



Introducing Human Trafficking to EFL Students in Japan

by Guy Smith (Tokyo Women's University, Japan)



Introduction

Japan is described as “a destination, source, and transit country for men, women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking.” It is designated as a Tier 2 country (a country whose government does not fully comply with the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act but is making a significant effort to bring themselves into compliance with those standards) by the U.S. Department of States' *Trafficking in Person's Report 2011*. Human trafficking and forced labor, especially in the area of forced prostitution, is a serious problem facing modern society in Japan.

However, while many global, social and economic issues are openly discussed in Japan, domestic problems are often given considerably less attention, perhaps due to the expectation that problems at home will “be taken care of “ by the proper authorities. Many people may be unaware that there is even a problem at all and would be horrified at the idea that millions of people are in some form of slavery around the world today.

A College EFL Project on Slavery

Modern slavery in Japan in the form of forced prostitution and labor is a disquieting and complicated domestic problem. I recently did a project with my college students on modern slavery connected to a module on the issue of past slavery in the USA. I found that, while students were well versed on the issue of past slavery, almost all of the students in the class were unacquainted with the very real and current state of slavery in the modern developed world. Furthermore, in a mini quiz on the topic, almost none had any idea of the huge number of people estimated to be in slavery in the world today. Most of them considered it a problem of the past. That slavery was a problem right here in Japan was difficult for students to accept.

Most were unaware of the existence of the Polaris Project, an NPO which is fighting forms of modern slavery in Japan. I would recommend any teachers interested in enlightening their students on this important topic to try out the following project. It raised considerably the awareness of the class regarding the seriousness of the problem here in Japan. In fact, several students made plans to visit the Polaris Project Office in the near future.

A College EFL Project on Slavery

The mini-project that I designed for my English class consisted of the following four components:

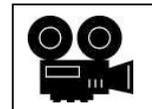
1. A quiz on modern slavery.
2. An introduction to types of slavery practiced around the world today.
3. The Polaris Project in Japan. Students were assigned to visit the website and write a report on the Polaris Project's activities and mission.
4. As a follow-up, students were given a list of movies to watch which deal with or include the subject of slavery in the world today.

Quiz on Modern Slavery

1. How many people are estimated to be in some form of slavery today?
_____.
2. There may be over 200,000 people in forms of slavery in Japan now. T F
3. Japan was put on a Sex Trade watch list in 2004. T F
4. The Japanese government is making strong efforts to fight against forced labor and prostitution. T F
5. There is an organization in Japan with over 1500 members trying to combat forms of slavery in Japan. T F

Movies about Modern Slavery

- *Blood Diamond*
- *Eastern Promises*
- *Slumdog Millionaire*



Websites about Modern Slavery

- U.S. Department of State Report on Japan
www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2011/164232.htm
- International Labor Organization
www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/



The Polaris Project
<www.polarisproject.jp>

Quiz Answers

1. 27,000,000
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. True