachers would then ask their classes what their initial reaction and feeling was and how they

thought they would respond if this was the language they would have to learn in order to function in a new society. After this brief discussion period the students would be given the English translation of the Laotian legend, Thao Pia and Thao Toung (see appendix). The content of the story would add to their understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

Following the Laotian legend, the students would be asked to write at least three questions to ask a Southeast Asian peer during the program. Past experience has taught me that if each student is requested to write only one question, often fellow classmates have the same one, therefore, there are fewer diverse questions collected. The seven World Cultures classes would already have answered a pre-program questionnaire; they would have heard about Southeast Asian social and cultural ways presented by their teachers; and they would have had the opportunity of experiencing a story written in Laotian before reading the English translation. These building experiences would provide the necessary background knowledge, giving students the skill to write three or more thought-provoking questions to be answered by a panel of Southeast Asian peers.

I planned to collect the sets of questions from Mr. Von Deck one week before the program. This would allow enough time to read the questions thoroughly and compile a master list of the ones most frequently asked plus any others that were interesting and appropriate for the audience. Once I completed the list of questions I intended to meet with the Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese students who had agreed to participate in the panel. It was my belief that the students from Southeast Asia would better understand each question if they had the opportunity to consider and reflect on each one a few days before the program.

The primary purpose of the pre-program questionnaire was to stimulate the students' thinking about Southeast Asian people. Often young American teens know little about other cultures and life styles of people in other countries. It is quite common that American students believe that Southeast Asian countries share a Chinese heritage. They frequently generalize and forget to consider that every country in Southeast Asia has a distinct culture, different language and varying life styles.

The first statement on the questionnaire provided factual information that since 1975 about 750,000 refugees have settled in the United States and 250,000 more will arrive over the next ten years. "Why do you think they are coming?" This question was a means to check how knowledgeable the students were about refugee immigration.

"Describe what you think their traditional dress looks like." The second statement was intended to spur students' imaginations and to see what influences they bring to their response.

Question three, "What kinds of foods do Southeast Asian people eat?" was chosen to take a closer look at students' making inappropriate generalizations.

"How many seasons do you think they have in Southeast Asia?" The fourth question called for knowledge of climates in a geographic location.

Number five required the students to draw a picture of a Southeast Asian house. Their drawings necessitated an awareness of the climate, the land topography, and the students' attitudes as to how modernized they thought homes in Southeast Asia are.

Lastly, students were provided with a world map and asked to place an X on Southeast Asia. Hopefully, those who did not know geographically

where the area was were motivated to later ask their classmates or teacher.

The results of the pre-program questionnaire revealed that the majority of the American students did not specifically know where Southeast Asia was and had little knowledge of the cultures of people in those countries.

Question 1: The majority of the students believed that refugees were settling in the U.S. because they wanted better jobs and opportunities. Some expressed the opinion that refugees probably thought America was a better place to live and that they fled Communism and sought freedom. Only a few students mentioned the fact that the refugees were driven from their homeland and forced to find a new country.

Question 2: Most students thought Southeast Asian traditional dress was a long, loose robe tied with a belt and sandals or no shoes. Some thought veils or turbans were worn and others thought straw hats. Students also believed that many people wear baggy pants with matching loose shirts.

Question 3: All the students listed rice as one food that Southeast Asian people eat. Other answers included wheat, soup, fish, fruit, vegetables, corn, meat, chicken, and grains. Also mentioned were wild boar, deer, and beans.

Question 4: Approximately half of the students thought there are four seasons in Southeast Asia. One quarter answered two seasons and others thought there were one, three, or six seasons.

Drawing: Many of the drawings of a Southeast Asian house had a chimney on the roof. Most were grass roofed with one door. One student drew a large community house with several doors and another drawing included a swimming pool. Only two students drew their houses on stilts.

Map: One class knew where Southeast Asia was on the map since they had recently studied the geography of that area. In the other six classes only a few students accurately placed an X on the appropriate area. Many chose the territory occupied by China. Others placed their X on the Soviet Union, India, or Malaysia. A couple of students designated South America and Africa.

Once students completed the pre-program questionnaire, the World Culture teachers began using the cultural background information packet that I had prepared. The materials included information to be given in a classroom lecture and an awareness activity using a legend written in Laotian.

The background information was compiled as a means for the classroom teachers to pass knowledge on to their students. I purposely chose to highlight differences between the Laotian and Hmong people who share the same country. Following that information, I listed thirty six Southeast Asian social and cultural customs. The material came from many sources and I consciously included things that I believed would be of interest to ninth grade American students. The remainder of the information contained cultural information about people from Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Following the delivery of this information to their classes, teachers passed out copies of the Laotian legend. They were asked to read it in Laotian. Understandably, they felt confused and quickly gave up. Teachers asked their classes to consider how one feels when confronted with a "strange" writing system. I was told that through reflection, they had questions about how they could cope if transplanted to a new culture. Students became aware of the difficulties they would have trying to make themselves understood. They recognized the frustration attempting to make

meaning out of the unknown. Students then read the English translation of the Laotian legend. They talked about how they thought Thao Pia felt and if Thao Young's feelings were the same or different. Discussing the two Laotian boys, I was told, enabled some students to make a personal connection with young people from a different land. Some feelings, they realized, were universal regardless of where a child grows up.

The pre-program awareness activity and questionnaire were essential to enable each student to consider the way of life in another culture. The background information provided knowledge to increase awareness and allow for the beginning of a shift in attitude. The classroom activities prepared the students to be a ready audience, full of anticipation and with a high level of interest. Having submitted questions to ask the Southeast Asian guests, the American students had a personal investment in the Program.

Chapter III

The Program

This chapter describes the three components of the Cultural Program. The first part was a series of slides portraying the history and immigration of Southeast Asian refugees to the local area. Following the twenty minute slide show were Hmong and Laotian dancers in their traditional costumes exemplifying their unique cultures. The last segment of the Program consisted of a panel of seven Southeast Asian students from area schools who answered questions submitted by the American students in the audience.

From the slide show¹ on loan from Fitchburg Library, the students learned that Laos is a mountainous country between Vietnam and Thailand, with China to the north and Cambodia to the south. They learned that today, as part of the remaining legacy of the Vietnam Conflict, another generation of immigrants is beginning its upward struggle with American life. The Worcester County area is fortunate to count these energetic people as part of its cultural mosaic.

A varied pattern of islands, valleys, mountains, and cities could be seen in the colored slides taken from the air. Approached from the sea, the slides show a Chinese junk, whose design has not changed in 1,000

¹"Southeast Asian Refugee Resettlement." slide show edited by Gunther Hoos. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Fitchburg Mosaic Project. Fitchburg Public Library. Fitchburg, MA. 1983.

years. The land is shown from the jungles to the rice paddies to the busy villages.

Students learned that traditionally, the name Indo-China applies to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the countries which once made up what was known as French Indo China beginning in 1893. It ended in 1950 when separate treaties recognized the three countries as independent, self-governing states within the French Union. After the Geneva Conference in 1954, the French lost control and Vietnam was divided into two portions with an arbitrary line known as the 17th parallel. North Vietnamese soldiers tried hard to take over the South. American advisors were sent to help the South Vietnamese, who lacked competent personnel. Initially the U.S. only had a training role, but eventually became active and committed vast sums of money and hundreds of thousands of lives. Finally, after tremendous resistance in America to the war expansion, America began Vietnamization and withdrew troops. Laos soon came under Vietnamese control which forced thousands to flee, mainly by sea. Thus began the immigration to America.

The slide program specifically centered upon immigrants who settled in the Fitchburg area. Oysai Chanthachack and his family were pictured. Mr. Pysai had worked as an assistant to Dr. Thomas Dooley in northern Laos and is pictured in Dooley's book The Night They Burned the Mountain².

Shortly after the communist takeover of Laos in the summer of 1975, he was arrested and sent to a re-education camp. After his release, Oysai and his family made a dramatic escape across the Mekong River to Thailand.

Although their boat was sunk by gunfire, the family reached Thailand and

²Thomas A Dooley, M.D. The Night They Burned the Mountain. Photograph no.3 American Book. Stratford Press, Inc. New York, N.Y. 1960.

freedom. One of his sons, Vienulai, was a member of the Asian student panel following the slide show and dancing.

