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My Children! My Africa! Study Guide

My Children! My Africa! is a two-act play written by Athol Fugard, a white South African playwright who has written over 30 plays. There are only three characters in the play: a white South African teenage girl, a black South African teenage boy, and the teen boy's teacher. The play takes place in Camdembo, South Africa in 1985, and it explores the rising tensions between black people and the apartheid government, and more generally between blacks and whites at the end of apartheid South Africa.

The play was first performed at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, in 1989, with **Fugard** directing. The play was performed in the early 1990's in London and New York City.

My Children! My Africa! was greatly influenced by **Fugard's** own experience as a white person in South Africa during apartheid. Like Isabel, the white character in the play, **Fugard** grew up with black South Africans working for his family, and was affected by the way others saw his relationship specifically to a worker named Sam with whom he was close. As an adult, Fugard worked with a group of amateur black actors in a ghetto outside Johannesburg, which got him interested in doing activist theater specifically critiquing segregation.

Fugard's daughter Lisa starred as Isabel in the early London and New York City productions of *My Children! My Africa!*, which was fitting since **Fugard** has said in interviews that much of the play was based on watching his daughter grow up and navigate issues of color, politics, and guilt in apartheid era South Africa.

ACT I

A Bantu classroom at Zolile High School in South Africa, circa 1984. Anela Myalatya is a teacher currently moderating a debate between his student, Thami Mbikiwani, and a student from a school in the affluent white neighborhood. The white student, Isabel Dyson, from Cambedoo High School, is declared the winner of the debate, but afterward the two students engage in conversation that results in a blossoming friendship. This stimulates Thami's teacher—known informally as Mr. "M"—to invite Isabel to join along with Thami in an interschool competition for the purpose of revealing that even in Apartheid-era South Africa, people of different races can work together toward a common goal. Of course, there's always the potential for the competition to net Thami a scholarship. Isabel admits that she had been somewhat anxious about how black students might react to a white student at first, but her friendship with Thami has convinced her that she should accept the invitation without worry.

Isabel arrives to prepare for the literature competition, but is questioned by Mr. "M" about the possibility that Thami might be involved in some trouble. Thami arrives before she can answer and as they start to study, it becomes increasingly apparent that their friendship has the potential to develop into something more romantic. When the topic of study veers into the darker and more dangerous waters of politics, Thami gets a dressing down from Mr. "M" for being involved in political protests that aims to vandalize rather than raise serious discourse. Thami clearly resists the suggestion that the vandals should discuss and dispute the injustices moving them to violence rather than using violence, but manages to keep his temper under

cover long enough for Isabel to move things back into the realm of studying for the competition.

Isabel extends an invitation to both of them to meet for tea at her house on Sunday. When the teacher leaves, Thami launches into a tirade against his out-of-touch thinking and old-fashioned ways, asserting that the violent behavior is absolutely necessary in the quest to achieve racial justice. The discussion grows increasingly heated as Isabel suggests that maybe Thami should just try talking with his teacher, and eventually she leaves in a state of heightened agitation.

ACT II

While studying with Isabel, Thami announces that he has decided to withdraw from the competition. A planned protest against Bantu academic policies involves boycotting classes the next day. Isabel expresses her hope that they can still remain friends, but Thami is dubious. Mr. "M" shows up trying to get Thami to change his mind about backing out of the competition, but Thami is steadfast in his conviction that words alone are not nearly enough to enact genuine political change. At which point his teacher admits that the police have contacted him about naming names of those planning the boycott. Tensions boil, and everyone leaves under a cloud of anger.

The next day Mr. "M" shows up to a classroom utterly devoid of students. Despite the risk involved with breaking the boycott, Thami shows up with a warning that his comrades have denounced the teacher for naming names and his life may be jeopardy. Thami then tries to convince Mr. "M" now that time is the time to get involved and take action. The response from Mr. "M" is to speak of his love for Africa and to mourn for all the deaths that political disagreement has already caused. Thami tries to physically prevent Mr. "M" from leaving the school, but he does so anyway, and is immediately set upon by a murderous mob of thugs.

Thami meets with Isabel to inform her of his plans to leave the country and join the resistance. Isabel admits that she cannot grieve for his murdered teacher. Thami lets her know about a place that the teacher used to visit to feel a sense of serenity and peace; a place that Isabel can go to for mourning without fear. She promises the dead teacher that she will not waste her life.

My Children! My Africa! Character List

Anela Myalatya (Mr. M.)

Informally known as Mr. M, he is a highly-respected and beloved teacher at Zolile High School in Camdeboo during Apartheid-era South Africa. Mr. M is Thami's favorite teacher (and the latter is his favorite student) and he desperately wants Thami to succeed, but fears that his involvement with a bad crowd will bring him down. As a result, he tries to get Isabel to work with Thami in an interschool literary competition in the hope of landing a scholarship for his favorite student.

Thami Mbikwana

In apartheid South Africa, to be young, gifted and black is not enough. Mr. M understands this, and so does Thami. Unfortunately, Mr. M thinks the way out is a scholarship, while Thami becomes convinced that words are not enough and so gets involved with an underground group of political activists seeking to meet violence with violence.

Isabel Dyson

Isabel differs from both Mr. M and Thami in one very significant way: she is white. She also attends Camdeboo High School, which is not just an all-girl school, but also an all-white school. She wins the debate with Thami which opens the play, develops a friendship with him and comes between teacher and student, both of whom she respects, when they enter into conflict with each other over how to deal with the political reaction to apartheid.

My Children! My Africa! Glossary

comrade

companion who shares one's activities or fellowship in an organization

apartheid

policy or system of segregation or discrimination on grounds of race

Zionist

religious movement represented by a group of independent churches which practice a form of Christianity incorporating elements of traditional African beliefs

Afrikaner

Afrikaans-speaking person in South Africa, usually denoting one descended from 17th-century Dutch and Huguenot settlers

baas

what non-whites call masters or bosses.

bantu

member of an indigenous people of central and southern Africa that speaks a Bantu language

black

During the Apartheid period, a derogatory term referring to any person with dark-colored skin, stretching from African natives to those from the Indian sub-continent to Australian aborigines

mealie-pap

a staple food of the Bantu resembling a polenta made from ground corn

Platteland

country districts of remote South Africa

affluent

wealthy

vandalism

deliberate destruction of or damage to public or private property

racism

belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race

boycott

withdraw from commercial or social relations as a punishment or protest

eloquence

fluent or persuasive speaking or writing

inglorious

causing shame or a loss of honor

sabotage

deliberately destroy, damage, or obstruct

intuitive

using or based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning

Ja

Yes

privileged

having special rights, advantages, or immunities

phobia

strong fear

My Children! My Africa! Themes

Race

Race is the most prominent theme in *My Children! My Africa!*. Athol Fugard is a white South African, and saw the impact of apartheid second-hand through the experiences of his black friends and the black actors in a theater group he worked with. He wrote *My Children! My Africa!* to expose some of the ongoing struggles of apartheid in the 1980s, particularly related to education. Apartheid was a system of segregation laws that kept black South Africans from the spaces and resources to which whites had privileged access. In *My Children! My Africa!*, two of the characters are black, and one is white. Isabel, the white character, initially thinks that the black characters will be grateful to her for visiting their school and will not equal her intelligence and personhood. However, she comes to love both Thami and Mr. M, and recognize through them the way the difficulty and importance of the struggle against apartheid. Thami and Mr. M are both proud of their race and their racial heritage, even if they have different ideologies about what it is necessary for an individual to do to end apartheid.

Education

In South Africa at the time shown in *My Children! My Africa!*, schools for white and black South Africans were completely segregated. This is shown in the play by Isabel and Thami attending different schools, and the fact that Thami did not receive an equal education to Isabel is shown by Isabel's shock and disgust at how simple and dull Thami's school seems. However, the play shows that even black South Africans raised in these segregated areas had the intellect to succeed in academics and in life, if the government would have allowed them the chance them.

The subject of teaching and teachers is also very important to the play. All of the characters are either teachers or students, and the traditional relationship between teachers and students is shown through the characters of Thami and Mr. M. Mr. M keeps an emotionally distant relationship and often tells Isabel that he will tell Thami what to do rather than ask him. Secretly, Mr. M tells Isabel that Thami is his favorite student and that his biggest goal, after all his years of teaching, is for Thami to succeed.

