

Experience the Culture of the Mekong Kids

Mekong Kids by Khemachat introduces a wealth of fascinating topics in Thai and Isan culture and society. Interested readers can explore and experience the richness of Boom's culture through a variety of creative projects. Some ideas are listed below. Have fun!

1. **Cooking.** There are many kinds of Thai and Isan (also spelled Isarn, Isaan) food that Boom talks about. Research them. Find out the ingredients and how to make them. Prepare them at home or school and have an Isan food day.
2. **Geography.** Make a poster map of all the places that are mentioned in the book: Nong Khai, Bangkok, Udon (also spelled Udorn, where his dad worked), the Mekong River, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. You can even go on Google Earth and see if you can find the market where Chue lived, the temple Wat Pho Chai, and Boom's school. Make a blowup map on your poster for these.
3. **Creative Writing.** Boom's dad wrote Boom a letter after his visit. We know something of what was written. Pretend you are Boom's father and write his letter to Boom. Or pretend you are Boom and write a reply back to your dad. What would he write about? Or you could pretend to be one of the other characters and write a letter or retell part of the story from that character's point of view. For example, how would Khiao write to his older brother about the *kapom* hunt?
4. **Calendar.** Make a calendar for Boom's year. Include BE and CE (AD). Include when school starts and finishes, and the temperatures and rainfall for each month of the year so you know the seasons. Include what-to-do notes for farmers for planting their tobacco and other vegetables. Include the dates for different festivals like at Wat Pho Chai and Songkran. Find out more about what people do at the festivals and include some pictures on your calendar.
5. **Environment.** Boom tells us a lot about the environment. He talks about growing tobacco on the banks of the Mekong River, about fish (swamp fish, sheat fish, Giant Catfish) and fishing methods (nets, lines), about lizards called *kapom*, and about the self-sufficiency economy. Find out more about some of these topics. What is the same and what is different about the Mekong River today?
6. **History.** Choose a history topic from Boom's story. You could do some research about Buddha images in Thailand that come from Laos, or treaties that France made with Thailand and Laos, or the reason there are MPU (Mekong Patrol Unit) boats in the Mekong River.
7. **Globalization.** You could do some research about the spread of Ovaltine around the world, or how and when Boy Scouts reached Asia. Find out about Thailand's Boy Scouts.
8. **Music.** Remember the lullaby Khem sang? She loved Isan music and had memorized a lot of songs from famous people, like Khen (Ken) Dalao and Pho Chalanoi. Find out more about these people and *molam* music. Listen to some songs, and make a DJ track list for an Isan party.

9. Dance. When the boys push Uncle Noi's trishaw up the hill, they sing "Heave Ho, Sarapa" and do the dance "Get Down, Salawan" just to be silly. Look up the Salawan *ramwong*, a traditional Thai circle dance, on the Internet. Learn the movements and give a performance.
10. Ghosts. When Boom was lost on the campout, he dreamed about a lot of different ghosts. Find out more about them and make a Ghosts of Thailand poster. Can you find out about some famous Thai ghost movies?
11. Respect and Etiquette. In Boom's society people have different ways of showing respect: to teachers, to monks and Buddha images, to the king and his family, and even to photos of the king, or to cloths with a royal footprint. Find out more about these things. Can you also find out some dos and don'ts in Thai culture?