

# Stories and Rhymes in Xhosa: A Selective Overview

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## Introduction

There is virtually no person in the world who has not grown up with the folk or oral literature of his and her own culture. Much of this literature derives from oral tradition and even in our modern world, it is through oral tradition that children first take their steps on the road of continuously learning to live together with others. As such, folk literature fulfils an important function. It provides a cultural, a moral, a social as well as an intellectual base for people. More often than not, when people are confronted with important or difficult decisions or situations in their lives, it is the fact that they draw on a rich resource of their common folk wisdom that saves the day.

In addition to these roles that folk literature plays, it also shares many common themes, attitudes and attributes with the folk literature of other cultures. On this basis, much fruitful comparisons can be made of the folk literature of different cultures. Such comparisons may reveal elements which many cultures hold in common. In brief, these may include elements related to obedience; the sensitivity to the differences between good and evil or right and wrong; adherence to generally accepted norms of society and community; respect for the dignity of others; respect for nature; the instilling of a work ethos and so forth. Where such themes are broached in folk literature as well as encountered in adult life, it is the sensibilities which have been instilled in a child when at his or her most impressionable age which help the person to live both a satisfying and prosperous life. This is so in virtually all cultures.

Given the traditional, conservative and often patriarchal nature of folk literature, however, the child or pupil should also learn to problematise elements from folk literature beyond the mere acceptance of authoritative wisdom. Such problematisation has at least four functions. *Firstly*, it will allow the urban pupil, even when he or she has not been exposed to folk and cultural tradition to the extent that a rural child is, to link up with cultural traditions which are worthy of knowing. Given that many people have become 'rootless' in terms of their traditions and

histories, and are only confronted with issues of everyday survival, such a linking up may prove vital for many youths.

*Secondly*, the many-sided issues which folk traditions treat can be problematised in real life situations beyond mere moralising tendencies. This is true of all literature. Within literature, we find many of the life-situations and debates which also take place in daily life. More often than not, literature also problematises issues in daily life which people are unable or unwilling to articulate. The more one becomes aware of the variety of ways in which one may deal with these life-situations, i.e. through literature, the more one becomes empowered to deal with them in real life.

*Thirdly*, such problematisation in education context, may bring the child to dialogue and debate with peers on issues which are central to human life and society, laying a basis for how the pupil will do so later in life too. Moreover, it may also lay the basis for how grown ups will interact with literature when mature. Through literature, one may continuously become more informed and participate in public debates in an ever more knowledgeable way.

*Finally*, the problematisation of folk- and culturally informed tradition may open possibilities for the pupil's own imagination and creative interaction with regards to the development of literature analogous to or critically analogous to that of traditional literature.

It is against this background that this article provides a cursory overview of a selection of folk- and culturally informed literature in Xhosa. I have at least four aims with this exercise.

*Firstly*, some of the material here, is, or has been prescribed at schools. In the school context, these summaries may be used to fulfil the four functions I have ascribed to folk- and culturally based literature above. (At the end of the summaries, I come back to this point, and provide a few suggestions.)

*Secondly*, since this literature is only available in Xhosa, the brief summaries in English may give some indication as to some of the themes and elements which the literature deals with, to a wider audience. Since similar themes and life issues are dealt with in the folk and culture literature in other languages, this may be used for comparative research.

*Thirdly*, in literature, we have a resource which may be appreciated by both young and old. Whether for leisure or for informed reading and learning, literature expands our horizons. This is especially true cross-culturally. Through cross-cultural reading, the reader becomes acquainted with cultural understandings which differ from those of one's own. The more one can appreciate the cultural understandings of people from other cultures, the more one becomes familiar with the tapestry of culture around one's own. This is important, because then one becomes aware that one's own culture does not stand alone. It forms part of this tapestry.

Fourthly, if one is able to read the literatures of other cultures in that culture's own language, then one becomes even more enriched by its literature. This is the ideal. However, since everyone cannot become fluent in the languages of all the people one meets up with during one's life, you often only have access to that culture's literature through translations or summaries. This overview provides the latter. It is hoped that people who are not conversant with Xhosa literature, may benefit from this sample, and maybe, inspire some to attempt reading this literature in Xhosa.

### ***Hayi lo mlomo Oh! (This Mouth) by G.J. Mdledle***

This story is situated in the rural area near King Williams Town in South Africa. In a family of three, i.e. husband Zizwe, wife Lidiya and their only child, Nomveliso, there has been a quarrel between the husband and his wife the whole night long. The main complaint of Lidiya concerns the treatment she gets from Zizwe. As the story develops, it appears that Zizwe has been unjustifiably and falsely accused by his wife.

Zizwe was deeply touched by what Lidiya has said. He decides to leave the common household. He does not know where he could go to. He proceeds in the direction of Komga (Qumra). In the afternoon, he comes to a household of a certain Ishangisa on the Kei Road. As he was thirsty, he asks for water. However, he was not only given water and food, but was also asked to spend the night there, as it was already late. This made Zizwe to realise that a black man has the precious gift of accepting and entertaining visitors.

In the meantime, when Lidiya noticed that it was late and Zizwe had not yet returned, she became afraid, and thought that he must have been assaulted on his way home. This could have been the case, especially if he was drunk. She decided to leave the household too, and went in the direction of East London. Here, she got herself a employment, her duty being to look after the child of a white family. She behaved as if she had never been married, wearing short dresses, contrary to the Xhosa tradition. Married Xhosa women wear long dresses. After having looked for work too, Zizwe became employed at Komga as a clerk on a dairy farm. He was promised an increase in salary if he could bring his wife to stay with him. So, he went back home to fetch Lidiya, only to learn that she had disappeared too.

