

Shake Hands With the Devil

Note to Educators

The film, “Shake Hands With The Devil”, explores challenging topics, such as racism, violence, murder, genocide and personal responsibility. Although the gravity of these subjects requires that teachers explore them with care, this call for caution does not suggest that such explorations are not suitable for classroom learning. In fact teachers who choose to guide students through such challenging material are illustrating to students that schools remain places in which students are prepared to be responsible, informed adults. They are also treating students as fully engaged thoughtful citizens who both deserve to be informed about society’s most compelling socio-political issues and who are capable of coming to terms with such complex topics.

The following are a few guidelines that can assist teachers in guiding students through such issues in an emotionally safe and cautious manner.

- 1.) As we each are the best judge of what we can safely explore, it is best to reassure students that they have ultimate control over what material they want to confront. For example, a teacher can suggest that students may want to look away during difficult scenes or leave the classroom if necessary. Giving students permission to control how much graphic or difficult material they want to process shows respect students inner defenses.
- 2.) Students find it helpful to have a pencil and paper handy to write-down their reactions. This provides a safety device to separate oneself from the material or to safely and silently vent one’s emotions.
- 3.) Immediately after the film a teacher can choose to wait a moment before turning on the lights, thus allowing students a moment to compose themselves. A teacher can also ask students to take a moment to write down emotions and first thoughts. These thoughts can be a good beginning point for a discussion.
- 4.) Teachers should also keep in mind that some students may giggle or joke out of nervousness. This does not denote disrespect but often is an immature way to react to serious material. Teachers can explain this, and without embarrassing the offending students, let them know that laughter is an inappropriate response to violence and personal tragedy.

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. Before viewing the film, jot down a few notes outlining your thoughts about Africa in general and Rwandan genocide in particular. Share your thoughts with others. As a group do you think your knowledge base about Africa is similar to your knowledge base about other regions in the world? What might account for this knowledge or lack thereof?
2. What does the term genocide mean? What other 20th Century historical events are similar to the mass slaughter in Rwanda?
3. How does mass violence begin? Why do you think that individuals take part in mass killings? Who and what institutions/issues bear responsibility for such actions?

Post –Viewing Questions

1. How has viewing this film either reinforced or challenged your beliefs about Africa and the Rwanda genocide?
2. In any discussion about genocide, the issue of responsibility becomes important. In your view, what were some of the causes of the genocide? What, if any, roles did societal institutions play? Some commentators, including General Dallaire, believe that international institutions and other must share in the blame for the killings. Do you agree? Why? What other governments, institutions share blame?
3. There is much attention paid to the issue of racism-both between Tutsi and Hutu and also between the Europeans and Africans? How central a role was the ideology of racism in the genocide – both in the killing of Tutsis by Hutus and in the refusal of world powers to pay sufficient attention to the murder of almost 1 million Africans?
4. General Dallaire’s wife calls him her “Canadian hero”. Many people agree with her. However, Gen. Dallaire claims that not only does the word make him uncomfortable, in fact, he sees his mission as a failure. His task, he says, was to communicate to the Western powers the need to intervene. His task was to shame the West into action. He could not do that. In the bleak moral landscape of the Rwandan genocide, can one think in terms of heroism? If such thoughts are appropriate, was Gen. Dallaire heroic and why? Who else could be considered heroic? Why?
5. Why do you think the Rwandan genocide continues to haunt Gen. Dallaire ? Why do you think he wanted to return for the tenth year commemorative services? In general, how does the experience of the violence of war affect those who endure it? How long can those effects linger? What does the contemplation of these questions have to teach us about war and violence?

Research Topics

Genocide

The Rwandan genocide is one of several 20th Century events that have been named as a genocide. The Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide are some of the others. After discussing the term genocide, compare the Rwandan events to one of the other 20th century genocides. What lessons does each have to teach us about human nature, civic responsibility and moral autonomy?

History

Using one of the sources listed in the Resource Section, give an account of the Rwandan genocide, being sure to include the topics of colonialism, Tutsi- Hutu ethnic divisions, the use propaganda, the role of the Church and the role of the West.

Youth

The film shows pictures of members of Hutu young men dressed in colourful clothing dancing and chanting together. How and why were young men used in this war? What role did clothes and music seem to play? Are youth particularly susceptible to group thinking? Why?

Background and Vocabulary

The People

Hutu:

The Hutu people are the majority ethnic group in Rwanda (approximately 90%). They traditionally have been the farmers in Rwanda.

Tutsi:

The Tutsi people are minority ethnic group who in terms of the economy and military had achieved dominance. They traditionally were the cattle owners.

Twa:

The Twa are a pygmoid people who suffered much discrimination. They were hunter-gatherers and often played the role of entertainers - dancers and singers. They did not play a significant role in the genocide as their numbers are very small.

The Land and Location

Rwanda is a small country about the size of Wales. It is one of the most densely populated lands in Africa. It is situated in Central Eastern Africa between Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania on the east and the Congo (formerly Zaire) on the west. Rwanda is mostly non-industrialized and remains an agricultural country

Politics:

The land now called Rwanda was first colonized by the Germans and subsequently the Belgians. The French, through the Catholic Church and its missionaries, also had a role in culturally and religiously influencing the country. After much struggle and bloodshed, independence was won from Belgium in 1962. The divisions between the Hutus and Tutsis had been exploited by the colonial powers and left much suspicion-prejudice between the two ethnic groups.

Between 1976 and 1994 the Hutu led National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND) was in political control of the country and led many pogroms (massacres) against the Tutsis.

The opposition movement, led equally by Tutsis and some moderate Hutus, was called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). This party was based in Uganda until it marched into Rwanda against the Hutu army and stopped the genocide. The RPF took control of the country and maintained control until democratic elections were held in 2004. The RPF won those elections and remain the ruling political party in Rwanda.

Source: Rwanda: Which Way Now? Waller, D., Oxfam, UK and Ireland: 1996.

TERMS

Interhamwe

The radical youth wing of the Hutu dominated party (MRND). They were responsible for instigating much of the killing.

Modern Colonialism

As a practice colonialism dates, with a few exceptions ... from the end of the 19th Century, when the major European explorers laid claim to and attempted to rule over enormous tracts of the globe mostly in Africa and Asia without establishing permanent settlements....The term has come to refer to...a condition of unequal relations in which a strong colonial state controls and usually exploits an alien and “weaker” people in the latter’s homeland.

Source: International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences. Smelser, Baltes, (eds.), Elsevier Science Ltd., New York: 2001.

Genocide:

From the Greek, geno “race” and Latin, caedes, “killing”, liquidation of a people. The term now ... is generally applied to the murder of human beings by reason of their belonging to a specific racial, ethnic or religious group

Source: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust. Gutman, (ed.), Macmillan Publishing Co., New York: 1990.