



FILM GUIDE for Education & Engagement

Touching the Untouchable

A Film by Chihiro Wimbush & Meena Srinivasan



"We all are born with a certain package. We are who we are: where we were born, who we were born as, how we were raised. We're kind of stuck inside that person, and the purpose of civilization and growth is to be able to reach out and empathize a little bit with other people. And for me, the movies are like a machine that generates empathy. It lets you understand a little bit more about different hopes, aspirations, dreams and fears. It helps us to identify with the people who are sharing this journey with us." – Roger Ebert



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CREDITS

Written by Meena Srinivasan & Chihiro Wimbush

INTRODUCTION

Touching the Untouchable is the story of the empowerment of a Dalit, Untouchable, community in Tamil Nadu, India. Long shunned inside India's rigid caste system and denied basic human rights and amenities, the new generation of Dalits are taking matters in their own hands and creating their own community where clean water, food, education, sanitation and health will be accessible for all. Their leader is Dalit activist Gauthama Prabhu. He reaches out to a kindred soul Venerable Pannavati, a Buddhist nun who, as an African-American from the Civil Rights era, understands the plight of a disenfranchised people. Together, they work to uplift the Untouchables.



USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to open hearts and minds and engage in conversation. Its purpose is to help individuals connect more deeply with the film and provide resources to share the film with family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. For more suggestions on how to share the film contact info@alensinside.org

OUR STORY

“CASTE NEVER LEAVES ONE’S MIND”

How did we get here: filming in a Dalit colony in India, a world away from our Oakland, California home? This was the question we asked ourselves as we waded into this reality of huts, waste, and smiles. The deeper we got, the more our emotions were pulled in two directions, a tug-of-war between the shock of seeing conditions far below the standard any human being should ever live in, and the innocent joy we were greeted with as rare visitors to these villages. We were a satellite of planet Pannavati, the African-American Buddhist nun, former Pentacostal minister, and driving force behind the quest to bring change to this community, including clean water, toilets, access to food and schools for their children – all resources we take for granted. And, just as important, bringing a sense of self-empowerment and worth to a people who have been denied basic dignities for millennia.

Chihiro met Pannavati a year earlier at a talk she gave about her first visit to India and her vision to alleviate the suffering and transform the lives of the Dalit people. Chihiro was moved by her impassioned call for support and in talking to her afterwards, realized there were points of intersection: he had spent the past 5 years filming the bottom rung of American society, homeless shopping-cart recyclers in West Oakland, and Pannavati’s work was focused on Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state in India and Meena’s family place of origin. Inspired by Pannavati’s call for a more socially engaged spiritual calling, one that transcended religions, focusing less on the self and more on addressing the suffering and injustices of the world, Chihiro offered his services as a filmmaker to document her work, and even more importantly, the lives of the Dalits as they worked with her to change their lives and empower themselves.

So here we were in India, December 2013, to see the sights (Delhi, Rishikesh, Mumbai) and ultimately to get married in Chennai, Tamil Nadu’s capital, at the end of the month. But three weeks before we exchanged our wedding vows, we took a detour from the tourist circuit, meeting up with Pannavati, riding a rickety van to Tiruvannamalai, the famous temple town by the great Mount Arunachala, where the guru Ramana Maharishi famously lived, in the heart of Tamil Nadu. Pannavati was here for the second time, teaming up with the committed Dalit leader, Gauthama Prabhu, to bring resources to the Dalits. She toured the villages, listening to the needs of the people, so she could plan larger scale and deeper impact change in

the years ahead for present and future generations. And we were here to record all this.

We are people of color committed to the intersection of social justice with empathy for others and engaged spirituality that is non-dogmatic and advances, rather than retreats from, the burning issues of our time. This powerful fusion is present in our own lives and everyday work and is at the heart of Pannavati's work with Gauthama and the Dalits in India.

We are no strangers to working with disenfranchised populations. Before becoming a filmmaker, Chihiro was a teacher of homeless/at-risk children in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco and in addition to chronicling the lives of our own "untouchables": the American poor and homeless, he has travelled the world documenting stories of the disenfranchised: AIDS orphans in South Africa, disabled students in China, poor villagers in Cambodia using baseball as a means to a better life, among other stories. Meena has taught teen mothers in a Brazilian favela and run a girls tutoring program in a Delhi slum. Additionally, she has written about inclusive educational policy for the United Nations, and currently trains educators in Social Emotional Learning for the Oakland Unified School District.

A few years after graduating from college, Meena had a heartfelt calling to live in India, and moved back to the land of her ancestors. Meena spent five years living in India where she worked closely with the Dalit community. In the fall of 2010, a leader in the Dalit Buddhist community invited her to share mindfulness practices with their children given her background as a mindfulness practitioner. Previously these lower-caste Hindus, the Indian Buddhists with whom Pannavati and Gauthama work in Tamil Nadu, converted under the political influence of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, author of India's constitution, to denounce caste oppression and transcend the Hindu caste system. They became Buddhist for political and spiritual reasons, and today, the implications of their actions continue to unfold.

Working with the Dalits was transformational for Meena, born as Brahmin, or member of the highest priest caste. Growing up in the United States, Meena's family made trips to India, where she witnessed older-generation relatives make comments about how non-Brahmins are "dirty," and refuse to touch anything that had been touched by one of "them." Spending time with Dalits, teaching their children, exposed the insidious lie at the heart of this caste-system apartheid, that these people were any different from the rest of us. Yet it was so deeply entrenched that the Dalits themselves struggled to see their own self-image separate from what the outside world imposed upon them.

