

Book Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions for Running the Rift

1. Discuss the various ways in which you see the question of identity addressed in Running the Rift.
2. What reasons do you see for the Tutsi living in Uganda to invade Ruhengeri in 1991? How does it fit into the broader conflict between Hutu and Tutsi? Why do you think Roger joined the RPF?
3. What can you say about the class system in Rwanda after reading Running the Rift?
4. How did the Belgians exploit the class system, and how did this exploitation eventually contribute to the genocide?
5. Running can be seen as a metaphorical theme throughout Running the Rift. Why does Jean Patrick run from any awareness of politics? What challenges does the political reality in Rwanda pose in terms of his own belief system?
6. Physics and geology are two more themes that run through the novel. How do those subjects work as metaphors? Identify specific examples.
7. The title Running the Rift can have several meanings. Identify those meanings and discuss how they relate to the narrative.
8. Discuss the character of Coach. What do you see as his motivations concerning Jean Patrick? Do you see those motivations change over time?
9. Discuss how Coach's belief system may have changed once the genocide started. Why do you think he took his own life? Do you think he let Jean Patrick live, or did he miss?
10. Identify issues of "culture clash" with Jonathan and Susanne. Why does Bea sometimes bristle around them, and why does she mistrust Jonathan to speak out on behalf of the Rwandan people?
11. How do you see the role of the media in the genocide? Does the role change or intensify over the course of the years between 1991 and 1994?
12. Can you draw any parallels between the media campaign in Rwanda and that in Germany before and during the Holocaust? How about other genocides, such as those in Bosnia or Darfur? Any parallels between Rwanda and what you see happening in the United States?
13. Given all the disturbing warning signs regarding the approaching genocide, why do you think more Tutsi did not decide to leave before it started? Why do you think Roger didn't insist the family escape earlier?
14. How do you see Pascal's role in the genocide? Was he guilty of abetting it?
15. Who, if anyone, do you think acted heroically during the genocide?
16. There are many nonfiction books addressing the subjects of the Holocaust and genocide more generally. What role do you think fiction plays in telling this kind of story, and how is its role different than that of non-fiction? Why is literature of witness important?

Discussion Questions from Naomi Benaron

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Supporting Documents



[Running the Rift Discussion Questions PDF](#)

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[Online Events Brochure](#)

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