

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Information on Rwanda

This sheet provides background information about Rwanda and its people. Your children won't need all of this information but as you read Christophe's Story you can decide what to share with them. It should also help you to answer any questions your children may have.

Factfile	
Capital:	Kigali
Official languages:	Kinyarwanda, French and English
Population:	10.5 million
Highest mountain:	the Karisimbi volcano (4,519 m)
Highest lake:	Lake Kivu (1,460 m)
Religion:	mostly Christian, 4.6% Muslim

### Geography

The Republic of Rwanda is a country in east-central Africa, bordered by Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania. It has one of the densest populations in Africa. It is often called the 'Land of a Thousand Hills' because steep mountains and deep valleys cover most of the country.

### How people live

Most of the population are subsistence farmers living on small farms. There are very few villages – most families live in self-contained compounds on hillsides. There is a small professional class (e.g. Christophe's father was a doctor) living in towns and cities such as Kigali.

There are primary schools in Rwanda but only about 16% of the population have been to secondary school. The adult literacy rate is about 70%.

### Language

Hutus and Tutsis speak the same language (Kinyarwanda). Many people (like Christophe's family) speak French because Rwanda was a colony of Belgium from 1916–1962.

### History and ethnic groups

The original inhabitants of Rwanda were the Twa, a Pygmy people. They now only account for around 1% of the country's population. The ethnic groups who fought bitterly in 1993–4 were the Hutus and Tutsis. While they are often considered separate ethnic groups, they speak the same language and share many cultural characteristics. There is also a history of intermarriage between the two groups.

The differences between the Hutus and Tutsis were more occupational, rather than ethnic. The Belgians considered the Tutsis as superior and as a result they enjoyed better jobs and educational opportunities.



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In 1933 the Belgians introduced identity cards. These served to indicate tribal ethnicity as either Tutsi or Hutu which only enhanced the racial distinction. Animosity grew, culminating in a series of riots in 1959. Between 20,000 and 100,000 Tutsis were killed and over 150,000 more fled to Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda.

When Belgium granted Rwanda independence in 1962, the Hutus took control of the country. Over subsequent decades, the Tutsis were portrayed as the scapegoats for every crisis.

### Building up to genocide

Gregoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, was the first president from 1962–1973. Juvénal Habyarimana, also a Hutu, seized power in 1973 and Rwanda enjoyed relative economic prosperity during the early part of his regime. However, towards the end the economic situation worsened and the president began losing popularity.

As the economy worsened, Tutsi refugees in Uganda – supported by some moderate Hutus – were forming the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Their aim was to overthrow Habyarimana and secure their right to return to their homeland. Habyarimana exploited this threat to re-establish his power and Tutsis inside Rwanda were accused of being RPF collaborators.

In August 1993, after many attacks and several months of negotiation, the Arusha Accords were signed between Habyarimana and the RPF, but it did little to stop the continued unrest. Habyarimana's plane was shot down by right-wing Hutus on April 6th, 1994.

### 1994 Genocide

The repercussions were catastrophic. In the three months following the assassination an estimated 800,000 Rwandans, mostly Tutsis, were killed. The genocide was triggered by the death of the president being attributed to Tutsis, economic pressures and the years of ethnic tension between the two groups.

The killing was well organised. A militia called the Interahamwe (meaning those who fight together) grew – encouraged by the presidential guard and radio propaganda – to 30,000 strong. Hutu civilians were forced to kill their Tutsi neighbours and incentives were offered, such as money, to encourage more killing.

In July 1994 the RPF captured Kigali and the government fell. Once they had gained control of the country, approximately 1,200,000 Hutus fled to Zaire.

In May 2003, 93% of Rwandans voted for a new constitution and a balance of political power between Hutu and Tutsi. The constitution also outlawed the incitement of ethnic hatred. The first presidential elections since the genocide were held in August 2003 and Paul Kagame won a landslide victory, becoming the first Tutsi president since the country's independence.

Now the population of Rwanda consists of the Banyarwanda (People of Rwanda) who share a common culture, language, and geographic space.



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