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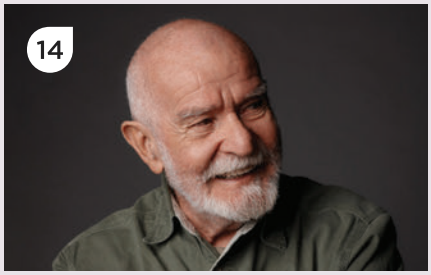
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ON THE COVER

A town named in honour of Joseph Barry by Gustav Hendrich, WCARS

In the 17th century, European farmers, or *trekboers*, settled in the fertile Overberg region, drawn by its fresh water, fertile land, and higher rainfall. However, the mountain barrier hindered transport, particularly for fruits like apples, peaches, and apricots, and farmers faced economic isolation due to the lack of nearby markets. This led to the construction of the Tradouw Pass, connecting the small village of Kannaland to Cape markets. By the mid-19th century, improved infrastructure allowed mercantilist Joseph Barry to establish a successful trade in grain, wool, and agricultural produce. Over time, Barry gained the favor of local farmers and became known as a 'mercantilist mogul'.[1] After 1854, Barry regularly topped the Western Cape's legislative council polls, becoming a powerful businessman. His company, Barry and Nephews, expanded across the southwestern Cape, revitalising struggling farming communities. Edmund E Burrows described Barry's influence as extending to Robertson, Montagu, and Bredasdorp, with branches in most Dutch Reformed Church congregations after 1858.[2] Kannaland's development was also influenced by Dutch farmer Adolph van Coller, who donated half of his land to the Dutch Reformed Church. A rumor suggested that one of van Coller's wives, secretly in love with Barry, persuaded him to name the town after him. This led to the birth of Barrydale.[3]

The Gothic-style Dutch Reformed church, completed in 1877, became the town's centre, followed by the formation of a Village Management Board. After the Barry era, the town grew slowly, achieving municipality status in 1921. Today, the town is known for its agricultural produce and tranquil environment, attracting visitors seeking an escape from city life.

In a final tribute to the legacy of the Barrys, Burrows acknowledged that, 'they [the Barrys] assisted in molding the agricultural pattern of the country, and by their broad liberal outlook, contributed greatly to the communal life of the people'.[4]

1. Burrows, EH, *Overberg Outspan. A Chronicle of People and Places in the South Western Districts of the Cape* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1952), p. 261.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
3. History of Barrydale *https://xplorio.com/barrydale/en/about/history/.*
4. Burrows, *Overberg Outspan*, p. 276.

The **Cape Librarian** extends its gratitude to the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (WCARS) for making available its rare collection of vintage photographs for the cover images of the magazine in 2025.

Picture credit: R241 Barrydale

editorial | redaksioneel | upapasho

How does that saying (which may or may not be attributable to Albert Einstein) go about doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result? What *is* crystal clear is that our approach to teaching elementary reading is critically deficient. And it's getting worse. At the end of February, the 2030 Reading Panel — which monitors our country's progress in foundational reading outcomes, released another shock report.

It has now become apparent that 80 per cent of Grade 3 learners cannot read for meaning in any language. As proficiency in home language reading at the end of Grade 3 is a strong indicator of future academic prospects, including repetition of Grade 4 – this statistic is particularly distressing.

In addition, 70 per cent of Grade 6 learners' reading skills were rated below grade-level in Afrikaans or English, as assessed by PIRLS (2021), SASE (2022) and SEACMEQ V (2021).

The latest findings echo the panel's 2021 findings that the majority of South African learners cannot read for meaning at the appropriate age; and without suitable interventions an entire generation is being neglected to fail.

Systemic assessments conducted in 2023 indicated no pre-Covid recovery. That said, the Western Cape has been bucking this trend with its R1.2-million #BackonTrack learning losses reading recovery programme that launched in 2023 to specifically focus on assisting Grades 4, 7 and 8 learners. It saw an increase in Grade 4 language skills by up to 195 days and 225 days for Grade 7 maths learners, following just five Saturday sessions.

The challenge at hand is also institutional: critical preschool programmes are unfunded by the government (requiring an estimated R18-billion); and what's more is that twice as many necessary secondary school teachers are being produced against the 50% shortage of foundation phase teachers. African languages are the most marginalised, with only one-fifth of the required number of Language of Learning and Teaching-specific teachers being produced.

Rome wasn't built in a day. (But it is burning now.) And neither have the red lights signalling our country's reading crisis only been flashing from yesterday, which only proves that the current trajectory of our reading interventions, along with the way that teachers are taught — are plainly inadequate, with zero prospect of improvement.

As eternal beacons of hope throughout the centuries, libraries have been duty-bound to teach a love for books and promoting literacy to future generations. In South Africa, today, never has that calling been nobler.

Or necessary.



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libraries | biblioteke | amathala eencwadi

Biblioteek vier 165 jaar

Riversdal Biblioteek vier vanjaar sy 165ste bestaansjaar en die Wes-Kaapse Minister van Kultuursake en Sport, Ricardo Mackenzie, het op Maandag 20 Januarie gedeel in die verjaarsdagvieringe.

Volgens rekords is die datum waarop die biblioteek tot stand gekom het 1 Januarie 1860. Kinders is eers op 30 Julie 1894 toegelaat onder toesig van hulle ouers, maar vandag word almal aangemoedig om die biblioteek te besoek en hulle ontvang tussen 3,000 tot 4,000 besoeke per maand. In Julie 1885 was daar 24 lede en teen Desember 2024 het dit gegroei tot 3,619 lede. Die biblioteek beskik tans oor 35,000 boeke, wat bestaan uit 'n wye verskeidenheid en daar is beslis iets vir almal. Op 30 November 1973 word die huidige biblioteekgebou betrek met 'n ledetal van 1,609. Dit is 'n pragtige biblioteek met genoeg spasie en baie sonlig.

Minister Mackenzie het, nadat hy deur die biblioteek gestap het, die verjaarsdagvieringe bygewoon. In sy toespraak het hy beklemtoon hoe belangrik lees is. Hy is baie opgewonde oor wat Hessequa Munisipaliteit doen en alreeds vermag het. As 'n kind het hy sy middae na skool in die biblioteek deurgebring, want dit het hom uit die moeilikheid gehou. Die minister het gesê dat die oudste biblioteke in Suid-Afrika in grotte soos die Blombosgrot buite Stilbaai is. Die eerste bewoners van die grotte het reeds rotskunsstories vertel en dis waar biblioteke begin het.



Na sy toespraak het die skoolkoor van Panorama Primêr twee pragtige liedere gesing voordat die minister die verjaarsdagkoek gesny het. Die gaste kon natuurlik nie wag om 'n stukkie verjaarsdagkoek of 'n kolwyntjie te neem nie.

(Johan Victor, *South Cape Forum*, 24/01/2025)

Huguenot Square leads with Learner's course

Huguenot Square Library hosted its first learner's license programme of the year on 6 February. The mini course was attended by 72 members of the community; and once again facilitated by The Drive Company. The agenda was split into two parts. In the first, attendees were taught the K53 rules and procedures; and where they make notes and could ask the necessary questions. This was followed by a mock test in the second part of the course, which serves as a dry run in preparation for the actual test that they will write at the traffic department on the day of their formal application. The tests were marked afterwards, whereafter the participants were phoned and informed that their results were available at the library. Staff at Huguenot Square always hope for positive results; and that attendees are subsequently empowered and encouraged to make their actual appointments at the traffic department to write the learner's test. This programme is just one of many facilitated by us to empower the community of Belhar. We wish all participants best of luck with their future driving endeavours. We would really like many of them to return with their learner's license certificate in their hands!

Cheryl Petersen, Assistant Librarian: Huguenot Square Library



Attendees writing the mock test

City Library staff reads to thousands on World Read Aloud Day

Librarians, assistant librarians, other city staff members and even our mayor read to 37,000 people of all ages on World Read Aloud Day (WRAD) on 5 February.

This annual event once again saw **City Libraries** partner with Nal'ibali to help them reach their annual target of reading aloud to 3.5 million children. WRAD is indeed a highlight on the City's Library and Information Services Department's calendar and could not have happened without a dynamic organising team behind the scenes.

Spearheaded by the children's coordinator for LIS, Tracey Muir-Rix, the launch event for the department took place at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's hospital in partnership with hospital management.

Storytellers included the creative talents of assistant librarian Gafieldien Agulhas from Southfield Library; librarian-in-charge of Gugulethu Library, Nomonde Mama; librarian-in-charge of Tygervalley Library Annamarie Mostert; librarian from Rondebosch Library, Mitchel Hunter; Tracey Muir-Rix and the team from Nal'ibali.

Guest storyteller and Cape Town Mayor, Geordin Hill-Lewis (lovingly renamed Mayor Gee) did not disappoint. His unexpected antics became one of the most cherished memories of the festival. With a burst of playful energy, he kicked off his shoes to reveal a pair of pink and black, funky socks. Together with LiBee the Library Mascot and Aunty Tee the library lady, the mayor brought the story of the Kitchen Disco to life as he danced the Kitchen Jive with the children. Laughter and giggles rippled through the crowd as the children and adults' faces lit up with delight as they shook like a mango and partied like a pear.

Not to be outdone, Annamarie Mostert, the energetic librarian in charge of Tygervalley Library, captivated her audience with a puppet show. The dog characters' loud barking had the children in stiches, while the spider created a few scary moments. Their laughter and screams were a testament to the power of storytelling and a gentle reminder that sometimes the simplest stories can sow the strongest seeds of joy. As the main theatrical performance concluded, several children raced to the puppet theatre to see the mystery behind the curtain. However, the characters had magically disappeared.

Storytellers from LIS and our brand new MMC for community Services and Health, councillor Francine Higham, who became an instant honorary storyteller when she joined library staff in the wards — also read to some of the young patients at the hospital.

Gafieldien Agulhas shared a particularly touching moment when he recalled that initially he felt overwhelmed by the large crowd all waiting for their names to be called. Amid the chaos, he spotted a three-year-old boy who was playing on the floor with an amputated leg. At first the little boy was agitated that his fun was disturbed, but as soon as Gafieldien got into character he noticed that the boy started intently listening to him and getting excited as he brought the story of a ninja to life. Gafieldien said that at that moment he dimmed out all the surrounding noise and for that period he read his heart out for this little boy, who at such a young age had lost a limb.



Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis doing the Kitchen Jive

Mitchel Hunter shared: 'The most touching moment for me was in the outpatient ward. Everyone was tense and sad, the kids were subdued and bored, but while I was reading an exciting, interactive story (**If you're snappy and you know it** by Pip Williams) I saw emotions transform in that room. The kids' eyes lit up, the voices rose joyously, they stood up and did the actions. Even the parents lightened up and engaged in the story, song, and actions. Engaging in a magical word where animals sing songs was a momentary respite for the patients and their carers from the stresses caused by illness.'

Waseefa Achmat, who initiated the outreach at the hospital said afterwards that 'participating in World Read Aloud Day was truly an uplifting experience. Seeing the joy and laughter on the children's faces as we read to them was heart-warming. The puppet show was an added pleasure, providing a joyful escape from their medical journey'.

After the stories, the team handed out goodie bags to all the children present containing snack packs, art items and their own take-away book. It was a welcome surprise for the children present.

Simultaneously, elsewhere across the city, 101 libraries joined the reading festivities by reading out loud at ECDs, clinics, schools and even old-age homes.

Tracey Muir-Rix, Children's Coordinator: City of Cape Town LIS

Rose Valley Biblioteek kroon Meneer en Mejuffrou Boekwurm

Ons personeel het hulleself gereeld vantevore afgevra — wat kan ons biblioteke doen om seuns en dogters saam betrokke te kry, maar sonder om enigiemand minderwaardig of uitgesluit te laat voel?

Daarom het **Rose Valley Biblioteek** in Oudsthoorn op Donderdag 19 Desember 2024 'n modekompetisie aangebied waarna Meneer en Mejuffrou Boekwurm aangewys is.

Die uitgangspunt was om kinders bewus te maak van hul talente en dat hulle altyd oor hulleself moet goed voel. Daar is ook gestreef daarna om jong lede van die gemeenskap aan te moedig om meer boeke te lees alvorens hulle aan die kompetisie kon deelneem. Ons aangewese gereelde leser was Nahemia Everts, wat ons kinders aangemoedig om het biblioteekbesoeke en boeke uitneem 'n gewoonte te maak. Die bekroonde wenners het hulle uitstekend van hul take gekwyt om die res van die Rose Valley se inwoners te inspireer. Ons is voorwaar baie trots op hulle.

Dankie aan Charlotte Kamfer, Maurice Langdon en Sherelda Grundlingh van Rose Valley Biblioteek vir hulle deurlopende en onbaatsugtige bydraes aan die gemeenskap.

Chad May, Streeksbibliotekaris: Oudtshoornstreek

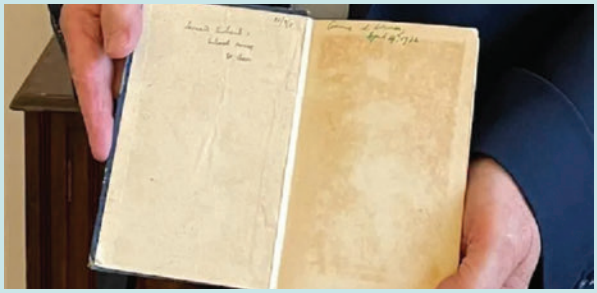


De Doorns bolstered with IT skills boost



An ICT training and community engagement forum was hosted for the De Doorns community on 13 February. The aim was to promote digital literacy and provide training to various local groupings through a series of workshops; and co-facilitated by ICT Yeboneers and Champions to upskill participants with basic but essential IT know-how. Members from several public forums attended and received tutoring focusing on basic hardware management, word processing and using online resources for school and university applications.

Book returned after more than 100 years



Poetry of Byron was returned to St Bees School, near Whitehaven, Cumbria, after it was discovered in Carmarthenshire, south Wales. An inscription bears the name of former pupil Leonard Ewbank, along with the location School House, St Bees and the date 25 September 1911. Headmaster Andrew Keep said the school was 'honoured' to have the book back as a tribute to Mr Ewbank, who died in battle during World War One.

(*bbc.com*, Federica Bedendo, 18/10/2024)

Bathandi, babhali, bafundi besiXhosa, sihlaba ikhwelo kuba ikhwelo lityala. Sicela nithumela amabalana, amanqaku, nako nakuphi okunokuphucula, kufundise, kwazise, kukhulise, konwabise kuphinde kukhuthaza ukubhalwa nokufundwa kolwimi lwesiXhosa. Sikhuthaza ooSozilwimi ukuba imisebenzi yabo yophando eshankathelweyo ngesiXhosa ingangeniswa nayo ukuze ipapashwe njengenqaku eliyakufundwa luninzi lwabantetho isisiXhosa nabanqwenela ukusifunda.

Inspiring Innovation: Western Cape Library Managers Conference 2025

The Western Cape Library Service successfully hosted its highly anticipated Municipal Library Managers Conference on 6–7 March at the scenic Caledon Hotel. This annual gathering brought together library managers, municipal representatives, and key stakeholders — including the Western Cape Education Department and Provincial Treasury — for two days of insightful discussions, collaboration, and forward-thinking strategies.

One of the standout moments of the conference was a thought-provoking session by guest speaker Emile Poggenpoel, who captivated the audience with a powerful discussion on self-care for leaders — a topic that resonated deeply with attendees.

A highlight of this year's event was the showcase of innovative and creative community outreach programmes, where Library Managers shared inspiring initiatives that are making a real difference in their communities.



Christelle Lubbe discussing CoCT Libraries outreach

Key discussions covered a range of crucial topics, including:

- The Public Library Service Bill and its future impact.
- Mentorship on writing and presenting professional papers to empower library professionals.
- Strengthening public library-school collaboration to enhance literacy and learning.
- Funding challenges, including Langeberg Municipality's shortfall and VAT on grant funding, with insights from Provincial Treasury's Steven Kenyon.
- Exploring alternative funding opportunities in an open forum led by Chad Capon.
- The #Back on Track reading project, presented by Portia Smit of the Western Cape Education Department. DCAS is very excited about the partnership opportunities emanating from this talk.
- OverDrive usage trends and insights, presented by Stanley Jonck of the Provincial Library Service.
- ALMAL concept and collaboration with Museums by Dr Michael Jansen van Rensburg.

According to Cecilia Sani, Director: Library Service, the importance of these two days goes beyond the discussions, as the conference fostered valuable networking opportunities, which lead to strengthened partnerships, and reaffirming the vital role of public libraries as hubs of learning, engagement, and innovation.

The Western Cape Library Service extends its gratitude to all participants, speakers, and contributors for making this event a resounding success. Here's to another year of growth, collaboration, and impactful library services!

Carmen Lucas, Deputy Director: Municipal Support Services



Attendees at the conference

Ons biblioteke: die hart van elke gemeenskap



Lees of nie lees nie? Biblioteek of nie biblioteek nie? Hoe beskryf jy iets wat mense party keer nie verstaan nie? Die liefde vir lees en 'n biblioteek. Ek besef dat almal nie dieselfde voel of dink nie, maar iewers moet 'n begin wees. Myne het op 'n jeugdige ouderdom begin.

Baie mense beskou 'n biblioteek as 'n gebou met baie boeke, maar vir my is dit 'n plek ver verwyder van die alledaagse; 'n plek van kennis, 'n plek van heimweë, maar ook een van lag.

Waar begin ek? Is ek gedwing om te lees,of is dit 'n passie wat alreeds daar was? Ek het begin lees omdat ek nuuskierig, leergierig en weetgierig was. Die feit dat ek my kon afsonder en nie deelgeneem het aan vervelige speletjies nie, het baie gehelp. Toe ek as lid kon aansluit by die biblioteek, was ek in ekstase. Toe kon ek my droom uitleef.

Wat dinge baie maklik gemaak het was die hulpvaardige personeel wat ek vanaf Dag Een tot op hede die pad mee saamloop. Hulle is altyd daar om jou te help, en indien jy 'n spesiale versoek sou rig, hulle uit hul pad sal gaan om jou te help.

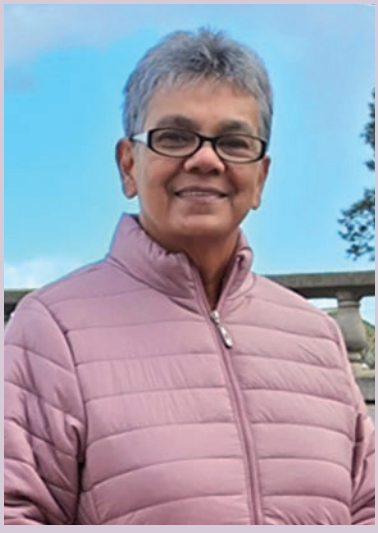
My tyd wat ek in die biblioteek deurbring kan nie in geldterme gemeet word nie. Lees verbreed jou algemene kennis; jou woordeskat word groter en nuwe uitdrukkings kom na vore. Lees gee vir my gemoedsrus en bied aan my ontvlugting.