The second part of the Program centered on two Laotian girls from Gardner, a sophomore and junior in high school, and three Hmong girls in grades seven, eight, and nine in Fitchburg.

Souvannaphone and Souvanni Sengvilay, the Laotian girls, wore their native Laotian costumes and performed two dances together using graceful hand gestures portraying the activities of dressing the hair, threading flowers to make a garland and strolling through a garden. Their skirts of deep emerald and cranberry silk had borders of gold threaded patterns. The matching silk shawls produced a charismatic splendor as they flowed through their dance movements. Southeastern Asian music played as they demonstrated their traditional dance. Souvanni then performed alone displaying her magical charm and movements of grace which were cultivated in a school for dance in Laos.

The three Hmong girls, Chis Moua, May Oua Yang, and May Ter Yang wore bright, multicolored skirts, silk brocade blouses and hand sewn beaded sashes with coins. Their heads were wrapped turban-style which indicated the clan to which they belong by the stripped bands crossing the headpiece. Their delicate fingers waved inward and outward as their barefeet gently stepped from side to side to the rhythm of the music.

The dancers brought a vibrant, visual representation of their cultures to the audience. Similarities and differences in their dance were apparent, each offering a special, unique beauty.

A panel discussion was the final component of the Cultural Program. The audience closely listened to each question answered by a member of the panel.

The seven panel participants were Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese junior and senior high school students from the adjoining cities of Fitchburg and Gardner. These Southeast Asian students had met with me prior to the Cultural Program and had reviewed the seventy-three questions that had been compiled from a list of three hundred-twenty that the American students had submitted. All in all, forty-nine questions were asked. The panelists did not rehearse or write out answers to the questions. My interest was that they be familiar with the questions and have the opportunity to ask for clarification.

It was interesting for me to note that the student who expressed desire to answer the most questions was, in fact, the individual who declined to respond to the majority of the questions during the panel discussion. The Southeast Asian students enjoyed having a chance to discuss their countries' culture as well as their personal preferences. It was obvious from the response of the audience that they too enjoyed the experience, which added to their knowledge of the similarities and differences among those cultures represented on the panel and American culture.

The honesty of the panelists answering each question drew applause from the audience. The American students enjoyed each response from an Asian peer and seemed genuinely interested in the differences and similarities among the Asian cultures represented on the panel and between Asian and American cultures.

The entire program was well balanced. Each segment was approximately twenty minutes in length. The opening slide show focused the audience's attention and drew upon the information that they had received in class. Seeing the dancers in their costumes and hearing different background music

livened the spirits of the American students. Lastly, the panel discussion captivated the listeners, who were waiting for their own questions to be answered. The final applause left no doubt that the Program had been a valuable cultural experience.

Chapter IV

Post-Program Activities

Having seen the Program, the American students sensed a new cultural awareness and needed a vehicle to reflect on their experiences. This chapter explains the post-program activities which provided the opportunity for each student to assess his/her increased knowledge and awareness of Southeast Asian cultures.

I prepared a questionnaire to be distributed to all the World Cultures students who had seen the Cultural Program (Appendix). This allowed each student to reflect on the Program and to sift out parts that were the most meaningful. Questions were asked to engage each student to consider his/her attitude and the part that had the most personal significance. Ideally, I would have seen all the American students in small groups to get their feedback after the Program. This was not possible; however, I was able to schedule working with one World Cultures class where I introduced a writing activity which asked the students to reflect on the cultural event and focus on one particular part that was valuable to them. Sharing their reflections with a partner deepened their personal experience and allowed the possibility for attitudinal shifts.

Providing a vehicle for students to reflect and be aware of what they had seen and heard throughout the cultural event was my purpose in writing the post-program questionnaire.

Question 1 was designed to have the students assess the background information that I had provided their teachers and to determine if it had been helpful in their understanding the Cultural Program.

Question 2a asked students to consider the three parts of the program and be aware if any part was unclear.

Question 2b provided the opportunity for students to have their classroom teachers clarify any part of the program that they didn't understand.

Question 3 aimed at reflection and asked the students to choose the part that they liked the best.

Statement 4a had students identify three interesting things that they found in the program.

Statement 4b required deeper reflective thinking by asking students to choose the one thing that they found the most interesting and tell why.

Question 5 students were asked to use discriminatory skills and consider both similarities and differences of the Hmong and Laotian People. The questions were chosen to increase their awareness and continue their reflection on the Cultural Program they had seen.

Question 6 asked students what the music reminded them of, which called upon an awareness of the sounds and an attitude towards the music.

Question 7 required the students to recall the names of the area towns where the Southeast Asian participants were from.

Question 8 gave students time to consider the panel questions and perhaps recall the ones that they had individually submitted. If any question remained unanswered they had the opportunity to ask it and either their teacher or I would present the question and answer to the class.

After the students completed the post-program questionnaire, I collected and compiled the responses. The results were satisfying to the

World Culture teachers and me since they indicated that the students had reflected on cultural similarities and differences.

The results of the post-program questionnaire were as follows:

Question 1: Students unanimously said the background information prior to the program aided their understanding. Some mentioned that it helped them understand the answers that the panel participants gave. Others said the information helped them understand why the refugees came here and what they've gone through. One student said, "It helped us to be more familiar about what they were telling us about." Another wrote, "It gave us a base to work up from."

Question 2: For some students the Asian accents were difficult to understand. A few students wanted to know more about the different kinds of houses and what they actually looked like inside.

Question 3: The part of the program enjoyed by most was the panel question and answer session. I believe it was because the students had an investment in the questions that were asked.

Question 4: The results showed that the answers to the questions were the most interesting part. Also of interest to the students were the clothes that the dancers wore and the style of dancing. Some students indicated that the background information was very interesting and others liked the slide show and the information it provided.

Question 5: Students became aware of the existence of similarities and differences between the Hmong and Laotian people. They mentioned similarities of foods, use of bright colors, graceful dancing, and attitudes towards dating in their cultures. Some differences

observed were the kinds of hand movements when dancing, different native dress, the houses were not built the same and their accents were a bit different.

Question 6: The music reminded many students of Hawaii. Some said it was similar to Chinese music, others mentioned folk music, primitive music, snake charming sounds, and music of the 60's.

Question 7: Nearly everyone recalled the names of the two neighboring towns where the Southeast Asian students lived.

Question 8: Questions that were not answered were:

1. "Is there a problem with younger people drinking?"
2. "Would these people like to kill the communists in Southeast Asia?"
3. "Can people touch someone's head to help them if they are hurt?"
4. "How do parents choose their children's names?"
5. "Do you like the life style better here or there?"
6. "Would you want to go back?"
7. "What material are the houses made of?"
8. "Do they all have to grow their own food or do they have grocery stores?"
9. "What do you think of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War?"

I later asked two Southeast Asian students to answer the nine questions and mailed the responses to the World Culture teachers.

Looking over the post-program questionnaires and maps was satisfying to find that the majority of American students were able to locate Southeast Asia. Students remarked that they believed it was beneficial

having an understanding of the cultures before seeing the slide show. A large percentage of the students enjoyed the dances and everyone responded with enthusiasm over the panel discussion. The latter was overwhelming the favorite section of the Program and one student remarked, "It bridged the culture gap." Obvious to me, was the fact that the American students had a positive experience learning about Southeast Asian cultures.

In addition to distributing the post-program questionnaire I was able to work with one World Culture class for fifty minutes. Given the time restraint and the class size of twenty-four students, I wanted an activity that would allow each student time to assess how he/she personally experienced the Cultural Program.

I chose to do a reflective writing activity with one of the World Culture classes after they had seen the Cultural Program. The purpose was to provide an avenue for students to clarify what was most meaningful to them after seeing the Program. The five steps that I used were adapted from Nancy Olsen's³ writing stages and conferencing technique.

My first objective was to outline the writing steps for the students so they could familiarize themselves with each stage and ask for clarification. Next, I wanted to provide a way for students to find a purpose for writing and feel a personal investment in their topic. The pair conferencing would ask them to trust one another. Each of the writing stage was designed to challenge the students to learn from themselves and their partners. My hope was that this method of writing would be enjoyable and that it would be a positive, new experience for each student.

