



SHINE GLOBAL

IGNITE DISCUSSION GUIDE

War/Dance



Background

For many years, the country of Uganda in Africa experienced conflict and war within its own borders. One of the most active rebel groups was the Lord's Resistance Army, or the LRA. The LRA originally stated its mission was to overthrow the Ugandan government and impose its own ideals. However, it evolved into a movement of violence, led and directed by Joseph Kony.

This movie was made when villages in northern Uganda were under attack by the LRA; the rebel soldiers raided villages and committed atrocities such as rape, torture, execution, and the kidnapping of children. Boys were often forced into becoming soldiers or slaves and girls were forced into slavery or "given" to army leaders to be used as sex objects, or "wives." Most of the kidnappings took place at night, so children in rural areas often left their homes to hide in the countryside or in the cities. The children suffered terribly, being forced to observe or commit atrocities, becoming victims themselves, and losing their parents and families.

Uganda is home to many different tribes, or cultures. The conflict with the LRA in northern Uganda forced many people from the Acholi tribe to move to internally displaced persons camps where they could live in relative safety protected by the Ugandan Army. However, they were still vulnerable to attack by the LRA. Further, the Acholi people were not able to farm and live their traditional lives in the camps; they were crowded into a relatively small area often with inadequate sanitation facilities, and had to rely mostly on provisions handed out to them by the government.

War/Dance tells the story, in 2006, of children in the Patongo refugee camp in Northern Uganda. For these children, the chance to attend the National Dance Competition in Kampala, the capital city in southern Uganda, provided them with a release from the traumas of their daily life. This opportunity to participate in the universal human joy of music and dance, a central part of life for the Acholis, allowed the children to find physical and emotional release, be part of a unifying community, and demonstrate pride in their culture. *War/Dance* follows three of these children, Dominic, Rose, and Nancy, as they acknowledge the losses of the past and generate hope for the future.



Key Words

Acholi tribe: a group of people sharing the traditional Acholi culture, living in northern Uganda

Bush: an area of land that is not planted with crops and is covered with bushy vegetation and trees

Bwola: the traditional Acholi royal dance. It was once performed only for the chief, and then later for celebrations. It is performed today by children at their schools and festivals as a way of preserving Acholi culture.

Child soldier: a child who is forced into serving as a soldier in an armed conflict. Boys are forced to fight and girls to be sex slaves.

Displacement camp: a tented camp set up by a government to house people whose homes have been destroyed or who cannot safely remain in their villages due to armed conflict

Internally displaced: forced to move away from one's home and into another shelter in the same country, due to danger and conflict

LRA – Lord's Resistance Army: a violent rebel group and cult that has operated in Uganda and other African countries

Raid: a sudden, surprise attack

Rebel: a person who rises against a certain group or authority

Xylophone: a musical instrument consisting of a series of graduated wooden bars. Sound is made by striking the bars with a small wooden hammer.

Issues

- The effects of war on children and their demonstration of resilience
- The importance of music and dance to the strength of the human spirit
- The healing nature of belonging to a group, tradition, and culture
- Tribal identities that continue to be pervasive and can take priority over the formal political system

Supporting an Effective Discussion

The students and community members in your group may not have experience participating in productive discussion groups. Here are a few suggestions to help support an effective discussion.

To promote continuity of the discussion, you may want to introduce some prompts that can be used to facilitate one comment following another. For instance:

