

A close-up, slightly out-of-focus photograph of a woman's face, showing her eye, nose, and mouth. The lighting is soft and natural, with a blurred background of green foliage.

# trafficked

teachers notes

A one-hour documentary investigating the international trade in prostitution

The trafficking of women and children for prostitution is a global problem. The United Nations estimates that more than one million children are forced into sexual slavery each year. Some of them are trafficked into Australia.

This powerful documentary follows former police officer turned private investigator, Chris Payne, as he investigates this shocking crime.

As a member of the Australian Federal Police, Payne headed Paper Tiger, a special operation aimed at combating sex trafficking in the mid 1990s. For a decade, he has been haunted by the case of 'Nikkie', a young Thai girl found working in a Sydney brothel. Her rapid deportation stopped the police investigation in its tracks. Now Payne is back looking for answers...and Nikkie. How did she end up in that brothel? What happened to her afterwards?

Payne follows the trail of evidence from Australia to Asia. Along the way, he meets the parents of Phuongtong (Noi) Simpalee, another Thai 'sex slave' whose death in an immigration detention centre in Sydney made headlines.

Through these stories and Payne's own experiences, **Trafficked** provides a disturbing insight into the international sex trade.

### Curriculum links

The program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at senior secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Media, Society and Environment, Politics, Legal/Justice Studies, Global Education and other courses with a human rights focus.

### Human rights issues

The film opens with the words 'Sex trafficking is the movement of women and children from their homes by force or deceit. Many victims are imprisoned in foreign brothels and beaten or killed if they try to escape.'

- Pick out the brutally harsh words in this statement and comment on their impact.
- Why do you believe the words are backed with peaceful pipe music?
- What is the symbolic value of the white clouds floating behind the words?

It is illegal in Australia to buy people. Underage prostitution is also illegal.

- Do you think sex trafficking is immoral as well as illegal? Why/why not?
- Why does poverty in some South East Asian countries feed the trafficking problem?
- Define 'human rights'.
- Brothels in Australia are controlled by state law. Check the legal status of registered brothels in your state.

Any business as high risk and lucrative as sex trafficking is clandestine and thus difficult to stop. The big money involved signals how important the business is to the society which supports it. Implications for both individual participants and the society which demands such 'commodities' are many.

**Activity:** Think about children who know they could be sold into sexual slavery and about those who have been forced to work in brothels. Now complete and extend the table below. Some has been filled in to give you a start.

Consequence of Sex Trafficking	Result for Individual	Result for Society
Prostitutes turn to drugs	Life ruined/health issues	Compromises citizen safety
75-90% trafficked children HIV+		
Suicide risk		
Parents can be worried		
Girls' lives isolated/ no support networks		

## How sex trafficking happens

The United Nations estimates that more than one million children are forced into sexual slavery each year. While only a few cases of children being brought into Australia in this manner have been documented, it is strongly suspected that there are a number of children included in the 1,000 or so women who are trafficked to Australia each year.

- Define the word 'child'. What is the United Nations definition of 'child'?
- Why is trafficking in children totally unacceptable?
- What are the implications of the words 'forced' and 'slavery'?
- What is the difference between women working in registered brothels and girls trafficked internationally?

The film indicates that traffickers recruit children/girls from the poorer areas of South East Asia like Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam or Cambodia. The traffickers may funnel the children through Bangkok where they falsify passports for them. According to Nikkie, this is where Chana Serirat 'inducted' her into prostitution. Chris Payne tells us this 'practice is two-fold...how to work as a prostitute, how to put on a condom and breaking a girl's spirit, being detained in a room for several days, being raped or pack raped, until she submits and accepts that she's only good for prostitution.' Once 'ready', girls are 'sent off to Australia, Japan, Europe and America, even East Timor.' But 'the biggest market in South East Asia is actually the local market.'

- Can you think of any group of people outside the locals who would swell prostitute usage within South East Asia?
- What is the difference between people smugglers and traffickers who sell girls as commodities? In your answer, think about lack of choice.
- Should men who pay child prostitutes share responsibility for the problem?
- Do you agree with Chris Payne that 'in Australia we can get rid of the trafficking. It's a lot harder for the Thais and the Cambodians...'? Support your answer with evidence.

## Phuongtong Simpalee (Noi) and her story

Noi's story was widely reported in late 2001, following a routine compliance raid conducted by the Immigration Department. Several illegal immigrants were taken to Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. Here the staff failed to acknowledge and treat Noi's worsening physical condition. She was suffering from malnutrition and acute pneumonia. Three days later she was dead. (Noi was also a heroin addict, though her addiction was not the direct cause of her death.) The news report indicated she was not given adequate medical treatment. It includes details of her 'vomiting into a bucket for 65 hours'.