³Nancy Olsen. Six Steps in the Writing Process. Seminar: School for International Training. Brattleboro, Vt. Summer 1985.

To prepare for the five-step writing activity, four different colored 5x7 cards and lined paper are needed. Students receive only one colored card at a time. The writing task is explained by the teacher and students are given a specific time limitation. Afterwards, they share what is on their card with their partner. The partner then asks the writer to respond to the task question.

Pink card 1: Brainstorming a Topic.

Make a list of nouns, of the things that you remember from the program. You will have one minute to list whatever you recall.

Question 1: What topic would you like to write about and why? The writers will first read their lists to their partners, after which the partners will ask the first question. It is important that the partners ask the question and do not give an opinion. Their task is to listen to the writer's response. The pairs have a total of four minutes.

Yellow card 2: Brainstorm Details.

Write all the details that you can recall that further discuss your topic. Do not write complete sentences, instead jot down phrases and do not concern yourself with spelling or punctuation.

You will have three minutes to brainstorm details on your card.

Question 2: What connects all these details together for you and why? The writers read their details to their partners, after which, the partners will ask the second question without adding their opinion. The pairs have a total of four minutes.

Green card 3: Discovery Stage.

Write in complete sentences. I will ask you to put your pen on your card and not stop writing for one minute. Do not worry about spelling or punctuation. Just let your thoughts flow from

your head down through your pen and onto the card. Do not erase or stop to contemplate, just continue free-flow writing.

Question 3: What do you like best about what you have written and why? What else would you add if you were to write more? The writers read what they have written and the partners ask both questions being careful to listen and not add personal comments. The pairs have a total of four minutes.

White card 4: Revision.

Consider your responses to your partner's questions and add any new thought and maybe take out something that does not seem to fit. You will have three to four minutes, as needed, for the revision.

Question 4: How is this writing different from the last one? Why did you make those changes? The writers share what they have written with their partners who will then ask the two questions. The pairs have a total of four minutes.

Feedback Paper: After you have both answered the two questions, exchange your white cards and read your partners revision. Each partner will complete a feedback task consisting of three parts:

1. Copy the sentence directly from the card that you like the best.
2. Copy the sentence that is not clear to you.
3. What would you like the writer to add more about?

Everyone has six minutes to complete the feedback task, after which, the white cards and feedback papers are returned to the writers to read. This will take approximately one minute and then share your insights and

awarenesses for two minutes.

Lined Paper: Expansion.

Reflecting on your conversations with your partner, the feedback paper, and your white card, expand your thought and develop a paragraph. Everyone has five minutes to write and may have more time if needed.

This writing activity may be modified to fit a different time schedule. Students usually enjoy the opportunity of conferencing with a friend, but have the tendency to offer their opinions. It is important in this task that the students clearly understand that they are playing the role of a listener when their partner is reflecting.

The class was receptive to try a new method of writing down their thoughts. Before beginning the activity, I quoted Donald Graves who once asked, "How can I tell what I think, till I see what I say?" After a brief class discussion, I then asked the class, "When reading your writing, how does it help you to clarify what you're thinking?" After several students commented, I read the outline of the writing activity that I had written earlier on the blackboard. A few students had questions that I answered immediately. Other questions I said I could clarify when we reached that particular writing stage.

The scheduled class time was fifty minutes, therefore, I had to adhere to a specific time schedule at each stage. I felt that students could have used more time at certain stages yet I recognized the importance of completing the entire writing awareness activity. Students engaged in conferencing after each writing stage and appeared to consider their partner's questions thoughtfully. The end result was reflected not only in their final writings, but in their spirit of conversing and their growing aware-

nesses. During the last three minutes of class time, they shared what they had gotten out of the whole experience. Students acknowledged the fact that prejudices disappear when people become enlightened about other cultures. They considered the background information, the writing activity they had just completed, and their awarenesses and attitudes. Through the written and oral feedback I observed students reaching a deeper understanding and appreciation for the similarities and differences among people from Laos, Vietnam and the United States.

Post-program activities will vary according to the number of students participating and the availability to work with them in large or small groups. Activities that individualize with a group will allow each student to personalize and deepen their awareness. Through this process a student may view cultural diversity as fascinating, void of a judgemental attitude.

Chapter V

Assessment

My primary goal to provide an opportunity for cultural awareness for American students culminated on October seventh when the Southeast Asian Cultural Program was presented for seven World Culture classes at Oakmont High School. Having chosen to work with these one hundred and forty-eight American ninth grade students, I wanted to focus on individualizing instruction within the seven large groups.

Through the pre-program questionnaire I endeavored to allow each student to consider his/her knowledge on Southeast Asian culture. Purposely, I established that their participation was appreciated and that all answers were acceptable. I wanted the students to have the chance to recognize their own familiarity or lack of knowledge about Southeast Asia. I believe the worksheet accomplished this objective.

Secondly, I wanted students to have the opportunity to learn about Southeast Asia, the people, and the cultures. Since I was not able to personally present background information, I prepared a packet for the three World Culture teachers to use in their classrooms. After meeting with the teachers I felt reassured that the students would have access to the historical, social, and cultural information. I included a Laotian legend, written in the native language in order to give each American student the chance to personally feel the confusion and to acknowledge the

overwhelming feeling of inadequacy when confronted with a different writing system without support of clues for understanding.

Students were bewildered at first, then they began looking for clues to understand the unfamiliar language. A few students turned their papers around and questioned if the language system required left to right eye movement. Other students thought they saw a pattern of punctuation, but were unsure of the markers. Everyone responded with relief that they were not being tested or asked to make sense out of the writing.

Students expressed interest in knowing more about the Laotian writing. After they read a translation of the legend, students discussed the two perspectives of the young Laotian boys. Drawing on the cultural background information given in class, each student submitted three questions to be answered by a Southeast Asian peer. This task allowed students to make a personal investment in the Cultural Program.

Students' knowledge and awareness were drawn together during the Cultural Program allowing for attitudinal changes within each student watching the event. One student said, "In class I understood some of the difficulties that refugees faced, but seeing the slides made it real to me." The dancers enabled the audience to visually capture parts of Southeast Asian cultures. "The Hmong and Laotian girls were so different," commented one student, "I thought they would all dress and dance the same." The last segment of the Program, the panel discussion, brought into focus cultural similarities and differences. The question and answer forum was a unique opportunity for American teenagers to understand their Asian peers' points of view. One member of the audience summed up the general reaction by saying, "Our countries may be very different, but as kids, we almost seem the same."

Following the Cultural Program I distributed the post-program questionnaire as a tool to reach all the World Culture students and elicit individual statements, opinions, and insights. Due to scheduling factors I was able to visit only one World Cultures class after the Program, therefore, the post-program questionnaire provided the opportunity for feedback and individual assessment of what each student had gained. Working with one class allowed me the chance to assist the students to reflect, discover, and further consider their own attitudes and awarenesses through the five-step writing activity. This was particularly successful because heightened cultural awareness comes through teacher-directed, focused questions, allowing students to generate answers for themselves. The prepared questions that students asked each other required quiet reflection and a student later said, "It helped me bring to the surface what was most valuable and interesting to me." The American students who enrolled in the World Culture classes at Oakmont High School this year are now more knowledgeable, possess a better understanding of people, and are more open to cultural diversity. I overheard a boy remarking to his friend on the way out of the auditorium, "You really can't judge a book by its cover." Perhaps these students will be less judgemental towards people from other cultures. That thought gives me a sense of satisfaction and hope for world peace.

The Cultural Program was an effective means of sharing cultural identities and broadening awareness for American students. It also provided the format for three Southeast Asian groups to learn from one another and work towards a common goal.

The most effective part of the Program was the panel discussion. The American student unanimously chose this as their favorite section which is

substantiated by their responses on the post-program questionnaire. Given time to submit panel questions, the American teenagers more closely followed the responses and found common bonds with students on the panel. When a Laotian student said her favorite American food was pizza, the audience immediately responded with cheer. The panel discussion, I believe, was the heart of the program.

