

L^B EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Ages 10 & UP

LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

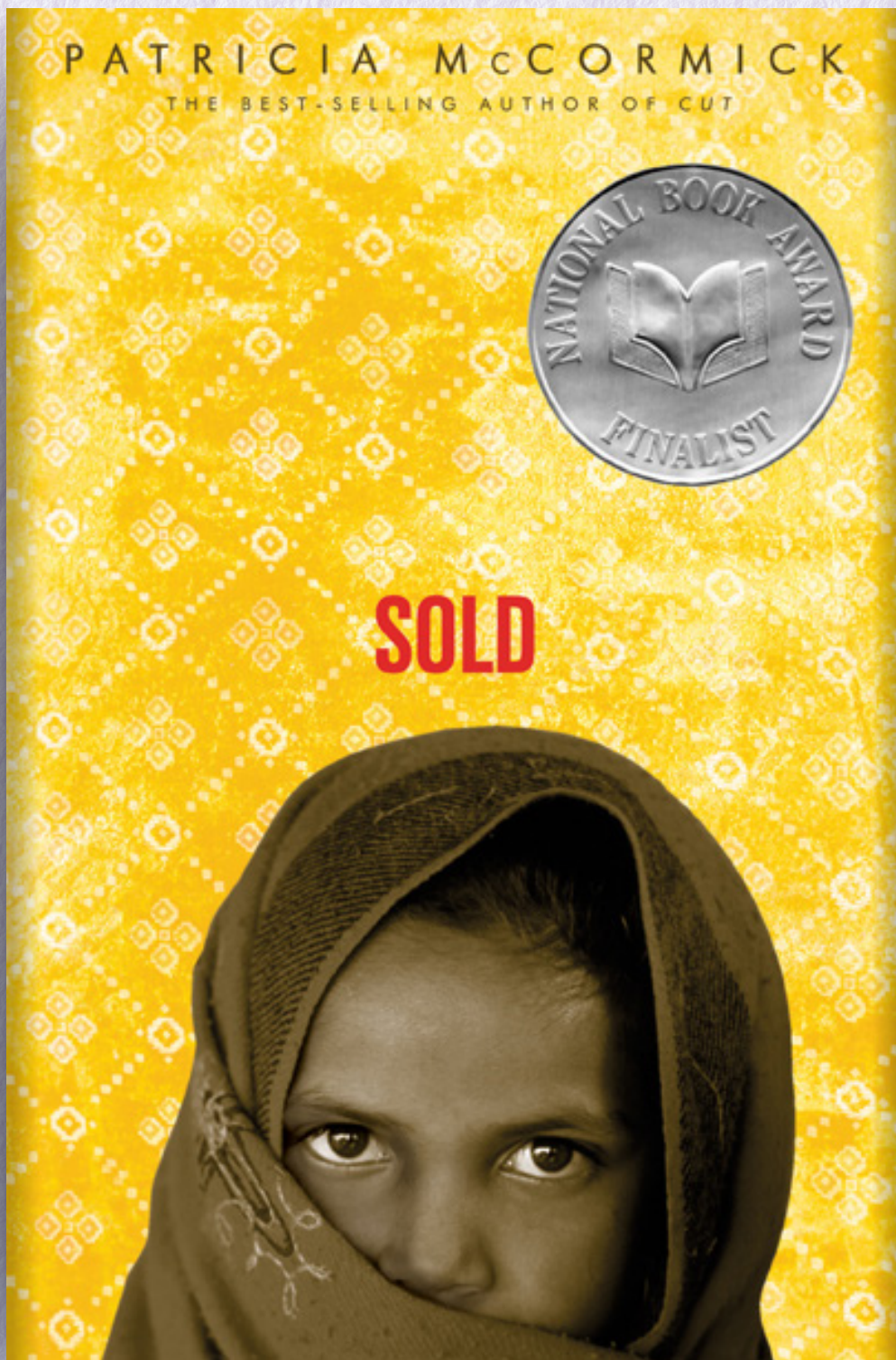
PRAISE & ACCOLADES

National Book Award Finalist

A 2007 Notable Books for a Global Society title

Readers' Choice Award Nominations

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• Iowa • Maryland • Missouri • Nevada • New Hampshire • New Jersey
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Tracie Vaughn, an award-winning children's author and literacy specialist, created this guide.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Encourage students to refer to specific passages in Patricia McCormick’s *Sold* when answering the following questions.

