

Fulbright-Hays Curriculum Project/Thailand & Laos 2003

**By
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Title: Project # 1: Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook of Thailand
Project # 2: Sunthorn Phu (1786-1855): the People's Poet of Thailand

SUMMARY: The Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook can be used independently of Project #2. It may also be used as a point of departure for Project#2 or other units dealing with Thailand or Southeast Asia. I believe it best if Project#1 precedes Project#2.

The Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook is designed to allow students to research, gather, collect, classify, and record information about the target country – Thailand-in order to gain a better understanding of the culture before moving onto more specific aspects such as literature, folklore, or poetry. Areas of exploration include the following: geography and climate, history, the Monarch, government and diplomacy, economy and currency, society and conduct, population and people, life an leisure, religion, flora and fauna, and the arts (music, dance, theatre, literature). After the scrapbooks have been compiled, students will present the findings to each other and/or to other classes or levels at the desecration of the instructor. This assignment, due to its large scope, may work best if students work together in pairs or in groups of three. This also allows for socially constructed responses to assignment, and may help with conceptual understanding, as well. Another approach is to do scrapbook as a class, and divide topics among students.

Southorn Phu (1786-1855): The People's Poet of Thailand is designed to introduce students to the poet of the Rattanakosin period (1772-present), who has been officially recognized by UNESCO, and whom critics have likened to William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer. This unit will ask students to utilize prior knowledge of literary elements, literary devices, poetry, archetypal characters, and the hero's journey in order to understand why Phu's poetry, full of magic and mythical creatures, has a similar romantic bend to contemporary Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, and also combines the adventure, romance, and ordeals of other culture heros such as Gilgamish, Beowulf, Odysseus, King Arthur, Superman, and Glooscap.

GRADE LEVELS: Project#1 can be used with grades 7-12. Project#2 would work best with grades 10 and 12, depending upon where multicultural and British literature falls in your curricular scope and sequence. I will be using both projects with all levels (basic to honors) of grade 10, as well as with a multi-age (grades 10, 11 and 12) Humanities class and a multi-age Creative Writing class.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

Project#1- What is the geography & climate of Thailand?
What are the basic historical periods of Thailand?
What role does the Monarchy have in Thailand?
What kind of government and diplomacy does Thailand have?
What is the economy in Thailand based on? What is its currency?
What social values, mores, and conduct are exhibited in Thailand?
What are the lifestyles and leisure activities that Thais engage in?
What are the current population and peoples living in Thailand?
What are the primary religions of Thailand?

What types of flora and fauna exist in Thailand?
 What types of art is preserved, performed, or produced in Thailand?

- Project#2- Who was Sunthorn Phu?
 Under which reigns did Phu serve, and in what capacity?
 Why is his work significant to the people of Thailand?
 What can we summarize or deduct about Thai culture and values from his poetry?
 What poetic devices are dominant in the translated verse of “Phra Abhai Mani?”
 What elements and themes of Phu’s work are universal?
 What images and symbols are dominant in “Phra Abhai Mani?”
 What elements of Buddhism are implied in “Phra Abhai Mani?”
 Who are the main characters in the poem, and which archetypes do they represent?
 Identify the elements of the Hero’s Journey present in “Phra Abhai Mani”
 (See Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.)

The following questions may be used after students have some background in British and World Literature:

- How is Phu similar to Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare in terms of court poetry and treatment of commoners and fantasy?
- How did the upheaval of colonialism during Phu’s time guide his writing?
- How is “Phra Abhai Mani” similar to the British Romantic works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley?
- Compare Phu’s hero to other heroes such as Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Odysseus, King Arthur, Superman, or (in my case) Glooscap of the Passamaquoddy of Maine. You may include any other culture hero for comparison. The objective is for the students to recognize *similarities* in characters, deeds, and treatment through a comparative literature and anthropological perspective.

