

## Contents Page

Introduction	i
Note from Moderators	v

### BATJHA KAOFELA 2024 TOP WINNERS

- Shattered Dreams** by Bonginkosi Sibanda
- Words as Bridges** by Brent Bayanda Sibindi
- I am not Alone** by Gugu Mntambo
- A Voice for All** by Konkokuhle Khumbuza
- Story of a Black Child: Brown Skin Girl** by Miriam Dlangamandla
- Inkoma Edla Yodwa** by Sanelise Rharhaza
- Listen to Your Parents** by Siyabonga Ndlovu
- The True Friends** by Thabo Mohamed
- The Royal Legacy Necklace** by Thato Talenyana
- Love and Discrimination** by Zenith Loilane

### BATJHA KAOFELA 2024 RUNNER-UPS

- The Book Club** by Amahle Ndlovu
- Special Talent** by Amahle Shoba
- Life is an Open Book** by Bosan Amba
- My Brunette Skin** by Konkokuhle Khumbuza
- Unknown Father, Unknown Me** by Lorraine Magadani
- The Girl Who Won't Show her Face in School** by Minenhle Luthando Mbambo
- The Memory Weaver** by Ntokozo Sibiya
- The Rising Africans** by Owam Sibuka
- The Youth of 1976** by Thando Mavunduse
- The Weight of Tears** by Venessa Chivizhe

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**# Batjha Kaofela**

**Literature and Solidarity in Times of Crisis**

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**16<sup>th</sup>**  
**JOZI**  
**BOOK FAIR**  
**Theme:**  
**Literature & Solidarity**  
**in Times of Crisis**

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual JBF IS HERE**  
**Book Launches, Seminars, Poetry, Dance, Music,**  
**Theatre, Exhibition, Booksales and Oupa**  
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**Click the link below to register**

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**Venue: Newtown Park,**  
**Johannesburg**  
**Free Entrance!!!**

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## Jozi Book Fair

A Book presented to:

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

School/Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Let us build a culture of reading & writing in all our languages

Presented By:

Dr. Maria Van Driel, Khanya College Director

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### Introduction

Dear Tsohang Batjha

Thank you for participating in the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Jozi Book Fair Short Story Competition. Thank you for the wonderful stories that you submitted that embodied the theme of the Book Fair '*Literature and Solidarity in Times of Crisis*' very perfectly. Ironically, the stories also reflect on the loss that we have experienced this year, of people who played a big role in the Jozi Book Fair and its objectives.

To expand on our work, we also revived our relationship with a number of schools in the Inner City, which will strengthen the work that the Jozi Book Fair does. This year, we received 119 Short Story, a drop from the previous year of 158. This is a reflection of the challenges that the project had this year in our work with the community organisations and the decline in the number of participating youth for various reasons, including funding, loss and some organisations having to close their doors. A sad reality for children and youth who depends on these organisations.

The stories in this edition, best describes the turmoil the we face in our communities, but most importantly shows how in times of turmoil, literature serves as a beacon of hope and solidarity. The various stories highlight the importance of collective actions in response to crisis.

Through literature, we witness the complexities of human relationships, whether through friendships, romantic relationships, family or communities. The struggle for identity, belonging and the grief and loss we experience when we lose our loved ones. It is through the different crises that we are able to find human connections and build solidarity. Hannah's box, a symbol of isolation, contrast with Arika's weaving, or the community that rebuilds a burnt library, where intergenerational and complex relationships are forged. The stories demonstrate that alone we are weak, but through collective support, we can overcome any crises.

Ntokozo's story symbolises the threads of vulnerability and resilience weaved together and forming self-discovery and growth. The collection of stories narrates the struggles and moments that shape us as individuals and as a collective.

Through the eyes of relatable characters, from the one who does not know her father, Olintando and her brunette skin or character with a bipolar disorder and Thembi and finding her identity as a member of the LGBTQI community. These characters reflect the quest for

identity, self-acceptance and belonging. They remind us of the importance of embarking on the journey to self-discovery.

Through the triumphs and struggles of these characters, we find reflections of our own experiences, reminders that we are not alone in our struggles, and inspiration to live our best lives and reveal our true beauty. The stories show that another world is possible.

On behalf of Khanya College and Jozi Book Fair, we thank everyone who helped Tshohang Batjha and made this edition possible. We thank the youth, parents, teachers, coordinators and our moderators: Neilwe Mashigo, Jayne Bauling and Susan April.

Enjoy your reading and keep writing!

Best Wishes,

The Jozi Book Fair Team

3 October 2024

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## **Note from Moderators**

It has been our privilege and pleasure to serve as moderators for the 2024 Jozi Book Fair Short Story Competition. This year's theme was *Literature and Solidarity in the Time of Crisis*, and many of the entries perfectly embodied this, placing a strong emphasis on communities coming together, with book clubs and libraries providing safe spaces, relief, and upliftment for the victims of upheaval.

As always, many of the stories were aspirational, with characters confronting challenges and overcoming difficulties. We appreciated the way that in which triumphing characters would use their changed circumstances to give back to their communities. Optimism was another heartening feature in many of the stories: prejudiced people see the light and reform, becoming supportive of those they previously condemned, and abusers repent and find redemption.

We saw an exciting growth in creativity, demonstrated by an increase in the number of imaginative stories, magic and magical realism making a strong showing.

This is an important writing competition for the entrants, a way for them to share their creativity and to express themselves. We congratulate all the entrants, and want to encourage them to establish a regular writing practice as a way of developing their ability to share stories on the page.

Thank you and congratulations to Khanya College and the Jozi Book Fair for continuing to offer this unique opportunity to our youth.

—the moderators: Neilwe Mashigo, Susan April, Jayne Bauling

## **Shattered Dreams**

**By Bonginkosi Sibanda**

**Grade 8, African House College**

Once upon a time he said, "The future is in your hands, son." This was while I was seeing my future flashing before my eyes. Through a window engulfed in fire, I saw community members running around with buckets full of water like ants on a mission. Old women had their arms extended, and were yelling, "Sizani!" In a slip of a second, my mother's lifeless body was on the floor. My father kept on trying to break the door down. All was in vain, as he was panting like a marathon runner.

