

log 2.

# The Center of the City

by ReadWorks



The sun was sinking in the sky as Chet, Maly, and their classmates visited the last stop on their school field trip to Angkor Wat, one of the most significant U.N. World Heritage Sites in Southeast Asia. They had already seen the main attraction, Angkor Wat itself, the large twelfth-century temple. They had wandered along the stone paths, exploring the various buildings-not only temples, but reservoirs, canals, communication routes, and monastic universities. Maly was amazed at the sophistication of the historical site, and wished she could see Angkor in its former glory days. Looters as well as the destructive effects of nature had inevitably ruined parts of the stone structures, but nothing could distract from the beautiful architecture that was left behind.

"And here it is, the Bayon Temple!" said their teacher, Mr. Reynolds, as they came to a massive stone building, smaller than Angkor Wat, but similar, marked by its pillars-the tallest in the middle, decreasing in height as they spread out further from the center. As the students walked closer and closer, they noticed something unique about these pillars. Huge stone faces were carved on the top of the towers, each with a calm smile. "The Bayon Temple is most famous for those faces that depict the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara-quite a mouthful, huh!" Mr. Reynolds told his students.

"So this is a Buddhist temple?" asked Maly. She recognized the word "bodhisattva," which her father had told her meant enlightened being.

"Absolutely!" replied Mr. Reynolds.

The students soon scattered to take a closer look at the stone carvings. A few wandered along the outskirts, where long carved walls depicted scenes from everyday life, historical events, and legends. Mr. Reynolds said that the intricate carvings were most likely painted and gilded back when the city was populated by civilians, but they had worn down with age. Chet was still impressed by the detail that had survived centuries, and lightly traced the carvings with his fingertips.

"You know," Mr. Reynolds started, "this temple is actually located in the exact center of the city of Angkor Thom." Chet looked away from the stone reliefs and up at his teacher.

"So this was the center of the ancient Khmer empire?" Chet asked.

"Exactly! It actually was the capital city. And they placed the Bayon Temple here because it represented the location where heaven and earth intersected. It was a very sacred place," Mr. Reynolds explained.

Chet looked around. The surrounding grounds were quiet, like Ta Prohm, the temple they had just visited before this one. His classmates walked in silence, peering at the gigantic faces that loomed above. There were a few other groups that tagged along behind tour guides, who rattled off facts about the site. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed three small Cambodian children chatting to each other, watching the tourists move from wall to wall. They giggled occasionally, but mostly just whispered to each other in Khmer, the official language of Cambodia. Chet had previously noticed young children running around the grounds of the historical site, some selling small paper animals, others just talking with the tourists.

Mr. Reynolds had been speaking to another student about the history of the Bayon temple when he saw Chet looking over at the kids. "A lot of young Cambodian children come here instead of going to school because they can make much more money for their families," he explained to Chet. "Some sell little trinkets to the tourists, and others will act as mini-tour guides," Mr. Reynolds said.

Chet dug his hand around his pocket in search of extra change. He figured he could spare some of his own money for these children in need. But would that be encouraging them to miss school? Perhaps if they weren't earning money here, they would return to their classes. Then they might be able to learn more and use their increased knowledge for a future with more opportunities.

Mr. Reynolds noticed Chet's confused expression. "It's a tough situation-you just want to help, but often you're dealing with a much larger problem. If you're concerned about their wellbeing, sometimes it's better to give food and clothes, since you know that will help them directly," Mr. Reynolds said. Then he looked at his watch. "But we have to run! The bus will be waiting for us!" He ran off to gather the students. Chet continued to watch the kids and wished he could do something to help.

On his way back to the bus, he told Maly about the discussion he had had with Mr. Reynolds about the children. "I'm sure you can find a way to help the kids! It's not easy, but I'm sure you can do it," she told him. As he boarded the bus, Chet was busy brainstorming, smiling at the thought of possibly returning to this ancient site.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Put all answers  
on the back

1. What significant U.N. World Heritage Site do Chet, Maly, and their classmates visit?
2. Who are the main characters in the story?
3. The Bayon Temple is located in the exact center of the ancient Khmer empire. This center represented the location where it was believed heaven and earth intersected. What can be concluded about the Bayon Temple based on this information?
4. Chet wants to help the Cambodian children he sees at Angkor Wat. Based on this information, what can you infer about Chet's character?
5. What is this story mostly about?
6. Read the sentences and answer the question.

"Mr. Reynolds said that the intricate carvings were most likely painted and gilded back when the city was populated by civilians, but they had worn down with age. Chet was still impressed by the detail that had survived centuries, and lightly traced the carvings with his fingertips."

What does the word "intricate" indicate about the carvings as used in this text?

7. What word or phrase best completes the sentence?

Chet wants to help the Cambodian children in need; \_\_\_\_\_, he is not sure how exactly he should help.

8. Describe the carvings on the Bayon Temple.
9. According to Mr. Reynolds, why do a lot of Cambodian children go to Angkor Wat?
10. People or things of both the past and present can be part of one's experience at Angkor Wat. Use evidence from the text to support or argue against this conclusion.

Explain this statement on the back.