

Being quixotic quizzical and just plain quizzY

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Author, compiler and quiz questioner of *The impossible book quiz*

For World Book Day on Friday 23 April 2004 I offered the Centre for the Book as its evening event *The impossible book quiz*. The idea was mainly to have people come and enjoy books and celebrate southern African writers. And, of course, indulge in the particular pleasure that only a quiz can provide: keeping your own personal score! It seemed like a good 'un-solemn' way to enjoy books together.

Two teams of book-ish celebrities faced up to one another: the Book-Marks and the Dog-Ears, each trying like mad to keep their place. Included in the two teams were: author and publisher Dianne Case, bookseller Michael Crouch, bookseller Henrietta Dax, poet and publisher Gus Ferguson, author Pamela Jooste, author and drama professor Kole Omotoso, author Henrietta Rose-Innes, and publisher Brian Wafawarowa.

I was the quiz questioner, and I'm a writer and compiler of books of mainly southern African work, and also the series editor of the *Siyagruva* series of novels for South African teens. The scorer was Ashraf Johaardien, playwright and coordinator of the Writers' Network.

It turned out a really pleasant evening, and it didn't matter a jot who knew what and who didn't. What the teams couldn't answer was passed on to the audience - who did extremely well, let me hasten to add!

Of course, you can't call a quiz *The impossible book quiz* and then make it so easy that just anyone can answer all the questions! But I didn't consciously go and search out complicated material. I simply sat in my study and looked around at the African books of poetry, novels, short story collections, plays and biography that line the walls, and thought of some of the

things about those books and those writers that interest and intrigue me. Things I'd picked up along the way and over years and years. Sometimes quite by chance.

I used to have a bevy of elderly aunts who got me to take them to Maitland Cemetery every so often, where they put flowers on the grave of an old family friend. After I'd sloshed buckets of water back and forth, I just wandered around a bit ...and came upon the grave of Olive Schreiner! I knew she was really buried in that stone sarcophagus on Buffelskop near Cradock, but here was this tombstone. I even took a photograph of it. It says: 'In loving memory of Olive Schreiner whose body rested here from December 12th 1920 to August 9th 1921 before re-interment at Buffel's Kop, Cradock.' It's that kind of thing you pick up.

Since the Quiz, I have been accosted by some slightly grumpy people who muttered about 'esoteric questions', 'too hard for anyone', 'who were you trying to show up?', but, to a person, they were people who weren't at the Quiz themselves! So, what do they know?

Anyhow, here's a selection of some of the questions (with the answers on page 45). You have a look and see what you think. Not to prove any point. Just for the sake of interest. Just for *mos*.

A last whisper in your ear: keep an eye on the bookshelves in a few months' time - I think *The impossible book quiz* just may be turning up in a new guise!

Questions

- Q 1. Who lived in 31 Dixon Street, now a pretty little painted house in the middle of the Gay Village in De Waterkant, Green Point in 1963 before going into exile in Botswana?
- Q 2. What is the title of the book of poems written by the former Premier of Mphumalanga, Mathews Phosa?

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- Q 3. What is the exact title and punctuation (if any) of Nadine Gordimer's most recently published novel?
- Q 4. The poet Sankie Dolly Nkondo was published by the South African Congress of Writers (COSAW). What top government job was she given in 1995? What does she do now?
- Q 5. What outrageous accusation did Bessie Head make against the President of Botswana Sir Seretse Khama by pasting a signed notice on the wall of the post office in Serowe?
- Q 6. (a) Who edited the literary magazine **The bloody horse**?
(b) How many issues were there?
- Q 7. Quote exactly the first two sentences of **Cry, the beloved country**.
- Q 8. Who is the subject of Athol Fugard's and Ross Devenish's film script, **The guest**?
- Q 9. Who threw the china plates around at the literary lunch in London at which he was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize?
- Q 10. (a) Who was born in 1913, is apparently still alive, published one novel, a book of poems, and whose real name is Marks Ramailtoa?
(b) What is the name of the novel?
(c) What is the name of the collection of poems?
- Q 11. Whose front door was a Cecil Skotnes artwork?
- Q 12. Who has honours degrees in both English (1960) and mathematics (1961)?
- Q 13. Name one
(a) Nigerian
(b) South African and
(c) Egyptian winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Q 14. Which poet was a drummer in a band?