All he kept on saying was, "I won't let anything happen to you and your mother." I was so confused by everything that was happening. I could hardly breath as the smoke from the fire found residence in my lungs. I tried to remember what might have started the fire at that

time of the night. After what seemed to have been two hours of hell, I heard sirens, bringing me some hope that we would be saved. My father fell on his knees and said, "The future is in your hands, son." I cried, begged him to hang in there. I could feel the blazing fire on my skin.

I tried to interact with him, but he was not moving anymore. I felt dizzy and passed out at that very moment.

"He's not responding," one nurse shouted. I opened my eyes, and I was covered in what can never be erased, something with greater power than memories. I was covered in scars that will never fade. I moved around with a reminder of the death of both my parents as a result of a cigarette that ended in the wrong place at the wrong time.

### **Words as Bridges**

**by Brent Bayanda Sibindi**

**Grade 11, Malvern High School**

In a small town, there was a library that nestled between hills. The town prided itself in its library, but when an earthquake hit, homes and the library were destroyed.

The town's people were left without shelter, food and running water, and the future seemed uncertain. An old woman named Martha who was the owner of the library took it upon herself to visit what was left of the library. The sight of the broken building and wet ruined books broke her heart. She asked for help from the townspeople.

With the help of a few people, Martha began trying to salvage what she could. Their spirits unbroken, they worked together in harmony. Soon children joined to help too, and the library which was in pieces soon turned into a home for many in the town.

This warmed Martha's heart because everyone started visiting the library often, reading and also helping to rebuild the library.

The library began to take shape, and then something incredible happened: the town's people, inspired by the effort to rebuild the library, began sharing their stories and food, and sometimes sleeping there. The library was always filled with voices and laughter now, which made Martha feel like the township people were her family, which was heartwarming.

The library, once a solitary structure filled with the wisdom of others, had become a living entity filled with the spirit of the town itself. It was now a place where literature not only existed, but came alive. It transformed a crisis into a new beginning for the town. The library now stood as a symbol of hope, unity, and the enduring power of literature and story telling.

**I am not Alone**  
**by Gugulethu Mntambo**  
**Grade 11, Parktown Girls High School**

I have always been a shy girl at heart, ever since the death of my mother and father when I was only thirteen years old. Before that, I was always the life of the party at home, cracking jokes during dinnertime, dancing to the most current songs during gatherings or celebrations and being the smartest child they have ever seen.

I was forced to live with uGogo from a young age, and to do so I moved from Gqeberha to Alexandra in Gauteng. Believe me when I say that the atmosphere was very different to what I expected, but I became more familiar with it in my last year of high school.

Alexandra was squashed, noisy and very stuffy, and is still like that now. Everyone just lives to survive, and more people live with no purpose. There is abundant crime every day, I always hear police sirens at midnight, and it's flooded with substance abuse, particularly alcohol.

Gqeberha was so quiet and airy. I always worked harder there than I did in Alex. Here, it was an abomination for a child of my age to do such work, but I carried buckets of water for long distances and helped with setting up the fire to cook every night. But here there are taps and stoves, it's the "suburban life" as many people say. I don't know why there has to be a difference, I mean the Bible says we are all the same in the eyes of God, so we should be equal as citizens of South Africa.

Gogo was very old; she could not even do the easiest daily activities for herself, such as walking and bathing. Her type-2 diabetes had worsened significantly, and I had to take her to emergency rooms almost every month. I worried whether she would live to see me pass my matric finals. Without her, I was nothing but a small particle of dust in the atmosphere. I always prayed to uThixo to let her live a long life, to see my successes and enjoy them with me, as I believed such a future was possible. We had no one else; it was just her and me against the world.

Matric in Alexandra High School was not a piece of cake. I was underestimated because of my shyness and quietness, but I always said that I was only there for my bright future and nothing else. "I am not here to please anyone," I would tell myself.

Over my years in high school, I made a friend whom I would rather call my sister. She was very smart, beautiful, and energetic. I only had her to speak to at school, and she always cheered me up when I was down, as she was lively and energetic, which was a true testimony to "opposites attract".

She always supported me during the toughest of times, such as helping me out with uGogo by accompanying me when I took her to the clinic, and by standing up for me when I was being bullied at school. I had never seen anyone like her. May God bless her forever.

I was always happy when I was in the classroom because I learnt and discovered many things that were unknown about life and about us as human beings. I always put effort into my studies, because I wished to get out of the devastating lifestyle that I have made out to be normal when it was not supposed to be. I wanted to leave poverty behind me and move into the rainbow and stars.

I once woke up early at 5 am to get ready for school, and following my daily routine, I went to check on Gogo. "Sawubona Gogo, unjani namhlanje?" I asked. I received no answer, so I asked again, more and more. Getting no reply, I felt the world shatter into pieces around me. Many thoughts rushed into my mind. UGogo lay there helpless, which I had never imagined in my entire existence. I did not know what to do, so I ran to Lwandile's house which was two blocks away. "Noxolo? Kwenzenjani mngani wami?" asked Lwandile. I said, "Uhambile uGogo," and she quickly came over and gave me the most heart-warming hug ever. I didn't go to school that day, as much as I loved school. I had lost my caregiver, my lover, my role model, and my everything in the whole wide world.

Planning the funeral was very difficult and sometimes I felt like giving up. I lacked almost everything that was required. I did not have enough money for the coffin and transport, plus I did not have food for the funeral attendees and helpers. Fortunately, Lwandile and her family gathered some people that they trusted in the community to help me with the funeral. Other people brought maize meal for pap, pumpkins, and soup, while others handed in monetary donations. Thanks to Lwandile and her family, the funeral was a success and a dignified one for uGogo. May she rest in peace.

Continuously, Lwandile helped me through the pain of losing my Gogo as well. She provided everything to help me, and I never lacked anything. When my marks dropped, she tutored me by herself. This was almost too good to be true.

Sometimes I would sit alone and ask myself, "Is Lwandile an angel in disguise?" Honestly, I do believe that she was indeed an angel.