BACKGROUND NOTES:

Montri Umavijani, the editor of Sunthorn Phu’s epic poem *Phra Abhai Mani* states: “*Classical Thai Literature can vie with the best literature in any language as a product of genius. However, the task of making it available to the world is beset with problems and difficulties. First of all, the Thai language, even though fully developed and capable of transmitting a great variety of human experiences, is understood only by a limited amount of people. Besides, classical Thai literature might strike the uninitiated reader as fantastic, far removed from real life, showing a world in which supernatural power, magic, and lofty passions predominate. But indeed these strange things are necessary elements of the world of classics – a world built entirely by its own rules and finished by its own laws. At this world’s core, however, the reader finds the condition of universality. Once arrived there, the reader may look back to the strange, winding path he has travelled with much satisfaction and understanding. T.S. Coleridge has similarly described the function of art as going either from the strange to the familiar or from the familiar to the strange. If classical Thai literature seems to begin with the strange, the fully absorbed reader will always find in it things with which he has already and always know.*”

Sunthorn Phu, the great Thai poet of the Rattanakosin period (1772-present) is well-known by Thais, and students learn his great poetry in school. Phu showed his poetic talent in his youth. He was appointed the royal clerk and received the title of Khun Sunthorn Phu Wohan in the reign of King Rama II. Later in the reign of King Rama IV, Phu was given the title of Phra Sunthorn Wohan, and served the court until he died in 1855 at the age of seventy. Sunthorn Phu was declared world poet by UNESCO in 1986 when Thailand celebrated his bicentennial. Critics have likened Phu to Shakespeare and Chaucer in the range, quality, and national importance of his works. A contemporary of Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, Phu was of a similar romantic bend. Phu's works are full of magic and mythical creatures, and sentimental Thai girls quote his love poetry.

Phu composed his famous epic poem *Phra Abhai Mani* on Ko Samet in the Gulf of Thailand. According to Montri Umavijani, *"It took Phu more than 20 years to write his masterpiece. It has often been criticized as being a story without end, written to earn a living. On the one hand, it is the story of the protagonist's strange loves with four women, namely, the Sea Giantess, the Mermaid, the Eastern Princess Suvarnamali, and the Western Princess Laweng. On the other hand, Sunthorn Phu's work presents a picture of the world governed by sciences and technology. There are things anticipating machine gun, ocean liner, aeroplane and technological warfare. The whole work is permeated with things which could be interpreted in technological terms. In spite of the diversity of stories and interests, the work held together well thematically. It rests on a new concept of education which Sunthorn Phu believed in and propagated."*

Due to the universality, fantasy, and romanticism of Phu's epic poem, it is easy to understand its appeal to high school students. To be able to add another masterpiece to the canon of literature that is read by most American students that is as exciting as *Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, *The Mort D' Arthur*, and *The Canterbury Tales* is reason enough to include this work in your curriculum, but to be able to open the world as we close the gap to a country that is clear on the other side of the world from us and smaller in size than Alaska, is a grater reason to include this work into your curriculum. Consider this Thai proverb: *"Maew mai yoo, noo raroeng."* "Cat not stay, mouse celebrate." Let's shoo away the Cat of difference!

STANDARDS: *In 1993, the Maine Legislature directed the State Board of Education to undertake the next step in education reform by establishing a Task Force on Learning Results that was directed to: "develop long-range education goals and standards for school performance and student performance to improve learning results and recommend to the commissioner and to the Legislature a plan for achieving those goals and standards." During the 1996 Legislative Session, the Legislature adopted much of the work of the Task Force and directed the Department of Education and the State Board of Education to continue to develop the Learning Results. What follows are the state of Maine's standards and performance indicators for the content area of English Language Arts that are met by this unit.*

Standard A. Process of Reading

Student will use the skills and strategies of the reading process to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate what they have read.

Performance indicators:

Student will be able to: Demonstrate an understanding that reading is a gradual process of constructing meaning and revising initial understandings.

Identify the author's purpose and analyze the effects of that purpose on the text.

Analyze how the cultural context of a literary work is evident in the text.

Represent key ideas and supporting details in various written forms (e.g. outline, paraphrase, concise summary).

Standard B: - Literature and Culture

Student will use reading, listening, and viewing strategies to experience, understand, and appreciate literature and culture.

Performance indicators:

Students will Identify the simple and complex actions and interactions involving main and subordinate characters in a work.