- To add on to that comment . . .
 - That makes me think . . .
 - That makes me realize . . .
 - This is important because . . .
 - On the other hand . . .
 - The reason for this is . . .
 - I dis/agree because . . .
- Think about the setup of the room. It is often helpful to move chairs into a circle, or to sit on the floor in a circle. In this way everyone can see each other and speak to the whole group.
 - Decide how you would like participants to join in the discussion. Raising hands is efficient, and students may be used to this method. However, it requires a leader to choose who is to speak next (and to be aware of who is chosen – for instance, care should be made to select hands from different parts of the room, and try to get voices from different groups, such as girls and boys). Some groups set the norm of “You may speak if no one else is speaking,” in order to get participants used to jumping in when another person is finished. You could also go around the circle, allowing people to pass. The most important aspect is to think about it ahead of time, and discuss the method(s) with the participants.
 - One way to ensure that everyone gets to share thoughts, even those who are hesitant to speak out, is to introduce the “turn and talk” opportunity. Periodically during the discussion, ask participants to turn and talk to a neighbor. They can group together in twos or threes. A little instructional preparation may be helpful if they’re not used to this method: stay seated, turn and face your neighbor, try to notice and make sure everyone has a partner, and listen as well as talk. This is meant as a brief interlude: after the partners talk for two to three minutes, the leader holds up his or her hand and asks everyone to focus on the group again.
 - If the group is interested in a certain topic or tangent and is having a productive discussion, don’t feel required to cover all the subjects or topics. The film is intense, and your group may need to sit with one topic and explore it.
 - Present questions and/or quotes for discussion in a visual manner — on a board, screen, or written on large cards. This may help the participants keep on track, especially those that are visually oriented.



Discussion Prompts

Opening Prompts to get the discussion started (you may want to go around in the circle and have everyone participate):

- What is one part of the film that struck you and stood out to you? How did it make you feel?
- Although the film is about children in a very different place, was there anything that the children did that felt familiar or that you could relate to your own life? Which of the children — Rose, Dominic, or Nancy — do you relate to the most?
- What is something you learned from the film?

How does music and dance affect these children? How has it affected you or someone you know? How does it help you to express yourself and your emotions? Here are some quotes to think about:

Nancy: “Songs make me forget about what is happening in the camp...all the disease, no food, people dying...Dancing is like closing my eyes and being with friends. It feels like I’m in my own home.”

Rose: “Before my father died, he told me singing was a great talent. Whenever I sing I think of him.”

Dominic: “I want to be a musician because playing the xylophone is a gift from God. Without music, there would be no life.”

As the discussion continues, choose one or more of these prompts to focus on:

- Think about the imagery that begins and ends the film – the bus/truck traveling along dusty roads with the children hanging on. How might this “journey” to the competition have affected the children and their outlooks? Have you had a journey that changed you in some way, large or small? How did your feelings during the movie change from the beginning to the end?
- Dominic says: “It’s difficult for people to believe our story, but if we don’t tell you, you won’t know.” What does this quote mean to you? Is it important to tell stories, even if they are traumatic or painful? Why?
- “Even though we are from the war zone, we can do good things.” Why do you think Rose said this? What would make the other children in the competition think less of Potongo because they are from the war zone? Can you think of a time when you have made assumptions about someone because of where or how they live? Has anyone made assumptions about you?
- Dominic says: “I want our school to be known as winners.” What do you think he meant by this? What is important about winning – is winning as a group different than as an individual? Potongo won the traditional dance competition. How do you think the children felt? How did they express it?
- Dominic says: “In my heart I am more than a child of war. I am talented. I am a musician. I am Acholi. I am the future of our tribe.” What is the meaning of tribe and tradition to these children? They have been displaced from their villages. How is their tradition and sense of self linked to their ancestral home? What is the importance of tradition and place in your life?



Additional Resources

The War/Dance Curriculum, developed by Amnesty International, has an extensive list of websites and other references.

<http://www.shineglobal.org/take-action/for-educators/war-dance/>

Credits

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Photos by Abbie Trayler-Smith.

How You Can Help

- Talk with your administration, teachers, or club sponsors to schedule a screening of *War/Dance* or another film at your school.
- If your school has an advisory program, talk with its coordinator about standardizing discussion of the film in every advisory group and asking students to evaluate the film.
- Explore your own community's traditions of dance, music, or other art forms and participate in or start a group practicing this art. Take inspiration from the Acholi children to use cultural tradition to help develop your sense of self and belonging.