Loyalty

Thami's loyalties to different people are tested throughout the play. At the beginning, Thami's strongest loyalty is perhaps to Mr. M. He does as Mr. M wishes, competing in debate and leading Mr. M to believe that he might go on to higher education. However, he also knows that he must be loyal to himself and his people, and he starts to feel conflicted about the education system set up by the government for black South Africans. Once Isabel enters his life, he is also loyal to her for some time. They practice together for their competition, meeting regularly and supporting one another by researching and studying. However, after some time, he breaks her loyalty as a teammate and friend by quitting the team and saying

that he probably cannot see her anymore. His loyalties have been pulled away from both Isabel and Mr. M by his new loyalty to the Comrades and the Cause, which come to dominate his life choices.

Friendship

The theme of friendship in *My Children! My Africa!* is most salient in the friendship that develops and then falters between Isabel and Thami. Though separated by race and gender, it seems at the beginning of the play that they will beat the odds and form not only a successful team but a friendship, or even a closer relationship. However, when Thami joins the Comrades, they want him to break off any contact with white people, and he must drop off the team and even tells Isabel that they shouldn't see each other at all any more. Isabel tells him, "You used the word friendship a few minutes ago. It's a beautiful word and I'll do anything to make it true for us. But don't let's cheat, Thami. If we can't be open and honest with each other and say what is in our hearts, we've got no right to use it" (p.51). One of the questions raised by the play is whether Thami and Isabel's friendship could have worked out, given their many differences and the tense moment in South Africa's history. In any case, because the Comrades believe that friendships between whites and blacks are against the Cause, Thami feels that he has no choice.

Politics

Some would say that all works of art are political in nature. However, some pieces of literature are written with the explicit purpose of challenging people's political views and awareness of political issues. *My Children! My Africa!* is an example of such a play. Athol Fugard wrote the play based on the experiences of black people he knew and his daughter's experience growing up as a white woman during apartheid. The play asks about the individual's responsibility in relation to questions of social justice. Mr. M believes that a broken or prejudiced political system must be attacked from the inside, with knowledge. In contrast, Thami believes that such a political system must be destroyed with force. Isabel's relationship to the political issue of apartheid was perhaps most analogous to the audiences who first saw Fugard's play. They were bystanders to the political issue, perhaps directly benefited by the dominant political system. Isabel becomes aware of the political problems that she ignored as a child, but does not involve herself in actually dismantling the system, involving herself in neither Mr. M or Thami's ideologies of change.

Names

One's name holds a piece of one's identity, and having many names often shows the many different relationships one has with others. In *My Children! My Africa!* one crucial aspect of names is how they reveal one's heritage as Bantu or English, which correlates highly with one's race. Isabel struggles to pronounce Mr. M's full name and the names of others in Thami's class, showing how uncomfortable she is pronouncing Bantu words, since she is white, comes from an English-speaking family, and attends an English-speaking school for white children. Thami and Mr. M, on the other hand, have no problem pronouncing Isabel's name or the names of any of the authors they discuss; white, Western culture is a constant presence in their lives. Mr. M even shortens his name purposefully so that all students can pronounce it, even though he is strict and traditional about most things in his classroom.

One can also choose the name they are called or gain a name as part of their reputation. Thami and Mr. M discuss this in Act II, Scene 1. Mr. M calls Thami a "silly boy" (p.65) and when Thami tells him not to, he asks if he should call him "Comrade Thami"(p.65) instead. This is because the resistance fighters called themselves comrades; Mr. M uses this title ironically, to emphasize Thami's link to them. Thami counters that people call Mr. M names: "stooge, sell-out, collaborator "(p.66). Again, these names are said to hurt Mr. M by linking these ideas to his identity.

Childhood and Coming of Age

Childhood is one of the most important themes in *My Children! My Africa!*, as might be guessed from the appearance of the word "children" in the play's title. The play can be seen as a "Bildungsroman" or coming-of-age literature, since over the course of the play both Thami and Isabel mature in many ways. Thami makes the life decision not to further his education but instead to leave the country and join a movement of black people fighting physically for change. Isabel realizes how closed-minded she was throughout her childhood, interacting with black people only rarely and with them in service roles. She comes to see Thami as a close friend and Mr. M as a mentor.

The theme of childhood is stressed through flashbacks. Thami tells a story to the audience about how he used to love school when in Second Form, and was even asked to read an essay he wrote to the entire school. He takes the audience through his growth from Second through Tenth Form; he progresses from enthusiasm to cynicism about the education system. Mr. M also tells a flashback story about when he was around ten years old, around the same age Thami was in his story, when he argues with Thami in their last scene together. Mr. M tells Thami about the teacher who inspired him to love books, showing how little Mr. M changed, following that inspiration to read and teach until it brings him to his death.

My Children! My Africa! Quotes and Analysis

"Knowledge has banished fear " p.29, Mr. M

Mr. M speaks this quote during a conversation with Isabel about her expectations and first impressions at the school in the location. Isabel tells him that she was initially confused and scared about the idea of spending time with black people as equals, but quickly came to see it as normal and enjoyable, especially once she got to know Thami and Mr. M. Mr. M puts this concisely as "knowledge has banished fear" (p.29), which could also be seen as a general moral of the novel, especially in the eyes of Mr. M, who values education, books, and knowledge above almost all else.

"It's not easy, you know, to be a teacher, to put your heart and soul into educating an eager young mind which you know will never get a chance to develop further and realize its full potential" p.26, Mr. M

Education is a major theme of *My Children! My Africa!*. Educational opportunities were limited for black South Africans during apartheid, and as Thami says later in the play, the history taught was of white heroes and conquerors. Part of the theme of education is also how Mr. M grapples to find individual meaning as an educator. While apartheid does limit what and where he can teach, he does not give up hope that his students will learn and use their

knowledge to better their positions in life. This applies especially to Thami, his favorite student, in whom he is very disappointed when he finds out that Thami does not want to continue his education but instead join in physical rebellion.

"I ended up being damn glad I was born with white skin" p.21, Isabel

Isabel hadn't thought much about race before visiting Thami and Mr. M's school for the debate that starts the play. However, what she sees there as she grows closer to these two characters makes her aware of all the privileges she has had being born with white skin and speaking English in South Africa. During apartheid, the color of your skin could determine where you lived, your quality and level of education, and your day-to-day treatment in society. When Isabel speaks this quote early in the play, she still has much to learn about race relations and the struggle for equality, but she shows that she has at least acknowledged her white privilege.

"The opposition has spoken about sexual exploitation and the need for women's liberation. Brothers and sisters these are foreign ideas. Do not listen to them. They come from a culture, the so-called Western Civilization, that has meant only misery to Africa and its people. It is the same culture that shipped away thousands of our ancestors as slaves, the same culture that has exploited Africa with the greed of a vulture during the period of Colonialism and the same culture which continues to exploit us in the twentieth century under the guise of concern for our future." p.8, Thami

This quote is spoken by Thami in the debate that begins the play. Because Thami is a skilled debater, it remains unclear how much he actually believes what he argues about women's rights. However, this quote shows that Thami is aware and critical of Western influence in South Africa. Furthermore, it shows that he knows how to use rhetoric that speaks to his audience, which will become important for him when he joins the Comrades in the fight against the government, speaking convincingly in meetings with the public speaking skills he has honed in school.

"The argument against equality for women, in education or any other field, based on alleged "differences" between the two sexes, is an argument that can very easily be used against any other "different" group. It is an argument based on prejudice, not fact." p.10, Isabel

This quote is part of Isabel's side of the debate that begins the play. Though race is a much more important issue than gender throughout the play, starting the play with a comparison of the struggles for racial and gender equality means that the audience must see the link between these issues as the play progresses. In both cases, a dominant group has been able to frame differences as demonstrative of a certain hierarchy. Isabel's acknowledgement of the unjust nature of limitations on women's rights perhaps helps her to understand Thami's passion for racial equality.

"History has got a strict timetable. If we're not careful we might be remembered as the country where everybody arrived too late." p.35, Mr. M

History is another major theme in *My Children! My Africa!*. Thami laments that black children are not taught the history of their people, but rather of the people who have colonized their land and subjugated them. Likewise, in this quote Mr. M worries to the

audience about the history being made during his lifetime. It is not exactly clear what he means by saying "everybody arrived too late"(p.35) since he is not an advocate for an immediate, violent uprising as is Thami, but it can be understood that Mr. M sees an extreme need for change.

"Being eighteen years old today is a pretty complicated business as far as we're concerned. If you asked me if I was happy, I'd say yes, but that doesn't mean I haven't got any problems." Isabel, p.37

Isabel says this to Mr. M when he questions her about Thami's emotional state. Isabel explains to Mr. M that teens may sometimes just have to work through their emotions and the problems presented by being a young person. This is especially true for Thami, since he feels limited and controlled by the apartheid education system. Emphasizing that both Isabel and Thami are eighteen underscores how they are on the brink between childhood and adulthood and how, while some things are parallel in their lives, many aspects of their day-to-day experience and their future educational opportunities present them with different problems and worries at this point in life.