- What is your reaction to this detail?
- Does Noi's death mean that the brothel owners could be considered murderers?
- Research and discuss problems associated with heroin addiction.

Chris Payne says in the film 'if she hadn't been picked up by Immigration she might still be alive'.

- Why do you think her fate would have been different if she'd been sent home?
- Could these girls be better helped? How?
- Do you believe that placing trafficked girls in detention is appropriate? Explain.

Ms Simpalee told immigration officials that she had been brought into Australia for prostitution when she was 12 years old. Chris Payne later discovered that this was a lie. She was 21 when she told her parents that she left Malaysia with seven other girls to work in a restaurant in Sydney. She died at 27.

Noi's parents also claim they did not sell her.

- Why might Noi have lied to immigration officials?
- What evidence do you see in the film that she didn't leave home until she was 19?



## Nikkie (Ning) and her story

In 1995 an Immigration Department brothel raid found Nikkie. She was 14. She was returned to Thailand.

Early in her life Nikkie lost her virginity and it appears that her father considered this sufficient reason to sell her to traffickers. Later in the film her father gives his side of the story.

- List factors likely to have influenced his actions.
- Do you believe he was justified? Why?

Nikkie is angry with 'the agents who got paid commissions' for her sale.

- Is she blaming the right people? Justify your answer.
- How does Nikkie's body language reveal her inner feelings when she hears her father's story?
- Why would Nikkie 'feel a sense of duty towards her father after all this'? What emotional consequences could arise for children out of this cultural obligation?
- Find out more about this cultural expectation which sometimes pushes Asian girls into prostitution so they can support their families.
- What does the presence of Nikkie's child add to the mood of the scenes?

Nikkie's husband and his family don't know about her past.

- What problems could arise because of her deception? Should she tell him? Why?

Nikkie suffered a horrendous ordeal in Australia.

- Do you think she will ever be able to forget it?
- What consequences from that time will endure forever?

Chris states 'Nikkie has come out of (her ordeal) with a strong air of dignity.'

- What are the ways you perceive her dignity in the film?

## Chris Payne and his story

First a police officer and then a private investigator, Chris Payne has a passion to stop trafficking.

The film's director, Luigi Acquisto, states 'Payne is a pioneer in the war against sex slavery in this country. He was the first law enforcement officer to identify the problem and to try to do something about it. He set up "Operation Paper Tiger" with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in the early 1990s to target sex traffickers and break the contract girl racket.' 'Paper Tiger' was disbanded in 1995.

Chris believes Australia holds back from fully committing to the problem partly because of the 'element of racism in as much as the victims aren't Australian citizens.'

- What are some other reasons you believe 'Operation Paper Tiger' was unsuccessful?
- How do you think the operation got its name?
- How would Chris's experience as a police officer have helped him in designing a strategy to track down Nikkie?

You have already looked at Nikkie's courage in testifying against her traffickers.

- What character qualities would Chris have drawn on to establish and sustain his police investigations, which he says were unpopular with many of his colleagues and superiors?
- Is it important to have people in society who will speak out against injustice and champion a cause, even when their ideas are unpopular? If so, why?

**Activity:** Back home, Nikkie's life turned around and she broke the cycle of prostitution. Complete the table below.

Nikkie's Life Change	Reasons to Make Change	Likely Needs Met by Change
She is a mum		
She got off drugs		
She married		
Her appearance became important to her		



Some details of Chris's personal life are included in the film.

- What does Chris tell us about his marriage breakdown?
- Why do you think he left the police force?

Consider the femme fatale archetype (film noir); that is, the fallen woman who either dies (Noi) or is redeemed through becoming domesticised (Ning).

- How valid are these conventions when applied to the documentary and the real people in it?
- Are trafficking victims 'fallen women'? Do some in society see them this way?
- Does this help explain the indifference Chris talks about in the film?

Chris says 'I thought a rice farmer from northern Thailand would be completely different from me. Not at all.'

- Explore his meaning and purpose.

He has tried to get compensation for the Simpalee family.

- Do you agree the family should be compensated? What are your reasons?
- What would this process involve for a solicitor and barrister?
- Who would pay the compensation money?

His motivation for compensating Noi's parents is that they 'lost the generation which was to take care of them when they grow old'.

- How would you describe his actions?

- How else has he tried to relieve Noi's parents' grief?

Chris describes those trafficked women as 'ghosts' in Australia. Yet they are very real people in their home towns. The girls are the same people both at home and abroad.

- What is the difference Chris is accentuating? Who makes this difference?
- How could various meanings of the word 'ghosts' apply to the girls?
- In what ways can people, organisations and governments in Australia contribute to eradicate the ghosts and give back life to these young women?



