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## Auszug aus:

*Sindiwe Magona: Mother to Mother*

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Sindiwe Magona: *Mother to Mother*

by Rainer Jacob



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Vor 50 Jahren befand sich Südafrika in Aufruhr. Die Ermordung der amerikanischen Studentin Amy Biehl stellte einen tragischen Höhepunkt der Apartheid-Ära dar, die kurz darauf endete. Wie hat sich das Land seitdem verändert? Was haben die Nachfolger Nelson Mandelas erreicht? Hat Südafrika seine Geschichte der Unterdrückung überwunden? In der Unterrichtseinheit beschäftigen sich die Lernenden mit diesen und weiteren Fragen. Sie erarbeiten Sindiwe Magonas Roman „Mother to Mother“ sowie dessen Kontext und setzen sich mit der aktuellen Situation in Südafrika auseinander.

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# Sindiwe Magona: *Mother to Mother*

by Rainer Jacob



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<b>Facts</b>	1
<b>Notes on the material</b>	3
<b>Topic 1: South Africa</b>	5
<b>Topic 2: Introduction to <i>Mother to Mother</i></b>	12
<b>Topic 3: Accountability and justice</b>	24
<b>Topic 4: Racism and violence</b>	35
<b>Topic 5: South Africa today</b>	46
<b>Exam: Call for unity</b>	55

## Competences and skills:

While reading the novel *Mother to Mother* and working with additional texts, students train their **reading** and **text comprehension skills** as well as their analysing competences. Throughout the unit, they continually apply and improve their **writing skills** and enhance their **speaking abilities** by giving presentations and carrying out a debate in class. Students also train their **listening** and **viewing skills** by engaging with videos.

## Overview:

List of abbreviations:

<b>A</b>	Analysis	<b>D</b>	Discussion/debate
<b>G</b>	Group work	<b>LVC</b>	Listening/viewing comprehension
<b>M</b>	Mindmap/visualising	<b>PR</b>	Presentation
<b>Q</b>	Quiz	<b>R</b>	Research
<b>RC</b>	Reading comprehension	<b>S</b>	Summary
<b>T</b>	Working with a text	<b>VI</b>	Working with a video
<b>W</b>	Writing		

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: South Africa	M1–M3	G, LVC, Q, PR, R, VI
2: Introduction to <i>Mother to Mother</i>	M4–M6	M, PR, R, RC, T
3: Accountability and justice	M7–M10	D, G, RC, S, VI, W
4: Racism and violence	M11–M14	A, G, PR, R, RC, T, W
5: South Africa today	M15–M17	G, LVC, PR, R, S, T, VI
Exam: Call for unity		A, S, T, W

# Sindiwe Magona: *Mother to Mother*

## Facts

### The Novel

*Mother to Mother* (1998) is a fictionalised account of the violent killing of the 26-year-old American Fulbright student Amy Biehl in Cape Town on 25 August 1993 by a mob of Black youths affiliated to the Pan-Africanist Congress. The events are narrated from the perspective of Mandisa, the mother of one of the perpetrators. In a series of letters addressed to the mother of the murdered victim, Mandisa tries to explain how and why the tragedy came about. To this end, she „draws a portrait of her son and of his world and hopes that an understanding of that and her own grief might ease the other mother’s pain ... if a little“ (Author’s Preface).

### The author

Sindiwe Magona (b. 23 August 1943) was the first of eight children and grew up in Gugulethu, a Cape Town township. She had a very hard childhood, and later, as a single mother, worked as a domestic servant. Despite all difficulties, she managed to finish high school through correspondence courses and took a BA Degree from the University of South Africa. She worked in various capacities for the United Nations for over 20 years until her retirement and return to Cape Town in 2003. Her works include a two-part autobiography, *To My Children’s Children* (1990) and *Forced to Grow* (1992), in which she describes her childhood under apartheid. In 2009, Magona adapted her novel into a stage play. A documentary was released in 2020.

