

## SYNOPSIS

Growing up in Alexandra, a squalid ghetto of Johannesburg, five-year-old Johannes Mathabane recalls the misery of the winter of 1965 in a shack with his brother George, sister Florah, and his parents. In the night, the family is raided by the Peri-Urban, a vicious city police squad searching for illegal residents. Since the Mathabane family lacks the all-important papers granting them the right to live as a family outside the tribal lands of Bantustan, Jackson Mathabane spends two months at hard labor on a white man's potato farm. He returns with hatred refueled and predicts that black people will supplant whites in South Africa. Johannes causes turmoil by violating his father's rigid respect for rituals. Jackson retaliates by increasing his expectations of tribal proprieties from his son.

In September 1966, Jackson goes to prison. Without the regular weekly wage from Jackson's factory work, his wife must beg for food and rent money to keep her infant Maria and three older children alive. Her mother, Ellen Mabaso, provides money and food. Johannes becomes adept at scavenging garbage heaps for discarded sandwiches, broken housewares, and useable refuse. In 1967, Jackson returns home an embittered man and risks the family's security with regular bouts of drinking and gambling. Johannes seeks security in gang membership, petty crime, and afternoon games of soccer.

As her importance increases, Johannes's mother challenges tribal rules. The family is beset by vicious fights. Against her husband's wishes, she joins an evangelical religion. Johannes is nearly asphyxiated from a brazier fire in the shack. While consulting a witch doctor, Jackson takes him on a truck ride to the Venda tribal reserve and plans to leave him behind. Johannes threatens to run away. On their return home, his mother gives birth to Merriam.

The threat of government demolition of the Alexandra ghetto terrorizes the family. They move to a section farther from the destruction. The walls crumble and ants, scorpions, rats, bedbugs, and lice attack the children, who sleep under the kitchen table on pieces of cardboard. After Jackson is arrested again, Johannes begins to beg for food. He grows more Westernized as he abandons his father's tribal beliefs.

Fortunately for the Mathabane family, Grandma Mabaso earns a steady living as a gardener for rich whites. She collects money for a bribe to release her son Piet from the police. The family acquires an official birth certificate for Johannes, which his mother uses to enroll him in school so he won't turn into a street criminal. He resists, but is moved by his mother's willingness to be beaten and harassed for his sake. The issue of education further alienates Jackson.

At Bovet Community School, Johannes studies in the Tsonga language and is named the top pupil in his grade. He is whipped for lacking tuition and uniforms, but makes excus-

es for his family's poverty. In 1968, he hears about Martin Luther King's death. He stays out of school and suffers a severe whipping. At age nine, he learns about the success of American boxer Muhammad Ali. At age ten, he witnesses a murder. The sight gives him nightmares. He contemplates suicide, but his mother convinces him of his worth to her and the family.

Granny gets a job with the Smiths, an altruistic white family who learn of her intelligent grandson and send him comic books and children's literary classics. He immerses himself in reading and profits by renting his comics to other children. Jackson convinces his wife to open a stockvel, an illegal beer hall, in exchange for investing his wages in the children's education. He stops drinking and gambling, but police raids end his lucrative business. Johannes earns money from tips and from writing and reading letters for illiterate workers, who correspond with their families in the tribal reserves. He meets Mrs. Smith, who gives Johannes clothing and a copy of *Treasure Island*.

The Tomahawks, a local gang, force Johannes to prove his gang loyalty by fighting the Dirty Dozen. A boy is blinded in one eye. Johannes withdraws from petty delinquency and continues to read. His relations with Jackson worsen. Mrs. Smith gives him a tennis racket and Scaramouche, a black painter, coaches him. As Johannes grows more skillful on the courts, his mother becomes a strong Christian. She contends that God is rewarding him with a first-class pass and academic scholarship.

Johannes increases the likelihood of success by meeting Wilfred Horn at the Halfway House tennis ranch. Johannes adopts the name Mark. In 1973, Mark sees Arthur Ashe, America's much admired black tennis champion. The next year, Mark wins the Alexandra Open. The following year he plays in the National Tournament in Pretoria. Mark wins a scholarship and promise of a sales job from Simba Quix, a snack food maker. In 1976, deadly riots break out in Soweto when the government tries to force black students to learn Afrikaans. Police use tear gas and truncheons on the protesters; many young children are shot. Mark offers to join guerrilla freedom fighters, but is rejected.

Mark meets Helmut, a German who risks arrest for eating with Mark in restaurants and traveling in his Volkswagen to black slums. Mark has to flee for his life from Jarvas and other street thugs who despise his white friends. Before a tournament in Pretoria, he meets Andre Zietsman, who whets his desire to go to America. Mark accepts a job at Barclays Bank, but chooses to apply for scholarships in America rather than seek advancement. He is banned from tennis competition and joins a white club. Stanley and Margie Smith help him apply to Princeton and other American schools. He acquires a first-class pass. After petitioning authorities for a passport and raising money to pay passage to America, he

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achieves his goal of traveling to America. On August 15, 1978, he departs for Limestone College in Gaffney, South Carolina.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

An intriguing figure in American literature, Mark Mathabane, author of *Kaffir Boy* (1986), has turned the searchlight on prejudice worldwide by baring the raw and unsettling details of his boyhood. Born in 1960 into the pariah class of black Africans in Alexandra, South Africa, Mathabane, who was baptized Johannes, is the son of Magdelene Mujaji Mabaso, a domestic worker, and Jackson Mathabane, an unskilled factory laborer of the Bantu tribe. As he reveals in his autobiography, Mathabane received no early childhood education and barely survived hunger while his parents strove to earn money for food and rent. In their small shack, he slept on the floor with his brother George and sisters Florah, Merriam, Dinah, and Linah. The intervention of his maternal grandmother, Ellen Mabaso, saved the family from starvation and illness.

