

## MOTHER TO MOTHER STUDY GUIDE

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SINDIWE MAGONA

Sindiwe Magona was born in Umtata, a town in eastern South Africa, and grew up in Guguletu, a township outside of Cape Town. She attended primary school in Guguletu, but finished high school through a correspondence course. She then received a bachelor's degree from the University of South Africa, and in 1981 moved to New York to work on a master's degree in Social Work. In between, she did domestic work and worked as a schoolteacher. After receiving her master's degree, Magona worked for the United Nations, first working in radio and then in the Public Information department until retiring to Cape Town, her home, in 2003. Magona wrote throughout her life, spending her earlier years writing autobiographical prose, short stories, and novels, and beginning to explore children's literature in her retirement.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MOTHER TO MOTHER

Portuguese traders first began to explore the coastline of South Africa in the 1400s, but Europeans didn't begin to colonize the area until 1600s, when the Dutch East India Company created permanent settlements at what is now Cape Town. The settlements were a port to help passing ships on their way to Asia, but colonization expanded as greater infrastructure was required to serve said ships. Over time, the colony expanded along the coast and inland, with white colonists killing and enslaving (or forcing into indentured servitude) black Africans as they encountered them. Eventually British settlers also arrived, initially only interested in the Cape as a strategic port, but eventually going to war against Boers (or Dutch South Africans), officially taking control of South Africa in 1909. As long as white Europeans had been in South Africa, black Africans were forced to endure racism and discrimination. This was formally written into law in the mid 1880s, and further formalized in 1948—the beginning of the fifty year apartheid which denied civil and human rights to all black South Africans.

### INTRODUCTION OF CHARACTERS

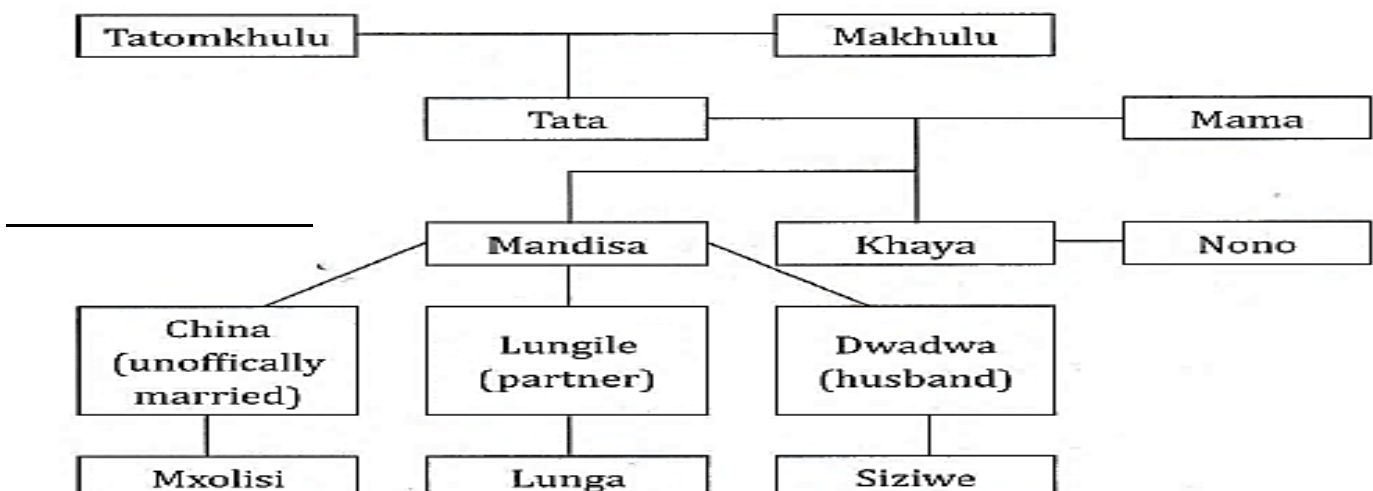
#### MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Mandisa Ntloko – Mother of Mxolisi and first person narrator
- Mxolisi – Son of Mandisa, involved in the killing of Amy Biehl, AKA Boyboy, Michael, Hlumelo)
- Amy Biehl – not part of the active storyline, but present in flashbacks, killed by a group of black teenagers, amongst others, Mxolisi

#### SECONDARY CHARACTERS:

- China – married (traditionally only) to Mandisa, father of Mxolisi, but not present in the active storyline.
- Lungile – unmarried partner of Mandisa, one son (Lungisa)
- Dwadwa – husband of Mandisa, father of Siziwe
- Tata – Mandisa's father
- Mama – Mandisa's mother
- Tatomkhulu – Mandisa's grandfather (Tata's father)
- Makhulu – Mandisa's grandmother (Tata's mother)
- Mzamo and Zazi – friends of Mxolisi while he is still a small boy
- Aunt Funiwe – Mandisa's aunt, Mama's younger sister
- Khaya – Mandisa's brother, married to Nono
- Nono – Mandisa's school friend, married to her brother

### **Mandisa's Family Tree**



## **SUMMARY**

Mother to Mother weaves back and forth in time, covering the narrator, Mandisa's life from her early childhood, through the birth of her children, through her son, Mxolisi's murder of the Girl, a white American driving through their township of Guguletu. This is interspersed with The Girl, Mandisa, and Mxolisi's experiences on the day of the murder, and the morning after.

The novel also includes interludes in which Mandisa addresses the Mother of the Girl, asking rhetorical questions about the Girl's life and upbringing, expressing her grief for the Girl's death, and attempting to explain—but not justify—Mxolisi's actions.

Chronologically, the novel begins with Mandisa's childhood. She and her brother, Khaya, were raised in Blouville, but were forced to relocate to Guguletu by the South African government. This derailed the educations of many students, although Mandisa and Khaya were able to remain in school for a while, at least until Khaya impregnated his girlfriend, Nono, and Mandisa became accidentally pregnant through non-penetrative sex with her boyfriend, China.

Mama, Mandisa's mother, is furious with her daughter, feeling that her pregnancy will embarrass the whole family, but eventually comes to love Mandisa and her newborn son. Mandisa's parents force her to marry China, who is no longer interested in her romantically, and the two lived together unhappily for two years, until one day China runs away and disappears forever. Mandisa then moves into a hokkie of her own and does her best to raise Mxolisi, eventually having another child, Lunga, with a man named Lungile, and finally marrying a man, Dwadwa, with whom she has her youngest child and only daughter, Siziwe.

Mandisa recounts Mxolisi's childhood. A talkative precocious boy, he stops talking for several years after witnessing the death of two older boys, Zazi and Mzamo. He regains his speech, but during his silence Mandisa realizes the resentment she feels for him, for interrupting her life with an unplanned pregnancy, and dramatically changing the course of her future.

As Mxolisi gets older he becomes involved in youth political movements, like the Young Lions. Increasingly radicalized and violent, this group burns cars, buildings, and even kills black South Africans around their township.

On the day of the tragedy, Amy is driving some of her black South African friends home from their university, when Mxolisi and others spot her in her car. A group of men converge, chasing her from the car, but Mxolisi is the man to stab and kill her. Mandisa discovers this later, spending the first night after the murder anxiously wondering if her son, who has not returned home, was somehow involved. A late night police raid of Mandisa's house furthers her suspicions.

In the morning, Reverend Mananga stops by and gives Mandisa vague instructions for how to see her son. She follows them and is briefly reunited with Mxolisi, whom she comforts and who comforts her, before he (presumably though not explicitly) turns himself in to the police.

## **CHAPTER 1**

- **Chapter Title: Mandisa's Lament**

A **lament** is an expression of extreme sadness or grief. Mandisa's grief is presented as a letter written by her (as the mother of Mxolisi) to the mother of Amy Biehl, the American student who was killed by Mxolisi and a group of black teenagers.

- **Introductory sentence:** *"My son killed your daughter"*

A shocking statement, it immediately captures the interest of the reader and lets the reader know who the letter is written to (Amy's mother) and by (Mandisa, Mxolisi's mother).

- **Paragraph 1: Mandisa's emotional status**

People's judgement of her son makes Mandisa feel as though she has some part in his actions. The piece indicates that Mxolisi has been difficult from a young age – in fact, from his conception. This is the first indication that his conception was unusual.

- **Paragraph 2 – 5: Sarcasm (as a coping mechanism)**

Mandisa keeps her thoughts busy by sarcastically reviewing the events in her head, should she have encouraged Mxolisi to kill Amy. She does this to reassure herself that people are being unfair towards her.

By initially referring to Amy as "a white girl" depersonalises Amy and turns her into any white female of her age. The sharp comment "where she does not belong" is Mandisa's attempt at shifting some of the blame from Mxolisi to Amy.

We can also tell from her sarcastic tone that Mxolisi would typically not think before acting. In paragraph 4 we see the first indication that the relationship between Mandisa and Mxolisi is strained. In paragraph 5 she appears exasperated and again portrays Mxolisi as behaviourally difficult.

- **Paragraph 6 – 8: Brief moment of acceptance**

It is clear that Mandisa knew that Mxolisi was capable of murder and she is in agreement that the act is wrong. However, she believes there is a reason for why things have led to this event. Mixed in some resentment, a second indication is given that Mxolisi's conception was unusual.

For the first time another member of the family is mentioned, Mxolisi's younger brother. The brother is not named in the text yet, but he is Lunga, only a half-brother of Mxolisi (they have different fathers, but the same mother).

The first mention of the theme of contingency takes place in the 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph. Mandisa dwells on the small things that could have happened different, to avoid the event that happened, but she is also aware that if something needs to happen, it will still happen, just possibly in a different way.

- **Paragraph 9 – 15: Blame shifting**

Mandisa thinks that Amy was irresponsible to put herself in a dangerous situation. Amy is portrayed as being naïve about actual dangers, but a good and compassionate person. Her lack of social awareness is at one point used as an excuse for her murder.

Racial tensions are first revealed in paragraph 13 by saying that if a black girl was killed, no-one in the country would have been aware or made it a big issue, but this is the murder of a white girl, so it has been getting lots of attention. (This is again emphasized at the end of paragraph 15) The second mention of this is in paragraph 15 where Mandisa purposely separate the areas in which white people and black people live and the type of activities that take place there.

Mxolisi's problematic behaviour is further emphasized by Mandisa's thought that Mxolisi does not learn any lessons from bad events and their consequences.

- **Paragraph 16 – 18: Attempt at justification**

Mandisa indicates that Mxolisi had a difficult childhood and elaborates on some of the things he's had to do to survive. She reveals that he is now in prison and comments on the irony that the government previously did nothing for the betterment of Mxolisi's life, but now that he is actually being punished for doing a wrong deed, the government is spending money on his food, clothes and housing.

- **Paragraph 19: A desperate prayer**

This paragraph reveals Mandisa's inner conflict between the knowledge that her son committed a serious crime and should be punished, and not wanting her son to suffer or for her to have to face the consequences his actions have had for her. At the end of the chapter, she asks for forgiveness for her son.

- **What we've learnt about Mxolisi**

- ✓ Uncontrollable from a young age
- ✓ Does not weigh up consequences before acting
- ✓ Disobedient
- ✓ Capable of killing
- ✓ Insensible
- ✓ Difficult childhood

- **What we've learnt about Mandisa**

- ✓ Aware of social standards and people's tendency to judge others
- ✓ Somewhat resentful towards Mxolisi due to various reasons
- ✓ Aware that certain ways of thinking can lead to certain behaviours and actions.
- ✓ Race-aware and aware of racial related tensions in her surroundings
- ✓ Realistic about Mxolisi's faults and aware of his darkness, but also empathetic, because she understands what he went through and how that led to current situation.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is a lament?
2. How is this lament represented and who is it written for and by?
3. What is the purpose of the short introductory statement?
4. Quote two places that indicate that Mxolisi's conception was unusual.
5. Discuss Mandisa's portrayal of Mxolisi as a child.
6. Why does Mandisa refer to Amy as "a white girl" in paragraph 7?
7. Discuss why it appears as though Mxolisi and Mandisa have a strained relationship.
8. Why does Mandisa think that Amy was irresponsible for putting herself in such a dangerous position?
9. Explain the racial tension found in paragraph 13 and 15.
10. What is the irony found in paragraph 18?

11. According to the first chapter, comment on what you think of the following characters:
  - a. Mandisa
  - b. Mxolisi
  - c. Amy

## **CHAPTER 2**

- **Chapter Information:**

Chapter two is a narrative of the morning of Amy's murder, leading up to the scene of the murder. There are three narratives followed:

- Amy's morning, first alone, then with her friends
- Mandisa's morning with her family until she leaves for work
- Mxolisi's morning after leaving the house

- **Chapter Title: Location and date**

The chapter heading tells us it's the day of Amy's murder. The first paragraph indicates that it's the morning.

- **Paragraph 1 - 11: Amy's morning alone**

Profiling of Amy's character and a narrative of her morning alone before she left to run her final errands. We learn here that Amy is supposed to go back to the USA the following day.

- **Paragraph 12 - 38: Mandisa's morning with her family**

The first paragraph contrasts the quiet, calm and reflective morning Amy had alone, to Mandisa's morning of chaos with her children.

Par 13 "...silent inert log..." – metaphor for her daughter that sleeps like a log.

Par 16 indicates that Mxolisi is not able to foresee a possible consequence before he completes an action.

