



LESSON PLAN

Architectural Wonders



RELATED PHOTO ESSAY

Angkor

BY CHRISTIAN HOUGE



Key Idea

Architectural sites provide an important window into ancient cultures. Angkor Wat, an architectural treasure in the heart of Cambodia, reflects a civilization that integrated culture, nature, and religion, but the impacts of tourism threaten its future.

Background

Angkor Wat, the world’s largest religious monument, is a temple complex built in the 12th century, in what is now known as modern Cambodia. It is located in Angkor, the largest pre-industrialized city in the world and the seat of the Khmer empire, which ruled Southeast Asia from the 9th–15th century. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the city of Angkor includes the remains of different capitals of the Khmer empire, including approximately 1,000 temples of various sizes. The area was largely abandoned by the late 14th–early 15th century likely due to a confluence of factors including drought, over-exploitation of the land, religious shifts, and war, and slowly became hidden by nature and the surrounding jungle. Portuguese missionaries came upon it in the late 16th century, but it was the 19th century French explorer, Henri Mouhot, who popularized Angkor by writing extensively about it in his journals.

In this photo essay, photographer Christian Houge documents the inter-relationship among culture, nature, and architecture within Angkor. Encompassing approximately 400 square kilometers, this vast area showcases art and artifacts, from both Hindu and Buddhist faiths, reflecting complex cosmological principles.

Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. W.9-10.4 and W.11-12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.



Class: 60 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Geography
- Modern World Studies
- Photography

COLLEGE

- Architecture
- Cultural Anthropology
- Geography
- History
- Photography

THEMES

- Cultural architecture
- Nature and photography
- Effects of modernization

MATERIALS

- World map
- Access to the photo essay online (or printed copies of it)

PREPARATION

- (Optional) Make copies of the photo essay



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Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the photo essay by showing Cambodia on a world map. Point out that students will view photos that capture the temple city of Angkor, an archeological site in the jungles of Cambodia. Explain to students that Angkor is currently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site primarily due to its artistic and architectural achievements. Other well known World Heritage Sites recognized for their architecture include the Statue of Liberty in New York City; Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; the Great Wall of China; and The Taj Majal in India.

What do you think makes architectural sites attractive to tourists today? Ask students if they have visited a historic building. The building could be a U.S. World Heritage Site, an old house, the home of a historical figure, or an old community church. What could be the value of visiting a historic building? How might walking through an old building impact one's experience of modern life?

Tell students that a number of things can threaten or destroy ancient architectural sites, including environmental factors, development, war, and tourism. Ask students: Do you think it is important to protect such sites for future generations?

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Explain that Angkor Wat is the world's largest religious monument. More than a million people visit Angkor annually, and the numbers continue to rise. Explain to students that World Heritage Sites, like Angkor, are universally recognized places that attract people from around the world. While viewing the photographs, ask students to think about ways that architectural sites, like Angkor, enable people to experience the natural and cultural history of the past. Ask students to take note of the ways that the photographer portrays the connection between people, nature, and architecture in his photographs.



Delving Deeper

After viewing the photo essay, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- Photographer Christian Houge explores the contrast between architecture and nature. Select a few photographs where the natural elements of water, trees, or sunlight play a central role in the photo essay.
- Angkor Wat means “temple city” or “city of temples” in Khmer. The city of Angkor contains about 1,000 temples of various sizes. Photographer Christian Houge said, “These images are an invitation – one of awe and wonderment.” Which photographs do you think portray the awe and wonderment of Angkor? Why?
- Identify a photograph where a person is included. What perspective does a person provide in this photograph? Would this photograph work without the inclusion of a person? Why or why not?
- Over a million tourists visit Angkor every year, and the numbers are projected to increase. Tourism is providing positive and negative outcomes to Angkor. Conservationists argue that high tourist numbers are negatively impacting the architectural integrity of Angkor as well as the human experience of the site. On the other hand, the tourism industry provides opportunities for local young people who live and work in this part of Cambodia, one of Asia’s poorest countries. If you were to take a side, which of the noted outcomes of tourism do you think is more important? Why?
- Based on what you have seen in the photo essay, why do you think so many people are drawn to visit this site? Would you like to visit Angkor Wat? Why or why not?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate what they learned from the photo essay. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the photo essay to justify their reasoning.)



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1. Imagine that the photographer created a fund to give \$10,000 to a young, budding photographer. The goal of the project is to capture the value of places embedded in history (like this photo essay of Angkor Wat) and their impact on people's lives. What place or building in your community, town, or city would you photograph for this project? Why? What kind of stories would this place tell? Who would be telling these stories? (C3.D2.Geo.6.9-12)
2. Imagine that Angkor Wat remains undiscovered to this day and you are a National Geographic explorer on assignment in Cambodia. Hiking through the forest around the city of Siem Reap, you come upon the temple of Angkor Wat. Write a report to your editors at National Geographic about the site with the aim of convincing them to send a team of photographers right away. Based on what you learned from the photo essay, how would you describe the artistic, architectural, and religious features of Angkor? (CCSS.ELA.W.9-10.4 and W.11-12.4)
3. Visit the [Google Cultural Institute's walking tour of Angkor Wat](#). This virtual walking tour takes a visitor thorough the sites of Angkor. Click on "street view" and navigate your way through the various views. Do you think technology can replace an in-person visit to a historical site? Why or why not? What might be some advantages and disadvantages of virtual tours, like this one from the Google Cultural Institute? Do you think it could be an environmental solution to minimize tourism? Why or why not? (NGSS.HS-LS2-7)

Resources

["Heritage site in peril: Angkor Wat is falling down."](#) *The Independent*, March 14, 2008.

Dan McLerran, ["Angkor Wat Facing an Uncertain Future."](#) *Popular Archaeology*, July 26, 2011.

["World Wonders: Angkor Wat."](#) Google Cultural Institute.

["Angkor."](#) UNESCO World Heritage Centre.



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["Lost City of Angkor Wat."](#) *National Geographic Video.*

["The Khmer Empire: Cambodia's Medieval Splendor."](#) *National Geographic Interactive.*

Ashley M. Richter, ["Recycling Monuments: The Hinduism/Buddhism Switch at Angkor Wat."](#) CyArk, September 8, 2009.

Thomas Fuller, ["Near Cambodia's Temple Ruins, a Devotion to Learning."](#) *The New York Times*, January, 24, 2012.