


THROUGH THE EYES OF A TRAFFICKED PERSON

A group activity for understanding the
plight of human trafficking victims

DEVELOPED BY

 *Sisters of Notre Dame, California Province*
Human Trafficking Awareness Campaign
sndca.org/trafficking

THROUGH THE EYES OF A TRAFFICKED PERSON

This activity works well in classrooms, during a prayer service, or before an informational presentation or panel discussion.

Number of people: 1 facilitator, 12-45 people.
Prepare extra cards for groups larger than 45.
Give more than one card per person for groups smaller than 45.

Time needed: 15-30 minutes, depending on the extent of your concluding activity.

To Prepare:

Copy each of the three stories onto a separate color – use card stock if it's available but plain paper works too. Cut the stories so that each number has its own card. The cards are laid out so that you should be able to cut at approximately 4.25 inches vertically and 3, 5.5, and 8 inches horizontally.

Pull out the blank cards. You can use them to write discussion questions or discard them.

Shuffle the story cards together & store in an envelope, baggie or rubber-banded set.

To Present:

Gather the whole group together. Introduce and explain the activity using the script below or your own words.

I'm passing out cards in three colors. The stories of three different people are told on the cards. These are real people though their names and certain details have been changed for their protection and privacy.

Your task is to get in a group with everyone who has same color card and then read the stories out loud in numerical order. Some people may have more than one card, but trade with others so you only have one color.

Once you finish reading the stories out loud, raise your hand for further instructions.

Allow a few minutes for the groups to arrange themselves. Once the groups are settled, visit each group to make sure they know to read the stories in numerical order and answer any questions.

As the small groups finish, have them appoint a spokesperson to summarize for the whole group. Each small group can be asked to pray a rosary, a repeated sequence of "Our Father," or another prayer for victims of human trafficking while they wait for other groups to finish.

To Conclude:

The simplest and quickest conclusion is to bring the groups back together and have each group summarize the story and identify one way they relate to the person they read about. You can also develop discussion questions that are relevant to your classroom unit or community's purpose.

Extension Activity for Classrooms:

Invite students to research other stories of human trafficking victims and re-write them in the first person.

FOR MORE IDEAS, VISIT



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1. My name is Ana. I am from Guatemala. My ex-husband was Mexican and we lived there for a few years. He kicked me and our two sons out of the house. I was desperate for work.

2. A woman from my hometown owns a factory in Southern California so I jumped at the opportunity to go there. I hoped to work for her for six months and then return home to open a sewing shop.

3. When I arrived, she took away my birth certificate and ID. She said if I went to the police, I would be jailed. The police in our hometown are very corrupt, so I believed her. In the factory, I make dresses from 5:30 in the morning until 11:00 at night. I often work 17 hours a day, but my time card only gives me credit for three.

4. If I didn't sew fast enough, my boss pulled my hair, pinched me, and slapped me. When she was unhappy with my work, she told me that she could kill me and no one would ask her about me. She told me that in the United States dogs have more rights than I do.

5. The factory doors are locked all day and the windows are covered. At night a watchman prevents me from trying to leave. I have not seen the sky for many weeks.

6. My sewing machine is crammed in with fifty others and we are constantly bumping each other. At night I share a bed with another woman even though it is barely big enough for one of us. There are no showers in the factory.

7. Sometimes the air in the factory is so full of dust from the cloth being cut that I can hardly breathe. I love when bolts of fabric arrive because I could see the sky from the loading dock and get some fresh air – but I hated the fact that the new cloth meant more work.

8. I am tired all the time because I only get one meal of rice and beans a day. My only happiness is the day we load trucks with racks of dresses we've made. I like the exercise.

9. The drivers have no idea how we live and laugh when we complain about working too hard. One day I take a chance and stow away on a truck. My boss is busy with paperwork. I hide under a rack of very long dresses and hold my breath until the truck pulls away.

11. Sitting in the cab, I start to cry. The fresh water tastes so good, and I can see beautiful mountains like in my hometown. The driver tells me everything will be OK and takes me to his church. Fr. Mike gives me food and calls my family to let them know I am safe. He explains there are laws to protect people like me and calls CAST (Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking) for help.

13. The detective who talks to me is more like an uncle than a cop. He doesn't even wear a uniform or a tie! CAST sends an attorney to protect me. She makes sure we take breaks to stretch or get a snack. When I am afraid to answer certain questions, she suggests that he come back to that issue later or ask the question another way.

15. A few weeks after I escape, the authorities raid the factory. My boss is arrested and my co-workers are rescued. Most of them decide to return to their families immediately. I learn that my family has been threatened and decide to stay here. I can learn English, get a good job, and bring my sons to America where we will be safe, together, and free.

10. The truck driver finds me hiding in the corner during his last delivery. I am terrified that he will take me back to the factory or to the police. Instead he gives me a bottle of water and tells me to sit in the cab of the truck while he finishes his work.

12. A caseworker comes to the church quickly. Fr. Mike gives us a quiet room and I tell my whole story. The caseworker says I can simply return home if I want, or I can stay in the United States and help rescue my co-workers. I choose to stay even though it means talking to the police.

14. Now I share a room in a shelter where I meet other women who have also been held in bondage. Some of them now have jobs and speak great English. I want that for myself – and my co-workers. CAST gives me clothes and a phone card so I can call my family too. It is so good to hear my sons tell me they love me!

1. My name is Juan. My family has a small house in Mexico. I work hard to support my wife and growing family of five, but money got very tight during the year 2000, the year of Jubilee. There aren't many jobs for a person who can not read but I'm willing to work hard. Like many Mexicans, I look for a job harvesting food in the United States, the land of opportunity.

