



A FILM BY SHALOM ALMOND

MY LONG NECK

"I WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HAVE A LONG NECK." **MAJA**

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



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OVERVIEW - Maja is proud of the 16 coils of brass around her neck that distinguish her as a Long Neck Karyan woman from Burma. But after 20 years of living on display and constantly being photographed in a tourist village in Thailand, the rings are becoming more a trap than a source of pride. When a chance meeting with an Australian filmmaker puts a video camera in her hands, Maja decides to turn the lens around and make a film about what it means to live in a "human zoo". The process turns her life on its head and forces her to choose between tradition and rebellion.

Curriculum Links

The curriculum areas that *My Long Neck* can be related to include:

- The Discipline-based learning Domain of Geography
- The Discipline-based learning Domain of History
- Specific links to the Australian National Curriculum

My Long Neck can be applied to the following elements of the AUSVELS Geography curriculum at Years 9 and 10:

Students investigate the characteristics of development that occur across the globe. They use an inquiry-based approach to explore how combinations of various physical and human factors interact to produce observable and sometimes predictable patterns at local, regional and global

scales. Students examine global patterns of development, considering classifications used by United Nation agencies, Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and other organisations, and evaluating the relevance of such classifications at global, national, regional and local scales.

This documentary can also connect to the **AUSVELS History** curriculum at Year 10 in which students are required to be able to:

Refer to key events, the actions of individuals and groups, and beliefs and values to explain patterns of change and continuity over time. They analyse the causes and effects of events and developments and explain their relative importance. They explain the context for people's actions in the past. Students explain the significance of events and developments from a range of perspectives. They explain different interpretations of the past and recognise the evidence used to support these interpretations.

The documentary can also be connected to the AUSVELS strands for **Inter Personal Development**, in which students are required, during Years 9 and 10, to develop their knowledge of local and global values and beliefs and consider the idea of values as social constructs and principles. *My Long Neck* could also be used as a supplementary text for students of English when studying themes of identity and belonging or how people encounter conflict.



Previewing Activities

After a chance meeting with an Australian filmmaker, Maja decides to make a film about her life in a Long Neck village, but soon begins to see it as a 'human zoo' and must take a stand to reclaim her culture.

Before students begin watching *My Long Neck* it may be beneficial to complete the following pre viewing activities which will provide both geographical context and a historical understanding of the Kayan people.

- Using a blank map of Asia fill in as many countries



and capital cities from memory. Then using an atlas or the internet add in any that you did not know. Colour different countries in so they are distinct. In particular, see if you can find Mae Hong Son district and label this spot clearly.

- Once your map is neatly labelled and coloured in, imagine the journey from Burma to Thailand as a refugee. Work out how many kilometres Maja's family would have had to travel from Burma into Thailand. List reasons why you think this journey might have been challenging and dangerous for Maja's family.
- Using the United Nations website, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>, copy out the internationally accepted definition of a refugee. What rights do refugees have? Refugees are often a contentious issue in Australia and frequently mentioned in the Australian media. What phrases and terms are used to describe refugees here? Why might someone flee their home to come to Australia? Why might Kayan people have left Burma and headed to Thailand?
- In pairs create a mind map (you may want to use ipad apps, in which case "DropMind Minding Mapping" is a good tool) in which you will research different aspects of Kayan culture. The different headings to include are: food, dress, religious practices, family life, politics, and any others you can think of. Share these mindmaps with the class and then write a half page summary of Kayan culture.

	KEY PERSONAL INFORMATION	OPINION ON NECK RINGS
MAJA	<i>Eg. Refugee from Burma, married with 2 daughters, wears neck rings, lives in the village</i>	<i>Eg. Identifies strongly at the beginning of the documentary with the neck rings as central to her culture and identity.</i>
MANANG		
MADAM		
MAPUN		
TOURISTS		

Viewing Activities

As students view *My Long Neck* direct them to complete the following activities:

- Fill out the following table on the different people mentioned in the documentary:
- At the beginning of the documentary what was your opinion on the village and the women who wear the neck rings? Did your opinion change throughout the film? Write a 250 word reflective piece on your perceptions of the Kayan women and their lives.
- *My Long Neck* briefly describes how the neck rings are put on. From the documentary and some of your own research explain the process of getting a 'long neck'. Continue your research and explain the history of women wearing neck rings.





