

# RWANDA

LESSON PLAN

FIND YOUR SPACE TO  
COMMUNICATE





# RWANDA

## A tiny country located up high

The Republic of Rwanda, with its capital in Kigali, is a tiny landlocked country in the very heart of Africa, which regained its independence only in 1962. The surface area of 26.4 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, which makes Rwanda only slightly larger than the state of Vermont, is inhabited by about 12 million people.

Rwanda shares borders with Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Uganda. It is located in the African Great Rift Valley region, which is characterised by steep slopes and flat bottoms, sometimes filled with lakes, meaning that the entire landscape is made out of highlands and hills. Almost 97 percent of Rwanda lies at an altitude of more than 1000 metres above sea level, hence its nickname of “the Land of a Thousand Hills”.

The region is criss-crossed by a dense network of rivers of the basins of the Congo and the Nile, with numerous waterfalls and rapids scattered everywhere.

## The tragedy the world refused to see

The population of Rwanda is divided into three main ethnic groups: Hutu, accounting for about 88 percent of the population, Tutsi, who make up about 11 percent, and Twa, the remaining 1 percent. Traditionally, Tutsis were cattle-raisers while Hutus were farmers. The former needed land for pastures, whereas the latter wanted to cultivate it. The conflict was inevitable, especially given the constant struggle for political power between the two tribes. And although they were the majority in the country, the Hutus had always been deprived of the opportunity to govern. At the beginning of April 1994, the plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down. Although the Tutsis were not officially found to be the perpetrators, the incident became a perfect excuse for the army and Hutu militias (Interahamwe – “those who fight

together”) to start a massacre, genocide against the other tribe. Almost two million people fled the country at that time, seeking refuge in the neighbouring lands. Most of them were members of the Hutu tribe who feared retaliation by the Tutsis.

Scores died of waterborne diseases or from exhaustion. In 2000, more than 100,000 people accused of complicity in the crime were awaiting trial. Under normal circumstances, it would take more than 100 years to judge them all, so the system of Gacaca courts, literally meaning “justice amongst the grass”, have been reinstated instead.

## Situation of children with disabilities

In a country that is only just recovering from such a great tragedy, it is impossible to deal with all problems and help everyone at once. Unfortunately, it is the children who pay the highest price. Some of them have no access to education. The disabled, including the deaf, are among those treated the worst. The locals believe that a disabled child can simply be killed to get rid of the problem. The state does not support any activities for people with disabilities either. The only nine schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing children are run by various NGOs. One of the schools taking care of deaf students is

located in Nyabiheu. It is attended by more than 130 students who live, study and grow up in a safe environment. The school gives the children an opportunity to learn sign language, equipping them with a tool to communicate with the outside world and their loved ones. It was founded by Louis Ngabonziza, who had a deaf aunt that he longed to communicate with. Kulczyk Foundation made it possible for all students at the school to have their hearing tested as well as purchased hearing aids for them. It was thanks to this action that Eric heard his mother’s voice for the first time in his life.





Duration:  
45 minutes

## SUBJECT

# Find your space to communicate

Print the materials from the appendices. Show the students fragments of the film available as an appendix to this lesson plan. Before the class, watch the full episode available at [www.kulczykfoundation.org.pl](http://www.kulczykfoundation.org.pl).

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

People are constantly communicating, in every situation, because “one cannot not communicate”<sup>1</sup>. Every behaviour, both verbal and non-verbal (even silence), is a message for the other person that can be received and interpreted either in line with the sender’s intention or in a completely opposite way. The receiver may not understand the message at all or ascribe a different meaning to it. This means that sometimes the actions of sending and receiving messages don’t lead to mutual understanding. It is often very difficult to reach it at all due to barriers and blocks that the participants in the communication process cannot or do not want to overcome. This is because they do not know how to create a space that would facilitate understanding. This can be done first of all by developing your own communication skills, practising the ability to listen, understand and respond to messages and to express your own thoughts.

You can learn how to create this space in a different way, by learning the stories of extraordinary individuals who are seeking opportunities to overcome barriers between people.

This is an important and inspiring lesson because in our daily life it often happens that we are not so much unable to communicate as we do not want to strive for understanding. Readiness to find it is one of the elements of an open attitude toward others.



Issues

<sup>1</sup> The first axiom of communication formulated by a group of researchers from Palo Alto, including P. Watzlawick, D. Jackson, J. Helmick-Beavin.

## OBJECTIVES

Maybe you can take just one step with your students, maybe two, or maybe even all three. It will always be a success for both you and your students!

- Step 1 – KNOW:** The student knows what it means to strive for understanding in the communication process. The student can use the paraphrase technique. The student knows the causes of disruptions in communication and the consequences of lack of understanding.
- Step 2 – FEEL:** The student is able to describe how people feel when they have problems communicating with others.
- Step 3 – HELP:** The student recognises the positive aspects of finding a space to communicate with others and expresses willingness to create such a space in everyday contacts with others.

## INTRODUCTION

Ask your students to work in pairs. One person from each of pair will talk about any topic for about 3 minutes: school, their achievements, struggles, interests. The task of the other person is to listen. Then they should switch.

After the exercise as the students the following questions:

- › What do you think the word “communication” means?
- › Why do people communicate?
- › How do we communicate?
- › How do we know that someone is listening closely to what we are saying?
- › What can make communication difficult?