I urge those planning similar programs to include a panel discussion as a part of the Cultural Program. The results are satisfying to the audience, the participants, and to those involved in planning the Program. If native cultural dancers are not available perhaps volunteer students could model costumes as you provide a commentary with native music in the background. A slide show, if unavailable, could be supplemented by pictures of Southeast Asians preferably in your community. Another idea is to create an Asian art display which could include pictures by master artists as well as young artists in your school system or area.

American students who attended the Cultural Program at Oakmont High School expressed a desire to talk personally with the Southeast Asian students after the presentation. With this in mind, I would plan a reception in the school cafeteria and invite all the participants to engage in informal chats in small groups, and ask an Asian student to join each one.

I encourage readers to plan a Cultural Program and offer the materials that I developed that are in the appendix. I would enjoy hearing about other cultural events and would appreciate your sharing new program ideas with me. Correspondence may be sent to:

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Westminster, MA. 01473

Appendix

My Schedule of Appointments

- June 11th Meet with the head of the history department to discuss the involvement of seven World Cultures classes in pre- and post-activities for a Southeast Asian Cultural Program. Determine a date and discuss the program agenda.
- June 20th Meet with the principal of Oakmont High School and present a written outline of the program for approval.
- June 24th Contact Southeast Asian students and explain the program and its intent to provide an opportunity for cultural awareness for approximately 150 ninth grade Americans taking World Cultures classes.
- June 25th Reserve the Southeast Asian slide show at the Fitchburg Public Library for October 7th and all necessary projection equipment:
- 2 Kodak carousel projectors
 - 1 diamond crystal dissolve unit
 - 1 powermate
 - 1 external speaker
 - 1 Wollensak tape recorder
- August 26th Meet with each Southeast Asian dancer to confirm their participation in the program on October 7th.

- August 27th Submit a written request to the superintendent of Fitchburg Schools for a professional day off on October 7th.
- September 10th Meet with the history department head to review the program outline. Discuss the specific time schedule for the event.
- September 20th Deliver the pre and post-program questionnaires and the packets of background information. Meet with the three World Cultures teachers to clarify any concerns and questions.
- September 25th Borrow the slide show and all necessary equipment from Fitchburg Library to familiarize myself with it and to video tape the slide show and audio tape.
- October 3rd Meet with the Southeast Asian panel participants to go over the prepared questions.
- October 4th Speak with the head of the A-V Department, the music teacher, and the vice-principal to confirm their availability to assist me.
- October 5th Borrow the slide show and equipment from Fitchburg Public Library.
- October 7th Pick up the Hmong dancers and two of the panel participants at their homes. Arrive at Oakmont and familiarize the Asian students with the auditorium and the time schedule for them to participate.

Schedule of Events for the Oakmont and Asian Students

September 23rd The World Culture classes complete the pre-program questionnaire.

September 24th-27th Classroom teachers provide Southeast Asian cultural and social background information. Students read Laotian Legend. Students submit three questions they would like a peer from Southeast Asia to answer.

September 27th I collect the questions, categorize and list them and make copies for the Asian students.

October 3rd The Asian panel participants meet with me to go over the questions.

October 7th Southeast Asian Cultural Program at Oakmont High School: 8:15-9:30 a.m.

I slide show 20 minutes

II dancers 20 minutes

III panel discussion 30 minutes

Students complete post-program questionnaire in their World Culture classrooms. I do an awareness writing activity with one class.

Pre-Program Questionnaire

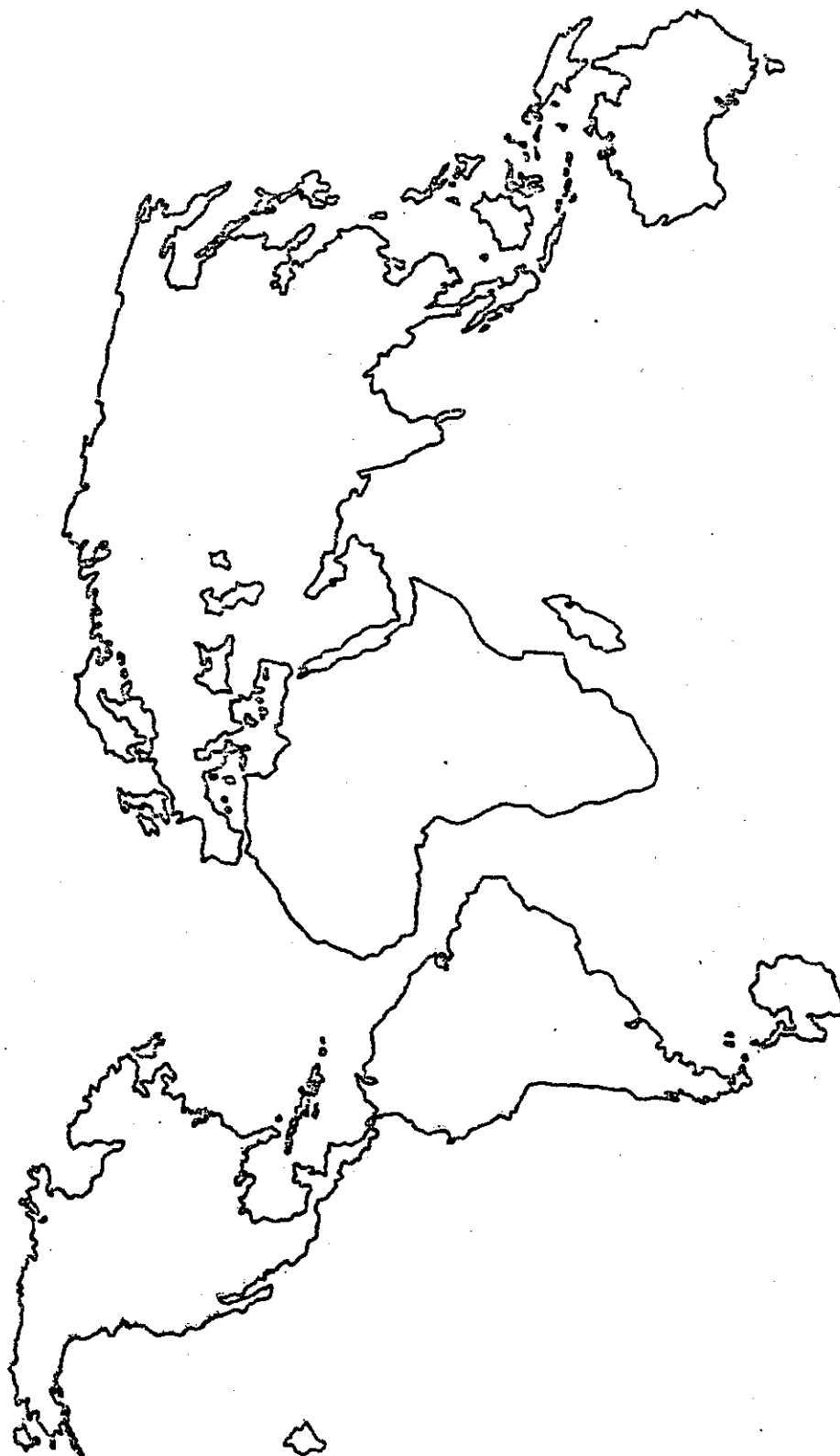
M _____ F _____

AGE _____

1. Since 1975 about 750,000 Southeast Asian refugees have settled in the U.S. and 250,000 more will arrive over the next 10 years. Why do you think they are coming?
2. Describe what you think their "traditional dress" looks like.
3. What kinds of food do Southeast Asian people eat?
4. How many seasons do you think they have in Southeast Asia?
5. Draw a picture of a Southeast Asian house.

Map

Place an X on S.E. Asia



INFORMATION

The Lao people moved from the Yunnan area of China and settled in Laos about 658 A.D. There were major kingdoms set by 1702.

There are many ethnic groups living within Laos. The man is the traditional head of the household. He makes the decisions that are critical while the women take care of the household chores, cooking, and financial matters. Children respect and obey their parents and often live with them even after marriage. Marriages must be approved by both parents. The groom must pay the bride's parents and also be responsible for the expense of the wedding feast at her house.