Currently, I am twenty years old, and I am very independent and working towards my degree in dermatology at Wits university. I will forever be grateful for Lwandile and everything she did for me. She was a beautiful pearl in my life. Lwandile died of brain cancer when she was only eighteen years old. I always pray for her and thank God for bringing her into my life. I tried my best to help her family by assisting with the funeral and by letting them know that I was with them when she died. Izandla ziyagezana (hands wash each other). I still check up on her family as well, because Lwandile was like my sister and I will never forget her.

In these times of darkness in our lives, we always come to help each other either by organising and coming together. No human ever made it through troubles in their lives without help from another human, just like Lwandile and me. Communities mourn for their members together, people protest together against what is bad, like people protesting against Israel, and people organise to request service delivery from the government and so on. As humans, we can conquer anything as long as we are together. Let us continue to work together, because as the famous saying goes, 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu'.

Rest in peace Lwandile Zikode.

## **A Voice for All**

**by Konkokuhle Khumbuza**

**Grade 10, Rena Le Lona Creative Centre**

It was one of the boring summer days at school. I'm usually happy and bubbly, but today I feel like I've lost a part of me. Anyway, my name is Nobuntu and I have a twin sister called Buntu. I am a first-year student at Melville High. My sister Buntu has changed a lot since we started this school together. I feel like Buntu died a long time ago due to her popular but unfriendly friends. I don't know how my life turned upside down, but I thought I should share the story with you.

Me and my sister are room-mates at Melville High. We were lucky to get scholarship, although we are surrounded by rich and well-known kids and sometimes we feel like outsiders. Some learners have a way of making us feel loved and welcomed. Buntu joined the popular squad that bullied other kids and made them feel less and outsiders. Buntu asked me to join them, but I refused because of the reputation they hold and how they use it to hurt other kids. I found other good friends that made me feel like one of them.

School was going pretty well, although it felt like Buntu was now changing into a monster. We grew so far apart and I felt like my other half was slowly engaging in bad things as their squad name was Bad Girls. One morning I woke up early and went to the chemistry class about twenty minutes before the bell rang. I walked in to see Mr James behind his desk, muttering softly, "Pee...rr...ffee..ct." I ignored him and went straight to my seat. After a while I heard a female voice coming from under his desk, and I quickly stormed out of the class, realising the situation. I spotted my friends and went to them. I found them gossiping and I also said what I had ran from in the classroom. We talked and laughed until the bell rang.

After a few weeks, I saw that my twin sister was going through some sort of hard time and needed space, so I didn't bother her. I minded my own business, but a few days later Buntu asked me for a favour. I was stunned but I first wanted details about the favour. She asked me to come with her and I did. We found Liv and Rikki, her friends, in the girls' bathroom. Liv was sweet this time. They explained the plan and told me that I should pretend to be Buntu for one day. I told them I needed time to process this and they gave me some time. I thought about it and I gave them a reply saying, "I will do it for the sake of you, Buntu." We had to switch our identities, and I would become Buntu for one day. I was very uncomfortable at school because I was not my true self, but the day went very quickly, and no one was suspicious, so no one knew about what we did.

School went quite well until I found Buntu crying in the bathroom alone. I hugged her tightly and comforted her without asking her what was going on. When we went to the dining room, she told me everything that had been happening in her life. She even told me about Mr James who offered to sleep with her in exchange for good marks, and I saw that she needed me more than ever right now. I went to her bedroom and shared the bed with her for the night because she was going through a hard time.

A week passed with no news about Mr. James leaving the school, so we decided to take this matter into our own hands. We gathered evidence about him and went to the principal to report this matter. It turned out the principal knew about this and kept quiet about it to protect the school reputation. We then decided to involve the police because this matter had gone too far. The school played their part very well and there was a meeting for everyone, even the teachers, held in the hall.

The police were standing in front and I was standing on the other side. The police addressed the agenda of the meeting and this gave me a chance to evaluate more about what had been going on. I was always shy and scared, but standing there, all eyes on me, I stood bold and fierce, showing no sign of weakness, and I explained the things that had been happening right under our noses. After I'd done explaining, I heard sound of chairs dragging. Everyone stood up and came to me in front and stood with me. The parents showed support, and understood why their children were distant lately; they also understood the sorrow and pain they went through. They not only supported me, but they stood firm as defensive parents and students. I was so happy that we stood up together and used our voices to fight this nonsensical thing that could ruin one's future and life. The parents and other school teachers came to a decision that the principal and Mr James should leave the school premises with immediate effect because of this unlawful act, and then they were sent to gather all their belonging and leave.

We watched them packing their things in boxes until they left school. After the meeting, we discussed opening a student-led campaign called 'Let's Talk, where we would host sessions for everyone in the school, in order to feel safe and protected and also to support those who are going through a hard time.

That is how my life turned, but I am happy that I got to become a voice for all and saved those in need around me, and I believe if you see one in need you must help because you might not know how many are going through that situation and in need of a voice to save them. Be the first one to make a change and empower others. "Your voice is your power and your power is your voice."

**Story of a Black Child: Brown Skin Girl**  
**by Mimi Miriam Dlangamandla**  
**Grade 10, Sakha Kids**

Mimi was a bright and curious sixteen-year-old girl with a warm, golden-brown complexion. She loved chilling with her mates outside, exploring the vibrant makers in her neighbourhood, and listening to her grandmother's stories about the world of ancestors. One day, while playing with her friends, Mimi overheard someone saying, "You're so dark, you blend into shadows." The words stung, and for the first time Mimi felt self-conscious about her skin. That evening she asked her grandmother, "Boniswa, why do people say mean things about my skin?" Her grandmother smiled. "Ah, my dear, your skin is like the rich soil of our ancestors' land, and it's fertile, strong, and beautiful. Do not let anyone dull your sunshine." That made her look at herself in the mirror, and see how beautiful her skin was. That there was sunshine within herself.

From that day going forward, Mimi walked taller, proud of her brown skin and the sunshine that radiated from within. She knew she was a bright light and no one could dim her glow. She thought, "No one can dull my light, my richness, my beautiful skin, and warm brown skin tone. I am a melanin, Queen of beauty and creative. Being a chocolate skin girl doesn't mean I have to take advantage of my skin tone."