Par 18 "...I possess the ability to raise the dead." – metaphor. Her family sleep like the dead.

Par 23 "Giraffe-like.." – simile, she compares her son to a giraffe (he probably has a long neck)

Par 24 – her way of telling him to greet everyone in the room. "throw" – metaphor, sharp way of speaking.

Par 35 shows that she has misplaced guilt. She feels guilty for not being able to spend time with her children, but it is because she has to work to make a living for them.

Par 37: Mandisa is creating the illusion that she maintains order, but everyone (her included) knows that she hasn't done so in a long time.

- **Paragraph 39 – 42: Amy**

The narrative of Amy's morning continues. Mandisa uses emotive language here to further convince the reader of Amy's good heart and personality. She assumes Amy's emotions and thoughts to get a specific reaction from the reader.

- **Paragraph 43 - 51: Mxolisi's morning**

We can see from the first paragraph that Mxolisi does not attend school.

In par 44 we are introduced to the political background that sets up the scene for Amy's murder.

In par 45 we learn that Mxolisi has been sent for a traditional ceremony where he goes into the mountains to the rural tribes to be circumcised. This ritual is supposed to take the form of a spiritual journey and have a positive effect, but in his case, the ritual has been unsuccessful. We learn that he bullies his siblings and that he is lazy, but an enthusiastic socializer.

Par 51 "Like a gigantic, many-limbed millipede..." – comparing the crowd and the growing of the crowd to a millipede with many limbs.

- **Paragraph 52 – 69: Amy's storyline**

Par 52 – 56 continues the narrative of Amy, here with her friends at the University cafeteria. The emotive language sets up the scene to where Amy offers her friends a lift.

Her initial reaction in par 57 shows that she intuitively knew it was not a good idea.

In par 60 – 64 one of Amy's friends, Lumka, had her own struggle, also realising that it's a bad idea, but she feels torn due to her friends' silence and the desire to spend more time with her friend she may never see again. This is a dramatic point in the storyline, because if Amy had listened to her friend and not given them a lift, it could have changed everything.

In par 65 we are again told of Amy's empathy and understanding.

- **Paragraph 70 – 105: Mxolisi's storyline**

Par 70 – 84 – Mxolisi and his group of teenage friends visit a church where they ask the pastor for the use of the venue for a meeting. The pastor cannot accommodate them and after a threat of violence from the crowd, the pastor hastily offers them a time the following morning.

In par 85 to 87 the group disperses and smaller groups break off from the main group to go to their own homes.

In par 88 – 99 the group come across a burning car, set alight as part of the area’s riots. The driver of the car has run off to save his own life. Police arrive on the scene and the group disperses.

It is clear that the group’s reactions have gone beyond reasonable as they are now destroying their own resources to express their anger.

The scene of the burning car adds to the underlying tension that the writer is building up throughout the chapter.

In paragraph 100 – 105 the main group again breaks off and the remaining group is moving closer to the scene where the murder will take place, singing struggle songs. They were obviously out looking for whatever trouble they could find, as can be seen from par 105.

- **Paragraph 106 – 110: Amy’s storyline**

The writer takes us back to Amy, who is getting in her car with her friends. The mood is sombre, because it is their last time together. The sombre mood adds to the building tension.

- **Paragraph 111 – 122: Mxolisi’s storyline**

Mxolisi’s group continues past the police station on their way home.

In par 116, Amy’s car enters Gugulethu while the crowd sings a struggle song.

Par 118 – 120 shows that the crowd is eager for excitement – so eager that they will create it themselves.

Par 121 “The car is small.” This sentence stands alone to have impact – the car could have been missed, but the crowd saw it.

Par 122 gives us an indication of how Amy’s murder started – the crowd was gathering around the car, angrily shaking their fists in the air.

- What we’ve learnt about Amy:

- Happy person
- Long, thick, dark hair
- Good person
- Generous
- Fit and strong body
- Kind heart
- Deserves better
- Empathic and understanding

## **QUESTIONS**

1. There are three storylines in this chapter. Which characters are being followed?
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs:  
par 13; par 18; par 24
3. Comment on what you’ve learnt about Amy’s physical appearance and character traits.
4. Explain the illusion that Mandisa is trying to create in par 37 and why it fails.
5. Discuss the purpose of the writer’s explanation of the political background in par 44.
6. Explain the ritual in par. 45.
7. Explain Amy’s initial reaction when she offered her friends a lift.
8. Discuss Lumka’s inner struggle in par 60 to 64 and why it is so important to the story.
9. Discuss the scene of the burning car in par 88 and what we have learnt about the crowd of people that set it alight.
10. Comment on the following sentence: “The car is small.”

## **CHAPTER 3**

- **Chapter Information:**

Chapter three is a continuation of the narrative in the present (1993) and follows the following narratives:

- Mandisa’s afternoon at work
- Mandisa’s bus trip and walk home
- Mandisa’s childhood where her family was forced to move to Gugulethu.

- **Chapter Title: Location, date and time**

The chapter heading tells us it’s still the day of Amy’s murder, but now in the afternoon.

- **Paragraph 1 – 24: Mandisa at work**

We meet Mandisa’s boss, Mrs Nelson, who comes home in a rush, telling Mandisa that she has to go home, earlier than usual.

Par 2: Mandisa again emphasizes the segregation between black and white, by referring to Mrs Nelson as “the white woman that I work for”.

Par 4 – 13 describe Mrs Nelson’s “day off”. Par 7 in particular highlights the difference in social / economic class by Mandisa’s lack of knowledge such as gym and the unfamiliar circumstances of unmarried white women (par 9)

Par 10 shows a contradiction in “happily unhappy” – Mrs Nelson obviously enjoys the food, but (happily), but is **unhappy** about the effects it has on her body (makes her fat)

Par 13 again shows the difference in their economic classes where Mandisa compares her “off day” to Mrs Nelson’s off day.

Par 14 – 24 tells us about Mandisa’s trip with Mrs Nelson to the bus stop. In par 14 we see that a man that does nothing but work in the garden is again a strange concept to Mandisa.

Par 15 tells us about the normal routine of a Wednesday at Mandisa’s work – Mr Nelson comes home first and then Mrs Nelson, usually late and just before dinner.

Par 16 contains the first signs to Mandisa that something is wrong – Mrs Nelson is early, in a rush, doesn’t ask about the kids like she always does and the car engine is still running.

Par 20 strengthens this feeling for Mandisa, because Mrs Nelson is not complaining like she usually does.

Par 23 contains a metaphor – “a small marble is playing hide and seek along her jawline” – Mrs Nelson is clenching her jaw, obviously feeling tense.

Par 24 “White people are not allowed to go there”. This is Mandisa’s way of emphasizing that Amy was wrong to go to Gugulethu.

- **Paragraph 25 - 3: Mandisa getting on the bus**

Par 25 highlights how black people felt that they were not treated right: “The very activity revealed a desperation, a deep distrust.. They did not believe they would be adequately served.

Mandisa’s thought in par 29 “So, what’s new?” shows us that the unrest and rioting happens frequently and again serves as background information to portray the setting of that day.

In par 30 Mandisa realises that the youth have problems that negatively affect the entire society.

Par 33 – the fullness of the bus and fact that many people were standing in the bus, shows the desperation and unrest of the crowd, just wanting to get home.

In paragraph 39 the mood is one of doom and darkness, which adds to Mandisa’s anxiety of not knowing what is going on.

- **Paragraph 35 - 73: Mandisa’s experience as a child, being forced to move with her family to Gugulethu.**

**The year is 1968 and Mandisa’s first introduction to Gugulethu is not a positive experience.**

Par 44 shows a very negative and dreary description of Gugulethu, which shows us that Mandisa is prejudiced. She didn’t want to leave Blouvillei, so that made her already decide that she does not and will not like Gugulethu.

Par 46 emphasizes her feelings when she refers to Blouvillei using the emotive words “beloved home”. This is also the beginning of Mandisa’s need to constantly segregate black and white – the white people are now the only people allowed to live in Blouvillei, which means the black people need to find another home.

In par 47 she further expresses her dislike by personifying the sand (“unfriendly sand”)

Par 49 tells us about the spirit of the people from Blouvillei, who were willing to help each other when there is a need.

Par 54 gives us Mandisa’s perspective on the apartheid government’s manner of shifting the responsibility of problems that they do not want to solve themselves.

In par 56 she uses a metaphor to compare the sand that is blown everywhere by the wind, to the people who were “blown” into a new place to live.

In par 58 she is being sarcastic when she says “No one has ever **accused** the Department of Bantu Education of being that (a systematic organisation). She is actually saying that the department is extremely disorganised.

In par 68 she uses another metaphor “We die young, these days.” She is saying that people lose the ability to feel, because there is too much hurt. The paragraph also again emphasizes the chaos involved in the school system during that time.

In par 70 – 73 she mourns the life she lost when she had to move from Blouvillei.

- **Paragraph 74 - 107: Mandisa’s bus ride and walk home**

Par 74 – 88 shows how the distrust she experienced when first coming to Gugulethu has intensified over the years – people don’t trust each other’s word any more.

Par 88 – 89 further worsens Mandisa’s anxiety as she realises that the riots that were causing so much chaos was right by her house. The pressure is starting to build and we can sense her anxiety to get home as soon as she can.

Par 90 shows us that Mandisa is also very prejudiced towards the police from the way she describes the police station as they pass it in the bus.

In par 91 we see that despite their troublesome relationship, Mandisa feels the deepest for Mxolisi of all her children and he is possibly her favourite, even though she tells herself that she loves all her children.

Par 95 – 96 again emphasizes the distrust among the people and lack of empathy within their own race, the unwillingness to take care of each other, but rather focus on fulfilling their own desires first.

In par 98 she uses another metaphor “The crowd engulfs me and swallows me whole.” She is saying that she is surrounded by people and lost in the crowd as if she was swallowed by some huge monster.

Another metaphor in par 99 is “I find I cannot take one step without **putting my foot on a policeman**” – she is saying that the police are everywhere and consists of most of the crowd. The simile “They are like ants...” gives us a visual image of how the police’s presence is experienced.

In par 100 Mandisa has two concerns: the first is for how close the rioting has happened to her house. The second is for her daughter Siziwe – par 101 explains her concern by indicating that many girl children are being raped in Gugulethu daily.

In par 102 we see that she hasn’t prayed in a long time, which reveals that she has lost hope a long time ago.

In par 103 she is comparing her two sons and their personalities to each other.

In par 104 Mandisa fell over someone and lost her shoe. She is starting to feel desperate about the fact that her house is so near, but it is taking such a long time for her to get there through the crowd. Her metaphor “...the air had been oven baked” shows us that the air was hot from all the bodies in the crowd and their breaths in the air.

In par 105 she realises that there is anonymity in a crowd, you become the crowd and lose your identity as an individual. She then uses this anonymity in par 106 to push and shout her way home, where she finds Siziwe standing in the doorway.

The unanswered question in par 107 continues to build concern and tension.

- **Mandisa’s first impressions and experiences of Gugulethu:**
  - It’s packed with houses, people, dogs, peddlers and children.
  - It’s chaotic
  - The children have no goals and just roam the streets, unmotivated and uncared for.
  - The houses are ugly, impersonal, cold and unwelcoming
  - The area is big and congested, which is oppressing
  - The streets are dirty and because there are puddles of dirty, stagnant water that never seems to disappear, there are mosquitoes and flies everywhere.
  - Nothing grows there, there is only infertile sand
  - There is a constant, vicious wind that blows sand everywhere.
  - She is lonely, because she has lost all her friends

Mandisa did not want to leave her previous home, Blouvillei, where she was very happy, so we experience her image of Gugulethu as prejudiced.

### QUESTIONS

1. Explain which storylines are being followed in this chapter
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs:  
par 23; par 56; par 68; par 98; par 104.
3. Discuss the differences between Mandisa and Mrs Nelson’s social/ economic classes, highlighted in par 7, 9 and 13.
4. What is Mandisa’s normal routine on a Wednesday at work and how is this Wednesday different?
5. Quote Mandisa’s use of emotive words in par 46 that portrays her feelings towards Blouvillei.
6. Discuss Mandisa’s initial impression about Gugulethu when she arrived there as a child.
7. Quote an example of personification from par 47 and explain why she used this phrase.
8. Explain the difference between people’s attitudes toward each other in par 49 and then in par 74 – 88 and par 95 - 96.
9. Explain the simile Mandisa uses to describe the police in par 99
10. What can we tell from Mandisa’s words “I found myself doing something I had not known I still remembered”?
11. Why is she concerned for Siziwe’s safety in par 100?
12. Explain what happened to Mandisa in par 104 and how it affected her behaviour in par 106.
13. What is the purpose of the unanswered question “Where are your brothers?” in par 107?

### CHAPTER 4

- **Chapter Information:**

The chapter carries on from where Mandisa came home to find chaos in Gugulethu and Siziwe standing in the doorway.

- **Chapter Title: Location, date and time**

The chapter heading tells us it’s still the day of Amy’s murder, but now 7 o’ clock in the evening.

- **Paragraph 1 – 12: Mandisa and Siziwe**

The first part of the chapter talks of Mandisa’s concern for her children. Now that she saw that her daughter is safe, her attention has shifted to her two boys.



“I was more worried about Mxolisi” This is an indication that Mandisa may have had a premonition about Mxolisi’s involvement in the day’s events.