Make abstract connections (thoughts, ideas, values) between their own lives and the characters, events, and circumstances represented in various works.

Examine, evaluate, and elaborate on universal themes in literature, using reading and viewing to explain how themes are developed and achieved.

Draw from a broad base of knowledge about literature of the United States and the world to examine and critique how print and visual texts explore the human experience and condition.

Apply mature strategies to the reading and interpretation of lengthy adult level fiction, (e.g. satires, parodies, plays, poems, novels) using texts that are complex in terms of character, plot, theme, structure, and dialogue and sophisticated in style, point of view, and use of literary devices.

Standard C: - Literature and Images**Performance indicators:**

Students will Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between perception, thought, and language.

Compare the ways various social, occupational, and cultural groups use language, and comment on the impact of language use on the way people are viewed and treated.

Standard D: - Informational Texts**Performance indicators:**

Students will Scan a passage to determine whether a text contains relevant information.

Use discussions with peers as a way of understanding information.

Analyze and synthesize the concepts and details in informational texts.

Explain how new information from a text changes personal knowledge.

Standard E: - Processes of Writing and Speaking**Performance indicators:**

Students will Reflect on, evaluate, revise, and edit a sequence of drafts to improve and polish finished work.

Use planning, drafting, and revising to produce, on demand, a well-developed, organized piece that demonstrates effective language use, voice, and command of mechanics.

Standard F: - Standard English Conventions**Performance indicators:**

Students will Edit written work for standard English spelling, grammar, mechanics and usage.

Demonstrate how language usage may depend on the situation.

Standard G: - Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing and Speaking

Performance indicators:

Students will Write stories that effectively use descriptive language to clarify, enhance, and develop ideas.

Make effective use of a variety of techniques for introducing and representing ideas and insights in written work and oral presentations.

Standard H: - Research-Related Writing and Speaking

Performance indicators:

Students will Develop an appropriate strategy for finding information on a particular topic.

Use referencing while doing research.

Identify and use library information services.

Use government publications, in-depth field studies, and almanacs for research.

Use CD-ROM and similar resource media for research.

Identify and use a variety of news sources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, broadcast and recorded media, artifacts), informants, and other likely sources for research purposes.

Use search engines and other Internet resources to do research.

Make extensive use of primary sources when researching a topic and carefully evaluate the motives and perspectives of the authors.

Evaluate information for accuracy, currency, and possible bias.

Report orally, using a variety of technological resources to present the results of a research project.

OBJECTIVES:

In addition to the objectives set forth under the performance indicators, the objective of Project#1 is to provide students with an opportunity to seek out practical information about Thailand from which they will gain a better understanding and appreciation of the country and her people. Having accomplished this, students will then move on to Project#2, Thai poetry, where students will have an opportunity to gain an understanding and appreciation of the celebrated poet, Sunthorn Phu, and his contributions, impact, and influence on Thai literature, and to discover why Phu is likened to Shakespeare, Chaucer, and poets of the British Romantic Period. In addition, students will discover the universality of Phu's characters, the beauty of his verse, and the genius that elevates *Phra Abhai Mani* not only as a classical Thai work, but as a classical work among world literature.

MATERIALS:

Project#1 - You will need to have access to reference material in your classroom or through a library and/or on-line computer. Other materials for the scrapbook include posterboard, construction paper, glue, markers or colored pencils, and other craft materials. I have old issues of *National Geographic Magazine* in my classroom from which students find suitable pictures.

Project#2 - You should have either a copy of Phu's translated version of *Phra Abhai Mani*, or a copy found on-line. (See "Additional Resources") If you plan to tie into Campbell's Hero Journey, his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* should also be available. If you had read about other heros such as Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Odysseys, King Arthur or other local heros, you can compare and contrast Phu's hero prince with one of them.

STRATEGIES:

Project#1 and Project#2 will be introduced immediately following a unit on William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which treats colonialism, romance, fantasy, and reconciliation. My desire is for students to make connections and comparisons to Shakespeare's verse, literary elements, themes, and characters. Since my Project#2 will then extend the findings of Project#1 as we attempt to answer the questions for Project#2. Additionally, students will have already been exposed to literary devices, elements, poetry, archetypal characters, and the hero's journey. The unit preceding Project#1 had students create an anthropology journal of cultural elements from Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* which were excavated and recorded, then visually and orally presented; therefore, they should be able to successfully complete the research in Project#1.

