

Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds

A Refugee's Search for Home

By Mondiant Dogon with Jenna Krajeski

Guide written by Chris Gilbert

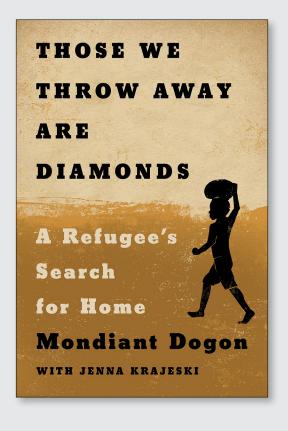
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INTRODUCTION –

In Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds, the reader experiences Mondiant Dogon's moving story. A survivor of massacres caused by people who committed genocide in Rwanda and came to Congo, and a former "forever refugee," Mondiant invites the reader to explore a number of noteworthy themes and real-world issues: the on-the-ground reality of the Rwandan genocide, the immense challenges faced by long-term refugees, the devastating emotional and psychological effects of trauma, the liberating power of education, and the importance of hope and persistence. This is a timely, thought-provoking book, and this guide was written to assist teachers and students as they engage with it. Through the questions, activities, and resources featured within, students are encouraged to adopt an analytical view of Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds and related topics. This guide contains five sections: discussion questions, various classroom activities, research opportunities, service learning projects, and other resources for students, teachers, and programs. Each section is applicable to multiple curricular areas, and as such, this document has an interdisciplinary focus. Activities can also be easily modified and scaled, as they were constructed with flexibility in mind. Lastly, students are encouraged throughout to utilize technology and work collaboratively as they complete their First-Year Experience® (FYE). This guide should provoke meaningful analysis and reflection, and it supports the overall purpose of the FYE: to fuse rigorous classroom study with immersive, communal learning experiences.

First-Year and Common Reading Guide



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can be posed to an entire class, given to small groups, used to initiate online discussions, etc.

- 1. In the opening section of *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds*, Mondiant mentions several reasons why he wrote the book. What are his reasons? Which of these reasons resonates most with you?
- 2. The moment that a young Mondiant sees his father bleeding from the head undoubtedly alters the trajectories of both of their lives. In what ways does this moment also alter Mondiant's identity?
- 3. "Children who become refugees can forget, our brains growing over the trauma like saplings covering the forest floor after a fire. But even though specific memories are incomplete, our experience lives deep inside us like a diseased organ" (p. 24). How does this quote illustrate the complicated relationship between trauma and memory? Relatedly, why do you think traumatic experiences are so particularly damaging for children?
- 4. "It's not anyone's fault they don't know what happened in my country. There are a lot of things that I don't understand about that history, and my life is the product of those wars and upheavals" (p. 28). Reflect on your own knowledge of the Rwandan genocide. Is this something you were familiar with prior to reading this book? Why do you think this period of history is not more widely taught in US schools?
- 5. "We thought of the Hutus we paid to work on our farms as our friends, and it was only after they attacked us that we tried to see how they might have resented us for insisting on these roles, as though we were born to own land and they were born to work on it" (p. 53). What role did social class play in the genocide?
- 6. "We began to forget that any of our Hutu neighbors in Bikenke had ever been our friends. A gulf opened between us, so that no amount of evidence of their own suffering could bring us back together" (p. 58). In what ways did the genocide dehumanize both Hutus and Tutsis?
- 7. "Our suffering was both invisible and visible, and for those first few weeks the UNHCR focused on treating what it could see" (p. 111). What is Mondiant getting at here? How can suffering be both visible and invisible? How can, and should, invisible suffering be treated?
- 8. Sadly, Mondiant became a child soldier. How do you think this experience ultimately affected him? Additionally, what do you think should be done now to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers?
- 9. In what ways does this book offer a critique of colonialism?
- 10. How did the Rwandan genocide specifically affect women? What forms of violence and trauma did women experience?
- 11. How would you describe the significance of education for Mondiant and other refugees?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- 12. Were you surprised to learn of the existence of "forever refugees"? Relatedly, consider the sort of media coverage this issue receives. Do you think Americans are sufficiently aware of the long-term refugee experience? What can be done to build greater awareness of this issue?
- 13. How do you think Mondiant's mother and father were ultimately changed by their experiences during the genocide?
- 14. In what ways does the book offer a window into Mondiant's adult struggle with trauma, loss, and grief? Do you think the book itself could be viewed as a part of Mondiant's healing process? Why? Why not?
- 15. In what ways are refugees like diamonds? What are some of the strengths and gifts they have to share with the world?
- **16.** If you could ask Mondiant one question related to this book, what would you ask and why?