“..it could be the unusual way in which he came into this world..” – third indication of Mxolisi’s unusual conception.

Par 3 shows us that Mandisa still defends Mxolisi in her trail of thoughts, despite all the problems she’s had with him. In par 5 – 6 we can deduce from Siziwe’s body language that she knows more about what happened than she is letting Mandisa know.

Par 7 “A sour face. Yesterday’s custard left outside the fridge” Simile for the expression on Siziwe’s face before she went inside the house.

In par 10 we see Siziwe again avoids answering Mandisa’s questions clearly, making us feel that she knows more.

Par 11 shows us Mandisa’s victim complex. She feels unappreciated by her family and feels sorry for herself that Siziwe didn’t even notice her condition when she arrived at the house.

Par 12 gives Mandisa the first chance to face the fact that all her children are home, except for Mxolisi. He has now become the full focus of her concern, which also leads to her defending him in her thoughts.

- **Paragraph 13 - 50: Mandisa and her neighbour**

Par 13 “Bang! Bang!” – onomatopoeia for the sound of knocking at her door. We can tell from Mandisa’s thoughts that she does not particularly like her neighbour.

Par 16 shows us some of Lunga’s character – he likes to read and can lose himself in his stories.

Par 17 “shambled” – metaphor for the speed and clumsiness with which Mandisa rushed to the door.

Par 19 is the first time the neighbour speaks and we immediately experience her as the typical nosy neighbour, who likes to be up to date on the gossip in the area.

Par 29 “That thin shaft..” – metaphor, she compares the small amount of hope she feels to a thin line of light coming through a doorway.

Par 31 – 33 is Mandisa’s thoughts.

Par 31 repeats the words “Every day” three times to emphasise that these terrible things she is describing, really happens daily.

Par 32 creates a feeling of opposition between the people of Gugulethu and the police. It paints a picture of black people’s experience relating to support from the police: “..are not **our** friends”; “**They** are”; “**we** do not like the police”; “a presence **we** dread”; “in **their** care”

Par 34 “I woke up” – not literally, but from her train of thought.

Par 39 “gloating” – shows us that Skonana thinks better of herself because she is not weighed down by the responsibility of children.

Par 43 “Each word rolled off her tongue as a bullet from a gun: bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!” – onomatopoeia and metaphor for the feeling of shock Mandisa gets when hearing that the events took place so close to her house.

Par 48 “as though I were talking about the slaughter of a chicken.” – Simile, she is comparing asking about the girl’s death like asking about a chicken’s slaughter.

Par 49 “..but heavy as hell.” The feeling that Mandisa got from the word “knife”.

Par 50 – the line stands alone for impact, so that the horror of the act may be emphasised.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Explain where this chapter fits into the main storyline of the book.
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs:  
par 17; par 29; par 43.
3. Quote two lines from par 5, 6 and/or 10 that give us the idea that Siziwe maybe knows more about what happened that day than what she is leading on.
4. What are the two things Mandisa is comparing in par 7?
5. Discuss the emergence of Mandisa’s victim complex.
6. Identify and explain the onomatopoeia found in par 13 and 43.
7. In par 31 the words “every day” are repeated three times. Comment on this.
8. Comment on the feeling of opposition Mandisa creates between the people of Gugulethu and the police in par 32. Quote to support your answer.
9. Comment on the last line of the chapter “They stabbed her.”

## **CHAPTER 5**

- **Chapter Information / Storylines:**

- 1: The day of Amy’s death, where Mandisa was mid-conversation with her neighbour at home.
- 2: Mandisa’s childhood – the end of her life at Bloulevi and the beginning of Gugulethu



- **Paragraph 1 – 2: Mandisa and Skonana**

This section speaks of Mandisa's reaction of shock to the news that a white girl was stabbed so close to her home.

- **Paragraph 3: Mandisa speaking to Amy's mother**

- **Par 4: Connection between current situation and Mandisa's move to Gugulethu**

- **Paragraph 5 – 145: Mandisa's childhood – the first rumours of the move up to the actual move to Gugulethu**

Par 5 – 6: Mandisa paints a picture of a happy childhood in Blouvlei and introduces the theme of the innocence of children into the chapter. She narrates herself as a carefree and happy child, so that we can understand her love for Blouvlei and the resulting devastation she felt because she had to leave.

Par 8: "... fishing out money out of her overall pocket." Metaphor: she was feeling in her pocket for money.

Par 10: "... beckoned Mama Mandila's little corrugated iron hut..." Personification: she feels drawn and called to the hut.

Par 11: "Like ships on choppy seas, golden-brown peaked-shaped balls bobbed cheerfully in the turbulent oil." Simile: comparing vetkoek dough to ships and oil to sea.

Par 11: "... singing itself hoarse." Personification for the noise made by the dough due to the heat.

Par 15: "Those days..." lets us infer that those signs of respect towards elders are not enforced anymore.

Par 19: Mandisa uses persuasive techniques on her mother to convince her to give her another vetkoek – sweet voice and using nice words in a polite manner.

Par 24: A reminder of the innocence of children – they are only concerned with what they want.

Par 29: "... as the compliments soaked through to the marrow in my bones." Metaphor: comparing the way water soaks into clothing / the ground to the way the compliments are flowing over her.

Par 33 is the characters' first introduction to the fact that they will move to Gugulethu. Mandisa purposely translates what she heard into her native tongue, to confirm that she heard the words correctly.

Par 39: Reaffirms her priorities as a child.

Par 43 links to the theme of children's innocence by showing that Mandisa's definition of trust is based on irrelevant details.

Par 44: "Like the rollings of the dung beetle..." Simile: Comparing the way the rumour spread to how a dung beetle moves around.

Par 45 is the first time Mandisa seriously considers the rumour of the move.

Par 47 – 55 shows the initial way in which the community chose to deal with the rumour – mostly denial and trying to justify why it wouldn't be possible, in order to reassure themselves that it is not a reality.

Par 50: "... sea of tin shacks..." Metaphor: comparing the amount of tin shacks to a sea in its vastness"

Par 50: "... lying lazily ..." Personification: Visual perception of the shacks

Par 52 links back to the theme of children's innocence by showing that as a child, emotive words were enough to soothe her and she was not worried about factual information, but rather used her parents' emotional state as a guide to how she should feel.

Par 56: "... the rumour, all (a) grown and bearded, (b) armed with the stamp of the government ..."

(a) Personification: Comparing the rumour to the signs that a boy has become a man (grown up and can grow a beard).

(b) Metaphor: comparing the fact that the letter is issued by the government, to a gun that is loaded.

Par 57: Mandisa again starts her story by illustrating the peaceful and happy routine of life in Blouvlei to emphasise why she was so attached to it.

Par 59: "Not content with that form of torture..." Metaphor: comparing going to church to being tortured.

Par 59: "...Sunday sun was stingy as a young widow with a dozen children to feed." Personification: comparing the sun and how quickly it seems to set on Sundays to a widow that does not hand out food to anyone, because she keeps it all to feed a bunch of hungry children.

Par 60: "...with the sun going home..." Personification: comparing the sun's setting with a person who goes home after a day's work.

Par 61: "...furiously bleeding sky." Metaphor: Compares the way that the sound of the airplane reaches them to the way blood runs out of a fresh wound.

Par 64: "... either deaf or stingier ..." Personification: interpreting the fact that the airplanes never answer them, as the airplanes being deaf and/or stingy.

Par 64: "It completely stole our tongues." Personification: They were shocked by the airplane into silence, so they are comparing the airplane to a thief who steals things (in this case, their tongues).

Par 69 – 72: Birds are used as a metaphor for the flyers that are falling out of the plane:

- "thin flat birds learning to fly" – metaphor to describe the way the papers look when they are falling.
- "some fluttered gently off and away" – metaphor to describe the way the papers move in the air due to air currents.
- "they'd danced their way" – metaphor to describe the movements of the papers before they fall down.

- “the sand was carpeted with the flat birds that could not fly” – metaphor for the way the papers were spread on the sand like a carpet.
- “There they lay, as silent...” – metaphor to say the papers were just lying still on the ground.
- “the strange birds the plane had birthed lay there” – metaphor: the way the papers came from the plane was like the process of giving birth.
- “some of the birds fluttered and hopped...and made as though they would take off” – metaphor: the rush of air caused by the boys’ movements cause the papers to move around.
- “fluttering still, fluttering, settled back on the sand” – metaphor: the papers were falling back to the ground.

Par 78: The first and closest to a formal announcement and confirmation of the move the Gugulethu.

Par 79: Mandisa’s first reaction to the news is one of unhappiness. In par 80 the realisation that Blouville was all she’d ever known, hit her and she realised that she didn’t want to leave.

Par 88: “The caterpillars above his eyes...” – Metaphor: comparing his eyebrows to caterpillars.

Par 91 shows the first shift in Mandisa’s childlike innocence where she realises the weight of the news her parents just heard, and then decides that her issue of not being thanked for bringing the paper, is not important in that moment.

Par 95: “Like bees smoked out of their hive...” Simile: comparing the way the people moved out of their houses after being called, to the way bees swarm from their hive.

Par 100: Shows that Mandisa’s earlier moment of “adult-ness” was just a moment and that they are only concerned with what it contained in the present moment.

Par 102: “...peach turned to plum...” Metaphor for the way the sky changes as the sun sets.

Par 110 shows us that the community was very indecisive on what to do about the upcoming move, they felt confused and concerned.

From par 120 the exit from Blouville starts.

Par 125 shows us that Mandisa’s father was not a person who showed much physical affection, like hugging or kissing his children.

Par 134: “...foreign shapes loomed...” use of emotive words to create a sense of dread and fear.

Par 135: “As though enacting a long-rehearse macabre dance, ...sprang uniform-clad white men.” – Simile – comparing the practised way in which the men exited their vehicles to a rehearsed dance.

Par 135: “In a cloud of pinkfleshed faces...” Metaphor: Comparing the amount of faces to the vastness of a cloud.

Par 135: “...like unruly children...” simile: comparing the destructive behaviour of the white men to that of a child.

Par 143: “Like the forced migration fleeing Shaka... our parents trekked.” Simile: compares the move her parents had to make to the move of Shaka and his people.

Par 143: “...endless acres of farms taming the sandy Flats...” Personification: the Cape Flats is a sandy place and the farms help to reduce the amount of sand around, thus the farms are keeping the sand in control like a human that makes an animal tame.

The journey that Mandisa’s parents had to follow by foot was approximately 25km. See the map for a probable route that the settlers had to follow with their belongings:

### QUESTIONS

1. Identify the emotive language in par 5 – 6 and explain the image that Mandisa is trying to create.
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs:  
par 8; par 29; par 50; par 59; par 61; par 69 – 72; par 88; par 102; par 135; par 189; par 200; par 205; par 206; par 213.
3. Identify and explain the uses of personification in the following paragraphs:  
par 10; par 11; par 50; par 56; par 59; par 60; par 64 (two occurrences); par 143.
4. Identify and explain the uses of simile in the following paragraphs:  
par 11; par 44; par 95; par 135; par 143.
5. Identify and explain the uses of figurative language in the following paragraphs:  
par 147; par 205.
6. Explain the use of the words “those days” in par 15.
7. Identify the persuasive techniques used by Mandisa in par 19.
8. Why did Mandisa translate the words of the man in par 33?
9. Explain the community’s reaction to the rumour; when it came out, how they thought about it over time and after the plane dropped the flyers off.
10. Why does Mandisa paint the story of a happy life in par 57?
11. Identify examples of the metaphor of the flyers and explain what it means.
12. What did we learn about Mandisa’s father in par 125?
13. Identify the emotive words in par 134 and explain their use.
14. Identify and explain the contrast illustrated in par 148 to Mandisa’s memory of Blouville.

15. How can we see that Dwadwa is not fond of Mxolisi?
16. Identify the similarities between the nun in East London and Amy.
17. Comment on the structure the writer uses from par 175 to par 183.
18. Discuss Mandisa's use of the quotation from chapter 1 in par 184.
19. Summarise the process of the degradation of the youth, as explained by Mandisa in par 191 – 207.

## CHAPTER 6

### Chapter Information / Storylines:

The storyline continues early on the morning after Amy's death.

Mandisa is up early after a restless night, filled with concern for Mxolisi. She hears activity in front of her yard – a car door closing.

Par 11 – Mandisa is always sure to highlight Mxolisi's good deeds too.

Par 12: "fraught" means "filled with something undesirable". She is saying that anything might happen, but that it will probably not be something good. This is an example of emotive language.

Par 12: "Happenings that will loosen some tongues, ... while others it will still..." – Metaphor: The things that happen will make some people talk (cause a hype) or silence other people (possibly kill)

Par 14: "My heart is a witchdoctor's drum" Metaphor: Her heart is beating fast.

Par 14: "The silence is suffocating" Metaphor: The silence makes her feel anxious, as if she cannot breathe.

Par 14: "BANG! CLANG-BANG" – Onomatopoeia of the banging sounds against the shack.

Par 17: "... shaking like a leaf blown about by a fierce South-Easter gale." Simile. Siziwe is shaking viciously out of fear.

Par 18: "Pat her as though I were putting a little baby to sleep" Simile. Mandisa comforts Siziwe as if she was a baby.

Par 19: "...the back door, as though someone were butting his shoulder against it..." Simile. She tries to describe the noise by identifying the source.