With his grandmother's support and his mother's insistence, Mathabane attended an all-black school for one year before displaying to the family his intelligence and academic promise. In subsequent years, he added athletic skill to his rapid learning of Afrikaans and English. In 1973, Mathabane attended a tennis tournament played by his hero, Arthur Ashe, who came to South Africa to serve as a model of hope and excellence to the demoralized black population. During the Soweto riots in 1976, Mathabane barely escaped the police violence that left many students dead. He worked for Barclays Bank. With the aid of Stan Smith, a tennis pro, Mathabane received a tennis scholarship to Limestone College and lived with a Gaffney, South Carolina, family while he attended Limestone College in 1978. He studied at St. Louis University and Quincy College before graduating from Dowling College in 1983.

Mathabane's family came to America for his wedding to linguist and writer Gail Ernsberger on August 1, 1987. They reunited on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. That same year, Mathabane received the Christopher Award as an epitome of its motto: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." After post-graduate work at the journalism school of Columbia University, he settled with Gail in Kernersville, North Carolina, sired Bianca and Nathan Phillip, and launched a career in speaking and writing. His advance from Macmillan for *Kaffir Boy* enabled him to send money to his family and to bring his sisters Linah and Dianah to North Carolina for schooling. He has been further heartened by American business and philanthropic outreach to Alexandra, particularly school books and food provided by Oprah Winfrey's donation of \$7,000 for the elderly.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Critics were quick to link Mark Mathabane's academic and literary success with the growing American backlash against the South African government's policy of apartheid. At a time when Nelson Mandela's notoriety sparked hope for an end to brutal racism, Mathabane's frank autobiography expressed the limited choices offered to a young man growing up in a crime-infested ghetto. Subsequent publications by Mathabane—*Kaffir Boy in America* (1989) and *Love in Black and White* (1993)—have opened his works to the world's understanding of the parallel growth of hatred and violence in a milieu that is hostile to normal human aspirations.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To contrast tribalism and religious fundamentalism
2. To list types of deprivation and abuse
3. To define racism and apartheid
4. To examine the damage done by parental oppression
5. To summarize political changes in South Africa
6. To list techniques for self-defense and survival
7. To expound on the theme of self-improvement
8. To discuss the influence of evangelism and superstition
9. To contrast settings
10. To account for a hopeful ending

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the benefits Johannes gains from his mother and grandmother
2. To note Jackson's inability to control angry outbursts and random violence
3. To evaluate Johannes's role in the Soweto riots
4. To account for Johannes's academic achievement
5. To analyze scenes in which sports and reading serve as emotional outlets
6. To comprehend Johannes's choice of "Mark" for a name
7. To analyze local corruption, bribery, male prostitution, and petty crime
8. To discuss health hazards faced by the Mathabanes in the Alexandra slum
9. To evaluate Johannes's numerous escapes from hunger, disease, and danger
10. To project how Mark will adapt to life in South Carolina

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in this autobiography. Explain the meaning of each. Part, chapter, and page numbers pinpoint the context in which the item appears.

1. Anyway, look here, as an old man you ought to be back in the Bantustan. (Part 1, Chap. 2, p. 22)  
I began speaking Zulu, Sotho and Tsonga, the languages of my friends. (Part 1, Chap. 5, p. 34)  
*(The policeman insists that Jackson return to the reserve where speakers of the Bantu language reside. Bantu, part of the Niger-Congo family of West African languages, is a broad term. As used by white South Africans, it is a generalization for all blacks. Although Bantu languages have the same origin, they are distinct and unintelligible to each other. Bantu is spoken by the Zulu, Swazi, Kongo, Mbundu, Mongo, Luba, Ganda, Nkole, and Pygmies. For the purpose of differentiation, the term "Bantu" does not identify race or culture.)*
2. The Mlothi was on the veld fringing Alexandra to the east, about half a mile from where we lived. (Part 1, Chap. 7, p. 44)  
*(Alexandra, a suburb of Johannesburg, is situated to the northeast of the city and a few miles south of Pretoria. To the east of Alexandra lies an open grassland dotted with a few shrubs and trees. Here, the city dumps garbage, which poor blacks like the Mathabane family glean for usable items and food.)*
3. Indeed the white missionaries—valiant men like Dr. Livingstone—heard the call and braved treacherous seas

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and jungles and disease to bring our ancestors Christianity. (Part 1, Chap. 7, pp. 58-59)

*(As a member of the London Missionary Society, Dr. David Livingstone (1813-1873) began work in Botswana, then moved north to the Zambezi River, Angola, and Luanda. His later travels took him across the continent to Mozambique and from Zambezi to Tanganyika and Zaire. He believed that spreading Christianity and opening Africa to commerce with Europe would halt the slave trade. For his trailblazing, Livingstone earned a two-pronged notoriety—praise for his intrepid exploration of the "dark continent" and blame for providing imperialists with an excuse to seize African territory. Men like Jackson Mathabane consider Livingstone and other European proselytizers as shills for traders, colonizers, and land grabbers.)*

4. My mother began telling me stories about white missionaries; about how Africa was once considered, by Europeans, a dark continent overrun with black savages practising pagan religions; about how many white people in South Africa believed that the Devil was black, that all black people were descendents of the cursed Ham, condemned by God to be forever servants of the white man. (Part 1, Chap. 9, p. 61)