### Hint:

Make students aware that communication is about transferring information and receiving it with their senses: hearing, sight, touch. Successful communication is the basis for good relations between people. In addition to verbal (word-based) communication, also non-verbal communication plays an essential role. A lot of important information is expressed through sounds which are not words (grunts, murmurs, etc.) as well as gestures, facial expressions, body language.

It is crucial to be aware of the non-verbal messages that others give us and know how to recognise if they are consistent with the verbal ones. You can also talk about the causes of communication disruptions. Some of the most common are:

- › different understanding of words and expressions,
- › ambiguity of the words used,
- › differences in the perception of reality by the sender and the receiver,
- › the participants in the communication process trying to oversimplify the content being communicated,
- › referring to the message content in a manner contrary to the recipient's expectations,
- › malfunctioning of communication channels (verbal, visual, kinaesthetic).



Objectives



Introduction



Film  
– Introduction,  
screening and  
reflection



Task

## BEFORE THE FILM

Tell your students that in a moment you are going to watch together fragments of a documentary telling the stories of some inhabitants of Rwanda. Ask them to think about the following issues while watching:

- How are people who can't hear treated in Rwanda?
- Why is education important for deaf children and their relatives?

## FILM SCREENING



## AFTER THE FILM

Talk to the students immediately after watching the film. The following questions may help you:

- What do you think the deaf children and their loved ones feel?
- How does Louis give the children a chance to make their dreams come true?
- What helped Eric overcome communication barriers?
- How can education change the lives of deaf people and their families?

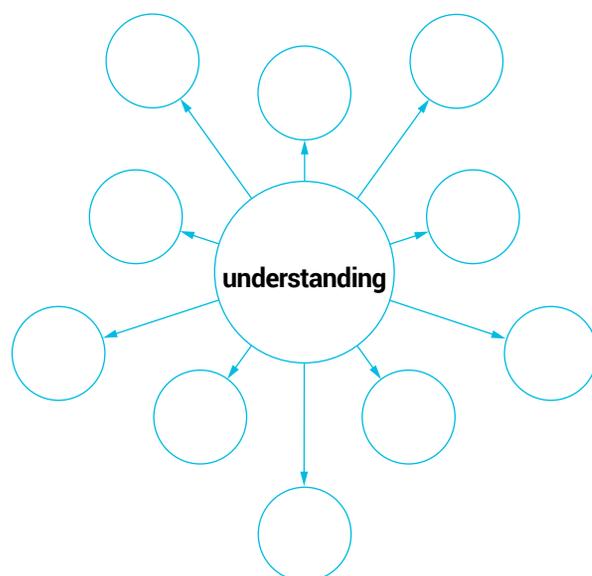
### Hint:

Tell the students that it is important to create the right conditions for understanding. Ask them to explain how they understand this notion. Emphasise the role of parents and the school community in making communication easier for deaf children.

## TASK

### Space for understanding

Invite students to complete the diagram together. Students can come up the blackboard and add suggestions of actions which they believe can facilitate understanding between people.



## CONVERSATION

## Hint:

Tell the students that sometimes, for various reasons, the message is only partially received or does not reach the receiver at all. In such a case it is difficult to understand each other.

Tell the students that the search for understanding requires giving feedback to the other person. One of the ways to communicate such information is to paraphrase, i.e. repeat the content of the message with one's own words. In this way, we inform the sender how we have understood the message. When paraphrasing, we use phrases such as:

- Do I understand correctly that...
- Are you saying that...
- I can see that...

Ask the students to try to paraphrase what the other person in the pair is saying. You can suggest the following conversation topics:

- You can't go on a school trip. Explain why.
- You don't want to go to a friend's birthday party. Explain why.

After completing the exercise, ask the students to share their thoughts on the subject.

## Hint:

The following reflections on paraphrasing should appear in the summary phase of the exercise:

- it gives the sender of the message a sense of being listened to with attention and understanding as well as the opportunity to add some relevant details to the original message;
- it allows the receiver to check if they understood the sender correctly, to clarify any doubts or discrepancies, and to find out what the intention of the sender was.



Conversation



## CONCLUSIONS

Guide your students through the following steps:

1. Making them aware of the situation of another human being (**KNOW**);
2. Drawing their attention to the role of understanding another person's problem in emotional terms and relating to that person (**FEEL**);
3. Making the decision to help in an active way (**HELP**).

### KNOW:

To understand another human being means more than just communicate with them. It involves the ability to perceive both what they communicate and how they do it. In order to be able to communicate, it is necessary to establish contact with the other person, respecting their individuality.

### FEEL:

Each and every one of us may face barriers that make it difficult to reach understanding. In such a situation we experience many negative feelings, such as helplessness, frustration, humiliation, fear. The sense of being misunderstood and the emotions it evokes may significantly hinder communication. To know if you have understood the other person correctly, you can paraphrase their words. However, in order for the other person to feel that we can recognise their emotions and share them, we can use mirroring. Mirroring is all about reading and naming the emotions that we assume the other person may feel. It is particularly useful when someone is very agitated, scared, intimidated, and these emotions limit their ability to communicate.

### HELP:

Ask the students to think about what was the most important to them in today's lesson. Let them share their thoughts and come up with suggestions on how to reach understanding that they could post on a blog. Ask them to explain what it means to seek understanding. Write down your suggestions and come back to them next time.



Conclusions