### **Inkomo Edla Yodwa (The Cow that Eats Alone)**

**by Sanelise Rharhaza**

**Grade 11, Sakha Kids**

There is a boy named Aphiwe who lives in Johannesburg with both his parents. Aphiwe is the kind of person that doesn't have interest in girls. He is only interested in boys, and he wants to change his gender identity to a girl. His parents do not know, and it would be bad news for his dad as he is proud that he has a son. When Aphiwe goes to school he carries a school dress in his bag so that when he arrives at school he can change and wear a school dress.

Most of the boys at school don't like him, and they always call him names and say that he is a gay, or say bad things about him, like he will sexually abuse them. They always treat him badly in class, calling him names that he doesn't like, so that he ends up complaining to the teachers, who try to speak with the learners about it.

After a while of hiding it from his parents, they ended up knowing what kind of a person Aphiwe is. Aphiwe's father was very angry when he found out. He thought Aphiwe was his son, but now he wanted Aphiwe to change. He beat Aphiwe all night, trying to make him the son he wanted. But Aphiwe refused to change who he was. His parents eventually let him be what he wants to be.

Aphiwe grows up living the way he is, and he is also caring to other people, motivating or encouraging them to be who they want to be and live their life the way they want.

**Listen to your Parents**  
**by Siyabonga Ndlovu**  
**Grade 7, Africa House College**

It was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2020 when I, and my brother Dumisani, and his friends, decided to go and swim in the river. We were at my mother's childhood place as schools were closed. We never grew up in the rural areas, and it was our first time visiting our grandparents. It was a very sunny day, and we were extremely excited. We were not afraid of swimming from the riverbank because we were used to swimming in huge pools in town where we lived with our parents.

Within ten minutes we were at the river. Dumisani's friends were used to swimming in the river because they always came home when schools were closed. All went well; we enjoyed ourselves, but after swimming I started to feel a bit uncomfortable. My stomach was sore and I started running; I felt weak and did not know what to do. Dumisani and his friends carried me home, and when my mom saw my state, she drove me to hospital. On arrival, doctors confirmed that I had diarrhoea. The pain was unbearable, and from that day I learnt to never to swim in dirty water. I recovered after some days, when we had to go back to school.

**The True Friends**  
**by Thabo Mohamed**  
**Grade 6, Metropolitan College**

Once upon a time there were two friends, Abdul and Thabo. They used to live and play together. Abdul was very sporty and always won their games. Thabo used to feel bad and thought it was no use. They were neighbours. One day it started raining heavily. Abdul was in high spirits. He started doing antics, but suddenly lost his balance and fell in the rain water. He called to his friend Thabo for help. Thabo came to his rescue. Abdul climbed on his back and reached a safe place. He thanked his friend for saving his life. When they began playing the following day, Thabo expressed his feelings to his friend Abdul. "I am feeling bad because of you, Abdul. You always won the games. I also want to be like you, winning games."

Abdul said, "You must bring water and your towel for wiping your body." One day later Thabo knocked at Abdul's house and told him to train him today. Abdul trained Thabo so hard that even Thabo wanted to give up, but Abdul said, "You want to win, then you have to train harder." Thabo said he was a professional, and Abdul said no, he was a semi-pro. They trained harder, and Thabo had a game the following day. He was so happy, and he won the game. They went to celebrate with Ice cream as friends, and drank milkshakes.

**The Royal Legacy Necklace**  
**by Thato Talenyana**  
**Grade 7, Metropolitan College**

Once upon a time in an unknown place far away was a village called Wonderous, filled with crazy people. In this village they had a tradition in which when a girl turns eighteen, she gets a legacy necklace.

Hence, there was this girl named Elera. She had good manners, was very respectful, very beautiful, and had a great attitude.

This time it was Elera's turn to get a legacy necklace because she had finally turned eighteen years old. She got the most beautiful necklace, and this made the women of the village angry and jealous. Three girls plotted something against Elera when they heard of this.

One day Elera's grandmother sent her to run an errand. On her way she was approached by three girls. "Haven't you heard?" asked the first girl. "Heard what?" Elera replied.

The second girl laughed, then said, "If the monster sees you wearing your necklace it will kill you." "But they s...said to never remove the necklace," Elera answered. "We threw ours in the river, we can help if you want," the third girl said. Out of fear, Elera took off her necklace and gave it to the second girl who swung the necklace up and tossed it in the river.

"You fool," said the first girl. Elera replied, "What?" Then all three girls removed their blankets, and they were all wearing their necklaces. The second girl then said, "I can't believe you fell for it." Elera realised that they had tricked her. "You tricked me, you still have

your necklaces on," Elera said with tears rolling down her face. The third girl replied, "There is no monster." All of them walked away and started laughing.

Elera ran crying, deeper into the forest. At some point she stopped and sat down with her back against a tree. A few moments later, when Elera was still crying, a voice whispered, "Come closer, my dear." Elera was intrigued by the voice so she followed it. The deeper she went into the forest, the louder the voice became. Then the voice stopped and she saw an old woman who asked, "What's wrong, my dear?" Elera broke down in tears and told the old woman what had happened.

The old woman then said, "I can help you on one condition." Elera looked confused. "You have to kiss all my boils and sores." Elera thought about it for a moment. "Fine, I'll do it." Elera kissed all her boils and sores. Then the old woman turned into a beautiful young lady. The lady then said, "Now it's my turn". She grabbed Elera by the legs and hands, and threw her into the river.

Elera was kicking and screaming until she realised she could breathe under water. Then she realised that kissing the woman's scars, boils and sores gave her the ability to breathe under water. Elera swam deeper into the river; then she came across a cave. "We've been waiting for you my dear. We couldn't find your necklace, but I have an idea." The lady then took out some threads and pearls.

"Take these and go up to the surface," said the lady. "Okay," Elera replied and went up to the surface. Then the pearls and thread turned into a beautiful necklace.

The necklace was no longer the legacy necklace, it had turned into the Royal Legacy Necklace.

When the three girls found out, they were angry. "Hello," said the beautiful lady. "Now bye-bye." The lady then took them by the arms and tossed them into the river.

They kicked and screamed until they drowned, never to be seen again.