De Doorns Biblioteek het ook vir 'n lekker storie gesorg. Terwyl ek eendag so deur die Engelse afdeling dwaal, maak 'n vrou my daarop attent dat die Afrikaans aan die ander kant is.

Dis 'n groot jammerte dat so min kinders deesdae nog wil lees. Lees leer jou goeie kommumikasievaardighede, maar bowenal verbreed dit jou algemene kennis. As ek kon, sou ek elke dag in die biblioteek wou deurbring: nie net vir die boeke nie, maar vir die glimlaggende, vriendelike, spontane personeel wat daar werksaam is.

Langenhoven het gesê: 'Met die water wat verby is, sal die meule nooit weer maal nie.' So voel ek as ek nie my boeke kan uitneem nie. Verveeld, geïrriteerd en asof my oë toegeplak is. Dit is my storie en so sal dit bly. Lees, lees en nogmals lees tot ek nie meer kan nie.

Damon Jansen



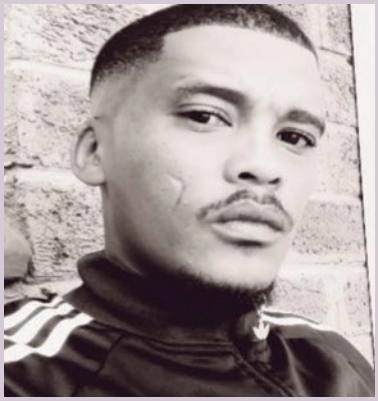
Esselen Biblioteek was my toevlugsoord sedert 37 jaar gelede na my man se dood. Die bibliotekaresse het spesiaal vir my boeke gehou sodat ek nie te lank daar hoef te bly nie, want hulle het geweet van my twee klein kinders wat wag by die huis. Ek so dankbaar vir hulle.

Ek het verslaaf geraak aan lees, want dit was my troos as die verlange na my man te erg geraak het. Ek het soms tot tweeuur in die oggend gelees — en dan moes ek nog gaan onderwys gee. Ek is baie dankbaar vir die biblioteekpersoneel wat my deur my routydperk gehelp het, om spesiaal vir my die boeke te hou.

Ek was 'n lid van die biblioteek toe dit nog 'n klein geboutjie was, oorkant die Anglikaanse kerk waar die nuwe siersteenbiblioteek nou staan.

Vandag is ek nog steeds 'n lid van die biblioteek en afgetree by die skool. My kinders en kleinkinders is ook deur die leesgogga gebyt.

Brenda Schoble



A journey in community service: my experience at Rosevalley Library

I was born on 22 February 1993 in Cape Town, Western Cape. I'm currently 33 years old and living in Dysselsdorp, Oudtshoorn, where I am fortunate to be working as a Temporary Law Enforcement Ambassador at the **Rosevalley Public Library**.

From a young age, I have always been driven and hardworking, with a strong desire to grow and learn. It is this passion that led me to the library services sector, a field I deeply admire for its vital role in the community. My time at Rosevalley Public Library has reaffirmed my belief in the importance of the services provided here, and I am eager to contribute to the success of this important social hub.

I have always seen myself as a team player, someone who thrives in collaborative environments and is always ready to take on new challenges. I value the chance to learn and grow from those around me. I'm confident that my communication skills, punctuality, perseverance, and computer literacy are assets that help me make meaningful contributions to the library.

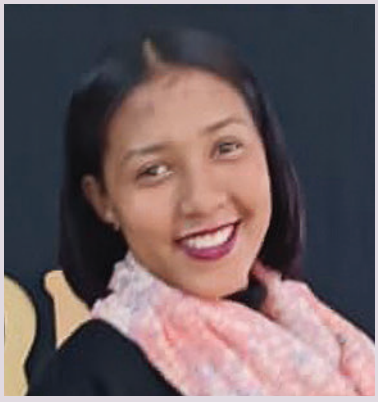
Reflecting on my time at the Rosevalley Library, I can honestly say that it has been a fulfilling and exciting experience. I recall visiting local libraries as a child, which sparked my love for reading and taught me the significance of books in broadening one's knowledge and vocabulary. This early exposure to libraries played a significant role in shaping my career interests, and now, I find myself deeply invested in understanding the many facets of a librarian's role.

I truly enjoy the tasks assigned to me and appreciate how each one helps me gain a deeper understanding of the library's operations. It has fuelled my desire to pursue a career in this field, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of the hard-working team here at Rosevalley Library. The calm, collaborative atmosphere has made this experience even more rewarding, and I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to such a positive and impactful environment.

I look forward to continuing to learn and grow within this wonderful community.

Jotran Jordaan

My journey at Duivenhoks Library



My six months at **Duivenhoks Library** was a transformative journey that exceeded my expectations. As a volunteer in the YearBeyond programme, I was warmly welcomed by the library staff, who treated me like family. Before joining the programme, I had just completed my studies and was eager to apply my skills and knowledge in a real-world setting. Duivenhoks Library provided the perfect platform for me to grow, learn and make a meaningful contribution. Beyond the shelves of books, I discovered a vibrant community hub where knowledge, skills, and connections were being fostered. My time at the library was a treasure trove of learning, growth and service. Through this experience, I gained valuable insights into the critical role libraries play in empowering communities. I witnessed firsthand how libraries provide a safe space for people to access information, develop new skills, and connect with others. Through this experience, I developed essential skills, including:

1. Communication: I improved my ability to interact with people from diverse backgrounds, ages and abilities.
2. Teamwork: I learned to collaborate with library staff, community members and partner organisations to achieve common goals.
3. Adaptability: I became more flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, priorities and community needs.
4. Leadership: I had opportunities to take initiative, lead projects and mentor others.

My experience at Duivenhoks Library reinforced the notion that libraries are indeed more than just repositories of books. They are dynamic, inclusive spaces that have the power to transform lives and uplift communities. I am grateful for the opportunity to have served at Duivenhoks Library and for the knowledge, friendships and memories that I've gained. This experience has left an indelible mark on my life, and I look forward to applying the lessons I've learned to make a positive impact on my future endeavours.

Wee-Ann Roberts

The Cape's oldest archives

by Gustav Hendrich

Covering nearly 150 years, the study and pursuit of the history of the Dutch East India Company, or *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), at the Cape of Good Hope continues to fascinate many historians and academics. To shed light on this history, a well-documented collection, regarded in archival circles as unique, albeit irreplaceable, is that of the Secretary of the Council of Policy. The Council of Policy (or C-archival group) is virtually the only documentary source on the early Dutch settlement.

In terms of completeness, the historiographer and Keeper of the Archives, Dr George M Theal, in 1880, already alluded to the value of these archives because of their 'excellent state of preservation'; and stated that the series is 'very nearly complete'. Theal furthermore emphasised that, in essence, the 'Debates and Resolutions of the State Council, by which the Cape Colony was governed from 1652 to 1795, are the most important documents in our archives'.[1]

To this, the renowned late historian of the VOC period, Dr Dan Sleigh, added that despite the irretrievable loss of some documents in 1782, when volumes were used for defense to roll bullets, it is miraculous that the predominant archival documents remained intact.[2]

Housed at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (WCARS) in Cape Town, this valuable collection remains a vital source of historical information. In April 2005, the collection was acknowledged internationally when the Council of Policy archives were listed on the UNESCO *Memory of the World Register*.[3] Thus, as custodians of the collection, the archivists remain committed to promoting its preservation and accessibility for public consultation.

Composition of the Council of Policy archives

With the establishment of the VOC at the Cape in April 1652, the Cape was to serve as a halfway station — a mere stopover. According to Sleigh's argument, it was a service rather than a 'refreshment station' to replenish Dutch ships on their voyages between the Netherlands and Asia.[4]



Interior of strongroom showing the Council of Policy archives (Photograph by F Pople, WCARS)

In governing the Dutch settlement, the highest authorities of power were vested in the Council of Policy at the Castle. The first formalised meeting took place on board the Dutch ship *Drommedaris* on 30 December 1651, while Commander Jan van Riebeeck and his crew were en route from the Netherlands to Cape Town.[5] Consequently, these minutes of the meeting are considered the oldest documents in the Council of Policy archive. After the erection of the fort and the later construction of the five-bastion Castle, meetings became more regular, though not fixed in any way. It was inside the room of the Council of Policy, representing a quasi-parliament, where political, legal, administrative, and judicial matters were discussed.

Working under the supervision of the Secretary, the *scribenten*, or *borsten van de pen* (translated from Dutch as 'scribes'), were responsible for inscribing the proceedings into the minutes on high-quality 17th-century paper.[6] Since political decisions were passed as Resolutions, this series is considered by far the most important of the Council's records. The *Resolutions of the Council of Policy* series is indisputably regarded as the most complete, and its politico-governmental value is extraordinary.

Apart from the Resolutions, various additional series forming part of the Council of Policy archives could be regarded as equally important. The *Letters Received* series, comprising the incoming letters from the authorities in the Netherlands, Batavia, and officials with 'confidential letters', as well as the return communiques presented in the *Letters Despatched* series, holds significant historical value that cannot be overemphasised.[7]

Worldwide, the Dutch trading posts were instructed by the Council of Seventeen in the Netherlands to keep a diary or journal, which in the Cape became known as the *Daghregisters* (or Journals). Despite its wordiness, the Journals are considered the most intriguing source, making for a curious read. Moreover, they contain a vast array of information on occurrences in the surroundings of the Castle, as well as on the arrival of ships, fauna and flora, and climatic phenomena. Professor DB Bosman described the Journal as 'an unequalled source of all types of information concerning the country'.[8]

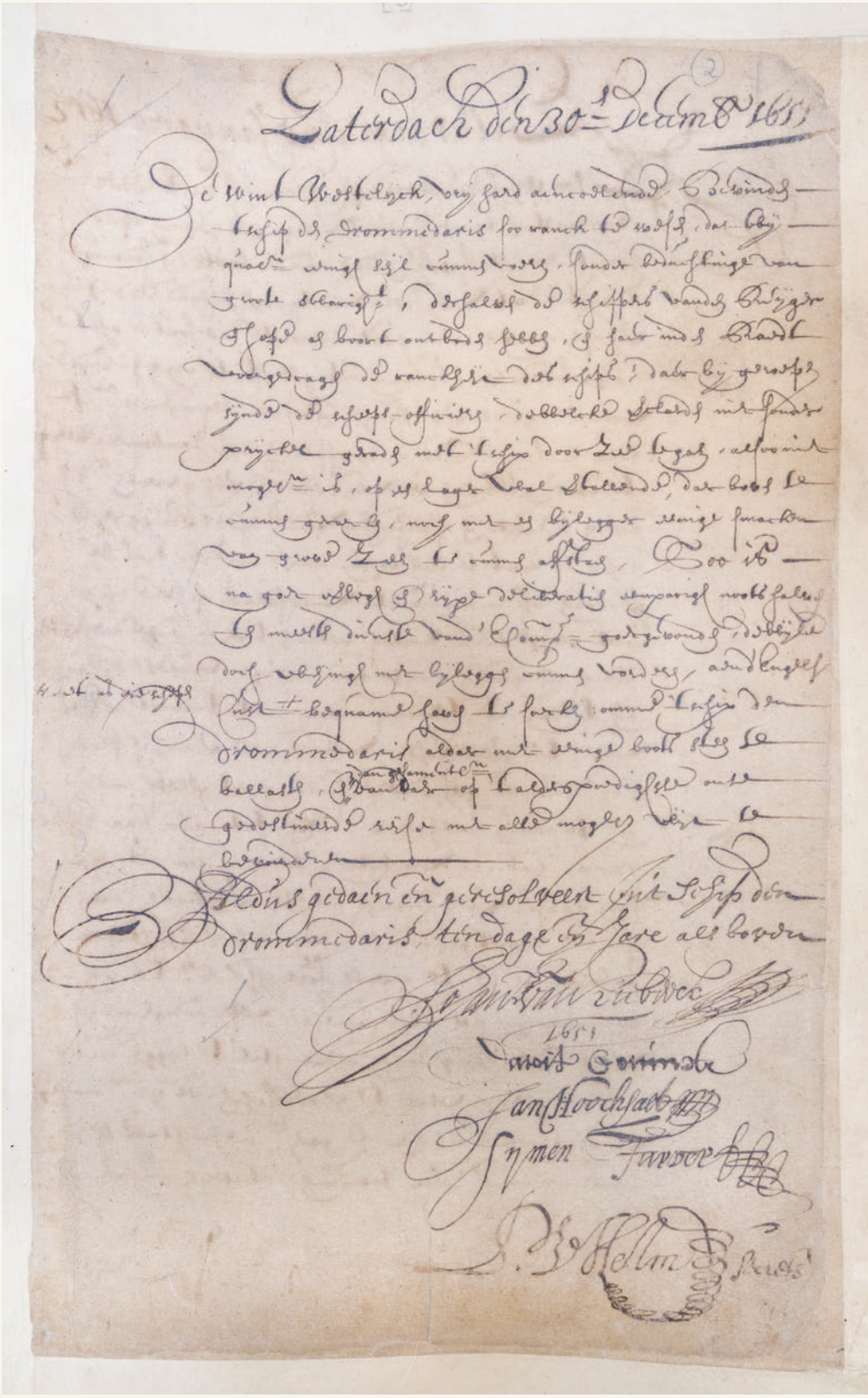
The series *Placaatboeken* (or Statutes/Proclamation Books) contains written notices and governmental information. The Memorandums and Instructions to Officials by the governor, such as those concerning expeditions to the interior of the Cape and memoranda left by

the governor for their successors, are of considerable value to politico-historical research. Together with the series *Ships* and other *Journals*, it provides first-hand information on life aboard Dutch ships and their expeditions to the coastal and interior areas, as well as information on the local inhabitants.

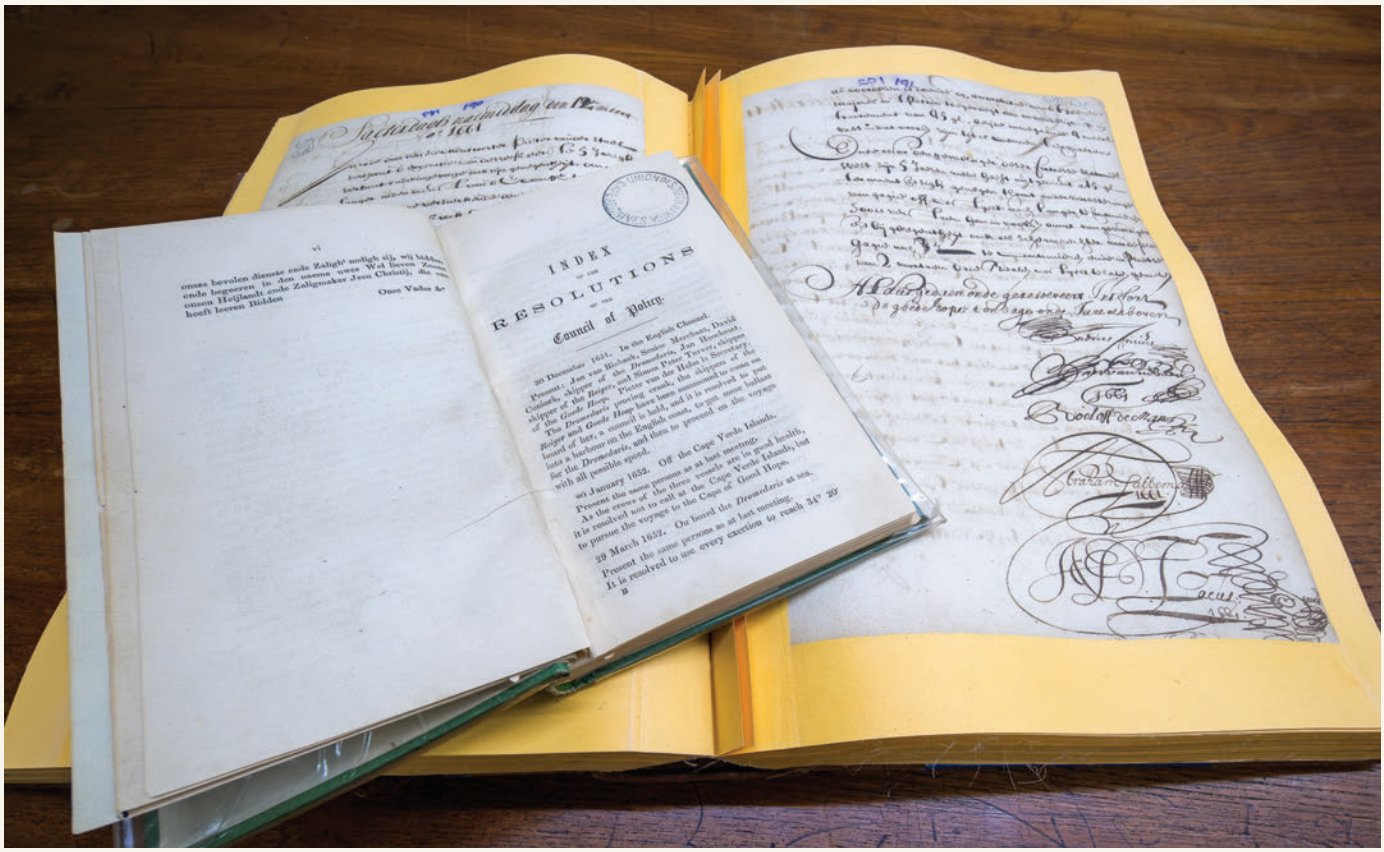
Other sub-series, such as the *Affidavits*, *Memorials*, and *Reports* — serving as political documents — and the *Diverse Documents*, specifically containing the *Kaapsche geschillen* (or Cape Disputes) arising from burgher complaints against the Company rule, cannot be overlooked. The diverse records on the Dutch outstations, such as Mauritius, Madagascar, and Malacca, further provide insight into the Dutch colonial possessions.[9]

Synopsis of the main series of the Council of Policy archives

The Resolutions	1651–1795
Letters Received	1652–1792
Letters Received: Nederburgh and Frijkenius	1792–1793
Petitions and Nominations (*Rekwisten en Nominatiën*)	1712–1791
Memorials and Reports (*Memoriën en Rapporten*)	1710–1791
Letters Despatched	1652–1795
Journals (*Daghregisters*)	1652–1794
Diverse Journals (including Ships and other Journals)	1664–1794
The Statutes/Proclamation Books (*Placaatboeken*)	1652–1795
Statutes of India	Undated
Memorials and Instructions	1657–1798
Affidavits (*Attestatiën*)	1652–1791
Oath Books (*Eedboeken*)	1652–1791
Burgher Complaints	1716–1796
Cape Disputes	1779–1785
The Conditions of Lease (*Pagkondisies*)	1687–1714
Diverse Records	1678–1795



First page of the Council of Policy archives, dated 30 December 1651 (WCARS, C1)



Depiction of Dr Theal's Abstract of the Debates and Resolutions with volume C2 in the background (Photograph by F Pople, WCARS)

Preservation and compilation of the inventory

The physical structure of the Council of Policy archives at WCARS has undergone painstaking work for the preservation of the collection. In the early 1970s, the Archives Commission decided to rebind the documents at the former Transvaal Archives Repository (now the National Archives in Pretoria).