Par 35: "... as though coming through a loudspeaker." Simile. The man's voice was very loud in the tiny shack.

Par 37: "...agitated beams dart back and forth..." Personification: the movement of the beams of light from the flashlight are quick, as though the beams are feeling agitated.

Par 37: "...frog at the back of my throat." Metaphor: It feels as though there is something in her throat, because she cannot speak.

Par 38: The candle is personified: "...frightens the candle, upsets its tummy and it erupts, spewing (a) **molten lava**..." (a) **Molten lava** is a metaphor for the hot wax from the candle.

Par 39: "An army of policemen..." Metaphor: She is comparing them to an army, because there are a lot of policemen. This is also a hyperbole (exaggeration), because an entire army could not possibly fit into her house.

Par 42: "Alarm tasted bitter in my mouth." Metaphor: She is so alarmed by the situation, she feels as though she has a bitter taste in her mouth.

Par 51: "...an unholy din dyes the air." Metaphor: The noise is so overwhelming, it seems like it is changing the air.

Par 55: "bullfrog-face" Metaphor: She is comparing his face to a bulldog, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Par 63: "My face is on fire." Metaphor: The policeman slapped her and it makes her face feel hot like it's on fire.

Par 70 is a decisive moment for Mandisa. She realises that something is terribly wrong and a part of her probably knows that Mxolisi is involved with the white girl's murder. She knows that their family is about to have their lives uprooted and that they would never be the same again.

### QUESTIONS

1. Identify and explain the emotive language in par 12.
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs: par 12; par 14 (two occurrences); par 37; par 38; par 39; par 42; par 51; par 55; par 63.
3. Identify and explain the uses of personification in the following paragraphs: par 37; par 38.
4. Identify and explain the uses of simile in the following paragraphs: par 17; par 18; par 19; par 35.
5. Identify and explain the use of onomatopoeia in par 14.
6. Discuss the hyperbole in par 39.
7. The last paragraph of the chapter shows a big moment for Mandisa. What happened in that moment?

## CHAPTER 7

### • Chapter Information / Storylines:

It is January 1972, Mandisa is 13, almost 14. This chapter tells of Mandisa's childhood, a few years after moving to Gugulethu and how she became pregnant.

Par 1: Mandisa quotes her words from chapter 1 to link to the previous chapter, but also to let the reader know what the chapter will be about.

In par 2 we learn Mxolisi's exact birth date as 4 January 1973, when Mandisa was 15 years old.

Par 2: Juxtaposition: Mandisa compares her concerns of the year before, with her concerns of when she gave birth to Mxolisi, to show how different they are.

Par 7: "moon time" refers to her period.

Par 7: "upside down year" – metaphor to say that it has not been a good year, lots of change and new things.

Par 7: "limped" Personification: The year is being compared to an injured person's limp.

Par 7: "ennui" means "a feeling of listlessness and dissatisfaction due to being bored or having nothing to do". This is emotive language, she feels that her mom has been nagging her, because her own life was boring and she had nothing better to do.

Par 10 "halcyon" means "a time remembered as being idyllic and happy". This is emotive language, she is saying that the days of Blouvlei were happy as if it came from a storybook.

Par 11: "I was flung back..." Metaphor: Her memories overwhelmed her.

Par 13: "My heart doing the gumboot dance..." Metaphor: Her heart was racing with excitement.

Par 25: "fished" Metaphor: she was looking for it in her bag.

Par 27: "secure guard" Metaphor: She should watch her words as if there is a guard in front of her mouth.

Par 36: "litany" means "things that are tediously repeated". This is emotive language, she is saying that the things that happened, happened one after the other, until she felt tired from all the bad things happening.

Par 39 "My stomach plunged to my knees" Metaphor for the feeling of shock she felt.

Par 41: "Eyes burned" Metaphor for the intensity of the emotion in her eyes.

Par 45: "her eyes said" Personification: The look in her eyes was clear as if the words had been spoken.

Par 49: "Handsome as spring weather, and as popular." Simile: She is comparing China to spring weather.

Par 50: "Mama would kill me" Metaphor for how angry her mother would be.

Par 52 tells us that Mandisa's mother did not have the sex talk with her. This contrasts their good relationship from Mandisa's Blouvlei memories.

Par 53: "rotten potato" Metaphor for how people would see Mandisa if she became pregnant.

Par 57: Mandisa's mother uses a popular traditional method of checking whether her daughter is still a virgin.

Par 57 "unspoilt, whole" Metaphor for being sexually pure.

Par 65: "It killed her" – Metaphor for how upset she was.

Par 80: "burn marks" Metaphor: If you don't listen (eg "Don't touch the hot stove plate!"), there will be consequences (eg your fingers will be burnt)

**Par 91:** 3 months later

Par 92 "face swam before my eyes" Metaphor to say she saw his face in her thoughts.

Par 92: "Fleeing..." Metaphor: She gets up to be busy, so that she doesn't think about China, which hurts her.

Par 95: "my daily bread" Metaphor: She had to face the consequences of the things that happened, daily.

Par 95: "Bitter as gall" Simile: She feels bitter about what happened.

Par 98: "Still as a heron" – simile: Comparing her mom's silence with the calculated stillness of a heron (bird that catches fish), preparing to hunt.

Par 99 is one of the first indications of the crumbling of Mandisa's faith.

Par 100: "Mocking me..." Personification: The fact that there is a letter, but it's not from China, is ironic and it feels to her that the letter is mocking her due to this irony.

Par 106: "deluge" means "severe flood". This is emotive language to show that it doesn't happen frequently that a letter arrives from East London (in particular, Aunt Funiwe).

Par 119: "Biblical Elizabeth" Intertextuality: referring to a Bible character who was barren (couldn't have children of her own).

Par 130: "The aunt I had determined would be my salvation" Metaphor: By saying her aunt is her salvation, she is comparing her situation to something she needs to be saved from.

Par 131: "New life injected itself into Makhulu's being..." Metaphor: The news from Funiwe energised her.

Par 131: "attacked" Metaphor for eagerness with which they completed the tasks.

Par 131: "She was a woman possessed" Metaphor for the excitement that took hold of her like a demon possesses a body

Par 131: "the serrated knife that ceaselessly tore at the tender flesh of my heart took a pause." Metaphor: The excitement was a distraction from the pain she'd felt at being separated from China.

Par 133: "angrily red mist": Personification: A description of the colour of the rising sun – red is being associated with anger.

Par 138: "My heart turned to a ragged-edged block of ice that tore at something inside me till it bled." Metaphor for how the nervousness was making her feel.

Par 149: Mandisa had mentioned a few times in this chapter that she resents her mother for sending her away. She is very angry at her mother and this is a definite break in their relationship.

Par 157 lets us know that her aunt noticed something her gran should've noticed before, but we are not told what she noticed.

Par 168 refers to how girls managed their periods in that time – with a rag.

Par 169: "Silence." The word stands alone, serving a dual purpose: firstly to illustrate the moment of silence that took place and secondly to make sure the reader realised what was just implied – that Mandisa was pregnant.

Par 177 is written in a specific manner that tells us that she was saying these words as answers to questions from her gran and aunt.

Par 192: "She has been jumped into!" The sperm from China and Mandisa's "play-sex" may have landed on her inner thighs, but one sperm cell made its way into her vagina and ovaries and impregnated her.

Par 193 at the end shows us that Mandisa's first instinctive feeling about the pregnancy is one of joy.

Par 196: "flood" Metaphor for the amount of tears her mother cried.

Par 196: "torrent of tears" – alliteration and metaphor for her mother's incessant crying.

Par 197 – 199: Mandisa's mother's first concern after hearing her daughter is pregnant, is not for her daughter, but for herself and for what the people will think of her.

In the last part of the chapter, Mandisa realises what the impact of this pregnancy will be on her life and future.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. There is a jump in the timeline from the previous chapter to the current one. Explain the purpose of the first paragraph to indicate the timeline that will follow.
2. Identify and explain the metaphors in the following paragraphs:  
par; 7; par 11; par 13; par 25; par 27; par 39; par 41; par 50; par 53; par 57; par 65; par 80; par 92 (two occurrences); par 95; par 130; par 131 (four occurrences); par 139; par 196 (two occurrences)
3. Identify and explain the uses of personification in the following paragraphs:  
par 7; par 45; par 100; par 133
4. Identify and explain the uses of simile in the following paragraphs:  
par 49; par 95; par 98
5. Identify and explain the uses of emotive language in the following paragraphs:  
par 7; par 10; par 36; par 106.
6. What in the chapter indicated that Mandisa's relationship with her mother is not what it used to be in Blouvillei?
7. Comment on the use of intertextuality in par 119.
8. Explain what happened when Mandisa went into her gran's room and her aunt Funiwe saw her.
9. Compare Mandisa's initial reaction to the realisation that she was pregnant, to her thoughts at the end of the chapter.

### **CHAPTER 8**

#### • **Chapter Information / Storylines:**

- Par 1 – 2: Mandisa speaking to Amy's mother
- Par 3 – 30: **1972:** Mandisa as a young girl, coming home with her mother after discovering that she's pregnant.
- Par 31 – 43: **1972:** Mandisa trying to get into contact with China
- Par 44 – 84: **1972:** Mandisa's first encounter with China since she came back home
- Par 85 – 96: **1972:** The start of negotiations with China's family.
- Par 97 – 100: **1972:** The start of wedding arrangements.
- Par 101 – 139: **January 1973:** Mxolisi's birth and first two months.
- Par 140 – 155: **April 1973:** The marriage ceremony
- Par 156 – 183: **April 1973:** Mandisa's arrival at her new home.
- Par 184 – 237: **1973 – 1974:** The first year of China and Mandisa's marriage.
- Par 238 – 255: **January 1975:** China's disappearance.
- Par 256 – 258: **1975 – 1977:** Mxolisi's early life
- Par 256 – 285: **1977:** The incident with Zazi and Mzamo.
- Par 286 – 291: **1977:** Visit 1: Mandisa's brother, Khaya and the Red Cross Hospital
- Par 287 – 318: **1977:** Visit 2: Nono (Mandisa's sister-in-law)
- Par 319 – 354: **1977:** Visit 3: China's father and the sangoma.
- Par 355 – 403: **1977 – 1993:** Nono and Khaya's wedding; Mandisa meets Lungile, has a son (Lunga); Mxolisi's school days until high school; his involvement in politics. Mandisa meets Dwadwa and has a daughter Siziwe. The chapter ends three weeks before the murder, telling of how Mxolisi saved a girl from being raped.

### 1. Mandisa speaking to Amy's mother

Par 1: Mandisa continues her letter to Amy's mother, focusing again on the mother-aspect. This introduces the continuation of Mandisa's storyline, after discovering that she is pregnant.

### 2. 1972: Mandisa coming home (Par 3 – 30)

Summary: Mandisa travels back home with her mother, who is visibly upset about her pregnancy. Once they're home, her mother forbids her to leave the house, in the fear that the neighbours will see that she is pregnant and judge them. Her father ignores her and her mother does not allow her to see China until her family has presented his family with her pregnancy. She writes a note to China, in the hope that she would be able to get it to him somehow.

Par 4: "taciturn" – doesn't speak much

Par 9: "loquacious" – very talkative

Par 12: "Bumpity-bump-bump-bump" – onomatopoeia, mimicking the sound the car makes as it drives over the uneven road; "palpable" – can feel it

Par 13: "haunted voice" – **metaphor**: her mother's voice is being compared to a ghost's voice. "arduous" – difficult

Par 14: "ludicrous" – extremely crazy. "interminable" – never-ending.

Par 16: "forlorn" – sad and lonely

Par 19: "only to be **mocked, laughed at** by the empty and sightless window." – **Personification** – she feels as though the window laughs at her because she could be so silly as to think China is there, calling her.

### 3. 1972: Mandisa trying to get into contact with China

Summary: Mandisa bribes two girls she knows to give her note to China.

### 4. 1972: Mandisa's first encounter with China since she came back home

Summary: China received Mandisa's note and immediately came to see her. China did not know about her pregnancy and is visibly shocked when he first sees her. She tells him exactly what happened, but he doesn't believe her, telling her to find the guy who is responsible for her pregnancy (he thinks she slept with someone else). Mandisa is shocked and hurt by his reaction. After they have a fight, she tells him to not come into her house again.

Par 50: "cloying" – disgusting from being too sweet

Par 53: "a mask carved from the hardest wood" – **Metaphor** – his face has no friendliness or love in it for her, but is hard and unmoved.

Par 55: "...in his **granite** face." – **Metaphor** – his face is cold and hard, like a slate of granite.

Par 57: "imperceptible" – almost can't see through it. "...darted thin but deadly tongues of fire." – **Metaphor**: the look in his eyes were as dangerous as flames.

Par 59: Ellipsis – used for emphasis and to evoke an emotional reaction.

Par 63: "aghast" – filled with horror or shock. "rigid" stiff

Par 65: "distended" – bloated, swollen.

Par 67: "vehemence" – forcefulness

Par 68: "irritation now **wrestled** with fear." – **Personification**. Her two main emotions are being irritated with the fact that China does not believe her, and afraid at what that would mean for her. The emotions are portrayed to be wrestling with each other.

"My words seem to have **unbottled** him" – **Metaphor**: his emotions are let out, like a bottle being emptied.

Par 74: "I stood there" – repetition is for emphasis, she was lost in the moment. "cur" – disgusting, despicable man.

