

## Seventh Grade Lesson on Ted Ngoy: The Donut King By Noreen Naseem Rodriguez

### GA Social Studies Standards:

SS7H3 Analyze continuity and change in Southern and Eastern Asia.

e. Explain the reasons for foreign involvement in Korea and Vietnam in terms of containment of communism.

### Background Information:

Bun Tek Ngoy was born in Cambodia in 1941 to a Chinese immigrant family in the village of Sisophon, near the Thai border. He was raised by a single mother who sent him to study in Phnom Penh, the nation's capital, in 1967. There he met his wife Suganthini and later joined the military.



The Cambodian Civil War took place between 1970 and 1975 between the Kingdom of Cambodia (led by Lon Nol) and the Communist Party of Kampuchea, also known as the Khmer Rouge. The United States was an ally to the Lon Nol government and North Vietnam was an ally to the Khmer Rouge, and both allies were deeply involved in the war. The U.S. participated in massive air bombing campaigns while North Vietnam sent troops to fight on the ground. Due to the violent tactics of the Khmer Rouge, rural Cambodians, who made up a quarter of the population, fled to urban areas in search of safety. The population of Phnom Penh grew from 600,000 in 1970 to around 2 million by 1975. Estimates of civilian and military deaths during the war range from 275,000 to 310,000, and about 1 million fled the country as refugees, with 100,000 settling in the United States.

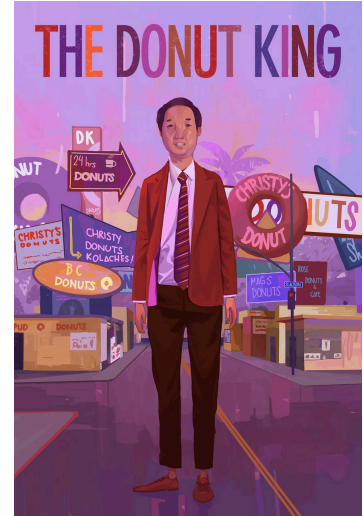


Ngoy, along with his wife and three young children, made it onto the last flight out of Phnom Penh and arrived in Camp Pendleton in Southern California in May 1975. The Ngoys, like many other refugees, were sponsored by a church, which helped them find a home and paid Ted to work as a landscaper and custodian for \$500 a month. Eager to earn more money for his family, Ted asked the church administration for another job and began to work at a gas station. The gas station was located next to a donut shop, and one night a co-worker asked Ted if he would like a donut from the shop. Ted had never eaten a donut before, but it was love at first bite, and reminded him of noum kong, a Cambodian rice flour pastry.

In the days that followed, Ted watched the donut shop closely while he worked at the gas station. Eventually, he stopped by and spoke to the employees, who suggested he apply for a position. Ted became Winchell's Donuts' first-ever Southeast Asian trainee and learned all the aspects of running a donut shop, from making donuts to accounting. He managed his own store and hired his wife and children to run it, which allowed him to earn enough money to purchase his own store. By 1980, he owned 20 shops, called Christy's Donuts, and would own many more in the years to come. The white boxes that were commonly used for packaging were rather expensive, and Ted found that purchasing pink boxes was much cheaper, so pink boxes became a trademark of his shops.

As more Cambodian refugees arrived in Southern California, Ted hired and trained them to work in his donut shops and co-signed loans for supplies and equipment. By the mid-1990s, there were 2,400 Cambodian-owned donut shops. As Cambodians moved across the country, many continued to open donut shops. Today, 80% of Southern California’s donut shops are Cambodian-owned.

While Ted left behind an incredible legacy in the donut world, his personal life consisted of many challenges despite his financial success. In 1985, he and his wife were millionaires and became U.S. citizens, and he formally changed his name to Ted. He was also active in the Republican Party and hosted fundraisers for George H. W. Bush. However, Ted developed a gambling addiction, and the Cambodian community that had long relied on him for economic support began avoiding him, worried that he would ask them for loans for his gambling debts. Ted moved back to Cambodia in 1993, hoping to establish a political career that might force him to quit gambling. He created the Free Development Republican Party and became a governmental advisor on commerce and agriculture. By 2002, his time in politics was over and so was his marriage, and the man who was once a millionaire was nearly penniless.



To learn more about Ted’s story through his own words and those of his family and friends, check out the documentary [The Donut King](#) and Ted’s [autobiography](#) of the same name.

**Instructional Resources and Suggestions:**

- 1. Introduction:** Begin by asking students what it means to be a refugee and where refugees come from and why. Today’s lesson will build on their existing knowledge about communism and immigration.
- 2. Video & Notecatcher:** Show students the video [“Why So Many Cambodians Own Donut Shops”](#) by AJ+ using the notecatcher provided or whatever students may be accustomed to in your class - if using the notecatcher provided, have students write their responses to the opening questions at the top. Content warning: there are brief images of piles of skulls and bones during the Cambodian genocide.

**Ted Ngoy: Donut King Notecatcher**

What is a refugee?	What are some examples of refugees you are already familiar with?	
List three facts about the Cambodian Civil War mentioned in the video. Make sure you mention at least one related to how the United States was involved.		
1.	2.	3.

<p>How did Susan’s family survive while in Cambodia?</p>	<p>How many Cambodians died during the civil war?</p>	<p>How did Lim’s uncle Tim Ngoy help her family after they arrived in the U.S.?</p>
<p>What is a current challenge being faced by Cambodian Americans?</p>	<p>What is repatriation? Why might this be so difficult for Cambodian Americans who immigrated to the U.S. as children?</p>	<p>What questions do you have about this?</p>

3. **Discussion:** The AJ+ video mentioned that Americans were divided about refugees, with a May 1975 poll finding that 37% of Americans were in favor of accepting Southeast Asian refugees, 49% opposed, and 14% unsure. What might be some reasons/beliefs behind each of these different opinions? To bring a more contemporary and local focus to the topic, look up the statistics in your local school district, town/city, and/or state regarding refugees; you can consult local newspapers for articles about various refugee groups in your community and compare/contrast community perspectives about them - just make sure to do this in a humanizing way that does not position one group as more deserving/worthy of living in the U.S. than another.

For further resources about refugees, consult the [UN Refugee Agency website](#) and [Amnesty International](#).

**Images Used:**

1. Ted Ngoy and family at Camp Pendleton via BBC
2. Ted Ngoy in front of his first donut shop in 1977, via BBC
3. *The Donut King*, Greenwich Entertainment