

# MONKEY DANCE

a documentary film by Julie Mallozzi



**Classroom Activities for use in grades 8-12**

## Dear Teachers and Students,

*Monkey Dance* is a 65-minute documentary film about three teenagers coming of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. Like many young Americans, these teens argue with their parents, hang out with friends, work part-time jobs, worship their cars, and strive to get into college. But Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda also happen to be Cambodian-American. Their parents are refugees who fled the Khmer Rouge genocide in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and resettled in Lowell hoping to find employment, safety, and a chance to faithfully rebuild their culture. But for teens growing up in Lowell, the city offers a dizzying array of choices, many of them dangerous.

We watch Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda try to make up for the failures of older siblings who joined a gang, did drugs, or committed crimes. At times they honor their parents' culture, at times they rebel against it. Surprisingly, it is traditional Cambodian dance that ultimately helps them navigate the minefield of urban adolescence. Dance gives these teens confidence, a sense of their roots, and a means of self-expression — especially through the *Monkey Dance*, a traditional folk tale that has been electrified by the troupe's addition of hip hop choreography.

*Monkey Dance* can help young people understand cultural and generational issues. We hope it inspires students to think critically about how the choices they make will impact their future. In classrooms or youth programs, the film can be a starting point for anything from a 20-minute discussion to a three-week learning experience. The film and activities fit into the following curriculum areas:

- US History (Immigration, Vietnam War)
- World History (Vietnam War)
- English
- Media Literacy/Journalism
- Sociology
- Anthropology/Foreign Cultures
- Asian Studies
- Social Issues/Teen Issues

The stand-alone *Viewers' Guide to Monkey Dance* is designed to provide background information for all ages (including adults) before or just after viewing the film. This Classroom Guide presents a series of exercises and activities for students in grades 8-12 to complete after the screening; you may want to hand it out beforehand so that students can look for answers along the way. Some questions can be answered by reading the *Viewers' Guide*, and others only from watching the film critically. The activities progress in complexity and required creativity, with the last few activities appropriate for first- and second-year college students.

Enjoy the film, and please be sure to visit our website, [www.monkey-dance.com](http://www.monkey-dance.com), to participate in the film's interactive community.

— Julie Mallozzi, *Monkey Dance* director  
— Chuck Caragianes, teacher and curriculum developer

**[www.monkey-dance.com](http://www.monkey-dance.com)**

Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance Video Fact Sheet**

Today in class we will be viewing the film *Monkey Dance*. *Monkey Dance* is a true story about three teens facing difficult choices as they grow up in the city. As you watch the film please answer the following questions using complete sentences:

1. In what city does *Monkey Dance* take place?
  
2. What are the names of the three main characters in the film?
  
3. From what country do the three characters' parents originate?
  
4. What are the occupations of the main characters' parents? Do the families have a lot of money?
  
5. Why is Linda's older sister in prison?
  
6. What do the three main characters do in their spare time?
  
7. What does Sochenda want to do when he grows up?
  
8. What sport does Samnang play?
  
9. What happened to Linda's car?
  
10. What is the "Monkey Dance"?

Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance Viewers' Guide Fact Sheet**

To fully appreciate the story in *Monkey Dance*, it is helpful to understand the context behind the three subjects' lives. Read over the Viewers' Guide and answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What religion do most Cambodian people practice?
  
2. What foreign countries have tried to dominate Cambodia over the years?
  
3. Why has the city of Lowell attracted immigrants from all over the world?
  
4. What are some of the temptations that teens in America face?
  
5. On the back of this page sketch a map of Southeast Asia and label the nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and the southern border of China.
  
6. Why did so many Cambodians flee their country in the 1970s and 1980s?
  
7. Give an example of some of the difficulties Cambodian-American parents face in America.
  
8. Who was Pol Pot? When did he take power?
  
9. About how many people did the Khmer Rouge kill? What were some of the reasons they used?
  
10. What are the goals of the Angkor Dance Troupe?

Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance**

### **The Story**

On a separate sheet, write a one-paragraph answer to the following questions:

1. Chose one of the three main characters and describe how they changed during the course of the film.
2. What issues do the parents in *Monkey Dance* struggle with? When do they seem most happy?
3. Talk about the significance of traditional dance in Cambodian culture. What happened to dance during the Khmer Rouge period? What role does it play in Cambodian communities in the US? In these teens' lives?

Name:

Date:

## Monkey Dance Compare and Contrast

Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting each of these pairs of images.

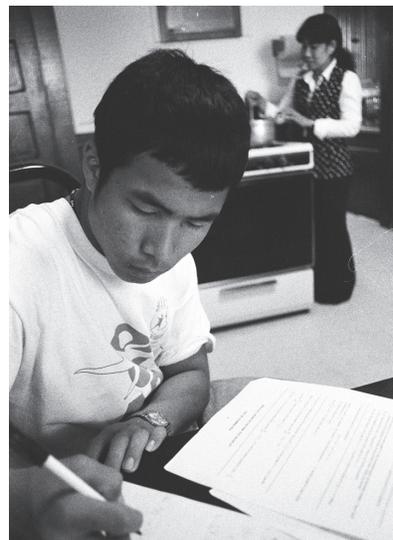
1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance**

### **Quotes**

Choose three of the following quotes from *Monkey Dance* and on the bottom and back of this sheet write a one-paragraph response to each one. Discuss what the character meant when they said it, and how it relates to other characters in the film and to your own life.