Par 75: "a massive **wave** of anger." – **Metaphor**: Her anger is compared to a big wave in the ocean.

Par 77: "incensed" – very angry

Par 82: "thick turgid nectar of the plump aloe leaf." – **Metaphor**: China's betrayal makes her feel as bitter as the juice from an aloe leaf.

"turgid" – swollen

### 5. 1972: The start of negotiations with China's family.

Summary: Mandisa is 6 months pregnant and is presented to China's family, in order to start negotiations about the future. After engaging in talks, China's family tell Mandisa's family that they will confer amongst themselves and send word to Mandisa's family when they have an answer. Mandisa ends up regretting telling China not to visit her again.

Par 88: "peculiarities" – different to what is normal or expected, strange. "bombshell" – **Metaphor**: the shocking news that she is still a virgin, but pregnant, is compared to the shock from experience a bomb explosion.

### 6. 1972: The start of wedding arrangements.

Summary: At 8 months pregnant, Mandisa is with China at the Priest's office. The priest convinced them that they needed to get married, to "do the right thing". Preparations were started for the wedding and China went off to the bush for a month to get circumcised in order to prepare him for manhood.

Par 97: The priest is considered to have authority above the opinions of others and even China's family accepts his instructions.

Par 98: "paraphernalia" – miscellaneous articles, especially the equipment needed for a particular activity.

**7. January 1973:** Mxolisi's (Hlumelo) birth and first two months.

Summary: The negotiations with China's family are still taking place and have turned ugly. Mxolisi is born before the wedding can take place. Mandisa has a moment of motherly bonding with Mxolisi (who at this stage is still called Hlumelo), where she feels as if she loses all resentment she had towards him. Her father also responded positively to him, which helped mend his relationship with his daughter.

The negotiations between Mandisa and China's families had not yielded fruit and are still ugly. Mandisa discussed her options with her parents and they all agreed that she would go back to school and follow evening classes. Mandisa did not want to marry China anymore. With her father's support, Mandisa enrolled for classes for the following year. However, when China's family heard this, they hastily objected and said that Mandisa and China should get married after all.

Par 100: "...the sun's rays **pierce** the dark night and **bleed** a new day into being." **Metaphor:** the sunrise is described using imagery, but the whole image is also a metaphor for a new beginning in Mandisa's life.

"flouting" – to openly disregard

Par 101: "eight pounds four ounces" – 3.7kg

Par 122: "Assorted Biscuits" – **metaphor** for many children from different fathers (with the implication that they will all refuse to accept their children)

Par 138: "prevaricated" – to be evasive

**8. April 1973:** The marriage ceremony

Summary: Mandisa marries China, but not in a formal ceremony. His family pays lobola to her family and she moves to his home, as tradition prescribes. As Mandisa leaves her childhood home in a van with only a few possessions, we see that she still resents Mxolisi for uprooting her life.

**9. April 1973:** Mandisa's arrival at her new home.

Summary: Upon arrival at China's house, the tradition of welcoming a new wife to the clan takes place (AKA induction). The evening is a disaster for Mandisa as she is embarrassed and ridiculed by her new family members.

Par 165: "veritable beanpole" – **Metaphor:** she is compared to a pole used to guide beanstalks when they grow.

Par 167: "A snake slithered down the furrow in my back." – **Metaphor:** The embarrassment stiffens her as if a snake is slithering down her back.

**10. 1973 – 1974:** The first year of China and Mandisa's marriage.

Summary: Mandisa and China's first night as married couple ends in a fight. This would set the pace for the next year.

Mandisa needs to completely the duties of a new wife:

- Get up at 4:00
- 5:30 take coffee to all her in-laws.
- Prepare breakfast and serve the family before they leave for work.
- Wash the young kids and dress them for school, pack their lunch bags.
- Empty chamber pots
- Get the children to school
- Tidy the house: make beds, pick up clothes, sweep the house, laundry
- Attend to Mxolisi
- Prepare dinner
- Make tea for the adults as they arrive from work
- Serve dinner

China got a job, his dreams of boarding school dashed, but he hated the job. He resents Mandisa for his current situation, saying that she could've had an abortion. Mandisa is shocked by this and thinks back on her childhood friend, Ribba, who died during a botched abortion. Mandisa tries to go back to school, but her new family has many excuses.

Par 184: "enmity" – a state of feeling active opposition or hostility.

Par 191: "perpetually" – constantly, never changes

Par 198: "with all Canaan open before us..." **Metaphor:** Canaan is the promised land Moses lead the Israelites too.

Mandisa compares this to her marriage with China, saying that they had the chance to make the dreams they once had of being together, true.

Par 199: "Two dead dry logs." – **Metaphor** – Mandisa compares their feelings towards each other to dead tree stumps – old and dead.

Par 209: Mandisa refers back to the earlier metaphor of the dog in the nettles.



Par 214: "...carefully careless..." **Juxtaposition** – although Ribba was a careful girl, her final actions proved to be careless. Placed next to each other to emphasise the contradiction.

Par 219: "prowess" – skill or expertise in a particular field.

Par 230: "I shrunk; because he was." – **Metaphor**: Mandisa feels smaller (less important), because Mxolisi is now more important than her dreams or ambitions.

### 11. January 1975: China's disappearance.

Summary: Mandisa again brings up the topic of going to school, but there are more excuses. She realises that she will never get to go back to school. Two weeks after Mxolisi's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, China disappears without a word to anyone. His family seems to blame her for his disappearance and search for him everywhere; at his job, police stations and hospitals. Eventually, China's father stopped coming to the house, which also meant that they would receive no money from him. Mandisa then finds a job to support herself and Mxolisi. Within 6 months of working, Mandisa leaves China's house and starts renting her own tin shack where she stays with her son.

Par 239: "...water to a sieve." **Metaphor** – Mandisa realises that the promises made about her education are not solid – like expecting a sieve to hold water.

Par 252: "the ground had opened up and swallowed him whole" **Metaphor** – he disappeared as if he had fallen into a deep whole. "swallowed" – **personification** – the earth is given the ability to perform the actions of a human.

Par 255: "...I had become a real square peg in a round hole." **Metaphor** – Mandisa did not fit into the household without being someone's wife.

### 12. 1975 – 1977: Mxolisi's early life

Summary: Mxolisi grew fast and had a good vocabulary at a young age. He is displayed as an exceptional child with a bright future, even though the changes in his life affect him. Mandisa spends a lot of time with him; kicking a ball, spinning a top, peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek (a game he was very fond of) and I spy with my little eye.

### 13. 1977: The incident with Zazi and Mzamo

Summary: Mxolisi is now four and has two friends, called Zazi and Mzamo, already in their early teens. They always do everything together, except when they go to school (or bunk classes). Mxolisi and Mandisa hear gunshots outside, followed by Mzamo and Zazi anxiously running into the main house and hiding in one of the cupboards. Their family takes Zazi's jacket and throws it outside near the fence and try to convince the police that the boys had jumped the fence. Just as the police are about to leave the scene, Mxolisi gives away their position – interpreting the events before him as the familiar hide-and-seek game he loves to play. The boys try to run away from the police and both are killed by gunfire. Mxolisi witnesses this and is shocked by what he saw. So much so, that he stopped speaking for two years. The boys are buried and Mxolisi shows no emotion, still not speaking. After a month of silence from Mxolisi, Mandisa's mother speaks to her boss, who tells them to take Mxolisi to the hospital.

Par 259: "Boys knocking at the door of manhood." – **Metaphor**: the boys are almost men, as close as the time between knocking on the door and it being opened for you.

Par 262: "paroxysms" – a sudden attack or outburst of a specific emotion.

Par 267 "caustic" – sarcastic in a bitter way.

Par 283: "...for him to come back. Return from wherever he had gone." **Metaphor**: not absent in body, but absent in mind.

### 14. 1977: Visit 1: Mandisa's brother, Khaya and the Red Cross Hospital

Summary: Mandisa asks her brother Khaya to visit with his daughter, Nobulumko, to fix her roof and she hopes that Mxolisi will talk to his cousin. But although they play and Mxolisi enjoys himself, he doesn't speak. Mandisa had taken him to the Red Cross Children's Hospital, where they were treated kindly, but it had no effect on Mxolisi. They tell Mandisa that he is emotionally sick and that he needed time – he would start speaking again when he was ready.

Par 287 "stubbornly dumb" – mute, as if he's choosing to be quiet on purpose.

Par 288: "They could not plant what the police had scorched away..." **Metaphor** – the doctors could not undo the trauma that the police had caused.

### 15. 1977: Visit 2: Nono (Mandisa's sister-in-law)

Summary: Mandisa's school friend and now sister-in-law visits her. She plays with Mxolisi trying to catch him off-guard so that he would speak. He doesn't, despite all her efforts. The two women end up talking about their last school year and how their lives had changed since.

Par 300: "eloquent" – fluent and persuasive.

Par 303: "coaxed" – persuade gently and gradually; "provoked" – stimulate someone to get a specific reaction. "discernible" – able to make out what someone is saying.

### 15. 1977: Visit 3: China's father and the sangoma.

Summary: China's father was informed of Mxolisi's silence and subsequently visits the family. It is six months since Mxolisi had spoken and China's father suggests that they take him to a sangoma. The sangoma senses Mxolisi's sorrow, but also

says to Mandisa that she must stop resenting her son. She gives them roots and powders as treatment, but also advises that he simply needs time.

A few weeks later, Nono is visiting again and reveals that she is pregnant again and planning to get married to Khaya. The conversation leads Mandisa to the realisation that she indeed does resent Mxolisi for everything she had to sacrifice to be a mother to him.

Par 326: “agitation” – a state of anxiety or nervous excitement.

**16: 1977 – 1993:** Nono and Khaya’s wedding; Mandisa meets Lungile, has a son (Lunga); Mxolisi’s school days until high school; his involvement in politics. Mandisa meets Dwadwa and has a daughter Siziwe. The chapter ends three weeks before the murder, telling of how Mxolisi saved a girl from being raped.

Summary:

- Par 355 – 365: Mandisa meets Lungile at Nono and Khaya’s wedding and they go home together.
- Par 366 – 369: Lungile had started living with Mandisa. She fell pregnant and had Lunga, her second son.
- Par 370 – 376: Mandisa experiences problems with Mxolisi, who starts wetting his bed when his new brother is born.
- Par 377 – 382: Mxolisi speaks for the first time in more than two years.
- Par 383 – 385: Mxolisi keeps improving, but never asks for his friends. He starts school and is top of his class. In standard five (grade 7), he receives corporal punishment at school and Mandisa had to convince him to keep going to school.
- Par 386 – 389: Lungile leaves the family to train as freedom fighter. Mxolisi gets a job to try and support his mother, but she again convinces him to stay in school.
- Par 390 – 403: Mxolisi goes to high school, where he gets involved in politics and becomes a leader. Mandisa meets Dwadwa, has Siziwe and marries Dwadwa. Three weeks before the murder of Amy, he saves a local girl from being raped and is considered a hero by the community. Now, however, the community is treating Mandisa as if she raised a monster.

Par 356: “...a nose that made me think of the map of Africa” – **Metaphor** – his nose is crooked.

Par 376: “...agape...” – hanging open.

Par 380: “old-man’s hooded look” **Metaphor** – he realises that she doesn’t have an answer for him and in that moment, he looks like an old man who has the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Par 385: “invariably” – always, in any case. “cajoled” – persuade someone by flattering them.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss China’s reaction to seeing that Mandisa is pregnant by referring to his body language. Quote and interpret the metaphors used to emphasize his body language and facial expressions.
2. Describe the emotional response that Mandisa had to China’s disbelief.
3. Name two positive things that happened when Hlumelo was born.
4. Shortly discuss Mandisa’s induction ceremony in her new home by focusing on the reactions of her new family members. The purpose is to ultimately identify how her new family feels about her.
5. Par 230: “I shrunk because he was.” Discuss what feelings Mandisa reveals towards her son in this sentence.
6. Discuss Mandisa’s emotional response to China’s disappearance and the changes she had to make to her life as a result.
7. Explain what happened in par 259 – 278, focusing on Mxolisi’s point of view of the events.
8. What did Mandisa and her family do to try to get Mxolisi to speak again?

## **CHAPTER 9**

### • **Chapter Information / Storyline**

It is 26 August 1993, the morning after Amy’s murder. The police burst into Mandisa’s house looking for Mxolisi. After they attacked Lunga and destroyed some of their belongings, the police left.

This chapter follows the two hours after this incident; Mandisa’s interactions with her neighbours, her children and her husband.

Par 1: “assailed” – to make a violent attack on something / someone.

Par 2: “psychotic paralysis” – a mental lameness, being in a state of shock where one cannot think clearly.

Par 3: Mandisa’s rant against the police makes use of sarcasm to mock the efficiency of the SAPS’s service to black people.

Par 11: “retreating” – moving away. “falter” – be unsure, hesitate.

Par 17: “...annoys Dwadwa, he will immediately **donate** that person to me.” **Metaphor** – any association Dwadwa has with a person that annoys him, is assigned to someone else, so that he can direct his anger. The “re-assignment” of that association is compared to a donation. “oblivious” – unaware, not affected by

Par 20: “superficial” – shallow, not serious.

Par 26: “varicose” – swollen, twisted, lengthened due to poor blood circulation. “amicable” – friendly, doesn’t want to fight.

