

INANGA: A SONG OF SURVIVAL IN A DAUGHTER'S RWANDA
A Film Produced by Gregory Barz

Curriculum Guide
by Matthew Clark (M.Ed., 2011)

PREFACE

This documentary film may serve as a catalyst for discussion among students ranging in age from elementary to collegiate level. Although specific questions may work for each grade level, it is recommended that the instructor read the entire Curriculum Guide to devise the best ways to implement it in the classroom.

The reasoning behind using this film in a curriculum is simple. It provides details about the culture and history of Rwanda by focusing on a traditional Rwandan instrument, the *inanga*. While many films about Rwanda focus primarily on the 1994 genocide, this documentary projects an optimistic view of contemporary everyday life in Rwanda via the story of a single musical instrument.

This film was produced by Gregory Barz who was assisted by Patrick McGovern and Scott Krenitski on field research and recording trips to Rwanda in 2009 and 2010. Originally on a quest to re-interview and film the elder musician Kirusu Thomas, an *inanga* player once associated with the royal Tutsi court, they discovered on their return in 2010 that Kirusu had died only days before their return to engage filming. Not to be deterred, Barz sought another means of communicating the story of the *inanga* and Rwandan culture to students all over the world.

I encourage you to watch the film and to peruse the Curriculum Guide to decide when the time is right to show this to your class. Students may need some introduction to what they are about to see, although there are no violent or graphic images in the film. The ability to read subtitles is important, as all verbal interaction in the film is translated either from French or Kinyarwanda (the local Rwandan language).

Thank you for sharing this valuable gift of music and culture in a contemporary African context with your students.

-Matthew Clark

Some Facts

- ❖ In the 100 days of the 1994 genocide, approximately 800,000 people were killed in the Rwandan *genocide* (killings based on ethnicity). The two ethnic groups involved were the Tutsis and the Hutus. The former ruling class, the Tutsis, along with moderate and sympathizing Hutus, were besieged by a sect of radical Hutus bent on eradicating Tutsis.
- ❖ Today, Rwanda's population has experienced growth, but approximately half of the population is under 18 years of age.
- ❖ Today, peaceful politics have been instated in Rwanda, but those who lived through the period of the genocide will not soon forget it or its effects on everyday life and culture in contemporary Rwanda.

Some Terms

- ❖ **inanga** – chordophone instrument made from a single cord doubled over up to eleven times to create what appears to be an 11-stringed instrument that is plucked with the fingers.
- ❖ **genocide** – a policy of deliberate and systematic killing and extermination of a group of people based on their ethnicity, race, or nationality.
- ❖ **mwami** – “king” in history Rwandan courts.

Some People

- ❖ **Sophie Nzayisenga** – well-known *inanga* player in contemporary Rwanda. Teaches and plays *inanga* in a desire to propagate the instrument to future generations. Daughter of Kirusu Thomas.
- ❖ **Kirusu Thomas** – late father of Sophie and one of the most respected *inanga* players (or traditional elder musicians, for that matter) in Rwanda. For a long time, Kirusu played in the courts of the *mwami* [king].
- ❖ **Sibomana Athanase** – *inanga* player featured in the film. Village leader (plays for large groups of children)

ELEMENTARY (*adaptable to grades 2–8*)

In the film, what are some of the signs that we are in another country? If we were there, what might we see, hear, smell, and feel? Although there are obvious differences, in what ways are these signs similar to your own culture?

Answers will vary, but students may highlight language, clothing style, design of houses, and the sound/timbre of instruments (they are certainly *not* piano or guitar) or materials instruments are made of (wood and string). You might have similar cultures in that you share language, clothing, instruments, etc., and many of your instruments might also made of wood and string like the *inanga* and others seen in the documentary.

In the film, we see that the *inanga* has been an important instrument for generations in Sophie’s family and in many others. Why has it remained a staple of their culture? What are some of your favorite family traditions? Which ones do you want to share with your friends?

Music in general is crucially important to Rwandan culture. Rwandans use their music to *express* history, messages, and emotions, and the *inanga* has been a part of the culture for a very long time; thus, it has a special link with the Rwandan culture. Student responses will vary.

SECONDARY (*adaptable to grades 7–12*)

Midway through the film, Sibomana Athanase states, “No one knows who first created [the *inanga*] ... all we know is that it is part of Rwandan culture.” What might he mean by this statement? What do you expect might be the meaning behind village children watching and listening to Sibomana so intently?

