



Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival  
Education Outreach Program Screening: *Life After Death*  
Director: Joe Callander  
75 minutes

Please use the below synopsis/Study questions to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays must be sent to Cinema/Chicago in order to be invited to subsequent film screenings.

### **Synopsis**

*Life after Death* follows the everyday lives of best friends, Kwasa and Fils, as they struggle to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide. Both boys embody the struggle of a generation left behind in the wake of violence and destruction.

### **The Rwandan Genocide**

Genocide has occurred many times, in almost every corner of the world throughout the course of human history. Genocide is the purposely systematic destruction, in part or in whole, of a racial, ethnic, or religious group. The Rwandan Genocide is considered to be one of the most atrocious instances of genocide in human history.

Rwanda's population has historically been made up of three ethnic groups; the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa. Although the Hutu have always greatly outnumbered the Tutsi, the Tutsi were the governing class of Rwanda for many years because they were favored by outside colonialist powers. The few ruling the many ignited ethnic tensions between the two groups, and the animosity between the two continued to grow in the years to come. In 1959, the Hutu revolution displaced the ruling Tutsi, and forced many other Tutsi to flee the country. Racial tensions continued to rise until 1990, when a group of Tutsi forces invaded Rwanda. A ceasefire was established and both the Hutu government and Tutsi forces agreed to create a transition government that would include Tutsi members. Hutu extremists, in an attempt to keep the Tutsi out of power, assassinated the Rwandan President who had agreed to the transitional government, and immediately initiated a mass murdering. Road blocks and barricades were set up by Hutu militia groups to prevent people from fleeing, and many Tutsi, as well as moderate Hutu, were slaughtered. Within three days of the assassination of the Rwandan President, a group of Hutu extremist leaders had formed an interim government and stepped into power.

After the new government stepped in, broadcasts over local radio stations called upon Rwandan citizens to take part in the mass killings. During a barbaric period of about three months, over 800,000 people

were violently murdered. Finally, the Tutsi forces regained control over most of the country, putting an end to the violence, and causing over two million Hutu to flee Rwanda.

What was left after the Rwandan genocide was a mere shadow of a country. Most of the cities and communities had been totally destroyed; all schools, hospitals, and government offices were ruined, and clean water supply lines were no longer operational. The Genocide forced millions to flee their homes and become refugees in other countries; at least 100,000 children were left homeless, or separated from their families, and at least 300,000 were thought to have been killed. Some 300 children, most under the age of ten, were accused of taking part in the mass murders of the Genocide. It is estimated that overall, about 200,000 people participated.

### **The Film and the Sponsors**

Kwasa is lucky enough to be sponsored by two American families, one being Dave and Suzette Munson, who aid him financially, visit him in Rwanda, and even help him find a job and a place to live. They also sponsored the making of this documentary. Despite the Munson's aid, the film illustrates Kwasa's trouble in keeping a job, as well as minor stints in prison. Kwasa repeatedly says that he is trying to make his life better and become a better person, yet the film concludes with Kwasa abandoning another job. Fils, who serves as a supporting character in the film, expresses his hope for eventually getting American sponsors. In the end of the film he describes his determination to keep whatever job he can get.

### **Study Ideas/Questions**

1. Do you think the Rwandan government should have been organized to include both Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups? How could the conflict between the two have been settled better?
2. Many people feel that other countries should have stepped in to prevent the mass murdering of Rwandan citizens. Do you think another country should have interfered to help establish peace? Why or why not?
3. How do you think Kwasa and Fils are affected by what they witnessed during the genocide? Why might it be hard for them to start over, given what they experienced?
4. What is the difference between Kwasa and Fils? Why does one seem to have more resolve to be successful than the other?
5. The scene in which Kwasa and Fils kill and cook a chicken can be a bit difficult to watch. How do you think this scene is representative of the documentary and the experiences of the boys as a whole?
6. Why do you think Kwasa struggles to keep a job? Is it because he is incapable of doing the work, or because he simply doesn't want to work?
7. Does the support Kwasa receives from the Munson's give him more of an advantage?
8. What do you think of the relationship between Kwasa and the Munson's? What do you think American families like the Munson's get out of sponsoring displaced Rwandan children like Kwasa?

9. The Rwandan Genocide is one of many tragic occurrences of mass killings of a population. Think about and research other occurrences of genocide around the world. Is there one instance that really stands out to you? Is there one that you consider to be worse than the others? The following links will be helpful to you.

- [Timeline of 20th and 21st Century Genocides](#)
- [Genocides Throughout History](#)

### **Useful Links and Resources**

[The Rwandan Genocide](#)

[Stories and Aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide](#)

[United Human Rights Council on the Genocide in Rwanda](#)

### **Interested in Film?**

**The Chicago International Film Festival's Student Film Council** is looking for members for the 2015-2016 school year! Visit [chicagofilmfestival.com](http://chicagofilmfestival.com) for more details!

Adobe Youth **Voices helps students/teachers get a film club started at their school to encourage** students to foster their creativity, practice their storytelling techniques, and even influence change through experimenting with society's most powerful medium. Find out more: [youthvoices.adobe.com](http://youthvoices.adobe.com)