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COEXIST VIEWER'S GUIDE

Dr. Mishy Lesser
July 2011
Work in Progress

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Using *Coexist* in classrooms and community groups

A Guide for Teachers and Youth Workers

Coexist tells the story of five survivors and three perpetrators of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and how they live side by side today. This Guide prepares young people for viewing the film, and gets them thinking and talking about how violence escalates, their beliefs about violence, life after genocide, and their own experiences as victims, bystanders, and perpetrators of violence. Through journaling, one-on-one conversations, small- and large-group discussion, and standards-aligned learning activities, educators can use the Guide to help viewers develop skills in critical thinking, collaboration, social and global awareness, and civic engagement, while reflecting on their own lives and clarifying their beliefs. Educators seeking lesson ideas on complex current issues will find creative and stimulating activities in the Guide that are relevant to their students.

Go to www.coexistdocumentary.org to screen and order the film. For help using the Guide and to share feedback, contact mishylessor@gmail.com.

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Director's Statement

Coexist began with my first trip to Rwanda in 2006 where we met and interviewed genocide survivors still trapped in the fog and pain of traumatic experiences so horrific they cannot be easily recounted. The experience jolted me out of the relatively comfortable world I had immersed myself in. Even before I got home an overwhelming voice inside of me said, I have to do more. These stories must be told, and I firmly believe the people who lived them are yearning to be heard. It wasn't until I visited a classroom to show clips from that journey three years later that I realized what this project would become, and what its core purpose would be. Students were truly inspired by the stories of Rwandans to consider opportunities for reconciliation and forgiveness in their own lives.

I went back to Rwanda in 2009 to shoot our documentary better equipped to understand how those students might learn from the stories we would uncover at reconciliation and healing workshops across the country. As we explored we learned the path to reconciliation is long, complicated, and uneven. Some people may never find ways to reconcile, instead favoring tolerance or coexistence. Others embrace reconciliation after years of work, conversation, reflection, and apologies. We also saw resilience, love, pain, and perseverance unlike anything I'd ever witnessed.


As I write this more than 2 years after that first classroom visit, many thousands of students have now seen our documentary film and learned valuable transformative lessons via this Viewer's Guide. What began as my quest to do something positive for the world has evolved into a specific mission aimed at provoking deep thought and reflection among youth and all people on issues that affect each of us: conflict, revenge, reconciliation, forgiveness, and truth.

I am honored to partner with *Coexist* Learning Director, Dr. Mishy Lesser, the author of this Guide. We are honored to take this journey with you and welcome your thoughts, critiques, feedback, and your stories. Because I will always believe: Films don't change the world. You do.™

Adam Mazo
Director of *Coexist*
June 2011

Introduction

The Film

Coexist is a forty-minute film that was created by documentary filmmaker Adam Mazo, with support from Mass Humanities  , the Yip Harburg Foundation, the Germeshausen Foundation, and in-kind donations from dozens of donors and supporters. Completed in September 2010, the film chronicles the experiences and perspectives of victims, perpetrators, and survivors of genocide in Rwanda, and the challenges Rwandans face as they try to end the cycle of violence that has caused catastrophic loss, incalculable suffering, and fear that continues to grip many Rwandans. Viewers will be introduced to Rwandans Agnes, Fifi, Jean, Gregoire, Theophilla, Solange Nyirasafari, Alexander, Sam Nyshimiyimana, Marc Gwamako, Domitilie, Elisabeth, Reverend Philbert Kalisa, and Fatuma Ndangiza, and Boston University Director of African Studies, Tim Longman, all of whom tell stories that reveal the complexity of forgiveness and reconciliation, and the level of distrust and fear that continues to grip many Rwandans. They share testimony in the hope that others will examine and learn from their excruciating experiences. A seven-minute Rwanda history video provides historic context for viewers and is usually screened before *Coexist*.

The Viewer's Guide

Coexist Viewer's Guide consists of five lesson plans and resource materials to support the teaching of Social Studies through an examination of the history of genocide, challenges and choices faced by post-genocide society, meanings of forgiveness and reconciliation, cycle of violence, personal beliefs, and the relationship between individual and collective responsibility to protect vulnerable groups from harm. It can be used for classes in History, Social Studies, Current Events, Civics and Government, and Language Arts. The guide is supportive of socio-emotional and moral development of students, and positive school climate campaigns. It is appropriate for Grade Levels 8-12 and post-secondary.

The core theme of the Guide is the pressing need for global citizens to learn to dialogue and de-escalate potentially harmful situations. Informed by four overarching goals, viewers of *Coexist* will learn to

1. Reflect on the origins of dehumanization, limitations of forgiveness, complexity of coexistence, danger of revenge, and challenges of rehumanization.
2. Deepen their understanding of violence, its emotional and structural causes, and impact.
3. Appreciate the dangers of othering, bullying, scapegoating, and stereotyping.
4. Develop and practice skills for speaking truthfully, listening compassionately, and acting to deter violence.

Coexist and the Viewer's Guide aim to foster social and emotional skill development in youth viewers so they can explore their own beliefs and feelings about violence, forgiveness, revenge,

reconciliation, and the importance of dialogue. In each lesson, the Guide aims to relate the material of the film to the experiences and realities of teenagers in the U.S. Although many youth viewers of *Coexist* in the U.S. will likely have no direct experience with genocide or mass atrocity, they may be familiar with individual and group behaviors that, in other historic contexts, have been identified as early precursors to genocide, such as name-calling, slander, blaming, scapegoating, isolating, humiliating, and targeting. The Guide supports the exploration of how atrocities can develop, from tension to polarization to acts of violence to mass murder and genocide.

By encouraging teens to connect their experiences with the Rwanda story, the Guide helps teachers examine with their students the justifications people use for violence and our collective desensitization to its devastating impact.

Five-Lesson Overview

Lesson plans begin with learning objectives, and include an opening activity, key questions for reflection, a main activity, and a closing activity. Discussion questions can easily be retooled and used as writing prompts. Two lesson plans contain homework assignments, and one provides quiz questions and answers.

The Guide offers an extensive range of activities for teachers to choose from to meet the learning needs, interests, and experiences of students. There are no time parameters in the Guide, as experienced teachers will determine their duration based on a variety of variables. Because class time and interests vary, teachers will find that there is far more material in each lesson of the Guide than can be used in a single class. In some cases, teachers may decide to cover a lesson from the Guide over the course of several class sessions. Both the Guide and film are designed to support this approach.

Teachers are invited to consult with the author of the Guide about their readiness to screen the film, how to prepare students for disturbing images and stories, and what set and sequence of learning activities could best support the learning goals and objectives of their class.

The five lessons are:

1. Preparing to screen *Coexist*
2. Screening *Coexist*
3. After screening *Coexist*
4. What It Means for Me
5. Action Steps

The author wishes to thank the scores of teachers, students, school administrators, youth, and youth workers, whose willingness to wrestle with the complex and at times disturbing issues posed by *Coexist* have helped shape this Guide.