

**Lesson 14**  
**Reading South Africa: A Lesson in Three Parts**



**Candy Hamilton**, College Place Middle School



**Objectives:** At the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Understand how historical events have shaped South African literature.
2. Describe different aspects of South African life as a result of reading novels and viewing films.

**Suggested Grade Level:** 7-8 (Could also be used at the high school level with additional readings selected from the ancillary texts listed under materials.)

**Time:** Ten 50-minute class periods per part

**Suggested Subjects:** Language Arts, English, World Literatures, and World Geography (with ancillary readings)

**Materials:**

Novels:

- ◆ *A Girl Named Disaster* by Nancy Farmer  
306-page novel about Nhamo and what happens to her after her mother dies, and she is forced to marry a cruel man who already has three wives. A journey of self-discovery and growth. Excellent glossary of terms included. ISBN: 0140386351
- ◆ *The Warm Place* by Nancy Farmer  
A 152-page novel with animals as the main characters. A lonely giraffe who wants “the warm place” of her homeland. All of the characters must overcome evil to find home. ISBN: 0140379568
- ◆ *No Turning Back* by Beverley Naidoo  
A 189-page novel about a young man who runs away from his mother and stepfather because he can’t please his stepfather. His mother is pregnant and he wants to be there for his little brother or sister, and finds that making a life on the streets isn’t any easier than making it work at home. Also has a glossary at the end. ISBN: 0064407497
- ◆ *Journey to Jo’burg* by Beverley Naidoo  
A 75-page story about a young girl who makes the decision to go to Johannesburg to find her mother because her younger sister is very sick and needs medicine. She takes her younger brother with her and their journey is life changing. ISBN: 0064402371
- ◆ *Chain of Fire* by Beverley Naidoo  
This is the 242-page follow-up to Ms. Naidoo’s *Journey to Jo’burg*. We follow Naledi as she is forced to a new “homeland”, meets new people and has to decide whether or not to fight. ISBN: 0064404684
- ◆ *A Bone from a Dry Sea* by Peter Dickinson  
An engrossing 200-page novel, told from the perspective of two different characters, 4 million years apart. An excellent read, especially for those students who are interested in fossils and digging up the past. ISBN: 0440219280

- ◆ *Thunder Cave* by Roland Smith  
Action packed 249-page novel about Jacob Lansa who wants to catch-up with his father who is working in Kenya with elephant herds. His quest on bicycle and by foot bring him into contact with truly interesting characters. ISBN: 0786811595
- ◆ *Waiting for the Rain* by Sheila Gordon  
Tengo and Frikkie dominate this 214-page novel about what happens when you find out a life-long friend has beliefs that are totally different from your own. What happens to that friendship? ISBN: 0786811595

Ancillary Texts: *I Write What I Like*, Steve Biko; *Buckingham Palace, District Six*, Richard Rive; *My Traitor's Heart*, Rian Malan; *Out of Bounds*, Beverley Naidoo; *South African Dispatches: Letters to My Countrymen*, Donald Woods; *Ways of Dying*, Zakes Mda; *Crossings: A Senior Poetry Anthology*, Annemarie Heywood

Videos: *Cry Freedom*, *A Long Night's Journey Into Day*, *The Power of One*, *Sarafina*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Gandhi*

- ◆ Literature Circle Discussion Prompts
- ◆ Universal Journal Questions
- ◆ Literary Timeline
- ◆ Journal/Reader Response Log

### **Instructional Procedures:**

1. Inform students that they will be delving into what, for some of them, may be a whole new genre of literature: that of the African experience, specifically South African. Next, explain the historical context that shaped the lives of the writers whose work they will encounter.
2. Divide the class in half, and hand out the Literary Timeline. Make one half responsible for the events from 1880 – 1990, the other for the events spanning 1990 to the present day. Using the Literary Timeline, have each group determine what they need to research to better understand the following: apartheid, Sharpeville Massacre, Nelson Mandela, Olive Schreiner, Nationalist Party, ANC, etc. Two class periods in the library should be sufficient to learn basic information.
3. Next, have each group decide how they will present their answer to one of the following questions: 1880–1990 groups: What were the forces that may have helped to shape South African literature from 1880-1990? Post-Apartheid groups: What forces have reshaped South African literature from 1990 through today?
4. Next, ask each group to present their answer. Instruct the students to take notes and tell them they will use these notes later in the lesson. After each group presents, allow time for questions.
5. Using the novels listed under Materials, choose as many as you can afford to get. You do not necessarily need a class set unless that is how you choose to approach the study. These novels can be found at the local library as well. Attached are discussion prompts and journal questions for use during these literature circles. [Note to Teacher: A couple of excellent websites are listed below to help get you started if literature circles are new to you: [www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/mla/circle/intro.html](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/mla/circle/intro.html). Canadian education site that has basic, easy to follow information about what literature

circles are, how to do them, and assessments. [fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/](http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/). Seattle University website for educators in primary and middle school grades; easy to use, with great links. [www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/curr259.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr259.shtml). A very user-friendly site, with excellent information about resource materials as well as how to get started.]

6. Choose any two of the listed films. [Note to Teacher: <http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides> is an excellent website for films' benefits, possible problems, background information, and discussion questions.]

The films can be used to reinforce the key concepts and give students an opportunity to synthesize information. At this stage, ask them to complete and illustrate their answer to the following statement: South African literary history, from today forward, should be viewed as... and should include...because....