Meena was shocked by how frequently Dalit Buddhists asked what caste she belonged to. When she shared this with one of the community leaders, she was introduced to a colloquial saying, *Jzaat manathun kadhi nahi jzaat*, which means “caste never leaves one’s mind.” In other words, conversion is a step in the process of changing your mindset about caste. The message is profound: transcending caste starts from within.

Chihiro Wimbush & Meena Srinivasan
A Lens Inside
alensinside.org

A Lens Inside develops multimedia and films to create educational curricula promoting social emotional learning through the exploration of social issues. Bringing together their passion for education, media, mindfulness and social justice, Meena Srinivasan and Chihiro Wimbush started **A Lens Inside** in 2013, as a fiscally sponsored project of United Charitable Programs – a registered 501(c)(3) public charity.

A Lens Inside:

- Commits to raising social consciousness to alleviate suffering in the world.
- Promotes a mindful sense through media and education that reflects the human experience in all its many facets.
- Shares and tells inspirational stories while connecting communities and people around the world.



CENTRAL ISSUES

Touching the Untouchable is first and foremost a film about possibility, in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds: extreme poverty and deprivation, resulting from centuries old prejudice against a people who have never known what it is like to be treated as equal human beings. We experience this directly and viscerally in the “colonies” where they live and in the experiences of the Dalit villagers themselves. Through the eyes of their proud leaders, Gauthama and his village lieutenants, we see the work it takes to address the basic human amenities that are lacking (clean water, health, education, self-sustainability) but also the far deeper challenge of healing the fractured collective psyche of a people treated as less than human, and instilling them with self-esteem and pride. Pannavati serves as our guide into this world, a Westerner by culture and experience, who has embraced an Eastern religion that originated in the country she now visits. Pannavati and her dedicated work in India, against all normal probability, is a reminder of the power any one of us has to effect deep and meaningful change in the world, while her own background as an African-American woman, connects racial oppression and prejudice back to our own country: it’s not merely a “Third World” problem, but rather, she reminds us, it exists here, just a little beneath the surface. Ultimately, this film challenges us to examine our assumptions, and shows how, in the new digital era, it is possible for two disenfranchised people to connect and together change the world around them.

Touching the Untouchable is an excellent tool for outreach and relates to the following topics:

Social Justice
African–American & Dalit Connection
Untouchability
Caste/Race/Class Discrimination
Engaged Buddhism
Sacred Activism
Filmmaking
Inclusion
Sustainable Development
Water
India

A Lens Inside Co-Founder, Meena Srinivasan (right) working in the field with a Dalit woman



ENGAGEMENT

Touching the Untouchable can be screened in a variety of settings to build awareness and spur dialogue:

- Groups focused on any of the issues listed below
- High school/Middle school students
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Social Justice organizations
- Engaged Buddhist organizations & sacred activists
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and social justice
- Groups interested in supporting and/or fundraising for the Dalits, or for A Lens Inside so they can create more engaging and empowering content

A Lens Inside Co-Founder, Chihro Wimbush filming in the fields



DESCRIPTION & MAIN CHARACTERS

Main Characters: **Gauthama Prabhu** is the leader of the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu, following in the footsteps of his father, and there are great expectations placed upon him by his people. Though Gauthama is well-educated, he experienced discrimination from a young age, and is driven to change this system of oppression. But he cannot solve the overwhelming needs of his people alone. So he reaches out to a kindred spirit: **Venerable Pannavati**, an African-American Buddhist nun in North Carolina, descendant of slaves and sharecroppers, who came of age in the Civil Rights era. Her lengthy spiritual journey, which includes a time as a Pentacostal Minister, and her passion for social justice, has led her to work in her own community back in the United States – creating a gluten-free bakery training program for homeless Appalachian youth - while also working abroad in Thailand, ordaining nuns against Buddhist patriarchal law there, and creating safe havens for young girls there who might otherwise be sold into sex slavery. When Gauthama contacts her from the other side of the world, she answers this new calling and goes all in.

The film highlights Pannavati's return to Tamil Nadu, India where she reunites with Gauthama who is delighted she has kept her promise to come back after her initial visit to bear witness. Together, they work to bring compassion, humanity and dignity to the Dalit people there, empowering them against prejudice, and fighting to bring in resources and support, to help the Dalits build their own sustainable community starting with wells for clean drinking water with future plans to create schools for education, safe haven and opportunity for young girls and women, permaculture and greater access to health care. They travel from Chennai to the Dalit colonies in the countryside, and with Gauthama's leaders on the ground there – **Mughil**, a former radical "Dalit Panther" and **Sundari**, a rare female leader in this patriarchal world – reconnect with old communities and reach out to new ones with their message of self-empowerment, listening sessions to ascertain their needs, and attempts to rally the people behind the work to address their many serious challenges from clean water to education to health and safety, as well as opportunity for women and girls.

WHY TELL THIS STORY NOW?