The Lao language is tonal and basically monosyllabic, much of it borrowed from ancient India. The writing system is not made of Roman characters. Most children go to school when they are six years old. Students must pass an exam before graduating from sixth grade and being allowed to continue. After tenth grade they must pass another exam and yet another three years later in order to be allowed to progress.

Lao New Year is in mid April. It is a time for saying thanks and asking forgiveness. People celebrate the new growth of plants and streams filled by the heavy rains. The traditional music and dances are an important part of the ceremonies. Cotton and silk skirts, woven with gold and silver threads creating designs, are worn by young girls and women. Their long hair is wound into a bun and laced with beads and gold chains. Musical instruments are hand carved and the center of activity. Men often display their golden belts and silver jewelry. Wood and ivory carvings may also be made for the special occasions.

Most meals are served family style, therefore, guests are welcome to share at any time, unannounced. Families sit on the floor around a woven mat upon which the food is spread. Some people may sit around a low rattan or bamboo dining table. Sweet or sticky rice is rolled in the hand and eaten, while forks, spoons, and chopsticks are used for most everything else. Knives are not necessary since meats are always pre-cut very thin or chicken is left to eat off the bone. The Lao people prefer to eat fresh meat and often slaughter their own animal. Families make a day of fishing and bring back the catch to eat.

The majority of Lao are Buddhist which has existed in their country for approximately 200 years. Other religions, such as Christianity, Islam, etc. are practiced by some. Many of their traditional ceremonies require the presence of a monk. This spiritual support can improve their mental health and adaptability.

In the early 19th century, about 50,000 people migrated to northern Laos from China to find peace, freedom, and more land for farming. By mid 1960's the population had grown to 350,000.

Hmong language is tonal. Their alphabet was designed in the early 1950's by missionaries using the Roman alphabet. Many of the older folk are not able to read or write their language since it is so new. Schools were not available until the 60's and even then few of these mountain dwelling people had the opportunity to attend. Only the wealthy young boys were sent away to private schools in large towns. Since coming to America, the Hmong people believe that education can bring a better future and many have successfully complete high school. Some are continuing on to higher education.

There are two major tribes in the Hmong culture, which are noticeable in their traditional costumes which they wear for the New Year's celebration and other special occasions.

The Hmong women are known widely for their magnificent applique handwork where fabric is cut and folded under to reveal other cloth layers underneath. Men may have special trades such as blacksmithing, silver-smithing, saddle making, wood making, hand tool making, etc.

The household often consists of the eldest male, his wife, children, unmarried brothers and sisters, and parents. Order and authority are maintained by respect for age. Younger children respect their older siblings. There are twenty-one different clans in the Hmong society, but thirteen are larger than the other eight. All clan members share the same last names and are considered to be brothers and sisters (perhaps similar to the American Indian tribal family). Admission to a clan is by birth, adoption, or marriage. After marriage, a woman goes to live with her husband's clan since she is not permitted to marry within her own, however she often retains her fathers clan name and considers herself still a member.

Hmong people are hardworking and do not have week-ends, holidays or vacation time off. They always enjoy the companionship of their family and friends through work and play.

They usually eat three meals a day. Breakfast may consist of a light soup with rice. Lunch is similar with some chicken and pork added and dinner is the same. When visitors come they are always offered something to eat, although the guests will often try to refuse in politeness.

Southeast Asian Social and Cultural Customs

1. Last name designates the family root name or clan.
2. Given name (first name) is used most often.
3. Children usually live with parents until they marry and often afterwards. Not uncommon to have 3-4 generations under one roof.
4. Hmong women marry between 14 and 18, men between 15 and 30, Lao and Thai women marry between 16 and 22, men between 18 and 30. Vietnamese women marry between 18 and 25, men between 20 and 30.
5. Often, at birth, an infant is considered one year old.
6. They do not celebrate birthdays nor keep track of the date.
7. Brothers and sisters never touch or kiss each other.
8. Women do not shake hands with other women or men.
9. Touching another's head is prohibited with few exceptions.
10. Girls have no physical contact with boys.
11. Children are not allowed to write with their left hands. Hmong may write with either hand.
12. To show respect, pass something with two hands.
13. Bowing heads is a sign of respect.
14. It is disrespectful to look at someone steadily.
15. Calling with a finger up is used only toward an animal or an inferior. Between two equals, it is a provocation, To call a person, use the whole hand, fingers downward.
16. Parents are proud of having a large family.
17. Generally, they avoid arguments and conflict, are modest, shy, hide unpleasant emotions, show restraint in gestures and speech.

18. When a Southeast Asian person visits someone's home, he takes off his shoes at the steps or outside the room. If he left then on he would make the house or room dirty, which would be a burden to the hostess who must keep it clean. Also, when entering the inner part of a temple, it is necessary to remove one's shoes and also his hat, because this place is considered worthy of special respect.
19. When a guest comes to visit, a Southeast Asian will bring him a drink without stopping to ask whether the guest would like it or not.
20. If a fairly close friend visits just at mealtime, the hostess will urge him to stay for the meal, to join them in eating or to wait until the meal is ready. This is to show warm hospitality which is genuinely part of the Southeast Asian culture, and to encourage a closer friendship.
21. Southeast Asians respect someone older, so that older people are called "aunt", "uncle", "grandfather", or "grandmother", no matter what their work is and even though they are not actually related.
22. Many foreigners feel that Southeast Asians laugh in situations where laughing is out of place. This could be for the following reasons:
 - a. They may not have understood what the foreigner said, so they laughed out of embarrassment.
 - b. Their sense of humor is not exactly the same as the foreigners' sense of humor. For example, in a movie the person may laugh during a sad part because they are amused at the role of the actor.
 - c. When they do something wrong, they may laugh, but this shows that they are willing to admit they are wrong and aren't angry at the person who is criticizing them.

- d. When a foreigner speaks their language wrongly, they often laugh, but not to ridicule; rather, they laugh because they feel kindly toward a foreigner who is trying to speak their language. It seems strange because it is not considered necessary for a foreigner to learn their language. When a foreigner does, the people are pleased.
23. When speaking to someone in a high position, it is incorrect to stand with hands on one's waist, elbows on the table, hands in one's pockets, arms crossed across one's chest or across one's back, or resting on the back of a chair or on anything else that is close by. One shouldn't use gestures, or point to anyone, or across in front of someone else, or over his head. They consider this to be impolite. When walking in front of a respected person, one should bend over slightly to show full respect.
24. In the presence of a respected person, a guest or anyone who is considered important, one shouldn't sit with legs crossed, or elbows on the table; one shouldn't stand with one foot on a chair, or with one foot pointing forward, or sit with legs apart, or pointing with a foot at something. They consider this unbecoming and disrespectful. If a person touches another person by mistake, he should excuse himself.
25. When a man speaks with a nice girl, he shouldn't stand too close or touch her at all because the custom considers it necessary for a girl to keep herself pure until she marries.
26. When eating anything, if some food is still on one's fingers, it is not polite to lick it off, or to use one's fingernails to clean one's teeth when others are present. One shouldn't dampen one's finger with

saliva to wipe a smudge off oneself because they consider this very repulsive and impolite.

27. Southeast Asian people don't show love openly before others, even if it is a child or family member, because it is considered a personal matter and not suitable for others to see.
28. When you would like to help someone in some little thing like carrying something or taking them somewhere, don't ask whether they would like your help or not, if you see that you can help. If you ask first, the person will refuse and say "Never mind" because he wants to be considerate and doesn't wish to bother anyone.
29. A Southeast Asian does not speak bluntly. If one speaks in a straightforward way, it can cause the other person to be hurt, or it could fail to bring good results: these are things that need to be considered. Every nationality considers some things can be said and other things should not be said.
30. When a Southeast Asian asks "Where are you going?" or "Where have you been?" this is simply a method of greeting, not actually an intention of finding out anything about the person. This is like the American greeting "How are you?"
31. When a Southeast Asian calls someone "fat", he means that the person is healthy, well-looking and strong. If the person is really overweight, he is not likely to be spoken to about it. Also, to speak of a person's weight is a common way to ask about his health when he has been away a long time.
32. A Southeast Asian person usually asks about the price of things. They ask because it could be that they like that article and would like to buy one like it. If they know the price they will be able to bargain

for it correctly, and also get some idea where to buy it. This is because nearly everything is sold on a bargaining system in their country.