VARIOUS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following are activities applicable to a variety of curricular areas.

1. Explore the Rwandan Refugee Camp Experience

"As the months and years passed, Gihembe started to look less like a refugee camp and more like a settlement. Tents bloomed outward in two large sections from a spine of mud-and-tin buildings so that, if viewed from above, it began to resemble a pair of lungs, surrounded by neat rows of farmland and patches of forest" (p. 120).

Through his vivid narration, Mondiant brings the reader into the refugee camps in Rwanda and shines a light on the refugee experience in these settings. Invite your students to explore this experience through this activity.

To begin, ask students to view the following linked video below on refugee life in Rwanda: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWjwAhVvTEQ&t=1095s

While they watch, have them jot down connections to *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds*. The video explores refugee life in Rwanda, so students should be able to make multiple connections with the text. After students view the video, invite them to reference their notes and share their observations in pairs or small groups. Next, transition to a whole-class discussion. Use the following questions to facilitate this conversation:

- What general connections did you make between the video and the book?
- How does the video footage compare with the way you visualized Gihembe while reading the book?
- What questions does the video raise for you about refugee life in the Rwandan camps?

VARIOUS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

2. Compare and Contrast Rwandan Genocide Survivor Stories

"I am still reading all the books about the Rwandan genocide—histories and news analyses, manifestos and government reports. The amount of information and the number of voices can be overwhelming. I have read dozens of personal accounts of the genocide, each intimate, and still so familiar. These are the stories of Tutsis who watched their families die..." (p. 30).

After reading *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds*, have students access the three sources below. Each one details the experiences of a number of Rwandan genocide survivors.

- "'Music to kill to': Rwandan genocide survivors remember RTLM" from Al Jazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/6/7/music-to-kill-to-rwandan-genocide-survivors-remember-rtlm
- Survivor testimonies from the UN: https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/ rwanda/survivor-testimonies.shtml
- Survivor stories from the USC Shoah Foundation: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWIFgIFN2QqjSd8ndT1E86G1A8KA7bRlt

To begin, have students browse these sources. Ask students to select one survivor story to compare and contrast with Mondiant's experience in *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds*.

To facilitate this process, instruct students to use a Venn diagram. In one circle, students should note unique aspects of the survivor experience depicted in their chosen narrative; in the other circle, they should note unique aspects of Mondiant's experience. In the middle section of the Venn diagram, students should record similarities. Have students pair up and share their analysis before transitioning to a whole-class conversation. Students could also further explore their noted similarities and differences through extended writing.

3. Meet with President Kagame

"I would tell President Kagame about the struggles refugees still endured while in camps, and how difficult it was for us to go to school, raise families, and get jobs. I would tell him that we were grateful for his help—without him leading Rwanda and opening refugee camps, my family would probably be dead—but that now we needed something beyond safety. We needed a real home" (p. 316).

In the latter section of his book, Mondiant meets with President Kagame. During this meeting, Mondiant has an opportunity to express what he believes the Rwandan government should do for the refugees living within its borders. Through this writing activity, invite your students to step into their own meeting with President Kagame.

To begin, ask your students to draft a list of requests they would make during an imagined meeting with President Kagame to benefit refugees. What policy changes and commitments would they ask the president to make? What forms of aid would they argue the Rwandan government should prioritize? Additionally, ask your students to consider *how* they would attempt to persuade the president to support refugees. Would students use logical appeals, emotional appeals, or some combination of both?