- What is Lakshmi’s life like in her Nepal mountain home? What events create the need for her to go into the city?
- Discuss the vignette “Everything I Need to Know” early in the book. What do you think of the cultural mandates that Lakshmi’s mother tells her she must live by? Compare this vignette to “Everything I Need to Know Now,” which appears later in the book, when she is in the city. How does this second vignette represent all the changes in her life?
- Did you suspect bad intentions on the part of the “auntie” and “uncle” who escorted Lakshmi? Why do you think Lakshmi herself was not suspicious? She lives in a remote village with no access to outside information. How does this make her family more vulnerable to a trafficker’s claims?
- What things does Lakshmi wonder about on her journey? What ordinary objects fascinate her?
- How does Mumtaz gain control over Lakshmi and the other girls?
- Describe the other girls and women in the brothel. How do they accept or rail against their lives there? What does Lakshmi learn from them?
- For the festival of brothers and sisters, Harish gives Lakshmi a new pencil. Why do you think this small act of kindness “undoes” her? In what other ways do people reach out to help one another at the brothel?
- What do you think despair looks like? How does Lakshmi prevent her own despair from destroying her hope? Is it destroyed in others? How?
- What happens when Monica leaves the brothel to return to the family she has supported? Do you think Lakshmi’s own ama would treat her the same way upon her return? What about her stepfather? What makes you think so or not?
- What was the most upsetting part of this story for you? Do you think there is anything you can do to help? If so, what?

PROJECTS

LANGUAGE ARTS

- Patricia McCormick used verse, first-person narration, and an incomplete understanding of the situation to help readers experience Lakshmi’s story. Think about why the author made those choices and write your own vignette in verse from the point of view of another character in *Sold*.
- Next, write a letter to the editor of your local paper, to your senator or congressperson, or to another political figure to ask for their help in preventing the sex trade from continuing.
- Write a letter to someone who hasn’t yet read *Sold* or learned about human trafficking, explaining why education and awareness matter, and how they should learn more.

ART

- Create a piece of art inspired by the book. The form—sculpture, painting, musical performance, etc.— is entirely up to you. Chronicle your experience in a brief journal.
- Imagine that you are going to leave home for a year to support your family. What would you pack? What items would be indispensable? Work those items into some kind of art form—collage, sculpture, poem, or song, for example. How does your list compare with what Lakshmi carried?
- Draw a map of Lakshmi’s travels and present it to the class, or create a PowerPoint presentation that chronicles Lakshmi’s geographical journey.

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. Compare the gross national product of Nepal to that of the United States and other countries. Compare the countries' literacy rates and infant mortality rates. Make a graph showing the differences.
- Lakshmi was initially sold for about 800 Nepali rupees. Determine the current exchange rate between US dollars and Nepali rupees and calculate the amount for which she was sold. Bring this amount to life by making a list of things you and your family routinely buy for that amount.
- Research the issues from the novel and create a poster, website, or pamphlet about what you learned. Be sure to include information for those who may be interested in getting involved.
- Invite a speaker to your school, or find out how to organize a student group to push for change" with "reactions, how it differs from the book, and how the movie impacts their understanding of the issues.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Visit Friends of Maiti Nepal (www.friendsofmaitinepal.org) or ECPAT-USA (<http://www.ecpatusa.org>) for ways to help. If your students would like to donate money, hold a fund raiser. It can be of any form you prefer—bake sale, car wash, walkathon, read-a-thon, or any other idea you may have. Break into small groups and compete to see whose idea nets the most donations. Graph your results and discuss which strategies were most successful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

To research *Sold*, Patricia McCormick traveled to India and Nepal, where she interviewed the women of Kolkata's red-light district and girls who have been rescued from the sex trade. Patricia is a two-time National Book Award Finalist, and the author of five critically acclaimed novels, among them *Never Fall Down*, the story of a boy who survived the Killing Fields of Cambodia by playing music for the Khmer Rouge. Her other books include the YA Classic *Cut*, and the young readers' edition of *I Am Malala*, the story of the Pakistani girl who was targeted by the Taliban for standing up for education. She lives in Manhattan.