Regarding the binding process, the volumes were bound in a 'livery' style, designed to achieve a uniform appearance of the shelved volumes. The paper bound into these livery-style bindings also underwent a mass treatment process, where each sheet was silked (laminated between thin layers of silk, chemically bonded to the paper — this is a permanent treatment that cannot be undone).

Today, mass treatments like this are considered detrimental to records, as they often destroy or significantly alter the original binding or bundling methods, as well as certain inherent qualities of the paper from the period.[10]

The nature of the silking treatment also meant that it is very likely that the effects of iron gall corrosion were accelerated by a treatment intended to prolong the lifespan of records.[11]

After the binding, the collection was returned to the former Cape Archives Depot on Queen Victoria Street. A concise inventory, with detailed remarks on the sorting and arrangement process, was compiled by the former chief archivist, Dr GC de Wet. For practical reasons, the volumes were arranged according to series, while new volume numbers were allocated during the rebinding process and indicated alongside the old volume numbers. In later years, the inventory was retyped in electronic format and made available in the Finding Aids Room.[12]

The collection consists of 2,776 volumes, comprising 142 linear metres of shelving space. From a conservator's perspective, it could be considered a hybrid archival group owing to its sub-series components and the fact that a limited number of the original records — stemming from the time of the first Keeper of the Colonial Archives, Rev HCV Leibbrandt (with its aesthetic binding) — and Dr Colin Graham Botha, with a distinct binding since the 1920s, were all attempts to safeguard the collection in accordance with evolving preservation practices. Yet, despite the shortcomings of the rebinding in the seventies and its detrimental impact, the collection remains, at least for the researcher, an aesthetic treasure to behold.

Unlocking a collection's value for the future

After the Second British occupation of the Cape in 1806, the Council of

Policy archives were transferred to several storage locations. From the Castle of Good Hope, where it was housed, according to the archivist Dr Anna Boëseken, in *een klijn camertje op de punt Leerdam* (translated from Dutch as 'in one small room in the Leerdam bastion'), there appeared to be a period of neglect.[13] Yet, upon the request of the first Archives Commission in 1876 for a transfer to the South African Library and later the basement of the Parliament building, concerted efforts were made to improve its preservation and accessibility. Reflecting on the earliest attempts to transcribe and translate, Leibbrandt sought to extract essential information from the collection in his publication, *Précis of the Archives*, which is hailed as a pioneering work.

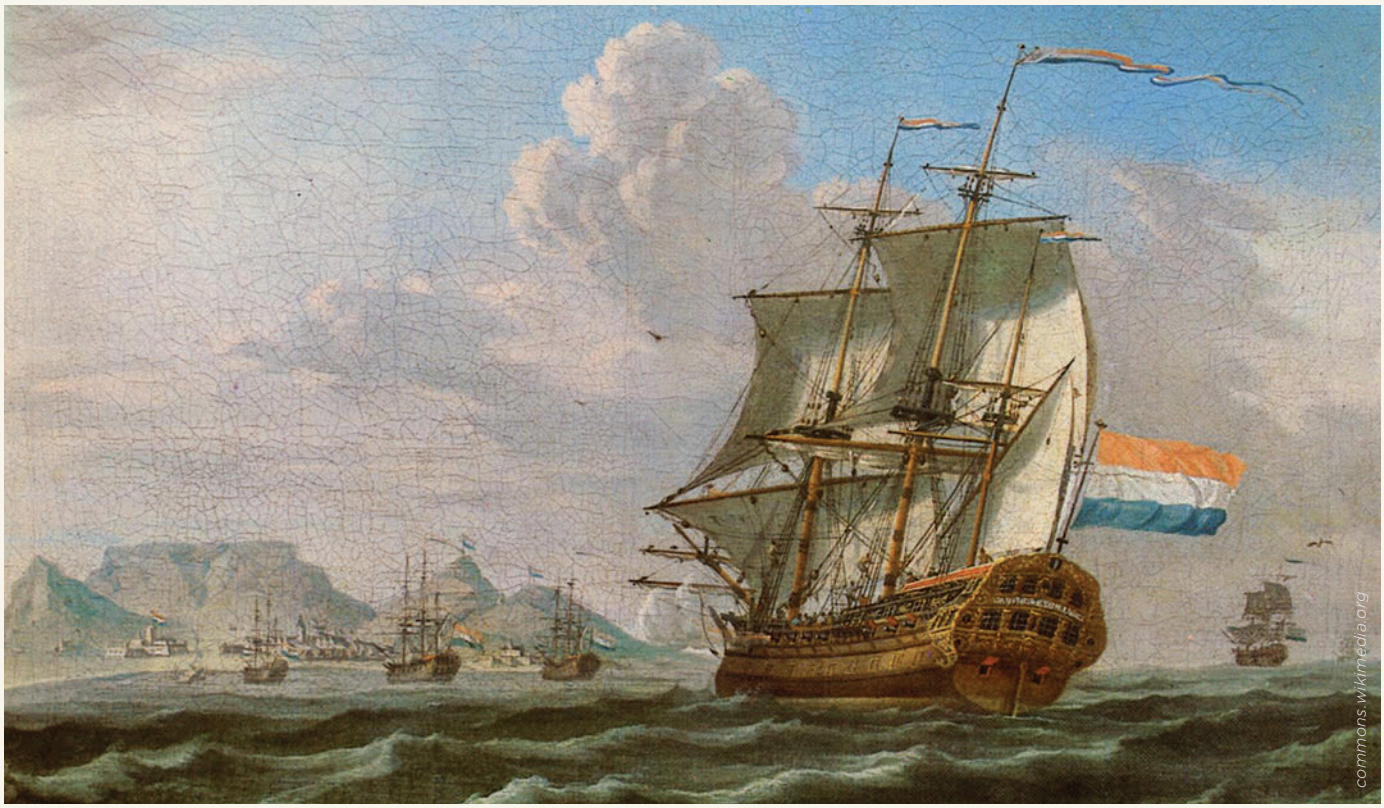
Similarly, Theal attempted to provide a condensed version of transcriptions and translations to English, with 'the view of facilitating research'. Despite his subjectivity in omitting trivial information in his *Abstract of the Debates and Resolutions of the Council of Policy*, from 1651 to 1687, Theal assured that 'discussions and resolutions of permanent interest have been condensed, but care has been taken not to eliminate any information of value'. As a result of circumstances and the overwhelming workload, Theal stopped transcribing the resolutions at June 1687 and called for a continuation of the 'requisite labour.'[14]

By the turn of the century, the development of the archival service in South Africa and the drive for its promotion inevitably spurred historians to revisit and actively study the Dutch period. A persistent desire to delve into the rich context emanating from the Council of Policy archives emerged. However, with the documents being largely inaccessible due to the illegibility of the Dutch handwriting, written in a stiff, prolix language, they still largely had to be deciphered and transcribed following the attempts by Leibbrandt and Theal.

During the mid-20th century, further enthusiastic attempts were made to transcribe the Resolutions and various other series, including the Statutes. Under the editorship of the archivist Kathleen M Jeffreys, a start was made in 1938, with the transcriptions published in *Kaapse Archiefstukken*.[15]

Since 1957, this endeavor was continued by the archivist, Dr Boëseken, who committed to the enormous task for the deciphering of the Dutch text, carried out by SD Naudé and JH Snyman. Boëseken was convinced that, 'for a thorough knowledge of our constitutional history... a study of the Resolutions of the Political Council is indispensable'.[16]

While there were significant gaps in many sub-series still requiring transcription, later historians — most notably Dr Sleigh, former director Piet Westra of the National Library, historian of Cape history at the University of Cape Town Prof Nigel Worden, and Dr. Susan Newton-King of the University of the Western Cape,



The Noord-Nieuwland in Table Bay, 1762

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4. Hendrich, G, 'Dan Sleigh: a passion for pursuing the past', *Cape Librarian*, November/December 2023, p. 10.
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to name but a few — undertook extensive research and greatly benefited from these transcriptions. For Sleigh's remarkable research on the VOC outposts, the vast Council of Policy archives were consulted on an almost daily basis in the Reading Room.

Studies by Sleigh and Westra on the mutiny of the Dutch slave ship *Meermin*, when a group of Malagasy slaves attempted to escape to freedom, only to be recaptured by the authorities, serve as a prime example of their active engagement with the documents. Astonishingly, some of the letters in bottles that survived the ocean waves were bound as part of the Council of Policy archives, thereby recording one of the most controversial incidents in the history of slavery at the Cape.[17]

Not only from individual academics, but also internationally, there arose an interest from universities, non-governmental organisations, and institutions to study the Council of Policy archives. Through concerted efforts and a renewed demand for transcription, this finally became a reality in 2001, when, in collaboration with the Dutch Ministry of Cultural Affairs, a transcription project commenced at the WCARS.[18]

The underlying intention of the project was to transcribe the documented records pertaining to the Dutch colonial possessions, mainly in Southeast Asia, and the former Dutch West Indies/Suriname.

Regarding its scope, the *Towards a New Age of Partnership* (TANAP) transcription project at the Cape from 2001 to 2003, under the direction of Drs Antonio Malan and Helena Liebenberg and consisting of a panel of professional linguists, transcribed the Resolutions of the Council of Policy in its entirety. The typewritten transcripts were converted electronically to XML format and published on the TANAP website. In terms of documentary transcription, it was an outstanding achievement.

Despite being hampered by a lack of funding, the Tracing History Trust (THT) was created in 2008 as a continuation of the work done for TANAP, with the intention of revealing the contents of the Dutch records and making them accessible for study or consultation universally. For that matter, the voluminous VOC Journals were transcribed. However, from a holistic perspective regarding the Council of Policy archives, the transcription projects remain an ongoing initiative, with much of the sub-series still to be transcribed.

As a conclusive remark, it is evident from its wide public consultation that the Council of Policy archives are of pivotal importance for recent popular studies on slavery, colonialism, and linguistics. Broadly speaking, our understanding of the early Dutch period as part of the heritage of the Western Cape is greatly enhanced. To reiterate what the former Chief Archivist of the Union of South Africa, Dr Colin Graham Botha, emphasised: it is admirable that these archives remained largely unscathed, and 'with the passing of time, the value of these documents increases', making the Council of Policy archives an ever more invaluable source for future generations of researchers and the general public.[19]

Dr Gustav Hendrich is an archivist in the Western Cape Archives and Records Service

Goodbye, my friend – you can go now – you've done it all

by Rory Riordan

The most frequently used description of Harold Athol Lanigan Fugard is that by William A Henry III, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic from *Time* magazine. In that magazine in 1988, Henry wrote, 'Athol Fugard is the foremost active playwright in the English-speaking world.' No small praise, but only a part description of the Fugard genius, whom I hope to show you in this note of love, admiration and appreciation.

We all know when and where he was born, when he came to Port Elizabeth (today Gqeberha), the lousy schooling and dud matric he obtained there (matric took him two years), his two and a half years at UCT before he abandoned his studies and, degreeless, hitchhiked up Africa and worked as a labourer on a tramp steamer from the Sudan to Scotland; of his endlessly faithful mother paying to get him home, and his first months back in Port Elizabeth, then Cape Town; and of his marriage to Sheila and his introduction, at her hand, to theatre.

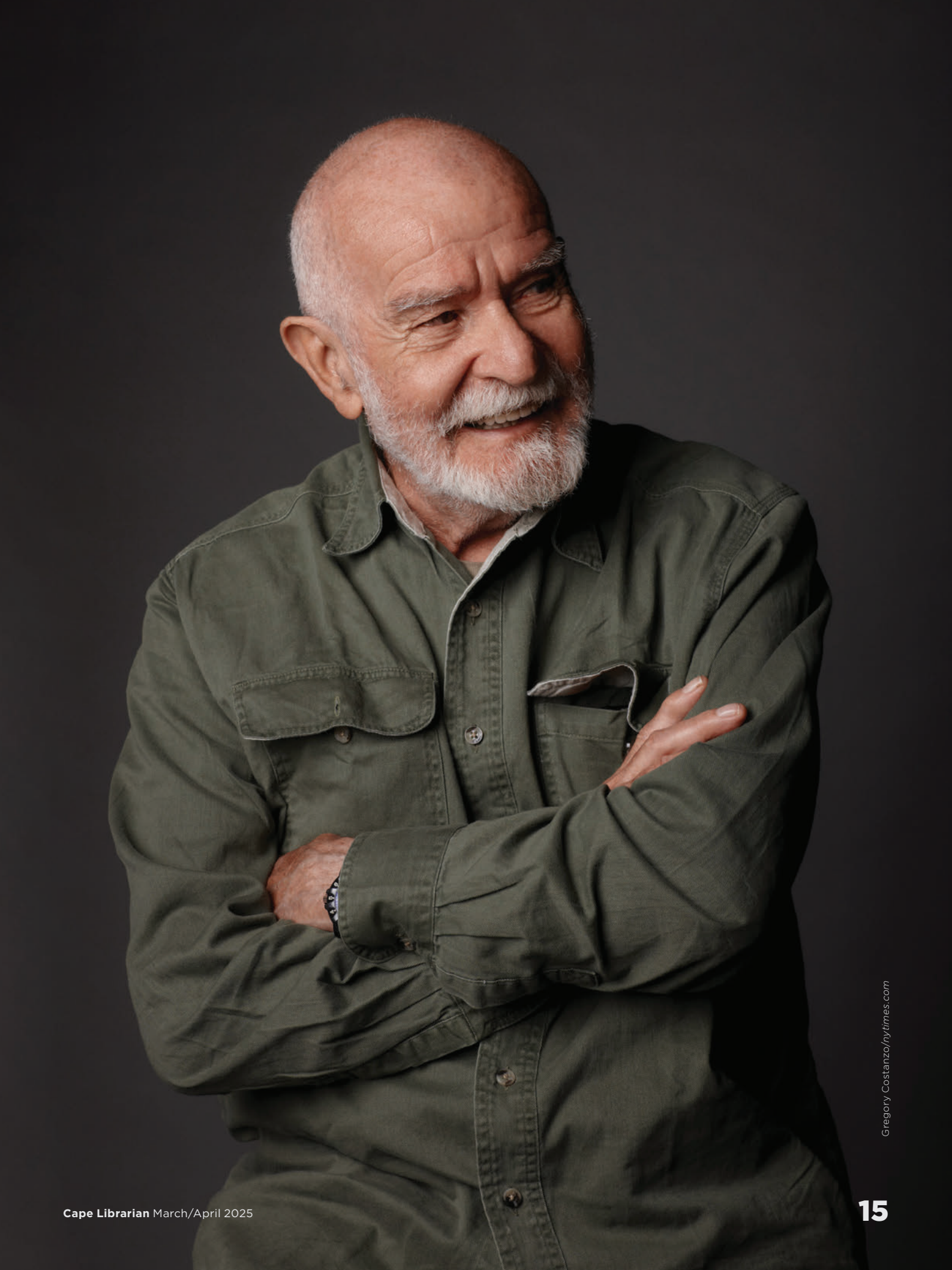
Then the two of them went to Johannesburg, to witness the horror of the final razing of Sophiatown in 1958/1959. In 1960, it was a year in London for them, trying to become writers — he a playwright, of all things, a profession which in South Africa was without hope or pennies then and still is now. No work, no money, no job and Sheila pregnant — it was on to the *Carnarvon Castle* and back to South Africa, to live in the one spare bedroom in his parents' tiny flat in Bird Street in Port Elizabeth.

The 29-year-old Athol Fugard who stood on the deck of the *Carnarvon Castle* in December 1960 on his way home to Port Elizabeth was an extreme case of a no-hoper. He had chosen to become a writer, and had written and discarded two novels — one thrown into the sea on a gin-soaked night in Fiji. Then he had narrowed his ambitions — he would be a playwright. In Cape Town, he had written two plays, in Johannesburg another two and in London a further pair. Nobody would read them, let alone bring them to a stage. Six plays written, all hopeless. A wife pregnant, no money and a father-in-law, Dr Meiring of Kirkwood, calling him a wastrel. Which he later admitted was accurate.

But something had happened.

On, or slightly before, that sea trip, he began three projects, all of which were astonishing, and two of which would make him an international figure in literature.

Firstly, he began to keep notebooks, jotting down impressions and thoughts. Later edited by his great



Gregory Costanzo/*nytimes.com*

friend Mary Benson and published by the long-suffering AD Donker, who loyally published so much of his early writing (which, believe me, didn't sell like *Harry Potter*), these notebooks are a treasure trove of his thoughts through the years 1960 to 1977.

Secondly, he took a shot at another novel, drawing on his experience of the destruction of Sophiatown and the resultant degradation of its brutalised population. While he made considerable progress, he abandoned this also and thought it had been destroyed. Fortunately, Sheila had stowed it away, and nearly 20 years later this first draft of *Tsotsi* emerged — to become a world-famous and most significant novel.

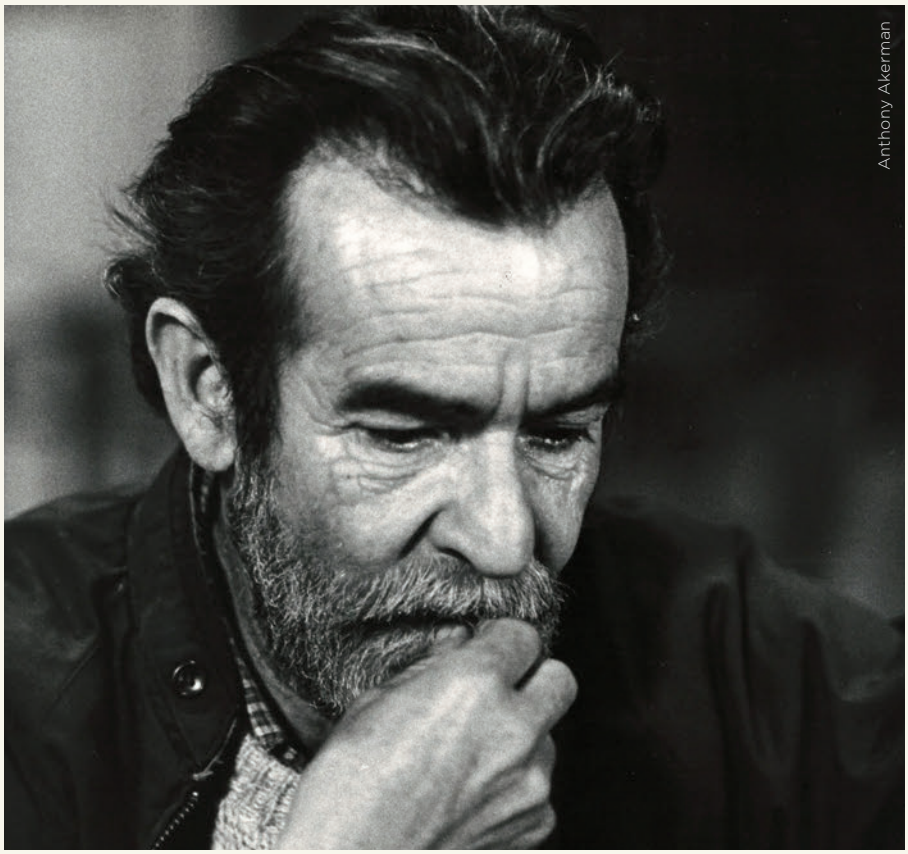
The third thing he turned his energy to was a play.

