The Naga Fireballs of the Mekong – an Unsolved Mystery

Subjects: English · Religious Studies · Geography · Science | recommended from age 12 (B1) | Video: 8:59 min



Watch the video
youtu.be/jKO6M26pnxU

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

A · Before watching

1. Imagine you see lights rising above a river at night. What explanations can you think of? Write down at least two.

B · While watching

1. Where and on which night do the fireballs rise? What do local people call the lights?

2. What are the Naga, and how was the Mekong created according to one tradition?

3. How did the Naga King Mucalinda protect the Buddha, and why are young men about to become monks called 'nak'?

4. What did the TV report in the early 2000s show, and what arguments did the residents bring against it?

5. How is the gas theory supposed to explain the lights, and what are its gaps?

Useful words

serpent	Schlange	broadcast	Sendung
riverbank	Flussufer	ignite	sich entzünden
ordained	geweiht (zum Mönch)	evidence	Beweis(e)
tracer round	Leuchtspurgeschoss	silt	Schlamm, Schlick

C · Put the story in order

Number the events from 1 to 8 in the order they happen in the video.

	Tens of thousands of people wait for the fireballs on the riverbank.
	A feature film spreads the debate across the whole country.
	Two quarrelling Naga kings dig out the Mekong as they chase each other.
	Residents in Nong Khai protest against the broadcast.
	Mucalinda shelters the meditating Buddha from the storm.
	To this day, nobody has measured a fireball at its source.
	The Buddha returns to earth at the end of Buddhist Lent.
	A TV crew films figures on the Lao side of the river.

D · Think and discuss

1. “To them, the fireballs aren't a puzzle waiting to be solved. They're an invitation.” Explain what this means.

2. What do the Naga stand for to the people along the Mekong? Give two points from the video.

E · Three explanations compared

Sum up each explanation and say what supports it and what speaks against it.

	What supports it?	What speaks against it?
Naga in the river		
Tracer rounds		
Gas from the riverbed		

F · Get creative

1. You are a reporter spending the night of Ok Phansa on the Mekong. In your exercise book, write a short, fair report: What do you see, what do the people on the riverbank say, and what explanations are there? (8–10 sentences)