Although more than 170 million Dalit Buddhists reside in India, the magnitude of the community and the fact of their religious conversion doesn't alter the fact that they still live in a Hindu-dominated nation—one which fails to acknowledge them as equals. In India, those who are from lower castes are legally classified as Scheduled

Castes and are referred to as either Adivasi, which means “indigenous” in Sanskrit, or Dalit, a self-referential Marathi term implying “those who have been oppressed by those above.” While the government of India’s Constitutional and Legislative Mechanisms affirm that they are adequately protecting Dalits from discrimination, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights has many documented cases of violence recently committed against Dalits. India does have Caste Reservation, a controversial scheme similar to the American Affirmative Action. However, those National Campaign data show that Scheduled Caste children who manage to secure spaces in higher education still continuously experience exclusion and discrimination. Recently, *The Hindustan Times* reported numerous atrocities committed against Dalit Buddhists by Hindu fundamentalist groups, including the burning alive of a Dalit youth, the murder of an eleven-year-old Dalit girl, and the beatings of Dalits in the state of Maharashtra.

For thousands of years “untouchables” have lived peacefully accepting their position in India but in the new India young people are starting to stand up to the caste system and many predict that a Dalit uprising is on the horizon, especially now with the election of Narendra Modi to Prime Minister, a member of the Hindu-nationalist BJP party.

Additionally, there has been added focus on women’s safety and rights in India with the ever-mounting number of rape cases making headlines, in many cases with the perpetrators being higher-caste, sometimes even being the very police that are supposed to offer protection. A big focus area of Pannavati’s work is for safety and empowerment of the Dalit girls and women in the community, from proper health, to inclusion in meetings (not the case before her arrival), a voice to express their needs, and a figure in Pannavati who demonstrates that women can be leaders too. Mindful of the rape, abduction and sex trafficking of vulnerable girls, she works to create a safe haven for young women to receive an education.

Finally, the work that Pannavati and Gauthama are doing in their small corner of the world, is addressing issues of global concern: poverty, water, food, health, sanitation, education, equity, and human rights. They are bringing a new model of sustainability to an isolated community that has had access to none of these things, working to create a center of living that will allow the Dalits to not just survive, but provide for themselves, and help their children thrive.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After watching the film, give viewers some time to reflect on what they saw. It may be helpful to provide a few minutes for quiet reflection or journaling. You can use the following questions as an initial guide:

- If you had to describe what this film is about in one sentence what would you say?
- What are some themes the film touched on?
- Did you learn anything new? If so what?
- What questions do you have for the filmmakers? Why?
- What questions do you have for the subjects featured in the film? Why?
- Reflect on a particular scene that touched you and describe why and how it touched you?

Touching the Untouchable covers many topics, below are some questions by topic:

Social Justice: What are the basic human rights that the Dalits are denied? What rights do you have that the Dalits do not?

African-American & Dalit Connection: What connections can you make between the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the work Pannavati and Gauthama are leading in India? Why did Gauthama seek Pannavati out? How do you think Pannavati is able to connect with Dalits even though she's an African-American woman?

Untouchability: What other groups around the world have experienced untouchability? If untouchability is illegal why is it still practiced?

Caste/Race/Class Discrimination: What role does power play in caste/race/class discrimination? What similarities and differences are there between the types of discrimination experienced in the West vs. India?

Engaged Buddhism & Sacred Activism: How is the work Pannavati and Gauthama are engaged in seen as "Engaged Buddhism"? What does it mean to have an engaged spiritual practice?

Filmmaking: Do the filmmakers have motives? If so what do you think they are?

Sustainable Development: What role does sustainable development play in the film and the Dalit cause? What role do the Dalits play in this work?

Water: Why do you think Pannavati and Gauthama chose to focus on a well project? What are the issues at play in building a well for the Dalit community?

India: What connections can be made with Dalit communities in other parts of India? Gandhi called the Dalits “Harijans” or “children of God.” Why do you think he used this name for the Dalits? How would you feel about this name if you were a Dalit?”

What is “Untouchability”?

(Adapted from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights: <http://www.ncdhr.org.in>)

India’s Constitution abolished “untouchability,” meaning that the dominant castes could no longer legally force Dalits to perform any “polluting” occupation. Yet sweeping, scavenging, and leatherwork are still the monopoly of the scheduled castes, whose members are threatened with physical abuse and social boycotts for refusing to perform demeaning tasks. Migration and the anonymity of the urban environment have in some cases resulted in upward occupational mobility among Dalits, but the majority continue to perform their traditional functions. A lack of training and education, as well as discrimination in seeking other forms of employment, has kept these traditions and their hereditary nature alive.

Types of Untouchability Practices & Discrimination

In the name of Untouchability, Dalits face nearly 140 forms of work & descent-based discrimination at the hands of the dominant castes. Here are a few:

- Prohibited from eating with other members of other castes
- Prohibited from marrying with other members of other castes
- Separate glasses for Dalits in village tea stalls
- Discriminatory seating arrangements and separate utensils in restaurants
- Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals
- Prohibited from entering into village temples
- Prohibited from wearing sandals or holding umbrellas in front of dominant caste members
- Devadasi system - the ritualized temple prostitution of Dalit women
- Prohibited from entering dominant caste homes
- Prohibited from riding a bicycle inside the village
- Prohibited from using common village path