33. Southeast Asians usually ask about age so that they can refer to a person correctly. Even friends are usually called "older sister" or "younger sister", according to their age. Or perhaps one asks the age of another because he is pleased to see someone so young in a good position. Or it could be that a person who is older still looks very young.
34. They like to ask about wages. An educated person doesn't ask, except among close friends. They ask so they can see what the wages are in different work places. They might ask because they are pleased to see ability in one who is so young yet able to make so much money.
35. Though courtesy is so prized in personal relationships, a Westerner should not expect much courtesy in public, e.g., driving, waiting in lines. This is perhaps because of "the easy life" with which the Southeast Asian people have been familiar has not prepared them for this pattern of life.
36. For Southeast Asians, especially the villagers, "time and tide" still wait for most of them. It is, therefore, their wonder why Westerners are so punctual and so "bow to time". ⁴

⁴ Some Different Concerns Between East and West. Refugee Assistance Program: Panat Nikhom, Thailand.

FOR TEACHERS TO USE AS THEY WISH

Laotians adopt a relaxed attitude toward life and are notable for their peaceful, take it easy, not to worry, philosophy. They prefer simplicity, only cultivate what they need, and try to rid themselves of worldly desires with little or no planning for the future. In Laos, it is enough to plant the rice and watch it grow; weave cloth and enjoy wearing it; go to the temple and pray; sit and think; or simply sit and watch the village world go by. The acquisition of knowledge holds greater prestige than the accumulation of money. Survival in the western world means denial of their most basic life truths.

Asians generally use the indirect approach; talking around a subject before coming to the point. A smile may mean happiness or sorrow, agreement or disagreement, understanding or misunderstanding. To speak or laugh loudly is considered bad manners, especially for women. Adults are expected to control their temper and emotions. Above all, they never want to "lose face" (especially men).

It is insulting for a man to touch a woman in public; kissing is only in private. Parents and children do not kiss. Parents kiss only infants and younger children. In general, Laotian people do not express their feelings verbally. They feel their presence, i.e., at a party, is an expression of their friendship and caring, thus they do not send thank you notes or say "You're welcome." They may smile or slightly bow their head with their two hands joined together at chest or face level. They don't like to repeat themselves (i.e., would not repeat, "thank you"). Only close male friends slap each other on the back.

The body is considered sacred and is to be respected. Every part of the body is suppose to be inhabited by a soul growing in importance from the feet to the top of the head. It is forbidden to touch another head without permission. They do not touch a "superior" part of a body with an "inferior" part of another (i.e., touching hands to a shoulder or foot to a leg).

Many have adapted Buddhism to suit their religious needs. The most important holiday for Laotians is the Lunar New Year in the Buddhist calendar between April 1st and 15th. For the non-Christian Laotians, Christmas and New Year are not important. Hmong New Year is celebrated the end of December or the first of the year.

Laotian diet consists of fish, fresh fruit, and sweet (sticky) rice. Hmong prefer "regular" rice. City people buy food every day while rural families have small gardens. People have no refrigerators, thus, use and prefer fresh foods. Usually Laotians sit on the floor around a tray to eat and leave the meal as soon as each finishes. They do not use napkins, but wash before and after meals. Most often they use spoons, chopsticks and hands to eat their two large meals a day. They devote a great time to cooking; it's an art. A lot of spices are used which produce pungent aromas. The women serve the men and any guests and children before eating themselves.

Appliances, telephones, and cars were great luxuries and usually non-existent.

Males have higher status. Women must obey their parents when young and unmarried and their husbands when married. After marriage a Vietnamese and Hmong couple will live with the husband's family while a Laotian couple will go to live with the wife's family.

Cambodians may live with either side. Legally, Hmong women keep their own name after marriage, but for formal situations, use their husbands' last name. Children take the father's last name legally, as do the other Asian countries. All are patriarchal family structures. The Lao give their given name first, however, the Hmong, Vietnamese and Cambodian place their last name first. The families pride themselves in large numbers and may have four or five generations together.

The majority of the men smoke, as do some married women (some prefer to chew betel nuts which produce a dark red juice and temporarily dye the teeth and gums). Although western influence may be seen in male dress, most women continue to wear a large piece of cloth wrapped and secured above their hips. Country people go barefoot.

Childbirth takes place in the home. Hmong husbands deliver the baby with the help of a midwife. Lao, Cambodian and Vietnamese people prefer a midwife to deliver and men, unmarried women and husbands are not allowed. Often they squat while holding onto a rope suspended from the ceiling. Following the delivery mothers drink warm liquids, never chilled. Children are breast-fed for two to four years.

Vietnamese and Hmong prefer underground burial while Cambodians and Laotians usually cremate bodies. White is worn for immediate mourning.⁵

⁵John Vandeusen. Southeast Asian Social and Cultural Customs, parts I and II. (no publishing information).

Thao Pia and Thao TOUNG

Thao Pia and Thao TOUNG were friends. Thao Pia's father was a farmer, and they lived in the country. Thao TOUNG's father was a government professional, and they lived in the city. Thao TOUNG went to a school in the city, and Thao Pia went to a rural school.

One day, Thao TOUNG wrote a letter to Thao Pia at his rural school. He invited his friend to come to town during his vacation for a visit. He said, "My School will still be in session, so you can visit school with me. Then we'll visit downtown with all its big government office buildings. They have planted flowers outside the building, and it is very pretty to see. At night, I will take you to the theater, and we'll walk around the streets to see the lights. You'll see so many wonderful things."

Thao Pia answered his friend's letter. He told his friend, "Next year, when your school closes for vacation, I would like to invite you to come to visit me at my home. I live in the country, so I don't have all those things you have in town. We'll go fishing at a big river, and we'll cook the fish for our lunch. I'll take you to see the rice fields and walk down the roads. A cool breeze will slowly blow around you and make you happy. You'll hear the songs of the insects and birds, and that will make you happy too.

If you come during the rainy season, at night, you will hear some rain, and the frogs will sing all night in the rice fields. In the morning, you will see traditional farm life. You'll be so happy, you'll forget your town."⁶

⁶Bettie Lou Sechrist and Dang Moua. Lao-English Legends, "The Country Cousin and the Town Cousin" page 5. Southeast Asian Learners Project. Long Beach United School District. Education Dept. 701 Locust Ave. Long Beach, CA.

Questions Submitted by American Students

Having heard the background information on Southeast Asian culture and customs, the American students submitted a total of 320 questions from which I compiled this list to ask the panel of Asian students:

1. What's your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. What language do you speak?
4. How long have you lived here?
5. How old are you?
6. Is your family here?
7. Why did you decide to come to the U.S.?
8. Did you spend a long time in a refugee camp, if so, where?
9. Was it hard adjusting to life in the U.S.?
10. Is the English language difficult?
11. After living in the U.S. for a while, what do you like the best?
12. What do you miss the most from your country?
13. What is your favorite American food?
14. What is your least favorite American food?
15. What is your favorite food from your country?
16. How do you serve your food and where do you eat?
17. What kinds of clothes do people wear in your country?
18. What is your school day like?
19. How many hours do you go to school?
20. Did you have gym class?
21. What subjects did you have to take?

22. How is school different here?
23. What did you do in your spare (free) time?
24. What kinds of sports or games did you play?
25. Did you have any place to go for activities?
26. What do you do now when you have free time?
27. Do people use cars? If not, how do they get around?
28. What kinds of jobs do people have in your country?
29. How do people farm the land?
30. What vegetables and cattle did you have?
31. Do many people starve of hunger in your country?
32. How many seasons do you have?
33. How cold does it get?
34. Does your country have town laws?
35. What are some of the penalties if a law is broken?
36. How old do you have to be to drink?
37. Do you have any drugs in your country?
38. What age can you drive?
39. Why don't you have birthday parties?
40. Why is respect so important?
41. Do Americans seem disrespectful?
42. Why is it impolite to look at someone's eyes when you talk?
43. Do you respect everyone all the time?
44. How is bowing a sign of respect?
45. Why can't brothers and sisters touch each other?
46. Why don't people shake hands?
47. Why can't you touch someone's head?
48. When you get angry what do you do?