"I don't think I want to be a doctor anymore. That praiseworthy ambition has unfortunately died in me. It still upsets me very much when I think about the pain and suffering of my people, but I realize now that what causes most of it is not an illness that can be cured by the pills and bottles of medicine they hand out at the clinic. I don't need to go to university to learn what my people really need is a strong double-dose of that traditional Xhosa remedy called Inkululeko. Freedom." p.53, Thami

In his monologue to the audience, Thami reflects on his dreams as a young child and now, as an eighteen year old boy trying to decide how to make a difference for his people. While he used to want to become a doctor, even thinking that he would treat white people for money and black people for free, he has realized that the healing his community needs is not just medical. While he says that he realizes what his people need is freedom, one of the major questions of the play is how to achieve that freedom; while Thami says that he doesn't need to go to university to figure out the solution, Mr. M still clearly believes that that is the path he should take to become a true leader.

"Do you understand now why it is not as easy as it used to be to sit behind that desk and learn only what Oom Dawie has decided I must know? My head is rebellious. It refuses to remember when the Dutch landed, and the Huguenots landed, and the British landed. It has already forgotten when the Old Union became the proud young Republic. But it does know what happened in Kliptown in 1955, in Sharpsville on 21st March, 1960, and in Soweto on the 16th of June, 1976. Do you? Better find out, because those are dates your children will have to learn one day." p.56, Thami

It is often said that history is written by the victors. Thami discusses this sentiment in this quote, saying that the government-created education system under apartheid has taught only the history of his people's oppressors rather than the history of his people. The dates that Thami gives are of a massacre, a rebellion, and the adoption of "the Freedom Charter." Thami shows a moment of hope at the end of the quote by saying they are dates "your children will have to learn one day" (p.56), showing that he believes the cause of his people will ultimately succeed.

"If the struggle needs weapons, give it words, Thami. Stones and petrol bombs can't get inside those armored cars. Words can." p.64, Mr. M

Mr. M's view is that apartheid, and prejudice in general, must be dealt with through non-violent methods, especially through education and attempting to reform the system from within. Thami and the Comrades' view, in contrast, is that the system must be violently overthrown, using materials like stones and petrol bombs as necessary. Mr. M fears that Thami's life will be wasted if he turns away from his education to join in the violence, and his fears come true when Thami joins the boycott, participates in the burning of his school and the death of his teacher, and then flees the country to join the revolution movement.

My Children! My Africa! Summary and Analysis of Act I, Scenes 1 - 3

SUMMARY

ACT I, SCENE 1

A school debate is in progress at Zolile High School. Mr. M, a teacher, stands at a table with two students, Isabel and Thami, on either side of him. Isabel is white, and Thami is black. Mr. M calls for order while Isabel and Thami argue with each other about something Isabel has just said. Thami believes that she said that women are more emotional than men, while she clarifies that she said "women were more intuitive than men" (p.7). Finally, Mr. M is able to get their attention and silence by ringing the school bell "violently" (p.7).

Mr. M reads them the definition of a debate from his personal dictionary, reminding them that the opposing viewpoints should get "equal time and consideration" (p.7). Mr. M calls for an end to the open section of the debate and asks for Thami from Zolile High School to make his closing statement, reminding him to be brief.

Thami stands and the audience applauds him wildly. He is clearly very confident and comfortable speaking in front of others, and his closing statement is emotional and well-reasoned. He argues that African culture is in "great peril" (p.8) because of Western colonial influence. Specifically, he argues that a woman's role is to be in the home, rather than to work the same jobs as men. At one point, he even makes the audience laugh by saying that he does not have milk in his breasts to feed children while his wife digs roads. He ends by asking the audience to vote for him.

Mr. M calls on Isabel, who is from Camdeboo Girls High School. She stands with determination and makes her closing statement for the point of view that women should be allowed to hold the same jobs as men. She argues that Africa is held back by clinging to traditional, primitive values. She also warns that arguments based on differences between sexes can easily be expanded to other groups people hold prejudices against. The crowd applauds her politely.

Mr. M calls for a vote by a show of hands. Seventeen people vote for Thami and twenty-four vote for Isabel, meaning she has won. They break for the afternoon, so the audience of students leaves. Mr. M, Thami, and Isabel chat together. Thami congratulates Isabel and tells

her that she did a good job. Isabel says she almost thought that Thami believed what he was saying and Thami protests, perhaps jokingly, that he does. Mr. M jokingly scolds Thami for exploiting his popularity with the audience. He also says that he believes the audience are the real winners of the afternoon since they had to listen intelligently and picked Isabel over their friend. Mr. M leaves, saying he hopes that there is another occasion when Isabel can join them.

Isabel and Thami are left together as they pack up their school bags. They talk about Mr. M; Isabel says "He's wonderful" (p.13) but Thami will only say "He's okay" (p.13). Isabel says that she had a good time and admits that she wasn't expecting it; Thami agrees, and Isabel prompts that this is because he's never debated against a girl before. Isabel describes the great feeling of debating freely, rather than the stuffy way they do it at her school. Isabel calls it a "riot" (p.14) and Thami makes a joke that Isabel doesn't understand at first about not saying that word since "Police start shooting as soon as they hear it"(p.14). Thami makes another joke and this time Isabel gets it, adding that she can just imagine how badly her parents would react to this kind of joke. She tells him that she is a "sober, sensible, English-speaking South African. I'm the third generation"(p.15) and tells him about her dad, mom, and sister who all work in the family pharmacy. She tells him that she's the rebel of the family. Saying that she'll answer any questions as long as she gets to ask some afterwards, she also reveals that she's eighteen years old, likes English and wants to be a writer, and likes to play hockey. Thami asks what she had for breakfast and she describes in vivid detail what her maid, Auntie, served her.

Isabel asks Thami to talk about himself and his family now. He tells her that Mbikwana is an old Bantu name and that his parents are "ordinary, hardworking, Bantu-speaking, black South African natives. I am the one-hundred-thousandth generation" (p.16). His mother is "a domestic" (p.16) and his father works for the railway, both in Cape Town, while he lives with his grandmother and sister in Camdeboo.

Isabel starts to look at the class register; as she reads out names, Thami points to where the students sit. Looking at names carved into Thami's desk, Isabel asks where his is and Thami responds that he doesn't "want to leave any part of [him] in this classroom" (p.17). Isabel says she has no problems with school, and that she believes her school years may be the happiest of her life, and Thami says that is not true for him. He tells her that school does not mean the same thing to white and black people. In Junior school he loved going to class, but "everything changed" (p.18). They go back to talking about Mr. M, with Isabel guessing that Thami is the teacher's favorite and that Mr. M might even have Thami's whole career planned out. Something about this makes Thami suddenly mad, and he tells her that he doesn't do what his teacher says. He apologizes for snapping at her but says that he gets upset because Mr. M treats him like a child and tries to control him. Isabel says that she's going to write for the school newspaper about the debate, and Thami gives her a copy of his speech to use. They hear Mr. M ringing the school bell loudly and they run out of the room, surprised by the time.

ACT I, SCENE 2

Isabel stands alone onstage and gives a monologue directly to the audience. She talks about a place on the edge of town called Brakwater, which most people just call "the location" (p.20). She complains about how ugly it is, saying the mayor of the city said the same thing one day to her dad. She says that she's been there a few times to visit her maid when she was sick and

to take medicine to the clinic. The houses there are made of bits of corrugated iron and other scraps, and they don't have electricity or running water. Isabel says she "ended up being damn glad [she] was born with white skin" (p.21), but that she doesn't think about it that much.

After Thami's school created a debate team, Isabel tells the audience that they contacted her school to try to set up a "pioneering intellectual exchange" (p.21) and her school decided it would be okay after checking with the police and ensuring that the students would not walk around outside of the school at all. Isabel went with two other girls, "feeling very virtuous" (p.21), reminding themselves that English was not these students' first language. When they got there, the school and classroom were gray and dingy. The students immediately studied them critically, not gratefully as the girls had expected.

Isabel clarifies that it is not as if she has never had "contact across the color line" (p.22) since she gossips with her maid in the morning and a man named Samual who delivers medicines for her father and with whom she likes to have conversations about life. However, in Bakwater she was the outsider, and she soon became excited by the new situation—a "new world"(p.23). She decides that she wants more contact with these people to expand her understanding.

ACT I, SCENE 3

Isabel is alone onstage when Mr. M enters, wiping his head with a handkerchief. He says that he has been looking for her. She calls him Mr. M when greeting him, which makes him happy. He asks her about a "return visit" (p.25) to his school and she tells him that she would be very excited to do so. He tells her that he has not come to ask her to debate against one of his students again, but rather to join Thami on a team for a new inter-school English literature quiz. Isabel delightedly agrees, even when Mr. M warns her that he can be a strict teacher.