At home, Zizwe's mother (Lidiya's mother in law) was being criticised by the people of the location. They were also continuously chasing away her children. She had a miserable life. In East London, Lidiya, is not happy either. She decides to go to her maiden home, from where she was taken to her in-laws. An arrangement for her reunion with Zizwe was made. Lidiya is now aware of the fact that Zizwe had left her because of her talking too much. She decides not to hurt Zizwe's feelings again, while Zizwe recognises that Lidiya had quarrelled with him because of her being

pregnant at that time. Women are short-tempered when they are pregnant (according to the author). She gave birth to a baby boy who is named Zinzo Xanti. Zizwe becomes prosperous with his work and he buys a motor car. Later, he asks for a transfer to King Williams Town which is closer to home. He and Lidiya educate their child, Zinzo Xanti, who becomes a medical practitioner. Thereafter, they had a happy life.

### **Comment**

The book itself is interesting to read. Although it was written about 15 years ago, there are educative sentiments which still apply to present-day life. e.g. see the gossip mongers - their aim is to destroy, not to build. General maxims are also mentioned. 'don't talk too much, silence is sometimes golden'; 'from a bad thing, a good thing can spring'. Concerning the basic plot-line, one could argue that Zizwe did the wrong thing when he left home. However, compare this with Mao Tse Tung's assertion, that 'failure is the mother of success'. In conclusion, due to the wealth of knowledge of traditional Xhosa life and culture in the book, it may benefit people who are interested in advancing cross-cultural understanding. Such understanding cut both ways. On the one hand, there are elements of European culture which the Xhosa should not have accepted; on the other, there are traditional elements in Xhosa culture which, similarly, are detrimental to the culture.

### ***Eze Via Africa* by M.V. Mabusela**

(21 short stories-for children between 8 and 12 years of age.)

#### **1. 'Ugubevu Nemvulakazi' (Gubevu and the Heavy Rain)**

Gubevu, a young boy, never wanted to listen to the teachings of his father. As a result, his father chased him away. After stealing some money from his father, he went into the wilderness. In the wilderness, he managed to find a huge rock which served as his shelter. He stayed here for some time. However, one day a heavy rain came, which cause the rock to break. This happened while Gubevu was asleep. The rock fell on him, killing him instantly.

#### **2. 'Udakada Nowatoyina' (Dakada and Watoyina)**

Dakada was a boy looking after cattle. Like others, he enjoyed grabbing the tail of one of the beasts and then to cling to it. The boys usually competed in seeing who can cling to the tail of a beast the longest. One day Dakada played this game with Watoyina, a heifer. After having clung onto the tail for some time, he was kicked in the chest by the heifer and became unconscious. From that day onwards, Dakada gave up the game.

**3. 'Unciphileyo Netakane Legusha' (Nciphileyo and the Lamb)**

Every day at milking time, Nciphileyo used to play with one of the lambs. The game was to imitate fighting rams. One day, Unciphileyo had to leave his home for a long period. When he came back, the lamb had grown up. He did not notice this. When he tried the same game with the lamb, he was hit hard on the head by the lamb and fell unconscious.

**4. 'Idlelo Leentaka' (Bird's Field)**

This story is about shepherds catching birds, roasting them, and then having a meal.

**5. 'Udyakalashé Nomyolufu' (The Jackal and the Wolf )**

A hungry jackal met a wolf busy eating bread. In order to get a piece of bread from the wolf, he thought of a plan. He picked up a piece of paper and told the wolf that it was a letter from heaven. The jackal 'read' the contents of the letter to the wolf. The contents, according to the jackal, was the instruction to the wolf to give him (the jackal) a piece of bread. Although there was no such instruction on the piece of paper, the wolf believed what the jackal had said and gave him the piece of bread.

**6. 'Isikhova' (The Owl)**

Although this bird has big eyes, it does not see during the day. Hence, it goes out only in the evenings. It lives from rats. The owl is of particular help to farmers because it eats rats.

**7. 'Udyakalashé Nomqhagi' (The Jackal and the Cock)**

The cock had a flock of sheep which he kept in two different sheepfolds. It became apparent that some sheep were going missing continuously. One day, the cock kept watch in one of the households. The jackal who was stealing the sheep, came, and found the cock there. When asked by the jackal how he managed to keep watch in both sheepfolds, the cock said that he had divided himself into two parts. He then advised the jackal to do the same, if he wants everything to come his way. When he was back home, the jackal asked his wife to divide him into two. The wife did this, and the jackal died.

**8. 'Uzonezile E Tsomo' (Zonezile at Tsomo)**

Zonezile liked to swim. He used to swim in a river called Itsomo. His mistake was that he was so sure of his ability to swim, that he did not heed his father's warnings. One day, while swimming, he was swept away by the water and he drowned.

**9. 'Unomlenzana Neencukuthu' (Nomlenzana and the Bugs)**

Nomlenzana enjoyed killing the insects coming to the light by burning them in the light's heat. If her mother protested, Nomlenzana only stopped for the moment and

continued when her mother was not in sight. When she was doing this one day, the hut's roof caught fire and burnt down.

**10. 'Umlambo' (The River)**

In Africa, there are many rivers, big and small. In these rivers there are places where people can cross. The rivers are dangerous when it rains or snows. The various mysterious creatures in these rivers can also pose a threat to human beings. The children are specifically advised to be aware of the rivers when crossing.

**11. 'Ugqamqikili Namaqanda Enyoka' (Gqamqikili and the Snake's Eggs)**

In 'Gqamqikili's' mind, every egg is a bird's egg. He would take them whenever he finds them and eat them. One day, he mistakenly took the eggs of a snake and ate them. As a result, he vomited continuously. He realised his mistake the following day when he saw a snake where he had found the eggs.

**12. 'Ixsha Lokubhuqisa' (Time of Harvest)**

This is a happy time for herdboys because they are not expected to look after cattle. The cattle graze wherever they want as there are no crops in the fields. The boys play various games, participate in stick fighting and hunt rats. Others reap from what has been left behind in the fields and sell the crops. This is really a happy time for herdboys.

**13. 'Uthambo Esekisini' (Thambo at the Circus)**

Playing with animals at a Circus was one of Thambo's hobbies. When a circus is in town, he would even play truant. One day, while playing with a lion at a Circus by putting his arm in the lion's den, he was grabbed by the lion. He was taken to a hospital bleeding and his arm was permanently removed.