Par 29: “meddlesome” – interfering, curious in an annoying way

Par 33: “panicky cooing of a frightened dove.” – **Metaphor** - Siziwe is being compared to a frightened dove. “grotesquely” – extremely ugly.

Par 59: unwillingness, hesitant, doubtful

Par 76: “suppressed” – to hold back.

Par 84: “lethargic” – tired, inactive, sluggish.

Par 99: “dragging such a thorny bush of a scandal” – **Metaphor**: the scandal he envisions Mxolisi bringing over them, is compared to a thorny bush that not only pricks the skin, but also sticks to it (meaning the scandal will not only be bad in the moment, it will last forever.)

## QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the metaphor found in par 17: “he will immediately **donate** that person to me.”
2. Discuss how the following metaphor found in par 99 ties into the theme of **presience**: “...he will come here dragging such a thorny bush of a scandal, you won’t know what to do with yourself or where to hide your eyes.”

## CHAPTER 10

### • Chapter Information / Storylines

Par 1 – 110: Mandisa has a flashback to times spent with her Grandfather and the stories he told her of the Xhosa people.

Par 111 – 271: The afternoon after Amy’s murder. Mandisa is lead to Mxolisi’s hiding place.

#### 1. Par 1 – 110: Mandisa’s flashback

Summary: Mandisa has a flashback / dream of before she went to school and her Grandfather told her about the Xhosa prophet, Nongqawuse, who lead the Xhosa people in burning all their crops and cattle, believing it will herald a new day with a more prosperous future.

**Contextuality:** The real history of the Xhosa cattle burning:

In 1856, a 15year old girl, Nongqawuse came home saying she had met the spirits of three of her ancestors. They gave her the following prophecy:

- the dead would arise
- all living cattle must be slaughtered (because they were raised with **impure hands**)
- cultivation would cease
- new grain would have to be dug
- new houses would have to be built
- new cattle enclosures would have to be put up
- new milk sacks would have to be made
- doors would have to be weaved with buka roots
- the people must abandon witchcraft, incest and adultery.

In return, the spirits would sweep the British settlers (white people) into the sea.

The ancestor Nongqawuse saw resembled one of her dead uncles, which is why the clan believed her.

The prophecy was repeated to the chief, who ordered his followers to obey the prophecy. Between 300 000 and 400 000 head of cattle were killed and most of the Xhosa people’s crop were burnt.

A small minority refused to take part in the killing of cattle and burning of crops, and Nongqawuse used this as justification for why the prophecy didn’t come true.

She predicted that the prophecy would be fulfilled on 18 February 1857 and that the sun would turn red. This did not happen.

Eventually, everyone who had believed her prophecy, turned against her. The end result was a great famine, which reduced the population of Xhosa people from 105 000 to fewer than 27 000.

Par 19: “great blue river without end” – **Metaphor** for the ocean.

Par 39: “...bearing rich promise too” – **Metaphor** the promise is in the harvest the crops will bring.

Par 40: “fallacious” – based on a mistaken belief.

Par 63: “mastication” – to grind or crush finely.

Par 66: “button without a whole” **Metaphor**: refers to money. The Xhosa people had no need for money / coins and their initial rationalisation of money was that coins resembled a button, but it did not have a hole it would fit into.

Par 71: “zenith” – climax or at its highest point.

Par 84: “...rivers **roared**...” – personification.

Par 89: “intimation” – indication or hint.

Par 91: "...is it at a robust tree trunk the drowning man clutches?" **Metaphor**: when you are desperate, you cling to the smallest thing to give you hope that things would change.

Par 95: "vultures" **Metaphor** for the white people, who came to the villages to see what they could salvage.

Par 97: "Good Volume" – **Metaphor** for the Bible.

## 2. Par 111 – 271: Present day storyline

Summary: Mandisa wakes from her nap and is visited by the pastor at whose church Mxolisi wanted to have the meeting. He slips her a secret message and after following his instructions, Mandisa ends up meeting Mxolisi in his hiding place. The interaction is emotional and she learns that he was indeed one of the people who stabbed Amy Biehl.

Par 125: "reeled" – to stumble, not function properly.

Par 130: "unpalatable" – distasteful, not good.

Par 132: "inveigled" – convince by deceiving or flattering.

Par 134: "...its comforting, accommodating lap." **Personification** of the chair by saying it has a lap, like a human.

Par 156: "ceaselessly" – non-stop.

Par 182: "sauntered" – walk slowly and relaxed.

Par 243: "Thunk" – **onomatopoeia**.

Par 249: "unequivocal" – clear, certain, confident

Par 267: "jamboree" – a large celebration or party. This is a **contradiction**, because the emotions she is feeling right now is not related to a celebration.

Par 269: "A hundred years later.." – **hyperbole**.

### QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how the British took advantage of Nongqawuse's failed prophecy.
2. Discuss the various emotions present in Mandisa and Mxolisi's interaction.

## CHAPTER 11

### • Background

Mandisa had just met up with Mxolisi the day after Amy's murder and discovered that he was involved. She addresses Amy's mother again in this chapter.

### • Chapter Information / Storylines:

Par 3: Mandisa is trying to justify the murder again, by asking if Amy had not been exposed to the same dangers in her own country.

Par 5: The previous day Mxolisi was a hero, because he led a group of teenagers in their political endeavours and saved a young girl from being raped. But today those same people are judging him and casting him aside.

Par 7: **Metaphor** – Mandisa is comparing her son to a dog that has been worked up for the hunt to explain how we remain apart from their actions, while they take all the risk involved.

Par 9: Mandisa speaks to Amy's mother.

Par 10 – 13: Mandisa discusses the realisation that parents are responsible for their children's actions, but that parents don't even notice what their children are busy with.

Par 16 – 28: Mandisa's neighbours arrive at her house to help her grieve. At first, she wishes they would leave her alone, but when she realises why they are there, she is grateful and draws strength from her friends.

Par 30 – 31: Mandisa is addressing Amy's mother.

### QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the metaphor Mandisa uses in par 7 in an attempt to take the blame for the murder away from her son.
2. In par 10 – 12, Mandisa comes to a stark realisation about her community and the way their children are raised. What did she realise?
3. In par 16 – 28, something special happens to Mandisa. Discuss what happened and the significance of the event.
4. How is Mandisa trying to console Amy's mother in par 31?

## CHAPTER 12

### • Chapter Information / Storyline

Mandisa addresses Amy's mother again in this chapter and ends off the story of how Amy's murder took place.

Par 1 – 4: Mandisa addressed Amy's mother, telling her what "opportunity" looks like for the people of Gugulethu, emphasising their dependence on white people and their need of manual labour.

Par 5 – 6: The setting is described in detail, so as to describe the background of the event taking place.

Par 9: "Nothing sets it apart. Nothing. Until you look inside." – shorter sentences to build up the tension of the final moment.

Par 10: “splinter” – **metaphor** – Mandisa compares the smaller groups leaving the main group, to splinters on a piece of wood coming away from the main frame.

Par 11: “...the car comes to a **reluctant** stop” – personification – the car is made to seem hesitant to stop, as if it knows what is ahead.

Par 14: “Instantaneous ignition” – **Metaphor** – the individual’s reaction to Amy in the car is compared to a flame that ignites immediately, upon the first try.

Par 21: “...into a one-minded monster” – **metaphor** – the crowd and their mob-mentality is compared to a monster that only has one idea in mind.

Par 32: “The **pack** races forward..” – **metaphor** – the group of people are compared to a pack of animals, probably hunting animals, which is an effective metaphor, because just as animals out on the hunt, they are thirsting for Amy’s blood.

Par 36: “...emitting a surprised groan” – **personification** – the car appears to be surprised by the action requested from it.

Par 43: Amy speaking to herself, trying to tell herself that everything will be okay.

Par 45: “**unthinking** winds” – **personification** – the wind is described as almost uncaring, not thinking about the impact of the words it is carrying.

Par 47: “An **earthquake** rocks the car” – **metaphor / hyperbole** – the rocking of the crowd against the car is compared to an earthquake.

Par 53: “the **darkened stomach** of the car” – **metaphor** – the car is dark inside (as a person’s body is on the inside) due to the crowd blocking out the sunlight.

Par 53: “...now **naked**, unglazed windows” – **personification** – the empty window frames are compared to a naked person.

Par 67: Mandisa is admitting that Mxolisi has been programmed for this moment by years and years of exposure to racial tensions, hatred and unfair treatment. His upbringing led to this exact moment.

Par 71: To show that there was no proper reason for her murder, simply the fact that she was white and present in a black suburb.

Par 72 – 73: Mxolisi and Amy are described here next to each other as **juxtaposition** to emphasise the difference between them: Mxolisi is less than 100m from his house, but he is lost in a figurative manner. Amy is thousands of kilometres from her home, but not lost at all – she found what she wanted to do with her life. The juxtaposition is repeated in par 76 – 77.

Par 80: “Perhaps not yet.” – this is a dark ending to the novel. Mandisa is saying that if things worked out differently, her son might not have murdered Amy and become a murderer. But by saying “not yet”, she is admitting that it was inevitable for him to end up being a murderer. This links up with par 67, where she notes that his upbringing led him to commit this act of hatred.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the monologue Mandisa has with Amy’s mother in the beginning of Chapter 12.
2. Comment on the techniques used by the writer in the remainder of the chapter, to build tension up to the climax, where Amy is killed.
3. In par 74, Mandisa says: “Died when the time and place and hands were all in perfect congruence; cruel confluence of time, place and agent.” Discuss this statement and how it ties into the theme of contingency.
4. Discuss the final sentence of the chapter and what it finally reveals about Mandisa’s opinion of her son.

## **THEMES**

### **COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID**

Every part of the lives of the black South Africans at the centre of the novel are influenced and informed by the legacy of white European colonialism and apartheid. Although decades of oppression and forced relocation affects every aspect of the black South Africans’ lives, the murder at the centre of the novel is specifically a result of racist policies and reflects the specific tensions and resentments of the murderer Mxolisi’s generation. Mandisa, the narrator and Mxolisi’s mother, argues that the conflict at the core of the book, a white woman’s murder at Mxolisi’s hands, is the logical conclusion of decades of tension and oppression, which lead both to simmering violent resentment on the part of young black South Africans as well as doomed white Western attempts at intervention and de-escalation. Although the murder comes less than a year before the official end of apartheid, the novel suggests that the legacy of three hundred years of colonial oppression remains inescapable and continues to shape every aspect of South African’s future.

Though a fictionalized account, Mother to Mother is based on a real crime: the murder of Fulbright scholar Amy Biehl in Guguletu, South Africa, in August 1993. By providing a detailed history of the real-life political climate that its fictional characters face, the novel argues that Mxolisi’s violence is the logical outcome of centuries of racist oppression. Mandisa, in her letters to the Mother of the murdered Girl, explains, “Your daughter. The imperfect atonement of her race. My son. The perfect host of the demons of his.” Mandisa believes that her son was driven by the hatred instilled in black South Africans because of centuries of mistreatment by white South Africans and colonizers. Mandisa also argues that Mxolisi,

having seen the bleak future in store for him—a future seemingly guaranteed by the disenfranchisement of black South Africans under apartheid—turned to anger and protests. She explains that Mxolisi “was only an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race. Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being. [...] The resentment of three hundred years plugged his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties. My son, the blind but sharpened arrow of the wrath of his race. Your daughter, the sacrifice of hers. Blindly chosen. Flung towards her sad fate by fortune’s cruellest slings.” Both Mxolisi and the Girl, then, tragically become puppets of a larger, centuries-long conflict.

Magona goes on to detail how the more specific political climate of much of Mxolisi’s life lead to his radicalization. Black South Africans have become increasingly upset with the white government that quarantines them in segregated slums and then fails to provide them with adequate education or opportunity. Mandisa reports essentially non-stop, increasingly violent protests since the 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising, which have created growing animosity towards all white people. These protests are the result of centuries of colonial oppression as well as apartheid, which began in 1948 and created sometimes-unliveable conditions for black South Africans. Mandisa feels Mxolisi’s radicalization was thus not entirely his fault, describing how, with respect to violence, “We had been cheering him on since the day he was born. Before he was born. Long before.” Mandisa further describes how the youth were radicalized: “The Young Lions. From near and far, admiration fell on their already swollen heads [...] Our children fast descended into barbarism.” Again, this wasn’t fully the fault of the children, who were deprived of adequate schooling and whose parents were largely absent, forced to work long hours for low wages. Mandisa does accept responsibility for praising the early stages of her own community’s violence, which seemed a fair and logical response to the violence of apartheid. Mandisa explains how the younger generation “went and burnt down their schools” before they “graduated from that and from burning buildings. Unoccupied buildings. Public buildings. Now, they started stoning black people’s cars. And burning black people’s houses.” So intense was their rage that it spilled over onto their own people. This points to the immense strain South Africa’s colonialist and racist history placed on black communities, whose understandable anger quickly grew out of control.

