



Refugee
(USA, 63 minutes)
Director: Spencer Nakasako
Study Guide

Synopsis

In *Refugee* by Spencer Nakasako, three young Cambodian American men, raised on the streets of San Francisco's tough Tenderloin district, travel to Cambodia wielding video cameras to capture their experiences of meeting fathers, sisters and brothers for the first time. These family reunions reveal the quagmire of Cambodian political upheaval and military invasion, as well as the heavy toll of years spent apart in different worlds. As we follow their journeys we learn about the impact of war, refugee and immigrant culture, family, death, personal and political history, identity and, ultimately, reconciliation and forgiveness. In the seventies and eighties, many Southeast Asians, including Cambodians, fled war-torn countries and traveled to the U.S. as refugees. These families experienced tremendous turmoil, separations and culture shock upon arrival in their new home in America. Often, these communities faced difficulties in language, education and employment. Years later, the younger generation's exposure to this impoverished legacy and their increased fluency with the digital age has created a number of documentary films on this much-overlooked segment of American society. As we watch we learn that many other youth share similar issues: cultural barriers, war trauma, intergenerational misunderstandings, low-incomes, violence and drug abuse.

Discussion Questions

- Statements about the films. Agree, not sure or disagree?
 - The father was responsible for the separation of Mike's family.
 - The Aunt should have brought Mike's brother to escape.
 - Mike's mother was right to not talk to him about his father and brother while he was growing up.
- Compare Mike, David and Paul's arrival and departure in Cambodia. What is different about their attitude and how it's represented?
- How do Mike, David and Paul differ in their relationship to Cambodia? How do their different attitudes affect their experiences?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to end *Refugee* at the Killing Fields? What are Mike's reflections in that scene? What do you think about him forgiving his father?
- Have you ever lived in or visited another country? What was different about this place and the people who lived there? How does your experience

make you think differently about where you live now?

- What are some examples of the different kinds of family represented in the film? Are there people outside your relatives who have become like family to you? What makes them like family? Do you feel like a stranger in your family? When and how?
- Where were you born? How has the place of your birth shaped how you identify yourself?