Calming down, Isabel tells him that visiting his school has been one of the best things that has ever happened to her because it was so eye-opening to see the school and meet people from the location. When she tried to explain how it felt to be on equal terms with black people to her parents, they didn't understand. She says her mom is still frightened of black people, but she's not because "Knowledge has banished fear" (p.29).

Isabel asks Mr. M if he has asked Thami about competing yet. He replies that he is not going to ask him, he will *tell* him, since he is the teacher and Thami is the student. Isabel tells him that this sounds "dictatorial" (p.30). He responds to her by saying that black South Africans adhere to more traditional hierarchies of age. He also tells her that a teacher's dream is to mentor one specific, gifted student in life, and this student is Thami. He says that Thami wants to make mischief now, but he sees real leadership and power in his future if he shapes up. They return to the subject of the competition, with Mr. M saying that his real plan is to get Thami a university scholarship out of it. They agree to start practicing the next week.

ANALYSIS

It is clear that Thami believes in equality of all races in South Africa, but his position on women is not clear. After the first scene, where Thami and Isabel debate about women's rights, the reader or audience is left to wonder how good Thami is at playing devil's advocate and using rhetoric designed to win, and how much he may actually believe in what he says about women needing to stay in their traditional roles.

At its core, *My Children! My Africa!* is a story about segregated education during apartheid. Apartheid was an era in South African history in which black and white South Africans were segregated by law. These laws determined where people were allowed to live, their schools, who had access to public places, and more. The education given to black South Africans was not only separate, but it was not equal to the education whites had the privilege to receive. The school buildings were often run down, and the teachers poor and perhaps poorly educated themselves. In addition, tribal African culture could not be taught in these schools, which is why Thami later complains about his people's history not being taught.

One of the most important quotes in this section of the play is "knowledge has banished fear" (p.29). The quote can be seen as Fugard's main message, especially at this part of the play. Isabel is white, and thus is outside of, or rather the beneficiary of, apartheid's laws. While she had some knowledge of black people and apartheid's effects, just meeting and really communicating with black people for a day radically changed her perspective. Fugard encourages white audience members to be like Isabel and to get to know at least the characters in his play, so that they can stop fearing black people or involvement in social justice causes, and take on individual responsibility for what happens in their country.

The way that Isabel struggles to pronounce Mr. M's name and the names of other students in Thami's class is significant because it shows how important names are in showing one's cultural identity and associations. Because Isabel lives in an English-speaking home and attends an English-speaking school, she has not come in much contact with Bantu names. Perhaps some, like Mr. M, have even attempted to make things easier for non-Bantu-speakers by shortening or changing their names. However, Thami and Mr. M have no trouble pronouncing her name, since her language and culture are dominant, meaning they have had to learn to speak that language and pronounce those types of names for much or all of their lives.

The tension between Mr. M and Thami is clear even from the first scene of the play. Though the audience does not yet understand their difference in political ideologies, we see the way that the strict, traditional relationship between the men causes tension that will be revealed further through their monologues and conversations with Isabel with one another. Thami does not want Mr. M to control his life decisions, while Mr. M sees Thami as his favorite student and perhaps as the embodiment of his hopes for non-violent change in South Africa.

ACT I, SCENE 4

Mr. M is alone onstage; he delivers a monologue directly to the audience. He starts by talking about Confucius's ideas about life, since he identifies as a Confucian. Specifically, he talks about the idea that someone eagerly pursuing knowledge forgets all sorrows and other concerns, saying that it is not exactly true for him, even if he does pursue knowledge eagerly. He moves on to another idea of Confucius's—that he could do anything his heart prompted without transgressing what was right. He says he is envious of Confucius, that he could be so sure of his morals to be able to wake up and know you will only do things that are right. Even though he is old, Mr. M says he cannot have such a calm heart, and he describes his state of constant inner turmoil as being like a zoo full of mad, hungry animals. He extends the metaphor to say one of the animals, Hope, has broken out; this, he says, is why he is a teacher—to keep his hope alive.

In closing, he summarizes his life. His full name is Anela Myalatya and he is a 57-year-old bachelor who lives a simple life going back and forth between his small home and his small classroom. He compares these two spaces to matchboxes, describing his bare room which only has a table, a chair, and a bed. He describes how people yell to him as he runs between his two places, telling him that he'll be late, and he remarks that they are right—"History has got a strict timetable. If we're not careful we might be remembered as the country where everybody arrived too late" (p.34).

ACT I, SCENE 5

Mr. M waits in the place where he, Isabel, and Thami will practice for the competition. Isabel rushes in carrying her hockey gear. Mr. M asks her about the hockey game she has just come from and she talks expressively about how they lost and how it made her feel like hitting a girl with her hockey stick. They talk about being bad losers, with Mr. M confessing that he too can be petty when he doesn't win. Isabel says she thinks Thami is a good loser, and Mr. M hesitantly agrees. He asks her about their recent friendship and she tells him that they have become close. She tells the teacher that she owes him a lot and that Thami would probably like to tell him the same thing if he would let him. She scolds him for keeping such a strict teacher/student relationship, which limits the amount Mr. M can actually understand about Thami. Mr. M asks about Thami's problems, and Isabel doesn't want to talk about Thami behind his back, but Mr. M confesses that he's worried about Thami stirring up trouble outside of school. He has heard dangerous whispers about trouble coming in the location, and he asks Isabel to tell him if she's heard Thami talking about such things. Isabel tells Mr. M that he hasn't said anything like that, but that she wishes he hadn't asked her since he would have ended their friendship if he had told her something and she told it to his teacher. Mr. M apologizes and asks her not to say anything to Thami.

Suddenly, Thami enters, also directly from a hockey game. Thami says that they lost, and Isabel gloats over being right about him being a good loser. Mr. M asks what they are focusing on today and Thami responds that they are set to discuss 19th century poetry. They get started, with Thami and Isabel asking questions to one another and scoring a point every time they get a correct answer, switching "service" (p.39) every time Mr. M says to. They cover Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, Tennyson, Shelley, Wollstonecraft, and Keats, focusing mostly on events in their lives. Mr. M prompts them to focus on actual poetry more, and they start to recite poems for the other student to complete.

The practice goes off the rails when Thami starts to talk about the pyramids being built by slaves in the Bible; he notes that there were many more slaves than masters and that, unlike them, the black people of South Africa "won't leave it to time to bring them down" (p.45). Mr. M questions who exactly Thami is referring to and Thami says "The People" (p.45). Mr. M questions whether he counts as one of those and Thami tells him that he can choose to by identifying with the fight for freedom. Mr. M argues back, saying that he must be one of The People then since he does want their freedom, but saying that he's been fighting for it in a different way for a long time. He tells Thami that lawlessness is not okay for anyone, the government or the people, so nobody should be toppling each other's statues.

Isabel cuts back in to try to get them back on track with literature. Mr. M agrees that they should pick some novelists to study, and sets it to them to make a list of 20. Isabel also invites them to tea with her family; Mr. M immediately accepts, but Thami doesn't respond. Mr. M leaves.

Isabel and Thami are left alone together, and she tries to keep talking to him about coming to tea. They start to argue about why they would want to meet him, and Isabel changes the subject, understanding that it's really a problem between Thami and Mr. M that is causing tension. Isabel tells Thami that she's seen him giving Mr. M critical looks, and now Mr. M has started to give him critical looks back. When Isabel pushes further, Thami tells her that he thinks Mr. M is out of touch with how younger black South Africans feel; people are pushing for radicalization to get change faster, but Mr. M has old-fashioned ideas about how to make change in society. Isabel asks whether them working together on the competition is one of those old-fashioned ideas, and Thami tries to avoid answering. When Isabel asks him again, he says that their friendship isn't one of those old-fashioned ideas, but doing the competition together may be. Isabel encourages him to talk to Mr. M, but Thami says the problem is bigger than just him and Mr. M and that what he needs is to get out of his classroom since it is part of the prejudiced government system. Isabel encourages him again to talk to Mr. M, but now Thami gets angry, telling her to keep her advice to herself. Isabel apologizes heatedly and tells him on the way out that they shouldn't use the word friendship to describe their relationship if they aren't truly friends.

ACT I, SCENE 6

Thami is alone onstage. He starts his monologue singing a song in Bantu and then translating it into English; the song is about going to school. He returns again to the story of how much he loved school as a child. His teachers praised him and he was always eager to get into the gates in the morning. When he was in Standard Two, his teacher liked an essay he wrote so much that she asked him to read it about an assembly; the essay was about how he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up, describing how he would treat white people for pay and black people for free.