**14. 'Udyakalasho Nomfuyi' (The Jackal and the Farmer)**

One day, the jackal acted like a sheep by putting on a sheep's hide. The farmer put him in the same kraal with other sheep that night. During the night, the jackal ate some of the sheep. Discovering this the following morning, the farmer beat the jackal. The jackal promised the farmer to tell him where he had hidden the meat. The farmer let him go free, but instead of telling him where he had hidden the meat, the jackal ran away.

**15. 'Ingxangxosi'**

This type of bird has long legs. The boys like to chase it wherever they see it, but they don't eat its flesh. People are fond of this bird because it is useful to them as it feeds on snakes which are the enemies of the humanity.

**16. 'Udyakalashé Nekati' (The Jackal and the Cat)**

In the conversation between a jackal and a cat, the jackal claimed that he was superior to the cat. The reason is that the cat has only one trick when it is threatened: it climbs up the nearest tree. But, according to the jackal, jackals have quite a variety of options when they are threatened. While they were still talking, a pack of dogs approached and the cat immediately ran for the nearest tree. The jackal just ran away but the dogs caught up with him and killed him.

**17. 'Jimbovane' (The Ants)**

Although ants are small, they are much wiser than human beings. For example, people cannot easily kill an elephant, but an ant can kill an elephant with ease. The ants can also prepare for difficult times, such as rainy days, winter, and for droughts, by collecting food and storing it.

**18. 'Uzolile Nendlu Yehobohobo' (Zobile and the Finch's Nest)**

Zolile liked to kill birds, and even used to take away their young ones and the eggs. In order to get to some nests, he one day climbed up a tree which was near a deep well. Unfortunately, the branch of the tree broke and he fell into that deep well. He was saved by nearby people.

**19. 'Unontente Nenkamela' (A Camping Man and The Camel)**

While the camping man was in his tent one-day, there came a camel who requested this man to allow him to let him hide his head in the tent. After some argument, the man agreed. Next, the camel asked to be allowed to let his shoulders in. Ultimately the man allowed the camel to enter into his tent. Then, the camel kicked the man out of the tent.

**20. 'Uthekwane'**

This bird is very proud of itself. There is a belief about this bird viz. that if one kills it and puts its body into a river, it will rain incessantly until one takes the dead body out of the water.

**21. 'Umzingeli Nethole Lengonyama' (This Hunter and The Cub)**

A man who liked to keep young animals, one day got a cub. He fed it until it has grown up. One-day, while soothing it, the animal attacked him and he died.

**Mamfene by L.M. Mbulawa**

It is a general understanding among people that it is difficult for the minister of religion to leave for another circuit when transferred from his traditional one. This is so especially when the new circuit is not as rich as the previous one.

This was the case with Gezulu. When transferred from Mamfene to Stofelton in Natal, he interpreted the action of the Church President as an effort to separate him from his affluent congregation Mamfene. He vowed to do all in his power to ensure that the new and young but otherwise intelligent minister of religion from Cala would not land his foot at Mamfene. To this end, he organised not only the members of the church, but also people from the village, and unduly influenced them against the new minister. There were, of course, members who were not prepared to toe the line. Some openly opposed Gezulu. Others did so secretly, because Gezulu was not only respected by some other cliques, but was also feared. Moreover, both he and his wife (who supported him) had turned to drinking. When drunk, he would not argue for long with another person without delivering blows on him. When the new minister, Kheswa, ultimately arrived, accompanied by the Church President, Gezulu and his supporters decided to kill them.

Many Gezulu supporters were not unfriendly with Kheswa and the Church President in an outright manner. Many, including Gezulu concealed their attitudes and appeared to be ignorant of the plot. Soon, however, Gezulu exchanged some bitter words with the new minister and the Church President and so betrayed his true sympathies.

Just when the preparations for setting alight the hut in which the victims were sleeping, were completed, the faction loyal to the new minister and the President and headed by Bheka, took the initiative. They kept watch throughout the night. When the rival group attempted to execute its plans, Gezulu and others were caught red-handed, and were assaulted. Court trials were conducted against Gezulu, who, at the time of his arrest, was dressed as a woman. He was ultimately charged with arson, and having been found guilty, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment with ten additional cuts. When the prison doors eventually opened and Gezulu emerged, he was a totally new man. He had mended his ways. He decided not to be the same again, and his wife repented with him.

### **Comment**

This book is prescribed from grade five and upwards and interesting to read. It contains insights for both adults and school children. However, its weakness is that it portrays Gezulu only negatively and the oppositional faction only in a good light. This is a tendency among many of our authors. If character is portrayed only in negative terms—as is the case with Gezulu—nothing good about him is shown, and if he is at first shown as good, he will remain so throughout the narrative. In my opinion, this approach is too artificial. Everybody, with no exception, has both good and bad sides to his or her character. When presenting characters, a more practical and realistic approach would be to expose both their bad and good sides. Our authors need to grapple more with the real complexities in life.



## Popular Xhosa Rhymes

### 1. 'Unopopi Wham' (My Toy Child )

This rhyme is used when a mother praises her little daughter, referring especially to her beautiful dress, teeth and smile. She hopes, that when she has grown up, she will support her mother.

### 2. 'Umgibe' (A Bird's Trap)

Two birds come to a trap. One interprets it as prepared food; and the other recognises the trap. The first is caught in the trap and the second escapes unhurt. The children, of course, even grown-ups, are warned by the writer that sometimes, danger looks attractive at first sight.

### 3. 'Iziqhamo' (Fruit)

The orchard is a centre of attraction not only to human beings but also to birds. Somebody who eats fruit is generally free from infectious diseases. Hence, the Xhosa traditional medical doctors recommend fruit as the best preventative measure for sickness.

### 4. 'Ukukhuthala' (Industriousness) (To be Industrious)

The author tries to display the industriousness of ants. During harvesting, one finds them carrying loads on their backs. They are hard working, obedient to their leader and always plan and prepare for the future long before. The author here shows the wisdom of making provision for the future.

