about rebuilding out of terrible destruction. It is a story made for

gardens of nature, a story about war, about integrity in the face of atrocity,

But to the garden’s scholar, it always stands for something.

Thus, the sharply upturned eaves, so painstakingly designed, might

serve to warn off the evil spirits, to admit light into the interior of a

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rock may suggest a mountain, or it may simply be a stunning rock.

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According to director Thuy, the key message of the film is

Vietnamese audiences that speaks deeply to Americans.

The film moves from past to present, between remembering

and transformation. The sepia-toned images that accompany a

straightforward narration of events are crisscrossed by bright-colored footage of laugh-

ing children at play. Scenes of school children running gaily down

a village path once strewn with bodies are cut through by cameos

of survivors holding famous newspaper photos of their mothers

and sisters who died, reminding grandchildren never to forget.

While one man sits by the tablet that marks the death of his entire

family, other villagers work the fields and ply the river.

In one of the most touching segments of this very moving

film, two women from the village share tea, fruit from their gar-

den, and family photos with two members of a U.S. helicopter

crew who intervened to rescue them and ten other people from

the carnage. The occasion is the 30th anniversary of the massacre,

marked by solemn offerings of incense by Vietnamese and Ameri-

cans attending the commemoration, and by official ceremonies for

the opening of the peace park. “We cannot forget the past,”

Boehm says in his remarks, “but we cannot live with anger and

hatred either.”

Perhaps it is safe to say that most teachers over the age of

fifty remember “My Lai” (the internationally recognized name for

a village known locally as Son My) as one of the most publicized
dark moments of the war in Vietnam, as a place where U.S. sol-
diers massacred 504 villagers on the morning of March 16, 1968.
Perhaps it is also safe to say that many of our students have never
heard of it. How shall we teach them? What shall we teach them?

According to U.S. National Standards for History, students

should be able to “evaluate how Vietnamese and Americans expe-

cienced the war and how the war continued to affect postwar poli-
tics and culture” and “to explore the legacy of the Vietnam War.”

This film addresses these issues, but more importantly, will add

nuance to how the Vietnam War (commonly referred to by the

Vietnamese as the “American War”) is taught in the United States.

According to director Thuy, the key message of the film is

that a person, or a nation, must feel shame for its past mistakes

and the pain of their own wrongdoing before they can heal the

wounds. “It is not easy to build something out of such a disastrous
past,” the film concludes. Not easy, but it is what the villagers

must do, what the veterans must do, and what much of the world

must now find a way to do. This gentle, unflinching film makes an

important contribution to that end.

Note: The Sound of the Violin at My Lai is being piloted for

adoption by 5th grades throughout Vietnam—providing interest-

The Sound of the Violin at My Lai

Directed by Tran Van Thuy
Produced by the Central Documentary and Scientific Film Studio, Hanoi

“The Sound of the Violin at My Lai,” winner of “Best Short” at

the 1999 Asian Pacific Film Festival in Bangkok

1998. 32 Minutes. VHS. Color.

Distributed by The Video Project
P.O. Box 411376, San Francisco, CA 94141-1376
Phone: 415-241-2514 or 800-4-PLANET
FAX: 415-241-2511
E-mail: video@videoproject.net
Web site: www.videoproject.net

The Sound of the Violin at My Lai
EDUCATION ABOUT ASIA
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ing possibilities for exchange, both by students and teachers. Two other films by Tran Van Thuy that teachers in the United States have found useful are The Story of Kindness, an award-winning work that exalts kindness over power as it probes the gap between words and deeds, and has been described as having an ‘almost cult-like’ international following; and Story from the Corner of a Park, a more recent release, a sensitive meditation on the grace with which a poor family faces the difficulties caused by the care of their two disabled children, thought to have been affected by Agent Orange. For further information on Tran Van Thuy’s films, contact the Fund for Reconciliation and Development at http://ffrd.org or First Run Icarus Films http://www.frif.com.

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Hidden India
The Kerala Spicelands

Direction, editing, and music by Jan Thompson
Written and hosted by Bruce Kraig

Produced by Food for Thought Productions
2002. 60 Minutes. VHS. Color.
Distributed by PBS Home Video
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 800-752-9727
Web site: www.shop.pbs.org

H
idden India: The Kerala Spicelands is a colorful, vibrant presentation of many aspects of culture in Kerala, a state located on India’s southwest coast. Described by its producers as an introduction to the “culinary traditions and culture” of Kerala, the video discusses topics ranging from growing and harvesting spices, to religion, to the legacies of historical contact with Europe and other areas of Asia.

Best known for its spices, Kerala is described as having “the highest literacy rate in India” (above ninety percent) and a better quality of life than “anywhere else in India, Africa, and most of Asia.” The video segues smoothly through a variety of topics, beginning with a brief historical background that includes the introduction of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to India, and the coming of the European explorer merchants led by Portugal’s Vasco da Gama in 1498. The growing, harvesting, and preparation of food is a recurring theme. Spices such as black pepper, cardamom, ginger, nutmeg, and turmeric are found in the mountainous Ghats, while staple foods such as coconuts and rice grow in the lowlands. Food markets in Kerala include non-native foods such as potatoes and chili peppers that were brought from Central and South America to India by Portuguese merchants. Host Bruce Kraig maintains his enthusiasm throughout his narration, even while chewing paan, an areca (betel) nut wrapped in a palm leaf. Paan is a mild narcotic and is used as a digestive aid.

Keralite culture is illustrated not only through food, but also through arts and religion. Kathakali, or “story dance,” is a feature of the arts in Kerala in which actors portray all emotions through elaborate facial expressions. The dances are based on classical literature such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Hinduism is woven into segments that show a marriage ceremony, and describe the caste system, discussing the degree to which it is observed in Kerala. Viewers also observe festivals, such as the Great Elephant Parade, in which people costume themselves as representatives of Hindu divinities. The video concludes with a discussion of British and Asian legacies in India. The British introduced railroads, the parliamentary democracy form of government, and tea plants and rubber trees to south India. The Asian influence is seen in the Keralites’ use of large fishing nets such as those used in earlier times by Chinese merchants. These help demonstrate Kraig’s conclusion that in Kerala, “the traditional and the new exist side-by-side.”

Hidden India: The Kerala Spicelands is appropriate for use in high school and college levels to introduce students to the culture, customs, religions, and foods of southwestern India. A caveat should be mentioned: the video describes Hinduism as a “polytheistic faith,” which is not how many Hindus view it. Hinduism is monotheistic and henotheistic, recognizing a single Supreme God manifested in many forms such as Vishnu and Shiva. This point aside, the video beautifully and actively illustrates its topics, each of which lasts about four to seven minutes. The video could also be used in short segments to illustrate a specific point.

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