49. Is it hard to keep your emotions inside?
50. Is everyone polite in your country?
51. Do people yell or shout at each other?
52. What chores do boys have in your country?
53. What chores do girls have in your country?
54. Why can't a boy and girl hold hands in public?
55. How can a boy and girl get to know each other before they get married?
56. Does your family choose your husband or do you?
57. Would your family be upset if you married someone who was not the same nationality?
58. Why do girls get married so young in your country?
59. Where does a couple live after they get married?
60. Can a husband and wife show affection in public?
61. Are you allowed to get a divorce?
62. Can a man have more than one wife?
63. How many generations live together?
64. Are the houses crowded?
65. Did you have electricity?
66. What are the insides of the houses like?
67. What kinds of beds do people sleep on?
68. What kinds of stoves do people use for cooking?
69. What are the houses like in the mountains or near water?
70. Do people usually live in the same town all their life?
71. Was life easier or harder in your country?
72. How are American kids the same as kids in your country?
73. How are American kids different?

Memorandum to Oakmont Students

October 1, 1985

TO OAKMONT FACULTY

FROM: MR. ARSENAULT AND SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: "WORLD CULTURES PROGRAM"

On Monday, October 7, all students - mostly 9th grade - involved in the World Cultures program will be attending an assembly program on Southeast Asia. This assembly is tentatively scheduled to begin Period 1 and extend into Period 2. If all goes well and on schedule, students should be reporting to their 2nd period class about 9:30. Please schedule for your classes accordingly.

Finally, since there will be only 1 Social Studies teacher in the Auditorium, it is requested that the following teachers free because of the attendance of ninth grade students assist in the auditorium coverage.

Period 1: Mrs. Phelps, Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Smith

Period 2: Mr. Nims, Miss Gilmour, Mrs. Phelps, Mr. Zbikowski

Outline Of the Program Sequence of Events

- 8:10Thanked the individual administrators and faculty members at Oakmont High School who helped make the Program possible.
- Acknowledged that this audience had already given thought to the similarities and differences between the United States and Southeast Asia.
- Gave the Program agenda: 1. The students would be viewing a slide show focusing on refugee resettlement in northern Worcester county. 2. Following the slide show, three Hmong girls would perform three traditional dances in their native costumes. The girls are students in Fitchburg. 3. Next, two Laotian girls from Gardner would perform two dances. The dances and the background music are part of their cultural heritage. 4. Following the dancing portion of the program, two more students from Fitchburg would join a panel to answer the questions previously submitted by the audience.
- Suggested that everyone sit back, relax, and enjoy.
- 8:20..... Slide show centering on Southeast Asian refugee resettlement in Fitchburg and Gardner.
- 8:45..... Introduced the Hmong dancers.
- 8:55..... Introduced the Laotian dancers.
- 9:05..... The panel participants introduced themselves.
- 9:35..... Concluded the Program thanking the participants and the audience

Transcript of the Panel Discussion

P= participant

Q= question

P1 Hello, my name is May Ova. I'm from Laos and I speak Hmong. I live here about five years and I'm a freshman at Fitchburg High. Thank you.

P2 Hi, I'm in 8th grade now. My name is Chia. I speak Hmong and I lived here five years.

P3 Hi, my name is May Ter. I'm from Laos and I speak Hmong and I came here about five years and I'm in 7th grade at Memorial School.

P4 Hi, my name is Souvannaphone Sengvilay and I'm from Laos. I speak Laotian. I been here four years. I'm in junior high school. I mean Junior in high school.

P5 Hi, my name is Souvanny Sengvilay. I'm from Gardner. I'm Laotian. I talk Laotian. I've been here four years and I'm sophomore in Gardner High School. Thank you.

P6 Hi, my name is Vu Vo. I'm from Vietnam. I speak Vietnamese. I've lived here for four years. I'm a freshman at Fitchburg High School.

P7 Hi, my name is Vienvilai Chanthachack and I live in Fitchburg and I speak Laos and I been here for three year and I'm Fitchburg High School Senior.

Q1 Why did you decide to come to the United States?

P5 Why? Because of the communists.

- Q2 Did you spend a lot of time in a refugee camp and if so, what camp or where was it?
- P4 Thailand, about 8 months.
- P5 I live in Thailand Camp and Philippine Camp.
- Q3 Was it hard adjusting to life in the United States?
- P3 Yes.
- P2 Yes.
- Q4 What was the hardest thing to get used to in the U.S.?
- P5 The American ways and the English.
- P4 The language.
- Q5 After living in the U.S. for awhile what do you like the best?
- P5 I like the food.
- P4 The food is the best.
- P6 Food.
- P7 I think is the date is the best for me.
- Q6 What do you miss the most about your country?
- P5 My big house.
- P4 My culture.
- P6 Mostly my family and all.
- P7 Mostly, my sister and my brother, I think I miss my friend, too.
- Q7 What's your favorite American food?
- P2 My favorite food is pizza.
- P4 I like hot dog.
- P6 Everything.
- P7 I like meatball.

Q8 What is your favorite food from your country?

P3 Coconut.

P2 My favorite food is sugar cane.

P5 Papaya.

P4 Lao fruit.

P7 He likes mango and I like mango too.

Q9 What clothes do people usually wear in your country?

P7 The clothes people wear in my country just like this. Usually the girls they wear like a skirt, but the boys, when they play soccer game or something, they wear shorts. It depends they wear on the farm just like dirty clothes. usually they wear things like I wear right now.

P6 Same for me.

P5 Well, most of the boys wear jeans or T shirts from the United States.

Q10 What is your school day usually like in your country?

P5 At lunch we go home and we come back, not like America. We don't have the cafeteria and all the stuff. Same teacher everyday, that's fine!

Q11 Did you have gym class? What subjects did you usually take?

P5 Well, I have gym only Monday morning so you can exercise and something like math and reading....history too!

Q12 What did you do in your spare time?

P2 In my spare time I go visit my friends and go swimming and play a lot of stuff together.

P5 I go to friend of mine.

P6 We play soccer a lot.

P7 Usually, if I have a spare time, all the boys they want to go together to talk about girls.

Q13 Did you have any special places to go for activities or for entertainment?

P4 I don't think so.

P7 For activities, usually the night time we go if we have dance or game somewhere. Usually the boys go, they make a group for the girls. They don't want to go one, one, one because it's not polite for my people, but usually they go in a group.

Q14 What do you do now when you have spare time?

P1 Go roller-skating.

P4 Watch TV and movies.

P5 Call my friends up.

P6 I don't have spare time because after school I have school activities.

P7 I think my spare time I go see my girlfriend.

Q15 Do people use cars in your country? If not, how do you get around?

P3 Walk and sometimes if you have a bike, ride your bike.

P5 My father have a car and sometimes I walk or have a bicycle.

P6 Mostly people walk or bicycle. They don't have a lot of cars in Vietnam.

P7 Me too, I walk.

Q16 How do people farm the land in your country?

P6 They use buffalo to pull the sleds

Q17 Do many people starve of hunger in your country?

P5 Oh, yes there's a lot of them. I guess friends of my aunt from Hawaii she called to tell us that from now on in the Thailand, near Thailand Camp, there's no food there.

Q18 How many seasons does your country have?

P3 We have two seasons.

P5 Three seasons: spring, summer, and rainy day.

P4 Some parts have two and some have three.

Q19 How cold does it get?

P4 Sixty degrees.

Q20 How hot does it get?

P5 One hundred degrees.

P6 It can go up to 110 degrees or even 120.

Q21 Does your country have town laws?

P2 Yes, we have laws.

Q22 What are some of the penalties if the laws are broken?

P6 In my country, if a man or a boy with long hair down to the neck, they going to cut off all your hair or they might let you go to jail for a couple of days or a week.

Q23 How old do you have to be to drink?

P5 Any age.

P2 I think the same.

Q24 What age can you drive?

P2 You can drive any age.

P5 My father say 18 in the city.

P6 Depending if you know how to drive or not.

Q25 Do most Americans seem disrespectful?