Mandisa also details how her own life has been heavily affected by apartheid and colonialist oppression, thus underscoring the deep roots of racism and how a lack of opportunity and resentment accumulated over generations. Born in the late 1950s, Mandisa grew up under intense government-sanctioned racial segregation. Racism robbed her of experiences that could have afforded her a better life, and, in turn, increased her resentment of her white oppressors. Whereas white communities were free to accumulate wealth and power that then led to a better start for their children, black communities didn’t have the chance to build that foundation necessary to create a better life for future generations. Instead, they were stuck in a cycle of oppression and poverty, and this understandably led to resentment being passed down from generation to generation. In explaining how she was forcibly relocated to Guguletu, Mandisa calls the city an “accursed, God-forsaken place” occupied by “a violent scattering of black people, a dispersal of the government’s making,” so impactful that “more than three decades later, my people are still reeling from it.” Mandisa’s circumstances also mean she is unable to closely watch her children because she must work six days a week. This is the direct result, again, of limited opportunities for black Africans, uneven wealth distribution, and cyclical poverty that makes it impossible to earn enough money to enter the middle class. All of this contributes to Mandisa’s absence as a mother, which prevented her from having greater oversight of her children.

The world of *Mother to Mother*, and by extension, the world of all black South Africans in apartheid-era South Africa, is deeply affected by centuries of racist policies. White settlers—who became governors and eventually politicians, police, and military enforcers—regulate most aspects of black South African’s lives, leaving them with little freedom and little opportunity, keeping them from education, quality housing, and opportunities for escape and advancement. The murder at the centre of the novel is the result of centuries of simmering rage, in which Mxolisi, a kind of sacrifice of his generation, takes out the pain of the oppressed black South Africans on a white woman, who comes to represent all of white colonialism in the region.

### **FAMILY, TRADITION, AND OBLIGATION**

The members of the black South African families at the centre of *Mother to Mother* rely on each other and their larger community for support and structure. In a country where many social support systems and government help have failed, black South Africans are left only with the strong, tight-knit communities and family units that have carried them through since before colonization. These groups, tied by proximity, blood, and tradition, offer a sense of comfort and safety in a hard world. However, as Mandisa discovers most poignantly when she joins her new husband’s family, they also create distinct expectations and demands that can be incredibly burdensome. The novel ultimately argues that family and community, and the obligations that come with them, are both a blessing and a curse—at once a support system and a prison.

Mandisa’s life is a testament to the way that family units can be a source of productive discipline and firm guidance, as well as encouragement and support. As an adult, Mandisa loves and does all she can for her children. At the same time, she believes that as a mother it is her duty to give them rules to follow and keep them in line. She notes, “As I step out of

the door minutes later, I hastily throw out a couple of reminders: what they're supposed to do for me that day around the house, what food they're not to touch. [...] Not that I think this makes any difference to what will actually happen. But, as a mother, I'm supposed to have authority over my children, over the running of my house." To her, love and respect and authority are all tightly connected, and as a parent she is a figure who alternately offers comfort and discipline when necessary. Mandisa's own parents raised her this way: she recalls how her strict mother would bring her and her brother to church while other children had Sunday mornings free, and would rarely let the kids out to play, instead saddling them with errands and chores. Mandisa implies that even though her younger self felt stifled at times, living in accordance with such rigid rules gave her a structure and set of boundaries that she needed as a child. As she got older, Mandisa was motivated to continue with school because of her mother's pressure, and now similarly encourages her children to attend classes. Though Mandisa's childhood was far from perfect, she benefited from the firm structure and moral guidance that her mother provided her with, and went on to model that combination of support and constructive discipline for her own children.

At the same time, the novel highlights how family relationships can require obligations that are too demanding, and how adherence to wider community traditions and expectations can actually burden or isolate individuals and push them away from their families and communities. For instance, when Mandisa becomes pregnant despite having carefully avoided penetrative sex, her mother and father (Mama and Tata) practically disown her and force her to marry China, the child's father, although she is no longer interested in him (and vice versa). Mandisa then suffers in her in-laws' home, as she is treated like a servant as she acclimates to the new household (a common cultural practice called *ukuhota*) and openly despised by her new husband; however, she feels she has no other choice but to press on and do what her new family and community expects of her. This leads to her own suffering, but also the suffering of China, who eventually leaves her, feeling stifled by his unwanted role as a father and husband. Mandisa's suffering and China's desperate flight reveal how familial and traditional expectations can pull people apart instead of draw them together.

The novel also examines how family can be burdensome in the context of parents and children, noting that parents often logically feel responsible for their children. Although she is not directly responsible for the murder Mxolisi commits, Mandisa nonetheless feels she failed as a mother—a view the wider community also holds—and carries his sin with her. She says, "God, you know my heart. I am not saying my child shouldn't be punished for his sin. But I am a mother, with a mother's heart. The cup You have given me is too bitter to swallow. The shame. The hurt of the other mother." Mandisa prays for God to forgive her son, taking responsibility for his spiritual redemption, partially because she feels shame and hurt on his behalf, as well as an obligation to ease his own suffering. Although not directly tied to her son's crime, Mandisa, as his mother, feels bound up in her son's actions and choices.

Finally, because so many expect others to honour family and community commitments, when those fall through, people are left even more destitute than before. When family is all a person has, the lack of support becomes even more noticeable. When Mandisa becomes pregnant, her mother is so disappointed in her she sends her away to live with her grandmother Makhulu. When Mandisa eventually returns, her father refuses to recognize her as his daughter, and his soon-to-be grandchild as a relative. This is incredibly hurtful to Mandisa, who, in a time of great uncertainty, needs the love of family more than anything. Furthermore, while Mandisa's family doesn't accept her, they expect China and his family to unflinchingly accept Mandisa as the mother of their child, and to take care of her. When China eventually runs away after only a couple years of marriage, Mandisa is left with no true support system and no clear future. Despite this abandonment, Mandisa ultimately goes on to create a family with her son, who brings her joy but is also her greatest sorrow. This supports the broader argument that family is an important source of comfort but also has the potential to cause great pain and suffering.

### **FATE AND THE FRAGILITY OF HUMAN PLANS**

As the extraordinary circumstances of Mandisa's pregnancy demonstrate, the characters in *Mother to Mother* have very little control over their own futures. Mandisa plans for her future in almost painstaking detail, studying diligently in the hopes of escaping Guguletu and fantasizing about marrying China.

Her mother, meanwhile, goes to great lengths in her efforts to prevent her daughter from becoming pregnant, subjecting her to humiliating and invasive examinations. In the end, however, all of these actions prove useless in the face of whatever larger forces are at work: "So much store had I put on [Auntie Funiwe's] coming. Made great plans, banking on her benevolence. But, the very next morning following her arrival, not only did those grand plans unravel but my very life came to an abrupt halt. The life I had known.

The life I had envisaged. Everything I had ever known had been bulldozed, extinguished, pulverized" (114). Mandisa ultimately chalks her pregnancy up to destiny in the more traditional sense of the word— what she calls the "year's plans"—but her reference to bulldozing is significant, because it recalls the government's destruction of Blouville and the



move to Guguletu (88). In *Mother to Mother*, fate most often takes the form of historical trends operating beyond the control of the characters—specifically, colonialism and apartheid.

The effects of oppression limit the characters' lives to such an extent that they constitute a kind of predestination: Mandisa says at one point, for instance, that Mxolisi "had already seen his tomorrows; in the defeated stoop of his father's shoulders" (203). In this environment, people have no meaningful say even over their own actions; Magona describes the novel's central event—the murder of the American student—as a clash between races rather than individuals with unique hopes, desires, and motivations. Magona even suggests that the attack fulfills Nongqawuse's prophecy, explicitly tying the ideas of fate and systemic racism together.

### **MOTHERHOOD AND THE NATURE OF HOME AND FAMILY**

As its title implies, motherhood is a central concern in *Mother to Mother*. All three of the novel's major plot threads revolve around Mandisa's experiences of motherhood: in the flashbacks, we see the circumstances that led to her children's births; in the present, we see her frantically attempting to ascertain the safety of her children in the wake of the murder; and in her addresses to the student's mother, we see her appealing directly as a parent for compassion.

Through these complementary and intersecting storylines, Magona creates a picture of motherhood that is emotionally and morally complex. As a parent, Mandisa naturally feels responsible for her children: she brought them into the world, and has had at least some influence over the kind of people they have grown into. Mandisa's "responsibility" for Mxolisi, however, is tempered by the fact that she conceived him without having (penetrative) sex. Motherhood, in other words, is as much something that happened to Mandisa as it is something she undertook.

Mandisa's relationship with her children is thus a source of both happiness and suffering to her; she loves and looks after her children, but she is also in some sense their victim. These complexities hold true on a broader and more symbolic level as well. Throughout the novel, we see Mandisa's frustration with what she perceives as the younger generation's rash destructiveness; their resistance to apartheid, according to Mandisa, often amounts to little more than disrespecting and even attacking their elders.

At the same time, however, Mandisa realizes that those elders have facilitated the violence in Guguletu by passing on their own anger and resentment to their children. Magona's treatment of motherhood, in other words, parallels her treatment of themes like fate and racial oppression; *Mother to Mother*'s characters are caught up in a complicated web of responsibility that spans multiple generations. The novel's portrayal of motherhood is also closely related to its portrayal of family life and home more broadly.

One of the most disastrous effects of the move to Guguletu (and of apartheid generally) is the disintegration of bonds between neighbours, friends, and relatives; Mandisa, for instance, is forced to look for work outside the home, and her ability to parent her children suffers as a result. This wide-scale social disruption parallels the repeated dislocations and estrangements that characterize Mandisa's personal life—not just the relocation to Guguletu, but also her mother's decision to send her to Gungululu, and her departure from her childhood home after marrying.

Although she briefly enjoys the stability and comfort of a "hokkie of [her] own" after China has deserted her, Mxolisi's growing involvement in politics ultimately causes her family life to unravel (145). For Mandisa, as well as most of the novel's other characters, home and family are ultimately elusive goals.

### **THE NATURE AND ROLE OF EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE**

Schooling and learning are recurring topics in *Mother to Mother*, but they are not always (or even often) the same thing. Mandisa clings to the hope that education will secure a better future first for herself, and later for her children, warning Mxolisi that if he drops out of school he "would be part of the thousands upon thousands of young people who roam the township streets aimlessly day and night" (161). The schools in Guguletu, however, are too overcrowded to function properly when they are in session, and strikes and boycotts by both the teachers and students frequently shut them down altogether.

Under these circumstances, Mxolisi comes to see education as a luxury to postpone until after "liberation," rather than as a means to secure liberation in the first place (161). If they are largely deprived of formal education, however, students are nonetheless learning outside the classroom. In fact, Mandisa suggests that some kinds of knowledge are so central to the lives of black South Africans as to be virtually innate—most notably, anger toward white South Africans.

She recalls various incidents from her own childhood where she learned to think of white people as "dogs" and thieves, and laments that her own children have absorbed the same ideas in their turn (173). Magona underscores the tragic consequences of limiting people's access to education in the novel's final pages, where Mxolisi's learned resentment bumps up against education in the more traditional sense of the word: "'She's just a university student,' another of your daughter's friends screams, putting herself between her and her attackers.

But 'university student' falls on deaf ears. The mob cares nothing for these words. My son and his friends and all those mobbing around your daughter's car, they know nothing of universities" (209). The Creative and Destructive Powers of Language Although it to some extent overlaps with Magona's treatment of learning and knowledge, Mother to Mother's interest in language is also a theme in its own right.

Words are powerful in the novel, and often dangerous: Mxolisi, for instance, is so upset by the consequences of revealing Zazi and Mzamo's location to the police that he stops speaking entirely for several years. Language can also serve as a vehicle for ancestral anger, with terrible repercussions. In the novel's final pages, for instance, Magona depicts Mxolisi as whipped into a frenzy by the language surrounding him: "That irrevocable moment! The crowd cheers my son on. One settler! One bullet!

We had been cheering him on since the day he was born. Before he was born" (209). Language, however, also appears throughout the novel as a constructive and healing force; when Mandisa's neighbours come and speak to her in the aftermath of the murder, she likens the conversation to "the opening of a boil" (201). Indeed, the novel itself is a testament to the possibility of establishing understanding through language, both as Mandisa speaks to the student's mother, and as Magona speaks to us.

### **THE HUMAN CONDITION**

In Sindiwe Magona's novel Mother to Mother the protagonist, Mandisa, is telling her story to Mrs. Biehl because she is trying to help Mrs. Biehl understand the human condition and how it played a role in the tragic loss of her daughter. Mandisa is not asking Mrs. Biehl to forgive her son for his part in Amy Biehl's death. She is not asking Mrs. Biehl to feel sympathy for Mxolisi or the people of South Africa. In fact, there are times when it almost seems like Mandisa is criticizing the intelligence of Amy Biehl for putting herself in a dangerous position by entering Guguletu.

The message to Mrs. Biehl that Mandisa is trying to perpetuate is that larger circumstances had a hand in the death of Amy Biehl and that on August 25, 1993, more than one child was lost that day. The human condition can be defined as the "subconscious sense of guilt and agony" over humanity's ability for love and sensitivity and yet at the same time can be capable of "greed, hatred, brutality, rape, murder and war" ("Definition of the Human Condition"). As humans, we have the capacity to create good in the world, but as Mandisa shows, we also have the ability to perpetuate evil.

She explains to Mrs. Biehl that there was always the possibility that her daughter might have gotten "herself killed by another of these monsters that our children have become" (Magona 2). Apartheid in South Africa not only ripped the towns and families apart, it took the innocence of the children of the country and turned them into a vengeful mass, determined to make their voice heard by any means necessary. Magona's novel opens with "My son killed your daughter" (Magona 1). From the beginning, Mandisa is not trying to hide the fact that her son is to blame.