### 5. 'Ukutya Okondlayo' (Nourishing a Well Balanced Diet)

This poem shows the importance of vegetables. It is based on the saying, 'vegetables are the best harvest', meaning that the nutrients from vegetables are taken up by the body far more quickly than other food stuffs. The author also appreciates Zenzele (self-help) associations. They have brought to the fore the importance of this knowledge. Earlier, people never bothered to plant vegetables.

### 6. 'Inkunzi Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Bull)

It is interesting for herdboys to watch bulls when fighting. The one which has won the fight is praised by the boys. They like this scene to such an extent that they make their own bulls out of clay to imitate the real ones.

### 7. 'Uloliwe' (The Train)

This reminds one about a journey by train. It travels along beautiful valleys, steepy ways and along curves. It also represents the sound the train makes when nearing a station. When it ultimately reaches its destination, all the passengers disembark.

**8. 'Isileyiti Sam' (My Slate)**

An owner praises his slate, saying that it is washed and clean as a plate. The words he writes on the slate are legible and cannot be erased easily. He also praises the pencil with which he writes and the fact that his slate is cleaned with a wet cloth and not with a broad tongue, since that is unhygienic.

**9. 'Ukuwela Isitalato' (Street Crossing)**

This poem teaches young children how to cross a street. One must first look to the right and then to the left. If there is no vehicle coming one should quickly cross the street. When there is an oncoming vehicle, one should stop and wait till it has passed.

**10. 'Ukucenga Kwentakazana' (The Plea of a Little Bird)**

The writer here personifies the bird in order to show his objection to the removal of trees. The trees are not only useful to birds, because it is where they built their nests, but also to humanity. This is so because humanity gets shelter from the tree when it is very hot. In addition, trees contribute in attracting rain.

**11. 'Ihashe Lam Lomdongwe' (My Clay Horse)**

A herdboyc makes a horse out of clay to imitate a real horse he likes. He shows how he would treat his horse if he were to have one. He would keep it clean, brush it and feed it well.

**12. 'Impukwana' (The Little Rat)**

A little rat was hungry and wanted to go and search for food. However, it couldn't dare to do so because the cat, its enemy, waited patiently outside the hole. It knew very well that the cat would be praised if it would be caught. The rat then started complaining that its mother had not taught it how to survive in such circumstances.

**13. 'Inja Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Dog)**

Among Africans, prestige is achieved through acquiring livestock. Livestock is inherited by sons. That is why the main task of young boys is to look after the stock. They like to do this work and imitate real stock by making their own out of clay. In this instance, an imitation of a dog is made and praised.

**14. 'Umkhosi Weencukuthu Neetakumba' (A Battalion of Bugs and Fleas)**

Although these insects are a nuisance, they can be killed easily with insecticides.

**15. 'Isikhalo Somntwana' (A Child's Cry)**

A child begs a cow to give him milk and meat. The cow, which is personified by the writer, replies that unless she is given enough food by human beings, she cannot

produce milk and meat. The writer shows how humans depend on cows for sustenance. Therefore, in order to get something from them, humans must care for cows.

**16. 'Ihagu Yam Yomdongwe' (My Clay Pig)**

The author portrays the pig, its short tail and big snout. He appreciates the pig because it eats all unwanted and rotten food given to it. This makes it very fat so that by the time the owner sells it, he will be able to get a lot of money for it.

**17. 'Imbeko' (Obedience)**

After asserting that obedience is required of everybody, the writer tabulates the characteristics of an obedient person. Among them are the greeting of people, sympathy towards disabled people and the assistance of the needy.

**18. 'Amazinyo' (Teeth)**

Teeth are beautiful and snow white when they are well cared for by regular brushing. Apart from beautifying they are also useful.

**19. 'Uqothagileqithi'**

No sense can be deduced.

**20. 'Iinzipho' (The Nails)**

Most of the time birds and animals use their nails for various things, but human beings use their fingers. Although people also have nails, they would be wise to keep them as short as possible. Nails are carriers of diseases.

**21. 'Isilumkiso' (The Warning)**

The author shows a hen teaching her chickens to protect themselves from the enemy, the hawk. However, one of the chickens could not run fast and always forgot to abide by the mother's rule. One day, it went astray, a hawk appeared and caught it. The little chicken cried helplessly as it was being carried high in the air.

**22. 'Amafu' (The Clouds)**

The clouds look as if they are the clothing of the sky. When they are snow white they are interesting to look at, and when pitch black they instil fear—because thunder and lightning will follow. Snow and dew also come from the clouds. When it is very hot, the clouds neutralise the heat.

**23. 'Isele Nebuzi' (The Frog and the Rat )**

One day the frog sought to establish a friendship with the rat by requesting it (the rat) to invite it (the frog) to a meal. As reason, the frog argued that although socially they

were different, they were nevertheless neighbours. The rat agreed. The following day, when the rat came to the frog, it drowned. The frog refused to rescue the rat. The moral is that one should make friendship with somebody one knows.

**24. 'Ucoleke' (Cleanliness)**

This poem teaches cleanliness. It says that one should be clean from head to toe. One should also have clean clothes and that this includes one's underwear. It continues to also point to the importance of a clean or pure heart and mind and not even think of doing evil. The old saying that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' is also re-iterated.

**25. 'Umnumzana Umpukane' (Mr. Fly)**

Here, the fly is referred to as a gentleman who always likes to sit at table although he is an uninvited and dirty guest. You'll always find him in toilets or at any other untidy place. Thereafter, however, he comes and vomits all the dirt he had eaten on one's food. The author appeals to not leave food uncovered because that would give Mr. Fly enough chance to spread diseases.

**26. 'Inqwelo Yomoya' (The Aeroplane)**

One sees the aeroplane in the sky. When it is above the clouds, the mountains look as small as ant-hills, and the rivers as furrows. The aeroplane shortens long journeys. The writer likens the aeroplane to a bird.