Thami says that he has to update his essay now that he is older. He doesn't want to be a doctor anymore; he wants people to be cured through freedom. However, he doesn't know what exactly to dream of anymore because the possibilities of "bright young blacks" (p.53) like himself are so limited under apartheid. He says that he can't sit in class making his teachers happy and proud anymore.

He describes how the Inspector of Bantu Schools in the Cape Midlands Region made a visit to their school and told them how they were special and were going to be the "shareholders in the future of [South Africa]" (p.54). The whole time, Thami describes questioning what wonderful future the man could be talking about, since all he saw were poor, tired blacks struggling to survive in the land their ancestors had possessed for generations. He asks if, especially with the education he is talking about, the inspector thinks the students are blind or stupid enough to not see the differences in the way whites and blacks are treated by the South African government. He says that he has started to forget the history he was taught in school, but to remember dates from the history of the black struggle. He says they do not need the government schools anymore, but rather to teach and remember with one another, "lessons about *our* history, about *our* heroes" (p.56).

ANALYSIS

By this point in the play, the pattern of scenes with dialogue alternating with scenes with only one character delivering a monologue is clear. Fugard uses these monologues throughout the play to build characterization and themes and allow characters to reveal things to the audience that they wouldn't to other characters in the play because of their differences in race or gender or the propriety necessary to their relationships. These monologues are not written as happening in a specific location, so the director has the choice to have them performed on a blank stage, as if they are the thoughts in a character's mind, or in another location from the play.

The first of the three dates in black South African history that Thami says children will need to learn and remember some day is 1955 in Kliptown. This date and location corresponds to the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress of the People. The meeting was multi-racial and intended to create better conditions for black people in South Africa. Through this meeting, the National Action Council was created. However, apartheid obviously continued long after this meeting, despite the international backing of its goals.

The second date in black South African history is 21st March, 1960 in Sharpsville. This date refers to "anti-pass" protests that occurred in response to the policy of making black people carry an internal passport at all times demonstrating their identity. The passes created tensions with the police, so in 1960 the Pan-Africanist Congress launched a campaign to abolish them.

The third date in black South African history is 16th of June, 1976 in Soweto. The date refers to a protest march about the Bantu Education Policy. The uprising on 16th June began in Soweto, South Africa and spread throughout the country. The event also led to increased international support for anti-apartheid groups because of pictures published of police brutality.

Isabel believes that Thami does not respond to her offer of tea with her parents because he is upset about the situation with Mr. M. However, there is more symbolic meaning in his refusal to drink tea. Tea is a symbol of the impact of British colonialism persisting in South Africa even once it became a sovereign state. Thus, Thami's hesitance to go to Isabel's house for tea shows his discomfort with these people who have a role in his and all black South Africans' subjugation.

ACT II, SCENE 1

Isabel and Thami sit together. Isabel has a pile of books and papers and tells Thami that she's made copies of a condensed biography for some authors. She begins to read the one she has made about the three Bronte sisters, but finds that Thami is not paying attention to her. She asks if she should go on, but Thami says that he needs to talk. She asks him to get whatever he is going to say over with, but he says that he wants to choose his words carefully so she doesn't get the wrong idea and take it personally. After waiting for him to get to his point, she guesses that he is going to say they should break up their competition team and he says yes. She tells him that she has been feeling strange for a few weeks, like something had to go wrong. When she spent time with the black driver Samuel, she felt oddly fake and realized she had been talking to him like he was a child, which led to a big argument with her father.

She asks Thami if she's changing, since her dad said she is, but Thami doesn't help her. She asks if he's told Mr. M yet and Thami says he hasn't.

Isabel asks to talk more about why Thami is quitting. She tells him that she knows there is "unrest" (p.59) and he responds that his group does not call it that, but rather "'Isiqualo'...The Beginning" (p.59). She says she still doesn't understand why this prevents them from studying literature together, but Thami says it's much larger than just them; the people of the location are going to start boycotting all classes. Isabel asks if Mr. M knows and Thami says that he wasn't at the meeting because he isn't welcome in meetings organized by "the Comrades" (p.60). Isabel asks how long he thinks it will last, and Thami seems to think it will last months, saying they will keep boycotting until the government dismantles the current education system and negotiates with them. Isabel asks if they might resume studying after the boycott, and Thami is unsure.

Isabel seems to come to terms with the end of their team, saying there are worse things they could have done with their time. She asks Thami if they can still meet as friends. Thami is unsure again, and as Isabel keeps talking, she realizes that he does think their friendship is "an old-fashioned idea" (p.61). She tells him to go, but when he turns to leave, she calls him back. She says that it simply doesn't make sense that they can't be friends. He tells her that he is not supposed to mix with any whites, and has already put himself in danger by meeting with her when he could be seen by people, and has already been seen by her maid. Isabel challenges the irony of his Comrades controlling his relationships rather than granting him more freedom.

Mr. M enters the room and, having heard what Isabel last said, pushes Thami to justify what his Comrades are doing and asking of him. They argue back and forth, Thami speaking eloquently about how the government has been keeping black people out of society by giving them a poor education, and Mr. M telling him that he knows and has been trying to help people from within the system for his entire adult life. He chides Thami for reciting and even writing the Comrades's party lines, saying that he's heard about how Thami spoke the night before at a secret meeting. Thami says that he does not need the big English words Mr. M taught him and Mr. M cautions him to remember that words are sacred and keep humans separate from other animals. He urges Thami to lead the others back into the classroom. Thami says he won't and that he would be seen as a traitor for suggesting they do so.

Mr. M tells Thami that the government has given him orders to write down who does not show up for his class the next day. Thami asks if he will do it and Mr. M says that is none of his business. The tension intensifies when Thami tells Mr. M not to get into his business, then, and Mr. M says that he will do so because he is a man and Thami is a "silly boy" (p.65) who "will grow up to be a stupid man" (p.65) without a proper education.

Thami almost leaves without saying anything, but then pauses. He asks Mr. M if he knows that people called him a collaborator at the meeting and that he tried to stop them from saying those things. He tells Mr. M that he can write down his name on the list tomorrow, and then he leaves. Isabel moves to comfort Mr. M but he holds up his hand to stop her. She shouts "This fucking country!" (p.66) and leaves.

ACT II, SCENE 2

Mr. M is alone onstage. He tells the audience about trying to get to school the next morning. Every road was blocked by policemen, there were overturned buses, looted vehicles and buildings, and people everywhere shouting. He stopped on a corner and saw a child from Standard Six writing a political message on a wall. The child asked him earnestly about his spelling. A police van drove by full of schoolchildren yelling to him to tell their parents where they are. Mr. M tried to close his eyes to make everything go away, but he had to open his eyes when stones and tear gas bombs started to fall around him.

ANALYSIS

As with any play, a break in acts presents a major shift. In *My Children! My Africa!* there is not a good deal of time between the end of Act I and Act II. The shift happens within Thami, who makes the decision to leave school, including Mr. M and Isabel, behind. This change is revealed in dialogue by the middle of the first scene of Act II, but a shift in tone will likely be directed from the beginning of the act.

A motif in the play is the difference between the language used by the South African government and newspapers and that used by the people of the location, especially those with whom Thami has planned to physically fight against apartheid. For example, in this section of the play, Isabel uses the term "unrest" (p.59) and he tells them that his group does not call it that, but rather "'Isiqalo'...The Beginning"(p.59). Later in the play, they have a parallel discussion of the words murder and self-defense, taking the importance of these word choices to another level since these words have legal definitions and ramifications.

A key moment in the play comes when Isabel leaves the stage, yelling "This fucking country!" (p.66) Her shout is out of character, since she is strong-willed but not generally disrespectful. The shout can be interpreted as her coming to terms with how overwhelming the tension between Thami and Mr. M, and their competing ideologies, has become. It is important to note that she uses the word "country" (p.66) rather than referring to Thami and Mr. M, to the government, or to any issue in particular. She has only recently become aware of how the history of South Africa truly affects black and poor people in contemporary South Africa, so it seems that all she can muster is a curse at the country itself and all the problems included therein.

One of the great ironies of the play, and of the anti-apartheid movement in general, is pointed out in Act II, Scene 1; Thami and the Comrades are seeking more freedom, but Thami's freedoms are actually limited in this pursuit. That is to say, the Comrades begin to control his access to education and the places where and people with whom he spends time. Thami defends these limitations as necessary to the cause, but Mr. M attempts to push him on the issue even after Isabel drops the issue.