## **Love and Discrimination**

**by Zenith Loilane**

**Grade 11, PUSH**

It's on a Friday afternoon when Lebohlang Mabaso decided to visit her friend Busisiwe. In the house, she greeted everyone who was there. Busi and Lebo sat down, and had an interesting conversation until Busi's sister came in. "Busi, didn't you see..." the sister stopped immediately when she saw Lebo. They both looked at each other for a moment, and then Busi shouted, "Love at first sight!" and both of them came back to the real world, smiling at each other. "Hi, I'm Lebohlang, and who are you?" said Lebo. "I'm Thembi, Busisiwe's older

sister.” Lebohang couldn't stop staring at her; she couldn't resist the beauty she was looking at, falling in love with her from that moment.

Thembi was a short light-skinned girl with beautiful eyes and a cute smile. Lebohang, on the other hand was tall, and light-skinned with beautiful eyes. A few days went by and the two became closer, with Lebo developing more feelings for Thembi. Lebo was so taken by her beauty that she couldn't go a day without seeing her or talking to her. Lebo was scared to tell Thembi how she felt about her, thinking if she told her, it would break their friendship. Lebo decided to keep everything to herself.

Lebo's uncle was a taxi driver; he had a daughter, and he was a smoker, but he didn't drink. It was on the Saturday evening when he came back from work and found Lebo busy with her phone, listening to music. He asked her something and she didn't hear him because she was on her phone; he snatched the phone from her and gave her a hot slap. She was confused as to why he slapped her, but he started to shout, telling her how useless and lazy she was. This broke her heart because she was always getting slapped and shouted at for no reason, and would break down in tears. Karabo, Lebo's mother, was the only one who always supported her no matter what she was going through, but Lebo hadn't told her mother that she was lesbian.

Only her mother knew, she had noticed that Lebo liked hanging out with boys and had started to dress like them. She kept quiet, because she knew how hard it was for her to walk in the streets while other people were judging her because of her sexuality. Pinky, her grandmother, also didn't understand this thing of LGBTQ, but she forced herself to accept and support her grandchild. A few weeks passed and Lebo's uncle started to change his ways; he stopped smoking, and started to treat Lebo better than before. Ever since he had started going to church, he had learned that he had to understand and accept Lebohang just the way she was, because he had been too hard on her. He had always thought that he was doing the right thing being hard on her; after the news came out that Lebo was a lesbian, it hadn't sat well with him and he had become even harder on her, but now he realized that he was breaking her rather than supporting her. He made peace and everything was fine between them.

A few months passed, and Lebo and Thembi started to spend more time together. There was this kind of connection between the two, and Lebo couldn't go a day without thinking about Thembi. They were having so much fun together, having lunch dates, going out to the movies, ice-cream dates and fun days. With all that time they spent together, the stronger Lebo's feelings for Thembi got, and that was when she realised that she needed Thembi in her life. Someone who makes her happy, someone who was there for her when times were hard. When she was down and when she needed a shoulder to cry on. It was on a Friday afternoon that Lebohang decided to tell Thembi how she felt about her. Lebo went to her and greeted her, “Good afternoon, beautiful,” and Thembi smiled and said to her, “How are you doing today, my love?” They then took a walk and Lebo told her and that she had been hiding her feelings because she was scared of rejection. Thembi told her that she was feeling

the same and they both decided that they would be together for as long as they loved each other.

A few days later Lebohang took Thembi home to introduce her as her girlfriend. Karabo her mother was so happy. Thembi met the rest of the family, and they were so excited to have Thembi around, Lebohang's mother said that since they were together, they might as well just celebrate and have a braai. Lebo's uncle went to buy the meat for the braai, the braai started, and they all enjoyed it and had fun together celebrating the peace and love in the family. Lebohang and Thembi were finally together just as Lebo had dreamed would happen, and together with her family and friends they both promised to love and protect each other, no matter what happened then or in the future.

### **The Book Club**

**by Amahle Ndlovu**

**Grade 8, Malvern High School**

A group of strangers from different places always come together and discuss certain stories. They share their personal struggles and find solace in each other's company. This is how it started:

The town Edenvale was hit hard by strikes causing factories to close; people lost jobs, and families struggled to make ends meet. A young librarian, Samantha, had an idea. She gave out flyers inviting people to join a book club, hoping to make the community come together. The first book club they had, included people Jake, a former factory worker; Maria, a single parent; Dr Peter, a retrenched doctor; and a young college student named Abigail. They started with a book, *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel about resilience in the face of hardship.

As they discussed the book, people began telling of their struggles. Jake spoke about the job he lost, Maria spoke about how her husband died, and Emily about having stress in her career. Samantha listened, and the group found comfort. The book club became their everyday job, a lifeline, a place to find support and understanding. They found comfort and peace in the study group. The book club became a beacon of hope, showing that even in the darkest times, literature and solidarity could bring people together. News of this club spread, inspiring other towns to start their own clubs. The book clubs. The book club of hope became a symbol of power, of literature to unite and uplift, a reminder that even in times of crisis, we are not alone.

As the weeks went by, the book club continued to grow and thrive. More and more people joined drawn by the sense of community and connection that the club offered. They would meet every Thursday evening and discuss books. So the book club continued to thrive, a

beacon of light in the darkness, a reminder that even in the toughest times, there is always power of community, connection, and the written word.

## **Special Talent**

**by Amahle Shoba,**

**Grade 8, Habitat-61 Creative Hub**

Far away in a quiet, artistic village there was a boy named Thabo. Thabo was a thirteen-year-old boy who was talented (gifted). He knew how to draw, sew, paint and create new things with old things. He was the reason his village was so artistic.

One day, as Thabo was drawing, sewing and painting, he had noticed something, that there was nothing creative to sew any more; the people in his village had enough clothes, and his drawings and paintings were all over their houses. "So where do I put all these things now?" Thabo said to himself. "There are a lot of people who still need your paintings, drawings and your sewn clothes," said a voice in the bushes.

"Who is that?" said Thabo. "I am the person who is going to show you where to put those drawings and clothes," said Lisa, the girl from the city, who had come to the village for some information on how the people in this village lived. Lisa was a fashion designer and a journalist, working for a big company. "What are you talking about?" asked Thabo, because he did not know Lisa and did not understand what was going on.