1. Sam: "My brothers made a lot of bad choices that they're going to think about for the rest of their lives."
2. Sam's mother: "We try so hard to raise Sam to follow the right path."
3. Linda: "People are just waiting for me to fail."
4. Linda's father: "My liver swells with pride."
5. Sochenda: "I feel like I'm changing every day, with all the stress and everything."
6. Sochenda's mother: "My children don't know anything about hardship and hunger."

Name:

Date:

## Monkey Dance Creative Response

Choose one of the following activities:

1. Write a song or poem about growing up in the city — or about being in a refugee camp.
2. Pretend you are a Cambodian-American teen writing a letter to a cousin in Cambodia: do you recommend they move to Lowell or not?
3. Imagine you are a gang member trying to convince someone else to join.
4. You will be spending a week in Cambodia. Plan your itinerary using ideas from the film and outside sources.
5. Choose a side character from the film and use your imagination to expand on their story (examples: Linda's older sister, Sam's girlfriend Kanitha, a parent, the Stop & Shop manager).
6. Draw your own political cartoon about an issue raised by the film (see example below).

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### EDITORIAL



Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance The Making of the Film**

Documentary filmmaker Julie Mallozzi spent several years filming the lives of Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda, then editing the material together to make *Monkey Dance*. In the process, she made many decisions about what to shoot, what scenes to include, what voiceover to use, and how to shape the story.

On the back of this page, write a short essay about what might go into the making of a film like this. Some topics to consider:

- What is the film's point of view, and how was it achieved?
- Do you think the camera affected the teens' behavior?
- How does a filmmaker choose what scenes to include or exclude?
- Do you think the scenes occurred in the same order as they were presented in the film?
- Did this filmmaker have an agenda? What other films that you know have an agenda?



Name:

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## **Monkey Dance Research Topics**

Write a three-page essay on one of these topics — or choose your own, inspired by the film and your own experiences:

- Immigration in America
- Growing up in two cultures
- Teen pregnancy
- The Khmer Rouge
- Dance in young people's lives

## Acknowledgements

**Chuck Caragianes** is a History and English teacher with the Lowell Public Schools. He received his M.Ed. in Curriculum Design and Instruction from Northeastern University in 1990 and has worked professionally designing curricular materials with the American Social History Project based in New York City. He has completed three student-based collaborative projects with the Lowell National Historical Park, and has presented numerous workshops across the country.

**Julie Mallozzi** is a documentary filmmaker based in Boston, Massachusetts. Her films explore the interactions between cultures thrown together by history and between politics and personal stories. Julie's debut film, *Once Removed*, tells the story of meeting her mother's family in China and learning about their involvement in China's complicated political history. *Monkey Dance* is her second film. Julie studied filmmaking at Harvard University, where she currently teaches.

Assistance with text and images: Marc Miller, Andrew Ott, Anshu Wahi, Ginny Warren

Image Sources: Brian Farrington, *The Arizona Republic*, p. 7; The Lowell Sun: p.9; Julie Mallozzi: p. 6,7; National Archive: p. 6; Andrew Page: cover, p. 6, 7, 10.

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### If You Want to Know More

#### Books

Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile, ed. May M. Ebihara, Carol A. Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood, 1994  
Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors, Dith Pran, 1998  
Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts, ed. Arthur L. Eno, Jr., 1976  
The Continuing Revolution, ed. Robert Weible, 1991  
First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers, Loung Ung, 2000  
Fractured Identities: Cambodia's Children of War, James Higgins and Joan Ross, 1997  
A History of Cambodia, David Chandler, 2000  
Khmer American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community, Nancy Smith-Hefner, 1999  
The Sorrow of War by Bao Ninh, 1994  
Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison, David Chandler, 1999

#### Documentary Films

"a.k.a. Don Bonus," Spencer Nakasako, 1995  
"Dancing Through Death: The Monkey, Magic, and Madness," The Gardner Group, 1999  
"First They Killed My Father," NHK Japan, 2000,  
"Floating on the Lotus Flowers," Brandon Wathana Eang and Matthew Scott, 2000  
"The Flute Player," Jocelyn Glatzer, 2002  
"Rebuilding the Temple: Cambodians in America," Lawrence R. Hott and Claudia Levin  
"Refugee," Spencer Nakasako, 2003  
"S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine," Rithy Panh, 2003  
"Tenth Dancer," Sally Ingleton and Denise Patience, 1993

**Please see our website to participate in the film's online community:  
[www.monkey-dance.com](http://www.monkey-dance.com)**