

Burmese Lesson Based on a Poem

Submitted by

Kenneth Wong
Lecturer, UC Berkeley
(415) 566-7001
kennethwong@berkeley.edu

Submitted by Yu Yu Khaing
Lecturer, Cornell University
(607) 255-1340
yk696@cornell.edu

Text for lesson development

Excerpts from the Poem “Books Don’t Ever Bleed” by Khayan Pyar Htet Luu, first published in Yati magazine, later republished in a French bilingual anthology and Pan Alinga magazine.

*Translated by Kenneth Wong
October 20, 2015*

Little Brother,
If it’s getting dark
Open the book.

If things are going wrong,
Open the book too.

Take a bite out of the book
Like a piece of bread.

Drink up the book
Like coffee.

The book
Takes a photo of the world.

Even the pirate
Doesn’t carry a sword,
Doesn’t carry a gun anymore.
He carries only a book.
So his ocean grows wider than it has to be.

Lesson Proposal

I. LEVEL: Intermediate

The poem uses everyday words: *book, bread, coffee, and dark*, to name but a few. The sentences are short and clear. Readers with a good understanding of basic Burmese grammar, subject-object-verb placements, and command words can decipher the poem's narrative with minimal guidance.

Though the text is easily understandable, it also features similes and special command words. The last paragraph includes a series of compound sentences, with conjunctions that link cause and effect.

In linguistic simplicity and stylistic sophistication, the text straddles both ends. This lesson is written for **intermediate level**, but with some adjustment, it can also be taught to introductory and advanced classes.

I. OBJECTIVES:

Content objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Read a poem about the love of reading and identify author's perspective on reading
- Have simple discussions about the importance of reading books

Language objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- compose "if-then" statements using the Burmese phrase "nay yin" (if)
- construct similes using the Burmese word "lo" (like)
- use special command words "lite pawt" and "pyit lite," to encourage someone to take decisive action

II. PROCEDURE

Pre-Activity

i. Create a purpose:

Tell students they will read a poem about the love of reading.

ii. Activate:

You can ask students: "- Have you ever read poems? What is your favorite poem? What's it about? What did you get from the poem you like?"

iii. Anticipate:

Acquaint students with new Burmese words and phrases in the poem using pictures with Burmese labels (for words like *pirate*, *sword*, *gun*, and *take picture*).



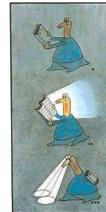
Prediction: Tell the students that these pictures and images associate books with positive experiences. Ask them to predict what positive experience can reading be associated with?, (Their possible answers are finding light in the dark, comforting breakfast (coffee and bread) and adventure (pirates)).

Main Activity -

Skimming

Students skim the poem individually and check their **predictions** in group. Student receives the actions / commands in the following pictures. Students put them in order according to the stanzas.

■



Scanning

Students answer multiple-choice questions designed to help them interpret the text. For example:

- According to the poem, if it's dark, you can open a (A) refrigerator, (B) window, (C) book.
- According to the poet, pirates now carry (A) wine bottles, (B) books, (C) dictionaries instead of guns and swords.

Language Focus

Students match random pictures with the correct Burmese phrases (to reinforce newly learned words like *pirate*, *sword*, *gun*, and *take picture*)

Students act out exchanges using If-Then constructions. For example:

- Student A: It's dark.
- Student B: If it's dark, turn on the light.
- Student A: I am hungry.
- Student B: If you are hungry, eat bread.
- Student A: Burmese is difficult.
- Student B: If it's difficult, study harder.
- Student A: I am a pirate.
- Student B: If you are a pirate, show me your sword.
- Student A: I am thirsty.
- Student B: If you are thirsty, drink water.
-

Students come up with their own similes by finishing incomplete sentences. For example:

- If you're hungry, eat a book like it's _____.
- If you're thirsty, drink a poem like it's _____.
- If it's raining, open a book like it's _____.
- If it's hot, drink a story like it's _____.

Post-Activity

Students list their favorite books or poems.

Students compose short poems incorporating newly learned words (such as *pirate*, *sword*, *gun*, and *dark*) in groups.

Ask them for the reason they like to read.

Ask them to talk about a book or a poem that has had an impact on their life.

End of lesson