"You know you are such a talented boy..You would make such a great artist," Lisa said. Thabo replied, shocked, "Artist! I may be talented but I have never thought about being an artist, and by the way, my life belongs to the village and my talent belongs to the king and the people of his palace." Lisa was shocked that such a talented boy as Thabo had never thought about being an artist some day. "I can take your drawings, paintings and the clothes you make to the city where you can make money for your village, and your village will be known as a the Artistic Village."

The boy didn't listen to Lisa; he just put the things he used to create new paintings, and clothes, inside the house and went back to the village. Days went by as Lisa tried to convince Thabo about his special talent. Finally Thabo slept on it, and one morning Lisa held a meeting without the king's permission. "Everyone here was born with his or her own special talent, so must we let the world recognise our talent."

The villagers started to notice that the king was hiding their talents and it was wrong of him to do so, so they went to the king and complained, but the king kicked them out of the palace. So the villagers went to Lisa to beg for help. As for Lisa, she wanted to help the

village people so much that she taught them how to advertise and export their goods, to show the world how talented they were. The villagers were recognised for their special talent and the king realised he was wrong and had made a mistake, and now the king was proud of Thabo.

## **Life is an Open Book**

**by Owale Lutshinda**

**Grade 8, Rand Girls**

My life, full of expectations and emotions, gave me many experiences.

In my small town, where everyone knew everyone, lived my family and me in a two-storey house. My life was pretty normal. Well, until I turned 12. When I turned 12, I got diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

This disorder made me have mood swings, high and lows. But what hurt me the most was when my own mom left me because she thought I was mentally ill. I was crushed, heart-broken. It hurt me deeply. But what could I do or say about it?

I grew up with a single dad and, you guessed it right, I was an only child. My dad gave me everything I asked for. I was never left behind on trends. I never even got a chance to be at school.

A few years later, I met a girl, her name was Béatrice. She also had bipolar. But, unlike me, she was happy about her life. She never felt sad or depressed about her disorder.

Ever since I met Béatrice, I learned to appreciate my self, appreciate my life. She taught me that, "Life is an open book, you just need to read on to find out what life has in store for you."

## **My Brunette Skin**

**by Konkokuhle Khumbuza**

**Grade 10, Rena le Lona Creative Centre**

In Soweto, in Johannesburg, lived a dark-skinned girl named Oyintando. She lived with her entire family except her dad, because he had passed away. Life was a bit tough. Oyintando's mom was not employed and the situation at home was tough because they only had two breadwinners who were the two uncles. One of the uncles was disabled, and the other one was an accountant.

Their life was ordinary, but there were some ups and downs. Sometimes the uncle that was working couldn't help with providing for them, because he also had a family of his own to provide for. The other uncle who was disabled had a grant that came only once a month, and it wasn't much because most of it had to cover his hospital bills. Oyintando had this very rich aunt, and the aunt hated Oyintando with all her heart because she was dark-skinned and their whole family was light-skinned. To the aunt, Oyintando was cursed with dark skin.

One day the crippled uncle magically healed. All of the family members were shocked, but the grant money would stop and they were all devastated, but very happy that the uncle had healed. Months had passed since the uncle magically healed and the family got terrible news, the working uncle was fired at work because he was framed by one of his colleagues for stealing money, which of course he didn't. The family began to think they were cursed because the uncle who was unemployed was now divorced by his wife who took their child away as well. The unemployed uncle had no source of income and his house was being repossessed, so he had no choice but to move in to his family house which was already packed with family members.

One day Oyintando's mom suggested that they should go to the rich aunt and ask her for some money, but the uncles refused and there was an argument in the house. Then Oyintando's mom turned to Oyintando and shouted at her, saying that she was the cause of all her sufferings and their life being miserable. The uncle who was disabled pulled Oyintando's mother and slapped her right through the face and said, "The child has a gift from God and is not the cause of this situation." It was the rich aunt's decision to leave them poor. Oyintando's mom was furious and she left the house.

Later that night, as they were eating dinner, Oyintando suggested that they should go to the street and ask for donations from people. Oyintando's mom had too much pride and refused, saying it was nonsense. She stormed out of the dining table, leaving Oyintando hurt. However, her uncles quickly comforted her, praising the idea as brilliant.

The next day they all woke up and went to town and asked for donations, and Oyintando's mom was left alone at home because of her stupid pride. Later that day they returned home and they found Oyintando's mom sitting and waiting for them in the dark. She said, "Wow, you really took this brat's idea and went to the streets and begged for money. What an embarrassment!" She had them wondering what was wrong with her because she was a beautiful lady, but she was starting to be like the rich aunt.

The next morning Oyi's mom left very early and that was very unusual for her. She actually went to the rich aunt house to ask for money, but the rich aunt's response shocked her. The

rich aunt said she should abandon her daughter. Oyintando's mom was shocked. Oyintando's aunt said she despised her daughter Oyintando. The mother ran out of her sister's house and ran home until she got to her bedroom and cried all night. Her brothers and Oyintando were very worried.

The next day Oyintando's mom made breakfast for everyone. At the breakfast table she apologised and told them what happened and begged for forgiveness. The family was shocked but they understood and forgave her and they said, "Everything is in the past, let's focus on the future and unite as a family because we need each other more than ever now."

## **Unknown Father, Unknown Me**

**by Lorraine Magadani**

**Grade 9, Sakha Kids**

I don't know my father and it's hard to define who I am, when a part of me is missing. I search for answers, but they are hard to find, and I'm left with questions that are swirling my mind.

I dream of meeting you, knowing your name, feeling your love and hearing your voice proclaim that I'm your daughter you're proud to claim, but until then I'll hold on to this dream.

I'm growing without you, and it's hard to bear the thought of missing out on the love we could share, but I won't let it define me and I won't let it bring me down; I'll rise above it and wear my crown. I may not know my father, but I will find my own way and sing my own songs.

I'll make my own path, and light my own ways, and sing my own songs. I'll rise above the pain and seize the day.

There's a hole in my heart, a space that is empty and wide, a place where my father's love should reside, but he's not here and I'm left to wonder why, and if I'm worthy of love, if I'm worthy to try.

