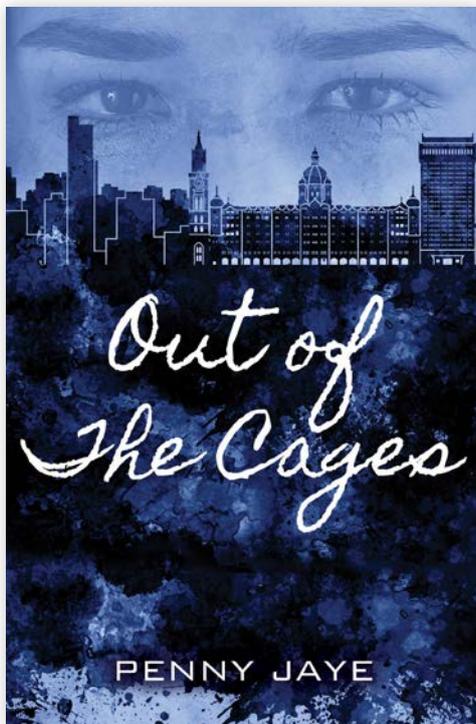




TEACHER'S NOTES



Out of the Cages

By Penny Jaye

ISBN: 9781925563412

Reading Level: 15+ years

Fifteen-year-old Meena has given up all hope of ever escaping the brothel.

For three years she's locked away her memories – of home, of her childhood friend, of what it means to hope. But when a botched police raid offers her a chance at freedom, Meena must face the truth about her past.

As she attempts to piece her life back together, the memories she has buried deep inside begin to resurface. Meena realises escaping the brothel is only the beginning of what it means to be free.

Themes

- Human Trafficking • Child Marriage • Sexual Exploitation • Human Rights • Child Slavery
- Love/Marriage • Rehabilitation • Modern-day Slavery • Family • Friendship • Strength in Adversity
- Rescued Children • Human Spirit • Hope • Treatment of Women • Third-world Countries

Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities:

CHARACTERISATION

1. How does Penny Jaye create a sense of setting and character at the beginning of the novel? Ask students to compare the Prologue with Chapter One.
 - Students can create a **Contrasts Table** and identify phrases and words that relate to setting, character, emotions and culture. What differences exist between the Prologue and Chapter One?

	Prologue	Chapter One
Setting	E.g. Nepal - where?	E.g. India - where?
Characterisation		
Emotions		
Culture		

2. Secondary characters contribute to and influence Meena's journey in *Out of the Cages*. E.g. Purna, Leela, Nahita, Putali, etc.
 - Students can construct a **Characterisation Table** to analyse how secondary characters have been constructed in the novel.

Character	Personality Traits	Role in Plot	Relationship with Meena
E.g. Putali	Vulnerable, exhilaration for adventure, trusting	Forced into prostitution alongside Meena	Best childhood friend from Nepal
E.g. Nahita			

3. Ask students to discuss the male representations in the novel. Meena and Putali's fathers are both absent in different ways (see note below regarding Nepal's largest Export). Meena's uncle and cousin betray her. Tarak defies Meena's expectations and falls in love with Sharmilla. Ask students to discuss these relationships and the ways in which male characters are constructed.
 - Think about how the girls are let down by characters who should really be protecting them (e.g. some police officers) and the possible reasons for this.
 - Who are the males that stand up for the girls? What is Meena's perception of them and why?

One of Nepal's largest exports is its workforce. Thousands of Nepali men and women travel overseas each year to find work. Unfortunately, although these people may not be trafficked into slavery, they are still vulnerable to exploitation and frequently find themselves in situations – such as with Putali's father – where they have secured a job but are trapped in debt or low paying conditions that prevent them from supporting their family, or even returning home as expected.

LITERARY DEVICES

4. The story of *Out of the Cages* is told using a combination of past tense narration set in the present day, and a series of flashbacks written in present tense.
 - How do the flashbacks contribute to the construction and pacing of Meena's story?

- Students can analyse how the literary devices of language, style and tone are used in the flashbacks. How are they used in the present-day story? What are the differences? What do they convey in telling Meena's story?

THEMES

5. Power structures exist in *Out of the Cages* to the detriment of the disenfranchised. Analyse the following power structures in the text and find examples. I.e. the patriarchy, master/slave, rich/poor
 - Students can compare these power structures in their own culture. Do they exist? What are the similarities and differences?
6. Fiction can be used as a means of advocacy in the fight against modern-day slavery. Do you agree? Why?
 - Students can consider and discuss the limitations and advantages of fiction as a tool in advocacy.
 - Ask students to consider the power of fiction in educating society about social issues.
7. Students can write a short story inspired by a social justice issue close to their heart. How does their piece of fiction educate others on their social issue? Alternatively, students can write a follow-on chapter to *Out of the Cages*. How might Meena use her freedom to help other girls gain theirs?
8. Survival is a key theme in *Out of the Cages*. Meena protects herself mentally and emotionally from her situation in the brothel by blocking out the memory of her childhood and her best friend, Putali. Students can discuss other factors in Meena's survival, as well as different ways in which secondary characters protect themselves from their trauma.
9. Though the girls at Little Sister have suffered immeasurable trauma, there is still a sense of hope among them. Ask students to consider how they might feel in similar circumstances.
 - Discuss what roles Sharmila, Didi and Maa play in giving the girls hope for the future.
 - Discuss the representation of the other women in the novel that help with Meena's rehabilitation.
10. Discuss the methods of rehabilitation employed at the Little Sister shelter. Ask Students to consider: do they think they work? And why?
 - Why does Sharmila ask them to role-play a human-trafficking scenario? What effect does this have on Meena when she participates for the first time?
 - On p.171, Sharmila says "Rehabilitation is something they don't count on, those traffickers. They think if they break us, we are broken forever. They don't realise that a girl who has once been trafficked can, in fact, become their strongest enemy." In what ways can a rehabilitated girl become an enemy of the traffickers?
11. Meena is consumed with guilt when she starts to remember her childhood friend, Putali. Do you think Meena is justified in feeling responsible for Putali being imprisoned in a brothel? Discuss how this sense of guilt leads to the choices Meena makes in *Out of the Cages*.
12. Discuss the role of heroines in *Out of the Cages* by comparing Sarita and Sharmila. Ask students who they think plays the more important role in saving Meena and why.
 - Discuss Sarita's sacrifice and ponder why it was so important to her to keep Meena alive.

