Title: Born Into Brothels  
Directors: Zana Briski, Ross Kauffman  
Country: USA  
Year: 2005  

Starring:  
Shanti Das  
Avijit  
Suchitra  
Manik  
Gour  
Puja Mukerjee  
Tapasi  
Mamuni  
Kochi  
Zana Briski (Zana Auntie)  

Writers: Zana Briski, Ross Kauffman  
Length: 85 minutes  
Language: English, Bengali  
Location/Time of Action: Calcutta, West Bengal, India, 2005.  

More information:  
http://imdb.com/title/tt0388789/  
http://www.kids-with-cameras.org/bornintobrothels/  
http://www.rapdict.org/Red_light_district  
http://www.myspace.com/barababa  
http://www.amnesty.org/  
http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html  

SUMMARY:  
Zana Briski is a professional photographer. This film documents a project she did with children in the Red Light District of Calcutta. She provided the children with cameras, taught them how to take pictures, and led a class on photography. In the course of this project, she became enmeshed in the children’s lives and began working on ways to help them find better lives away from extreme poverty and prostitution.
FROM THE FILMMAKER:

When I first went into the brothels of Calcutta I had no idea what I was doing. Circumstances had led me there and I had a deep visceral reaction to the place. It was as if I recognized it on a very personal level.

It took me two years to get inside, to be able to live in a brothel. I knew this was the only way I would move from visitor to resident, to fully experience, as much as possible, what it was like for the women and children living there. It was a difficult but precious experience and one for which I will always be grateful. I had the opportunity to understand lives lived behind closed doors, to help --- when it was asked of me --- in any way I could, and to communicate powerful stories with the outside world.

It has been my dream, since the beginning of the project, to inspire others to feel, to notice, to challenge, to take action. Some of the most inspiring moments I have had are at screenings of Born into Brothels at schools across the country. American children are riveted by the kids from Calcutta. The connect with them through the film in a way only kids can. Kids want to share, to know more, to get involved. This is why I wanted to build a curriculum around the film, so that it can be a catalyst for awareness and change. Amnesty International, in partnership with Kids with Cameras, has made this happen. I am deeply grateful to them for this.

In the film I say that I am not a social worker, or even a teacher. I am someone who follows my heart and puts myself in the ‘shoes’ of others. This is something we all can do. You don’t need to go to Calcutta to notice what is happening around you, who needs your compassion, be it an animal, a friend, a strangers.

After all, it is up to us to make the world a better place.

Zana Briski
Born Into Brothels: Companion Curriculum

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What human rights issues are illustrated in the film? What international laws are in place to stop or prevent those abuses?

2. What is the role of photography in this film? Of music? Of art?

3. What are the changes in the children’s outlook and personalities when they are taken out of the brothel to the beach and the zoo?

4. If these children were taken out of the brothel environment permanently, do you think that they could fully recover from the injustices and trauma that they have previously faced? Why? Why not?

5. If life in the brothels is all the children have ever known, then how do they know that it is not how they want to live? If it has become the norm, then how do they know that it is not normal for a child to grow up in that environment? Are we born with an internal human rights radar? Is awareness of human rights a part of human nature?
6. What can we do for kids that have not been presented with an opportunity to leave the brothels or who have not been helped by someone like Zana? What kind of programs can we implement to create sustainable change for all children of sex-workers? Is it enough to help the children? Why or why not? What can be done for the mothers and the rest of the community?

7. Think about the scene in which Zana is talking to a school principal about the possibility of enrolling the children into school. The principal says, “No one will take them.”
   - What does it mean to have a right to education?
   - What challenges do these children face in claiming their right to education?
   - Should the possibility of being HIV positive affect your right to an education?
   - Should your economic or social status affect your right to an education?
   - Should being the child of a sex-worker take away that right?

   Explain your answers.

8. Zana is not just documenting these children with her film, but she is enabling them to document what they see around them. What opportunity does this provide for them?

9. Documentary film often only includes the perceptions and ideas of the filmmakers. What are the pros and cons associated with this? In your opinion, was there anything that was left out of this film?

10. Most of the films we watch in World Cultures are selected with a view to finding insider perspectives. That is, the films we watch are made by the people they portray. In this case, *Born into Brothels* is primarily an outsider’s perspective. The film is made about Indians, by Americans. How does this affect the perspective or bias of the film? In your opinion, does this matter?

11. Calcutta is not the only city in the world with a Red Light District. Do you think the issues illustrated in the film are unique to Calcutta, or are these world-wide issues? What can we do for kids that have not been presented with an opportunity to leave the brothels or who have not been helped by someone like Zana? What kind of programs can we implement to create sustainable change for all children of sex-workers. Is it enough to help the children? Why or why not? What can be done for the mothers and the rest of the community?