P5 Yes, some of them do. They do to me.

Q26 Why don't you look at someone's eyes when you talk in your country?

P7 In my country usually if you're angry when you talk to someone like that. If you're not angry you just talk like this. But if you're

angry you can tell by your eyes, when you do to them, you just make strong eyes at them and they know about you. You're angry.

Q27 How is bowing a sign of respect?

P5 Your bow is for respect like your teacher, your mom, your Dad, like that, but not your friend. This (demonstrates a bow) means like, they're higher than you. I mean they're older.

Q28 Why can't you touch someone's head?

P4 Because it's against religion.

Q29 When you get angry, what do you do?

P7 When I'm angry, for me, I don't think I can fight. I just walk away. I don't think I have a choice when I'm angry.

P6 Same for me, I take a walk away from the people I'm angry at.

Q30 Is it hard to keep your emotions inside and not immediately yell at someone?

P5 Not that hard, you get used to it, like me. I get used to it.

Q31 Do people ever yell or shout at each other, if they do, when?

P7 They yell at a lot of people like a friends, but they don't yell at the teacher or parent. They're not going to yell at them. They yell at like a best friend. You can yell at, but not parents or older people, they don't do it. But the old people can yell.

Q32 What chores do boys have in your country?

P2 The boys have to carry some water and carry some woods and heavy stuff.

Q33 What kinds of chores do girls have in your country?

P2 The girls have to cook and help you clean the house. They have to go to the field and work there about two or three days and come back home.

Q34 Why can't a boy and girl hold hands in public?

P5 Why? Because they're not married yet! Yes, it's embarrass with a guy not married. Where in U.S. I don't know. I do that sometimes.

Q35 How can a girl and boy get to know each other before they get married?

P2 If they're like friends at New Years and they see each other, sometimes if a boy follows the girl home and he can't come inside though, but he's going to stay outside and they can talk and they get to know each other. They become boyfriend and girlfriend.

P5 The boy and girl get to know each other at the party and he follow you home and that's all a Laotian guy do... follow you home!

Q36 Does your family choose your husband or do you?

P3 Sometimes we do, sometimes your parents choose husband to marry you.

P5 It's up to your parents, but you can, you know, choose your husband.

P4 Usually the parents choose.

Q37 Would your family be upset if you married someone who was not the same nationality?

P4 Yes, because we have different culture.

P5 Some don't respect for your parents, see?

P7 This problem I don't know about because my brother is married to American people. I think that's okay.

Q38 Why do girls get married so young in your country?

P5 Because they have difficulty in their family, you know, no one to take care of their Mom and Dad. That's why they have to get married so they can work. So the guy can work for your family. Your husband work for your family.

P6 Same thing.

Q39 Are you allowed to get divorced in your country?

P6 You can get divorced anytime you want.

Q40 Can a man have more than one wife?

P2 They can have as much as they want.

P5 Yes, my father has four wives.

Q41 How many generations usually live together?

P1 Three.

Q42 Are the houses crowded?

P5 Yes, yes for some family.

Q43 Do you have electricity?

P4 In city, yes.

Q44 What are the insides of the houses like and what kinds of beds do people sleep on?

P5 It's beautiful inside my house and sleep on sleeping bag, but its different than sleeping bag.

P6 Most of the families, the bathroom is like ten yards from the house and when you have to go its far to walk.

P3 We sleep on mats.

Q45 What kind of stoves do people use for cooking?

P1 A big cooking fire.

P3 A fire place.

Q46 What do the houses look like that are in the mountains?

(I'm not sure they understand the question. Most of the homes in the mountains are built on the ground. Near the water they're built on high stilts so when the rains come the water won't flood the house.)

Q47 Was your life easier or harder in your country?

P5 Harder and easier. It was easier because when my family was together. In 1975 the communists came and took my parents away and that's the difficult cause we all separated. My sister in the south. I'm in the north. They almost sent me to Vietnam. Well, I think if I go there I will die without food in Vietnam.

Q48 How are American kids the same as kids in your country?

P7 I think some the same, but one thing's different...kissing.

Q49 Vienvilai Already answered our last question!

How are things different other than kissing?

How are kids in United States different from kids in your country?

P5 American kids they go out a lot with a guy. The different is school. The school in here is the best. United States is the best!

Post Program Questionnaire

M _____ F _____

AGE _____

1. Do you think the background information helped you understand the program? Please give a specific example.
2. a) Were there any parts of the program that were unclear? If so, what part?

b) What questions do you have about any part that was unclear?
3. What part of the program did you enjoy the most?
4. a) List three things you found interesting.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.b) Choose one of the three things that is the most interesting and tell why.

5. a) What similarities did you notice between the Hmong and Lao people?

b) What differences were you aware of?

6. What does the music remind you of?

7. What towns in this area have Southeast Asian settled in?

8. Do you have a question that wasn't answered? If so, what is it?

Place an X on S.E. Asia



Copy the sentence (directly from your partner's card)
that you liked the best.

They move around in wonderful states
and seem to be in another world.

Copy the sentence that isn't clear to you.

They show their culture in their dance.

What would you like the writer to add more about?

Their culture (how the dance related to it)

The refugees dance is smooth and calm. The dancer seems flexible, yet flows with a moving rhythm. It seems as if she is thinking about every move and carrying it out. She is joyful & happy. They move around in beautiful circles with precision. They are like in another world at peace. They are free of all worries & troubles. Their culture shows in their dance.

Copy the sentence (directly from your partner's card)
that you liked the best.

Dances were made up of unusual
movements.

Copy the sentence that isn't clear to you.

It was glittery and made noises.

What would you like the writer to add more about?
~~that~~ ^{the} preparation that goes into learning
these dances?

The dances were made up of unusual movements. There was lots of glitter and strange music. There was non-stop hand movements. And the foot movements were more low-key than the hands. The hands seemed to be more important than their feet did. I was surprised not to see any clapping or snapping. The costumes they wore were bright, layered clothing. It was glittering and made noises. It must tell a lot about their customs.

Copy the sentence (directly from your partner's card)
that you liked the best.

When they came to America, it was a better situation
because there was more food and no concentration
camps ^{and} communism."

Copy the sentence that isn't clear to you.

Fix 2nd sentence, sort of run on.

What would you like the writer to add more about?

It is probably also a better ~~situation~~ surrounding
them to grow up in."

↑
good thought, expand.

Southeast Asians came to America because their countries were starting to become communist, and they were against communism. Also, because many people were hungry and starving, they were in concentration camps and surrounded by poverty. When they came to America, it was a better situation because there was more food, and no concentration camps or communism. I think that it was a good experience for them to come to the U.S. and come into our schools and take English as a second language. It is probably also a better surrounding for them to grow up in, with no poverty about them.

Copy the sentence (directly from your partner's card)
that you liked the best.

Their dance is alien to me.

Copy the sentence that isn't clear to you.

The food the Southeast Asians eat in my opinion is
boring.

What would you like the writer to add more about?

More should be written about music and the
arts.

The food the South East Asians eat
 in my opinion is boring. Eating rice or
 fish is not actually exciting. Their dance
 is alien to me. The laws are more lenient
 than the U.S. laws. Marriages ages tend
 to be less than U.S. people. The same
 applies to drinking and driving. The
 music and arts touches upon their cul-
 ture. Nationalistic music is different in
 all countries making all music distinguishable
 to all nationalities. The number of people
 in the family is larger than the U.S.
 because of the great farming industry.
 The people tend to dislike the U.S. people.
 The laws are all different than the U.S.
 It reflects upon the fundamentals
 of their heritage.

Copy the sentence (directly from your partner's card)
that you liked the best.

Why do they have such young ages for driving, drinking
and getting married.

Copy the sentence that isn't clear to you.
The language is very strange

What would you like the writer to add more about?
How he knows the language ^{is strange} since they
didn't speak it?

The people seem to have jobs different than ours, which would reflect upon the basic fundamentals of their clothing and social lives. Also the food & dances they did were awfoward. Why do they ^{have} such young ages for things, such as diving, drinking and for getting married. Their history has that of respect and politeness rather than our history. There seems to be many differences & similarities between our cultures which leaves big gaps of communication between our countries.

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