Tourism and Exploitation

My Long Neck depicts the lives of the Kayan people who are refugees from Burma. They live in Thailand and must remain in Mae Hong Son district or risk being sent back to Burma. Their time in the village is conditional; they must wear traditional clothes and their neck rings. The men in the village cannot work and therefore entire families are dependent on the wage of the Kayan women who wear the neck rings.

- Why do tourists come to the Long Neck village? Would you visit a Long Neck village? Be prepared to justify your answer.
- One tourist seems angry at the women for charging money. Explain his viewpoint and then explain how Maja responds.
- The idea that the women feel like they are living in “zoo” is mentioned frequently throughout the documentary. In your own words explain why they feel this way.
- What does the word ‘exploitation’ mean? How might the women who wear neck rings be exploited in Thailand? Should the women in the village wear their neck rings for money?
- Maja also interviews two tourists, how do they feel about the village?
- The village chief and the people who own the village have a lot of power over the villagers. List different examples of ways that the women and men of the village lack different types of freedoms.
- Manang stops wearing her neck rings and is no longer paid by the village owner. What is the impact of this for Manang and her family?
- How does the documentary and making her own film help Maja come to an understanding about her own identity and culture? In what ways might Maja’s filming help other people in the village?
- Maja visits another village to meet with Mapun, a 97 year old woman who says she now only has “[her] body, earrings and neck rings. No other possessions.” How does Mapun feel about life in

a Long Neck village? Maja also talks to other people in this village about the way they are treated. How does she try to convince them that they are being exploited?

- Imagine you have been asked to write a speech for Maja to give to other Long Neck villages in Thailand. Your speech needs to be at least 2 minutes long and must convince the villagers that their culture and identity is being exploited by village owners and businesses. Remember that these issues are not simple, and that Maja identifies strongly with her neck rings, but is deeply concerned with how her people, and family, are being used by others for profit.
- Debate the following idea as a class: *Thailand’s Long Neck villages should be shut down*. Prepare for the debate by listing all the reasons for and against keeping the villages. Do not forget that these people have left Burma for a reason and it may not be possible for them to simply return back to Burma.





Notions of Beauty

It is evident that the neck rings play a big role in Kayan culture. They appear to be connected with notions of beauty and femininity, especially as women are the ones who wear the neck rings.

- Using your research on the history of neck rings, explain the link between the neck rings and notions of beauty.
- In what ways do women all over the world distort their bodies for beauty? List as many examples as you can from the present and the past. Why have women had (and continue to have) these beauty practices? Do men have beauty practices?
- The Kayan women seem to wear their neck rings from a very young age. Do you think there should be an age limit on beauty practices?
- Maja appears unsure about whether she wants her daughters to wear the neck rings. Explain the reasons why she may want or may not want them to wear the rings. How did you feel when you first saw images of Manang putting the rings on Yoko, Maja's daughter?
- Maja takes her rings off in the end of the documentary. Why do you think she does this? Do you think she will keep them off? Explain your answer.

Extended activities

Students can choose to do these activities as extension work or preparation for an assignment.

- Imagine you are a newspaper reporter who travels to the Mae Hong Son district to meet the villagers. You hear that the women will not get paid unless they wear traditional clothes and the neck rings. Write an expository article for a newspaper in which you discuss the Kayan people and their lives in the Long Neck villages.
- Re watch the documentary or go to the following link

to watch Maja's film for a small fee: <http://vimeo.com/ondemand/majasfilm/75073670>. Create a visual diary in which you tell the story of Maja and her family. You may wish to focus on another woman from the village.

- Debate the topic: 'body modification is acceptable'. You can draw on a range of different types of body modification in your arguments.
- Choose one cultural aspect in your life. Create a 5-10 minute video that explores your culture. You may choose to interview family and friends to highlight different aspects. Edit your film carefully and present it to the class when complete.
- Brainstorm some options for Kayan people so they are no longer reliant on the Long Neck villages for income.
- Investigate the Long Neck villages as a human rights issue. Choose another human rights issue in Asia and write a report in which you highlight these two human rights issues.



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<http://vimeo.com/ondemand/majasfilm/75073670>



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