VARIOUS CLASSROOM
ACTIVITIES
(CONTINUED)

Using the questions above, have your students write out a general description of what their requests and approach would look like. Additionally, give students the option to describe the meeting through creative writing. If students choose this option, have them describe a setting for the meeting, craft dialogue, and specify an outcome.

4. Craft a Support Map

"My memory is fractured, but when I think about everything that happened to me and my family, one thing I know for sure is that when we needed help, we somehow found it. There are good people all over Congo, from all of the country's hundreds of communities, who would help each other if they had the chance" (p. 212).

While undeniably centered on the horrors of genocide, Mondiant's story also details the profound acts of kindness and support that helped him persist and survive. Indeed, Mondiant is assisted in various ways by people such as Alphonse, the pastor and his wife, Tim Armstrong, and others. Invite your students to analyze these individuals, and the forms of support they offer Mondiant, through the construction of a support map.

To begin, ask students to review *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* with a general focus on forms of support (let students define this, but support could be emotional, educational, physical, etc.) Mondiant receives from others. Ask them to take notes as they search the text for this content. Next, ask them to use one of the free resources below to construct a concept map that depicts their findings.

- https://creately.com/lp/concept-map-maker/
- https://www.visme.co/concept-map-maker/

In this concept map, they should place Mondiant at the center. Then, have students reference their notes and generate a visual map that features several individuals and descriptions of the forms of support they provided Mondiant. To close the activity, ask students to present their work to the class. Additionally, ask them to explain how their concept maps developed their understanding of the various forms of support refugees should be provided.

5. Gallery Walk

"I spent the rest of the massacre at the bottom of a latrine pit, where I had fallen in my panic, fracturing both my arms and my right leg on the way. The pit was hell. It was filled with bodies, some of which must have died in the first massacre and were already decaying and thick with a black sludge made from human waste and the charcoal-like rocks used to keep the pits from collapsing" (p. 99).

"The blue-and-white UNHCR tents were demoted to a hanging door or a curtain in front of the kitchen, stretched across the top of the walls until it could be replaced by a metal roof, or used to collect rainwater. Even after Gihembe came to resemble a town in its own right—with shops and a school and real homes—those scraps of UNHCR tents remained, forever tangled within the machinery of the refugee camp" (p. 121).

In *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds*, Mondiant provides a number of descriptive passages that construct vivid images of his experiences, both during the genocide itself and his subsequent life in refugee camps. To accentuate this visual experience, have students analyze related images in a gallery walk activity, described below.

VARIOUS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

A gallery walk requires students to move around the classroom while thoughtfully observing and analyzing visual content. To prep this activity, select five to eight images that you believe will provoke students to reflect on the text and think deeply. You can select these images from the following websites:

- "Facing Atrocity: Rwanda's Genocide" 22 photos that document the genocide https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/photos/2019/04/04/photos-remembering-rwandas-1994-genocide-25-years-later
- "AP Photos: 25 years ago, images exposed Rwanda's genocide"
 —note: features graphic content

 https://apnews.com/article/6b874574970b4670b362d7fbb2b07b39
- "Refugee Children speak about their lives through photos" a series of photos taken by adolescent refugees as part of UNHCR's "Youth Photography Project" https://www.unhcr.org/rw/12977-refugee-children-speak-lives-photos.html

After selecting the images, display each on its own designated laptop/tablet or print each out in color. Each image should be placed at a different location in the room, and desks should be arranged so that students can easily move around and quietly visit each image. Encourage students to spend sufficient time reflecting on each image, and as they do so, have them record responses to the following questions for each image:

- What would a good title for the image be? Why?
- What strikes you about the figure(s) (clothing, facial expression, etc.), setting, or object(s) featured in the image?
- How does the image make you feel? Explain.
- In what ways can you connect the image to Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds?

After students have circulated around the room, have them share their responses in small groups or during a whole-class discussion.

6. Digital Timeline Construction

Invite your students to utilize *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* and several reputable online sources to construct a digital timeline that charts the course of the Rwandan genocide. Allow students to work individually or in groups. Give students the freedom to determine where their timeline begins and ends. For example, students may wish to begin with the colonization of Rwanda by Germany, or they may start with the Belgian occupation of Rwanda. Students may choose to extend their timelines to the present day to illustrate the contemporary effects of the genocide, or they may end their timelines much sooner. At a minimum, students' timelines should reference the central events occurring immediately before, during, and after the genocide.

