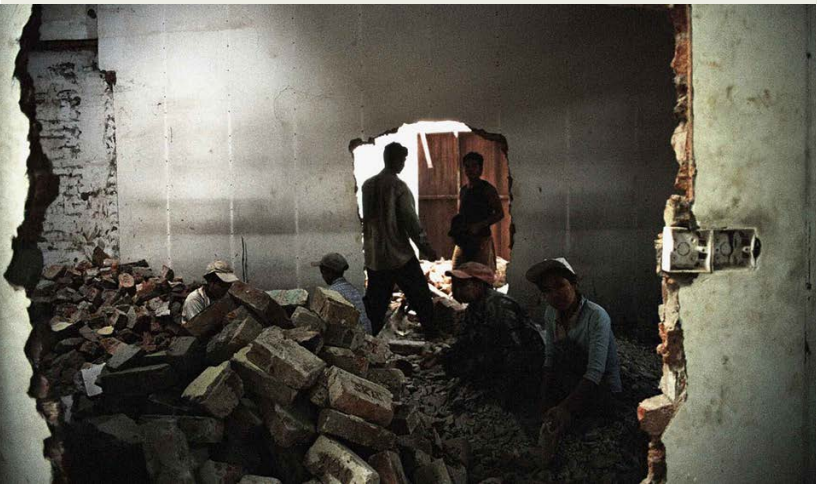




LESSON PLAN

A Collapsing City Skyline



RELATED FROM-THE-FIELD ESSAY

**“Entering Homes:
Inside Yangon’s
Dangerous Buildings”**

BY ELIZABETH RUSH



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Class: 60 minutes

Key Idea

A post-colonial Southeast Asian city emerges from decades of military rule and international isolation and opens up to outside investment for the first time in over 50 years. The changes occurring during this transition reveal resilience and adaptability of a people living in difficult circumstances.

Background

In 1948, Burma, now Myanmar, became independent of the United Kingdom and in 1962, a repressive military junta seized control, creating isolation and severe economic decline. In a single century, Myanmar went from being the wealthiest country in Southeast Asia to one of the poorest on Earth. In 2011, Myanmar transitioned to a parliamentary system and the government sold over 80 percent of its assets—everything from petrol stations, to rice mills, cinemas, ports, and soy sauce factories. In Yangon, the former capital and largest city in Myanmar, the Yangon City Municipal Committee (YCMC) carried out a city-wide inspection of all buildings over 60 years old, declaring those unfit for habitation as “dangerous.”

This article, “Entering Homes: Inside Yangon’s Dangerous Buildings,” explores changes taking place in the former capital city of Yangon. Despite decades of stagnation, the people of Yangon have crafted a life in the remains of a failed empire, showing resilience and adaptability. A unique result of the military’s “path to socialism” was a more equal distribution of living spaces among different classes. The author describes the first street fair in over ten years—Thingyan, the Buddhist Festival of Lights—and interviews three people reluctantly losing their homes which they have lived in for over 50 years. The buildings they live in have either been auctioned off or deemed structurally dangerous, and are scheduled for redevelopment.

Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 [or 11-12] topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- English Language Arts
- Modern World Studies

COLLEGE

- Architecture
- Cultural Anthropology
- Geography
- History
- Sociology

THEMES

- Place-based architecture
- Preservation of a culture
- Adaptability and resilience

MATERIALS

- World map
- Printed copies of the story, one per student (or access to story online)

PREPARATION

- Make copies of the story. Students will read the article as homework.



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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.

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 story by showing Yangon, Myanmar (formerly Burma), on a world map, asking students what they know about the people who live there or about their environment. Explain that students will be reading an article about the Southeast Asian city of Yangon (also known as Rangoon), which has experienced many drastic changes in a short period of time. Explain that from 1962–2011, Myanmar had a military-led government known as a junta that isolated the country from the rest of the world.

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Assign students to read the article as homework, pointing out that they will be talking about it in class the next day. Encourage them to pay attention to all the changes happening to the city and the people of Yangon as a result of the transition to a new government. Explain that they will be introduced to three people in particular whose homes have been affected by these changes. How can a person's sense of home shape who he is and how he lives?

Delving Deeper

1. Ask students to share what they learned about the city and people of Yangon from the article.
2. Lead a discussion with the class about the article with such questions as:
 - In the article, we are introduced to three people who are losing their homes. What characteristics do they have in common?



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- Despite difficult circumstances, the people of Yangon have lived ordinary lives. In what ways do they represent resiliency and adaptability?
- What do you think it would be like to make a life with the items that others have left behind?
- What do you think it would be like to witness a city's skyline collapse?
- How would you convince the government to leave, and not destroy, the historic buildings?
- The author writes, "As with every radical change, the process is both disruptive and transformative." What do you think she means by this?
- If you were asked to rename this article, what title would you give it?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story:

1. Author Elizabeth Rush says, "I loved Yangon from my very first glimpse because it taught me a unique lesson: that it is possible to fashion a life out of what others left behind, to live fully in an abandoned empire." What can we learn about resiliency in times of difficulty? (C3.D2.Geo.6.9-12)
2. Rush writes, "Yangon is the most beautiful city I have ever visited. Fragile, ephemeral, tenuous – it epitomizes delicacy and balance." Why do you think the writer chose to tell this story? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1)
3. What comment from today's discussion had the most meaning to you? Why? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1)



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Resources

(Photo essay) Elizabeth Rush, "[Still Lives from a Vanishing City.](#)"
Global Oneness Project.

Joshua Hammer, "[Myanmar's Young Artists and Activists.](#)"
Smithsonian Magazine, March 2011.