Mr. M's monologue to the audience in Act II, Scene 2 is one of the most imagery-filled parts of the play. He describes an area we have not seen in the play—the streets of the location. Mr. M wanders around crazily on the first day of the boycott, trying to get to school. Finally, he tries to close his eyes and wake up again to a resolved situation, but the yelling and throwing of stones and tear gas convinces him that it is not a dream. This motif of dreaming and waking up can be found throughout the play and symbolizes gaining awareness of the severity of a situation.

ACT II, SCENE 3

Mr. M is alone in his classroom ringing the school bell and calling for students to come to school "before they kill you all" (p.67). He goes to his desk, picks up the class register, and starts to call roll. For each student he asks "living or dead?" (p.68). He talks as if talking to the class, saying his lessons were meant to help them in life, and will be useless if they are dead. Someone throws a stone and it breaks the window. Mr. M starts to ring the school bell loudly again.

Thami appears and tells Mr. M to stop ringing the bell, saying he is "provoking the Comrades" (p.68) by openly defying the boycott. Mr. M says he is ringing the bell because he rings it at the end of every lesson, and he asks if Thami has come back only to tell him to stop ringing the bell or if he has come for a lesson. When Thami says that he didn't come for a lesson, Mr. M agrees that you don't need to know grammar to write slogans or throw rocks. He picks up his dictionary in one hand and the stone that came throw the window in the other; he ruminates on how the stone is only one word while the dictionary holds the whole English language. Suddenly, he offers the book to Thami; Thami ignores this gesture.

Thami says that he's come to warn Mr. M, not just to stop ringing the bell, but that at a meeting the night before he was named as an informer for giving the names of absent students to the police. He says that there is a plan to march to the school, burn the building down, and kill Mr. M. Mr. M writes this on the board while reminding Thami to always put a problem into words to try to solve it. Thami suggests that he can report back to the Comrades that Mr. M has realized he was wrong and Mr. M can join the boycott. Mr. M asks why he's doing this but Thami says that he's doing it for "the Struggle" (p.71), since the "Cause"(p.71) will be hurt if innocent people are accused and killed. Mr. M snidely apologizes for thinking Thami would have come because he cares about him.

He tells Thami to let them come since he isn't innocent. He confesses that he did go to the police and report on "the presence in our community of strangers from the north" (p.72) who he believed were creating unrest. He gave the police names and addresses, and he refused money for the information. He says that he did it to stop the madness and because he was lonely and jealous with Thami gone. He laments the children gone from his classroom, his only calling in life since he was a child. He tells the story of when he was ten years old, how while peeing on a mountain after a rugby match, a teacher told him about how books have the power to help you see all of Africa. He tells Thami about how his "visions of splendor" (p.74) for Africa was ruined when he saw a little child dead from famine on television; a tribesman dropped the little bundle with the child into a mass grave without delicacy and the program never told the viewers the names of the child or the man.

Mr. M's long speech is interrupted by the sounds of breaking glass and a crowd outside the school. Thami warns Mr. M not to go outside, saying he will lie to them about Mr. M being innocent. Mr. M presses Thami again on why he is doing this, but Thami repeats that it is for the Cause. Mr. M asks Thami if he thinks he is scared of dying. He goes outside ringing his bell, and he is killed by the mob.

ACT II, SCENE 4

Thami waits onstage. Isabel arrives. Isabel is tense, distracted. Thami thanks her for coming and she tells him that there is nothing she wants to see less than "anything or anybody from the location" (p.76). Thami says that he wants to say goodbye, though Isabel challenges that he already said goodbye three weeks ago, which was the last time she, he, and Mr. M were together. Thami says that he is leaving town for good. Isabel says that she thought he was asking to see her to talk about recent events, and reads to him from the newspaper: "...unrest-related incident in which according to a witness the defenseless teacher was attacked by a group of blacks who struck him over the head with an iron rod before setting him on fire" (p.77). She tells him that she's been crying, praying, and even going to the location, but she still can't come to terms with why he was killed.

Thami tells her that Mr. M was an informer, not just of students in the boycott, but the names and addresses of the political action committee, leading to many arrests. Isabel can't believe it, calling him a "police spy" (p.78), but Thami clarifies that it wasn't like that. Thami is understanding, saying that the teacher was confused and felt it was his duty. Isabel says that his actions didn't make him an informer in the way the word suggests, making his murder unjustified. Thami cautions her against using the word "murder" (p.79) saying that he was killed in self-defense because he betrayed his people and put everyone in more danger. He says that black people arrested, tried, and hanged by a white government are what his group would call murder.

Isabel starts to say something, then stops. Thami tells her to say whatever she was going to. She asks where he was when Mr. M was murdered and whether he tried to stop them. Thami says that he knows she has a third question: whether he was in the mob that killed him. She asks for his forgiveness, but says she does wonder that. She says that she loved Mr. M. Thami says he was there and did try to stop it by going to him beforehand, but that Mr. M seemed to want to be killed. Isabel continues to wonder aloud why he had to die, and Thami says that he loved him too and should have tried harder to explain what he was doing and why.

Isabel asks if the police are really looking for Thami and where he's going. He tells her that he's going north, leaving the country, and "joining the movement" (p.82). Isabel tells him that she's frightened that she's forgetting Mr. M already and that she found out he wasn't even buried, so she doesn't know where to go to visit him. Thami advises her to go to the mountain Mr. M told him about in the story from his childhood. They say goodbye to one another in Xhosa.

ACT II, SCENE 5

Isabel is alone onstage. It becomes clear that she is on the mountain where Mr. M's teacher talked to him about books as a child. Isabel says she's there to pay her respects to Mr. M, not with flowers, but with a promise to try as hard as she can to not waste her life. She calls herself one of his children and says that the future is still theirs. She walks off the stage, and the play ends.

ANALYSIS

The school bell is a symbol that appears throughout the play, but is of special importance in Act II, Scene 3. The bell is a representation of the traditional education system, so Mr. M

ringing it after the boycott has begun angers the Comrades. However, the audience also knows that the bell is of special significance to Thami, who so used to love hearing its sound when he was enamored with the education system; Thami now feels constricted and angered by the education system, so the bell, especially as rung by Mr. M, is a reminder of everything Thami is trying to put behind him.

One of the major questions of the play is whether Mr. M's goal is truly fulfilled. He tells Isabel early in the play that his goal is to have one special student who he mentors to success as an adult. However, Mr. M clearly means for this to be Thami, and since Thami leaves the country to join the movement rather than continue his education, it seems Mr. M's goal for him will not be fulfilled. Isabel promises to fulfill Mr. M's goal, but because she is white and not Mr. M's favorite student, this is not really an equal substitution. Isabel always had hope for her future, since she is white, but the play ends with the black characters not achieving what they want.

Mr. M's innocence or guilt is another question to be contemplated by readers and the audience. On one hand, as Isabel argues, Mr. M was simply following his conscience, as evidenced by him not having a history of informing the police or even accepting money for the information he gave. In any case, it is difficult to see the violent punishment doled out by the mob of Comrades as self-defense. On the other hand, Thami argues convincingly that Mr. M posed a very real threat to the movement, and that the white courts run by the government could not be expected to produce justice in this kind of situation.

Isabel and Thami's final words to one another, which are the words for goodbye in Xhosa, set the tone of the end of the play. Fugard has tried to make a case for the personhood of black, native South Africans, and he shows Isabel's perspective through her understanding of what Thami says and her saying the correct words back to him. Though their relationship seems like it is ending forever, one can imagine that Thami will feel a certain gratification that Isabel pays him and his people this final respect.

Fugard ends the play with a strong, interesting choice in the stage directions. Isabel delivers her final line, "The future is still ours, Mr. M" (p.84) and then Fugard writes, "(The ACTRESS leaves the stage.)" (p.84). "ACTRESS" (p.84) is written in all capitals, as the name of a character would be, but this character is not listed on the list of characters at the beginning of the play and clearly refers to not an additional character but the actress playing Isabel in a given production. This signals that the character of Isabel is left in the final scene, perhaps to give a sense of the story continuing. It is up to a director and actor to decide how this stage direction should be dealt with in practice.

My Children! My Africa! Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

Waking Up (Motif)

Being "woke" is a term currently used when people are aware of social justice issues in the community and world around them. This current term reflects a common metaphor for critical awareness, and this metaphors occurs in *My Children! My Africa!* as well. Since the place is largely about both Thami and Isabel becoming aware of their roles in South Africa's

struggle with apartheid, the motif of waking up is an important one to track. In a monologue to the audience, Thami says, "It's hard, you see, for us 'bright, young blacks' to dream about wonderful careers as doctors, or lawyers, when we keep waking up in a world which doesn't allow the majority of our people any dreams at all" (p.53). Later, when Mr. M sees that the boycott and the rebellion are really happening, against his wishes as someone who takes a more traditional view of fighting apartheid, he says, "This is too much now. Just stand here and close your eyes and wait until you wake up and find your world the way it was...Suddenly there were children everywhere throwing stones, and tear gas bombs falling all around and I knew that I wasn't dreaming" (p.67). These moments of waking up symbolize awareness of the reality and seriousness of the problem at hand.

