

Author's Note and Grade Rationale
Short Story
Noah Appleget

This story is completely different from my first idea that I had for this rotation. This is my final draft of my short story. My sister actually gave me the idea, and I started to expand on it. Basically it's about something that would've taken place during the Rwandan genocide. It isn't something that actually happened, but something that very well could have.

The audience for this story is probably anyone over the age of about 15. I think it might be harder for someone younger than this to follow. My favorite part of the piece is the ending. I worked really hard to find the perfect ending and think of how I wanted to wrap it up, and am pretty satisfied with how I ended it. The basic theme for this is just showing how cruel people were during the genocide, and how hard and scary of a time it would have been.

As far as my grade for this project goes, I feel very similar to how I have felt about all my other pieces. I worked really hard and think I met most all of the requirements for this piece. I was really worried going into this rotation because I don't think narrative writing is strength of mine, but think I really grew in my writing during this rotation. I put a lot of time into this and really was pretty happy with how my piece ended up, I hope you like it and know you will give me the grade I deserve.

THE SILENCE GAME

By: Noah Appleget

If you listen close, you'll hear it. In the dead of the night, the silence will scream. I've listened from my cot for years. The continuous ringing in the back of my head grows deafening, and the hairs on my arms stand straight. I'm not allowed to leave my cot during the night; Father says it is dangerous. So instead, I make up games to try and scare myself. The silence game is my favorite. Scaring myself is the most fun, the blood pumping through every vein, the adrenaline telling me to run but my Father's voice inside my head telling me to stay put. The other kids in the village don't understand why I love to be scared. They don't know what it feels like after the scare is over; the courageous triumph of overcoming the fear that takes place.

The moon shines brightly over Lake Kivu, reflecting distorted beams onto the water. I wonder if the ocean father talks about can reflect the beams just like Kivu. He told me once the war is over, we'd go to the ocean together. Said that we could build castles out of sand and go exploring for shells. That was weeks ago. Father is rarely home now, always going out to find the bad men. He comes home late, if at all, with tired eyes and droopy shoulders. He doesn't feel like playing racecar or boogeyman with me. I'm not mad though, because after the war everything will go back to normal. I won't have to walk to school with Damascene's older brothers, I won't have to stay out of the trees, and Father will come home happy again.

I can tell it is late, by where the moon beams rest on Lake Kivu, Father must not be coming home tonight. I am trying my hardest to scare myself, but I'm too alert to be bothered by the silence. My cot is itchy and more than anything I want to get

up. I want to tiptoe across the room and sneak a piece of honey bread. I can taste the sticky sweet syrup on my lips when a thud by my head breaks me from my trance. I shoot up from my cot. There is never anything but silence in my room at night.

There are shadows cast on my wall, black blobs trudging through the grass outside. I peek my eyes just above the windowsill to see what is there. Outside there are ten, maybe fifteen men slowly walking through our backyard. They are not talking. They do not even seem to be moving, more like floating through the grass. They all wear a sunken empty look and bow their heads. As I was kneeling back down, something caught my eye. One of them had stopped, dead in his tracks. All I could make out were the whites of his eyes, staring right back into mine.

He yelled something to the man in front of the pack, and they all stopped. My heart skipped, and I froze for a sliver of a moment wondering what to do. Something inside told me these were not good men. That these men wanted to find me. For the past nine weeks I have been told never to leave my cot at night, and for the past nine weeks I have obeyed.

I tried to slow my breathing, but something inside kept pushing out each breath faster and faster. I lay back down on my cot. *Just be quiet. They won't notice you.* I shut my eyes as tight as they would go. Another thud forced them open. There was the man, standing at my window. Looking right at me.

His lips drew themselves into a wide smile. My mind went numb. These were bad men. "No need to be afraid," he said, reaching out his hand. I had foolishly left my window open, and it wasn't until this strange man's fingertips crept in that I realized how dangerous it was. "Come with me," he smirked. "I won't hurt you. I just want to show

you the new village.” I didn’t want to anger him, but my whole body was being crushed by my own anxiety. I couldn’t move a muscle. He stepped even closer to the window. “Come on now, it will be fun,” he said. My lips couldn’t form syllables; I lay there defenseless, hoping my silence would make him disappear. “Here, I’ll help you,” he said jumping through the window and picking me up. His strong hands lifted me with ease and immediately the two of us were out the window, standing in front of the other men.

“You’ve got a very important young man there,” whispered one of the men on the end. The stranger holding me laughed from the pit of his stomach.

“Did you think I didn’t know?” He set me down. “Don’t worry Vianney, we are just going for a walk.” My mind had been blank until now; he’d said my name. My eyebrows furrowed. How did this man know my name? His long legs stretched out and started to march. “Oh yes,” he said not looking behind him, “I know who you are.”

We walked past all the huts on my road, and headed toward the village. I haven’t been allowed to go into the village the past few weeks, Father’s orders. Everything about it had changed. The streets were completely abandoned, no car or bicycle in sight. Most stores had been reduced to glass and rubble; any standing wall was marked with rebellion graffiti.

I wanted to know where we were going, and I wanted to know who these men were. I had to find a way out.

The man who had carried me stopped in front of an old bank office. “Step through here. Vianney come with me, and everyone else veer towards the right.” The others did as they were told, no questions. We stepped into a room with two curtains. The others went

behind the right curtain, and my carrier and I stepped behind the left. “Now be a good boy, he said, and don’t make a sound.”

My mind was left to wonder when he stepped from out the curtain. I couldn’t see anything. The cloth was much too thick, and the other men were not saying anything. I wonder if they’d all left me here. They looked like the rebels Father had talked about, with their tall thin stature and skinny oval faces. With every minute I was left alone the silence grew louder and louder. This is not like the silence game on my cot. I did not like this silence. It began at my feet, and it felt like there were needles in my toes that went up and itched around my neck until I was choked by the quiet stillness. I could not run, I could not speak, I could do nothing.

A voice broke through the darkness. I knew that voice. I’d know it anywhere. Father was here. “Show me where your men are hidden now, or it’s the capital for all of you.” Father’s voice was different, hard and tense. I could hear the man who carried me next to him.

“I’ll make you a deal, you can have and kill any of my men. All you have to do is tell me: right or left.” I could hear their footsteps edge closer to the curtains. Their conversation grew louder.

“I won’t stand here and be played a fool by some bastard who thinks he can get away with it.”

Father’s voice was at a yell, and the other man interjected, “Believe me officer I am not making you a fool, it’s just a simple question, choose which side of the curtain you’d like to shoot, and do so.”

I laid my head back against the cold concrete wall and closed my eyes, escaping back to the comfort of my cot. Back to the countless times I'd played the silence game, waiting in hope of the reassuring sound of fathers footsteps walking through the door. The silence was escalating, and I was ready to feel the triumph of overcoming the fear I was filled with.

Bang. A loud crack filled the air, sending chills down my spine. I opened my eyes and yanked back the black curtain, only to find the lifeless body of my father resting at my feet.