

SAVING BATU CAVES

A BAT EDUCATION ROLE PLAY



BACKGROUND

Batu Caves is a limestone complex situated six kilometres North of Kuala Lumpur. 440 million years old and one of the two largest limestone massifs in South-East Asia, they hold great importance for many people.

Within the complex is the Sri Maha Mariamman temple, Malaysia's most famous Hindu temple, established in 1891. During the Thaipusam festival in February every year, Batu Caves can have up to one million visitors.

Such impressive scenery plays an important role in Malaysian tourism as local and foreign tourists often visit the caves; up to 200 visitors visit the caves every day. In addition, caving and climbing on the limestone crags are very popular adventure activities.

A huge diversity of life is found in the caves. They are home to many animals and plants including five different species of bat, one which pollinates durian and petai trees and others which feed on large amounts mosquitoes and other insects each night.

Mining and quarrying activities at Batu Caves started in 1896. The mining companies hold a lease which allows them to mine until 2019.

The structure of the caves has become unstable due to explosions that remove the limestone. Frequent rock falls indicate the possibility of a collapse. These explosions also contribute to dust pollution within an area of 3.2 km radius around Batu Caves that significantly exceeds levels set by the World Health Organisation.

After a 25-year struggle to save Batu Caves, the site was finally declared 'safe' and free from mining in 2000, as campaigners discovered a loophole in legislation. Dynamite use is regulated and companies need a permit to buy and use dynamite. Campaigners used this legislation to force the state to stop companies from mining activities.

Since mining stopped, companies have been unsuccessful in their application for a dynamite permit. Now in 2005 the government has declared the possibility of granting 'Lime Stone Industries' a permit. A meeting open to all stakeholders has been called to discuss the future of Batu Caves.

(Note to facilitators: This role play is partly based on true events. In reality, mining ceased in 1981, and there has been no recurrence of mining activities since then. The caves were declared "safe" in 1994.)

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FACILITATORS NOTES

Activity Objectives

- Enable participants to experience a real bat conservation situation from different view points.
- Build assertiveness and problem solving skills.

Suggested Approach

1. Explain the background of Batu Caves
2. Split the class into 6 groups and give each group a role
3. The groups have 15 minutes to discuss and formulate their arguments
4. The moderator (facilitator) opens the meeting and guides it using the meeting agenda points
5. If time permits, a short session can be held three-quarters of the way through to let the various groups discuss amongst themselves and to form alliances that can lead to developing a solution
6. When appropriate, the moderator closes the discussion and concludes it afterwards

Roles

The moderator
Government officials
Directors of the mining company
Directors of the Tourism Development Corporation
Community group A – former employees of the mining company
Community group B – activists campaigning against the mines
Community group C – Hindu religious and community leaders
Bat scientists and conservationists
Financial planner (optional)

(If there are not enough groups for all the roles, the role of *Community group C* can be added on to *Community group B*)

Moderator

You are the moderator and chair of this meeting.
It is your responsibility to ensure each person has a chance to express their view. You must open the meeting and conclude it.

Meeting agenda

- Economical benefits and disadvantages of mining activities
 - Ecological benefits and disadvantages of mining activities
 - Public health and safety
 - Other points raised during the meeting
 - Government officials discuss the final decision
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Government Officials

You are the final decision makers of the company's application for a dynamite permit.

This meeting gives you the opportunity to ask the stakeholders questions about how the decision will affect them.

Who has the most convincing argument?

The future of Batu Caves is in your hands!

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The Mining Company

You are the directors of Lime Stone Industries.

The success of your application for a dynamite permit is essential for the future of your company. Work generated by your company is highly beneficial for the community and its development. You will employ 250 local workers if your permit is successful.

- What arguments will you use to convince the public that your work is beneficial to them?
- How will you persuade the government to finally give you the permit?

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Malaysian Tourism Development Corporation

You are directors of the Malaysian Tourism Development Corporation.

The physical state of the caves and temple is vital for attracting tourists.

During the Thaipusam festival, up to a million people, including Hindu devotees, local and foreign tourists visit Batu Caves. On a daily basis, the Caves and temple attract an average of 200 visitors. Tourism provides the community with employment and many other economical benefits to the community.

- How do you keep tourists visiting the caves?
- How will you convince the local people that tourism will bring greater benefit than mining will?
- Or can tourism and mining industries work alongside each other?

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Community A: Former Employees

Formerly you worked for Lime Stone Industries and have been offered further employment if the permit is granted. It will generate 250 jobs for the community.

Your families rely on your employment. It is difficult to find work and you need this job to put your children through university.

The company provides your community with employment. They also helped the local community by providing the hospital with a cardiac machine. If they are granted a dynamite permit they will sponsor the building of a community centre.

Can you convince other community members of your argument?

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Community B: Local Activists

You are activists who have been campaigning for the closing of the mines and quarries at Batu Caves for 25 years. You have consulted with the residents in the surrounding area and represent their views in this meeting.

The caves are a beautiful, special and important place for many people. They are somewhere peaceful to go for recreation, as well as adventurous activities, and hold great religious significance for Hindus. Bats found here also contribute as durian and petai pollinators and as pest control in the surrounding kampungs (villages). The livelihoods of farmers in this area depend upon these bats.

Mining activities contribute to air pollution, affecting the health of surrounding communities.

How will you convince the government and other stakeholders that mining shouldn't be allowed to resume?

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Community C: Hindu Religious & Community Leaders

You are Hindu religious leaders at Batu Caves. The temples could be at risk of collapse should the mining activities be permitted. The location of the Sri Maha Mariamman temple (established in 1891) is considered sacred and the temple holds great religious significance for Hindus in Malaysia. For the devotees, the preparations that they undergo for the Thaipusam festival every February make it one of the most important events of the year. Any threat to the Caves will affect their ability to carry out their religious obligations.

How will you stop Lime Stone Industries from getting a dynamite permit?

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Bat scientists and conservationists

You are fanatic bat scientists working for the conservation of Malaysian bats. Previously you provided campaigners with research evidence to stop Lime Stone Industries' actions.

Among the five species of bat found in Batu Caves are bats needed to pollinate durian and petai trees and large colonies of insect-eating bats. In the Klang Valley alone, petai sales is worth RM10 million (US\$2.8 million) and the durian trade in South East Asia is worth RM480 million (US\$120 million).

When disturbed, many bats do not return to their roost.

What could happen if these bats were to disappear?

Will you convince the government officials of the economical and ecological benefits of these bats?

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Financial Adviser

You are a financial adviser for local businesses who understands the many economical benefits that the mining company, local community and government will gain from this permit. Without future mining, all parties will lose out on financial benefits whether through employment, tax, charitable donations or other means.

Lime Stone Industries have been a valuable customer to you for many years. Can you help them come to a compromise with the other parties?

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