When he and Sheila returned from London to Mrs Fugard's Bird Street flat, Athol sat down at the dining room table and wrote and wrote and wrote. For five months.

At the end of May, three things happened: Lisa Maria Fugard was born, South Africa became a republic and Athol put his pen down. *The blood knot* was finished.

It took five months for it to make a stage. Well, hardly a stage. A raised platform in the Rehearsal Room at Dorkay House at the southern end of Eloff Street in Johannesburg. A hundred people attended, and it was chaotic. Unedited, the play went on for four and a half hours without an interval, with the audience on hard stack chairs in an unventilated room. More spoken words than in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare gave us 26 speaking actors, dozens of mute ones and 19 scenes, including 15 changes of set, et cetera. Fugard gave us the same two hobos in the same woebegone shanty for all of these four and a half hours. Phew.

The reviews were mixed. But, more importantly, Fugard had invited the two partners in United Artists to attend: Taubie Kushlick and Leon Gluckman. Kushlick wanted nothing to do with this play, but Gluckman saw potential. He convinced Fugard to edit it down to about two and a half hours of theatre, and — well, it then blew South African theatre apart. After a six-month tour of South Africa, Fugard was famous — but not rich. This play went to London, where it was destroyed by Kenneth Tynan's review,


Anthony Akerman

Athol Fugard in Amsterdam, 1981

and New York, where it was warmly received. The career of playwright Athol Fugard in the international world of theatre had begun.

We then witnessed behaviour in Fugard that he was often to repeat — if he was on a winning streak, he immediately abandoned this for another, totally different, style of theatre. *The blood knot* was about two brothers who tragically appeared to be in different 'racial groups', as South Africa was then delineated — one black and one possibly white. It was a stinging portrayal of the horrors of South Africa's racial classification. Fugard immediately abandoned both the racial component of his writing, and the critical. His next two plays were about poor whites, one set in a bombed-out Johannesburg boarding house, and the other about the 'second-hand Smits' of Valley Road in Central, Port Elizabeth. Good stuff, for sure, but what about apartheid?

When Fugard returned to Bird Street from the second London season of *The blood knot*, which was very successful, he was both famous and exhausted. The fame brought him his next journey into theatre, for Norman Ntshinga of the black township of New Brighton came to request Fugard's help in establishing a New Brighton theatre group. Ntshinga had read of this young playwright's success, and persisted in knocking on Fugard's door until he consented to do a play with this group.

Thus the troupe later known as the Serpent Players was born, initially operating from the abandoned snake pit in the vacated museum across the road from Mrs Fugard's flat. They were to become for Fugard 'the second significant provocation and stimulus to myself as writer and director that I have encountered in South Africa'. Together, they were to put on a variety of traditional plays, and together they developed the cooperative style of



John Kani, Athol Fugard and Winston Ntswona in London in 1973

playmaking that led to *Sizwe Banzi is dead* and *The island*.

Regretfully, they also attracted the attentions of the Special Branch of the police force; four of the Serpents, including Norman Ntshinga, were at one stage or another lugged off to Robben Island, and Fugard was to lose his passport for four years. During the years of the Serpent Players, racial separation was legislated both for acting casts and for audiences, and censorship of creative writing was greatly strengthened. I doubt that any of the other famous playwrights of the twentieth century world of theatre operated under such conditions.

At this stage, Guy Butler requested a play from Fugard to be shown at a congress of teachers of English at Rhodes University.

Fugard had had three experiences that now guided his writing. He had given a black lady a lift while returning from Norman Ntshinga's trial in Cradock. She was carrying her whole world in a bundle on her head, and had been thrown off the farm she had lived on for years because her husband, a labourer on that farm, had died. Then he had seen a couple of vagabond 'coloureds' at a traffic light on Russell Road in Port Elizabeth. They, too, carried their world on their exhausted heads. And thirdly, he had again seen apartheid's bulldozers at work, for the mixed area of South End, Port Elizabeth's District Six, had been destroyed in 1965. From these images, the play *Boesman and Lena* was created by Fugard. It was premiered at the Rhodes Theatre in 1969 at Butler's conference.

Russell Vandenbroucke, an American academic who wrote the most detailed and researched biography of Fugard, regards *Boesman and Lena* as the best play written since Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. With that we will not argue. It is a devastating depiction of forced removals and the debasing of the unfortunate wretches thereby mauled by apartheid's bulldozers.

This stunning play created the character of 'Lena'. This role was taken on by Yvonne Bryceland. She and Fugard had worked together before, but the earlier roles do not compare with Lena, a part Ms Bryceland played over 400 times. Fugard once told me that Ms Bryceland was the most important and powerful influence he had had in his career in theatre. For those who are not fortunate enough to have seen her in full flight, Ross Devenish filmed *Boesman and Lena*. The performances of Fugard (Boesman) and Bryceland (Lena) are magical. It is, to me, a mystery that this film didn't garner truckfuls of awards.

Having returned to a political theme in *Boesman and Lena* and having brought the house down on both South African and world stages, Fugard again abandoned the formula that guided his success and disappeared into a

rehearsal room with Ms Bryceland and two other actors for three months. The end result, *Orestes*, was never scripted, and was quickly shown the back door by its sponsor, the government body CAPAB. Never mind, it led to the three plays that cemented Fugard's reputation and established those of the two most talented of the Serpent Players, Winston Ntshona and John Kani.

The first of these plays, *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act*, was put together by Fugard and Bryceland in three months, for the two of them — with Bryceland's husband, Brian Astbury — had conspired to create an independent theatre dedicated to the performance of plays nobody else would touch. Astbury and Bryceland were the driving forces of this project, to be called The Space, and Fugard promised a play to open the theatre in March 1972.

Fugard lived in Cape Town for three months, but this was not enough time to get it all together. Eventually, the play happened, but Fugard later rewrote it considerably.

When they proposed *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act* as a name to Astbury, his reply was: 'Great name if you want to open on day one and be closed on day two.' This was not so much because it was a mouthful; Astbury felt that the name would get them closed down.

But they went ahead.

Fugard became more and more frantic. Barney Simon, a friend from Fugard's first Sophiatown plays, came down to help. Fugard repaid this generosity by throwing Simon out of the rehearsals. He later admitted that their friendship never fully recovered from this tantrum. He insisted that the stage and the lighting all be removed. It was chaos, Fugard-inspired.

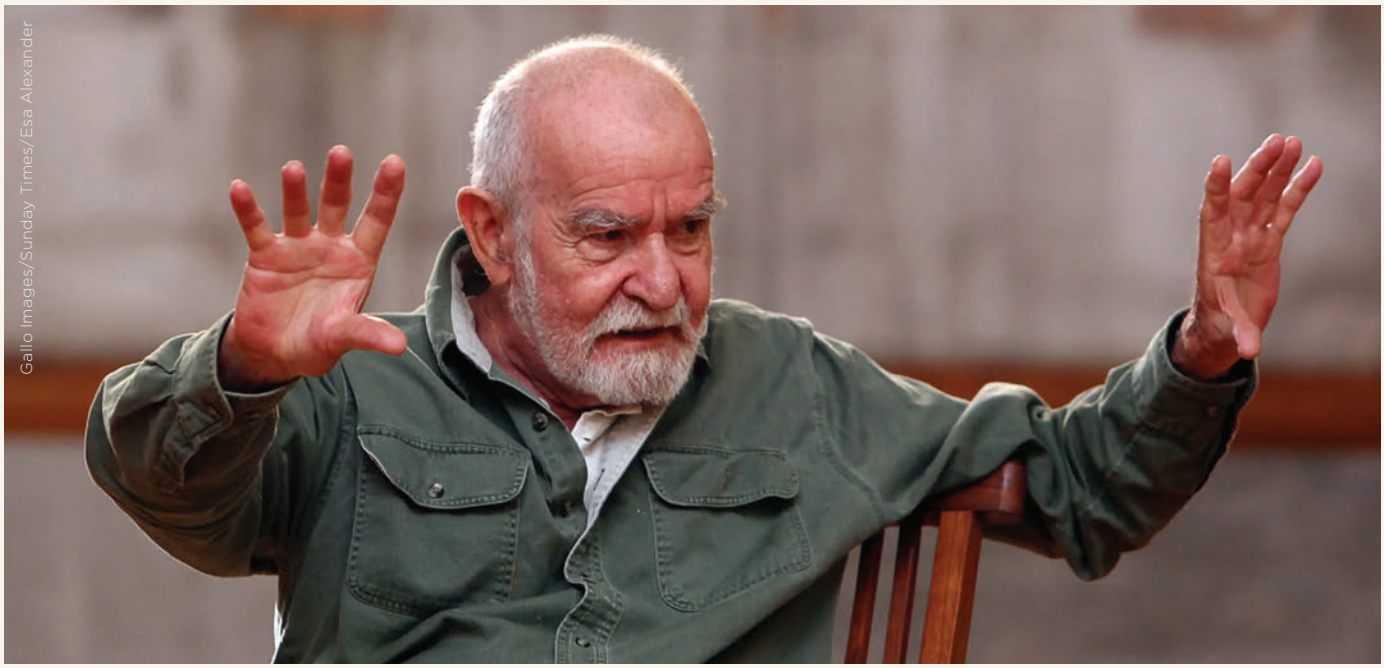
Then John Kani and Winston Ntshona approached Fugard and asked his help to make them both men of the theatre. They were sick of the menial jobs they endured. Fugard, barely able to support himself, offered his help and booked space for them at The Space. Again, little happened until the last minute; the three of them — Fugard, Kani and Ntshona — disappeared into an abandoned school and Fugard's neighbour's garage, and in 18 days they had *Sizwe Banzi* on the stage in Cape Town. Later, they used the same method to create *The island*, only this time it took 11 days. Neither had written scripts until months later.

These two plays, collaboratively created by these three, are undoubtedly the high point of South African theatre. The critics from the UK's *Independent* newspaper rank *Sizwe* as the 40th best play of all time, and it won Best Actor Tony Awards on Broadway in 1975 for both Kani and Ntshona, a world-first. They beat out Anthony Hopkins in the British National Theatre's *Equus*. Not bad for two guys with Bantu Education matrics, who had never been to a drama school or a university, acting in their second language and in a play they had co-created in 18 days! Such has been the magic of Athol Fugard.

Yes, there was much more to come — the Ross Devenish movies, scripted and acted by Fugard himself; the four autobiographical plays (*'Master Harold' ... and the boys*, *The captain's tiger*, *Exits and entrances* and *The bird watchers*), which is a medium Fugard alone has used; the novel **Tsotsi**; and the play he wrote for Yvonne Bryceland, *The road to Mecca*. For her role as Helen Martins, she won the Laurence Olivier Award for the best acting performance on a stage in London, and the Tony for Broadway — I doubt that this double has ever been equalled.



Athol Fugard and Zakes Mokae in a scene from *The blood knot* at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 1985



Athol Fugard during an interview in Cape Town on 19 April 2011

Oh, he was not perfect — in fact, as we have mentioned in conjunction with Barney Simon, he was at times a bloody handful. And there was the booze issue — in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, he was way over the top, and was the first to acknowledge it. On 1 January 1983, he went teetotal and he stuck to it.

But his record is unique, and is much greater than being just the best playwright in the English-speaking world. He was also a brilliant director, and won a Tony for that. And a brilliant actor. See him as Eugène Marais in **The guest**. And he wrote film scripts. Only Pinter, winner of the Nobel Prize, can match this all-round skill set — but Pinter operated in London, with possibly 50 theatres in walking distance from his home. Fugard operated from Port Elizabeth, on a godforsaken toe of Africa, a place described by Fugard's biographer Dennis Walden thus: 'A less propitious place for the production of works of art or literature than Port Elizabeth, it would be hard to imagine.' And Fugard had ferocious censorship to contend with — something Pinter could only read of. And segregated audiences. And segregated casts. And absolutely *no* state funding or state institutions to use. And no university post to pay the bills. And raids on his home by the security police, raids so invasive that they terribly disturbed his wife. And the confiscation of his passport at a critical time.

Put all that together, and Athol Fugard was the Person of the Theatre of the Twentieth Century.

And he is ours.

He lived a few houses from where I now live, in this culturally difficult industrial town.

And he gave a million interviews, always cheerful and willing.

My second last visit to Athol in his Stellenbosch home was something I will never forget. I started by pushing forward factual questions, to help fill out the book I am writing. He tried so hard to answer, but the answers would not come. He looked despairingly at Paula for help. But she had not been in Port Elizabeth in 1963. I realised the anguish I was causing, and quickly changed tack. I spoke of the absurdity of writing a four-and-a-half-hour play for South African audiences, and then noted that, as inconceivable as it was, it had worked. He started to warm. I mentioned that I had long thought that I was the patron of the Ancient Fathers' Society (I was 57 when my Amy was born), but then along came our mutual friend Albie Sachs, who was 67 when his Oliver was born — now the 90-year-old Fugard had swept us both out with the dust. He started to laugh. It was vintage Fugard — that twinkle in the eye, that love of laughter, that ability to turn anything into a party. Paula found a half bottle of wine in the fridge, and this Port Elizabethan had the time of his life with one of his greatest heroes.

That night in bed, I shed a tear — not from sadness, but out of joy. And the joy was caused by Paula, who so kindly and tenderly looked after this giant in his last years. Thank you, Paula.

Now, he is gone, never to be replaced. I'm sure many who are reading this knew him.

Celebrate. Our lives have been enriched by one of our world's greatest creatives.

Rory Riordan studied pholosophy at Rhodes University and lives in Schoenmakerskop, just outside Gqeberha. His book, ***Apartheid's Stalingrad****, the story of township revolt against apartheid, particularly in the townships of Gqeberha and Uitenhage in the 1980s, was published by Jacana.*

This article was first published on ***litnet.co.za*** *on 11 March 2025.*

Book reviews

compiled by book selectors

ADULT FICTION

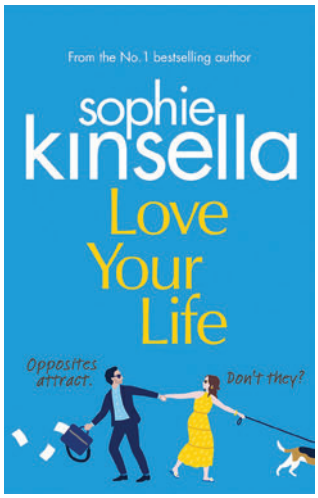
DE LA CRUZ, Melissa
The queen's assassin.- Penguin Books, 2021.
'A young woman, raised in obscurity and trained in magic, rescues a handsome boy and sets off to save her kingdom in this duology opener. In a kingdom where the only magical knowledge to escape centuries of tyrannical rule belongs to women, Shadow wants to go on adventures. She's connected to both the palace and the Guild, a group of mostly female magic-wielding assassins and adventurers. Unfortunately, her mother has just recalled her to court, where she'll be expected to wear fancy gowns and jewels and maybe be married off. Rebellious Shadow runs off to rescue Caledon Holt, the Queen's Assassin, who is bound to the Queen until he finds the hidden magic scrolls. Chapters alternate between Cal's and Shadow's perspectives as the pair reluctantly partner up to infiltrate a neighbouring kingdom and root out the conspiracy trying to destroy Renovia. From perpetual frustration to all-in love, this is more about the romance than the world, although the world with strong women, marriage equality, and characters of varying skin tones certainly has its strengths, lightly realised though it is. This is a classic plucky heroine fantasy in the vein of Tamora Pierce and Kristin Cashore, with some modern tweaks. Pleasantly formulaic light fantasy with an appealingly strong female lead.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

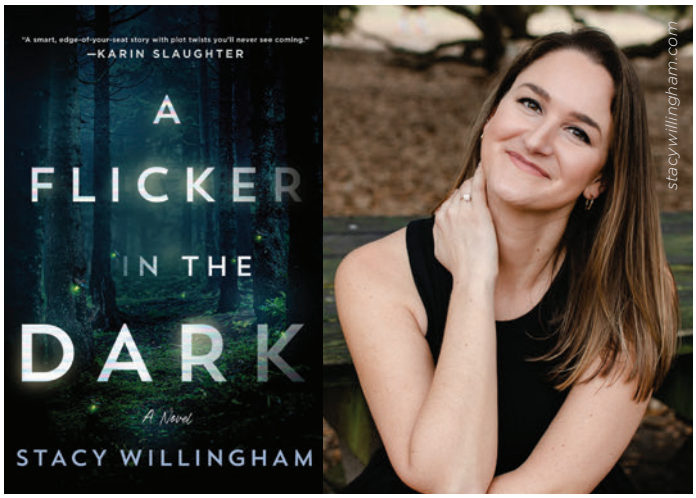


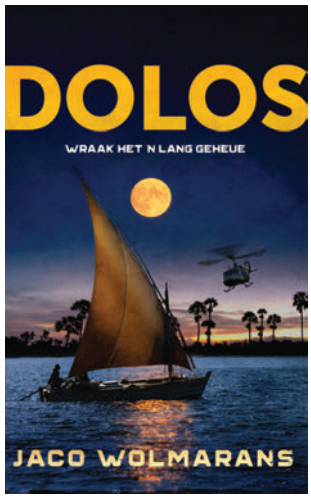










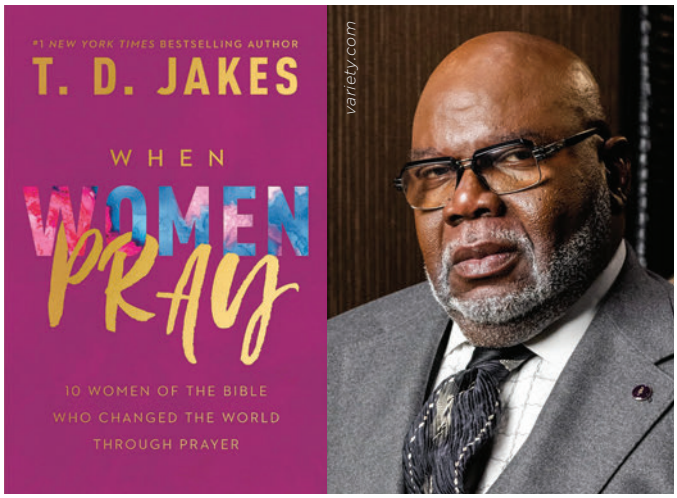


GILMORE, Lucy
I hate you more.- Sourcebooks Casablanca, 2021.
'Sparks fly when a former beauty queen crosses paths with an uptight veterinarian in the run-up to the West Coast Canine Classic dog show in this delightfully over-the-top rom-com. Though 28-year-old Ruby Taylor abandoned her pageantry career at 18 to work as a nursing assistant in a senior residence, she trusts her competition know-how will help her fulfil an old woman's dying wish to see her golden retriever, Wheezy, win a local dog show. Thirty-year-old Spencer Wilson, one of the Canine Classic judges, has never seen a more beautiful woman or a less qualified dog. But when Ruby hires Spencer's twin brother and roommate, Caleb, to train Wheezy, Spencer is pulled into close contact with Ruby, and the more time they spend together, the more he's tempted to throw away the rule book. Gilmore's empathetic, appealing lovers both wrestle with old family dynamics — Ruby with her demanding pageant coach mother and Spencer with his challenging twin — as they seek to break out of roles that no longer work for them. Snappy dialogue, a brisk pace, and buoyant humour will charm Gilmore's fans and newcomers alike.' (*publishersweekly.com*)