*(The Biblical injunction against the children of Ham stems from his seeing the nakedness of his father Noah. In punishment for disrespect to his father, Ham bore a curse, which fell on his son Canaan. In the last three centuries, self-serving interpreters have noted that, because Ham was the father of Cush, a black man, the negroid race must derive its inferiority from the curse of Ham. The biblical verse has been used to exonerate the slave trade and as justification for the cruelties of the Ku Klux Klan and other racist societies.)*

5. For some unknown reason, I was fearful of the place and wanted to turn back, but the sight, nearby, of shirtless, muscular *impis* engaged in mock fights using spears and knobkerries made me stay. (Part 1, Chap. 10, p. 70)

*(Under apartheid, blacks were forbidden to possess firearms, whether for self-defense or hunting. These Zulu warriors carry traditional weapons—spears and pikes with knobs on the end. They develop their skills by practicing lunge, parry, and feint combinations that distract, disable, or kill opponents.)*

6. Later on in the day my mother told me that I was lucky to be alive, thanks to my sister's screams, because poison gas and accidental fires were the number one killers of black people during winter months because many of the shacks they lived in had to be heated by braziers, and people often unwittingly left them indoors at night, as she had done. (Part 1, Chap. 14, p. 82)

*(The use of charcoal burners, braziers, or grills in an enclosed area produces enough carbon monoxide to rob the atmosphere of oxygen. The poisonous gas is a silent killer because it depletes the victim's energy and kills before the victim realizes the danger. Florah's contact with the brazier alerts Johannes to the choking that would soon have asphyxiated him.)*

7. He paid *lobola* [bride price] for you. And your father ate it all up before he left me. (Part 2, Chap. 21, p. 132)  
*(Mujaji Mathabane chafes at the traditional system under*

*which she married Jackson. He is older than his wife and apparently saved enough money to purchase a bride tribal style. The goods, usually cattle or other livestock, passed to Ellen's husband. Thus, the women of the family receive no monetary or personal benefit from the transaction. Jackson feels entitled to demand from his wife obedience to his every whim. As he slides deeper into alcoholism and gambling, he rejects any use of family energies and money that does not benefit him directly. Thus, education violates his concept of *lobola* because it derives from his wife's initiative and deprives him of a son whom he might otherwise return to the tribe for indoctrination and circumcision.)*

8. Many of the letters from the tribal reserves were about the day-to-day struggles of living there: children forced to leave school for lack of books and school fees; infants afflicted with polio, cholera, kwashiorkor, tuberculosis and various malnutrition-related diseases, many dying because there was no money to pay for medical treatment; plots of land confiscated by greedy tribal chiefs and their cohorts because of taxes in arrears; crop failure because of drought and pestilence; witchcraft accusations and persecutions—the list of miseries was endless. (Part 2, Chap. 29, p. 180)

*(A significant part of Johannes's coming to knowledge occurs as he writes and reads letters to tribe members' families, who are forced by law to live on the tribal reserves while the men of the house live in town in barracks. Infants tend to suffer from malnutrition and die of kwashiorkor, a fatal protein deficiency. The disease produces reddish skin and hair, debility, and flaccid muscles. Stomachs are grotesquely distended with body fluids and enlargement of the liver. Even those rescued with nutritious food may never recover a healthy frame or sound intelligence.)*

9. One evening while sitting by the table reading a torn copy of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, I turned my eyes at my mother kneeling by the brazier, cooking porridge, Linah strapped to her back and bawling. (Part 2, Chap. 34, p. 209)

*(Paton's sociological novel, published in 1948, reveals the despair and deterioration of black culture as the promise of good jobs in mines and factories drew blacks from their tribal heritage. After the adventuresome depart from the values and social restraints of village life, they fell prey to gambling, crime, prostitution, drugs, and alcohol. Easy money turned into irrevocable poverty and broken health. Some died violently or were sent to prison. Although families broke down, the racist structure offered no hope of redemption. The 1996 film based on Paton's novel cast James Earl Jones as Rev. Stephan Kumalo, a humble parson who attempts to rescue his sister and son from the dark underside of Johannesburg.)*

10. [The ANC liberation movement] was founded in 1912 by a group of black intellectuals, many of whom had studied in England and America. It began as a nonviolent movement, inspired by the work of Mahatma Gandhi who lived in South Africa from 1894 to 1914, and it sought to peacefully bring about a South Africa free of racial prejudice. (Part 3, Chap. 38, p. 229-230)

*(Drawing on the peace-seeking aims and principles of Mahatma Gandhi, the ANC attempted to wield non-vio-*

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lent power by organizing peaceful demonstrations, work slowdowns, and boycotts of transportation, public facilities, and commercial establishments controlled for the benefit, empowerment, or enrichment of whites. As a tool, the Gandhian paradigm forces the ruling class to concede that it can't survive without the compliance of the underclass. This concession to symbiosis elevates the disenfranchised blacks by acknowledging that their use of bus systems and their purchase of goods and services enables the ruling class to remain in power.)

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the autobiography.

#### Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. What causes Jackson to turn against his family?

(An older man at the time of his marriage to Mujaji, Jackson purchased his bride tribal style—by trading cattle to her father as compensation for her worth. After siring Florah, Johannes, and George, he is arrested several times and serves a year in prison at hard labor. During his absence from home, his wife supports the children and begs and borrows money for rent. The birth of a fourth child, Merriam, depletes her energies and inhibits her return to a full work schedule. By the time Jackson returns, he is bitter at the white world and overwhelmed by family responsibilities.

Smoldering in impotent rage, he takes out his spite and dismay on his wife and children, who have grown more urbanized and less tribal in attitudes and obedience. Unable to function fully in Alexandra, Jackson retreats into a cycle of gambling and alcohol. As he provides less for his family's upkeep and offers less tenderness to his wife and young ones, the children turn to their mother and grandmother for their needs and alienate themselves from Jackson.)

