

# Freedom in Our Lifetime: South Africa's Struggle

## Student Text



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## Introduction: A Negotiated Revolution

In 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa, following the first truly democratic elections in that country. It was the first time Mandela had been allowed to vote in his seventy-six years. One of the most famous political prisoners of the twentieth century, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in South African prisons for violating the laws of apartheid. His original sentence was life.

### *What was apartheid?*

Apartheid, an Afrikaans word that means “separate” or “apartness” in English, was the law of the land in South Africa from 1948 to 1990. This system of racial discrimination was designed to keep whites, blacks, coloureds, and Asians separate from each other in every way. The government segregated all schools, housing, jobs, and transportation. People were often forbidden to speak against the government, blacks were not allowed to vote, and the government could detain people for months and even years without charging them. Some have described apartheid as the most complex system of racial discrimination ever devised.

The United Nations, members of the international community, and many South African residents condemned the apartheid government. But it took nearly fifty years of internal and international pressure to remove the apartheid laws from the books.

During his decades in prison Mandela had plenty of time to think about how he and others could change the racist system.

**“We [the prisoners] established a very strong relationship [with the warders] because we adopted a policy of talking to the warders and persuading them to treat us as human beings.... Sit down with a man, [and] if you have prepared your case very well, that man, after he has sat down to talk to you, will never be the same again. [Talking] has been a very powerful weapon.”**

—Nelson Mandela

This spirit of dialogue ultimately made it possible for South Africa in the 1990s to make the remarkable transition from the repressive rule of a white minority government to an inclusive democracy. Many had predicted that a violent civil war would precede the change in government. That did not happen. A member of the new South African Constitutional Court, Albie Sachs, whose right arm was blown off by a car bomb the government planted in 1988, called the transition a “negotiated revolution.”

**“It wasn't a miracle. It didn't just come to pass. Our transition had been the most willed, thought-about, planned-for event of the late twentieth century.... For the doubters, it had been a miracle, while for those with intense belief, it had been entirely rational.”**

—Justice Albie Sachs

These readings will take you back to a point in time when whites, blacks, coloureds, and Asians in South Africa were debating how to solve the “South Africa Problem.” The first reading traces the early history of South Africa, providing background on the peoples of the region and on the development of a segregated society. Part II explores the responses to apartheid by whites, blacks, coloureds, and Asians in South Africa as well as the international community.

In 1961 leaders of the anti-apartheid movement met to discuss their options. Their comrades were being jailed and killed, the apartheid laws were becoming ever more stringent, and whites were becoming more conservative. What was the solution to the apartheid problem? Using primary sources, you will delve into questions that changed the course of South African history. An epilogue will explain the outcome of the 1961 debate.

# Freedom in Our Lifetime: South Africa's Struggle

## Teacher Resource Book

TEACHER RESOURCE BOOK

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

## Poetry and Politics

### Objectives:

**Students will:** Explore the relationship between political events and literature.

Compare and contrast 1950s poetry from black South Africa.

Evaluate the impact of the Sharpeville massacre on blacks in South Africa.

### Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II in the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 11-12) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-13).

### Videos:

Short videos for use with this lesson can be found at <[www.choices.edu/southafricamaterials](http://www.choices.edu/southafricamaterials)>.

### Handouts:

“1950s Protest Poetry” (TRB 17-20)

### In the Classroom:

**1. Essential Question**—Write the following statement from the handout on the board: “Literature in Africa cannot but be political.” Ask students to consider the role of literature in political protest, and, vice-versa, how politics can influence writers. Can students think of examples of U.S. literature that addresses political themes? Remind students that anti-apartheid works were often banned in South Africa, and that writers frequently lived in exile.

Play the video of Professor Newell Stultz answering the following question:

- How did Sharpeville affect the anti-apartheid movement?

Play the video of Fatima Meer answering the question:

- How did the Soweto uprising contribute to the end of apartheid?

**2. Group Responses**—Form eight groups of students (or fewer, if you have a smaller class) and assign each group one of the poems from the handout. Ask students to consider the questions in relation to their assigned poem.

