

Kindergarten Lesson on Ted Ngoy: The Donut King **By Noreen Naseem Rodriguez**

GA Social Studies Standards:

SSKG1 Describe the diversity of American culture by explaining the customs and celebrations of various families and communities.

SSKCG2 Describe examples of positive character traits exhibited by good citizens such as honesty, patriotism, courtesy, respect, pride, and self-control.

SSKE1 Describe the work that people do such as: police officer, fire fighter, soldier, mail carrier, farmer, doctor, teacher, etc.

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 at 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. 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. By 2002, his time in politics was over and so was his marriage. 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:** Ask students if they like donuts and what their favorite flavors are. Today, they are going to learn about a man who became famous for his donut shops after leaving his homeland in the middle of war.
2. **Instructional Activity & Assessment:** Depending on what resources you have available to you, here are some suggested activities to teach students about Ted Ngoy:
 - a. If you are able to access a copy of the book [Ted Ngoy: "The Donut King"](#):
 - i. Read aloud the first three paragraphs of chapter 2, drawing students' attention to the map highlighting Cambodia and the photo of Phnom Penh (the rest of the chapter is about how Ted met and courted his wife). Ask students to summarize what they learned and record their comments where all can view them.
 - ii. Summarize what was skipped in the rest of chapter 2 by telling students that in Phnom Penh, Ted met a woman named Suganthini and they fell in love and got married. Her father worked for the government and her family had much more money than Ted's family. Then read aloud chapter 3, checking for student understanding periodically.
 - iii. Finish up Ted's story by reading the first two paragraphs in chapter 4 about Ted helping other Cambodian refugees, then show them the map of Christy's Donuts in California. Read or summarize the second paragraph on page 30 about Ted choosing pink boxes because they were cheaper, then end with the paragraph and photo on pages 40 and 41.
 - b. Offer students a short summary about Ted Ngoy's background based on the information

provided here. Let students know you want them to be able to answer two questions after watching [“The Reason Why Your Doughnut Box is Pink”](#) : 1) How did Ted help other refugees from Cambodia when they came to the U.S.? and 2) What made the boxes they put donuts in special? Then play the video. After watching, have students share with a partner and then create a summary about Ted as a class. If time allows, students can draw/color donuts and write a character trait that describes Ted on each one and tape their character trait donuts to a piece of chart paper with a pink box.

- c. If you have students whose primary language is not English or you are working in a bilingual or dual language setting, while the narration on [this Inside Edition video about the documentary about Ted](#) is not kindergarten-friendly, you can use excerpts or stills from it so that students can see images of Ted, Cambodia, and Cambodian-owned donut shops. The images show how Ted’s family fled Cambodia and started their donut empire in the U.S., and students can identify character traits that led to his success and that of other refugee donut shop owners.

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