Students should reference important events and dates along with central figures, groups, and locations. Challenge students to include images, video, and other media in their timelines.

Free digital resources for this activity include Sutori (https://www.sutori.com/) and Venngage (https://venngage.com/features/timeline-infographics/).

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The following topics are designed to provide students with opportunities for extended inquiry and analysis.

In response to these, students could:

- Compose a research paper
- Deliver a presentation
- Design a lesson plan and teach a class
- Record a podcast (https://lifehacker.com/how-to-start-your-own-podcast-1709798447)
- Create a website (http://www.wix.com, http://www.weebly.com, and https://sites.google.com are excellent free resources for this)
- Use Adobe Creative Cloud Express (https://spark.adobe.com/) to create and share a variety of graphics and videos
- 1. "She listened with her friends to Hutu Power radio reports that described Rwandan Tutsis as animals, ripe for extermination. The radio was on so frequently, my mother began to wonder if perhaps it was true that Tutsis outside our village were different from us, as loathsome as the reports said" (p. 34). As this quote reveals, media played a powerful role in the Rwandan genocide. Perform research to learn more about how the media spread propaganda that inspired the genocide. What were the central media outlets involved in this effort to dehumanize Tutsis? How did these outlets accomplish this dehumanization (through the use of language, images, etc.)? How did the central players behind these media efforts profit from the dehumanization of Tutsis and the subsequent genocide? Be sure to explore the role Kangura magazine and Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) played.
- 2. "Around the world, more and more people were fleeing human rights catastrophes and wars. They were leaving home in search of food when climate change made it impossible to grow the crops they had relied on for centuries. They were being expelled by intolerant governments, leaving in the middle of the night for anywhere but where they were" (p. 129). As Mondiant notes, refugee crises are currently occurring in multiple countries across the globe. Select a country that is currently experiencing a refugee crisis and perform research while considering the following questions: What is the history of the crisis? What are its primary causes? Where are the refugees in your selected country fleeing to? What are the risks to those who remain behind? How should the crisis be addressed? You can use the following resource to help you identify a country you would like to focus on and initiate the research process: https://www.rescue.org/where-we-work.
- 3. "Through everything, school was the center of my life. I think this must be true for a lot of refugee children. It doesn't matter what the classroom looks like or who the teachers are, or even what is taught. It doesn't matter if we are threatened by violence. We will risk everything to study. If parents can send their children to school, all hope is not lost" (p. 152). Select a refugee camp, in Rwanda or elsewhere, and explore the state of education in your selected location. What educational opportunities exist in the camp? Do the schools

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

have adequate resources? What type of training, pay, and support do teachers receive? What pedagogical practices are utilized in the schools? How do these schools empower and transform the lives of refugee children? What obstacles do these schools face, and how should these obstacles be addressed? Finally, what sort of opportunities for higher education exist?

- 4. At the center of *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* is an exploration of the emotional and psychological effects of trauma. Review the text and analyze how repeatedly experiencing trauma affects Mondiant. What sort of emotional and psychological effects does he experience? What aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder are apparent? Extend your research beyond the book to learn more about the broader emotional, social, and psychological effects of experiencing trauma. How long does the damage typically persist? How do survivors cope? What forms of support exist? What role can storytelling/narrative play in the healing process?
- 5. "Refugee camps around the world would follow, their residents finding new homes and meaningful lives in countries that wanted them. All major governments would realize that resettlement was not only the humane thing to do, it was smart; who knew what we could contribute to Germany, or America, if given the chance" (p. 315). Mondiant's story highlights the need for countries to embrace programs and policies to facilitate the resettlement of "forever refugees." Research to learn more about the United States refugee resettlement process. What does the resettlement process consist of? What steps must refugees take to initiate resettlement? What obstacles do these refugees face? How should the refugee resettlement process, particularly as it relates to "forever refugees," be improved?