**3. Drawing Connections**—Literary critics often consider the events at Sharpeville to mark a turning point in South African literature. Ask students to recall the events at Sharpeville as described in the student text. What happened? How might that massacre have changed the way people wrote about their situation? If time permits, ask students to compare the post-Sharpeville poem with the others in the collection. How do they differ?

Have students consider how violence is expressed in the poems. Which poems discuss violence? Do they talk about past violence? Future violence? What are their attitudes about the use of violence?

### Extra Challenge:

Have students research the works of one of South Africa's banned or exiled writers.

### Homework:

Students should read “June 1961: The Moment of Decision” and “Options in Brief” in the student text.



## 1950s Protest Poetry

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**"Literature in Africa cannot but be political."  
Femi Ojo-Ade, literary critic**

*Introduction:* In the 1950s black and coloured literature in South Africa grew enormously as the anti-apartheid movement developed breadth and strength. The following poems, written between 1949-1960, reflect a range of responses to the apartheid government and to the effects of apartheid on everyday life. As you examine your assigned selection, consider the questions below. Be prepared to share the conclusions of your group with your classmates.

1. What was happening politically and economically in South Africa at the time the poem was written?
2. What does the poem describe? What events or scenes does it portray?
3. Does the poem discuss violence at all? If so, how?
4. What is the mood of the poem? Is it resigned, angry, hopeful, etc? Remember that poems are meant to be read aloud. You may wish to read your poem aloud with your group.
5. How does the poem envision the future? What does your poem suggest will happen to race relations in South Africa?

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

**Selection 1****Remember Sharpeville***Dennis Brutus (c. 1960)*

What is important  
about Sharpeville  
is not that seventy died:  
nor even that they were shot in the back  
retreating, unarmed, defenseless

and certainly not  
the heavy caliber slug  
that tore through a mother's back  
and ripped into the child in her arms  
killing it

Remember Sharpeville  
bullet-in-the-back day

Because it epitomized oppression  
and the nature of society  
more clearly than anything else;  
it was the classic event

Nowhere is racial dominance  
more clearly defined  
nowhere the will to oppress  
more clearly demonstrated

what the world whispers  
apartheid declares with snarling guns  
the blood the rich lust after  
South Africa spills in the dust

Remember Sharpeville  
Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom  
Remember the dead and be glad

**Selection 2****Where the Rainbow Ends***Richard Rive (1955)*

Where the rainbow ends,  
There's going to be a place brother,  
Where the world can sing all sorts of songs,  
And we're going to sing together, brother,  
You and I,  
Though you're White and I'm not.  
It's going to be a sad song, brother,  
'Cause we don't know the tune,  
And it's a difficult tune to learn,  
But we can learn it, brother,  
You and I,  
There's no such tune as a Black tune,  
There's no such tune as a White tune,  
There's only music, brother,  
And it's music we're going to sing,  
Where the rainbow ends.

**Selection 3****A Game of Guessing***G.M. Kolisang (1958)*

I adjusted my tie and put on my hat,  
And walked out of my rusty shanty home.  
I caught the 8.30 a.m. Booth Camp bus.  
I heard the street clock strike nine,  
Entered an elegant, stately shop.  
'Yes, John. What do you want?'  
Amiably said the lady behind the counter.  
'How,' I asked, 'did you know my name, Madam?'  
I in return, did courteously ask,  
Thoroughly satisfied by her amazing ingenuity.  
'Oh! Of course I guessed it,' was her positive reply.  
'Then, Madam, you are, I am convinced, surely capable  
Of guessing what it is I want.'

**Selection 4**

**Because I'm Black**

*Herbert Dhlomo (1949)*

Because I'm black  
You think I lack  
The talents, feelings and ambitions  
That others have;  
You do not think I crave positions  
That others crave.