Follow-up activities for Project#1: I will use my CD slide show of my travels throughout Thailand, as well as The Emerald Buddha and The Grand Palace, and Ban Koh Forest Monastery CDs that I purchased to take the students on a visual tour of Thailand after they have completed the scrapbook project. I will bring in an eighteen-year-old Thai student who has recently relocated to this area as a guest speaker from Thailand to answer questions from my students, and to allow my students to share what they have learned about Thailand. There will be Thai food and music, as well.

Follow-up activities for Project#2: For my unit, I will have a CD slide show of rod puppets from the Joe Louis Theatre in Bangkok's Suan-Lum Night Bazaar in Lumpini Park that were used in the performance of *Phra Abhai Mani* at the time of my Fulbright-Hays Seminar. Unfortunately, I was not able to videotape the actual performance. I will also use various web sites to show students Phu's statue in the village of Ban Kram, as well as some of his characters that adorn the beach 7 kms. South of Hat Chao Samran in Phetchaburi Province. Additionally, I will show video footage of Ko Samet, with the mermaid and prince statues on the rocks of the shore. This island (then called Ko Kaew Pisadan) provided the place of composition and setting for Phu's epic poem *Phra Abhai Mani*.

Enrichment: Project#2, then, will immediately precede a unit on world folk and fairy tales in which we will explore the folk traditions about *mermaids/merfolk* and their roles as seen through literary works such as *The Odyssey* and in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. This will also establish a point of departure for the unit on multicultural folklore, which can be enrichment and extension. Materials for enrichment or follow-up activities can come from several sources. See my Reference and Additional Resources sections for suggestions.

Extended Enrichment: Another form of extension and enrichment is the development of a board game over the poem or a section of the poem. The objective of this assignment is to demonstrate the students' understanding of the text in a way that is graphic, three-dimensional, and dynamic rather than through writing or testing. Their quest is the same, that is, to explain the author's purpose. The process is as follows:

1. Look at Phra Abhai Mani's adventure and imagine it as a shape. Does he come full circle in returning home; does he ascend, descend, travel flatly, or experience a bumpy journey? Your answer will help to determine the shape of your board game.

2. Now decide the manner in which his adventure progresses. Do you see a steady path with interruptions, distractions, forks, or temptations? How does he manage to maneuver and proceed? Do others assist him? This will determine the way your game will be played.

3. Design and build your game. You may use as a template an already existing board or format, if it suits your understanding of the text. Otherwise, start fresh. Provide all necessary pieces (dice, cards, moving pieces, questions, etc.) Give your game a meaningful title.

4. Provide complete directions for play and scoring so that your classmates can play.

An Exemplary Game will:

- * showcase both the creators' and the players' thorough understanding of the complexities of Phra Abhai Mani's adventure
- * provide clear and concise directions for play
- * have complete and working parts
- * be of final draft quality
- * be gorgeous in its execution
- * be fiendishly clever and imaginative
- * offer both amusement and lead to questioning aspects of the text

*Note: This project is a big hit with *all* levels of learners.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

Project#1 - To gather information for the **Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook**, you may use any travel book, atlas, or internet site; however, I will be using the following resources:

Eyewitness Travel Guides: Thailand. New York: DK Publishing, Inc. 1997

Lonely Planet: Thailand. Melbourne, Australia: lonely Planet Publications, 2001.

Useful web sites include the following:

amazing-thailand.com
 asiasource.org
 asiatravel.com (nice map)
 cia.gov (lots of facts here)
 circleofasia.com
 gocities.com
 lonelyplanet.com
 prd.go.th/ebook/inbrief (great stuff)
 thailandlife.com

Project#2 - The primary text for Phu's most notable poem is found in the translated text:

Puruchatra, H.H. Prince Prem. The Story of Phra Abhai Mani. Thailand: Kurusapa Press, 1993.