- Separate burial grounds
- No access to village's common/public properties and resources (wells, ponds, temples, etc.)
- Segregation (separate seating area) of Dalit children in schools
- Prohibited from contesting in elections and exercising their right to vote
- Forced to vote or not to vote for certain candidates during the elections
- Prohibiting from hoisting the national flag during Independence or Republic days
- Sub-standard wages
- Bonded Labor i.e., slavery
- Face social boycotts by dominant castes for refusing to perform their "duties"

Prevalence of Untouchability Practices & Discrimination

These statistics are taken from a survey of practices of untouchability undertaken in 565 villages in 11 major states of India. They clearly demonstrate that the inhumane and illegal practice of untouchability is still commonplace in contemporary India:

In as many as 38% of government schools, Dalit children are made to sit separately while eating. In 20 percent schools, Dalits' children are not even permitted to drink water from the same source as the other children. A shocking 27.6% of Dalits were prevented from entering police stations and 25.7% from entering ration shops. 33% of public health workers refused to visit Dalit homes, and 23.5% of Dalits still do not get letters delivered in their homes. Segregated seating for Dalits was found in 30.8% of self-help groups and cooperatives, and 29.6% of *panchayat* (local self-government organization in India) offices. In 14.4% of villages, Dalits were not permitted even to enter the panchayat building. In 12% of villages surveyed, Dalits were denied access to polling booths, or forced to form a separate line. In 48.4% of surveyed villages, Dalits were denied access to common water sources. In 35.8%, Dalits were denied entry into village shops. They had to wait at some distance from the shop, the shopkeepers kept the goods they bought on the ground, and accepted their money similarly without direct contact. In teashops, again in about one-third of the villages, Dalits were denied seating and had to use separate cups. In as many as 73% of the villages, Dalits were not permitted to enter non-Dalit homes, and in 70% of villages non-Dalits would not eat together with Dalits. In more than 47% villages, bans operated on Dalit wedding processions on public (arrogated as upper-caste) roads. In 10 to 20% of villages, Dalits were not allowed even to wear clean, bright or fashionable clothes or sunglasses. They could not ride their bicycles, unfurl their umbrellas, wear sandals on public roads, smoke or even stand without head bowed.

Restrictions on temple entry by Dalits average as high as 64%, ranging from 47 % in UP

to 94% in Karnataka. In 48.9% of the surveyed villages, Dalits were barred from access to cremation grounds. In 25% of the villages, Dalits were paid lower wages than other workers. They were also subjected to much longer working hours, delayed wages, verbal and even physical abuse, not just in 'feudal' states like Bihar but also notably in Punjab. In 37% of the villages, Dalit workers were paid wages from a distance, to avoid physical contact. In 35% of villages, Dalit producers were barred from selling their produce in local markets. Instead they were forced to sell in the anonymity of distant urban markets where caste identities blur, imposing additional burdens of costs and time, and reducing their profit margin and competitiveness.

Similar Systems of Discrimination in Other Countries

Caste and systems of social hierarchy operate across the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, subjecting millions to inhuman treatment on the basis of being born into a certain caste or similar social group. Though the communities themselves may be indistinguishable in appearance from others, unlike with race or ethnicity, socio-economic disparities are glaring, as are the peculiar forms of discrimination practiced against them. It is approximated that around 250 – 300 million people across the world suffer from caste, or work and descent based discrimination, a form of discrimination that impinges on their civil, political, religious, socio-economic and cultural rights.

Common features seen in caste and analogous systems across the world include the following: (a) Physical segregation; (b) Social segregation, including prohibition on inter-marriages between caste groups; (c) Assignment of traditional occupations, often being occupations associated with death or filth, coupled with restrictions on occupational mobility; (d) Pervasive debt bondage due to poor remuneration for lower-caste occupations; (e) High levels of illiteracy, poverty and landlessness compared to so-called higher castes; (f) Impunity for perpetrators of crimes against low-caste communities; (g) Use of degrading language to describe low-caste communities, based on notions of purity and pollution, filth and cleanliness; and (h) Double or triple discrimination against and exploitation of women of low castes on the basis of sex, class and caste. Below is a list of some communities in other countries around the world facing discrimination due to caste or some analogous social hierarchical system:

Bangladesh: Methor community (traditionally sweepers and manual scavengers)

Burkina Faso: Bellah community (traditionally slaves, unpaid manual laborers, to other caste 'owners')

Japan: Buraku community (at the bottom of the Japanese class system; traditionally viewed as filthy and/or non-human)

Kenya: Watta community (traditionally considered low, worthless, and consigned to a life of servitude from birth)

Mauritania: Haratin community (these 'black moors' are considered slaves to the Bidan, or 'white moors', in Mauritanian society)

Nepal: Dalit community (situation is essentially the same as that of Dalits in India)

Nigeria: Osu community (traditionally the Osu people are 'owned' by deities and considered as outcaste, untouchable, and sub-human)

Pakistan: Dalit community (like Dalits in India except in Muslim society there is no concept of ritual pollution; concepts of privilege and shame used instead)

Rwanda: Twa community (at bottom of social hierarchy with no legal protections from discrimination and no representation in positions of power/authority)

Senegal: Neeno & Nyamakalaw communities (largely blacksmiths and leatherworkers, they are considered impure and face explicit segregation and exclusion)

Somalia: Midgan community (minority outcaste group facing violence, refusal of rights, and possessing no legal protections)

Sri Lanka: Rodi/Rodiya & Pallar/Paraiyar communities (these groups face discrimination in employment, practices of social distance, and denial of access to resources)

LESSON PLAN FOR TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

OVERVIEW: The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to India’s Dalit population and guide them in making evidence based claims in order to engage in an academic discussion. This lesson also focuses on developing social emotional learning skills with an emphasis on social awareness.