KINSELLA, Sophie
Love your life.- Bantam Press, 2020.
'A spellbinding romance comes to a crashing halt in the sparkling latest from Kinsella. Ava, an aspiring author and hopeless romantic, arrives in Italy for a week-long writer's retreat where, to facilitate productivity and limit small talk, everyone is required to remain anonymous. From the moment she meets "Dutch", a gorgeous stranger staying at the same monastery, she feels her "life fallen stunningly into place". They embark on a whirlwind romance and, on their last day in Italy, vow to make their relationship work back home in the UK, no matter what reality brings. But as soon as they return to London, their magical bubble is burst. Dutch is not the carefree carpenter Ava imagined him to be, but Matt Warwick, COO of a successful dollhouse company. While chaotic Ava enjoys "rescuing" abandoned furniture and books, measured Matt can't abide clutter. For her part, Ava can't stand Matt's horrific art collection and shivers all night in his freezing bedroom. Worst of all, Matt is not a fan of Ava's beloved but badly behaved beagle, Harold. In the face of these unexpected differences, can they really find a way to keep their promise? Kinsella's clever romance about the nature of compromise alternates laugh-out-loud humour with moments that will tug at readers' heartstrings. This rollicking rom-com is a hit.' (*publishersweekly.com*)

WILLINGHAM, Stacy
A flicker in the dark.- Harper Collins Publishers, 2022.
'At 12, Chloe Davis — the protagonist of Willingham's devastating debut — watched in horror as her father pleaded guilty to murdering six teenage girls and agreed to serve six consecutive life sentences to avoid the death penalty. Shortly thereafter, her mother attempted suicide, and her gregarious older brother retreated inside himself. Now Chloe is a 32-year-old self-medicating Baton Rouge psychologist, whose family history is unknown to nearly everyone but Daniel Briggs, the pharmaceutical salesperson to whom she's now engaged following a whirlwind romance. Chloe is already apprehensive regarding the impending 20th anniversary of her father's crime spree, so when a 15-year-old girl disappears from Chloe's neighborhood, she tries not to panic. A few days later, however, another 15-year-old girl vanishes after leaving Chloe's office, forcing Chloe to question whether a copycat killer has found her, or her paranoid imagination is seeing patterns where none exist. Willingham skillfully intercuts Chloe's anxious first-person narration in the present with flashbacks to her childhood, ratcheting up the tension. Atmospheric prose and abundant red herrings amplify the tale's intensity. Willingham is a writer to watch.' (*publishersweekly.com*)

WOLMARANS, Jaco
Dolos.- Tafelberg, 2023.
'Jaco Wolmarans se **Dolos** blaas nuwe lewe in die politieke-spanningsroman-genre, wat sedert post-September 2011 stagneer, ondanks die magdom van internasionale talent. Selde is daar 'n boek wat jou asem laat







ophou. Met **Dolos** kry Wolmarans dít perfek reg. Waar die meeste boeke van punt A na punt B haas, neem hy sy tyd om eers die onbekende wêreld oor 'n paar hoofstukke vir die leser uit te beeld. Deur tyd saam met die leser in opleiding deur te bring, het hy onbewustelik die spanningslyn snaarstyf getrek, want nou weet die leser hoe moeilik, amper onmoontlik, Tex Texeira se taak is. Ek weet eerlikwaar nie hoe die voormalige recce lewend hier gaan uitstap saam met sy nuwe bruid en kollega, Helena, nie. Die verhaal speel teen die agtergrond van Islamitiese ekstremisme en dwelmsmokkelary in die noorde van Mosambiek af. 'n Informant van Koverte Insameling by Militêre Inligting het die Mecau-dwelmkartel binnegedring. Intussen is 'n sluipskutter besig om sleutelfigure in die kartel dood te skiet, sy kruishaar volgende op die informant. Tex moet die sluipskutter doodskiet voordat hy weer sy sneller kan trek. Die hoogtepunt van die boek, net soos sy voorganger, **Ivoor**, is die bevredigende einde. Die skrywer weet hoe om sy lesers tevrede te stel, en hy doen dit in die oortreffende trap. Kenmerkend van Wolmarans is dat sy karakters deur die bank almal sielkundig ryp ontwikkel. Hy doen dit so doeltreffend dat ek stilweg hoop dat die sluipskutter teen bl. 327 gaan wegglip. Eugene Morrison Stoner, die ontwerper van die AR-15-aanvalsgeweer, het sy wapen *Dolos*, wat in Latyns misleiding beteken, gedoop. Wolmarans het dit reggekry om die wapen 'n integrerende deel van die sluipskutter se persoonlikheid te maak. Die bostonele leef so met reuk en klank dat jy jou neus tussen die bladsye kan druk en die sweet en bloed ruik. Ek was so vasgevang in die verhaal dat die kitsduiwel, waarvoor ek spesifiek uitgekyk het, my onverhoeds betrap het. Hoewel die boek direk op **Ivoor** volg, kan dit alleenstaande gelees word. Jaco Wolmarans is 'n skrywer wat sonder twyfel in dieselfde asem as mense soos Deon Meyer en Rudie van Rensburg genoem kan word. As daar één spanningsroman is wat jy vanjaar moet lees, dan is dit **Dolos**.' (*netwerk24.com*, Stefaans Coetzee)

ADULT NON-FICTION

JAKES, TD
When women pray: 10 women of the Bible who changed the world. - FaithWords, 2020.
When women pray encourages women to embrace the transformative power of prayer and is an empowering spiritual guide by well-known American non-denominational Christian pastor and motivational speaker. Drawing inspiration from the lives of ten praying women in the Bible, the book calls on women today to tap into their unique strength, identity, and healing through conversations with God, especially as they break barriers and lead in new ways. Bishop Jakes urges women to continue their journey of empowerment by dreaming like their daughters and praying like their grandmothers. A blend of personal reflection, biblical insight, and practical advice, this book is ideal for women looking to deepen their prayer life and spiritual strength. It will resonate with Christian women, particularly those navigating leadership, family dynamics, or seeking inspiration and empowerment through faith. **APM**

TABANE, Onkgopotse JJ
Yes, I am a pilot!: the biography of Major Mandisa Mfeka.- Sereti, sa Sechaba Publishers, 2022.
The book tells the inspiring story of Major Mandisa Mfeka, the South African Air Force's first black South African female fighter. It follows her journey from growing up in Ntuzuma township to achieving her dream. She overcomes many challenges, breaks barriers of race, gender, and class in a field mostly dominated by white men. Her story shows that with hard work and determination, anyone can fulfil their goals. This book is especially inspiring for young black girls, encouraging them to believe in themselves and always aim high. **KLT**

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

WIBBERLY, Emily and **SEIGEMUND-BROKA, Austin**
If I'm being honest.- Penguin Books, 2020.
'Cameron Bright prides herself on her honesty though what she calls

honesty, her classmates call being a straight-up bitch. Alongside her film- and YouTube-star best friends, she's one of the hot, popular girls at her Los Angeles high school, and she tells it like it is to the people around her, even if that means doling out some hard truths. But when her crush, Andrew, is less than impressed by her particular style of tough love, Cameron begins to doubt. She's studying **The taming of the shrew** in class, and, unlike Shakespeare's Katherine, doesn't need a guy to fix her. She can tame herself. First up, she plans to apologise to the people she's hurt, especially those like Brandon, a guy who became a social recluse after a cruel nickname Cameron gave him stuck. But as she gets to know Brandon, Cameron's surprised to discover that his strong personality meshes with hers. The Shakespeare-in-high-school story line is always popular, and Cameron's quest for redemption is given depth by her complicated family. A frothy drama with plenty of layers.' (*booklistonline.com*)

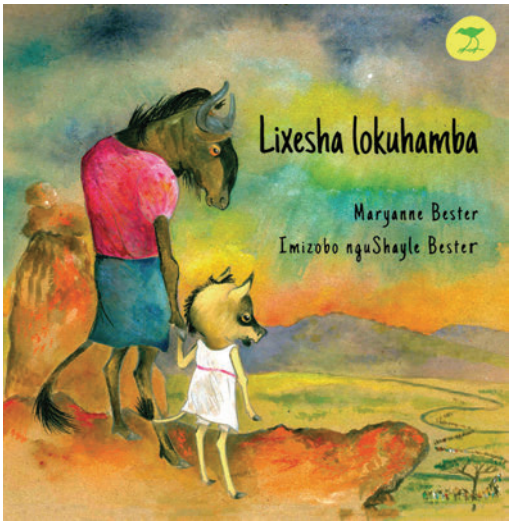
MONIR, Alexandra
Black Canary: breaking silence.- Ember, 2021.
'... In the not-so-distant future, Gotham City has been taken over by the dictatorial Court of Owls, the wealthy and powerful elite who put an end to all superheroes and released a poison gas that damaged women's vocal chords so they could no longer sing. Dinah Laurel Lance swears that as a child mourning the loss of her mother, she heard what should have been impossible: the sound of a woman singing. Teenage Dinah's interest in music lands her in trouble with the Court, leading to her father, Detective Larry Lance, to make a deal with them to protect her. However, his protection may be futile, as the arrival of the billionaire orphan Oliver Queen draws Dinah into further dealings with the Court while a visit from a friend of Dinah's mother simultaneously draws her further into the Resistance. In the latest of the *DC Icons* series, Monir's future Gotham City reflects the real restrictions placed upon women in some places in the world today: They cannot play sports, drive, or hold certain jobs, among other restrictions. Dinah's superhero origin is about discovering that her own voice is her superpower, literally and figuratively. Much of the story's conflict involves Dinah's interactions with the men in her life and how much or little she can trust them. Her relationship with her supportive yet protective father is the real heart of the novel. Monir deftly balances familiarity for DC fans and accessibility for new readers, blending superhero origin with a coming-of-age tale in an excellent book for fans of comics and dystopian fiction, as well as reluctant readers.' (*School Library Journal*, Aaren Tucker)

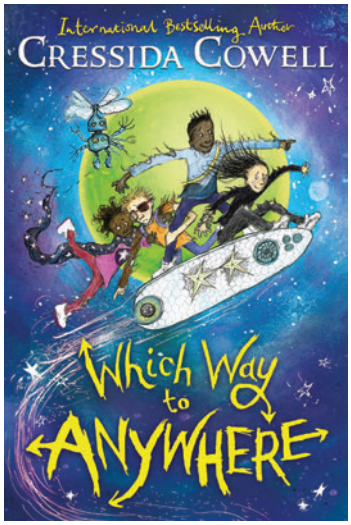
JUVENILE FICTION

BESTER, Maryanne
Lixesha lokuhamba/illustrated by Shayle Bester.- Jacana Media, 2021.
Kweli bali linesandi seengoma , umama ubiza umntwana wakhe ukuba agqibezele ukudlala kuba lixesha lokuhamba. Kodwa umntwana akakakulungeli usayolelwe ngumdlalo. Njengoko utyhalo notsalo luqhubeka kumnandi kubantwana, sifunda ukuba iNgcuka kunye neQwarha ngenene ziyalishiya ikhaya lazo zisiya kwindawo entsha. Ixesha lokuhamba, njengoko isihloko sisitsho, libali elimalunga neziphelo kunye nelahleko, kodwa ligxininisa kulonwabo kunye neziganeko zobomi. Kude kube sekupheleni, umntwana ukhuthazwa ngobubele ukuba alwamkele olo tshintsho aze amkele ithemba. **NNG**

COWELL Cressida
Which way to anywhere.- Hodder Children's Books, 2022.
'Stepsiblings run into world-hopping, magical trouble in this series opener from **How to train your dragon** author Cowell. After an *in medias res* opening teasing dangers about an alien world, the narration flashes back to where it began for two sets of siblings in a blended family. K2 and Izzabird O'Hero only agree with Theo and Mabel Smith, their stepsiblings, on two things — their love for shared







half sibling, baby Annipeck and their wish to unblend their blended family. Theo's convinced the O'Heros are witches; Izzabird wishes her relatives would hurry up and teach her their secret magic. But secrecy is thrown out the window by the arrival of an Otherworlder in the family washing machine — bounty hunter Horizabel Delft. There's also a robot assassin and a dastardly pirate. They're searching for a child with the gift of making alternative atlases that show passages between worlds. The child in question? The least stereotypically heroic O'Hero, cautious bully-magnet K2, who has dyslexia and amblyopia. To protect their family, the kids end up venturing to a human-hating world where they must make amends for the O'Heros' mixed legacies and learn what it means to be a family. Cowell throws all sorts of fantastical obstacles in the kids' ways, using action to add tension to the humorous narration that is enhanced by her frequent illustrations.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

HILLENBRAND, Will
First star: a Bear and Mole story.- Holiday House, 2020.
'Bear and Mole go camping, but when the sky gets dark, Mole needs a reassuring story. Squat little Mole, with a round, bulbous nose, wants to sleep outdoors to "see the stars turn on". So Mole and Bear gather their camping gear and hike while munching on berries. But when they arrive, it is beginning to get dark, and Mole wants to go home. To settle his fears, Bear tells him a story of the earliest bear family. To combat the night's inky darkness, First Little Bear helps his mother shape white clay into the moon. Then First Little Bear scatters tiny white stones in the sky to become the stars. First Father Bear tries to push one, but it doesn't move. That star is the one constant — the titular First Star. Then, First Father Bear creates a "star picture" of First Little Bear in the sky, and First Star becomes his tail. Hillenbrand's warm, textured illustrations take on a gorgeous, luminous blue for the tale of the first bears, both text and stars glowing white against it. Of course, Mole delights in Bear's storytelling, and suddenly the darkness isn't so scary after all. The lack of back matter on constellations represents a missed opportunity in an otherwise lovely book. A calming, night-time addition to this adored duo's series.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

MOAHLOLI, Refiloe
You are loved/illustrated by Zinelda McDonald.- Pan Macmillan Children's Books, 2021.
This locally published lyrical picture book, featuring beautiful illustrations, is written by a best-selling and award-winning author from Umthatha, Eastern Cape. It tells the story of a girl named Athandwa, who hears a special song in her heart. At first, the song scares her, but she soon discovers that her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother also know the song. This realisation helps her embrace and love what makes her unique. The book beautifully highlights the bond between mothers and daughters, the wisdom passed down through generations, and the importance of staying true to oneself. The Afrikaans title is **Jy is liefde**. **MNH**

ROUX, Madeleine
No humans allowed!/illustrated by Tim Probert.- Farshore, 2021.
'A series opener about students at the school that trains monsters for *Dungeons & dragons*. Even though the monsters of Dungeon Academy are penalised for acts of niceness, Zelli still stands up for bullied beings. That's not the biggest way she doesn't fit in, though: The horns and tail she wears are fake; she's secretly a human who was adopted by her minotaur mothers (one a Dungeon Academy teacher). When Zelli notices that the illustration of heroic adventurer Allidora Steelstrike is the spitting image of Zelli herself, she realises she's actually the daughter of the dungeon dwellers' mortal enemies. When a group of top students goes missing at a nearby village where a Steelstrike's been spotted, Zelli decides to take a chance to find the students — and her birth family. Accompanying her are fellow misfits: a thoughtful vegetarian

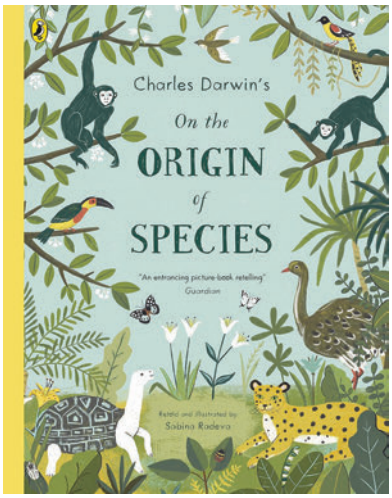












owlbear named Hugo; Bauble, a book-smart mimic who prefers taking a book form to fighting; and enthusiastic kobold Snabla, who wishes he were scarier than he is. The monstrous party works together to discover the fate of the students and to find Zelli's birth mother. The themes of belonging and purpose are spelled out, but in the setting it works. There's enough humour that even those new to tabletop gaming will find plenty to chuckle at.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

JUVENILE NON-FICTION

NICOLSON, Ambre en HSU, Jaxon
Die A,B,C van Suid-Afrikaanse baanbrekersvroue.- Wenkbrou, 2019.
'n Inleidende biografiese bundel oor 26 ongelooflike Suid-Afrikaanse vroue wat met hul bydraes die geskiedenis, hede en toekoms slyp. Onder hulle is kunstenaars, rebelle, atlete, aktiviste, vryheidsvegters en ander soos Caster Semenya, Fatima Meer, Natalie du Toit en Dope St Jude. Dit vertel van vroue wat nie bang is om ongemaklike vrae te vra nie en geregtigheid nastreef. Dit is 'n viering van die waagmoed, deursettingsvermoë en passie van doodgewone vroue. Dit word toeganklik vir jong lesers aangebied, maar sal ook byval by 'n wyer verskeidenheid lesers vind. Die Afrikaanse weergawe is versorg deur Ronelda S Kamfer. Ook beskikbaar in Engels as **A to Z of amazing South African women** (Modjaji books, 2017). **AT**

RADEVA, Sabina
Charles Darwin's on the origin of species.- Puffin books, 2022.
'An introduction for younger readers to the major ideas in a seminal work of science. Radeva, a graphic designer with a background in molecular biology, uses a combination of simply phrased statements and short quotes to boil down Darwin's main notions about variety among both wild and domesticated animals, the struggle for existence that drives the process of natural selection, the development of instinct and of complex organs over long spans of time, and the anatomical resemblances in seemingly disparate species that point to common ancestries. Studiously avoiding mention of religion ("For most of human history, many people believed that everything on the world was created all at once"), she sketches out the genesis of Darwin's thesis with nods to Buffon and Lamarck, brings his theories up to the present with discussions of epigenetics and other recent evolutionary insights, then closes with rebuttals to select "Misconceptions" about Darwinism's precepts. Opening and closing with dozens of labeled butterflies and other insects on the endpapers, the illustrations feature gatherings of nave-style flora and (mostly) fauna, drawn in minimal but precise detail and lit with bright, clear colours. Human figures beginning with Adam and Eve in leafy garb and ending, except for a few vignettes, with an evolutionary line leading up to the white-bearded scientist himself default to white. Cogent review of some landmark ideas, now seemingly obvious but once revolutionary.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

Most of these titles are available in e-format on the Western Cape OverDrive webpage and Libby app.