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

These projects are designed to connect students' learning experiences with the larger community.

1. Support a Charity or Organization That Aids Refugees

"It was one of many organizations that tried to help in refugee camps, whether by sending food or money or school supplies, or helping to build homes to replace tents or systems for fresh water. Sometimes these organizations offered exposure to the world, sending photographers who documented us in front of our homes or studying in the one-room school, children reaching their hands out toward the camera" (p. 264).

To initiate this activity, have students organize themselves into groups and invite them to select one of the charities described below (note that these are only suggestions; students can look online to locate others as well. If they do so, encourage students to vet charities through the use of https://www.charitynavigator.org and https://www.guidestar.org):

- Alight (https://wearealight.org/) works to support and provide opportunities to displaced people, refugees, and host communities.
- World Vision Rwanda (https://www.wvi.org/rwanda) implements a variety of programs to benefit vulnerable children and their families in Rwanda.

- The International Rescue Committee (http://www.rescue.org) works to assist people affected by humanitarian crises.
- USA for UNHCR (https://www.unrefugees.org/gifts/all-gifts/school-supplies/ #story) allows users to donate money to purchase school supplies for refugee children.
- UNHCR Rwanda (https://www.unhcr.org/rw/how-to-help) works to support refugees located in Rwanda.
- Survivors Fund (https://survivors-fund.org.uk/) works to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide.

After students select a charity, ask them to plan and implement several different fundraising activities to support it. To provide students with some fundraising ideas, refer them to the extensive list located here: https://www.causevox.com/fundraising-ideas/.

Whatever students choose to do, encourage them to promote their efforts through social media. After students conclude their fundraising efforts, have them debrief the class and reflect on what was successful and what could be improved.

2. Volunteer with an Organization/Agency That Supports Refugees

This activity invites students to connect with other individuals who care about the refugee crisis by asking them to volunteer with an organization or local agency dedicated to assisting the many refugees who currently need aid. To begin, ask your students to access one or more of the following resources to help them find a local organization or agency they would like to assist:

- https://www.volunteermatch.org/
- https://usahello.org/how-to-help/
- https://www.rescue.org/volunteer
- https://www.unhcr.org/united-nations-volunteers.html
- https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview

Ask students to maintain a journal during their time volunteering so that they can share their experiences with classmates and the local community.

3. Host a Dinner for Refugees

To combat the alienation and cultural disconnect that many refugees undoubtedly experience, invite your students to plan and host a dinner for refugees in your area. To begin, encourage students to access the two resources below:

https://www.changex.org/us/unitedinvitations/guide
 This website outlines the process of hosting a "Welcome Dinner" for new arrivals in your area. The five-step guide featured here outlines how hosts can register their event, connect with people in their area, send invitations, and initiate the dinner.

http://refugeeswelcometodinner.com

This is the website for "Refugees Welcome," a "dinner project where refugees and non-refugees break bread and break barriers. Anyone can host a dinner—organizations, businesses, individuals, groups of friends. All you need is an open heart and a big enough table." Students can use this website to sign up to host a dinner, and they can also locate dinners that others are hosting.

Students can use either of these resources to get started, but regardless of which resource they use, encourage them to work collaboratively to plan their event. Additionally, students should carefully consider where they wish to host their dinner. Your school may provide space to host such an event, but the home of a professor, churches, and restaurants also offer potential locations for hosting the dinner. Local businesses may also wish to host.

Lastly, encourage students to reach out to local refugee resettlement agencies (https://www.wrapsnet.org/rp-agency-contacts/ is a useful resource for this) to locate and invite refugees to the event.

4. Become an Expert and Educator

Have students select a topic related to *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* to research in small groups. Some suggested topics include:

- Child soldiers in Africa
- US policy related to refugees
- The failure of the US to intervene in the Rwandan genocide
- The state of education in refugee camps
- The psychological effects of experiencing trauma
- The existence of "forever refugees"

The purpose of this activity is for students to become experts on their topic so that they may effectively educate other members of the campus community. First, student groups should read and analyze the applicable sections of *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* while performing secondary research as well. After students have sufficiently researched their topic, have them answer the following two questions:

- 1. What is the essential information that others must know about my group's topic?
- 2. What are the controversial elements of my topic?