OBJECTIVES:

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand:

- The caste system still influences modern Indian society.
- Populations across the globe share similar experiences of discrimination.

Essential Question

- How does caste affect society?

According to Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, the founders of Understanding by Design: “Essential questions are open-ended with no single, correct answer. They are meant to stimulate inquiry, further questions and be reexamined over the course of the unit. They are designed to be thought-provoking to students, engaging them in sustained, focused inquiries, culminating in meaningful performances.”

Knowledge Content

Students know the origins of the caste system and some of its modern legacies.

Skills

- Students will practice critical thinking through making evidence-based claims, a key Common Core State Standards skill (CCSS), and develop their social emotional learning skills through engaging in an academic discussion.



Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which children and adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. These are the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work effectively and ethically.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

- Establish and maintain healthy interactions and relationships across diverse communities
- Embrace diversity and take the perspectives of people different from oneself
- Demonstrate empathy for people similar to and different from oneself



TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE FILM GUIDE

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Making evidence-based claims about texts is a core literacy and critical thinking proficiency that lies at the heart of the CCSS. The skill consists of two parts. The first part is the ability to extract detailed information from texts and grasp how it is conveyed. Education and personal growth require real exposure to new information from a variety of media. Instruction should push students beyond general thematic understanding of texts into deep engagement with textual content and authorial craft. The second half of the skill is the ability to make valid claims about the new information thus gleaned. This involves developing the capacity to analyze texts, connecting information in literal, inferential, and sometimes novel ways. Instruction should lead students to do more than simply restate the information they take in through close reading. Students should come to see themselves as creators of meaning as they engage with texts. It is essential that students understand the importance and purpose of making evidence based claims, which are at the center of many fields of study and productive civic life. We must help students become invested in developing their ability to explore the meaning of texts. "Making Evidence Based Claims." *Making Evidence Based Claims*. ODELL Education, Engage NY, 13 Nov. 2012. Web.

GRADE LEVELS: 6-12 (Our hope is that this lesson can serve as a springboard for exploring social justice topics with your students as you develop their critical thinking and social emotional learning skills.)

SUBJECT AREAS: India, Buddhism, Current Events, Social Justice, Sustainability, Global Studies, African-American Studies

MATERIALS:

- Internet access for research and video streaming; equipment to show online video to the class
- Student handouts

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (Common Core State Standards ELA-LITERACY)

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
- Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

- Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

BEFORE THE LESSON: Please read Tom O’Neil’s article in National Geographic: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/features/world/asia/india/untouchables-text>

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED 80 minutes (This lesson can also be broken into two 40 minute class periods.)

ASSESSMENT: Formative assessment: Questions to check for understanding.
Summative assessment: “Exit Ticket” where students answer the essential question:

- How does caste affect society?

LEARNING PLAN

Before Class Begins Practice Mindful Breathing: Your breath is always with you. Observing the breath is one of the easiest, simplest ways to start practicing mindfulness. Mindful breathing can be done anytime, anywhere. As course instructor, you practice mindful breathing during the few minutes before class begins because the most important thing in being with and teaching children is one’s state of mind. Your presence is the greatest gift you can offer your students. When you are feeling peaceful and present you will naturally be able to create the conditions for a harmonious, engaged classroom. By bringing awareness to your breathing, you can gently bring a wandering mind back to the present moment. As you consciously breathe in and out silently say to yourself “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I feel peace.” This practice helps you develop your own Social Emotional Learning with an emphasis on self-awareness and self-management.

Classroom setup: Seating is organized in a circle with desks/chairs on the outside.

As students arrive: Greet students at the door with your attendance sheet— mindfully take attendance. Make eye contact with each student, smile, ask them their names, welcome them to class, mark attendance, and hand them handouts for the class. Invite students to take a seat and once they are settled in introduce the essential question and class topic.

Introduce topic & essential question – 10 minutes (adapt script accordingly): Today we are going to learn about the Dalit community in India through watching and analyzing a short film along with texts. (If students are unfamiliar with India be sure to utilize maps to familiarize them with the country’s location/geography). Now our essential question is the guiding question for our whole class, we come back to it

throughout the class, and by the end of the class each of you will be able to answer these questions. Essential questions don't have a simple answer but it's through asking the question that we learn. So our essential question for today is How does caste affect society? (Write on the board.) In order to answer that question we are going to read together closely some text, watch a short film, and analyze these sources. But before we can answer that question we need to make sure we all know what caste is and when it began in India. In order to do this we are going to read some text together, define caste, and interpret a diagram, then we will watch a short film and engage in an academic discussion. The concrete skill we are going to focus on is strengthening our ability to make evidence based claims.

Have you learned about the Aryans and the Dravidians? Around 1500 BCE the Aryans traveled East to India; they entered gradually and the people who were native to India were known as the Dravidians. Indian culture stems from these two groups and they are most commonly traced to their linguistic origins.