Psychology  
And Zoology  
Have proved that Race and blood are a fiction...  
All men are Man;  
Diversity means not disunion—  
It is God's plan;  
White blood and black in test transfusions  
Answer the same.  
They harbour childish vain delusions  
Who better claim.  
Because the people eat and sing  
And mate,  
You do not see their suffering.  
You rate  
Them fools  
And tools  
Of those with power and boastful show;  
Not fate, but fault, has made things so—  
Beware! The people, struggling, hold  
The winning card;  
And when they strike they will be bold—  
And will strike hard!

**Selection 5**

**The God of Formal Ways**

*Ezekiel Mphahlele (1950)*

I made a god,  
And now he rules with iron rod;  
I worship in his formal ways,  
His name I praise

I swear and lie  
To them and my own self—to buy  
A nod of favour and approval—  
Still so formal!

He must implore,  
While knocking at compassion's door;  
I show him, yet within's despise—  
Such form is vice!

My beaming smile  
Is just to aid my flattery style  
The mirthless laugh a social stunt  
Not to be blunt.  
O God of Form,  
You baffle reason, lull the storm  
Of passion, and the pain of truth  
You lie to soothe!

Made by me,  
You split me into two, and see!  
I sweat and chafe against your chains;  
I've lost my brains!

You know it well—  
I'd crush your power and break your spell,  
You know I may not just decide—  
There lies my pride!

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

**Selection 6**

**Rise Up**

*Desmond Dhlomo (1955)*

Oh land of warrior bold and brave!  
 Where once you did your spearheads wield  
 Your own dear land you strove to save  
 Now crumpled down, and do you yield?

O Chaka<sup>1</sup> great thy name I fear;  
 How like a god you strode this strand;  
 I praise you and this land once dear  
 Where once you strode with Black war band.

And I poor son, from your dust rise  
 And seek once more a once-dear land  
 —No assegais<sup>2</sup> nor war-like cries—  
 But crave on earth a worthy stand.

Rise up! swarthy Chaka's train,  
 'Tis time that you should show in deed  
 That you be brave, have evils slain  
 And love and peace you seek to breed.

Rise up! 'tis not by magic hand  
 You'll win a name in lands abroad  
 But through great toil and trusty stand  
 You'll live as if all time afford.

<sup>1</sup> Chaka = Shaka, a Zulu king famous for his military skill

<sup>2</sup> assegai = throwing spears used by Zulu warriors

**Selection 8**

**How Long, O God?**

*Walter N.B. Nlapo (1950)*

Burst forth my heart complaining  
 Yours can't be joyful song.  
 Sorrows you have been restraining  
 Within yourself for long!

Like flame let your feeling's flower  
 Cry aloud, let earth hear  
 Your mighty voice with all its power,  
 Tell the pains of many a year.

I'm black but I'm kingly, and even  
 God knows; a slave I cry,

**Selection 7**

**The Contraction and Enclosure of Land**

*St. J. Page Yako (1958) translated from Xhosa*

Thus spake the heirs of the land  
 Although it is no longer ours.  
 This land will be folded like a blanket  
 Till it is like the palm of a hand.  
 The racing ox will become entangled in the wire,  
 Too weak to dance free, it will be worn out by the  
     dance of the yoke and the plough.  
 They will crowd us together like tadpoles  
 In a calabash ladle. Our girls  
 Will have their lobola<sup>1</sup> paid with paper,  
 Coins that come and go, come and go.  
 Blood should not be spilled, so they say  
 Nowadays, to unite the different peoples,  
 Until we no longer care for each other,  
 As a cow licks her calf, when love  
 And nature urge her to do so.  
 Can money bring people together?  
 Yes, a man may have words with his son's wife,  
 His son need no longer respect her mother.

Yes, we fold up our knees,  
 It's impossible to stretch out,  
 Because the land has been hedged in.

<sup>1</sup> lobola = "bride price" paid by man's family to woman's

And for fatherland grieving;  
 And stars shed tears in the sky.

God! must my tears flow forever?  
 Hear me in my tears  
 before I cross Lethe river<sup>1</sup>  
 To land of no fears.

<sup>1</sup> The legendary Lethe River erases the memory of those who cross it.