

A close-up portrait of Sandra Uwiringiyimana, a young woman with dark skin and red braided hair. She is looking slightly to the left with a calm expression. She is wearing a blue and green patterned garment with a red beaded necklace. The background is a plain, light gray.

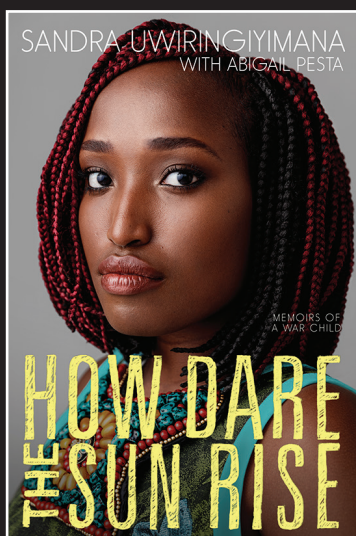
SANDRA UWIRINGIYIMANA  
WITH ABIGAIL PESTA

MEMOIRS OF  
A WAR CHILD

# HOWDARE THE SUN RISE

DISCUSSION GUIDE





Grades 8 & Up

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Ten year-old Sandra Uwiringiyimana survived what no human being should ever experience: the brutal attack on the refugee camp where she and her family were living to escape war. Her little sister was murdered in the massacre, her mother gravely injured, and other members of her ethnic minority tribe slaughtered. Eventually, through a United Nations refugee program, she and her surviving family members were resettled in Rochester, New York. Though out of physical danger, Sandra's new life in America is far from easy. American values, racial tensions, pressure from her parents to stay in her "cultural lane," and the haunting memories of that terrible night in Africa make assimilation a daily struggle. Through the healing power of the arts, the kindness of people devoted to helping displaced peoples, and the resilience and determination of her character, Sandra finds the courage to tell her powerful story and in doing so sheds light on the injustices faced by "the unseen," the thousands of people forced to flee their homelands and live as refugees.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandra Uwiringiyimana is cofounder and director of partnerships and communications at Jimbere Fund, an organization that aims to revitalize distressed communities in Congo. Since her family's resettlement in 2007, Sandra has fought hard to call for justice for the Gatumba massacre and has become a voice for women and girls, refugees and immigrants, and forgotten people like the Banyamulenge tribe. In telling her story, Sandra has shared the world stage with Charlie Rose, Angelina Jolie, and Tina Brown at the Women in the World Summit. She addressed the United Nations Security Council at the request of Ambassador Samantha Power to plead with world leaders to act on the pressing issue of children in armed conflict. Sandra is a student at Mercy College in New York City.