Go through handout & diagram – 10 minutes: Point students to their handout and hold it up. "Can I have two volunteers to read, up to the diagram? I'm going to ask you to pause as you read so we can make sure everyone is on track, okay?" As the first student reads have him/her stop after defining caste. Review "what is caste?" and the definition. Have the second student read up until the diagram and ask the following questions: 1. Why is the diagram shaped like a pyramid? 2. Why are the untouchables in a category that is outside the pyramid? Invite students to turn to a partner to answer these questions and then share as a large group.

Watch film – 12 minutes (film is 8 minutes): "So now that we have an understanding about what the caste system is we are going to watch a short film called *Touching the Untouchable*, which highlights a modern example of the caste system in India today.

You can access the film freely at <https://vimeo.com/121960391>

Once the film finishes, invite students to answer the following question in pairs or small groups, give students think time before they share their answers: *If you had to describe what this film is about in one sentence what would you say?*

Walk around to check for understanding and participation.

Claims & Evidence – 8 minutes: Model filling out the claims and evidence handout with students based on the short film and/or the handout you read as a class. For the film you would need to read the section "our story" in the film guide in order to model accurately the claims and evidence handout. Modeling is a very important teaching strategy to ensure students understand what's expected of them and how to complete the task they are asked to engage in.



Name: _____ Date: _____

CLAIM:

Source:
Author: Who wrote/created the source? Why did they create/write this source?
When did he/she write/create the source?
Summarize the source: What is this source about?
How would the author respond to the essential question?
Evidence: How do you know? Quote or paraphrase from the source, and cite where in the source you found the evidence.

Students work on Claims/Evidence Handout - 15 minutes: After modeling and ensuring students understand what is asked of them invite students to complete the claims and evidence handout for 3 sources of their choice including the film, the handout they read as a class and one of the articles listed in the RESOURCES section of the film guide. Depending on developmental and grade level of students the time needed for this section may vary.

Academic Discussion – 25 minutes: Depending on class size this section may take longer, adjust accordingly. The focus question of the academic discussion is the class essential question. Once students have completed their claims/evidence handouts give them a few minutes to prepare individually for the academic discussion. Have them jot down some notes answering the class essential question: *How does caste affect society?*

Before engaging in an academic discussion it is important that students understand what an academic discussion is and the skills required in order to engage in one.

Quality Academic Discussions:

- are purposeful, sustained conversations about content
- require students to **work together** to **co-construct** knowledge and **negotiate** meaning in order to attain high levels of thinking and deep understanding about a topic
- are characterized by high student **engagement and participation**, as students discuss relevant topics that **allow** for **multiple and diverse perspectives**

It may be helpful to co-construct norms/guidelines for academic discussion with your students so the conversation itself goes smoothly and everyone has a chance to participate.

Start students off by having them answer the essential question in pairs after they have written down their individual answers. If time permits, ask additional follow up questions: What do your sources tell you about caste? Is there caste in your society? Why did Gauthama reach out to Pannavati? Who is Ambedkar and where can you see him depicted in the film?

Then launch into a larger group discussion. Feel free to utilize questions from the discussion prompts in the film guide. In order to support the discussion and use of academic language it may be helpful to adapt the sentence starters below for your students. As students participate take note of who speaks and what they say. If needed step in to ensure those who are not participating have an opportunity to share with the large group.

Sentence Frames for Clarification:

- _____, could you please rephrase that?
- I did not understand _____, could you repeat that, please?
- I did not understand _____, do you mean _____? (here you rephrase what you think the group member said and wait for clarification)
- It's not quite clear. Can you explain what you said about _____?
- Can you say more about that?
- In other words, are you saying _____?
- I have a question about _____. State your question.

Sentence Frame for changing the subject:

- I think we've exhausted the topic of _____, can we move on to _____?

- Does anyone have any final comments to add about _____ or shall we move on to a new subject?

Sentence Frames for affirming an idea and adding to it:

- My idea is related to _____'s idea _____.
- I really liked _____'s idea about _____.
- I agree with _____. Also, _____.
- My idea build's on _____'s idea. I _____.

Presenting a different angle on a subject:

- While I can see why you believe this, I see this differently. In my opinion _____.
- I understand where you are coming from, but I see it a bit differently. From my perspective, _____.
- That's a valid point, but I feel _____.
- On the other hand, _____.
- I do agree with the part about _____ but _____.

Expressing your opinion:

- I believe that _____.
- In my opinion _____.
- I feel that _____.
- I think that _____ because _____.
- To me, it seems obvious that _____.

End the academic discussion with an "Exit Ticket." Share with students that "the exit ticket is our way of bringing everything back to our essential question which is the focus of our lesson—what you are supposed to take away. There are no right or wrong answers I want you to come to your own understanding. *How do you think caste affects society?* So I really want you to be thoughtful and reflective about this." If you feel comfortable and are already using a mindfulness bell in your class you can also invite the bell and share, "Before you begin to write I'm going to invite the bell and you can go to your breath, close your eyes or keep them open, just listen to the sound, whatever works for you. The reason why I invite the bell is that it can sometimes help us get to a really deep space where our heart is connected to our head and we really feel what we write and what we are expressing. So after you no longer hear the sound of the bell you can begin writing and when you are done raise your hand and I'll come over to check your exit ticket before class ends. You must hand in your exit ticket, along with your claims/evidence handout in order to be excused to leave class when it's over."