Sibomana is likely referring to the longevity of the *inanga* as a staple of Rwandan life and history. He comments that *inanga* competitions are sometimes held, demonstrating both the instrument's core recreational and educational value; this is also evident from the village elders' playing of the *inanga* and other local instruments recreationally. The village children watch Sibomana as a master of his craft (playing the *inanga*) because it is a valued aspect of Rwandan culture and history.

At the end, we hear the Rwandan popular music star Meddy discussing the importance of keeping the *inanga* alive. One way he contributes to this is by supporting other musicians who incorporate traditional *inanga* music into their popular songs. (Over the credits, we hear another popular hip-hop song that samples Sophie's *inanga* playing.) Think of some of your favorite songs that you often hear in public or on the radio. Are they mostly pop, folk, classical, rap, etc.? Do any of them combine more than one genre? Could you imagine hearing, for example, classical/pop fusion or folk/rap fusion?

One point Meddy is making is that this older music and culture must be kept alive for future generations; further, such musical effort that include or incorporate the traditional *inanga* music in songs may contribute to post-genocide healing in a war-torn country. Student answers will vary for the integration of folk with popular music; however, some possible examples might include some types of country music and pop/hip-hop that opens with or interludes with a strain of classical music.

COLLEGIATE (*adaptable to grades 10–collegiate*)

During the documentary's village "jam session," Sophie hands her *inanga* to a child (in fact, her nephew), who immediately begins to play the instrument. What is the symbolism behind this gesture? Why might the filmmakers have wanted to include this transaction in the film? How does this scene demonstrate the transmission of tradition in regards to the *inanga*?

This transaction symbolizes many things, including the *inanga*'s longstanding cultural importance for Rwandans. It may also symbolize how music may connect people, even across generational divides (notice the elder village men, the adult Sophie, and the child). Since the boy is Sophie's nephew, it may also represent how a family member may value something to such a great extent that she wants to teach it to her nephew. Finally, it may also stand for the idea that culture and music may reunite and heal post-genocide Rwanda.

How has the *use* of the *inanga* musical instrument changed over time? How has the *use* of music changed over time in Rwanda? What are some ways that *you* use music in *your* own country, and how has *your* use of music evolved or developed over time?

The *use* of music is not something that we always think about when we listen to or play music. However, in many cultures, music serves specific functions in certain contexts. For instance, the *inanga* was originally a court instrument that served specific functions in regards to the *mwami* (king), but is now used for entertainment, recreation, or preservation of culture by singing songs associated with the instrument to tell histories. From the documentary film, it seems that much of Rwanda's music today references the

genocide and/or the progression toward peace. In your own country, has the use of music shifted from a subject of study and worship to entertainment or even to the point of background sound?

ACTIVITIES

Activity One—Geography/Culture

Can you find Rwanda on a map of Africa? In what geographic area is Rwanda located? Do some further research to discover more about other aspects of Rwandan culture (*e.g.*, food, clothing, language, music, history, money, etc.). What are some of the countries that border Rwanda? Do some further research to discover whether the cultures and music(s) of those countries are similar to those of Rwanda.

Activity Two—Building Your Own *Inanga*

Do some research on the history of the instrument (What materials would be used? What is the inspiration for playing *inanga*?). Refer to the bibliographic materials cited in the booklet accompanying the documentary film and audio CD. You can create a model *inanga* from yarn and cardboard by following these steps:

- ❖ Materials needed:
 - a. Cardboard slat measuring approximately 24" x 8"
 - b. Yarn (approximately 24')
- ❖ Cut 11 equally-spaced slits in both 8" sides
- ❖ Tie off one end of yarn with a knot; weave yarn through all 22 slits; tie off other end of yarn.
- ❖ If desired, decorate the body (cardboard) of your *inanga* with symbols such as "*", "RWANDA", or other that you choose.
- ❖ Now you have your model *inanga*! On an actual *inanga*, the materials would be wood and cord, and the strings would be tightened to different tensions to produce different tones.

FOR THE MUSIC TEACHER BONUS QUESTIONS AND CURRICULAR IDEAS

The following musical concepts are present to a great degree in Rwandan *inanga* music and could be taught in conjunction with viewing this film.

- ❖ ostinato rhythms
- ❖ pentatonic scales
- ❖ improvisation
- ❖ dynamic stasis
- ❖ text-music relationship
- ❖ informality of music-making
- ❖ organic nature of music creation
- ❖ timbre (different from Western)

After introducing these concepts, a teacher might ask students to list all of the salient musical features that they hear while watching this film.