Photo by Jesse Pesta

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This book has an enigmatic title. Before reading, discuss what this phrase might mean. Think about and share a time in your life when you may not have wanted the sun to rise.
2. In chapter 1, the author describes the horrific massacre that her family and others experienced while living in a United Nations refugee camp in Burundi: "I heard our attackers singing and chanting. They were singing Christian songs . . . 'Imana yabatugabiye . . . God has given you to us.' The men seemed to think they were on a mission from God to massacre us" (p. 5). How do the perpetrators of such crimes use faith as an excuse to commit acts of violence against innocents?
3. After Sandra and the surviving members of her family are resettled in the United States, they become refugees in a strange, new land. Discuss how her family is treated by authorities as they prepare to leave Africa, and how they first experience the United States. How does Sandra's experience in the church thrift shop color her first impressions of American life?
4. Throughout the text, Sandra describes how expectations, assumptions, and perspectives about American life made it difficult to fit in. Discuss how pre-conceived notions, based on media and other secondary sources, made adjusting to her new life a constant challenge. Focus on issues related to socio-economics, race, and gender norms.
5. The men and boys who attacked the Burundi refugee camp targeted the people because they belonged to an ethnic minority group. One of the major themes of the text is the idea of "the other." Discuss the events of chapter 7 with this theme in mind.
6. Discuss Sandra's observation in chapter 18, about being black in America: "I was quickly learning that I was not considered African American, even though I was from Africa and I was living in America" (p. 151). Reread and discuss chapter 21. Discuss the topics that are raised in this chapter, including media images of African Americans, race relations and tensions between African Americans and the police, misconceptions between races, and inherent biases based on race.
7. The concept of identity is a central theme of *How Dare the Sun Rise*. What is identity? Sandra was named after a Rwandan prime minister, which made her feel like she had "big shoes to fill" (p. 19). How is one's name an element of identity? How did being a refugee challenge Sandra's concept of identity?
8. As an activist for refugees, Sandra realized that she could use her own story as a platform to help others. One of the ways she uses her voice is to shed light on rape and sexual assault perpetrated against refugee girls and women. Discuss the stigmatization of sexual assault victims and how it causes harm. What can you do to change the stigma surrounding these issues?
9. Throughout the story Sandra demonstrated extraordinary resilience. What does it mean to be resilient? Discuss the ways in which Sandra is resilient. How does her decision to return to the refugee camp demonstrate her strength and courage?
10. What is social justice? Discuss how Sandra's work as an activist advances the cause of justice for displaced peoples. What is meant by the following advice given to Sandra by her mother: "Be righteous and faithful when no one is watching" (p. 273)? How did Sandra live this advice throughout the book?
11. During her interview with Charlie Rose at the Women in the World Summit, Sandra commented on the nature of fighting injustice: "Hatred doesn't solve a thing. I know that justice needs to be fought for. It needs to be demanded. I know that it can come from anyone, even a teenager like myself" (p. 199). Discuss what you can do to demand justice in areas of the world where you witness injustice.

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**The Unseen.** 2016 was a year that the world witnessed forced migration and refugees in numbers unprecedented in the 21st century. Do research into the various countries around the globe where people are being forced to flee. Dive into the deeper questions of why people are leaving home and country, such as war, famine, fear, or environmental challenges. Conclude your research by examining where these people are living and how they are being treated as refugees. Report back on your findings.

**Identity Card.** In chapter 25, Sandra describes receiving a New York State ID after passing her US citizen test, and of the card writes, “It was the first thing I owned that proved I exist” (p. 205). Brainstorm the components of your identity, the things that make you you. In addition to physical attributes, create a list of your likes, values, personality, and goals. Using an 8.5 x 11-inch piece of cardstock, create an identity card that incorporates the items on your list.

**Forces for Good.** In *How Dare the Sun Rise*, the author references many organizations and events she became connected with in her work to help refugees, such as the UNHCR, the Women in the World Summit, and RefugePoint. Spend time researching these and other organizations. Organize a committee in your school and brainstorm how your school can partner with a local refugee organization to aid refugee families in your community.

**All That Is Taken for Granted.** In the story, Sandra describes how water is a precious commodity in the refugee camps. Families live in tiny spaces, often just tents with little privacy. In the United States, she describes being shocked by the luxuries Americans have daily. After completing the book, think about your typical day, from the moment you wake up to the time you turn in at night. Make a list of those things you have that you rarely think about as luxuries, such as warm clothing, food, and water. What things can you live without? Come together as a class and share your list.

**The Healing Arts.** Art and music are featured prominently in Sandra Uwiringiyimana’s life. Her family’s choir and the portraits of refugees that she and a fellow student created not only helped her heal from the horror of her past but also brought her story to the international community. Organize an art and music exhibit to educate your fellow students and community members of the plight of refugees and the displaced. Write informational brochures and create posters to share important information. Charge a small admission to the event and donate the proceeds to a local or state organization that works to resettle refugee families in the United States.

The discussion questions and activities in this guide can be correlated to the following Common Core State Standards Correlations CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8-10.1, RI.8-10.3, RI.8-10.4, RI.8-10.5, RI.8-10.10



This guide was created by Colleen Carroll (cc@colleencarroll.us), children's book author, literacy specialist, curriculum developer, and education consultant.