**27. 'Amazim' (The Man-Eaters)**

This poem tells about two man-eaters or cannibals who went out to hunt for food. One caught hold of a woman who was picking up some wood and wild plants for the family. He cooked her and devoured her. The second one found some children who were left alone and ate them up. The writer reprimands people who behave in the same way as cannibals, especially concerning animals. Many people hunt for wild animals and birds and kill them. These might have been in search for food for their young ones. When they are killed, their young one's may die too. Ultimately, one should be sympathetic towards animals because they have feelings just like human beings.

**28. 'Umnumzanauntwala' (Mr. Louse)**

The louse is referred to as a dangerous creature. It lives on dirty bodies and clothes. It can be found even on long ladies hair if it is not cared for. This would make such a person a disgrace. The louse is also a carrier of typhus, a very dangerous and fatal disease. Here people are advised to be neat and clean and to wash and comb their hair thoroughly. This is so that they may avoid the spread of diseases caused by this creature.

**29. 'Ukonakala Komhlaba' (The Erosion of Soil)**

The author describes eroded land. It is full of gullies and the soil for grass has been washed away. He further appeals to people to prevent the destruction of trees and veldt fires as well as to avoid the wrong methods of ploughing and the overgrazing of pastures. This is needed because these are the causes of soil erosion. People should replenish the eroded lands by planting grass and trees.

**30. 'Inyaniso' (Truth)**

The poem tells about a group of boys who were shepherds. One day, on their way to the veldt, they decided to steal fruit from a farmer's orchard. While busy feasting, the owner came and beat them severely. One elder boy denied that they were responsible for the theft and another boy shouted while he was beaten and admitted that they had really done the damage.

**31. 'Umkhombe' (The Ship)**

The writer likens the ship to a sea-bird. It looks like a moving house which crosses deep waters with ease. The ship helps people to go from one continent to another. It also helps people fighting wars.

**32. 'Umakhwenkwe' (The Young Boy)**

The poem deals with a young boy, Makhwenkwe. He was five years old but he considered himself to be a grown-up person. One day when he was alone in the house, a visitor knocked at the door. He thought of what his father usually said to visitors and said 'where do you come from?' The visitor was surprised and she took the little boy and kissed him. Makhwenkwe felt that he was being undermined and cried with anger. By this time, his mother and his sister who had gone to the river, entered.

**33. 'Iintyatyambo' (The Flowers)**

The beauty of flowers causes one to compose. The flowers have different colours. They are also of different shapes and sizes.

**34. 'Ukuthembeka' (Faithfulness)**

A certain poor old woman went to the shop to buy a few goods she could afford to buy with the little money she had. On her way home, she picked up a R10 note. The faithful woman decided not to use the money, but to hand it over to the owner.

**35. 'Iinkwenekwezi' (The Stars)**

In African society, the different kinds of stars are given different names according to when they appear and what they mean to the Africans. For example, the star *knounas Canzibe* appears at the end of May or beginning of June, and is therefore known as

indicating the start of the winter. The star *Silnuela* shows the start of the ploughing season. The writer is here praising these various stars. The reason is that, because these stars are admired by the Africans, they are always observed.

### 36. 'Inkomo Zakowethu' (My Family's Herd)

The author tells about the white cow which always leads the herd of cattle when coming from the veldt. He further describes the herd of cattle one by one according to their colours and their physique. At the back of the herd is the bull which always bellows angrily .

## **Apha Naphaya** by D.M. Tongilanga

### (Here and There)

#### 1. 'Uyise Kadengana' (Dengana's father)

Solani and his wife Novayithi were staying in the Nxaruni administration area. They had numerous children. That Novayithi was the mother of so many children was evident from her very thin legs. In a family of so many children, the condition of poverty and hunger is the order of the day. This family was not an exception.

What increased hunger rather than decreasing it, was the fact that Solani didn't want to work. He spent his days beer-drinking. When he came home, normally at dusk, he would demand food from his wife who was not working either. If no food was available, they would quarrel, and Solani would beat his wife. Each time this happened, Novayithi would go out and beg the neighbours to give her something to eat. The neighbours were sick and tired of this behaviour. One day, Novayithi asked for advice from one of her neighbours. The advice was not to give her husband any food. She accepted this advice and practised it. The advice was more effective than Novayithi had thought, because her husband decided to go and look for work in East London. In East London, he worked for an African woman, Mamtob. Although he was neither satisfied with the work he was doing nor with his salary, he stayed for nine months. He was then dismissed from work because of quarrelling with his employer. The quarrel was sparked off by his coming late to work because he had been drinking beer before work. The incident which immediately followed, forced him to return to his wife. He assaulted one of three men who had asked him for tobacco and matches. Solani interpreted this as only a preparation for attacking him. Hence, he decided to strike first and deliver a blow on the other with a stick. Fearing the wrath of the police, he quickly left for home.

When he arrived home, he began to practice agriculture on a wide scale. He ploughed, planted, harvesting and start selling the crops. Seeing that Solani was now prospering, the people in his area decided to follow suit. By this, Solani did not only help himself and his family, but also the nation.

## 2. 'Uvimba ka Bhelezabhube'

It was a hot Sunday morning and crowds of people moved up and down the dirty Mekeni Street of Mdantsane location in East London. A young boy of about 12 years of age walked slowly, stopping now and then to disturb the swarm of flies which helped themselves on the heap of rotten and odorous rubbish which was always thrown away by the inhabitants of the location. Ultimately, this boy got into one of those shabby houses made of zinc. On entering the house, he asked for something to eat from his mother. He was told where to get bread, but there was none, as the mice had helped themselves to it. He was then instructed to go and borrow 10 cents from a neighbour so that he could buy himself bread. After having eaten the bread, he joined his friends who were playing a robbery game. From there, they were disturbed by a loud quarrel between Nonlantsani, Nte's mother and Selisa. Since Nte was living a miserable life and his mother, Nonlantsani, couldn't afford every meal for them, he decided to join a group of boys who worked for Hlophe. Their main duty was to make dagga rolls. This job came to an end when their boss was arrested, and they also had to run for their lives.

Hereafter Nte's mother told him to look for work in town. The work Nte got was difficult for him and he decided to leave the place soon after starting.

