

Secondary Assembly: Remembering Rwanda

Reader 1

“The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it.” (Joseph Conrad)

Reader 2

These words were written over a hundred years ago but they still ring true today. Human beings always seem to be highlighting differences between each other.

Person A is better than, smarter than, more beautiful than person B. Sometimes greed or a desire to have control makes people cruel to others. They exploit a perceived weakness, mock an accent, and make life difficult for people seen as outsiders. In schools and communities there are those who think they are stronger if they attack or bully people they regard as different.

Reader 3

Whichever way you look at this type of behaviour it is not pretty and most people in our community work together to try to stop it.

Reader 4

But some people are full of hatred and taking the dignity away from difference becomes their main aim in life.

Reader 1

15 years ago, when most of us were babies, genocide took place in Rwanda.

Reader 2

Genocide is when a group of people become filled with hatred for others. They tell lies about another group of people. They make life difficult for them, discriminate against them and finally try to murder the whole group and wipe them off the face of the earth as though they never existed.

Reader 3

Genocide is a crime against humanity.

Reader 4

Those who survive genocide often lose everything, including all their family and friends. They often have to leave their country and become refugees. They have to try to rebuild their lives far from home. Sometimes they share their stories so that others, like us, will listen, remember that a genocide happened, work together to make sure that the individuals who died are never forgotten and speak out when we notice prejudice and discrimination. The survivors hope that their stories will help the peoples of the world work together to prevent such terrible things happening again. We call their stories survivor testimony.

Reader 1

Today, 15 years after the genocide in Rwanda, we are going to share some extracts from survivor testimonies. We hope that by hearing the words of individuals we will remember that those who died were individuals with hopes and dreams for a future.

They were young people like us and they deserve to be remembered.

Reader 2

If you read the history books you will find out that the genocide began when members of one group of people living in Rwanda, the Hutus, decided that another group, the Tutsis, should be exterminated. The history books try to explain why it was so easy for a few people to persuade so many Hutus to think like this and how in 100 days thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, who did not agree with discrimination and murder were killed. However, today we are not thinking about historical arguments or politics, we are remembering individual lives which were cut short, individual people, human beings like us.

Reader 2

Freddy Mutanguha was 18 years old. He lived with his Mum and Dad and his four sisters in Kibuye, Rwanda. Freddy says....

Reader 3

“My Mum was the person I loved most in the whole world. I still remember the things she used to do...she used to tell me: “Life is about making friends and learning to live with people. When you learn how to live with people, you’ll never fail to do anything.” And she would say “It’s not good to be selfish, you should always share with others” I was there when the perpetrators came to kill my family...they took the younger ones, my sister Rosette and I were left behind. We saw them being taken with our own eyes...I knew some of the killers very well...I know the people who took them away. They were our neighbours among them a man named Benoit who had been our neighbour for years. He was Mum’s friend...and there was another young man called Kanani, Mum had been his teacher in primary school...”

Reader 4

Freddy and Rosette, one of his sisters, survived but Freddy’s Mum, Dad and three young sisters were murdered by people from their own community.

Reader 1

How can former neighbours and friends turn into killers and destroy the lives of people they know well? We call genocide a crime against humanity but it is also thousands of crimes against individuals.

Reader 2

Remera shared his testimony with a poet. The poet turned his story into a poem. In this extract Remera remembers how he and his brother and sister tried to escape from the killings. The words of the poem echo the thoughts we heard at the start of our reflections this morning.

Reader 3

We don’t know what was go on
At that time and we decide if we stay together, we going to die together.
Maybe if we are separate, one of them can be save.
And then I left home with my sister and my brother.
And we left our parents there.

...we walk for 20 days.....

When you are in that kind of situation you try to make something to help you.

We erase the ethnicity and we write we are Hutu.

But physically we are not Hutu.

That is the difference.

They say Tutsis have a long nose and Hutu a short nose.

That is fit for me.

And then they catch us and they ask;

“Who are you? Where are you going?”

Ah

It was difficult to answer that.

Anyway

They take us into the forest and they shoot us

Reader 4

They shot Remera and his brother and sister because they looked different. Remera survived but his brother and sister died.

Reader 1

Using the things that differentiate us, and make us unique because someone has a different complexion or slightly flatter nose is not a pretty thing when you look into it. The readers stand back and everyone views the HMD Remember Rwanda slides (you can download them from.....)

The final slide reads

Rwanda?
Why should I care?
Maybe
because
it might
have been you and
me.
Remember!

Conclude by playing a track from Jean Paul Samputu’s Voices From Rwanda (you can download it from iTunes and you can see a picture of Jean Paul, himself a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda, performing on <http://www.hmd.org.uk/files/1238676529-270.jpg> or add a reading from the Christian Bible.

Hebrews 13 verses 1-3

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Remember to welcome strangers, because some who have done this have welcomed angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them. Remember those who are suffering as if you were suffering with them.

Notes for teachers

Freddy's full testimony can be read on our website
(<http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/item/77/>)

Remember Rwanda was written by students of the Remember Rwanda Group
www.whyshouldweremember.org

Remera's Story was taken from the poem of the same name by Derick Burleston
You can find out more about the Rwandan genocide at www.hmd.org.uk.