Finally, have students present their research to the campus community in such a way that it both informs and invites them to discuss the issue. Groups could:

- Staff an information booth (be sure to obtain permission first) in a visible area and distribute brochures, flyers, or other documents. Free web resources such as https://www.canva.com/ will work for this, or students could use programs such as Microsoft Publisher to create documents.
- Launch an online campaign through social media or a designed website. Encourage students to create captivating presentations through Prezi (http://www.prezi.com), Google Slides (http://www.google.com/slides/about/), or Microsoft Sway (https://sway.com).

Design and publish infographics. An infographic is a visual representation of
information that features short sections of text and multiple charts, graphs, and
other visuals. The digital medium offers students a unique way to package and
convey knowledge while sharpening their digital literacy skills. Free resources
for this include http://piktochart.com and http://piktochart.com and http://easel.ly.

Regardless of the format students select, their presentations should invite their audience to ask questions and engage in dialogue.

5. Debunk Myths Regarding Refugees

"If we don't tell people what our life is like, they are left only to imagine. Do you think that refugees simply leave their homes and stay somewhere temporarily before they are resettled? Do you think everyone in the world has a passport or is a citizen of a country? Do you think that refugees lead easy lives, collecting food or money we don't have to work for, living happily off the generosity of the UN and our host nations?" (p. 252).

Have students identify and debunk myths regarding refugees and the refugee crisis through the creation and distribution of brochures and/or fact sheets. These two document forms are ideal for this activity because they typically feature concise language, statistics, and are easily distributed and quickly read.

- To begin, place students in small groups. In these groups, students should list some of the most prominent myths they are familiar with regarding refugees.
 After this, have students perform online research to locate additional myths and information about them.
- Next, have students perform research (using credible sources) to debunk the myths they have identified.
- Finally, students should organize their information in a concise, visually
 appealing format. If possible, show them examples of exemplary brochures and
 fact sheets, and direct students to create their own and distribute them to the
 campus population. Note that students could also distribute digital versions of
 their work through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

Useful resources for this activity:

- https://refugeerights.org/news-resources/busting-myths-about-forced-migrants-refugees-and-public-benefits?gclid=Cj0KCQiAwqCOBhCdARIsAEPyW9lz3pRoXPdo1ipt-_QptzHNihQOjpwQAPOI6cFjIO9VXQWRu7fFxGkaAuNJEALw_wcB
 - "Busting Myths about Forced Migrants," a resource from the International Refugee Assistance Project
- https://www.unrefugees.org/news/myths-and-facts-about-refugees-in-theunited-states/
 - "Myths and facts about refugees in the United States," a resource from the UN Refugee Agency

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/debunked-the-5-biggest-refugee-myths/

"The 5 biggest refugee myths: debunked," a resource from the World Economic Forum

https://www.canva.com/create/brochures/
 A free, online brochure maker

 http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/promoting-interest/ fact-sheets/main

Suggestions and guidelines for composing fact sheets

OTHER RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PROGRAMS

The following are resources useful for an extended study of *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* and its related subjects.

- https://time.com/6105035/protracted-refugee-situation/
 "The Invisible Tragedy Facing Refugees Like Me," a piece by Mondiant Dogon
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNPI0pJotGE
 A conversation with Mondiant Dogon from Alight
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUCko3hMnrg
 A talk with Mondiant Dogon from Westport Public Library
- https://lithub.com/mondiant-dogon-on-writing-as-an-important-and-difficult-healing-process/

"Mondiant Dogon on Writing as an Important and Difficult Healing Process," a dialogue featuring Mondiant and his co-writer, Jenna Krajeski

- https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/rwanda
 Information on the Rwandan genocide from the United States Holocaust
 Memorial Museum
- https://www.unhcr.org/world-refugee-day.html
 Information on World Refugee Day from the UN Refugee Agency
- https://dallaireinstitute.org/

The official website of the Dallaire Institute, an organization focused on ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

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NOTES



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