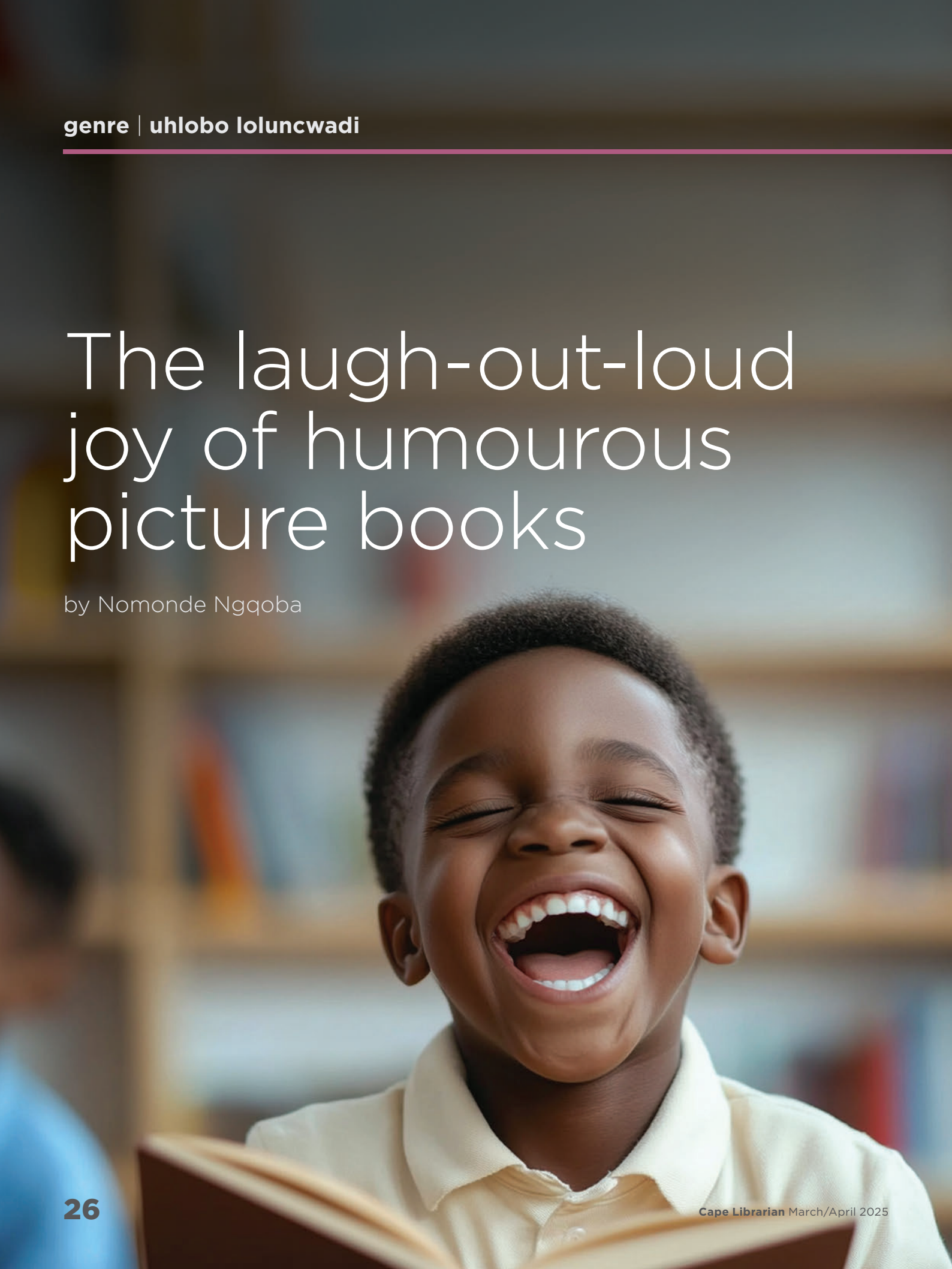
Die meeste van hierdie titels is ook beskikbaar in e-formaat op die Wes-Kaap Biblioteekdiens se OverDrive webblad en Libby-toepassing.

Note: At the time of going to press some of these titles are not yet available at the libraries.

APM Ayanda Majola
AT Anél Taljaard
KLT Kwanele Thabede
MNH Mbali Hadebe
NNG Nomonde Ngqoba

The laugh-out-loud joy of humourous picture books

by Nomonde Ngqoba

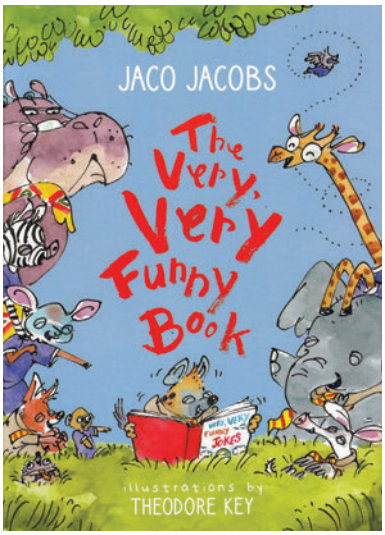


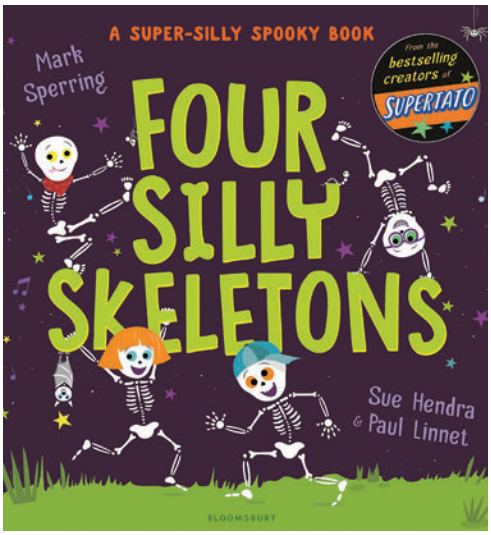


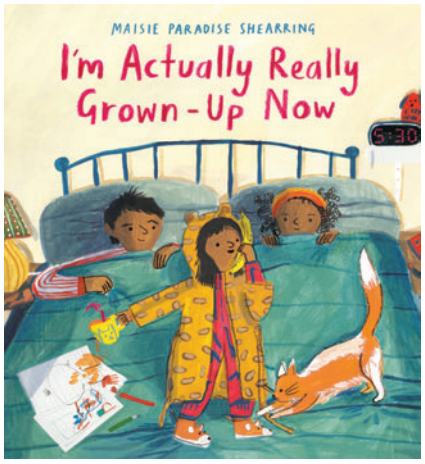
Funny children's stories not only entertain but also play a vital role in a child's emotional and intellectual development. They foster imagination, enhance language skills, and impart valuable life lessons in a way that feels natural and enjoyable. These tales captivate young minds, sparking creativity while delighting readers of all ages. From the timeless antics of mischievous animals to the imaginative adventures of unique characters, these stories offer more than just laughter — they often highlight important moral lessons, teaching children about friendship, kindness, and resilience. Whether through clever wordplay, slapstick humour, or heartfelt narratives, they remind us of the enduring value of humour and the simple joy that laughter brings. These stories create lasting memories and a lifelong love of reading, making them an essential part of childhood.

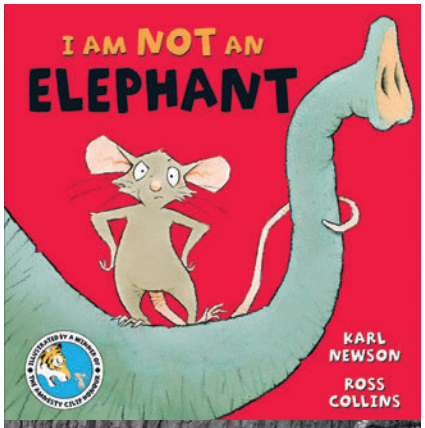
JACOBS, Jaco
The very, very funny book/illustrated by Theodore Key.- Pan Macmillan Children's Books, 2021.
In Miss Hippo's outdoor classroom, the young animals are bustling with activity, joyfully drawing pictures and singing songs. However, Hyena is in fits of giggles and guffaws, unable to contain his laughter. He's brought along a joke book to school, which has him laughing out loud. Throughout the morning, Miss Hippo tries to control his disruptions. But when she finally gets a glimpse of his book, she can't help but laugh herself after reading the jokes, which are then shared with the reader as an innovative book-in-book experience.

SPERRING, Mark
Four silly skeletons: a super-silly spooky book/illustrated by Paul Linnet.
- Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2022.
'A cautionary tale of silly skeletons who go dancing under the full moon despite their sensible aunties' offer of torches and lanterns. Enthused by the music, the daft dancers rush headlong to the Big Drop, where they tumble and topple down, breaking into bits. Oh, what a pile of bones and grinning faces stare out at us then! Fortunately, the ever-resourceful Auntie June is on hand to glue them (somewhat haphazardly) back together for more of their addled adventures. And they're so

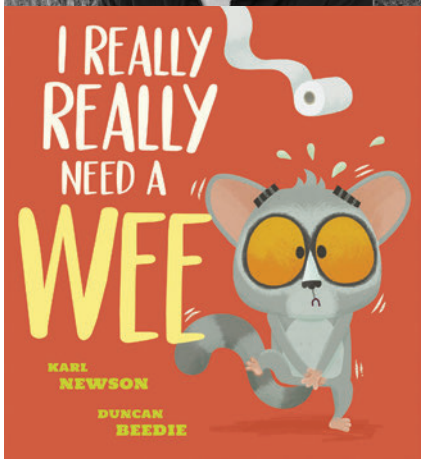












screwball, they don't mind having two left feet or arms sprouting from their skulls because these are skeletons raring to go. Full of clanging sounds and clattering mishaps, the comic book style ensures that no one is ever really hurt, while the humourous and inventive text keeps the reader firmly on the path to fun. Fresh and funny, the rhyming story fairly skips along. It's a great pairing of writer and illustrator because, against dark or black background, the white skeletons are as sharp and witty as the language. The images are graphic and sophisticated, with bold patterns and shapes, while the fast-moving compositions remain controlled, like every aspect of this tight and energetic book.' (*booksforkeeps.co.uk*)

SHEARRING, Maisie Paradise
I'm actually really grown-up now.
- Two Hoots, 2020.
Meena would very much like to attend an adults' celebration, but she is ordered to bed instead: only adults are allowed to stay up late. The following day, she tells her parents something very important: 'I'm actually really grown-up now!' In this hilarious tale, we follow Meena as she organises her own adult party and discovers what adulthood entails. She enjoys hosting parties, going to work and experimenting with fashion, but quickly learns that adulthood may not always be as simple as it seems. The author has a unique ability to capture the humour that may be found in ordinary events as well as the bittersweet highs and lows of childhood.

NEWSON, Karl
I am NOT an elephant/illustrated by Ross Collins.- Macmillan Children's Books, 2020.
'Mouse is back again and this time, he's keen to convince everyone that he is NOT an elephant. Not only does he not make the right noises, but he does not smell like one either. Having used some quick thinking and even quicker talking to prove his point to the other animals, he then settles down to lunch... which leads him to a startling realisation. Full of personality and self-confidence, this rodent has the gift of the gab and his imaginative claims will have readers laughing every time they read the book. Pictures and text combine perfectly to make this a brilliant read aloud, full of opportunities for doing the voices or encouraging children to act the story out. As with his first adventure, the book offers plenty of possibilities for working with in class as well as being enjoyed as the wonderful story it is. At the end of the story, Mouse decides he is a dinosaur — how might a class continue the story? How would he convince the other animals that a dinosaur is indeed what he is? The bright, lively illustrations are sure to inspire brilliant artwork with bold backgrounds and creatures with cheeky expressions. Hopefully, there will be many more adventures for this charming creature and his friends. **I am NOT an elephant** is a light-hearted, engaging and humourous read with great appeal, sure to become a firm favourite.' (*goodreads.com*)

NEWSON, Karl
I really really need a wee/illustrated by Duncan Beedie.- Little Tiger Press, 2020.
Bush the baby is in trouble. Before leaving home, she didn't need to go to the toilet, but now she urgently needs one. But what if she has nowhere to go, what will she do? A humourous story, told in rhyme about a situation most young readers will recognise and is full of 'toilet humour!' Ideal for teaching kids the value of that last-minute potty break.

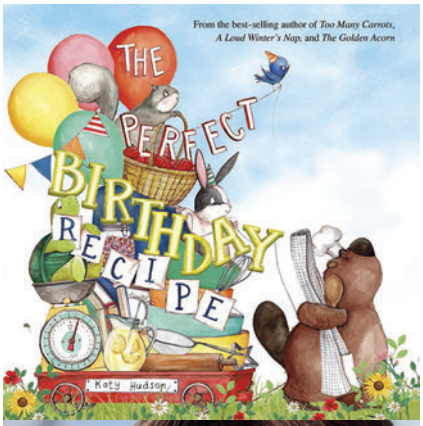
HUDSON, Katy
The perfect birthday recipe.- Raintree, 2020.
'Can this birthday be saved? Beaver is an exacting sort, and he's planned the perfect birthday cake for his upcoming celebration. Unlike a certain little red hen, from the start he'd prefer to do it himself, but his enthusiastic friends Tortoise, Bird, Rabbit, and Squirrel are determined to help bake the cake. A series of mishaps on the parts of these well-intentioned pals makes for a result that is less than perfect according to

Beaver's perfectionist point of view. In a rage, he tells everyone to leave and then starts all over, following the complicated recipe to the letter and into the night. This time, the cake is perfect, but when Beaver digs into a slice, he also begins to sob with loneliness and regret. His friends overhear his cries and graciously return to his side and comfort him, resolving to celebrate the next day after everyone's had a good night's sleep. When they do celebrate, they use the original cake (what becomes of the "perfect" one is unclear), and all's well that ends well. Throughout, Hudson's accompanying illustrations use a nice balance of spot and full-page compositions to support pacing and offer faithful depictions of the characters and events in the story. A good sense of movement and expression animates the anthropomorphic characters, adding humour to the telling. Sweet as cake.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

CARNAVAS, Peter
Jonathan/illustrated by Amanda Francey.- New Frontier, 2020.
'Jonathan loves to dress up in all sorts of costumes he manages to put together from items lying around the house and scares his family. No matter how hard he tries, Jonathan is just not very scary at all, even his family says so. He is almost ready to give up and find a new game to play when he meets a dinosaur who gives him a helping hand. The simple text together with the vibrant illustrations makes this humourous story perfect for young readers.' (*goodreads.com*, Get Ahead Kids)

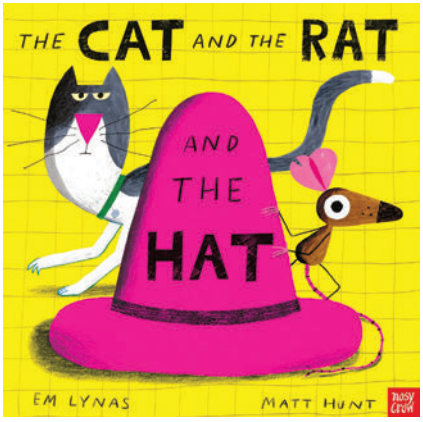
LYNAS, Em
The cat and the rat and the hat/illustrated by Matt Hunt.- Nosy Crow, 2021.
'A happy cat has a yellow mat where it likes to play, rest, and dream about fish. The cat is content until it sees a rat wearing an enormous pink hat and wants it. The cat chases the rat and, ultimately, takes the hat. But the rat is not willing to give up so easily. What ensues is a true game of cat and mouse, with the rat and the cat chasing each other and vying for ownership of the precious, gigantic pink hat. Things get even more complicated when the duelling pair is noticed by a bat who happens to be wearing a fancy cravat. Then the bat decides that it, too, wants the hat, and the cat and the rat lose interest in the hat and instead decide that they want the bat's fancy cravat. The chase is on as each animal tries to get a hold of the item of clothing it desires, all the while trying to outsmart its peers. This charming rhyming book's ridiculously humourous premise will appeal to children and adults alike. The colourful pictures are delightfully absurd and enhanced by clever textual design. (Most notably, when the bat speaks, its words appear upside down.) Lynas turns the primer-level language into a deliciously clever, rhythmic text; paired with the vibrant illustrations it makes for an ideal read-aloud. A delightfully silly rhyming picture book about cats, rats, bats, and high fashion.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

POSKITT, Kjartan
The runaway pea left behind/illustrated by Alex Willmore.- Simon & Schuster, 2021.
'Can a legume on the lam ever find its hap-pea-ly ever after? Dinner may be on the table and ready to go, but for one little pea, the adventure has just begun. Despite the protestations and mockery of the food left behind, the runaway pea ping[s] off the plate and into a series of unfortunate events. Without intending to, the pea plops into a dollop of sauce, tumbles into a dog bowl, is flung into an aquarium, avoids a mousetrap and a spider web, and that's just for starters! As the pea's adventures grow increasingly arduous, he finally rolls under the fridge, where the desiccated fruit he meets there tells him that now that he has touched the floor, he's not loved anymore. But what's this? Could there still be a satisfying ending in store for this little green miscreant? This chipper British import keeps the action high as the pea pinballs from catastrophe to calamity. Clever perspectives amp the slapstick, and the anthropomorphic pea with two









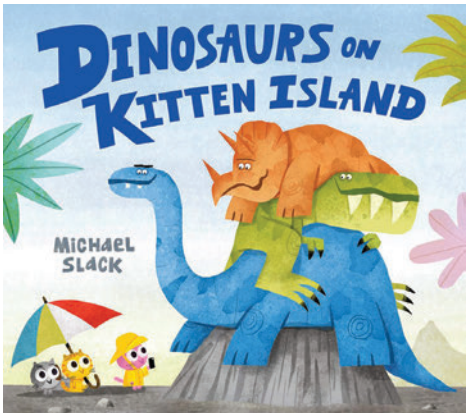
wide eyes and a mouth, but no limbs — is surprisingly expressive. Expert rhymes scan without strain, keeping the merriment high (with the help of the occasional butt joke). Even if peas aren't any particular child reader's favourite food, the twist at the end may encourage budding gardeners to experiment with some plantings of their own. Don't play with your food. Find food at play!'
(*kirkusreviews.com*)

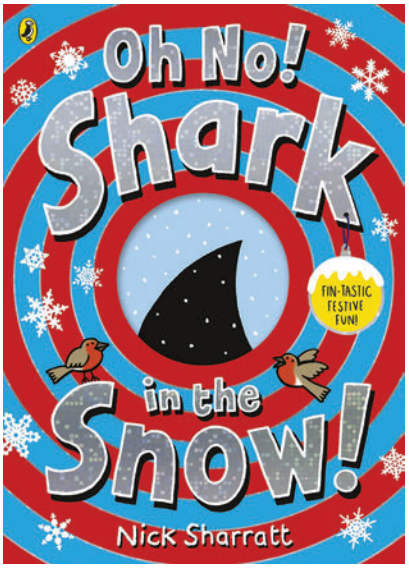
SLACK, Michael
Dinosaurs on Kitten Island.- Farshore, 2022.
'Watch out, dinosaurs: those kitties look innocent, but they are adorable bundles of menace. The reptilian residents of Dinosaur Island are bored. The narrator encouragingly tells them they can make dirt forts or watch things sink in tar pits or even reassemble skeletons, but they've done all that. They want to play with the kitties of Kitty Island. The pink and yellow and calico kitties who conquered the Dinosaur Island dinos in **Kitties on dinosaurs** (2020) are ready for a reverse play date. Game No. 1? Launch the Lizards — with a geyser. After an alarming, wet flight through the air, surely the dinos have learned their lesson, but nope. Game No. 2 involves another frightening flight, this one aboard a deflating dirigible. Game No. 3? Hairball Floaty Races, which is both gross and dangerous, once the kitties attach the outboard motors to the revolting swim rings! The dinos are starting to get the idea that these kittens are playing for keeps. Game No. 4 starts with jumping into a foreboding chasm, but ends in the Tiny Baby Kitty Playroom, which teems with bevies of even smaller kitties. That has to be safe, right? You'd be surprised. Slack's gleefully silly artwork features wide-eyed, innocent-looking kittens and scary but usually terrified dinos in bright cartoon colours.'
(*kirkusreviews.com*)