## **The Girl Who Won't Show Her Face in School**

**by Minenhle Luthando Mbambo**

**Grade 6, Metropolitan College**

Once upon a time there was a girl named Hannah and the girl named Anna. Hanna always had a box covering her head everyday at school. Anna was always bullying Hanna and saying nasty things like, "You are ugly." The teachers always reprimanded Anna. The teachers asked Hanna's daddy why she was always covering her head with a box, Her father replied by saying, "Hanna was once in love with a boy called Bruno. He dumped Hanna and told her she is not beautiful. That is when she started having her head covered with a box."

Some other boy called China and Bruno were always bullying other kids, Hanna included. They said to her, "If you take off that box, we will leave you alone." She did take it off and everyone was amazed, and then she ran home and cried. China went to Hanna's home to apologise and confessed his love to Hanna.

## **The Memory Weaver**

**by Ntokozo Sibiyi**

**Grade10, Rena Le Lona**

In a small village nestled between two great rivers, there lived a young woman named Akira. She possessed a remarkable gift – the ability to weave memories into fabric. With every thread and fibre, she could capture the essence of a moment, preserving it for eternity.

Akira's talents were sought after by the villagers, who would bring her their most treasured memories. She'd listen intently, then weave their stories into magnificent tapestries. As she worked, the memories would come alive, transporting her to distant lands and forgotten times.

One day, a stranger arrived in the village, carrying a mysterious, tattered cloth. He asked Akira to repair it, but as she touched the fabric, she felt an unusual energy. The cloth was woven from memories she'd never encountered before – memories of a life she'd never known.

Intrigued, Akira embarked on a journey to unravel the secrets of the mysterious cloth. She followed the threads of memory to a long-forgotten city, where she discovered a hidden archive of forgotten stories.

As she delved deeper into the archive, Akira realised that memories were not just personal experiences but also the threads that connected humanity. She returned to her village, determined to share this revelation with the world.

From that day on, Akira's weaving took on a new dimension. She no longer just preserved memories but also wove the fabric of human connection, reminding everyone that their stories were part of a larger tapestry.

As Akira returned to her village, she began to weave a new tapestry, one that would show the interconnectedness of all memories. She called it the "Fabric of Humanity."

People from the village and beyond brought her their stories, and Akira wove them into the fabric. She added threads of her own memories, and those of her ancestors, creating a rich and vibrant narrative.

The Fabric of Humanity grew, and soon it was too large to be contained within Akira's small workshop. She moved it to the village square, where it became a symbol of the community's shared history.

One day, a young girl named Kaida approached Akira, fascinated by the Fabric. Akira saw herself in Kaida and knew it was time to pass on her gift.

"Come, Kaida," Akira said. "Let me teach you the art of memory weaving."

And so, Akira began to mentor Kaida, sharing her knowledge and skills. As Kaida learned, she brought new ideas and perspectives to the craft.

## **The Rising Africans**

**by Owam Sibuka**

**Grade 10, Rena Le Lona**

Sizwe was an eighteen-year-old boy who was raised by his mother, and he was her only son. Sizwe was a proud enthusiast and brave person in the village. They lived in a small village in Kwazulu-Natal, Emalahleni. The village people were still living in the old way and they were not advanced like the other villages. Nokuthula, Sizwe's mother, was a kind-hearted woman who was considerate towards other people's feelings. She always took good care of Sizwe, but she did not know that she was raising a hero.

Sizwe was a brave person, but in people's eyes he was a great disappointment because he did not go to school. Sizwe's reason for not going to school was not because he was dumb, but because of the situation at home, the background of his family, and also because the village did not have secondary or tertiary schools. He had dreams of going to university just like other kids, but unfortunately he was not lucky enough to go to university. He was not offended when they called him dumb, because he knew that that was not the reason he could not finish his studies.

Sizwe had dreams and was determined to live up to those dreams. "A young man with big dreams, I want to be a billionaire." His mother would encourage him to do better. "Don't

give up, my boy, and don't ever feel sorry for yourself, perseverance will get you where you want to go."

Sizwe tried to make friends but it seemed that no one wanted to be friends with an uneducated person. His only friend was his mother, he loved her, and always spent time with her. "My mom is my best friend," he said. A warm-hearted home is the best prize in the world.

There was a day when Nokuthula and Sizwe were sitting under a tree having drinks and snacks, while having a discussion. It involved the school matter. "I can't even imagine how my life would be if I managed to go to school. My peers are living their best lives with the latest phones and discussions about their lectures, and me, I can't relate; I can't even go on social media and see these beautiful lives everyone is living out there," Sizwe said. "But my child, the social media lifestyle does not make you successful; trying to please everyone and living a fake life is detrimental. You have to stay true to yourself and stop wanting a lifestyle you cannot afford. All that I know is that all these people on social media are not really happy with their lives because they constantly have to impress others to prove a point. Appreciate the life you have that God has given you. The more you do so, the more you will find a great purpose for living and working hard for your desires. I know people have been giving you a hard time by judging you for not going to school, but you don't have to prove to them that you're intelligent. Prove it to yourself, not to other people," said Nokuthula in a calm voice and spirit. He heeded his mother and those inspirational words.

A year passed. In the university of KZN things had been tough when the owner of the university sold out and started working with the Boers. Mrs Musuku sold the land to them for her beneficiaries and starting from there things started changing, from school pass rates, languages and financial matters. They had to change languages to Afrikaans and they also had to pass with 50% or more. The learners even had to pay for books and the school fees. This policy spread through the entire continent of Africa and many places adopted it. South Africa was under oppression and people's rights were being denied; no one was allowed to speak their mind or move freely without being threatened with exile, which was like being sentenced to death, and no one could survive that. The people of South Africa needed a hero to save them. They were given the short end of the stick, and were hopeless, pleading for mercy.

Sizwe was not pleased with seeing human rights being violated, but what could an illiterate, uneducated person do? Power came with two big feelings, confidence and faith, that this would come to an end and people would be freed once again. Sizwe planned a campaign to overthrow the Boers' law. People had lost hope, but eventually they saw how good the plan was and swallowed their pride. The plan was to set a date and attack the Boers' law. They were fully armed, and Sizwe was the leader of the march, brave enough to face the unknown danger. Thousands of students came together to support each other (solidarity) and they fought for their rights, the right to education and the right to change their languages from Afrikaans to whatever they wanted. The Boers were threatened because all over the Africa the war was taking place, so they couldn't stop or kill everyone because they

need them, because who else would become their puppets for them to use to gain more money. Clearly they were not armed enough to face the power and resilience of black people.

