

Making Sense of World Conflicts

Lesson plan 8: Corneille – Music of life

Age group: 14–17

Objectives

To consider how the causes and effects of conflict can affect individuals, and to look at one individual's response. To show how the use of language can convey powerful messages.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will have explored social and moral issues through contemporary texts including poetry and non-fiction texts; and examined how people make sense of difficult experiences through language and image.

You will need

The **worksheet: Music of life** and the **worksheet: Corneille's French R 'n' B** (both below). The **Rwanda country profile** (below) is optional.

What to do

Starter

1. Corneille is a Rwandan-born singer, now based in Montreal, who has created his own R'n'B, celebrating his new life after the tragic genocide in his homeland. This activity uses the positive moves that Corneille has made to overcome his incredibly difficult childhood experiences to show how people move on after horrific experiences of conflict. Give pupils this brief background on Corneille.
2. If pupils have not already carried out work on Rwanda and the conflict that took place there ten years ago then check that they know where Rwanda is and locate it on a map if possible. You could distribute copies of the **Rwanda country profile** (worksheet).
3. Give pupils in pairs copies of the translation of one of his songs and ask them to read the words. They should discuss what they think the message of the song is and whether it is optimistic and positive or not.

Activity

4. Give pupils the article about Corneille's life, **Corneille's French R 'n' B** (below), and ask them to read it. If they need further information, the full version of this interview is available **online** (http://www.rfimusique.com/musiqueen/articles/091/article_7928.asp).

5. Ask pupils in pairs to plan a mini documentary of fifteen minutes to tell the story of Corneille's life. They should make notes about the background information they will include, the places where they would like to shoot film and create a list of people they would like to interview. They should draw out a storyboard of between ten and sixteen frames. This should show the scenes that they would include and include brief notes of the points to include with each scene, whether background or interview material. They should indicate how long each scene will last.

6. Depending on the time available you can ask pupils to do further online research into Corneille, his music and his life. Or you can give them information and images printed from various sites such as Corneille's own website (<http://www.corneilleonline.com/>) and Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk) for details of his albums. You can also use search engines to find more material and images. Additionally, you (and the pupils if appropriate) could also access the Oxfam website at for more information on Rwanda today and its history.

7. Pupils can then display their storyboards. If time they could write the complete commentary to accompany their storyboard.

Closing discussion

8. Discuss the ways in which Corneille has made something positive out of the terrible events of his youth. Is music a good medium for expressing difficult things and deep feelings? Why or why not?

9. If pupils were to meet Corneille what would they say to him?

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Worksheet: Music of life

Corneille is a singer, now based in Montreal, who has created his own R'n'B, celebrating his new life after the horrific conflict and genocide in his homeland of Rwanda in Africa. These are some of the words of one of his songs on the album *Parce qu'on vient de loin* (Because we come from far away).

Alone in the world
People often say that I look as if I have
Everything I want, but they don't know about
The ghosts which haunt me and
The requiems which I sing to myself.
I pretend to be tough every day which goes by
But the stones of every wall
Will break one day.
Perhaps I am the rock which people think I am
But I'm more fragile than you think.
Mother said to me before she left,
'Don't ever show your weaknesses
And if the worst comes to the worst,
Be strong and swallow your tears
Because your pride will be your best weapon.'
So I know how to laugh when I have to
But you mustn't think I fall apart when no-one's looking .
I walk tall so that I don't bend
And I sing often
In order not to cry.
When I think of my life,
I face my nights.
Each day which dawns I say to myself that
I'm alone in the world
There's nothing I can do about it
I'm alone in the world
I can't stay silent about it any longer
I'm alone in the world
I feel lonely in the world.

Extract from song written and performed by Corneille
English translation of *Seul au monde* C/A: Corneille © Level Music Inc by kind permission of
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Worksheet: Corneille's French R'n'B

Acclaimed as one of the hottest new arrivals on the French-speaking music scene, Corneille made a major impact with his debut album, *Parce qu'on vient de loin* (Because we've come from far away), released in February 2003. The Rwandan-born singer, now based in Montreal, has created his own individual style of French R'n'B, celebrating his new life after the tragic genocide in his homeland.

Given his first-hand experience of the Rwandan genocide, it is perhaps not surprising that Corneille has evolved into such a forceful personality. The singer freely admits that writing the songs on his album *Parce qu'on vient de loin* was a way of exorcising both collective dramas and his own personal nightmares triggered by a day in April 1994 when the army broke into his family home in Kigali. 'I lost my whole family that day,' says Corneille, 'My father, my mother, my brothers and my sisters were all wiped out while I was in the same room as them. I managed to escape the massacre at the last minute, diving down behind the sofa to hide. The soldiers never stopped to check whether their killing spree had spared anyone.'

After coming so close to death himself, the singer appears to have chosen to celebrate life in his music. But there's an undeniable political edge to his songs at times, too. 'My album's dedicated to all those who feel they've been ignored and overlooked,' Corneille declares. 'I've realised just how much injustice there is in this world. Take the events in Rwanda, for instance. OK, so the media reported the genocide in Rwanda – which was, let me remind you, the biggest genocide in the world since the Holocaust – but they made much more of a fuss about 11 September. You had all these different governments rushing to pledge help and support to the US, but those governments didn't lift a finger in 1994 during the Rwandan genocide. What's my new album? Definitely a celebration of my new life, but I never forget that countless people never had the right to that.'

(Adapted from the website of Radio France Internationale
http://rfimusique.com/siteEn/article/article_7138.asp)

Rwanda: country profile

The country has been beset by ethnic tension associated with the traditionally unequal relationship between the dominant Tutsi minority and the majority Hutus. Rwanda experienced Africa's worst genocide in modern times in 1994 and is still recovering from the effects. Many people had to flee to neighbouring countries to escape the killing.

Since then, most of the refugees have returned to Rwanda. In 2000 Paul Kagame became President of Rwanda under an interim government. His government soon introduced a policy encouraging people to describe themselves as Rwandans rather than Hutus or Tutsis. His presidency was confirmed in a landslide victory in the 2003 election.

The country continues to work to boost investment and agricultural output and to foster reconciliation, but involvement in two wars over the past eight years in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo has hindered its efforts.

Population:

7.954 million

Capital: Kigali

Major religions:

Christianity, indigenous beliefs

Ethnic groups:

Hutu 84%, Tutsi 15%, Twa 1%

Life expectancy:

39 years (men), 40 years (women)

Main exports:

Coffee, tea, hides, tin ore

Media: Rwanda's broadcast media are, in the main, government-controlled. A privately run radio station, the first to open since the 1994 genocide, began broadcasting in 2004.

There is a growing number of newspapers but they face government restrictions and generally exercise self-censorship.

Climate: Temperate; two rainy seasons (February to April, November to January); mild in mountains with frost and snow possible.

Physical features: Rwanda is a beautiful country. The forest-covered mountains in the west give way to fertile, terraced farmland, tea plantations and rolling hills, before turning into savannah in the east. The Virunga mountains in the northwest along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo are the home of the only surviving mountain gorilla population in the world.