2. Why does Johannes attend school?

(Johannes runs wild in the ghetto and begins to steal food, persecute minority merchants, and carouse with other gang members. His mother commits herself to rescuing her oldest boy and to educating him beyond a subsistence level so that he can compete for good jobs and escape the ghetto. Johannes rebels against the formalities of the Bovet Community School, which he associates with conventions and demands of the white world. His mother indicates that a gang of youth truant officers will forcibly return him to school if he doesn't attend regularly. After disillusionment sets in, Johannes tests the system and discovers that the punishment is not worth the freedom of playing hooky.)

3. Describe Granny Mabaso.

(Ellen Mabaso is an independent woman who lives in a house with her daughter Bush and son Piet. After her husband deserts her, she maintains her home by renting to illegal workers. She grieves that her son Cheeks is in prison for theft and maneuvers the freeing of Piet from jail by bribing officials.

After Mujaji falls into debt and begs for food and rent money, Ellen rescues her daughter's family, providing funds for back rent and for food and medical care. As

determined as her daughter, Granny Mabaso joins in the fight to keep Johannes in school. After his father threatens to return him to the tribe, Granny receives Johannes in her home and constantly reminds him that he is the family's hope.)

4. How does Johannes change after he enters the white world of sports?

(At first, Johannes wants no contact with whites, whom he categorizes as devils and blames for the ills of apartheid. After Granny introduces him to Mrs. Smith, her white employer, he begins whacking tennis balls with a used racket. To learn the game, he accepts coaching from Scaramouche and masters a white man's sport. To advance beyond the basics, he must mix with whites and get to know managers, players, onlookers, and other people interested in tennis.

The need for courtesy and cooperation forces Johannes to drop his hostility and allow helpful whites to befriend and aid him. He introduces himself as Mark, a new name that replaces Johannes, and finds it hard to return to the subservience of the kaffir addressing white people as "baas." Gradually, Johannes's limited world expands for Mark and includes Clyde Smith, Helmut, Wilfred Horn, Andre Zeitsman, and the Smiths, Stan and Margie, who search for scholarship aid in America.)

5. What choice of jobs awaits Mark?

(When education falters during the Soweto riots, Mark grows disenchanted with his life and threatens to give up school to work in a factory. Even though he has mastered English, Afrikaans, and tribal languages, he stands to gain little in the world of work and will probably have to apply at factories. He worries that his mother's health is threatened by increasing labor as a washwoman and as mother to a growing family. His determination to work meets with strong opposition from Mujaji, who insists that he not give up his desire to educate himself.

When his academic achievement and notoriety as a tennis player boosts Mark from the ghetto to local prominence, he receives offers of employment. Simba Quix, a snack food maker, offers him a scholarship and training and employment as a company salesman. Barclays Bank extends an offer, which Mark takes. He impresses his employers with quality work and advances to higher pay and more authority. Gradually, he takes on more responsibility for family finances, looks for new quarters for his parents and siblings, and becomes a young lower middle-class black.)

#### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Explain the purpose of apartheid.

(In 1948, the Afrikaaner-led National Party came to power in South Africa. The government passed a series of laws that disenfranchised nonwhites, who could not vote or run for office. Draconian regulations restrained nonwhites from sharing public transportation, toilets, water fountains, and recreation. Criminals often died from torture in notoriously brutal prisons and interrogation centers.

Overall, blacks were denied ownership of property and equal employment and education, and discouraged from access to government services, such as passports and work papers, which they needed to make any change in

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their lives. To survive in town, blacks from Bantustan had to have documentation in order to find a job. Wives and children remained behind until proper documentation reunited the family and allowed them to rent a shack in a ghetto.)

7. Why is language important to Johannes?

(Part of the suppression of black Africa results from low educational skills among blacks, who continue to speak tribal languages and who have little opportunity to learn Afrikaans and English, the languages of the white world. After Johannes begins to earn school honors and to speak Afrikaans and English, he develops self-confidence and refuses to shuffle and bow to white overlords. His skill both startles and impresses white authorities, who expect all blacks to be ignorant.

Johannes gains sophistication and understanding of the outside world by reading newspapers and listening to the radio. Thus, he adds information about Martin Luther King and Muhammad Ali to his classroom studies of Gandhi and famous American blacks. Johannes's acumen nets him jobs reading and writing letters and supplies the additional pocket money he needs to buy primers, supplies, and uniforms and treats for his siblings. The upward spiral of growing pride in achievement enables Johannes to create a new self—Mark Mathabane, the name he takes for his dealings with sports figures.)

8. Why does Mark choose to leave Africa?

(To access the highest levels of learning and opportunity, both in school and sports, Mark chooses to leave his job at Barclays Bank and to travel to America to study at a college. He accepts a lucrative offer from Limestone College in Gaffney, South Carolina, and keeps pressing the consulate and African officials for a passport while lining up donations toward his plane ticket. With the help of the Smiths and Wilfred Horn, he intends to overcome the final hurdles that separate him from life in a free country.

The yearning for America dismays Johannes's mother, who fears losing him. He maintains his ambition to leave South Africa's apartheid. To the interrogator at the Department of the Interior in Pretoria, he declares that he will return home when he finishes his studies, because he considers Africa his home. The tearful farewell between Mark and his parents and siblings brings up new questions: "I wouldn't be seeing them in a long time, perhaps for many years. How much would I have changed? How much would they have changed? How much would South Africa have changed?" After thinking over the worst and best of the past, he concludes that freedom in a new land is a quest for a life that will better him, his family, and black Africans.)