Christmas day was a bad experience for Nte and Nomsa because their mother couldn't afford to buy them new clothes.

One night, the boys assembled at a certain spot and burnt tyres in the middle of the street to detain cars from passing. At midnight, a strong wind came and revived the fire. The people tried their best to extinguish it, but in vain. Fire fighters were phoned and informed, but they couldn't help either. The main reason was that broken glasses prevented them from going near the fire. Many people who were victims of the fire and broken glasses, were taken to hospital. No-one ever mentioned the people responsible for the fire, though all knew very well who it was.

When Nte arrived home, he suggested to his mother that she should buy fruit from the market so that he and his sister could sell it in the location. Nonlantsani experimented with this suggestion, and it really worked. She tried to get a hawker's license and everything went well. They all started a new life. When Nte and his sister have grown up, they were both prosperous and enjoyed their work.

## 3. 'Indlala Inamanyala'

One of the plagues that have remained imprinted on the minds of many people is that of 1935. During that year, everything, grass, trees and even the crops on the fields were ravished by ants. No one knew where the ants came from. Agricultural experts tried their best to fight the ants and ultimately managed to overcome them. Although everything had started to regenerate, people were left poor and starving. People like Nozenza who never bothered to plough her fields, severely suffered in this situation.

She had to beg for food from her neighbours. And they became upset because of the continuous begging.

One day, while approaching the house of her neighbour, they saw her coming and Nongaliphi, who was cooking meat at the time, quickly hid the pot in a suitcase. After conversing for a long period with her visitor, the pot in the suitcase burnt and Nongaliphi pretended not to know the cause. As Nozenza went from house to house asking for food, the people became sick and tired of her.

She now adopted a new plan of stealing goats from people's kraals. This she and her children did at night. They had to cook the meat at night too. People suspected this and she decided to stop. At last decided to go and look for work in East London where her elder daughter worked. On arrival, her daughter tried to get her a job. She fortunately got one in Berea Road.

Her duty was to wash clothes. Nozenza, who had never been in any town before, did not know how to wash clothes using the washing board. For this reason, she did not use the washing board she was given. Instead, she trampled the clothes with her feet. The girl who worked in the kitchen was shocked to see this and tried to teach the older woman. However, Nozenza did not want to listen to her. The girl then phoned and informed their employer who was at work. She came immediately and burst into tears when she saw the way her clothes were washed.

They tried to show Nozenza her mistake, but she did not want to listen. Instead, she insulted them as she was convinced she was doing the right thing. She was dismissed and told that if she wouldn't leave at once, they would call the police. Knowing what would happen when the police come, she decided to leave at once.

On arrival at her daughter's residence, she told them all that took place at Berea. As she had nothing to do now, she was asked to assist her daughter in washing and ironing clothes. Eventually, she was also employed by a white woman nearby. From that day till now, she works in East London and visits her family weekly.

#### **4. 'Alitshoni Lingenandaba'**

About six months had gone by since Dolakhe Olala, an old man, got ill. His family had taken him to various doctors and even witchdoctors but without any improvement. At last, he passed away early one morning in July. Immediately after the news broke, crowds of people gathered at his home. His neighbour, Diza, who worked in King Williams Town, arrived on the very same day.

It is a common practice among African people that when a neighbour dies, people gather at that particular home and assist in the preparations for the funeral.

At this home, it was the same. Young women worked from morning till night cooking, fetching water and baking. It is also a custom among Africans that, during the days leading up to the funeral, people assemble at the deceased's home and attend a short sermon every night.



The day of the funeral was Sunday. On Saturday evening, young and old people assembled at this home. A service was held throughout the night. This is usually conducted in the presence of the corpse and everyone is free to participate, whether by saying a short prayer, by preaching or by leading a hymn.

On this day, everything happened as is normal. However, a few young men who had drunk beer, tried to cause disorder. This came to an end when one of the elders disciplined a young man called Zola with a hot clap and dragged him outside. The sermon carried on until the next day.

At 11h00 on the Sunday morning, the funeral service was conducted by one of the Wesleyan Church priests, Diza. Various hymns were sung and a prayer was said. At the end, courageous and sympathetic words were said to console the mourners.

Thereafter, wreaths were laid and telegrams read. Donations from friends and relatives were given to the bereaved. A procession to the graveyard was led by Diza who was the officiating minister, followed by the hearse and the congregation. After Dolakhe Olala was laid to rest, everybody returned to the Olala home for lunch.

Plates of food and glasses of drinks were served. All visitors were satisfactorily served with food, and only those who never get satisfied, could find fault or talk of things which they criticised.

## 5. 'Unqaba'

Nqaba, the eldest son of Nqatha, stayed at Hala location. He attended his primary education there and never had the opportunity to visit another town. His school had old dilapidated buildings which nobody, not even the principal, seemed interested in renovating.

Moreover, the principal seldom came to the school. On Mondays and Fridays especially, he did not come to school. This left the children without anyone to teach them. It was a surprise for Nqaba, though a pleasant one, when he passed standard six at this school. He was the only one who managed to pass.

He made preparations of going to Shawville school in the district of King Williams Town where he would be trained as a teacher. His problem, as one would imagine, was that he had never been to any other town before. This is the reason why he nearly ran away when he saw the train at the station.

In the compartment, he met some other students who were also travelling to Shawville. These students were drinking alcohol. They did not succeed to persuade Nqaba to do the same. For this, they despised him. In most secondary schools in Africa, it is normal for older students to bully, ill-treat and even beat new students. Nqaba was also subjected to the same treatment at Shawville.

After two years of training, Nqaba qualified as a teacher. He got a post at Qunra location. The school here was in the same condition as the one he had attended

at Hala. He devoted himself in improving this school, being assisted by the principal. The arrival of Nqaba also improved the results of this school, but the teachers in the nearby schools were jealous of him.

They plotted to teach him to become a drinker of liquor, so that he should not spend most of his time preparing school lessons. All this, however, was in vain. Nqaba studied privately, and today he is holding a university degree.