Glen Alsop

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

What inspired you to tell this story?

I had a chance meeting with a photographer who was working undercover to document the presence of young girls in brothels overseas, and I knew immediately that I wanted to do what no one else had done so far: tell this heartbreaking story from the point of view of one individual girl. I believe that young adults want to know what's happening to their peers on the other side of the world, but that media accounts, by their very nature, cannot usually go beyond the surface. To me, there is nothing more powerful—or permanent—than the impact of a book.

What did your travel to India and Nepal bring to your story?

I spent a month in India and Nepal tracing Lakshmi's steps—going from a poor, isolated village in the foothills of the Himalayas all the way to the teeming red-light district of Kolkata. Trained as an investigative reporter, I took notes and photos observing the sights, smells, foods, sounds, and customs—details to give the book authenticity. I also interviewed women in the red-light district, girls who had been rescued, and a man who had sold his girlfriend in exchange for a motorcycle. It helped that I was a foreigner in the busy streets of Kathmandu and Kolkata, because I was as confused and overwhelmed by these places as Lakshmi is in the novel.

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What were the challenges of bringing Lakshmi's story to life?

Perhaps the biggest challenge was not to let the sadness of the situation overwhelm me. When I first came home from India, I fell into a despair unlike anything I'd ever felt before—something I now understand was a delayed reaction to the suffering I'd witnessed. Moreover, I felt inadequate to the task of doing justice to the stories the women had entrusted to me. But when I thought about the young girls who might be recruited to take their places as the women became ill or died, I felt urgency—urgency that their experiences be known and understood by the outside world. And I began to write. It was also a challenge to keep the book from being too grim, and to keep Lakshmi's humanity alive in a believable way. It was important to remember that in even the grimmest of situations, there is kindness as well as cruelty, boredom as well as terror, and even, surprising as it may seem, humor.

One of the people instrumental in Lakshmi's escape is a white American. Why did you choose to have an American character in this book?

I intentionally chose to include an American because the person who inspired this book was a young American photographer who was documenting the presence of girls in brothels. I wanted to honor his work. I also knew most of my initial readers would be in the United States and I wanted them to see a character they could relate to - and perhaps be inspired to follow his lead and get involved. Some readers have objected, saying this portrayal reinforces the white savior narrative. If I had to write the book again, I might choose differently. But at the time I was writing the book, much of the rescue work was being done by American organizations and so the inclusion of a white character was accurate. Now that that work is largely being done by local organizations, I would imagine that character not only as Indian or Nepali, but as a woman, to further emphasize the theme of female empowerment. But it's important to remember that it is Lakshmi who initiates her own escape.

Sold is one of the most frequently banned books in the United States, according to the American Library Association. What do you make of the book bans, and what do you want people to know about them?

Parents are entitled to try to control what their own children read, but no one has the right to decide what others can read. To ban challenging books from classrooms and libraries is a disservice to young readers—it deprives vulnerable readers of the chance to see experiences like their own in a book and get help if needed. And it deprives other readers of the chance to develop empathy for their peers who may need that help and that visibility. Book bans can also deprive young readers of the information they need to navigate a difficult world - and to become activists to improve that world. Book banning doesn't protect kids; it leaves them unaware of the world they will face. And to ban this book in particular, is disrespectful to the girls and women who shared their stories so that others wouldn't experience the harm they did.

How can we help?

Educate yourself by visiting the websites in this guide; then work to raise awareness among your friends and family members, and in your school or community. Write an essay for your school paper or a letter to your local paper or your congressperson. Organize a student group at your school; then show a film about trafficking, invite a speaker, and raise or donate money. The cost of living in countries where trafficking takes place is very low: one week's allowance, for instance, could go a long way toward providing medicine, toys, or books for the children of the red-light district, or could contribute to the work of organizations that stop trafficking and provide safety for victims. As Elie Weisel said, "Let us remember: what hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander."