

American Documentary

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Rescue List: Discussion Guide Filmmaker Statement



[THE RESCUE LIST](#)



Several years ago, we met a Ghanaian man who told us his story of being trafficked into modern slavery as a child. He described enduring six years enslaved to fishermen who forced him to work on fishing boats on Lake Volta in Ghana. Eventually, he managed to escape, return home, and start kindergarten at age 13. As an adult, he assembled a courageous grassroots team to rescue and reunite trafficked children with their families.

His story shocked us and the statistics staggered us. Today, there are more than 45 million people enslaved worldwide, including over 18,000 children enslaved on Lake Volta alone. Despite its prevalence, human trafficking and modern slavery remain a hidden issue. Traffickers operate in the shadows of society, preying on economically and socially disadvantaged populations around the world. In part, it is the invisibility of modern slavery that allows it to persist.

As our relationship with the rescue team developed, we felt that we had a unique opportunity to shine a light on this issue through their work.

From the beginning, we wanted to empower the children in our film by telling the story from their perspectives, but it was of critical importance to us that their recoveries be paramount. We decided to make the film observationally. Our film intimately follows Peter and Edem as they work to recover from their trauma, viscerally portraying our protagonists' day-to-day lives in recovery, rather than focusing on their past. By bearing witness to their daily lives, we sought to provide the children with a forum to tell their own stories through their words and actions. We found that this process of following the action, and telling the story through slow disclosure, conveyed the children's gaps in memory and knowledge of what happened to them, while also revealing the steadfast friendships that enabled them to survive - something we had not expected. Through this observational process of discovery, authentic themes emerged: friendship, belonging, and survival. These themes are human universals that we all identify with and experience. We believe that character-driven stories like these humanize issues of global importance, moving audiences through the power of this universal connection.

Our observational approach is guided by our backgrounds in ethnographic filmmaking and our commitment to cross-cultural understanding. As outsiders to this community, we endeavored to understand the complexity of this human rights issue from a culturally relative point of view and to reflect that in the film. It was not our intention to villainize anyone, but rather to reveal the circumstances that create an environment in which children are exploited. We worked as a small three person team, embedded in the community, and immersed in our participants' daily lives. Collaboration, reciprocity, and trust lay at the heart of our process. This allowed us to build strong relationships with our participants and create a film grounded in respect and understanding. By taking this approach, we witnessed a moving story of friendship, courage, and belonging that transcends the trope of victimhood, and shows us what it truly means to love and survive. We hope that audiences connect with the individuals in our film on a personal level, and come away with a better understanding of the complexity of trafficking, as well as a sense of hope for the future.

- *Alyssa Fedele & Zachary Fink, Directors, The Rescue List*

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *The Rescue List* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, we recommend choosing one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to collectively reflect on the discussion and consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, email the POV Engage Team at events@pov.org.

SYNOPSIS

In a hidden safehouse in the Ghanaian forest, social workers help two children recover from a childhood enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta - the largest man-made lake on Earth. But their story takes an unexpected turn when their rescuer embarks on another rescue mission and asks the children for help.

Haunted by the memory of his friend who disappeared on the lake, twelve year old Edem is reluctant to talk about his experience. Meanwhile, seventeen-year old Peter is burdened by a sense of responsibility to help his best friend, who is still enslaved to their master on the lake. When Kwame, their rescuer, announces that his team is setting off on another rescue mission and needs the children's help, Peter seizes the opportunity, setting in motion a journey that will change the boys' lives forever.

The Rescue List charts the unfolding drama of these rescue operations alongside a stirring portrait of the boys' recoveries as they prepare to return to their families. The film depicts a moving story of friendship and courage that transcends the trope of victimhood, exploring what it means to love and to survive.

Key Participants

Peter – A rescued child who was sold at a young age and worked on Lake Volta until he was 17.

Edem – A 12-year-old boy who worked on the lake with his friend Steven

Teye – Peter's friend who worked on the lake with him

Kwame – A former child slave who now works as the lead rescuer

Steven – Edem's friend who worked on the lake

Bernice + Kwesi: Social workers at the shelter

Key Issues

The Rescue List is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- modern slavery and abolition
- human trafficking
- poverty
- educational inequity
- trauma & recovery

- Lake Volta and privatization
- community, friendship
- extractive economies

MODERN SLAVERY

Despite the fact that slavery was abolished by most countries 150 years ago, there are more than 45 million people trapped in modern slavery today. One in four of these is a child. *Modern slavery is a human rights violation that is defined as the recruitment, movement, harboring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation.* Farming, fishing, mining, domestic servitude, sex work, manual labor, and factory work are among the most prevalent forms of modern slavery.

In Ghana, where *The Rescue List* takes place, there are 100,000 people living in modern slavery. Of these, 18,000 are children enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta. Many of the children are trafficked into modern slavery by families living in extreme poverty who believe they are sending their children to a better life.

LAKE VOLTA

In 1965, shortly after Ghana's independence from Great Britain, the World Bank, the UK, and the United States (including the American corporations Kaiser Aluminum and Reynolds Aluminum) funded the construction of the Akosombo Hydroelectric Dam on the Volta River in Ghana. The main goal of the dam was to power the aluminum industry and spur economic growth. The dam created Lake Volta. Spanning 3,000 square miles in the central region of Ghana, Lake Volta is the largest man-made lake on Earth.

While the Akosombo Hydroelectric Dam Project was sold as "the largest single investment in the economic plans of Ghana," the flooding of the Volta River Basin forced the relocation of 80,000 people from 700 villages. This loss of land resulted in the dismantling of the region's primary economic practices from riparian fishing and agriculture.

Meanwhile, coastal fishermen began moving inland to the lake to fish for tilapia, establishing a direct connection between southern seaside communities and remote villages forming on the shores of Lake Volta. It is through these connections that traffickers now move children from seaside towns, inland to the lake, where they are sold to fishermen for slave labor.

Traffickers target economically disadvantaged families, often single mothers struggling to meet their family's basic needs, and coerce them to send their children to the lake where they say they will receive food and clothing, and attend school in exchange for helping out with fishing activities. The traffickers offer a small sum of money in exchange for the child, typically around \$20 US dollars. They are often deceptive about how long the child will be away, promising that the child will return home in a few month's time.

In fact, these children are separated from their families and enslaved indefinitely on the lake, far from their hometowns, with no means of communication or escape. They are fed and clothed minimally, withheld from

school, and forced to work long days on fishing boats, setting and pulling in nets. Many children endure physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. It is in this socio-political context that *The Rescue List* is set.

CRITICAL ECOLOGY & EXTRACTION

The origin of all wealth comes from the natural world we live in—our ecosystem. Ecosystems provide society with soil fertility, food, water, shelter, goods and services, medicines, stability, pleasure, knowledge and leisure. Ecosystems are the essence of our livelihood, and, the primary means of subsistence for millions of people in developing countries all across the world.

To understand child trafficking and slavery on Lake Volta, we must contextualize it historically from a critical ecological lens. Prior to the development of Lake Volta in the mid-twentieth century, the local Akosombo people lived off the land. They settled in villages adjacent to the Volta River and benefited from the occasional river runoff that brought nutrients to the soil. The Volta River was the foundation to their economic, political, and cultural practices. As such, their calendars, primarily agricultural and fishing, were created around the rivers predicted flood and drought season. The river brought not only nutrients to the land, but people and community.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a British explorer, by the name of Albert Kitson, surveyed the land in hopes of extracting natural minerals. Kitson found the land was rich with bauxite and manganese, a central ingredient for making aluminum. Plans to extract the minerals from the land came to fruition in the mid-twentieth century when an American company Valco, Kaiser Aluminum secured a contract with the Ghanaian government to build the Akosombo Dam. The Akosombo Dam would generate enough electricity to power the region, and the American company would gain access to the aluminum while also being exempt from taxes on trade and receiving discounted electricity. The highly contested contract was renegotiated in 2002. Local villagers argue the government sided with the corporations.

The development of the Akosombo Dam transformed the entire ecosystem of the surrounding region. The land is no longer as fertile and agricultural activity has since exhausted the already inadequate soils. As such, the Akosombo Dam significantly affected the livelihood of the agricultural and fishing villages. The shift in ecology drove the displacement and destruction of their community.

RESCUE & RECOVERY

Founded by a Ghanaian survivor of child trafficking, Challenging Heights is a grassroots non-profit organization that rescues trafficked children from modern slavery in Ghana's fishing industry on Lake Volta. Rescued children are brought to Challenging Heights' rehabilitation center, which provides medical and psychological care, as well as schooling - a first for nearly all of the children.

While at the shelter, children participate in Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). NET is a short-term intervention for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) developed by psychotherapists in Germany. It is often used with refugees and asylum seekers in crisis regions where long-term treatment is not possible.