- Do you believe Sharmila’s methods are effective and her motives pure?
13. Meena is extremely reluctant to return to Nepal when Maa and Sharmila organise her safe passage home. Discuss Meena’s possible reasons for not wanting to go back.
- Many girls rescued from brothels are unable to return home because of prejudice from their own families and communities. Discuss the implications of this and possible reasons why this occurs. What might the future hold for a girl in this situation?

IMAGERY

14. Discuss the importance of Sarita’s leaving scarf and what it represents to Sarita and then Meena. Discuss the significance of Meena leaving it for Sarita at the drop-in centre and the message she leaves with it (p.247).
15. Meena is drawn to a painting of Nepal outside Didi’s office. What do those mountains represent for Meena? Seeing that painting stirs up a lot of emotions in Meena from longing to guilt. Why is this?
16. “The roller bird was grey like that. Grey until its wings spread and it flew away” (p.4). Discuss the symbolism of the roller bird in the story.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the power structures evident in *Out of the Cages*. Show evidence for how they influence Meena’s journey.

Discuss the symbolism used in the story and its relationship to the traumas of human trafficking.

Discuss the relationships Meena has with the women in her life. Explain the differences and similarities between these relationships using evidence from the text.

Discuss the relationships Meena has with the men in her life. Explain the differences and similarities between these relationships using evidence from the text.

Discuss the role fiction has in advocacy and change in the world. Use evidence from the text.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

ACELA1565	ACELA1567	ACELA1568	ACELA1569
ACELA1570	ACELA1572	ACELA1571	ACELT1639
ACELT1640	ACELT1641	ACELT1812	ACELT1642
ACELT1643	ACELT1774	ACELY1749	ACELY1752
ACELY1754			

About the Author

Penny Jaye writes books for children and older readers. She lives in western Sydney with her husband and three children and is currently studying for her Master of Arts (writing and literature at Deakin university).

She enjoys the challenges and opportunities of juggling a busy family life with writing commitments, including doing author visits. Some of her favourite things include family movie nights, lunch by the river and being tucked up in bed to read a new YA novel.

Out of the Cages is her first young adult novel with Rhiza Edge. She also writes as Penny Reeve.



Author's Note: The Story Behind the Story

I remember exactly where I was when the story for *Out of the Cages* caught my attention.

I was living in Nepal. My husband worked for an international health and development organisation and our family was based in Pokhara. That day I had been drinking tea – hot, spiced and sweet – in my Nepali friend's house and she was sharing a small photo album with me. Most of the people in her photos I recognised, younger versions of my friend's family; her parents, her neighbours, her children so tiny and cute. But there was one young woman pictured that I didn't recognise, so I asked my friend about her. My Nepali language wasn't perfect then, but I understood enough to know that this girl was no longer around. She'd gone to the river to wash clothes and she'd never returned. The family had no answers, she'd just disappeared.

Nepal is a beautiful country. Beautiful in scenery and in its people. But like every country, it holds heartbreak and one of these is the experience of those who have been trafficked. Every year thousands of people – women, men and children – are trafficked across the border. They are sold into slavery in India, in China, Thailand, Dubai, some even make it to Australia and are caught up in domestic service, visa-less, illegal and trapped. A significant proportion of those trafficked from Nepal, especially the young girls and women find themselves sold into the brothels of India. The girl in my friend's photograph may not have been trafficked. She may have been swept away by the river, or just decided not to come home. No one knows. But the questions in her story were the stimulus for this story.

I began researching and writing *Out of the Cages* while we were still living in Nepal. As I read local newspaper articles, met with trafficking survivors and visited rehabilitation homes, I learned more about the stories of these young girls who disappear. There have been other books written about this topic – *Sold* by Patricia McKormick is one, Rosanne Hawke's *Mountain Wolf* another. But I wanted to tell the story of the return. Of those girls who have been trafficked, sold, broken and used, but somehow escape. What does freedom feel like if you've forgotten how to feel? Can hope be grown again when you've been taught it doesn't exist? And friendship – what happens to friendship when the truth about the past is hard to unravel?

Writing *Out of the Cages* was one of the hardest things I've ever done. It stretched me from my comfort zone both as a writer and as a person. There are some parts of this story I hated writing. And yet I knew I had to write it: to honour those who have survived, those who fight day in and day out for freedom. And for those who remain trapped, unseen and unheard, this book is my prayer. That one day we will see a world that won't accept slavery as common place, and those who have been captives will be finally set free.