2. A man in my town is a foreman in California. Many of my relatives and I crowd into our friend's truck. The journey takes two days and two nights. I sleep most of the time and don't even remember crossing the border.

3. We stop somewhere in the mountains for a meal and bathroom break. I thought I was coming to the United States on a legal working visa, but now I'm told that my presence here is illegal and the police will deport me if they find me.

4. I wake up early one morning when we arrive at an asparagus farm in California. We are given runny eggs and weak coffee. As soon as we finish eating, we start working and we don't stop until it is too dark to see what we are doing.

5. I thought I would make enough money to send most of my paycheck back home. Instead, I discover deductions for transportation, housing, food, and other "debts" I didn't know about.

6. My wife can not believe that I am left with only \$20 a week. When I call with the bad news, she thinks I am lying and cheating on her. My "friend" Hector the foreman thinks that is funny and teases me.

7. We get fed two or three times a day, but the food is terrible and the portions are small. Sometimes the meals are spoiled eggs or bad meat. We often go hungry despite our hard work. Back home, my children are also going hungry.

8. I live with nearly fifty other men in a crowded, dirty camp with no kitchen and only a few toilets and showers. At night, armed guards patrol our camp. No one knows we are even here except a community worker who hands out pamphlets that I don't know how to read. I tell him that his little pieces of paper can not set us free.

9. Many of us get sick but there are no doctors or nurses. One of us has a hernia but he is forced to work anyway. I never mention my aching back. What good would it do? We only have a few more weeks before the harvest is over.

11. One night we have a worker's meeting after the guards are lured away to play poker. The community worker has reported our situation to Luis, a young man from the California Rural Assistance League and an attorney named Pat. They tell us that we have rights to fair pay and they can help us win our wages back.

13. Pablo invites me to live with his family in Los Angeles where he has found a good job in a restaurant. One day at the market I discovered that asparagus is a delicacy which can get \$4.99 a pound – and our restaurant charges \$8.00 a plate! The work is much easier and the pay is better too, but my wife will not join us here.

15. Now I am learning how to read, write and speak English so I can train as a chef. My wife has finally learned the truth about what happened to me and I think we will reconcile someday. I hope my children will come here to get a good education so that they will never suffer like I did.

10. Somehow my brother-in-law Pablo escapes, but Hector reminds me that he is also from our town and promises that “one day, I will see him again.” I am afraid that he will hurt our families and try to warn my wife. She tells me that I am crazy in addition to cheating on her.

12. Our case moves very slowly and we have to find work on other farms where the growers pay us 25 cents a pound – about half of what they earn. At least now I can send some money back home, but my wife has not yet forgiven me for the lying and cheating that she thinks I did.

14. My attorney referred me to CAST and my new case worker helps me get legal assistance to straighten out my immigration papers, some refugee benefits and medical care. We finally win our back wages and I send my share home even though my marriage is very strained.

1. My name is Khai. I am from Thailand. I work in houses and restaurants to support my two children and my mother. It doesn't matter that I did not have much school because I am a hard worker. I visit my temple every week and take the words of our Buddhist monks to heart.

2. In 1989 I get a job working for Supawan Veerapol, the common-law wife of our Ambassador to Sweden. She sponsors my visa for America and promises me a good wage, transportation costs and living expenses.

3. I kiss my children good bye and hope to one day bring them to the United States, the land of the free. Instead of opportunities, I find only misery.

4. Supawan brings me to her house in Los Angeles. It is huge, bigger than any house I have seen before. I realize that it will take many hours of work to keep it clean, and I also have to work at her restaurant.

5. Supawan takes my identity papers, makes me serve her guests on my knees, and reminds me constantly that she is very important and I am no one. She forces me remain physically lower than her at all times.

6. I am not allowed to make phone calls or talk to neighbors or shopkeepers. Almost every day I walk to the restaurant. Six days a week, I work twenty-hour days at the restaurant and the house. My heart screams for help, but no one hears it.

7. I am afraid to go to my consulate, where Supawan often reminds me that she has many friends. She has warned me that a hit man can be hired to kill people very cheaply in Thailand, and that she knows where my family lives.

8. I am afraid to go to the police in Los Angeles because they would believe Supawan instead of me – after all, police are very corrupt in Thailand and probably here too.

9. When I have severe abdominal pains, I am not allowed to see a doctor until I become so sick that I lose thirty pounds in just a few months. Supawan threatens and abuses me for nine long years.

11. I am surprised to learn that federal prosecutors want to help me get justice. Supawan is convicted and sent to prison for several years. I tell everyone who asks me, “The U.S. Attorney gave me a new life. He delivered me, like a doctor delivering a baby, to a new life. Justice does exist. I have a different view now on law enforcement, the courts, immigration, and prosecutors.”

13. CAST helps me get a special T-visa, learn English, and apply for federal benefits, including food stamps, health care and Refugee Cash Assistance. My case worker makes sure I keep my medical appointments and understand my doctor’s instructions.

15. I have freedom now. I eat what I want. I am not afraid. I don’t worry that people are watching over me. I feel like an ordinary person. I think that this is good.

10. Finally a truly good person takes me to the Thai Community Development Center, an organization that helps immigrants. They find me shelter and connect me to a new organization called CAST, which was formed when over 70 Thai people were found enslaved in a sweatshop that was hidden in a suburb of Los Angeles.

12. I know that I did the right thing, but in my culture Supawan is considered a “high soul” because of her status. About 80% of the local Thai community are against me. They think I am ungrateful to my benefactor and can’t believe how bad Supawan really is.

14. Now I have a good job and a nice place to live. But I worry about keeping my family safe when Supawan gets out of jail and returns to Thailand, so I am trying to bring them to the United States.