

LIRO FILMS

SWEET DREAMS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sweet Dreams is suitable for both high school and college classes - the emphasis in discussions will vary accordingly.

The film has been shown in high schools around the country as well as in teen school screenings sponsored by groups such as The United Nations and Human Rights Watch.

It has shown on multiple University campuses and is recommended for university courses in Global Development Studies • Human Rights and Social Justice • African Studies • Peace and Conflict Resolution • Women's Studies • Holocaust and Genocide Studies • Business and Social Entrepreneurship • Arts education

Film Synopsis

In 1994 Rwanda suffered a devastating genocide. Close to a million were killed by neighbors, friends, even family. Horror swept the land. And when it was over, those who remained were broken, dead inside.

The country has made great strides in economic recovery, but “people are not like roads and buildings” says Kiki Katese, pioneering Rwandan theater director. “How do we rebuild a human being?”

Kiki decided to start *Ingoma Nshya*, Rwanda's first and only women's drumming troupe, open to women from both sides of the conflict. There was only one requirement: to leave the categories of the past at the gate.

For the women – orphans, widows, wives and children of perpetrators – the group has been a place to begin to live again, to build new relationships, to heal the wounds of the past. Yet the struggle to survive and provide for their families still persists.

So when Kiki came up with the idea to open Rwanda's first and only ice cream shop, the women were intrigued ... What was ice cream exactly and how would they do it? Kiki invited Jennie and Alexis of Brooklyn's Blue Marble Ice Cream to come to Rwanda to help the drummers open their

shop, which they aptly named *Inzizi Nziza* (Sweet Dreams).

Sweet Dreams follows this remarkable group of Rwandan women as they emerge from the devastation of the genocide to create a future of hope and possibility for themselves and their country.

Note to teachers:

Asking students to deal with the subject of genocide is a daunting, sad, but important challenge. While there are several films that document the Rwandan genocide, **Sweet Dreams** is telling a new kind of story – one of reconciliation, resilience and hope. In this film, students can learn about the devastating social and emotional toll of the genocide – as well as the extraordinary courage and imagination Rwandans are showing in rebuilding their lives and country. This guide offers teachers the opportunity to frame discussions in a number of different ways around issues of peace and reconciliation, trauma and healing, women’s social and financial empowerment, grassroots social action and change.

Note: Sweet Dreams is a documentary—the people in the film are not actors. They are going about their regular lives, and the filmmakers have captured their story and turned it into a film. It was filmed over a period of one and a half years. There are scenes of intense sadness as well as scenes of joy and humor.

Brief Historical Overview

By the early 1990s, Rwanda, a small country with an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, had one of the highest population densities in Africa. About 85 percent of its population is Hutu; the rest is Tutsi(14%), along with a small number of Twa(1%), a Pygmy group who were the original inhabitants of Rwanda.

For most of its early history Rwanda was a monarchy, ruled by a Tutsi king. The divisions between the two ethnic groups were primarily economic – the minority Tutsis owning cattle and the majority Hutus, under their rule, working the land.

Part of German East Africa from 1894 to 1918, Rwanda came under the League of Nations mandate of Belgium after [World War I](#), along with

neighboring Burundi. During this colonial period the ruling Belgians favored the minority Tutsis over the Hutus, exacerbating the tendency of the few to oppress the many, and created a legacy of tension by issuing racial identity cards distinguishing the two groups.

A Hutu revolution in 1959 forced as many as 300,000 Tutsis to flee the country. By early 1961, victorious Hutus had forced Rwanda's Tutsi monarch into exile and declared the country a republic. After a U.N. referendum that same year, Belgium officially granted independence to Rwanda in July 1962. Ethnically motivated violence continued in the years following independence. In 1973, a military coup installed Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a moderate Hutu, in power. Over the next 20 years, with the pressure from exiled Tutsi forces mounting, an extremist Hutu movement grew. Its mandate "Hutu Power" exhorted Hutus to rid the country of the Tutsi "cockroaches" once and for all.

On April 6, 1994 a plane carrying President Habyarimana as well as the President of Burundi was shot down. Though it is not known whether this was done by Hutu extremists or the opposing Tutsi forces (RPF) it was the spark that ignited the flame of Genocide.