SHARRATT, Nick
Oh no! Shark in the snow/illustrated by Linda Burgess.- Puffin Books, 2021.
'A Christmas-themed picture book to recommend. Timothy Pope walks with his dad in the park on a cold winter day. It is snowing, so the landscape is white. Timothy looks through his telescope and sees a black fin-shaped object. "Wait, is that a shark?" He shouts: "Shark in the snow!" When readers turn the page to find out, it is something else, looking like a shark's fin. The children in the park laugh. Several other similar encounters follow, with Timothy shouting out loud. In this book Timothy Park is back in the park, seeing sharks everywhere when he looks through his telescope. This picture book is the same format as the others, with a die-cut hole on the front cover and several of the pages. The holes focus on what Timothy thinks is a fin, and readers can have fun guessing what it really is. A turn of the page provides the whole picture.'
(Sabrina Gosling, former WCLS book selector)

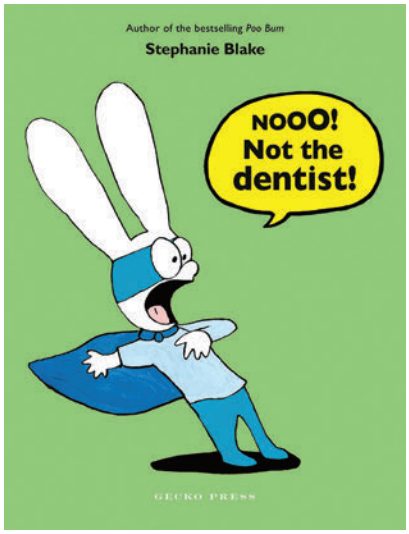
SENIOR, Suzy
Who will kiss the crocodile?/illustrated by Claire Powell.- Little Tiger Press, 2022.
'A snappy, rhyming retelling of *Sleeping Beauty*. Princess Liss's parents throw a ball for her first birthday, but they've left someone off the guest list, with the classic fairy-tale result: an angry fairy, with green wings and a purple dress, arrives uninvited and places a curse on the princess. In 15 years, Liss will bump her knee and die — and as an added twist, she will look like a crocodile until then. Another fairy, wearing a top hat

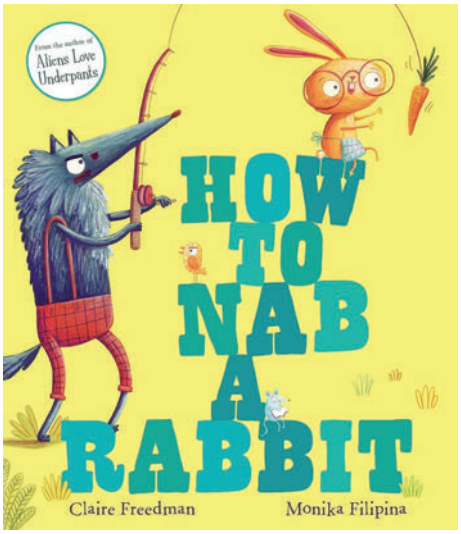


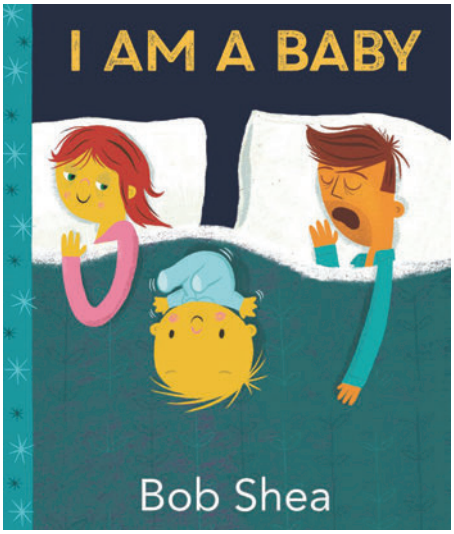












and with orange wings, swoops in to modify the curse so the princess can be woken with a kiss. But who will kiss a crocodile, even a sleeping one? Three princes fight their way through the thorns but run screaming from Liss's sharp teeth. Neighbours call Clare and Katarina, of the Fix-It Crew to tend to the castle's hedges. This tough duo are the ones to save the day, and Liss and her family celebrate with another ball. While Liss remains a passive character, this is a lively retelling. Every page bursts with bright colour, and the rhyme scheme is a delight to read aloud. A fresh and fun-fractured fairy tale.' (*kirkusreviews.com*)

BLAKE, Stephanie
Nooo! Not the dentist/illustrated by Linda Burgess.- Gecko Press, 2023.
'A funny picture book to help ease toddler fears about visiting the dentist. Simon returns with his cheeky humour and favourite catchphrase to help young children approach any daunting new experience. Simon gets a sore tooth, so he needs to take his first trip to the dentist. The night before the appointment, Simon's friend Ferdinand makes the most of the chance to show he knows more. Ferdinand uses his full imagination to describe the graphic horrors of the dentist's chair. "I will NEVER go to the dentist!" yells Simon. But his mother takes no notice. When Simon is eventually persuaded onto the dentist chair, insisting his name is "Poo Bum", he finds a remarkably patient dentist and an experience he wasn't expecting. And now he can get on the phone to Ferdinand to explain it doesn't hurt a bit — not if you're a Super Rabbit, anyway. The *Simon* picture book series is intelligent, funny and adored by toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children. Perfect to read aloud and giggle together as a family or for reluctant readers who will enjoy the bold and simple text and cheeky humour.' (*geckopress.com*)

FREEDMAN, Claire
How to nab a rabbit: by the big bad wolf — absolutely foolproof/illustrated by Monika Filipina.- Simon & Schuster, 2018.
A delightful and humourous picture book story narrated by the Big Bad Wolf himself, who offers a series of supposedly foolproof tips and tricks for catching a rabbit. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that his plans are anything but foolproof, leading to a series of comical mishaps and unexpected outcomes. The illustrations complement the text beautifully, adding an extra layer of humour and charm to the story. The story cleverly teaches young readers about the importance of thinking things through and the value of cleverness over brute force.

SHEA, Bob
I am a baby.- Walker Books, 2023.
'"I am a baby and I am not sleepy/ I am not sleepy because I am a baby." As a result, Mommy is tired, Daddy is grumpy, Kitty is hiding, Puppy is overfed (from all the food Baby tosses), laundry is thrown about, and the furniture is sticky. Luckily, Grandma stops by, making everyone feel much better. As any sleep-deprived parent can attest, life with an infant can be challenging. Shea's digitally enhanced pencil illustrations feature stylised objects and characters, minimal backgrounds, and cheerful pastel greens, purples, pinks, and yellows. He depicts typical new-parent activities (attempting to assemble a play yard, tripping on stray toys, changing dirty nappies) and makes effective use of facial expressions to convey emotions. The endpapers are also notable: the front spread depicts the couple before parenthood, while the back spread is a baby album. This egocentric yet lovable infant will strike a chord with exhausted new parents, and emerging readers will appreciate the repetitive, deadpan text. A welcome addition to baby story times.' (*booklistonline.com*)

Nomonde Ngqoba is a book selector at the Western Cape Library Service

‘I’m God’s lonely man’: the insanity and profundity of **Taxi driver** (Part 1)

by Robert Moult



imdb.com/Columbia/TriStar

A taxi cab slowly appears through the dark background and into steam coming from a manhole to ominous-sounding music that reaches a crescendo as it passes by with the title **Taxi driver** appearing.

Neon lights then illuminate the screen, along with Bernard Herrmann's superb score that's changed from ominous to almost romantic as the screen reveals a nightmarish atmosphere that would rival Dante's **Inferno**. We then enter the cab and see the eyes of the driver that move anxiously from left to right, mirroring the alienation and isolation of the occupant, Travis Bickle — one of cinema's most analysed characters.

Taxi driver is one of New American Cinema's finest achievements; and it goes without saying that it ranks highly on the list of the best ever films made. Robert De Niro, the actor who portrayed Travis, gave one of the most remarkable and memorable screen performances ever.

Yet while one of the most acclaimed, it is also one of the most disturbing films ever made.

It was released in 1976 and continues to be discussed nearly 50 years later; as well as laying bare America's problems with gun use, then as much as it still does today.

Director Martin Scorsese has continued to make many iconic films, and although **Taxi driver** was not his debut, it really laid the foundation for one of cinema's greatest partnerships with Robert De Niro — one that's spawned ten films, and each a masterpiece. **Mean streets**, that saw them together for the first time, had all the hallmarks of their partnership with their emphasis on detailed improvisation. While De Niro actually only appeared in a supporting role of Scorsese's depiction of little Italy in New York, his appearance eventually helped the film being made.

Its originated from a distant source, starting with a troubled film enthusiast and script writer who hailed



Getty Images

Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese on the set of **Taxi driver**, 1976

from Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the Midwest: a very different place from New York.

Paul Schrader came from a strict home with few comforts (films were forbidden) and opportunities for personal growth. His father abused him and his brother, and he did not watch a film until he was 17. Guns were a part of daily life, and his rigid Calvinist upbringing made for a cold and lonely existence. Yet, after seeing an Elvis Presley film, cinema became a passion for him; and with his talent for writing he enthused about art films in college, despite initially studying theology.

Despite the scarcity of these films in the Midwest, he managed to see a suitably significant number to write articles for a student newspaper about directors such as Bergman, Bresson, Dreyer, Ozu, and — along with every other American film student — Akira Kurosawa. These articles caught the eye of the doyenne of American film critics, Pauline Kael, who was known for encouraging young writers. Kael recommended Schrader to UCLA, where he went in 1968.

The transition from the Midwest to Los Angeles was a major disruption, for he was socially out of his depth in California; and although ambitious he struggled to adjust to the social culture. He made a few friends that would later become prominent figures in New American cinema; notably Brian de Palma and John Milius. The latter was a gun enthusiast, which struck a chord for Schrader, who as a child slept with his gun.

His social awkwardness led him through several unsuccessful marriages; and after the umpteenth breakup he was sleeping in his car. He was also drinking heavily, taking a variety of pills and became increasingly suicidal. In what turned out to be a blessing in disguise, he was admitted to hospital with a bleeding ulcer. During his recuperation, he came upon an idea that turned out to be the origin of the script for **Taxi driver**.

Schrader listened to a song called *Taxi* by Harry Chapin and combined that idea of a hired-car driver transforming into a gunman and assassin. He read Arthur Bremer's **An assassin's diary**, who was a lone gunman that unsuccessfully attempted



Paul Schrader wrote the screenplay of Martin Scorsese's **Taxi driver**

to assassinate the white supremacist Governor of Georgia, George Wallace. Another inspiration was Dostoyevsky's **Notes from the underground**, with its unnamed protagonist; and Robert Bresson's film **Pickpocket.** Schrader cathartically poured all his self-loathing, sense of alienation and frustrations into a script, which he alleges took a mere 15 days to pen, with **Taxi driver** as the result.

Knowing he had a great film in the making, how could he promote and sell it to a producer, a film that he doubtlessly expected to be challenging given the subject matter? A disturbed Vietnam veteran driving through a beastly vision of New York exploding into violence would be a tough sell, even in the times of establishment-challenging films that typified New American cinema in the early 1970s.

He first presented the script to Kael who, despite responding positively, was terrified by the graphic violence it contained. De Palma, no stranger to brutality or controversy, read it too, and although impressed, felt it could not be made. It was a budding film producer named Michael Phillips, who, along with his wife Julia and Tony Bill felt that they could make the film, except that they would first need a box office buster to get enough clout for **Taxi driver** to be made. That came in 1973 with their Oscar-winning smash hit **The sting**.

Several people were in line for casting and directing **Taxi driver.** De Palma was favoured at one point to direct but was unavailable. At the same time, after the Phillips' saw Scorsese's **Mean streets**, they knew they had the right director. With his portrayal of Johnny Boy, they also knew they had the right actor to play Travis Bickle too: Robert De Niro. It was just a question of availability; yet in 1974 that proved difficult as both were linked to other projects. Both, however, were very enthusiastic and even proposed to take pay cuts as part of their commitment to the film.

De Niro was becoming an in-demand actor at the time. Francis Ford Coppola had just cast him in **The Godfather: Part II** for which he'd won an Oscar for best supporting actor. While **Taxi driver** was beginning to take shape, De Niro was also working on



Robert De Niro won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in Francis Ford Coppola's **The Godfather: Part II** in 1974



Cybill Shepherd and Martin Scorsese on the set of **Taxi driver**, 1976



Harvey Keitel and Robert De Niro in **Taxi driver**, 1976

Bertolucci's epic **1900**, an Italian film that saw him co-cast with the likes of Donald Sutherland, Burt Lancaster and the rising star Gerard Depardieu.

De Niro would fly back to New York now and then to drive taxi cabs and get into other aspects of the Bickle character. So bright was his star that at the time he could have demanded $250,000 for any part, but such was his enthusiasm over the project that he did it for $35,000.

For his part Scorsese had a prior commitment to a studio film titled **Alice doesn't live here anymore**, yet he too accepted less money for directing **Taxi driver**. The only other star was Cybill Shepherd, who'd emerged from two commercial flops and was not seen as a top-draw actress. Peter Boyle was reasonably well-known as he did a number of acclaimed films in character roles. Like Boyle, Harvey Keitel was a highly regarded character actor, and up to then had appeared in every Scorsese film. He got the role of the pimp Matthew after discussing it with Scorsese, who initially wanted Keitel for the role of Tom, which eventually went to Albert Brooks. Keitel had an actual pimp as a consultant and managed to use the pimp as a film extra. The budget was set for $1,9 million, which was quite modest for the time.

Taxi driver was shot during the hot summer of 1975. Filming happened to correspond with a sanitation strike, which meant garbage was everywhere in New York. The city was also bankrupt at the time, and the above factors gave the film its foreboding atmosphere, with grime and social ills adding another layer of realism. Producer Phillips could obtain access to almost any building in the city's run-down areas, as many were being condemned of which a few were used as locations. At times the film had a documentary feel to it as it presented New York in a decayed and depraved state; providing the viewer with a glimpse of a failing city.

Cinematographer Michael Chapman used ingenuity to shoot the cab scenes, while the sound technicians did their part in adding to claustrophobia inside Travis's cab. As a perfectionist Scorsese left no stone unturned and approached the great film composer



Robert De Niro's iconic, improvised 'You talkin' to me?' monologue in **Taxi driver**, 1976

Bernard Herrmann (of Hitchcock fame) and persuaded the composer to read the script. Herrmann was initially reluctant until he read that Travis poured peach brandy over his corn flakes; immediately realising that this was no ordinary taxi driver — nor script. Incidentally, it was also to be his last-ever score, characterised by its unsettling percussive and brass sounds to a warm jazz romance theme that hints of an intimacy Travis never experiences.

Throughout his career Scorsese was a keen improvisor and pusher of boundries. Like many American film makers, he was influenced by the French New Wave of the early 1960s, whose use of handheld cameras helped create a new film language. **Taxi driver** is full of such moments. In one famous scene Travis is seen talking to Betsy on a payphone at the end of a corridor. This is after his disastrous date with her, and the phone conversation is not going well. The camera then moves away to the right from De Niro while he continues to speak; revealing a long corridor leading out to a busy but impersonal New York street, then freezing while he keeps talking before hanging up. The moment highlights De Niro's alienation from society by his isolation in the phone booth.

The film's most famous scene is another superbly improvised set-up. In the script, Schrader has Travis addressing the mirror. De Niro is alleged to have attended a stand-up comedy show at the same time, and an idea struck him while watching the show, which resulted in the iconic 'You talkin' to me?' monologue. This penchant for improvisation has always been a feature of their partnership over the decades, and it is one of the features of New American cinema that still remains influential today.

Part two follows in the May/June 2025 edition of the **Cape Librarian**.

Robert Moult is a former librarian at Wynberg Public Library



WhatsApp: the future and bringing our libraries into the digital age — one emoji at a time

by Lonwabo Joseph Mabele

At the 2023 City of Cape Town Public Library Seminar, I had the chance to speak about something that has been on my mind for a while: how we, as librarians, can evolve with the digital habits of our users. The theme, *WhatsApp-ing the Future: Librarians Decoding Youth Culture, One Emoji at a Time* wasn't just a catchy title — it was an open invitation for us to rethink how we connect, communicate, and remain relevant in an age where information fits in the palm of our hands.

Let's be honest, the way people engage with libraries has changed dramatically. In South Africa alone, WhatsApp is used by over 96% of internet users, making it one of the most widely adopted digital communication tools in the country. With an estimated 26 million South Africans actively using the platform, WhatsApp is more than just a messaging app — it's a digital lifeline, especially for those who rely on mobile internet over desktop access. For many in Africa, WhatsApp isn't just an option; it's the internet. And yet, how often do we, as librarians, consider integrating our services into the spaces where our patrons already are?

Bridging the digital divide: why WhatsApp?

One of the biggest challenges we face in African libraries is the digital divide — the gap between those who have easy, affordable access to technology and those who don't. While some of our users have fast Wi-Fi and multiple devices, others rely on a single smartphone loaded with limited data as their only gateway to information. Libraries are meant to be equalisers, but how do we ensure access when technology itself is unevenly distributed? WhatsApp, with its low-data usage, offline message queuing, and widespread adoption, provides a powerful tool to bridge this gap.

For instance, a student in Khayelitsha might not have the funds to browse the web extensively or the library OPAC, but a simple WhatsApp chatbot



could allow them to search the library catalogue, check availability, and even receive recommended reads — without the need for a laptop or expensive internet connection. A mother in a rural area might struggle to bring her child to storytime sessions, but a WhatsApp broadcast group could send her daily literacy tips and voice notes of engaging read-alouds.

Integrating WhatsApp with Library Management Systems (LMS): APIs to the rescue

Now, I know what you might be thinking: *This sounds great, but how do we actually make it work?* The answer lies in APIs (Application Programming Interfaces). Simply put, APIs are like digital translators that allow two different systems, like WhatsApp and our library management system (LMS) to talk to each other. Instead of manually sending messages or updating catalogue entries, APIs enable automation, ensuring a smooth and scalable solution.