The main activity of NET is establishing the child's life history. Together, the child and the therapist create a

written autobiography detailing the child's major life events from birth to present. In the lifeline exercise, the child identifies the chronological sequence of positive and negative events along their lifespan by placing symbolic flowers and stones on a string laid out before them.

This lifeline activity allows the children to reconstruct the fragmented memories of traumatic experiences into coherent narrations connected to the chronology of their life story. At the end of treatment, the child is given a written account of their life narration and the therapist keeps a copy.

There are many benefits of NET for survivors of modern slavery. For the children, regaining access to their biography and communicating their history to others enables them to reclaim their identity, and supports self-understanding and self-acceptance. It may also empower them to stand up for their own rights, and the rights of others, as victims and survivors. This form of therapy also aids in survivors overcoming the speechlessness that often comes with surviving trauma. This speechlessness can lead to social isolation. Sharing personal life stories is one of the most powerful ways to create intimacy in relationships. By engaging in a positive sharing relationship with the therapist, the child may find it easier to share their stories with others.

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AFTER THE FILM

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

- What are 2-3 things you learned from *The Rescue List*?
- What specific feelings did the film bring up for you? Do you remember which scene brought that feeling up?
- Did this film generate any new thoughts, ideas, or ask you to consider something you hadn't yet before considered?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask? What would you ask; and why?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly moving or disturbing. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

DISCUSSION PROMPT - TRAFFICKING & MODERN SLAVERY

Despite the fact that legal institutionalized slavery was abolished in many countries 150 years ago, modern slavery still exists.

- How does this depiction of modern slavery differ from your perception of what it looks like?
- If the topics of trafficking and modern slavery are not new to you, then how did your viewing of the film change your perceptions about trafficking and modern slavery?
- How did your understanding of how and why children are trafficked change?

- In what other contexts are you aware of trafficking and modern slavery happening in the world?

DISCUSSION PROMPT - RECOVERY

The social workers in the rehabilitation shelter go to great lengths to support the children psychologically and emotionally to facilitate their healing and education.

- The film opens with Edem recounting his story of trafficking while looking directly into the camera. How did this scene strike you?
 - When you meet Edem in the therapy room at the shelter a bit later, does he seem like the same boy who opened the film? Why or why not?
- What was the significance of Edem's trip to the seashore in terms of his healing process?

DISCUSSION PROMPT - REUNIFICATION

The trafficked children in this film are reunited with their families.

- Why do you think the children are sent home?
- What do you think is the advantage of children being reunited with their community?
- How do you feel about Peter and Edem being sent home?
- Did the children's reunions with their mothers match your expectations? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION PROMPT - EDUCATION

The social workers in this film emphasize the importance of education in these children's lives.

- How do you think education fits into the solution path for ending modern slavery?
- Do you think education is enough to end modern slavery? In what ways yes? In what ways no?
- Do any other structural barriers exist that intersect this issues of modern slavery and education? Do these barriers make education a less probable, or more probable, solution?
- What other solutions do you think exist?

DISCUSSION PROMPT - FRIENDSHIP

The stories of Peter, Edem, and Teye were centered around their friendships on the lake.

- What role did these relationships play in the boys' abilities to sustain, and ultimately, survive life on Lake Volta?
- What similarities do you see in the friendship bonds between Peter & Teye and Edem & Steven (whom we never meet)?
- Why do you think these bonds of friendship were so important to the children?

For further resources to learn about modern slavery, visit www.therescuelist.com/resources.

RESOURCES

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Explore content related to *The Rescue List* on the POV website, where you'll also find other relevant features, shorts and digital projects.

Challenging Heights

Learn more about the work of Challenging Heights and the organization's impact.

US Department of State - Trafficking in Persons Report

This report provides in-depth updates about the state of human trafficking worldwide, including Ghana.

Global Slavery Index

The 2018 Global Slavery Index provides a country by country ranking of the number of people in modern slavery, as well as an analysis of the actions governments are taking to respond, and the factors that make people vulnerable.

Slavery Footprint

www.therescuelist.com/slaveryfootprint

Discover your personal connection to modern slavery.

US Institute Against Human Trafficking

Learn more about human trafficking in the United States and its presence in your community.

End Slavery Now

Connect with the global organizing community around modern slavery and sign up for action updates.

Survivor Alliance: Resources

This survivors' network has resources for how to ethically engage survivors in your screening and other organizing work.

FRDM

FRDM helps companies learn about their supply chain exposure to modern slavery.

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