The School Bell (Symbol/Motif)

The school bell is a vital prop in *My Children! My Africa!* Mr. M uses the bell to summon students to class, and continues trying to do so in vain after the boycott has begun. At that point, the bell is seen as a representation of the traditional education system, so his ringing it angers the Comrades and contributes to his death when they burn down the school. The school bell is also of particular significance to Thami, who recalls his childhood when he loved school and the associated sound of the school bell. He says in a monologue, "I remember my school bells like beautiful voices calling to me all through my childhood" (p.52) and sings a song in Bantu and English about the school bell ringing, including lyrics mimicking its sound.

Importance of Word Choice (Motif)

In situations of social tension and change, word choice can become incredibly important. Out-of-date terms from slang to medical jargon can be construed as attacks on those who prefer new or different terminology. This concept shows up as a motif in *My Children! My Africa!* related to both gender and race politics.

The play begins with a inter-school debate between Thami and Isabel. Specifically, the first lines of a play are Thami and Isabel arguing about Isabel's word choice. Isabel says that she said "women were more intuitive than men" (p.7) while Thami believes that she said women "were more emotional than men" (p.7). This semantic argument is important because describing women as intuitive is more "progressive" than describing them as emotional, and Isabel would likely have been careful to use this particular term in supporting her argument against traditional roles and perceptions of women.

Later, Thami and Isabel fight about the words that should be used to describe what the Comrades are doing. While the white South Africans with whom Isabel's associates follow the government and newspapers in using words like "unrest" (p.79) and "murder" (p.79) to describe the riots and the death of Mr. M, Thami informs her that he and his group saw the latter as "self-defense" against an act putting them in grave danger.

Mr. M himself is perhaps the most vocal supporter of careful word choice, telling Thami that an education in words and rhetoric will be more important in ending apartheid than joining the cause physically.

The Dictionary (Symbol)

Besides the school bell, Mr. M's most prominent prop is his dictionary. When they meet during the riot that ends in Mr. M's death, Mr. M shows Thami how the dictionary has his name and the year 1947 written in it; this means that Mr. M has had the same dictionary for almost 40 years. This shows Mr. M's devotion to the English language, and language in general, but also how he is stubborn in his adherence to tradition. Dictionaries are updated and re-published every few years, but Mr. M stays with the one that he received when he was young and remained comfortable with. Mr. M tries to give the dictionary to Thami, but Thami refuses, showing how Thami does not want to receive Mr. M's knowledge, especially as it relates to English, the language that reflects South Africa's colonial history.

Tea (Symbol)

Not long after they become debate partners, Isabel invites Thami to tea at her house. While this may seem benign to some readers, tea is a symbol of the impact of British colonialism persisting in South Africa even once it became a sovereign state. Isabel has already told Thami that she is from a long line of white, English-speaking South Africans, and he accepted this at the time, but his hesitance to go to her house for tea shows his discomfort with these people who have a role in his and all black South Africans' subjugation.

My Children! My Africa! Metaphors and Similes

"Enthusiasm for your cause is most commendable but without personal discipline it is as useless as having a good donkey and a good cart but no harness" (p.8) (Simile)

This quote is spoken by Mr. M during the debate that begins the play. He instructs both Thami and Isabel to calm down, since they cannot get their points across when they act "without personal discipline." The simile sounds traditional, almost biblical, showing this perhaps conservative side of Mr. M's character (especially as he is seen by Thami).

"My unruly behavior? I caught that disease in the location, I'll have you know." (p.31) (Metaphor)

Isabel speaks this quote jokingly to Mr. M early in the play. However, Isabel's use of the metaphor of the location giving someone disease suggests the complex and incendiary dynamics between the characters, since it refers implicitly to the belief that the segregated areas in which blacks lived were dangerous and could "infect" one with bad behavior. On the other hand, her irony about this—she is in effect defending her behavior—makes this also a critique of the idea that the behavior "caused" by the location is "unruly" or bad.

"I've got a whole zoo in here, a mad zoo of hungry animals...and the keeper is frightened!" (p.33) (Metaphor)

In this quote, spoken directly to the audience, Mr. M talks passionately about the emotions inside of him. He uses this metaphor of animals in a zoo to show how he tries and fails to

control his emotions, and how powerful and fierce they can be. This instability is a result of his internal conflict over how to best serve his students and his country under apartheid.

"Sometimes dealing with the two of you is like walking on a tight rope. I'm always scared I'm going to put a foot wrong" (p.48) (Simile)

Isabel says this quote to Thami about being in situations with him and Mr. M, since their relationship is strained by the student-teacher dynamic, and their differing views on how to deal with apartheid. While Isabel is not directly impacted by apartheid, especially in her life before the play begins, she begins to experience these tensions when she spends time with Thami and Mr. M, trying to grapple with their charged conversations.

"I remember my school bells like beautiful voices calling to be all through my childhood" (p.52) (Simile)

In this quote, Thami reminisces about earlier days in his life when he enjoyed school more than anything. The school bell is already a motif in the play, used by both Thami and Mr. M, but here it is painted in a very positive light through its comparison to "beautiful voices."

My Children! My Africa! Irony

Teachers and Students

One irony of *My Children! My Africa!* is that teachers are not always wiser than students. At one point in the play, Isabel chides Mr. M for being so traditional that he must ask her how Thami is doing emotionally rather than asking the student himself. She urges him to give up the strict and limiting role of teacher who demands things of students rather than asking, and keeps them at arms length emotionally. Perhaps, she suggests, this is why Mr. M cannot convince Thami to stay in school when the boycott begins.

Self-Defense

One major irony pointed out by Isabel is that the Comrades and Thami call killing Mr. M an action taken in self-defense. Isabel responds to this idea by saying, "What? A mad mob attacks one unarmed defenseless man and you want me to call it..."(p.79) but Thami insists that Mr. M did present a true and physical danger to his people by giving up information about them which could lead to violence, arrests, and even hangings.

Mr. M's Goal

Mr. M tells Isabel early in the play that it is his goal to have one particular student truly learn from him and succeed in life. Mr. M wants this student to be Thami, who he feels has the intelligence and leadership qualities to go far. Mr. M feels that his goal is never reached by his death, since he dies after Thami has dropped out of school to join the boycott. However, Isabel talks to Mr. M in her final monologue, promising him that she will fulfill his goal by

working hard in life. There is irony in Mr. M's special student turning out to be Isabel, and in the fact that he will never know if his goal is achieved, since he dies thinking it will not be.

Freedom

An important irony in *My Children! My Africa!* is shown when Isabel and Thami fight about the Comrades and how the revolutionary group Thami has joined will limit their ability to be friends. Isabel asks how this group could be said to bring freedom when they themselves are limiting what Thami does. Fugard stresses this irony by having Mr. M enter the scene at the moment that Isabel makes this argument; the teacher asks Thami to answer the question even when Isabel gives up on getting a satisfactory answer. Thami finally answers both of them that there is no comparison between the "discipline" (p.63) enforced by the Comrades and the legal restriction of the freedoms of black people under apartheid, but this does not convince Mr. M that there is not irony in the process.

My Children! My Africa! Imagery

Characterization Through Stage Directions

In a well-written, -directed, and -acted play, characterization should happen not only through dialogue but also through the translation of stage directions into motivated actions. These can be as large as the relation of characters and props to one another in space and as small as facial expressions. Fugard provides strong characterization through stage directions, giving the director and actors room to interpret but stating clearly the attitudes of the characters. This can be seen in his contrasting descriptions of Thami and Isabel as they prepare to deliver their closing statements in the debate in the first scene. Of Thami, Fugard writes "*HE is secure and at ease...His 'concluding statement' is outrageous and he knows it and enjoys it*" (p.8). This description shows Thami's intelligence, confidence, and sense of humor. Isabel, on the other hand, is out of her comfort zone, and Fugard writes, "*SHE takes the audience with direct unflinching eye contact. SHE is determined not to be intimidated*" (p.9). Though we learn later that she was surprised and uncomfortable at first in the location's school, she presents a powerful argument while embodying what she says about women's abilities.