Over the next 100 days (from April to July 1994), as many as 800,000 Tutsis were killed. Begun by the extreme Hutu nationalists in the capital city of Kigali, the genocide spread throughout the country with staggering speed and brutality, as ordinary citizens and gangs of young men (known as the Interhamwe) were incited by local officials and the Hutu Power government to take up arms against their neighbors. Though the genocide was explicitly directed to eradicate the Tutsis in Rwanda –there were also moderate Hutus killed as well as retaliatory and revenge killings by the Tutsi forces.

The current President, Paul Kagame, was formerly the General of the Tutsi –led Rwandan Patriotic Front, which put an end to the genocide.

Aftermath of the Genocide

One of the extraordinary and most difficult aspects of the Rwandan genocide was its intimacy. People were brutally slaughtered by their neighbors, teachers by their students, workers by their colleagues - mostly with the familiar farm implement, the machete.

Now, just 20 years later and within one generation, they are attempting to

live together again. This is a daunting social and political task.

The government has put in place several programs designed to build a united Rwanda, which require their own separate study. Among these are the Gacaca courts (“justice on the grass”), the abolition of the former quota systems in education and the Month of Commemoration, documented in the film. The government mandate is to create a new Rwanda, in which the former ethnic categories are abolished. Yet shattered lives and psyches are not easily healed.

Sweet Dreams documents a unique grass roots approach to creating new social and psychological possibilities for the future.

General Questions or Activities:

Before watching the film:

What do you know about Rwanda? Where is it? Who lives there? What events have happened there?

After watching the film:

Have your impressions about Rwanda, or Africa in general, changed? What are the themes of the film, and the “big ideas” explored in the film? What is the relevance to your life? To other countries around the world?

Specific Discussion Questions:

1. How much did you know about the Rwandan Genocide before watching **Sweet Dreams**? Did the film achieve a good balance between information on the genocide and how it impacted the present state of the country?
2. Was the Rwandan genocide different from other genocides you might have learned about? In what way?
3. Ingoma Nshya means “New Drum or New Era”. Why was this chosen as the name of the drum troupe?
4. Why is it important that Ingoma Nshya (the drumming troupe) consisted of women only? Discuss ideas of women’s empowerment – for the women themselves and for society as a whole.

5. Why is the shop called Inzizi Nziza (Sweet Dreams) and why is that the film's title? What kinds of dreams is the film talking about? Do you think the women have been changed by their involvement in these projects?
6. How does a country recover from such an immense atrocity as a genocide? Does a country ever recover? Does time heal all wounds, or are more active steps towards reconciliation with such a painful past necessary?
7. Why did Kiki have the idea for an ice cream shop? Could it equally as well have been any other kind of shop or restaurant? What does ice cream represent? When do people choose to buy ice cream? In which ways can this lead to an improved quality of life for the local community in Butare, Rwanda?
8. What is your relationship to music? Discuss the concept of "the healing power of music," and any personal experience you have had with music as a tool to transform pain and suffering.
9. Women in the drumming troupe come from both tribes that were involved in the Rwandan Genocide. Mothers, daughters and sisters of both victims and perpetrators came together. Discuss the notions of reconciliation and forgiveness.
10. Have you ever had to forgive someone the seemingly unforgivable, or be forgiven for something terrible? What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome in this process?
11. The film documents some of the events in the April, the month of Mourning and Remembrance. Discuss the scene in the National Stadium as it relates to trauma and healing.
12. Although this film is specifically about Rwanda, do you think there are lessons in the film for other people in other places?
13. Are there situations in your own life or within your community that could be addressed in some of the ways shown in the film? Does it have to be drumming and ice cream? Or, what might other meaningful initiatives be?

14. Unlike many documentaries, **Sweet Dreams** intertwines stories that might not ordinarily go together: drumming, genocide, ice cream. It has different moods: intense sadness, joy and humor. There are no experts telling you what to think. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to make a film like this?
15. Do you think you get a full picture of world events from the news media? How might you learn more about people and situations around the world?

Discuss the following quotes from the film:

“ Trying is very important. When you believe that something is possible, it’s done already” – Kiki Katese

“ If you bring development to the women, you bring development to the entire family” – male villager

“ Reconciliation is not only about two people(s)- people need to reconcile with themselves, with happiness, with life.” – Kiki Katese

Recommended Readings

1) *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With our Families: Stories from Rwanda.* By Phillip Gourevitch. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1998.

2) *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda.* by General Roméo Dallaire, N.Y.: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004.

3) *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak.* by Jean Hatzfeld with Preface by Susan Sontag