However, a web site exists that has the complete poem:

members.tripod.com/sakchaip/bookworm/sunthorn/adhai_1.html

Other books handy for this unit include:

Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949.

Jumsai, M.L. Manich. History of Thai Literature. Bangkok: Chalermnit, 2000.

Nathalang, Siraporn, Ed. Thai Folklore: Insights into Thai Culture. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2000.

Umavijani, Montri, Ed. *Translated by* Pren Chaya (H.H. Prince Prem Purachatra). Nirat Muang Klaeng. Thailand: Kurusapa Business Org. 2001

Web sites for Project#2.

bangkoksite.com/rayong/statue.html (Phu's statue)
 gocities.com/tathisri/sunthornphu.html
 kenneth.champeon.com
 members.tripod.com
 thaistudents.com/literature/sunthornphu.html
 thingsasian.com
 2.fmg.uva.nl/seamain/icts7/literature.html (criticism)

Other resources for use with extension and/or enrichment:

Livo, Norma J and Cha Dia. Folk Stories of the Hmong. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1991.

http://www.denmark.org/mermaid_June96/Captured.html (The Little Mermaid)

mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/art/shadow.html

members.aol.com/hmongstudiesjrnl/HSJ-v2n1_Hein.html

mienh.net/folktales

northern.edu/hastingsw/mermaid.html

seasite.niu.edu/lao

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION:

Project#1 – Assessment for Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook

The Cultural Anthropology Scrapbook will be graded on information and visual quality of the product. I have included a grading rubric for this project. An oral presentation grade may also be given.

An Exceptional Scrapbook will:

- * have a creative cover design, a neat format, and include all topic requirements
- * use several sources to obtain information as indicated by bibliography
- * include a detailed map of Thailand
- * be visually and creatively appealing
- * showcases the creator's thorough understanding of the all concepts
- * be of final draft quality (no mistakes, errors, etc.)

A Average Scrapbook will:

- * have a cover design, a neat format, and include most of the topic requirements
- * use a few sources to obtain information as indicated by bibliography
- * include a map of Thailand
- * be somewhat visually and creatively appealing
- * showcases the creator's understanding of most of the concepts
- * contain a few mistakes

A Below Average Scrapbook will:

- * have a cover design, unstructured format, and will be missing several of the topic requirements
- * use one or two sources to obtain information
- * may or may not include a map of Thailand
- * lack creativity, or will not be visually appealing at all

- * showcases minimal understanding of most of the concepts
- * contain several mistakes and errors

Project#2 – Assessment for Sunthorn Phu

After Project#1 and Project#2 have been completed. Students will write a comparison paper in which they compare any specific element, device, treatment or character included in Phu's epic poem to another author's work that they have studied. A generic rubric follows; you may tweak it or create your own.

An A (100-93) paper will be:

- * Well-organized (intro, thesis, evidence, conclusion)
- * Excellently written (coherent, intact sentences, varied and appropriate vocabulary and literary terms); has a flair!
- * Profound and insightful in its understanding (shown particularly in a real conclusion that ties author's purpose and then moves beyond to a Universal meaning)
- * Profuse with evidence in the form of quotations smoothly integrated into the structure of the body of the paper
- * Void of most, if not all, mechanical errors

A B (92-85) paper will be:

- * Well-organized (thesis, evidence, conclusion)
- * Well-written (coherent, appropriate vocabulary and terms)
- * Complex in its understanding (shown by conclusion that ties ideas together and explains author's purpose)
- * Using paraphrasing in service of analysis
- * nearly void of mechanical errors

A C (84-77) paper will be:

- * Organized but formulaic (may restate question or use vague "funnel" form as thesis; offer points as a listing; give little evidence; summarize rather than conclude)
- * Adequately written (some sentence problems, some repetition, limited vocabulary and literary terms)
- * Superficial in its understanding (shown by reaching a summary)
- * Burdened with too many mechanical errors
- * Not long enough to aggress topic

A D (76-70) paper will be:

- * Incomplete in its understanding or misreading; offering plot summary or reader response; off-topic, confused in structure; poor in writing, containing many errors; and is less than two pages long

A n F (below 70) paper will be:

- * Needing lots of work - come see me.