Q 15. These are the opening lines of which works?

(a) *One Saturday in late August when my friend Olwen Taylor's mother telephoned to say that Olwen would not be able to go to the bioscope because she was going to a wedding, I refused to go with Gloria Dufalette or with Paddy Connolly. Paddy Connolly's little brother picked his nose, and no member of his family stopped him doing it.*

(b) *Attend my fable if your ears be clean, in fair Banana Land we lay our scene.*

(c) *Here? Mud.*

(d) *Sunk low on their springs, three weathered white Sierras roar past the wrought-iron gates of Parliament. Heavy, ham-like fore-arms bulge through the open windows, honking, waving old Free State and Transvaal flags. Hairy fists in the air. I run across the cobblestone street, clutching notepad and recorder.*

Q 16. Which poet and his wife produced the early editions of the popular literary magazine **Staffrider**?

Q 17. Who went to prison, came out, and wrote which work about the experience? Why did s/he go to prison? Times? 4 or 5?

Q 18. Where did Athol Fugard, Richard Rive and Don Maclennan have their photograph taken together? What were their backs up against?

Q 19. (a) Whose real name was Mary Challans?

(b) How had she earned a living before becoming a writer?

(c) What was her lifelong partner's name? (She wrote radio scripts.)

(d) Where did they have a house for many years?

(e) What was its name?

Q 20. (a) Which recent novel,

(b) by whom,

features as characters Cecil John Rhodes, Rudyard Kipling, Olive Schreiner, Oscar Wilde?

Q 21. Can you guess at

(a) the exasperated publisher and

(b) the difficult writer who received this letter?

Dear XXX, I'm fed up with all this money business. It's ruining everything. I have told you that we are not willing to make any change whatsoever in the present arrangements. They are generous when

related to the sales expectations of the book. Stop being so sorry for yourself. Get on with your writing. Some of it can be commercial and some of it can be self-indulgent. For goodness sake try your work on experimental publishers and get their support for your unstructured work. Have you put your poetry together yet? Yours in annoyance and desperation, YYY.

Q 22. Doris Lessing's two volumes of autobiography are called:

(a) Under ... *blank* ... *blank* , and

(b) Walking ... *blank* ... *blank* ... *blank*.

Q 23. Steve Biko wrote a newspaper column for some time.

(a) What was the column called? It was eventually used as the title of a collection of his writings.

(b) What pseudonym did he use for these columns?

Q 24. Which poets have published collections called:

(a) **Come and hope with me.**- D. Philip, 1994.

(b) **The good life, the dirty life and other stories.**- Carcanet, 1995.

(c) **Hurry up to it!**- Donker, 1975.

(d) **I flying.**- Carapace Poets, 2002.

(e) **A littoral zone.**- Carrefour P., 1991.

(f) **Azanian love song.**- Skotaville P., 1983.

(g) **Arse poetica.**- Kwela, 2003.

(h) **It is time to go home.**- Donker, 1979.

Q 25. What is the title of Tatamkhulu Afrika's as yet unpublished autobiography?

Q 26. Observatory is the locale for a number of works, including two novels with quite intricate titles by:

(a) Ashraf Jamal, and

(b) K Sello Duiker.

What are the titles?

Q 27. Which novel by Zakes Mda has recently been placed on the *Librarians' top ten list of the decade*?

Q 28. Which author has two books on the *Librarians' top ten list of the decade*?

Q 29. Whose novels, **The edifice** and **The combat** were published in the *Heinemann African writers series*?

Q 30. Who amazed her daughters by writing a novel called **Toasted penis and cheese**?

Note: Spearhead will be publishing *The impossible book quiz book* in November 2004.