**Activity:** Chris's quest to find Nikkie has all the elements of a mystery genre. Complete and add to this table.

Element of Mystery Genre	Example	How It Adds To Tension
Lack of power Dead ends followed Suspense Missing persons Uncooperative persons Mysterious locations Mistaken identity Language difficulties Misleading information	Chris did not have access to official files	Makes it harder to solve the problem

## Filmic language

The narrative of **Trafficked** is enhanced by the way director Luigi Acquisto tells it visually.

- You have already examined the beginning of the film. What similarities do you see in the end of the film? What is the director emphasising here? What are the subtle differences and why has he created them?

The Sydney Harbour Bridge is a well-known Australian landmark.

- Why does the director include it in the opening shots of the film? What meanings does he wish it to carry?
- Can you identify the purpose of other icons included?

Images of freedom and affluence contrast with those of poverty throughout the film.

- Choose three sets of examples. What is achieved in each?

We see many mobile vehicles in the film (cars, planes, boats).

- What is the general tone achieved through their movement?
- Choose four individual shots of vehicles. What does the director achieve in each one? Pay attention to camera angle and context.

Water features strongly throughout. For each of the following examples, explore reasons Acquisto included the image. What connotations can you think of that add meaning to the scene?

- The Thai Songkran water festival where 'every-one runs around throwing water on each other'

- Sydney Harbour
- Nikkie walking alongside a river
- Chris on the Mae Kok river where Noi's ashes were scattered
- The central sunken pool in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, at the Refuge for Trafficked Girls

What do you think the following symbols reveal? Check their context.

- Elephant being transported in a truck
- Noi's mother working with bundles of dried soy bean plants in the field (Chiang Mai region)
- Nikkie's grandmother with cremation jar
- The yellow news clippings folder which Nikkie turns face down

## Solutions

- Suggest some ways that Australia might stop the trafficking of women and children.
- Should the federal or state police be responsible for controlling it? Given the power, would you form a special department or task force to handle the area, or would you include it in the jobs handled by the Department of Immigration?
- Should Australia be involved with punishing the traffickers if they are not Australian nationals?
- Do you approve the idea of a world body to co-ordinate efforts to stop this lucrative business? How would it work?

In America and Britain a visa is available so that women may remain in the country to testify against their traffickers. In Britain the women may also be given permanent residency. While the

**Irony** Visual irony is achieved through contrasting what is seen with what we as viewers know to be true. Look at the following ironic situations in the documentary and complete the table. Add your own examples to the list.

Visual Image	Appearance	Reality
Trafficked girls gathered around peaceful pool in Cambodian refuge	Peace and grace	Their young lives must be in turmoil because of the situation
Pristine white Sydney Opera House with ferry passing in front	Purity, peace, culture	The city accepts hundreds of trafficked women each year
Phon District Jail	Vichien, Nikkie's trafficker, imprisoned here	Her words helped Chris find Nikkie

Australian government has recently introduced some changes, Australia does not have a provision for residency status.

- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of such a system?
- Would such a permit reduce the sex trade to Australia?

Society is really many individuals living in the same city/country.

- Do we as a whole society share a responsibility to alleviate trafficking and the misery it causes? If we don't take action, what might happen? If we do take action, what might be the emotional and financial costs? Explore the likely benefits in both these cases.

### Task

Create an interesting collage which represents either the problems you've seen in the film or the solutions you can imagine. Use a variety of materials and colours to express your ideas. You may wish to include pictures, fabric, objects or language. Be original! Then write a paragraph explaining the meaning of your work.

### References and further resources

Amnesty International [www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au)  
Global group defending human rights

Australian Federal Police [www.afp.gov.au](http://www.afp.gov.au)

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [www.humanrights.gov.au/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/)

Child Wise [www.childwise.net](http://www.childwise.net)

A not-for-profit organisation working to prevent, protect and reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Australia and overseas

Oxfam Hong Kong (See Campaigns: End the Child Sex Trade) <http://www.oxfam.org.hk/en/default.aspx>

Parliament of Australia Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)

Project Respect [www.projectrespect.org.au](http://www.projectrespect.org.au)  
A lobby group about trafficking

Sydney Morning Herald article 'Man Bailed on Sex Charges' [www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/06/19/1055828436089.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/06/19/1055828436089.html)

United Nations [www.un.org/en/index.html](http://www.un.org/en/index.html)

US State Department Trafficking in Persons 2005 Report [www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005](http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005)

### Trafficked

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Writers: Luigi Acquisto, Chris Payne

Director: Luigi Acquisto

Producers: Stella Zammataro, Luigi Acquisto

Executive Producers: Anna Grieve, Franco Di Chiera

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