The wheel changed after the war took place, the Boers were threatened to leave the place and find new land to rule, and they were told that they would not live in peace. Theft was increasing and they couldn't stay in a place like that; all they needed was to make more money, not to waste money to buy more resources. After a month went by, there were only a few Boers left, until they all vanished.

Sizwe became a voice for all the black people and became the reason why every black person was free from the oppression of the Boers. Sizwe's words and actions were heard and seen. Sizwe was a brave and enthusiastic boy, and he was called to a big company to address how he managed to do all of this. Three words came to mind. He said, "It begins and ends in your mind. What you give power to will have power over you if you allow it." The people of the community supported Sizwe.

Sizwe was granted with an opportunity as he was blessed with a prize to study abroad and become a president. He studied for years in America. Time passed, he graduated and managed to build and supply more things in his village. He made a massive change to his village. Nokuthula was proud of her son and she knew that she had given birth to a leader. He became an example of leadership. "Judge your success by what you had to give in order to achieve it. The great end of life is not knowledge but action."

This is how the South Africans rose up against the Boers, with solidarity in times of crisis. "We push together, we conquer." (If people start to give importance to peace over power, this world will be a better place).

## **The Youth of 1976**

**by Thando Mavunduse**

**Grade 9, Habitat-61 Creative Hub**

It had been a cloudy day on June 16 1976. Jessica Mkhize was a young teenager with fierce-looking eyes and this brave-spirited lady was standing in front of a group of learners in her school. In her speaking, her voice was hasty as if shouting; her attitude was decisive. "I am fighting for our right to learn in our own mother tongue today," one girl made the call for the voiceless students to join her. The apartheid government had passed laws that required black school children to learn all subjects in Afrikaans. Thus, they were not willing to be dominated without any reaction. The events that unfolded also revealed that Jessica was capable of leading her peers to the streets to pick up other learners who were on their way from other schools, and with chants of "The whole city is ours - Amandla, Awethu!" ringing in their ears they continued walking. The protest created chaos and unruliness. Police, expecting such a reaction, began to unleash their power on the protesters. Grenades and

guns were thrown and fired; people shouted in agony and frustration. Caught in the violence was Tiara Mavunduse, a simple and aspiring student who fell to the ground. Her lifeless body lay cold in the heart of the protest movement. As a result of this, despite having watched the violent scenes, Jessica knelt beside Tiara. She was suffering, but resolved, with Tiara not the only one who had given her life as three others died from police brutality. Still crying, Jessica did not move from this position and the determination did not leave her face. "We will not fail," she promised her classmates in a shaking voice yet firm. "Their lives must not be wasted even when we go out to kill for our freedom." Books were where they took shelter, received guidance and a weapon. The stories of defiance and heroism filled their minds and spirits, every page a declaration against oppression. Their unity and mental strength stood as symbols of optimism despite the long arm of apartheid. Jessica was cornered by police one night. They came into her home with force, dragging her out in dead silence. Jessica saw her family members' eyes, those of friends and fellow activists, silent farewells. In the questioning room, dimly lit, they subjected her to a brutal session. They wanted names, anything about others she could give them so that they could arrest them too.

She said nothing but remained resolute in her stance on this matter. Her silence was an act of defiance as well as the last stand she could make for herself. She knew giving up names would mean betraying comrades who had struggled together with her bravely during those times of hardship. That is when violence escalated. When Jessica's spirit refused to be broken by the police, force became the order of the day. Although she lost her life due to it, a legacy was left behind that cannot be easily wiped away from history books or from our memories. Her bravery became another story in itself as it was told again by countless others who had gone through similar experiences during this period, which demonstrated how deeply rooted their bravery truly was, even faced with impossible odds such as these. Afterwards, the seeds of change sown by Jessica and her friends began to sprout. The apartheid government eventually broke down and in the new morning, their voices were remembered. The name of Jessica Mkhize, with other names like Tiara Mavunduse among others who died, would be a symbol of resistance as well as unity's strength. Their story can now be found in history books; it is a message for people to understand that hope is never erased even during times of crisis.

**The Weight of Tears**  
**by Venessa Chivizhe**  
**Grade 11, Waverley Girls High**

The sky was a deep, foreboding grey, like a physical manifestation of Vanessa's sorrow. Tears streamed down her face as she walked home from school, her feet carrying her on autopilot. The trees seemed to blur together, their branches like skeletal fingers reaching out to snatch at her clothes.

Vanessa's long, dark hair was a tangled mess, like her emotions. Her bright brown eyes, once sparkling with life, now seemed dull and lifeless. Her slender frame was hunched, as if the weight of her secrets was crushing her.

As she turned a corner, an elderly woman with silver hair and warm, hazel eyes approached her. "Child, what's wrong?" she asked, her voice like a gentle breeze on a summer day.

Vanessa hesitated, then poured out her heart, sharing stories of her father's passing, her attempts to take her life more than three times, her parents' divorce, her step dad's uncomfortable presence, her mom's hurtful words, and her struggles with body image, self-esteem, and depression. The old lady listened intently, her eyes never leaving Vanessa's face.

When Vanessa finished, the woman smiled softly. "You're carrying a heavy burden, child. But you don't have to do it alone." She suggested Vanessa join a group talk, where she could share her struggles with others who understood.

Vanessa was hesitant, but the woman's kindness put her at ease. She agreed to attend the group talk, hoping to find solace.

However, the group was not what Vanessa expected. The others seemed to be competing in a "who's suffered the most" contest, and Vanessa felt like an outsider. She began to doubt whether she truly belonged.

But then, something shifted. One of the group members shared a story that resonated deeply with Vanessa. For the first time, she felt seen and understood.

The old lady's words came back to her: "You're not alone, child." Vanessa realised that she didn't have to hide behind a mask of happiness. She could be vulnerable, and still be loved and accepted.

As the group talk came to a close, Vanessa felt a weight lift off her shoulders. She knew she still had a long way to go, but for the first time in a long time, she felt hope.

For those in need of someone to talk to call: Childline 0800 1111

And remember, you are not alone.