### South African history in a nutshell

- 15th/16th century: trading stations established in Africa by Portugal and later by Dutch, English, French, and other European maritime powers; slave trade rapidly expanded
- 18th/19th century: further explorations by European powers; British possessions in East and South Africa

- 1899–1902: South African War (Boer War) between Great Britain and Boer (Afrikaner) republics; after Britain's victory, South African possessions (Transvaal, Orange Free State, Cape Colony and Natal) became a dominion within the British Empire
- 1910: Union of South Africa (self-governing) – historical predecessor to the present-day Republic of South Africa
- 1948: Apartheid system introduced (segregation) – lasted until the early 1990s
- since 1950s and 1960s: rising African nationalism; frequent confrontations (such as the Soweto uprising in 1976); government repression and escalating violence
- 1987–1993: bilateral negotiations between ruling National Party (F.W. de Klerk) and opposition African National Congress (ANC, Nelson Mandela) – both politicians were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993
- 27 April 1994: first democratic elections (the ANC won 62.65 % of the vote)
- 10 May 1994: Nelson Mandela sworn in as the new President of South Africa
- Presidents: Nelson Mandela (1994–1999), Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008, resigned), Kgalema Motlanthe (2009), Jacob Zuma (2009–2018, resigned), Cyril Ramaphosa (2018–)
- June 2021: former South African president Jacob Zuma sentenced to 15 months in prison because he defied an order to appear at corruption inquiry
- July 2021: unrest triggered by the jailing of the former president Jacob Zuma

### **Development after 1994**

- End of repression and racism: apartheid system abolished (1994)
- Legal protection: constitution protects the rights of all citizens, irrespective of their race
- Economic progress: rise of Black middle class: Black South Africans make up 50 % of the country's middle class. However, this is still lower than their overall share of the population (80 %).

## Economic problems

- Unemployment rate: about 30 %
- South Africa has 0.8 % of the world's population and 3.2 % of the unemployed. Nearly 40 % of those aged 15–34 are not in work, training or education.
- Unequal distribution of wealth: the highest-earning 10 % receive 55–60 % of all income, while the richest 10 % own 90–95 % of all wealth.

2019 data, taken from: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-africa/#economy> and <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/04/25/cyril-ramaphosa-faces-a-daunting-task-if-he-wins-south-africas-election> [last access: 01/12/2021]

## Notes on the material

The unit comprises five topics and a suggestion for an exam. **Topics 1–4** introduce the setting South Africa, the political and social circumstances of the country in the 1990s as well as the contents, the characters, and salient themes of the novel. **Topic 5** brings the students up to date with the issues afflicting South Africa today. A final **exam** provides the possibility for a test of learning success.

**Topic 1** makes students familiar with the Republic of South Africa, its geography, ethnic and cultural diversity. Work with a video clarifies the system of apartheid (especially the most striking laws) and forms the basis for a wider look at race relations in the USA, in particular its Jim Crow laws.

**Topic 2** presents an introduction to the novel. The students study a general overview of the contents of the book and analyse the title and the writer's motivation. A research activity on important personalities in the history of South Africa (Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu) and Sindiwe Magona, the writer of *Mother to Mother* completes this section. A worksheet for detailed reading, the study of the lives of Mandisa and Mxolisi and the character constellation intensifies students' knowledge of the novel.

**Topic 3** deals with the question of accountability and justice. Students discuss the matter with relation to the book. A reading text informs about the workings and aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and forms the basis for a debate about the questions whether the young men who killed Amy Biehl should have been pardoned. Assignments for further activity include a video on the *Amy Biehl Foundation*.

**Topic 4** focuses on the issue of racism and violence. Starting with two excerpts from the novel, students research in groups similar occurrences in the USA (race killings, George Floyd) and the UK (Stephen Lawrence).

**Topic 5** focuses on three themes explored in the novel (inequality, violence, education) and the relevance of these issues for South Africans today. Three groups (A, B, C) study various materials (article, excerpts from *Mother to Mother*, statistics, video) to be used for a presentation on the issues in class.

A final **exam** can be used to make students apply their knowledge of the novel and its relevant themes to a topical text, an excerpt from the address by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on the National Day of Reconciliation, 16 December 2020.

The page numbers in this unit refer to the following **edition of the novel**:

- **Magona, Sindwe:** *Mother to Mother*. Diesterweg. 2016.



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