## **6. 'Isiko Lisiko' (Custom Is Custom)**

Circumcision is an ancient custom among some African tribes. However, of late, some western practices have permeated this custom. One of those western encroachments is the fact that there are quite a number of Africans who take the boys to the doctors for circumcision. A number of Africans object to such practices. As this is against custom. Those who support the practice of having medical practitioners do the circumcising operation, argue that western culture has influenced the Africans to such an extent that it is almost impossible to separate oneself from it—even from the long-standing customs of the Africans. The argument is that those customs should be brought in line with other western influences.

Sizakele Mahlaha belonged to the former group which advanced arguments for the maintenance of traditional practices. Despite the objections of his wife, Nosisa, and his younger brother, Zolani, Sizakele insisted on taking his son, Andile (a high school student and used to a western mode of life), to the veldt and not to the doctor for circumcision. He succeeded.

Although the circumcision and his stay in the veldt did not present problems, Andile became sick sometime after he had returned to school. He was taken to a SANTA (South African national Tuberculosis Association) hospital where he was treated for TB. He had to miss the examinations that year, but later his health improved.

## **7. 'Isiporo Sasavayneki' (The Ghost of Vayineki)**

Mgubasi owned a farm not far from East London. This farm was so well looked after, that one would thought that it did not belong to an African. (Many people think that there is a difference between the farms owned by whites and those owned by blacks.) This was not the case with Mgubasi. This was due to his hard working. Because Mgubasi was also strict with the people working for him, he felt into disfavour with most people. He was given the name Isiporo Sasavayineki (Isiporo is a ghost).

He expected of both his wife and children to work as hard as he did himself. Because she got tired of all the hard work, Nanase, his wife, decided to leave the common household, taking the children with her.

Mgubasi did not trouble himself by tracing her. He remained working on his farm for some years. One day, Nanase came back. She had been to her mother's

home at Idutywe. They stayed together with Mgubasi for some years. Then Mgubasi died. From then onwards, everything changed. All the wealth Mgubasi had been accumulating for some years, was squandered by Nanase within a few months. She even sold the farm.

### 8. 'Utobana Umolokazana Kadyonase'

Sobantu lived at a location called Isolo not far from East London. He was married to Dyonase, a woman from Kentawe in the Transkei. They had one child, a boy, whom they named Siganeke. Siganeke. He grew up as the only child.

Siganeke did not proceed far with his schooling. He did not even finished the junior certificate. It was not that Siganeke had no ability. Rather, he saw no point in studying, as his father was wealthy. When his father died, he got employment as a clerk in a certain law firm. Here, he was working with a beautiful girl called Jobana. They fell in love. When he told his mother that he wanted to marry Jobana, his mother opposed the idea on the grounds that Jobana came from a poor family.

However, Siganeke married Jobana against the wishes of his mother. Siganeke, his mother, Dyonase, and Jobana stayed together. Jobana and Dyonase did not stay together peacefully. This, of course could have been expected.

Jobana saw that the only solution in the quarrel with her mother-in-law was to go back to her maiden home. But she could not tell this to Siganeke. She then made a plan. She suddenly fell ill. When taken to a doctor, she would look better in the presence of the doctor, but when she went back to the common household, she would be serious again.

Eventually, she was taken in by her mother. The same would happen again. At her maiden home she would be well, but when at Siganeke's, she would be seriously ill. In this way, her marriage with Siganeke came to an end.

### 9. 'Izinongo Zobomi'

It is a habit amongst Africans to name a child after a certain incident. Some children are given names of famous people who lived long ago. Nontibiko was the eldest daughter of Nohani and Jongura. Namalanga was her sister and Xakekile her younger brother. One day while the two, Namalanga and Xakekile, were playing, their sister called them and instructed them to assist her with the cooking. They never bothered themselves about what their sister had told them to do. Instead, they kept on playing and teasing her. She became very angry. She chased them, but in vain. By the time she returned, the mealies in the pot had burnt.

Later, she managed to catch her brother and beat him. He threatened to reveal everything to his mother. When their mother arrived, she noticed that none of the work had been done and she thrashed them all. At sunset, the elder sister had to go and fetch water not very far from their home. Xakekile decided to hide somewhere

and frighten her. On her way home, somebody was throwing stones at her. She was convinced that it was a ghost.

She ran away as fast as she could, leaving the bucket there. At home, she had to be treated as she was very shocked. After some years, Nontibiko got married to Mahwedina. She gave birth to a baby boy. This child used to cry the whole night. The mother could not stand this. One night, her husband was waken because of the noise made by the child. He scolded his wife. This made them to quarrel.

#### **10. 'Ukusweleka Kuka Velile Sandile' (The Death of V. Sandile)**

Velile Sandile was born in the Ciskei but grew up at Kentane in the Transkei. He received his education at Lovedale Training College in the Ciskei.

Velile was installed as king at the time the Prince of Wales visited the country. During his rule, Velile visited Johannesburg in order to appoint his representatives there. When Velile visited Johannesburg again in 1968, he fell ill. His son, Mxolisi was in Cape Town at the time. Velile was quickly taken to Baragwanath hospital. Mxolisi was phoned to come and see his father before he dies. However, when Mxolisi arrived in hospital, his father was unconscious and could not speak. Velile died later that evening.

Arrangements were made for his corpse to be transported to King Williams town where he was to be buried. The government undertook to pay all the transport costs. What seems to be unforgettable for the people who were there, is the day of the funeral. The funeral of a king was not conducted the same way the funeral of an ordinary citizen is conducted. The people had come from all corners of the earth. Among the dignitaries who were present were Poto of Pondoland.

After the funeral, Mxolisi Sandile was installed as his father's successor.

### **Literature and Educational Skills Development**

The brief overviews of the literature above, can be fruitfully used for developing educational and learning skills. Below, I provide a few suggestions.

1. One can discuss the different plotlines in the various narratives. These can then be developed differently, with different events and different endings.
2. One can identify the different moral and cultural issues raised in the books and organise debates on them. This can be done with the character of people represented in the narratives too. As stated earlier, since moral and cultural norms as well as character are not either good or bad but complex, one needs to debate for and against the worst but also the best kinds of moralities, cultural norms and characters.