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. How does Mathabane express his personal growth? (Mathabane creates a tone that is forthright, informative, and compelling. He does not spare the reader the disgusting aspects of the squalor and attendant ills that afflict people who live close together in substandard housing. He informs the reader of details of South African history, the role of the ANC, the need for education, and the failure of organized religion to divorce itself from the government's racist policies. His interest in self-

improvement never overrides his desire to raise all black Africans from poverty and oppression.)

10. How does Mathabane's apologia compare with other cries for freedom?

(Kaffir Boy is not the first autobiography to divulge the urge for freedom and the devious methods by which oppressed people subvert their enslavers. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son* detail the author's hatred of whites and his distrust for those who offered compassion and assistance. A similar tone pervades the literature of the 1960s and 1970s. James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* exposed the mounting rage that threatened society with rioting and criminal behavior. More artful than these diatribes are the outstanding works by authors such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, William Armstrong, Jamaica Kincaid, and E. R. Braithwaite. Through laughter and satire, these authors press whites to acknowledge the wrongs of racism and to end prejudice.

Unlike these American writers, Mathabane clings to a naivete born of unfamiliarity with the white world. His meager awareness of movies informs him peripherally of his poverty. Newspapers and books press him further into an understanding of the world's racism. Entrance into white sports clubs, locker rooms, and offices completes his education in the unfair allocation of privileges to white Africans. By the end of his book, it is clear why Mathabane must venture to America and see for himself how African Americans fare in a world that boasts affluence, quality health care and living conditions, and full education and employment.)

### Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. Contrast Johannes with other rebels from young adult literature. Use as examples Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain*, Conrad Richter's *The Light in the Forest*, Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Hal Borland's *When the Legends Die*, and Irene Hunt's *No Promises in the Wind*.
12. Role-play a meeting between Mark and Muhammad Ali. Focus on questions about racism in America and Ali's determination to become a champion boxer. Close with advice from Ali on how to prepare for a career in sports.

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Mark Mathabane's style, present the following terms and applications to her novel:

An **autobiography** is a narrative written by a person about his or her own life and accomplishments. Mathabane's choice of autobiography as a tool of expression allows him to reflect on personal reactions to fear and deprivation and to expand from a first-person point of view the dangers of poverty, crime, rebellion, and riot. The honest tone of *Kaffir Boy* has caused readers to rethink their response to apartheid and its harm to black Africans.

**Dialogue** is the expression of the exact words exchanged between two or more conversants in a narrative. Mathabane records the manipulative questions and commands of the men who lure young boys into sexual perversion and promiscuity. The frank exchange between the pimp and Johannes indicates the level of



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menace these men hold over young street children. His naive response to the offer of food and money suggests that he is innocent of fearful areas of ghetto life that lurk nearby.

**Tone** is the author's attitude toward the subject and audience. Mathabane seems forthright in revealing to the audience his sincere attempt to evade crime and suffering by both legal and illegal means. He reports that he and his mother loot businesses during the Soweto riots, and he expresses his lack of control over participation in a gang battle in which a boy is blinded in one eye. The openness of Mathabane's commentary and his ingenuous reportage suggests that he hides nothing from the reader in his stark portrait of his early life in a South African ghetto.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Art

1. Design a wrap-around book cover that features Jackson Mathabane's aphorism "What a man does is more important than what he knows." Depict Mark Mathabane teaching a tennis clinic, helping his siblings, aiding his grandmother, reading and writing letters for illiterate people, or assisting customers of Barclays Bank.
2. Collect photographs and drawings to contrast apartheid with the Holocaust or American slavery. Use graphic information to display the number of people killed in the three political situations. Comment on the span of time covered by each.

#### Geography

1. Draw a map that details the outlying areas that ring Johannesburg, South Africa. Show Bantustan, Pretoria, Jan Smuts Airport, Rosebank, Soweto, Gazankulu in the Northeastern Transvaal, Natal, Witwatersrand, and Alexandra. Indicate the topography of each region.
2. Create a website on tourist attractions in the lower quarter of Africa. Comment on the availability of transportation, campsites, water sports, animal and bird life, hiking trails, forests, gardens, historic districts, and seaside resorts. Name the currency, immunization and visa requirements, time zone, native languages, and other tourist information.

#### Social Studies and Law

1. Make a chalkboard time line of the advances of black people worldwide in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Include the accomplishments of Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Steven Biko, Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King, Johnetta Cole, Colin Powell, Barbara Jordan, Harry Belafonte, Yvonne Goolagong, Arthur Ashe, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Nelson Mandela, Jamaica Kincaid, Bill Cosby, Coretta Scott King, Desmond Tutu, and Whoopi Goldberg.
2. Suggest ways that the United Nations and Amnesty International can help people flee danger and acquire political asylum when they are threatened during political upheaval, such as the 1976 riots in Soweto. Cite agencies that offer aid to women, children, elderly, handicapped, prisoners of war, displaced persons, orphans, and refugees, particularly Caritas, CARE, the Red Cross, and *Medicins sans Frontieres*.
3. Make a chalkboard glossary of historic, legal, and governmental terms: fascism, guerrilla, Marxism, socialism,

bootlegging, police raids, communism, anarchy, Mau-Mau, poll tax, magistrate, tribalism, Anglo-Boer war, demagoguery, terrorism, tribal reserve, democracy, ANC, *lobola*, apartheid, Uncle Tom, Nazism, Holocaust, *tsotsi*, proscription, infidel, *kaffir*, and passbook.

#### Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, compose a handbook to tennis. Include an outline of a court with dimensions, size of racket and ball, height and composition of net, rules and regulations, and scoring chart. Draw stick figures to indicate appropriate scoring and defensive moves.
2. Letter a time line onto poster paper to indicate waves of immigration to Africa. Include the Boers, Germans, and English. Determine when colonialism reached its height.

#### Science and Health

1. Write a formal definition of religious fanaticism, witch doctor, speaking in tongues, intestinal parasites, diabetes, tuberculosis, nightmares, hallucinations, poison, voodoo, and eye strain. Write a paragraph telling how each term influences the novel.
2. Lead a debate concerning the strain of fear, crime, hunger, disease, unsanitary conditions, and family disintegration on the mental health of young ghetto dwellers in Alexandra. Conclude the best way to rescue children from the physical and emotional stunting caused by poverty and exacerbated by prejudice.
3. Describe aloud conditions in Alexandra that could lead to an epidemic. Suggest short-term and long-term improvements to alleviate conditions.

#### Language Arts

1. Compose an extended definition of role model. Apply the definition to examples from the book.
2. Summarize entries or chapters in reference books that clarify these concepts: bride purchase, tribalism, juvenile gangs, alcoholism, pedophilia, paternalism, gambling addiction, spouse abuse, religious fundamentalism, and multi-lingualism.
3. Determine reasons why Johannes wants to be known as Mark. Does he prefer a name that sounds more American? Does he fear that Johannes links him to Johannesburg?

#### Economics and Current Events

1. Lead a discussion of the world's reaction to apartheid. Did American economic sanctions assist black Africa in freeing itself from white domination? What future measures can hurry the process of raising the living standards for disadvantaged blacks?
2. Explain why Nelson Mandela has become a symbol of hope to black Africans.

#### Education

1. Make a list of multicultural works to expand the understanding of a young South African student who is newly introduced to literature. Include the Bible, *Black Elk Speaks*, world fairy tales, *Walkabout*, Hans Christian Andersen's stories, *The Underdogs*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Hobbit*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Profiles in Courage*, *Cyrano*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Anna and the King of Siam*, the Koran, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Kipling's short stories, *Southerner*, a variety of newspapers, Lao-Tse's poetry,

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*Walden, R.U.R., Romeo and Juliet, Farewell to Manzanar, Poe's short stories, Johnny Tremain, and world mythology.*

2. Compose a list of teaching strategies to improve the horizons of slum children. Include individualized instruction, group projects, computer skills, contract learning, and peer tutoring. Name materials and equipment that would introduce students to modern classroom techniques, for instance, a microscope, laptop computer, educational cable television, calculator, controlled reader, CD-ROM, and map software.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Explain in a paragraph how you would assist Johannes and his parents to educate themselves, improve their health and hygiene, and find better housing and jobs to elevate the family from poverty. Discuss how you would justify your actions to Granny, Bantustan, white officials of Johannesburg, the media, diplomatic community, investors, or missionaries and church officials.
2. Join a discussion group to determine how history rectifies social injustice, such as gang murders, repressive paperwork and laws against minorities, tribal marriage, patriarchy, limited opportunities in sports and the arts, riots and looting, alcoholism, job discrimination, limited travel rights, poll tax, unlawful search and seizure, and marital and child abuse.
3. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of a crucial scene, such as the fight between the Dirty Dozen and the Tomahawks, Jackson's threat to cut out his wife's tongue, the 1976 Soweto riot, Johannes's meeting with Mrs. Smith and Clyde, Arthur Ashe's arrival in Johannesburg, Johannes's flight from Jarvas and his gang, the burning of the library, Granny's rescue of the starving family, Johannes's first day at school, discovery of the dead baby at the dump, the train ride to Pretoria, and flight to South Carolina.
4. Work with a group to compose a scene for television news, for example, an interview with a Boer racist, discussion of the use of Afrikaans as the standard language in South African schools, coverage of the first interracial tennis tournament or sports clinic, a speech by Nelson Mandela before the United Nations, an overview of Barclays Bank and its minority employment record, a memorial to Steven Biko, and a series of spot visits to slum clinics and churches.
5. Write a letter from Mark to his parents describing arrival at Limestone College and his evaluation of racial relations in South Carolina. Discuss public transportation, hotels, restaurants, police, travel, job opportunities, school and sports facilities, and interracial dating and marriage.
6. Dramatize in a short skit an extended conversation: Granny's discussion with Jackson concerning his abuse of the family, the witch doctor's prediction of Mark's success in tennis, Stanley Smith's request for a passport and travel visa from the American Embassy, the manager of Barclays Bank proposing a raise and promotion for Mark, an argument between a potential convert and a fundamentalist missionary, and Clyde Smith's complaints to his mother about Johannes's job as yard boy and shoe polisher.
7. Explain in a theme the significance to the novel of one of these quotations: "Oh, how I envied the white schoolchildren," "it struck me that she could not read," "Two black youths were electrocuted while riding on top of the train," "I had failed my mother tongue," "He's a good and loving father inside," "I'll get another woman to raise my children," "you can be raised like a true Venda boy should be raised," "I was beginning to oppose tribal values and superstitions," "I want you to have a future," and "some day I would find myself in a faraway place."
8. Make a list of questions for an interview with Mark Mathabane. Ask if he still plays tennis, if he has returned to visit his family in South Africa, what he likes to read, what movies and television programs he prefers, what plans he has for the future, and if he believes that racial prejudice in America is a serious problem.
9. Make a website that exposes American students to African history. Begin in ancient times. Summarize the rise of the Xhosa culture, styles of African music and art, architecture in the Nile Valley, European colonization on the west coast, and contributions by Albert and Hélène Schweitzer to tribal health.
10. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating tensions and power struggles within the Mathabane family. Note the rising importance of Johannes and the increasing tension and deprivations after the birth of more children, all of whom are female. Express Granny Mabaso's importance as rescuer and source of refuge. Include frequent raids, arrests, failure of the stockvel, and incarceration of both parents.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Compose a valedictory for Johannes to deliver to his graduating class at Bovet Community School. Comment on the value of learning, heritage, and pride to dispossessed people. Include citations on liberty from Gandhi, Shelley, Martin Luther King, Arthur Ashe, and Muhammad Ali.
2. Compile a list of deeds that reflect Mujaji's love and sacrifice for her children, especially Johannes.
3. Compose a scene in which Granny proposes adopting Johannes to rescue him from Jackson's threats to cut out his tongue or to enroll him in tribal manhood training.
4. Collect lines that demonstrate the importance of these themes to Johannes: courage, perseverance, pride, learning, self-improvement, intellectual curiosity, knowledge of current events, and family loyalty.

### OTHER WORKS BY MARK MATHABANE

- "Black and White Kaleidoscope," *New York Times Book Review* (Dec. 21, 1986, p. 19)  
*Kaffir Boy in America: An Encounter with Apartheid* (1989)  
*Love in Black and White: The Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* (1993)

### RELATED READING

- Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*  
William Armstrong's *Sounder*  
James Clavell's *Tai-Pan*  
Bryce Courtenay's *The Power of One*  
E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*  
Robin Graham's *Dove*

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Alex Haley's *Roots* and *Queen*  
Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender*  
Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*  
Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*  
Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*  
Conrad Richter's *The Light in the Forest*  
Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *The King and I*  
Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
Richard Wright's "Between the World and Me", *Black Boy*, and  
"Almos' a Man"

## TEACHER'S NOTES

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Davis, Tonya, "Childhood Lost In South Africa," *Black Enterprise*, Dec. 1986, p. 20.  
Dreyer, Peter, "Review," *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, March 30, 1986.  
Edmonds, Anthony, "Kaffir Boy In America," *Library Journal*, June 1, 1989, p. 116.  
Grogan, David, "Memories of A Native Son," *People Weekly*, July 7, 1986, p. 67.  
Hahn, Lorna, "Making Good In The Promised Land," *New York Times Book Review*, Aug. 13, 1989, p. 19.  
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Tynan, Laurie, "Audio Reviews," *Library Journal*, Sept. 15, 1989, p. 150.



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### VOCABULARY TEST

Using the terms that follow, replace each underlined word in the passage below with a synonym from the autobiography. You will have answers left over.

authoritative	energetically	insistently	passage	traditions
celebration	freighted	intentionally	prevailed	tribal
communal	functions	knit	religiously	unsuspecting
diet	homestead	neutrally	reserve	values
dread	illusion	offspring	suckle	veld

In this new shack my brother, George, was weaned. It was amusing to witness my mother do it. The first day she began the process she secretly smeared her breasts with red pepper and then invited my brother to nurse (1.) \_\_\_\_\_. Innocent (2.) \_\_\_\_\_, George vigorously (3.) \_\_\_\_\_ attacked my mother's breast only to let go of it instantly and start hollering because of the hot pepper. This continued throughout the day whenever he wanted to suckle. Finally, after a few days, he began to avoid (4.) \_\_\_\_\_ the sight of my mother's breast, and each time she teased him with it he would turn his face. He was now weaned. My father bought a small white chicken, my mother brewed beer, a few relatives were invited, and a small party (5.) \_\_\_\_\_ was held to mark George's advance (6.) \_\_\_\_\_ from infancy to childhood. He was almost two years old. He now had to sleep with Florah and me in the kitchen.

Soon after George was weaned my father began teaching him, as he had been teaching me, clan (7.) \_\_\_\_\_ ways of life. My father belonged to a loosely connected (8.) \_\_\_\_\_ group of black families in the neighbourhood to whom tribal customs (9.) \_\_\_\_\_ were a way of life, and who sought to bring up their children (10.) \_\_\_\_\_ according to its laws. He believed that feeding us a steady program (11.) \_\_\_\_\_ of tribal beliefs, mores (12.) \_\_\_\_\_ and rituals was one way of ensuring our normal growth, so that in the event of our returning to the tribal homeland (13.) \_\_\_\_\_, something he strongly (14.) \_\_\_\_\_ believed would happen soon, we would blend in perfectly. This diet he administered slavishly (15.) \_\_\_\_\_, seemingly bent on moulding George and me in his image.

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### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with characters from the autobiography. Choose your answers from the list of characters below. You may use some of the answers more than once and some not at all.

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| _____ 1. threaten Johannes for playing tennis with whites.               | A. Cheeks        |
| _____ 2. prays that her son will become a Christian.                     | B. Arthur Ashe   |
| _____ 3. agrees to give up alcohol if his family will sell illegal beer. | C. Jackson       |
| _____ 4. sends a gang of truant officers to return Johannes to school.   | D. Scaramouche   |
| _____ 5. orders Johannes to quit writing letters for tribe members.      | E. Andre         |
| _____ 6. quits school to support his mother.                             | F. Ellen Mabaso  |
| _____ 7. goes to prison for theft.                                       | G. Johannes      |
| _____ 8. is ordered to remarry.  | H. Mujaji        |
| _____ 9. manages the tennis ranch.                                       | I. Clyde         |
| _____ 10. becomes Mark's sports hero.                                    | J. witch doctor  |
| _____ 11. tries to get a scholarship for Mark in South Carolina.         | K. Wilfred Horn  |
| _____ 12. embarrasses his mother by denigrating Johannes.                | L. Stan Smith    |
| _____ 13. washes Johannes before the first day of school.                | M. principal     |
| _____ 14. conceals a switchblade.  | N. Piet          |
| _____ 15. becomes Johannes's first coach.                                | O. Jarvas's gang |

#### Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Finish each of these statements.

