

# Books in a Box

## Reading Guide

Blaine  
Bookmobile  
Deming  
Everson  
Ferndale  
Island  
Lynden  
North Fork  
Point Roberts  
Sumas  
wcls.org

the best place to begin



whatcom county  
**library system**

## Books in a Box Information

We hope you will enjoy the convenience of having multiple copies of the same title to share—either with your official book group or with an unofficial friends-and-family group!

Some general information about the kits:

- ◆ Kits check out for six weeks.
- ◆ Kits are available to reserve, but we cannot guarantee their availability for specific dates.
- ◆ One person in the group is responsible for the kits full return.
- ◆ Return kits in person at any Whatcom County library

How do I find a list of all your kits?

- ◆ Go to [www.wcls.org](http://www.wcls.org)
- ◆ Click on “catalog”
- ◆ In the Keyword Search type “book club kit”

This list includes kits owned by both Whatcom County and Bellingham Library Systems. Please note that the Bellingham kits must be picked up and returned to the Bellingham Library. Whatcom County kits can be reserved and sent to any location for pickup.

## Suggested Discussion Questions

1. The first section of the book entitled "Flights" describes two kinds of flights: those in Africa, which are obvious flights for physical survival; and those in New York City. What kind of "flights" does the New York part of the book refer to?
2. How does Deo derive his name? What is the irony in his name...or is there irony? What are the meanings of some of the other names of those he meets along his journey?
3. How does Deo think about his experiences in New York City as compared to his growing-up years in Burundi? Does he change his views over time?
4. The manager of the food store where Deo works humiliates him. Why does this treatment sting more than the other humiliations he has received before?
5. What does Deo feel about Sharon McKenna and her personal quest for his redemption? How do you feel about her McKenna's? Why is McKenna so insistent?
6. Talk about the meaning of this observation from Chapter 7 regarding history: "...history, even more than memory, distorts the present of the past by focusing on big events and making one forget that most people living in the present are otherwise preoccupied, that for them omens often don't exist."
7. Also consider this passage in Chapter 8 from the W.E.B. Dubois poem, "The Souls of Black Folk": "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships." How does this reflect Deo's life in New York?

8. Kidder conducts numerous interviews about Deo— Drs. Joia Mukherjee and Paul Farmer, Sharon McKenna, Charlie and Nancy Wolff. What are their various interpretations of Deo? Do you agree or not with any (or all?) of their assessments?
9. How does Deo's involvement in Partners in Health open up a new world for him?
10. What is Deo's reason for refusing psychiatric treatment? Do you agree with his decision and reasoning? Could he benefit from therapy?
11. Upon hearing Deo's account of his life, Kidder admits that he himself would not have survived. What qualities does Deo possess that enabled his survival? How do you think you might have fared under the same circumstances?
12. How and why does Kidder's relationship with Deo change during his trip with Deo to Burundi?
13. Describe Deo's reaction upon visiting the Muhato hospital. What is the significance of the left open door? How does the hospital visit compare to Deo's visit to the Murambi memorial?
14. Talk about Deo's belief that the primary cause of genocide is misery. Do you agree with his observation?
15. Deo laughs while recounting the suicide of a Belgian colonial. He also laughed earlier, in Chapter 9, while hiding among the corpses. Talk about this strange reaction and what it suggests about Deo's state of mind, personality or the culture in which he grew up.
16. In the epilogue, Deo talks about the Burundian volunteers who are building a road to his clinic. Talk about why they are so committed to bringing Deo's dream to fruition.
16. In what way, if at all, has this book changed your understanding of genocide? What other books or films have you seen that have focused on this problem, not just in Africa but in other parts of the world? Do you see genocide as a localized problem or a global issue?
17. If you've read Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, discuss the two men at the heart of both books: in what ways are they similar? Did *Mountains* affect your reading of this work?

(Questions are adapted by LitLovers.com from the Teachers Guide at Random House.)

### **Quotations from *Strength in What Remains***

"In Rwanda, ordinary people killed mainly out of prejudice. In Burundi, it was mainly out of fear. These were different catastrophes, Uvin insists, not to be conflated. But they had essential ingredients in common: "Social exclusion and the ethnicization of politics ... are the two central elements to violent conflict in Burundi and Rwanda that, like electrons, spin around a core of massive poverty and institutional weakness."

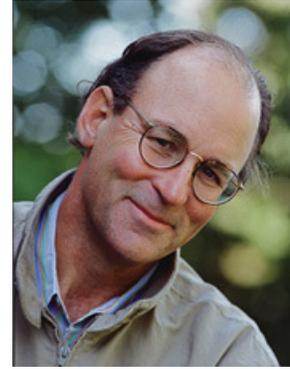
"In order to go on with our lives, we are always capable of making the ominous into the merely strange."