3. The short stories and rhymes can be dealt with by identifying issues which can be written on or debated. For instance, on the relationship of a child with his or her parents, pupils may write essays of brief stories analogous to ones overviewed here. The main requirements should be that they identify a particular kind of issue on which children and parents disagree and then to write a story about what happens if certain actions are taken by either the parents or the children. These must deal with both male and female roles and not only from a male perspective.

4. Let the pupils talk or write about the unsafe games children play and what can happen in the process; on an experience which they had where they were not observant or attentive enough to facts of detail in particular situations; on what particular people do in their particular careers in making a living; the situations in which the gullibility of people are exploited—as in the animal stories; on dangerous animals/ insects/ bacteria, etc.;

(If pupils have television available in their area, the teacher should be informed about educational programmes, especially on nature—and usually on Sundays—and encourage the pupils to watch it and talk or write on these.)

5. Given the level of children's educational or scientific knowledge, they can be encouraged to write educational short stories similar to the one on the owl, engendering an appreciation of the interdependence of humanity and the eco-system.

6. Make a list of different kinds of warnings older people warn children about and then let the children discuss these as to whether these warnings are helpful or not. It is important that children understand the nature of obedience in terms of traditional wisdom. However, it is just as important that pupils learn from an early age how to analyse situations for themselves and to think for themselves and for the benefit of society and community.

7. Similar to the rhymes and stories which make statements about health, pupils can be encouraged to identify the health hazards in society and then to write stories or poems on these issues.

8. Many of the stories and rhymes can be used to develop the observation and description skills of pupils. This will not only raise awareness but also lead to a greater appreciation of the actual environments people live and operate in.

9. One can discuss or let pupils write or debate on the importance but also the pit-falls of 'learning through experience'. This is a common feature of much oral and

culture literature. It is especially in rural areas where pupils are cut off from wider society, that this could be of much help in preparing pupils for adapting to changing circumstances—which they might encounter later in life. For children in the cities, this will be important too because they are exposed to many different kinds of dangers and threats rural children are not. In this context, it is important to instil a sense of purpose and how one can systematically work towards realising one's goals irrespective of what the circumstances are in which one has to do so.

10. All these stories and rhymes have elements common to other cultures. One can explore how people have similar festivals - harvest festivals for example - and then get the pupils to research in a library or encyclopaedia on these similar elements. When they celebrate the festivals in their own culture, they can then appreciate that others are doing the same but in different ways.

11. If the resources are available, the teacher can set tasks for the pupils to research the detrimental impact and effects pesticides have had on nature. In addition, pupils may research how people in power can misuse their positions of power.

12. Pupils may debate the importance of culture and tradition. But they may also debate the detrimental effects custom have on people. Whether positive or negative, custom and tradition, or their absence, have effects on people's dignity, their quality of life as well as how they interact in society and with the environment. Such debates on 'modern living' may be facilitated too.

13. In more advanced classes, one may debate or write on the way in which beasts, the environment or people are represented in literature but also in ordinary life. This may be done in conjunction with the development of skills of description. It may include themes from nature like snow, heat, drought, but also prosperity, etc. In art classes, it may link up with the way in which the clay dog, horse or bull are represented in the rhymes above. This may then also be used for the creation of images and sculptures which represent real-life objects to various degrees.

14. In multi-cultural classrooms, socialising practices which conflict can be unravelled and problematised. Students can either problematise these to work out a system which would be accommodating but also be asked about how they can accommodate other cultures in ways that suit each culture. This would include elements related to the respect of tradition, parents but also other's own ideals.

15. In even more advanced classes, one can ask students to write essays which use certain metaphors in the literature above. A good example is that of 'man eating'

man'. Some life situations can be described in terms of which these essays can be developed.

16. On the advancement of creativity and synchrony, students can be asked to go out into nature or culturally-defined architecture, built and constructed objects such as furniture, crockery and cutlery but also, if available, web-pages and describe their harmony, dissonance, interaction with their elements, etc. This would link up with the rhyme on flowers, etc.

17. Linking with the rhyme on astronomy, this whole area can be explored too. This can be done in terms of the history of astronomy but also in terms of contemporary astronomical discoveries and theories for the even more advanced classes.

18. One of the latent elements in many of the stories and rhymes above is the fact of honesty. When they experience things to be wrong or not conducive to what they expect as right and true, many people do not speak out but rather keep silent. Just as worse is when they attempt to change their own circumstances or those of others through manipulation. Pupils should be taught the importance and liberating power of honesty in all areas of living. Even when one's own feelings and perspectives are not accepted, or even when they are later found to have been wrong, the fact that one speaks and voices one's views and not remain silent will be liberatory or at least advance and contribute to the perceptions in culture and tradition.

19. Central to many of the stories is also the element of interventionism. This is an area where pupils can be taught a lot from historical events where the intervention of certain individuals either had detrimental or positive effects on others.

Where there are not many resources for some of these exercises, it is incumbent on the teacher to develop his or her own resources—from newspapers and magazines for example. The teacher can also encourage pupils to do the same. They may even develop their own portfolios or scrapbooks throughout their lives on themes touched on in this literature.

## Conclusion

The educational nature of narrative is a universal phenomenon. So too is the fact that oral tradition, folk- and culture traditions play a role at some point in every person's upbringing. The importance of this phenomenon must never be diminished. On the

one hand, it always provides the basis for the identity of every human being. Where people have lost this important resource, it can be instilled again. On the other hand, it is from the literary and rhetorical devices in these traditions as well as their wisdom impacting on diverse themes, that others can be developed. If children develop their thinking, observation, describing and other skills as indicated in this article, they may also fruitfully contribute towards a literature which remains relevant.

From deconstructive perspective, one may add much to these suggestions. The few mentioned, may make some contribution towards the enskilling of people as regards their own traditions but also assist in opening possibilities for the appreciation of the traditions and cultures of others.

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