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Students choose a group that experiences untouchability in another country, learns about the group and shares what they learn with their classmates. See "What is



***TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE* FILM GUIDE**
alensinside.org

Untouchability?" section in the film guide for a list of groups in other countries that experience untouchability.

Student Handout
Name: _____

The Caste System

Aryan society was organized into classes: priests, warriors and commoners. As Indian society grew more complex, these classes developed into what was later called the caste system. A **caste** is a social class whose members are identified by their job. Because there are thousands of different jobs, thousands of groups exist. Broadly, those groups are organized into four categories:

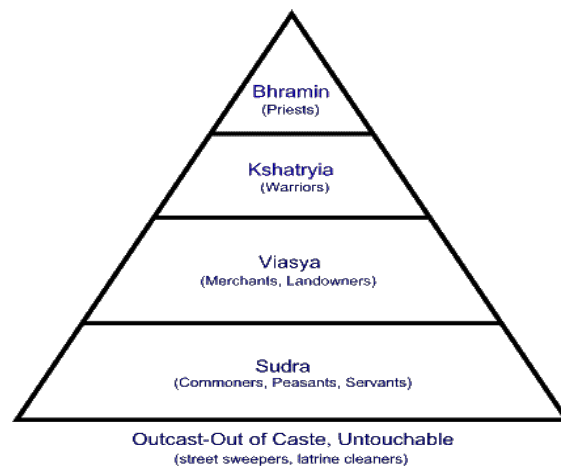
Brahmins: priests, scholars, teachers

Kshatryias: rulers, nobles, warriors

Viasyas: bankers, merchants, landowners, farmers

Sudras: laborers, servants.

After many centuries, another group came into being that was considered below all other groups. This group was called the Untouchables and they did the jobs no one else wanted.



Adapted from: Carnine, Douglas.
World History Ancient Civilizations.
 Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2006.
 Print.

Who are Dalits? & What is Untouchability? The word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit root dal- and means "broken, ground-down, downtrodden, or oppressed." Those previously known as Untouchables, Depressed Classes, and Harijans are today increasingly adopting the term "Dalit" as a name for themselves. "Dalit" refers to one's caste rather than class; it applies to members of those menial castes which have born the stigma of "untouchability" because of the extreme impurity and pollution connected with their traditional occupations. Dalits are 'outcastes' falling outside the traditional four-fold caste system consisting of the hereditary Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra classes; they are considered impure and polluting and are therefore physically and socially excluded and isolated from the rest of society.



Dalits represent a community of 170 million in India, constituting 17% of the population. One out of every six Indians is Dalit, yet due to their caste identity Dalits regularly face discrimination and violence which prevent them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India. Caste-based social organization extends beyond India, finding corollaries in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, as well as other countries outside of South Asia. More than 260 million people worldwide suffer from this "hidden apartheid" of segregation, exclusion, and discrimination. (Adapted from National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights)

CLAIMS & EVIDENCE

Name: _____ Date: _____

CLAIM:

Source # 1:
Author: Who wrote/created the source? Why did they create/write this source?
When did they write the source?
Summarize the source: What is this source about?
How would the author respond to the essential question?
Evidence: How do you know? Quote or paraphrase from the source, and cite where in the source you found the evidence.

CLAIM:

Source # 2:

Author: Who wrote/created the source? Why did they create/write this source?
When did they write the source?
Summarize the source: What is this source about?
How would the author respond to the essential question?
Evidence: How do you know? Quote or paraphrase from the source, and cite where in the source you found the evidence.

CLAIM:

Source # 3:
Author: Who wrote/created the source? Why did they create/write this source?
When did they write the source?
Summarize the source: What is this source about?
How would the author respond to the essential question?
Evidence: How do you know? Quote or paraphrase from the source, and cite where in the source you found the evidence.



EXIT TICKET

In 3-5 sentences drawing from examples you were shown in class and our discussion, answer the following question:

Based on what I heard from my classmates and my own analysis of the sources, my answer to the essential question is:

RESOURCES

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON DALIT HUMAN RIGHTS <http://www.ncdhr.org.in/>
This website is a great resource for background, history and statistics about the Dalit people.

UNTOUCHABLE BY TOM O'NEIL

This article is a must read for anyone who would like more background on the Dalit situation and history in India. We recommend all teachers who plan to use the lesson plan in this film guide first read this article and anyone hosting a screening should read it as well.

O'Neil, Tom. "Untouchable." *National Geographic Magazine* – *NGM.com* National Geographic Magazine, June 2003. Web 12 Mar. 2015.
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/features/world/asia/india/untouchables-text>

THE BLACK INDIANS BY THENMOZHI SOUNDARARAJAN

In this moving essay Ms. Soundararajan shares her reflections on growing up Dalit in America. Soundararajan, Thenmozhi. "The Black Indians." *International essays*. Outlook, 08 Aug. 2012. Web. 12 Mar 2015. <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/The-Black-Indians/281938>

AN AFRO-DALIT STORY BY VIJASH PRASHAD

Academic Vijay Prashad offers historical views on the African-American and Dalit connection. Vijay Prashad is the author of *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (Oxford University Press) and *Karma of Brown Folk* (University of Minnesota Press). Prashad, Vijay. "An Afro-Dalit Story." *Raceandhistory.com*. Race & History, 01 Mar 2000. Web. 12 Mar. 2015. <http://www.raceandhistory.com/historicalviews/afrodalit.htm>

FOUNDATION OF HIS SACRED MAJESTY (GAUTHAMA'S ORGANIZATION)

<http://www.hissacredmajesty.com/>

Foundation of His Sacred Majesty is a registered non-profit organization which envisages to achieve social transformation of those in need without any discrimination on account of caste, creed, race, sex or religion.