7. Conclude the lesson by asking students to reflect on what they have learned. This reflection could take the form of a piece of writing, a collage, a poster, an analysis of a song's lyrics that speaks to what they've studied, a poem, a children's book with pictures, or a piece of artwork with a written description.

**Extension:** Based on content learned throughout the unit, and the storyline of their literature circle book, have each student engage in a debate with another student who read the same book in their circle. Consider using the following resolution: *South African literature does not portray South African life and times accurately*. Arguments for and against could center around: time period of the book, the writer's background, the age of the character(s), the political positions taken in the book by the characters or implied by the writer through the actions of the characters, details or lack thereof, etc. Discussion, perhaps, of the effects of publishing at a certain time in South African historical context; would/could/should the storyline have been different if published post-1990? One student would be responsible for taking the affirmative position on this resolution - that being no, South African literature does not accurately portray the life and times of South Africa. In essence, agreeing with the resolution as stated. The negative position would be that yes, it does accurately portray the life and times of South Africa. This would employ assessment pieces of speechwriting, public speaking, reasoning, analysis, and research skills.

## Literature Circle Discussion Prompts

To be used as a whole group prompt or within the individual literature groups.

### *Waiting for the Rain*

- ◆ How important is friendship to you?
- ◆ Do you have a friend whose beliefs are different from yours? How does this affect the friendship?

### *A Bone from a Dry Sea*

- ◆ Have you ever had an imaginary friend?
- ◆ Where do you think humans came from?
- ◆ What would it take to convince you that there is a different answer to #2?

### *No Turning Back*

- ◆ Does a new government always mean a better government?
- ◆ How much abuse would you take before leaving home?
- ◆ If you left home, how would you know whom to turn to? To trust?
- ◆ Do you agree or disagree with the following:  
*All street kids are vicious criminals who deserve the life they are living.*  
Support your position.

### *The Warm Place*

- ◆ How do children's books sometimes help us understand the world around us?
- ◆ Should we remove animals (and possibly, others) from their "warm places" for others benefit?

### *A Girl Named Disaster*

- ◆ Why are particular names chosen for people?
- ◆ Do we make first impression judgments about people before we even lay eyes on them simply because of their name?
- ◆ Is it possible to overcome our past and our present and reach our goals? How come some people have difficulty in doing this?

### *Thunder Cave*

- ◆ What does it mean to survive?
- ◆ Does our society value some things more than others? Why?

### *Journey to Jo'burg*

- ◆ What is bravery?
- ◆ Is our country "dangerous" to any one group of people?

### *Chain of Fire*

- ◆ What is the "right of free expression?"
- ◆ Why do you think governments forcibly remove people from their homes and move them elsewhere?

## Universal Journal Questions

Universal for all novel study; which assumes concurrent social studies/history work on South Africa background, political, economic, social, and cultural.

- ◆ Do you believe this type of plot could ever have been carried out in real life?
- ◆ Whose perspective are we reading this novel from? Is this important? Why or why not?
- ◆ What would happen to the plot (and, most likely, the overall storyline) if you changed the narrator to a different character?
- ◆ When does this story take place: during Apartheid or after? How does that affect the story and the characters' decisions/ways of life?
- ◆ Why is it necessary for this type of literature to be studied?

## Literary Timeline

### Timeline of Events

1880 - 1990

1883

*The Story of An African Farm*  
by Olive Schreiner

1920/30

*Mhudi*

by Sol Plaahte

1948

The apartheid administration comes into power  
*Cry the Beloved Country*  
by Alan Paton

1958

*Darkness and Light*  
by Peggy Rutherford

1960s

The Sharpeville Massacre

A proliferation of black writing

*An African Treasury*  
by Langston Hughes

### Timeline of Events

1990 - PRESENT DAY

February 11, 1990

Nelson Mandela is released

1991 - 1994

The Nationalist government and the ANC sit down to discuss possible compromises and a national election. A negotiated settlement is reached.

September 1992

Njabulo S. Ndebele writes "I think I am attempting to highlight the ultimate impossibility of arriving at a definition of South African literature"

April 26 - 29, 1994

First national elections

April 27, 1994

Interim Constitution accepted

May 2, 1994

Nelson Mandela declares the ANC victorious

May 10, 1994

Nelson Mandela is sworn-in as the first president to be democratically elected in South Africa

May 8, 1996

A new Constitution is written, replacing the Interim one of 1994

1964  
Nelson Mandela is imprisoned on  
Robben Island

April 1, 1966  
South African literature is now  
declared white by law with the  
Government Gazette Extraordinary  
wherein six black writers living  
abroad were banned under the  
Suppression of Communism Act

1970  
A rejuvenation of black literature

*Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*  
by Oswald Mtshali's

1976

The Soweto Uprising

*Jol'iinkomo*  
by Makika Gwala

The literature of the townships  
now moves in the direction of  
the Black Consciousness movement

1980  
Renewed suppression of black  
writing

1986  
State of Emergency becomes a  
permanent part of the way the  
Nationalist government does work

1990  
A time for change?

February 7, 1997  
Amended text Constitution  
is published; expected to be  
redrafted by April, 1999

1997  
Mandela steps down as  
the leader of the ANC;  
Thabo Mbeki, deputy  
president of the ANC is  
sworn in as the new leader

June 2, 1999  
Second national election;  
ANC is again victorious and Mbeki  
is sworn-in as the new leader

233 of the 400 seats in Parliament  
are voted to the ANC