1. Arthur Ashe encourages Mark because

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Johannes changes his name because

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Jackson is surprised by his son's embrace because

\_\_\_\_\_

4. "Kaffir" is a racist epithet because

\_\_\_\_\_

5. The Soweto riots threaten students because

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Mark develops a separate identity because

\_\_\_\_\_

7. White males expect to be called "baas" because

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Johannes learns not to ridicule night soil collectors because

\_\_\_\_\_

9. A birth certificate is difficult to acquire for Johannes because

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Granny rescues her grandchildren because

\_\_\_\_\_

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### **Part III: Identification (10 points)**

Explain the significance of the following details:

1. comic books
2. garbage dump
3. passbook
4. banning
5. Afrikaans

### **Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for black hatred of all whites, even missionaries.
2. Discuss the dangers of crime and delinquency in Alexandra.
3. Describe Mark's confidence and success on the tennis court.
4. Summarize significant scenes of marital squabbling and spouse abuse.
5. Explain why Granny is usually employed.

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### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Setting Identification (20 points)

Identify the settings that fit the following descriptions. Select your answers from the list that follows.

- |                              |                      |             |                 |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Bovet Community School    | D. Alexandra Open    | G. cave     | J. garbage dump |
| B. Ellis Park Tennis Stadium | E. Barclays Bank     | H. Natal    | K. Johannesburg |
| C. Venda tribal reserve      | F. Limestone College | I. stockvel | L. Simba Quix   |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Diggers examine the corpse of a baby.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The place where Mark enrolls in the United States.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Mark wins his first tournament.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. A scholarship includes the offer of a job as salesman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Mark is promoted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Miss Mphephu tries to establish order.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Police raids end Jackson's access to easy money.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Jackson pays overdue taxes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The witch doctor divines the bones and learns that Jackson has lost contact with ancestral spirits.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Mark believes that people have come to see him humiliated.

#### Part II: Identification (30 points)

Place an X by statements that refer to Mark Mathabane.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. joins the battle between the Tomahawks and the Dirty Dozen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. suffers nightmares after seeing street thugs hack a man to death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. accepts free food and coins for engaging in sodomy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. flees from the tribal witch doctor and demands to be taken home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. fails a test in his native language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. urges George to forgive Jackson.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. joins his mother in looting Shortie's store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. helps Granny by working on the Smiths' grounds and by polishing shoes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. hears *The Merchant of Venice* on the radio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. receives personal words of encouragement from Arthur Ashe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. hears about Martin Luther King's death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. helps Granny distribute bribes to get Uncle Cheeks out of jail.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. pretends to like speaking Afrikaans.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. prefers eating fried locusts, a tribal delicacy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. tailors his father's shirt and pants to serve as a school uniform.

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### Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the paired blanks with answers that complete each statement.

1. After \_\_\_\_\_ dies of a bashed skull while in police custody, government officials close the \_\_\_\_\_, the black newspaper.
2. Ashamed of his need, \_\_\_\_\_ demands \_\_\_\_\_ from his son, who refuses to lend him money and moves in with his grandmother to escape threats.
3. Jackson pledges to spend liquor profits for \_\_\_\_\_ and promises to hand over his weekly \_\_\_\_\_ to his wife.
4. After going to the witch doctor for treatment, Mark learns from the \_\_\_\_\_ that he suffers from \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ gives Mark a few rands so that he can ride the \_\_\_\_\_ to Soweto to hear Arthur Ashe.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Contrast Johannes before and after he succeeds at school.
2. Describe the Mathabane family's need for food, clothing, and medical care.
3. Account for the difficulty of keeping documents in order.
4. Summarize the kinds of studies that make up Johannes's six years in school.
5. Explain why Jackson abuses his wife and children.

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### ANSWER KEY

#### VOCABULARY TEST

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. suckle        | 9. traditions   |
| 2. unsuspecting  | 10. offspring   |
| 3. energetically | 11. diet        |
| 4. dread         | 12. values      |
| 5. celebration   | 13. homestead   |
| 6. passage       | 14. insistently |
| 7. tribal        | 15. religiously |
| 8. knit          |                 |

#### COMPREHENSION TEST A

##### Part I: Matching (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. N  | 11. L |
| 2. H | 7. A  | 12. I |
| 3. C | 8. F  | 13. H |
| 4. M | 9. K  | 14. G |
| 5. J | 10. B | 15. D |

##### Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Answers will vary.

##### Part III: Identification (10 points)

1. Mrs. Smith's gift of comic books provides Johannes with reading material in English and with a valuable trade item.
2. When the family nears starvation, Johannes plunders the newly opened garbage dump for food and usable items and accidentally locates the corpse of a black baby girl.
3. The essential paperwork of apartheid, the pass-book indicates the status of a worker and the legitimacy of residence in Alexandra.
4. For fraternizing with whites, Mark is banned from tennis competition.
5. After the government tries to force black students to learn the Afrikaans language, young people erupt in widespread rioting.

##### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST B

##### Part I: Setting Identification (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. A  |
| 2. F | 7. I  |
| 3. D | 8. C  |
| 4. L | 9. G  |
| 5. E | 10. B |

##### Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- |      |      |       |
|------|------|-------|
| 1. X | 6. X | 11. X |
| 2. X | 7.   | 12.   |
| 3.   | 8. X | 13. X |
| 4.   | 9. X | 14.   |
| 5. X | 10.  | 15.   |

##### Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

1. Steven Biko, *World*
2. Jackson, bus fare
3. education, wages
4. clinic doctor, eye strain
5. Wilfred Horn, train

##### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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**TEACHER'S NOTES**



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