"... "You may not see the ocean, but right now we are in the middle of the ocean, and we have to keep swimming."

## Author Bio: Tracy Kidder

Source: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-non-fiction/993-strength-in-what-remains-kidder?start=1>, retrieved 6/11/12.

- Birth—November 12, 1945
- Where—New York, New York, USA
- Education—B.A., Harvard; M.A., University of Iowa, Writers' Workshop
- Awards—Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award, 1992
- Currently—lives in Massachusetts and Maine



Tracy Kidder has won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Robert F. Kennedy Award, among other literary prizes. The author of *Strength in What Remains*, *The Soul of a New Machine*, *House*, *Among Schoolchildren*, *Old Friends*, and *Home Town*, Kidder lives in Massachusetts and Maine.

Tracy Kidder is an American author and Vietnam War veteran. Kidder may be best known, especially within the computing community, for his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Soul of a New Machine*, an account of the development of Data General's Eclipse/MV minicomputer. The book typifies his distinctive style of research. He began following the project at its inception and, in addition to interviews, spent considerable time observing the engineers at work and outside of it. Using this perspective he was able to produce a more textured portrait of the development process than a purely retrospective study might.

Kidder followed up with *House*, in which he chronicles the design and construction of the award-winning Souweine House in Amherst, Massachusetts. *House* reads like a novel, but it is based on many hours of research with the architect, builders, clients, in-laws, and other interested parties.

In 2003, Kidder published *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure The World* after a chance encounter with Paul Farmer. The book was held to wide critical acclaim and became a *New York Times* bestseller.

## Reviews

### [Publishers Weekly](#)

★ *Strength in What Remains*, Tracy Kidder. Random House, \$16.00 (304p)  
ISBN 978-0812977615

With an anthropologist's eye and a novelist's pen, Pulitzer Prize-winning Kidder (*Mountains Beyond Mountains*) recounts the story of Deo, the Burundian former medical student turned American emigre at the center of this strikingly vivid story. Told in flashbacks from Deo's 2006 return visit to Burundi to mid-1990s New York and the Burundi of childhood memory and young adulthood—as the Rwandan genocide spilled across the border following the same inflamed ethnic divisions—then picking up in 2003, when author and subject first meet, Deo's experience is conveyed with a re-

markable depth of vision and feeling. Kidder renders his subject with deep yet unfussy fidelity and the conflict with detail and nuance. While the book might recall Dave Eggers's novelized version of a real-life Sudanese refugee's experience in *What Is the What*, reading this book hardly covers old ground, but enables one to walk in the footsteps of its singular subject and see worlds new and old afresh. This profoundly gripping, hopeful and crucial testament is a work of the utmost skill, sympathy and moral clarity.

“That 63-year-old Tracy Kidder may have just written his finest work—indeed, one of the truly stunning books I've read this year—is proof that the secret to memorable nonfiction is so often the writer's readiness to be surprised...Kidder's approach is a reminder of what can make American nonfiction so exceptional although, of late, it is rare. It's that bottom-up quality that defies big-budget marketing and calculation, the search from on high for a "sure thing." In this connected age, disruptive change—and transforming insights—bubble up furiously from the least likely places. Kidder saw that bottom-up flash of energy in the smile of a peripheral man. And we are lucky he did.  
**(Ron Suskind - *New York Times Book Review*)**

Extraordinarily stirring.... It's certainly not the first time we've heard heartbreaking accounts of the civil wars in Africa. But there is a touching intimacy about Deogratias's tale, and it forces us to look hard at the baffling history of the region. **(Marie Arana - *Washington Post*)**

## Suggested Readalikes

*Say You're One of Them*, Uwem Akpan.

*Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad.

*Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Romeo Dallaire.

*Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers.

*We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, Philip Gourevitch.

*There Is No Me Without You: One Woman's Odyssey to Rescue Africa's Children*, Melissa Fay Greene.

*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope*, William Kamkwamba.

*Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Tracy Kidder.

*Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Greg Mortenson.

*An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*, Paul Rusesabagina.

*Brooklyn*, Colm Tóibín.

*Cutting for Stone*, Abraham Verghese.

## **Web Resources**

Author website: <http://www.tracykidder.com/index.php>

Partners in Health: <http://www.pih.org/>

Village Health Works: <http://www.villagehealthworks.org/>

U.S. State Dept. fact sheet on Burundi: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2821.htm>