

**Book Rationale for *Deogratias***  
**prepared by Kelley McDaniel, Librarian, King Middle School**  
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**Location:** King Middle School Library

**Use:** free and open access; used in conjunction with studies of graphic novels, genocides, Africa, Rwanda and Paul Rusesabagina

**Possible Complaints:** profanity, violence (including sexual violence), racist language, genocide, inappropriate subject matter for young people

**Description:** This graphic novel originally published in French, in Belgium, paints an emotional picture of life in Rwanda leading up to, during, and immediately following the Rwandan genocide. The story is told, through flashbacks, from the point-of-view of a Hutu young man, who struggles to retain his own humanity while witnessing and finally, participating in the atrocities.

This book was given to me by the publisher at an ALA Conference. I read the book and thought that it had value in the KMS library for a number of reasons:

- 1) we have students from Rwanda and we have the responsibility to represent them, their history, and their experiences in the literature that we provide;
- 2) our Rwandan students' classmates and peers who want to know about and understand the Rwandan genocide deserve access to such resources;
- 3) the KMS library has books, including graphic novels and literature with graphic descriptions of horrific acts of violence, about other genocides, including Apartheid, the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the Bosnian genocide, Pol Pot's regime, and the genocide in Sudan;
- 4) this is one of few books about the Rwandan genocide I have found that is accessible to young people;
- 5) although this book is about the Rwandan genocide, it explores issues related to genocide in general, which has been a topic of study here.

I did not put *Deogratias* immediately into the KMS library collection; I considered it for a year. In the end, I decided to add it to our collection based on the reasons enumerated above.

Although the book has not circulated extensively, it has been used meaningfully by members of the King Middle School community:

- Two years ago, Paul Rusesabagina (the hero memorialized in the movie *Hotel Rwanda*), spoke at USM and that year, as well as the following year, I had requests for books and stories about Rwanda and the Rwandan genocide.
- Last year an eighth grade student was doing a project on Paul Rusesabagina and the Rwandan genocide and asked me for anything else I had on the subject. Among other things, I gave her *Deogratias*.
- This fall, a teacher was taking a course and doing a project on graphic novels. *Deogratias* was one of the graphic novels that I gave to her to use in her class presentation.

*Deogratias* is for mature and sophisticated readers, but we do have students who can understand its content and appreciate its artistic and literary merits.

I do not question or argue with the fact that a student complained that he was upset and offended by the book; as a matter of fact, I apologized for the offense that he experienced. **I take issue with his request that since he was offended by the**

**book, no current or future King Middle School student should be allowed access to it.**

No KMS student is forced to read a particular library book. The KMS library advocates choice when it comes to student reading.

Each year, in preparation for Summer Reading, I explain that there is no book in our library or on the reading list that is appropriate for everyone, but, "every book is appropriate for someone." As a way of explaining intellectual freedom to students, I frequently use the example that I do not like hate language and am offended by it.

"What if I borrow a book from the library and I find that it contains racist language? What can I do?" I ask.

One student always replies, "Stop reading it and return it to the library."

I also explain, "I like to know what you don't like (and why), as it helps me help you find books you will like. But," I say, "No one person has the right to say, 'Because I don't like it, YOU can't read it.' That right - the **freedom to read** - is up to each individual reader. And I'm here to defend that right for you."