VENERABLE PANNAVATI'S WEBSITE <http://pannavati.org/>

Venerable Dr. Pannavati, a former Christian pastor, is co-founder and co-abbot of Embracing-Simplicity Hermitage in Hendersonville, North Carolina.



TAKING ACTION & HOW TO SUPPORT OR GET INVOLVED

The best way you can take action, support or get involved is to share the film and this guide with anyone who you think may be interested!

Treasure Human Life Foundation is Venerable Pannavati's United States 501(c)(3) charitable organization offering on-the-ground engaged leadership, collaboration and fiscal accountability for global projects. To support the well construction and other development projects in Tamil Nadu you can offer a tax-deductible donation at: <http://pannavati.org/the-untouchables/>

If you feel compelled by what you've seen and read and want more feel free to donate to A Lens Inside so we can continue to create films like *Touching the Untouchable*. We also have a great deal of content and additional footage that we shot in India but at the moment we do not have the capacity to develop the content further unless we receive additional funding. You can make a tax-deductible donation to:
<http://alensinside.org/support-media-education-mindfulness/donate/>

FILMMAKER BIOS**Chihiro Wimbush**

Chihiro is an Oakland-based Documentary and Narrative Filmmaker. Chihiro is a 2012 Sundance Creative Producing Institute Fellow and a 2011 Bay Area Video Coalition Media Maker Fellow. He has worked on a wide range of projects around the world including baseball in Cambodia; AIDS orphans in South Africa; homeless bakers in Appalachia; students with disabilities in Guanzhou, China; and a conspiracy theorist's journey seeking truth across the United States.

Most recently, Chihiro edited a documentary feature on celebrated farmer and food writer Mas Masumoto and four generations of his peach farming family near Fresno, California. The film premiered at CAAMFest in March 2015 and will continue on the festival circuit before having its broadcast premiere on PBS in May 2016.

Chihiro has spent over 5 years co-directing, filming and assisting in the editing of a documentary feature on the lives of homeless shopping-cart recyclers in West Oakland, California. This project will premiere in 2015 and has been supported by the Sundance Documentary Fund, California Council of Humanities, San Francisco Foundation, Pacific Pioneer Fund, and is a project of the San Francisco Film Society.

Chihiro and K-Pacific production partner Jim Choi have produced several short documentary films, most recently for the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) with "Don't Lose Your Soul," honoring two godfathers of Asian American Jazz. The documentary had its broadcast premiere in San Francisco on KQED in 2013, premiered theatrically at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, and broadcast nationally on PBS in May 2014 as part of the series "Japanese-American Lives" hosted by Kristi Yamaguchi. Also for CAAM, Chihiro co-directed and edited a profile on celebrity chef Martin Yan, and edited a series of Directions in Sound concert videos now available on Comcast.

Chihiro has also worked in narrative film; as writer/director he created two short films, "Cross Fader" and "Double Features," both of which played at numerous festivals across North America. Chihiro served as a production manager/producer for three narrative feature films for the Center for Asian American Media, working with directors Wayne Wang, Richard Wong, and HP Mendoza.

Before focusing on filmmaking, Chihiro was a musician, DJ, as well as radio host and producer. He co-founded "APA Compass," the Asian-American public affairs show of the Pacific Northwest and hosted the world music program, "Your Blue Room" for 8

years, sharing music and interviews from an international array of musicians, DJs and producers. He has a BA from Columbia University.

Meena Srinivasan

Meena is a writer, edupreneur and thought leader in the field of Social Emotional Learning. Meena began her career at the ABC Network's hard news division in New York City after serving as an Associate Producer for an NBC affiliate in Western Massachusetts. Wanting to nurture her love of education Meena left the ABC Network to teach in secondary education. After a decade of experience in that field she is happily returning to the world of media to create films with her husband, Chihiro Wimbush. She sees mindful media as a wonderful next step in her career and journey as an educator committed to making the world a better place.

A contributor to United Nations' publications on inclusive education, Meena was one of the youngest educators to be awarded the prestigious National Board Certification by the United States National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She earned a master's degree in education from the University of California, Berkeley, and a bachelor's degree in history and political science from Amherst College. Her international outlook on education was enhanced by spending her junior year studying abroad at the London School of Economics. She has taught middle and high school students in Brazil, India, and California and currently works for the Oakland Unified School District's Social Emotional Learning and Leadership Development team. Meena is a dedicated student of Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Thich Nhat Hanh, and was involved in the creation of his bestselling book *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*. She served on the Board of Directors of the Mindfulness in Education Network, was Core Faculty of the Mindful Education Institute, and served on the Advisory Board of the San Francisco Asian Art Museum's exhibit, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*. Meena's also a recipient of the Hemera Foundation's Contemplative Education Fellowship. Her first book, *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness In and Out of the Classroom*, (Parallax Press, 2014) was recently featured on Edutopia. Meena offers a vast array of Professional Learning and Consulting services.