Costumes

If one looks at the end of the play, a list of very specific costume notes are given, from notes on when characters change outfits entirely down to their underwear color in each scene. These visual details contribute to the tone of the play, creating certain mood-influencing color palettes and juxtaposing different characters. Almost all of the clothing is very formal, and there are very few colors used; most clothing is blue, white, black, gray, or tan. This means that any pops of color a director chooses to include, as costumes or props, will stand out. Furthermore, it gives direction in terms of the characters' comfort with one another as the play goes on; Isabel is written to have bare feet at the meeting that begins Act II and Thami wears casual clothing—a T-shirt, sweatshirt, and jeans—to his last meeting with Isabel.

The Location Through Isabel's Eyes

In terms of imagery through dialogue, this is mostly present during the characters' monologues to the audience, since the dialogue during multi-character scenes is much quicker and focused on plot and emotion rather than description. One moment of important imagery comes when Isabel describes the location. The location is an important setting for the play; it is the run-down area where black people from Camdeboo have been forced to live. Isabel describes it early in the play without much sympathy, saying, "Most of the houses—if you can call them that!—are made of bits of old corrugated iron or anything else they could find to make four walls and a roof. There are no gardens or anything like that. You've got to drive in first gear all the time because of the potholes and stones, and when the wind is blowing and all the dust and rubbish flying around..." (p.20-21). The other characters who live in the location—Thami and Mr. M—do not give much description of the location because it has become normal to them. Through Isabel, we are able to see not only the bad conditions of the streets and buildings in the location, but also how they compare to what she is used to just miles away in the center of Camdeboo.

Childhood

Two scenes of strong imagery come when characters describe their childhoods. In a monologue to the audience, Thami describes his mental and emotional transformation between Standard 2 to Standard 10, especially with regard to his opinions on the education system under apartheid. He describes in vivid detail his joy at going to school as a child, his treatment by teachers, and the day he was asked to read an essay about his life in front of the school. Though Mr. M is much older, he also shares a childhood memory during the scene where Thami tries to convince him to leave the school and stop provoking the Comrades. He lapses almost into flashback as he describes standing on a mountain during a school trip and being told about the power of books by his own teacher. These two parallel moments of imagery immerse the reader or audience in the characters' experiences and how these experiences shaped their current personalities and opinions.

Children! My Africa! South Africa and the Apartheid Era

The history of South Africa is usually divided into five eras: the pre-colonial era, the colonial era, the post-colonial and apartheid era, and the post-apartheid era. *My Children! My Africa!* takes place in 1985, which places it near the end of the apartheid era.

The pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras of South African history saw the Dutch and the British vie for years over South Africa's natural supply of diamonds and gold, which they discovered in the 19th century. The Boers, descendants of Dutch-speaking settlers in South Africa in the 18th century, ruled until their defeat in the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, which established South Africa as a dominion of the British Empire. The country became a self-governing nation state in 1934, between the two world wars, and apartheid began in 1948 following South Africa's participation against the Axis in World War II.

Segregationist and discriminatory laws existed in South Africa under Boer and British rule, but apartheid itself took place during the period in which South Africa was a self-governing

nation state. Apartheid was driven by the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, a political ideology that opposed involvement in the war against Nazi Germany in World War II, which allowed the National Party to take power through the election of 1948. The National Party government was all white, though the population of South Africa was less than 20% white at the time. Upon being elected, National Party officials immediately began the era of racist legislation known as apartheid, which means "separateness" in Afrikaans. Under apartheid, non-white South Africans were forced to live in separate areas from whites and use separate facilities. One of the most important legislative acts of the era, the Homeland Citizens Act of 1970, moved thousands of African people from South Africa to areas where black tribes once lived; the land they were moved off of was often redistributed to white citizens. For those who were allowed to remain in urban centers, mixing between whites and non-whites was discouraged and "pass laws" were established which required non-whites to carry documents authorizing their presence in certain areas.

Opposition to apartheid built during the 1950's and 60's, but the government and police used arrests and violence to break up activist groups. One prominent activist who was arrested for his participation in opposition to apartheid was Nelson Mandela, who was jailed from 1963 to 1990. Other nations began to take action against South Africa to spur an end to apartheid in the 1970's and 1980's; The United Nations General Assembly denounced apartheid in 1973 and the United Kingdom and United States imposed sanctions on South Africa in 1985. Due to this international pressure, the National Party began to overturn the laws of apartheid beginning in 1989, and a new constitution which enfranchised non-whites took effect in 1994.

My Children! My Africa! Literary Elements

Genre

Play

Language

English

Setting and Context

Camdeboo, South Africa in 1985

Narrator and Point of View

N/A

Tone and Mood

Realistic, somber

Protagonist and Antagonist

N/A

Major Conflict

Thami feels constrained by the education system under apartheid, causing him to clash with his teacher Mr. M who has more traditional views about life in South Africa.

Climax

Thami tries to warn Mr. M about the mob, but Mr. M refuses to listen and is killed by the mob at the end of Act II, Scene 3

Foreshadowing

Mr. M asks Isabel if Thami is having any problems; as early as Act I, Scene 1 we see that Thami does not want Mr. M to control him, which foreshadows the active resistance that comes only later.

Understatement

N/A

Allusions

Many allusions are made to famous poets and novelists while Isabel and Thami are studying for the literature competition.

Imagery

Thami and Mr. M both describe moments from their childhoods in great detail

Paradox

N/A

Parallelism

N/A

Personification

N/A

Use of Dramatic Devices

The play switches between scenes of dialogue between characters in specific settings and monologues by each character directly to the audience. Costumes and props are of great symbolic importance.

My Children! My Africa! Essay Questions

1. What are differences between Thami's and Mr. M's ideologies of change? What are the merits of both methods? What are the downsides to the different ideologies?

Thami believes that there must be a violent uprising that forces the government to end apartheid or at least change some of its laws and policies. In contrast, Mr. M believes that change must come slowly and happen by black people becoming educated so that they can influence lawmakers with their words and ideas. Both ideologies have their merits, since Thami's has the potential to achieve change faster while Mr. M's results in less violence and danger. Thami sees Mr. M's ideology as too slow and sympathetic to the white people; he believes that Mr. M feels this way because he is old and was raised all his life within a backwards system that he has come to believe is okay. Mr. M, on the other hand, feels that Thami and Comrades' cause lacks stability and morality.

2. Does the play indicate the author's viewpoint on whether it is better to fight with words or stones? Where?

Mr. M warns Thami that words are stronger tools for change than stones or even bombs, since words can influence white people to make large changes to apartheid where stones can only express anger and incite violence in return. Thami and Mr. M are both presented as strong, intelligent characters. But because Fugard was not black or directly part of the resistance to apartheid, it could be guessed that Fugard is more likely to believe in Mr. M's ideology, since he was an intellectual himself and wrote plays focused on the injustices of apartheid rather than participating in acts of physical violence. He also creates something of a martyr figure in Mr. M, who is killed for his difference in ideology even though he was a poor black man himself.

3. Why do you think the playwright included the scenes where only one character was onstage and spoke to the audience? What effect does this have on the plot, character development, and themes of the play?

When the characters of *My Children! My Africa!* give monologues alone onstage they are able to reveal things to the audience that they can't say to one another. The relationships between the characters are quite constrained by age, race, and propriety; Thami and Mr. M have difficulty communicating because of their roles as teacher and student, while Isabel and Thami have different views on race relations and gender equality. During these monologues, the audience can travel in time to Thami's past as he reflects on his views on education under apartheid, or hear Isabel's true thoughts about the location before she became friends with anyone from there. The plot is punctuated by these interspersed monologues, and they deepen the audience's understanding of characters and themes.

4. What is the significance of Isabel being a female? Why do you think the playwright made this choice?

Athol Fugard carefully chose to make gender equality as well as racial equality a theme his play. He does this in two big ways: by making the character of Isabel a girl, and by making the debate at the beginning of the play about women's rights to education in South Africa. Linking the ideas of gender and racial equality could help non-blacks and people outside of

South Africa to begin to understand the struggle of black people during apartheid. It gives a point of comparison, since both are hierarchies that some justify by reference to tradition and genetic differences. Furthermore, Fugard has written that he was very inspired to write *My Children! My Africa!* by seeing his daughter, a white woman, grow up during apartheid. This was likely a big part of his decision to create the character of Isabel and bring the issue of gender equality into the play.

5. Was the ending of the play hopeful or tragic? How was it hopeful or tragic for each of the characters?

The end of the play should be read as tragic, since Fugard intended the play to help people to understand the terrors of apartheid and provoke them to seek change. At the end of the play, Mr. M has died, and Thami has given up any dreams of higher education to join in the movement for change through physical violence. Some might not see this as tragic, but it is clear that Mr. M's goal for him will not be fulfilled. Isabel promises to fulfill Mr. M's goal, but because she is white and not Mr. M's favorite student, this is not really an equal substitution. Isabel always had hope for her future, since she is white, but the play ends with the black characters not achieving what they want.