Imagine a scenario where a patron borrows a book. Instead of relying on emails (which many users don't check) or expecting them to remember the due date, the LMS automatically sends a WhatsApp reminder a day before their book is due. If they need an extension, they can simply reply with a button labelled 'Renew' and the system processes it instantly. Need to reserve a book? A user could send a title via WhatsApp, and the system checks availability and places the hold — all without needing a librarian to intervene manually. Think about what this would mean for your overdue lists or loss of stock. And the thousands that could be saved.

Platforms like Infobip and Twilio already offer APIs that can link WhatsApp with existing library systems, making automation not only possible but relatively straightforward. This means libraries can send:

- Automated overdue notices, reducing late returns.
- Real-time search and reservation services linked to the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue).
- Personalised book recommendations based on past loans, much like Spotify's curated playlists but for reading.
- Event reminders and programme sign-ups, encouraging more engagement without clogging up email inboxes.

Real-Life Examples: Where it's already working

The beauty of this approach is that it's not just theoretical: libraries around the world are already doing it. In Pakistan's National Defence University Library, WhatsApp is used to provide 24/7 reference services, allowing students to submit queries and receive real-time support. In Nigeria, university libraries have adopted WhatsApp-based book reservations, allowing students to check out materials with a simple message. And right here in the Western Cape, some public libraries have already started experimenting with WhatsApp for book renewals and event promotions. For example, George Library allows patrons to renew books via WhatsApp, cutting down in-person visits for busy users.

Beyond messaging: data, AI, and the future of library services

One of the most exciting opportunities here is the data we can gather. Such as analysing the types of questions users ask via WhatsApp, we can identify common gaps in information access and adjust our services accordingly. If we notice a spike in career-related queries, we can organise job-seeking workshops. If there's an increase in demand for digital literacy, we can curate free courses on using online resources.

And with meta-AI integration, libraries can provide multilingual support (helping users in isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English without needing separate staff for each), as well as smart suggestions for related materials, much like an AI-powered librarian in your pocket.

Are we ready to take the leap?

Libraries have always been about access, knowledge, and community. In a world where people spend more time on WhatsApp than on any other digital platform, the question isn't whether we should integrate our services: it's how quickly we can do it. The tools are there. The need is evident. And the potential impact? Immense.

So, my fellow librarians, what's stopping us? Are we ready to WhatsApp the future and bring our libraries into the digital age, one emoji at a time?

Lonwabo Joseph Mabele is the reference librarian at Brackenfell Library

The technological advancement of the public library in the Western Cape

by the Research Section

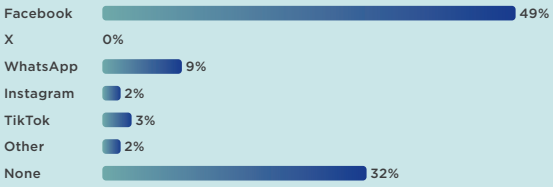
The aim of this study was to determine the level of technological advancement of the public library in the Western Cape. A survey was conducted among 347 public libraries in the province that are affiliated with municipalities and excluded the 30 depots.

The 13 questions in this survey focused mainly on the electronic, digital and online operational preparedness of the public library of today. A total of 207 public libraries (60%) responded. The survey was done using Microsoft Forms.

It was found that an average of 74,3% of public libraries indicated that they are technologically engaged; use the internet and social media; offer Wi-Fi, OPAC and e-governance access; and facilitate online meetings and training as well as electronic and digital services and equipment.

Results (207 responses submitted)

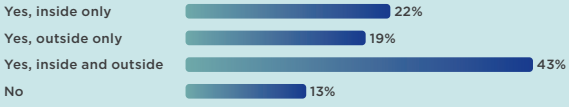
Does your library have an active social media account/s?



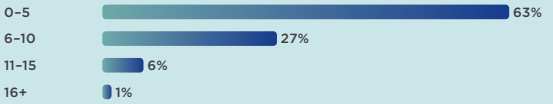
Does your library provide free internet access?



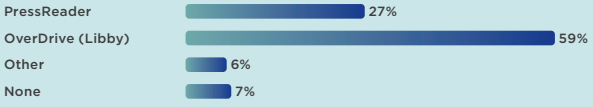
Does your library provide a Wi-Fi connection?



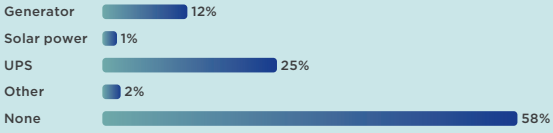
Please indicate the amount of public computer workstations available in your library



Does your library offer electronic/digital services?



Does your library have an alternative electricity supply?



Can your library catalogue/collection be accessed remotely (e.g. OPAC)?



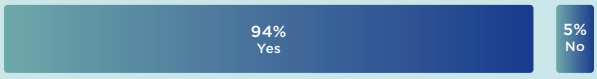
Does your library have Radio-frequency identification (RFID) gates to safe-guard resources from theft?



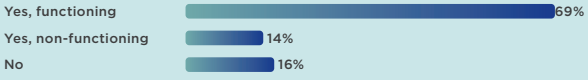
Does your library have a digital screen in use?



Are library staff able to attend online meetings and training?



Does your library have digital equipment installed at the main entrance that counts the number of people that enter the library (e.g. people counter)?



Does your library have a dedicated staff member assisting users with computer/internet issues (e.g. IT Cadet)?



Does your library provide assistance with e-governance (e.g. SASSA grant applications)?



Cracking the code:
the Dewey Decimal System made simple

by Yvette Herbst

Back in 1873, Melvil Dewey devised a genius way to organise books, and by 1876, the eponymous Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC) was officially in use. Fast-forward to today, and it's still the go-to system for libraries worldwide.

But don't think the DDC remains stuck in the past — it's constantly updated to keep up with new discoveries, evolving knowledge, and modern trends.

The DDC breaks down all human knowledge into categories, using a number-based system that makes it easy to find what you're looking for. It's super flexible, too. Librarians can build on existing numbers, match them with other classification systems, and even work with translated versions in over 30 languages, including Arabic, French, German, and Spanish.

OCLC, Inc. is responsible for publishing and managing the DDC, making it accessible through WebDewey, an online subscription service that keeps everything up to date. The system is used in over 140 countries, with more than 60 national bibliographies incorporating DDC numbers to streamline access to books.

With every new edition, the system grows and adapts. Recent updates have covered hot topics like Islam, pandemics, and even graphic design. Plus, the Dewey editorial office (located in the Library of Congress) assigns more than 60,000 new classification numbers every year to keep up with the ever-expanding world of books.

Major changes to the system aren't made on an impulse. They first have to go through the Decimal Classification Editorial Policy Committee (EPC), an international group of library experts who review and approve updates.

From Dewey's original idea to the powerhouse classification system that it has become today, it's obvious that the DDC has stood the test of time. It's a global tool that helps organise knowledge and make information easy to find, no matter where you are in the world.

The big picture: how the DDC is organised

At its highest level, the DDC splits all human knowledge into ten main classes. Each of these is then broken down into:

- First summary: 10 main classes
- Second summary: 100 divisions
- Third summary: 1,000 sections.

Not all possible numbers are used, and sometimes the headings you see in summaries are simplified compared to the full classification names. Just know that it is all designed to make finding books easier.

The 10 main classes of the DDC

Here's a quick look at how knowledge is grouped:

000 – General Works & Computer Science
Think encyclopedias, library science, journalism, and computer science.

100 – Philosophy & Psychology
Everything from ethics and logic to paranormal studies and psychology.

200 – Religion
General theology, world religions, and even mythology.

300 – Social Sciences
Sociology, law, politics, economics, education, and communication.

400 – Language
Linguistics, grammar, and studies of specific languages.

500 – Science
Astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology.

600 – Technology & Applied Sciences
Engineering, medicine, agriculture, home economics, and manufacturing.

700 – Arts & Recreation
Fine arts, music, performing arts, sports, and hobbies.

800 – Literature
Poetry, drama, prose, and literary criticism.

900 – History & Geography
From ancient history to modern-day geography and biographies.



Thinking in disciplines, not just subjects

One cool thing about the DDC? A single topic can appear in multiple places, depending on the perspective.

For example, the topic of clothing could be found under:

- 155.95 – Psychology of clothing
- 391 – Social customs related to clothing
- 746.92 – Fashion design under the arts

This setup is inspired by Francis Bacon's idea of organising knowledge based on human abilities:

- Memory → History
- Imagination → Art & Literature
- Reasoning → Science

How the numbers work

The DDC uses Arabic numerals in a logical, hierarchical way:

- The first digit = main class (e.g. 500 = Science)
- The second digit = division (e.g. 510 = Mathematics)
- The third digit = section (e.g. 530 = Physics)
- After three digits, a decimal point appears for further breakdowns.

For example, let's take the Reserve Bank of South Africa: 332.10968
Here's how it breaks down:

- 332 = Banking & Finance
- .1 = General works on banking
- .09 = A specific country or region
- .68 = South Africa

That's how detailed the system can get!

Bonus fact: Zeros are used as placeholders to keep things neat (e.g. '500' instead of just '5' for Natural Sciences).

Making the Dewey Decimal System work in libraries

We know the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system is how libraries keep things organised. But how does it work in practice?

Whether it's a public, academic, school, or specialised library, Dewey helps catalogue, shelve, and retrieve books efficiently. Because it's a universal system, a book on astronomy (520) in one library will be in the same spot in another library, making interlibrary loans and collaboration that much easier.

For example, in a public library's science section:

- General science books? 500.
- Biology books? 570.
- Chemistry? 540.

That logical structure means even if someone doesn't know the system, they can still figure out where to find what they need. And for librarians? Adding new books just became a mere matter of procedure.

How different libraries use the Dewey Decimal System

Public libraries

Since public libraries serve a wide audience with all kinds of interests, the Dewey System makes browsing intuitive. Here's how books might be classified:

- A gardening book → 635
- A mystery novel → 823 (or 823.92 for a South African mystery novel)
- A travel guide → 910

Academic libraries

Universities and colleges need a system that can handle all kinds of subjects. Dewey's got that covered:

- A physics textbook → 530
- A book on World War II → 940
- A psychology research paper → 150

School libraries

School libraries cater to different age groups, so the classification system keeps things simple:

- A kids' book on dinosaurs → 567
- A young adult novel → 823 (same as public libraries)
- A high school chemistry book → 540

Specialised libraries

Some libraries focus on very specific fields, but they can still adjust Dewey to fit their needs:

- A law library might adjust the DDC to better organise legal resources.
- A medical library could assign call numbers to different specialties.
- A music library might use Dewey for organising music history, theory, and genres.

Keeping library shelves in order with Dewey

Cataloguing and classification

Every new book gets a Dewey Decimal number based on its subject. This ensures it lands in the right place on the shelves.

Shelving and arrangement

Once a book has its number, it's shelved numerically, making it easy to find and return.

Keeping things organised

Librarians routinely check to ensure books are in the right place. If a library expands or patron interests shift, it might reorganise sections or create new subdivisions.

Helping patrons find what they need

Librarians use Dewey to:

- Direct patrons to the right section for their topic.
- Explain how Dewey works so patrons can browse confidently.
- Recommend related books based on call numbers.
- Assist with digital catalogues, teaching users how to search by Dewey number or keyword.

Why the Dewey Decimal System is remarkable

It's used worldwide

Dewey is the most widely used classifi-



cation system, meaning libraries across different countries all follow the same logic. If you've figured out how to find a book in one library, you'll be able to do it anywhere.

It's adaptable

As new knowledge emerges, the system evolves. Whether it's AI, climate change, or new medical fields, Dewey can keep up.

It's logical and hierarchical

From general topics to super-specific subtopics, Dewey uses numbers to differentiate between subjects. This makes it intuitive for both librarians and visitors.

It makes shelving and finding books easy

- Books on similar topics are grouped.
- The decimal system keeps everything neat and structured.
- Librarians can catalogue books quickly and accurately.



It helps people find books on their own

- Patrons can browse confidently without always needing help.
- They can stumble upon new books while looking for something else.
- It's consistent across all libraries, making it familiar and easy to use.

Key limitations and challenges of the Dewey Decimal System

The Dewey Decimal System (DDC) has been the backbone of library organisation for over a century, but it's not without its flaws. While it's great for keeping things structured, it does have some quirks and challenges that libraries must navigate.

Eurocentric bias and cultural sensitivity

The DDC was developed in the 19th century, so it naturally reflects the perspectives of that time, primarily Western viewpoints. This means that non-Western cultures, indigenous knowledge, and alternative worldviews don't always get the representation they deserve. Finding books on African philosophy, indigenous traditions, or Eastern medicine can sometimes be tricky within the existing structure.

Not always a perfect fit for new subjects

The world moves fast, and new fields of study pop up all the time. Think artificial intelligence, climate science, or digital media. The DDC isn't always quick to adapt, making it tough to slot in these interdisciplinary or emerging topics neatly.

A bit too rigid at times

The DDC's structured hierarchy is useful, but it can also be limiting. Some subjects fall into multiple categories, making classification tricky. For example, take Environmental Psychology. It sits at the crossroads of psychology, environmental science, and urban planning; but there's no clear-cut place for it in the DDC. Instead, it gets scattered across:

- 150 (Psychology) – Covers general psychology but not its environmental aspects.
- 333.7 (Environmental Science & Conservation) – Focuses on the environment but not human behaviour.
- 720 (Architecture & Urban Planning) – Talks about built environments but doesn't dig into psychological theories.

Struggles in the Digital Age

Libraries are no longer just about physical books; digital collections, ebooks, and online databases are now major players. The DDC was designed for books on shelves, so it doesn't always translate well to digital searches, where people prefer keyword-based navigation rather than numerical classification.

Not always user-friendly

Let's be honest, Dewey's number system isn't always intuitive for the average library visitor. Compare it to bookstore systems like BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications), which use simple, descriptive categories (e.g. 'Cooking', 'Travel', 'Self-help'). Many casual readers find that easier to navigate than trying to decipher a string of numbers.

Keeping it updated is a challenge

The DDC does get revised, but updating classifications across multiple libraries takes time and effort. Different librarians might also classify the same book differently, which can create inconsistencies.

Challenges of keeping the DDC relevant

Knowledge grows fast

The rapid pace of discoveries means new subjects often don't fit neatly into the system.

Interdisciplinary confusion

Topics that cross multiple disciplines often lack a clear home within Dewey's structure.

Niche subjects need special treatment

Highly specialised fields sometimes don't fit anywhere and require modifications.

Technology evolves constantly

Libraries need to keep up with new digital trends, but DDC wasn't created with online collections in mind.

Cultural sensitivity is crucial

Updating outdated or biased classifications is necessary to reflect today's diverse perspectives.

Multilingual resources need special handling
Classifying books in different languages can be tricky within the traditional Dewey system.

Users expect simplicity
Modern readers are used to fast, keyword-based searches and don't always engage with Dewey's numerical approach.

How libraries adapt to overcome these issues

Many libraries tweak the DDC to make it more user-friendly and relevant to their communities. Here's how:

Local adjustments
Libraries in diverse areas create sections for local history, languages, and traditions. Example: Adding a subcategory under 968.004/XH for Xhosa cultural topics.

Simplified categories
Schools and small libraries use broader classifications. Example: Instead of 796.33463 (Soccer), they might just use 796.3 (Sports).

Multilingual sections
Libraries with multilingual patrons expand classifications with language prefixes, like 150–X for Xhosa books and 150–E for English books.

Fiction by genre
Some libraries keep Dewey for non-fiction but organise fiction by genre (e.g. Mystery, Romance) to make browsing easier.

Maker spaces and non-traditional collections
Libraries with hands-on resources create special codes like 600–MAK for maker space tools.

Kid-friendly adjustments
Public libraries use simplified categories for children, such as labelling 590 as 'Animals' instead of 'Zoological Sciences'.

Timely updates
Some libraries create new sections for contemporary issues like climate change, digital literacy, and social justice.



School-friendly modifications
Adding 'S–' prefixes for school resources, like S–510 for school math books makes collections easier to navigate.

Adapting the Dewey Decimal System for modern libraries

Libraries have come a long way from the days of just physical bookshelves and printed catalogues. With digital technology taking over, the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system has had to evolve, too. While Dewey is still a go-to method for organising books, libraries are finding creative ways to make it work in today's digital world.

The good news? Dewey isn't going anywhere, it's just getting a tech-friendly makeover. Online tools like WebDewey make it easier for librarians to keep up with updates, apply classifications efficiently, and manage both physical and digital collections seamlessly. Here's how libraries are making Dewey work in a digital world:

Online catalogues and searchability
Libraries have digitised their collections, so instead of flipping through a card catalogue, users can now search by Dewey numbers, book titles, authors, or keywords in an instant.

Metadata and keywords
Beyond call numbers, books now have extra layers of metadata (like subject tags and descriptions), making it easier to find related materials.

Dynamic browsing
Digital catalogues mimic the feeling of browsing shelves by grouping books under categories and subcategories that users can explore with just a few clicks.

Hyperlinked cross-references
Ever found a great book on a topic but wished you knew about similar ones? Online catalogues now use cross-references, so users can easily jump between related subjects.

Curated resource lists
Librarians can create and share recommended reading lists on trending topics, making research easier for students and casual readers alike.

Personalisation
Users can save searches, bookmark favourites, and even get reading



recommendations based on their past searches.

Accessibility features
Screen readers, text-to-speech tools, and multilingual search options help make library resources more inclusive.

Real-time updates
No more outdated catalogues! Libraries can now update book records instantly and send notifications about new arrivals, availability, and due dates.

Interactive learning tools
Some libraries are integrating videos, podcasts, and online courses alongside books, creating a richer learning experience.

Mobile apps and responsive design
Library catalogues are now smartphone-friendly, meaning users can search for books and manage their accounts on the go.

Why Dewey still matters (even in a digital world)

Despite all these modern updates, the DDC System still plays a major role in keeping libraries organised. Here's why it continues to be relevant:

Structure and standardisation
It provides a universally recognised way to arrange books and digital materials, making it easy to find what you need.

Integration with metadata (the information that describes and explains data)
Dewey works well alongside keyword searches, helping refine results and improve discoverability.

User education
Understanding Dewey helps users develop better research skills, making it easier to navigate large collections.

What's next for the DDC?

As libraries continue to expand their digital collections, the Dewey system will need to keep evolving. Future updates might include:

AI-driven classification
Machine learning could help automate classification, keeping Dewey more up to date with emerging topics.

Better personalisation
Smart recommendations based on user behaviour could make searching more intuitive.

Improved inclusivity
Multilingual support and more culturally diverse classification will make Dewey more globally relevant.

Beyond books
Dewey could extend to archives, museums, and AI-powered search tools, helping to organise information beyond traditional libraries.

The Dewey Decimal System is far from outdated, it's just evolving. While its structure remains useful, libraries are adapting it to better fit modern needs. By integrating metadata, enhancing user experience, and making classification more inclusive, libraries can keep Dewey relevant in an ever-changing world. Whether in a physical library or a digital space, the core goal remains the same: making information easy to find, access, and enjoy.

Yvette Herbst is the assistant director of the Cape Winelands and Overberg regions at the Western Cape Library Service

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