She is not in denial, nor does she try to make excuses for him. Mandisa understands that Mxolisi is at fault, but she goes on to state "you have to understand my son. Then you'll understand why he killed your daughter" (Magona 1). In the "Introduction to Sindiwe Magona's Mother to Mother", Professor Callaghan states, "Mxolisi is unquestionably to blame for the violent act against Biehl, but Magona also refuses to condemn him because of the events that shaped his life and precipitated the circumstances that gave him the opportunity to commit such an offense."

Mandisa weaves a tale of family history and the impact apartheid has had on the people of South Africa, including the impact it has had on her son, Mxolisi. Through Mandisa's explanation of the events and circumstances that contributed to the fateful event on August 25, 1993, Mrs. Biehl and the audience are able to grasp the concept of the human condition and how it has contributed to the death of Amy Biehl. In order to help Mrs. Biehl understand the complexity of the situation, Mandisa describes the nature and extent of the damage the South African apartheid regime has done to the people and communities of South Africa.

She recalls the arrival of white settlers who destroyed the native people's traditions and culture (Magona 182-183), the migrant labour structure that tore families apart and the humiliation at the hands of those who were suppose to be the "law". She explains that "We die young these days. Today, one is lucky to see a grandchild" (Magona 32) and that through resistance the children have become "tyrants" and "power crazed" (Magona 24). The purpose of Mandisa telling this tale through not only Mxolisi's history, but her own as well, was to show Mrs. Biehl that they are human just like she is. They have experienced moments of happiness, pain and love. They have hurt, struggled and cried tears just as Mrs. Biehl is doing over the death of her daughter. Mandisa is asking Mrs. Biehl to see her as an equal and understand how the human condition has moulded her son into the hard and vengeful boy that could commit such a heinous crime.

At the end of her story Mandisa addresses Mrs. Biehl as her "sister" to express her feelings towards their common fate and to remind her that even through these unfortunate circumstances, they are united. My Sister-Mother, we are bound

in this sorrow we were not asked whether we wanted it or not. We did not choose, we are the chosen” (Magona 201). Mandisa asks Mrs. Biehl to not let the death of her daughter feel like a personal failure, but rather let it be “your source of strength, your foundation of hope” (Magona 202). Mandisa, in some ways, is suffering the same loss that Mrs. Biehl is. The bright-eyed boy that was once referred to as a “hero” in the community was lost in the bitter fight against apartheid. Just like Mrs. Biehl, Mandisa’s heart is breaking.

As a mother, she feels guilt over what her son has done. She explains to Mrs. Biehl, “I have not slept since. Food turns to sawdust in my mouth. All joy has fled my house and my heart bleeds, it sorrows for you, for the pain into which you have been plunged. It is heavy and knows no rest” (Magona 199).

Mandisa is not asking Mrs. Biehl to feel sympathy or empathy; she only strives to let her know that she is not alone in her anguish; that the loss of her daughter is felt deeply enough to span across cultural and racial boundaries.

Mandisa is asking Mrs. Biehl to understand that although an evil act has been committed, it was perpetuated by her son “executing the long-simmering desires of his race” (Magona 210) and that if perhaps they were not bound by this human condition her son may not have been a murderer, “But for the chance of a day, the difference of one sun’s rise, she would be alive today. My son, perhaps not a murderer. Perhaps not yet”

## **CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

### **MANDISA**

The novel’s narrator, Mandisa is also referred to as Molokazana and Nohenhake by her husband China’s family. Mandisa is the early middle-aged mother of three: Mxolisi, Lunga, and Siziwe. Born in Blouville to Mama and Tata, she has one brother Khaya. Mandisa was a respectful, hardworking child and talented student, whose life was first disrupted by her family’s forced relocation to Guguletu, and then by her surprise pregnancy.

Mandisa and her then-boyfriend, China, had purposefully avoided having penetrative sex, but they conceived anyway, and Mandisa has her first son, Mxolisi. Out of duty, Mandisa marries China, and the two are unhappily married for two years. However, one day China leaves for work and never comes back, leaving Mandisa to fend for herself. As she pieces her life back together and starts anew, Mandisa comes to resent Mxolisi for disrupting her life. Mandisa then conceives a second child with a man named Lungile, who, like China, also leaves her.

She eventually marries a man named Dwa-dwa, with whom she has her youngest child and only daughter, Siziwe. Out of all of Mandisa’s children, Mxolisi becomes the biggest troublemaker and the most politically charged. When he gets into hot water for stabbing and murdering The Girl—a white college girl who had ventured into Guguletu, earning her the attention of an angry mob, of which Mxolisi was a part—Mandisa feels great guilt regarding Mxolisi’s life and crimes. She feels responsible for him, and is made to feel responsible for his murder of The Girl by people in her community. The book, which she narrates, is a way for her to come to terms with her son’s actions, and to apologize to The Mother of the Girl for her hand in Mxolisi’s upbringing, while also explaining the factors beyond their control that lead to the tragedy at the novel’s centre.

### **MXOLISI**

Mandisa’s oldest son, and her only son with China. He is originally named Hlumelo, but China’s family renames him, claiming their right to do so, as grandparents traditionally name the baby. Mxolisi is twenty, but still in the equivalent of middle or early high school, both because of his own truancy and because of the abysmal school system. Mandisa and Mxolisi have a troubled relationship; she blames him for his own conception (he was unplanned), and, because she had never had penetrative sex before giving birth, she blames Mxolisi for essentially taking her virginity.

Mandisa, however, tries to compensate for resenting her son by paying more attention to him, at the expense of her other children, Siziwe and Lunga, who accuse her of favouring their brother. Mxolisi began his life as a sweet child, but when he witnessed the police murder his friends, Zazi and Mzamo, he stopped speaking for several years. He eventually regained his speech, and Mandisa sent him to school, where beatings from teachers discouraged him from continuing to pursue his education.

He dropped out without Mandisa’s knowledge to work and help her support the family, but she convinced him to return. Eventually he became politically active, and joined the Young Lions, spending his days patrolling the neighbourhood, sometimes fighting for his education, but often harassing members of his own community. Mxolisi becomes caught up in a mob that forms around the car of a white university girl when she drives in Guguletu—a place that is extremely unsafe for white people—and when the violence escalates, he stabs and kills The Girl. Mxolisi clearly feels guilt and regret for what he’s done, which he confesses to Mandisa in their final conversation in the novel. Although not depicted, he likely turns himself in, and spends time (if not the rest of his life) in jail.

## **MAMA**

Mama, whose name is Kukwana, is married to Tata, and has two children, Mandisa and Khaya. Mama is a strict parent, calling in her children while other parents allowed their sons and daughters to continue to play, expecting them to do many chores around the house, and demanding academic excellence. Mandisa, however, has a relatively good relationship with Mama until she hits puberty, at which point Mama becomes obsessed with Mandisa's virginity, forcing her to undergo vaginal examinations to ensure she hasn't had sex. Though she balks at the invasive examinations, Mandisa takes Mama's warnings to heart and refuses to have penetrative sex with her boyfriend, China.

Over time, though, Mandisa begins to refuse the examinations, and Mama banishes Mandisa to live with her grandmother (Mama's own mother), Makhulu, in Gungululu. Mama, a member of a local church, is concerned with her own social standing and the stigma Mandisa's pregnancy could bring upon the family. She cares about her own social capital more than her daughter's wellbeing, and so when Mandisa does finally become pregnant—despite not having penetrative sex—Mama is ashamed and embarrassed, and unable to bring herself to help her daughter. Once Mxolisi is born, however, Mama warms to him and begins to forgive Mandisa for having sex and getting pregnant out of wedlock, accepting her back into her life.

## **CHINA**

Mandisa's first boyfriend, and the father of Mxolisi. In his youth, China was a respectful teenage boy, a good student with a bright future, and never pressured Mandisa for sex, carefully listening to and acknowledging her boundaries. When Mandisa moves away to live with Makhulu in Gungululu, China writes her frequently, and presumably stays faithful. However, when he discovers Mandisa is pregnant, his entire demeanour changes.

He scathingly accuses Mandisa of cheating on him—after all, the pair have never had penetrative sex—and believes that she's trying to trick him into taking responsibility as the father of the child. Although he and his family are eventually convinced to acknowledge Mxolisi as part of their bloodline, and China and Mandisa marry out of duty, China never forgives Mandisa or their son for ruining his future. He is forced to drop out of school to work and support the family, and, after two years of unhappy marriage, runs away, never to be heard from again. Mandisa feels similarly, and throughout her life she resents Mxolisi for getting in the way of her own plans for her life.

## **AMY**

The white girl whom Mxolisi stabs and murders when she drives into Guguletu—a place that is extremely dangerous for white people like herself. Mandisa believes that The Girl was driving through the town in order to drop off her black friends from college, who had warned her about the risks of going to Guguletu, which she had promptly brushed off. As soon as the Guguletu residents spot a white person in their town, though, they begin to chant, “One settler, one bullet,” and a mob forms around The Girl's car, rocking it menacingly.

The crowd swiftly turns violent, as they chant that Boers (white people in South Africa) are dogs—“AmaBhulu, azizinja!” When Mxolisi fatally stabs her, he is treated like a “king.”

Although a fictional character, The Girl based on Amy Elizabeth Biehl, an American Fulbright Scholar studying in South Africa, who was murdered by a group of young black South Africans. The story is occasionally told from The Girl's point of view in the third person, but these passages are always Mandisa mournfully imagining what The Girl's final moments were like. The Girl's internal life is not known, instead it is constructed by Mandisa. Mandisa creates a book-smart, kind-hearted, dedicated friend, who nonetheless doesn't fully understand the racial dynamics of South Africa.

## **MAKHULU**

Mandisa's maternal grandmother and Mama's mother, who lives in Gungululu. When Mandisa stops submitting willingly to Mama's invasive “virginity checks,” Mama banishes her to live with Makhulu, despite the fact that Mandisa has never even met the woman. Luckily, Makhulu is a kind caretaker, keeping Mandisa “sane” and “bodily alive,” making sure to cook food she knows Mandisa likes, and making sure she feels love even if Mama abandoned her. Much less judgmental than Mama, when Makhulu discovers that Mandisa is pregnant, she accepts the truth: that this was an accident and Mandisa should not be blamed. Instead, Mandisa should be comforted, supported, and accepted by her family.

## **LUNGA**

Mandisa's second son, and her only son with Lungile, who eventually leaves her just like China did not long after she gave birth to Mxolisi. Lunga is small for his age, especially compared to his brother. Unlike Mxolisi he is not (yet) involved in student protests, and more regularly attends school. Both Lunga and his sister, Siziwe, accuse Mandisa of preferring their older brother, Mxolisi, to them. In actuality, Mandisa deeply resents Mxolisi for changing the course of her life, but she does shower him with extra attention to make up for her resentment.

### **SIZIWE**

Mandisa's youngest child and only daughter, and Dwadwa's only biological child. Both Lunga and Siziwe accuse Mandisa of preferring their older brother, Mxolisi, to them. This is partly true, as Mandisa objectively does give Mxolisi more attention than her other two children. However, this is because Mandisa deeply resents Mxolisi for ruining her life and blames him for his own surprise conception (Mandisa and her then-boyfriend China never had penetrative sex, but got pregnant anyway). Mandisa gives her eldest son more attention to make up for holding such a fierce grudge against him.

### **KHAYA**

Mandisa's brother, and Mama and Tata's son. Like Mandisa, Khaya is a smart, well-behaved child. He and Nono, Mandisa's close friend, begin dating when they are all teenagers, and Khaya eventually impregnates her. Unlike Mandisa, who Mama feels has brought shame to the family, Mama does not see Khaya as responsible for his girlfriend's pregnancy, illuminating a double standard in her treatment of her children based on gender.

### **DWADWA**

Mandisa's husband, and the father of her youngest child and only daughter, Siziwe. Dwadwa is a good man, who treats Mandisa's first two children, Mxolisi and Lunga, as his own (their fathers are China and Lungile, respectively). Still, Mandisa remains the primary parent of her three children, and is more involved in the internal and external lives of all of her children than Dwadwa is with his biological daughter and adopted sons.

### **THE STORY OF NONGQAWUSE**

Mandisa's grandfather, Tatomkhulu, tells her the story of Nongqawuse, a Xhosa prophetess. The story symbolizes how far the Xhosa people are willing to go in order to reclaim their land from colonizers, as well as how oppressive colonialism is. Historically, in 1856 Nongqawuse told her community that if they killed their cattle and burned their fields and waited three days, then the cattle and fields would regenerate, and a storm would come and wash away the Boers occupying their land. Tatomkhulu explains to Mandisa that to the Xhosa people then, as well as to the black South Africans in the novel's present, "No sacrifice [would be] too great, to wash away the curse" of colonization.

The same resentment that caused people to believe Nongqawuse's prophecy, sacrificing their own land and cattle in hopes of freeing themselves from colonizers, is the same resentment that created phrases like "One settler, one bullet!" and "AmaBhulu Aziainja!" The contemporary South Africans will resort to violence, and create a storm of their own making (through rioting, violence, and the destruction of property), in order to free themselves. In the novel's final pages Mandisa makes a direct comparison between Nongqawuse's promised storm and Mxolisi's murder of the Girl. She writes, "Nongqawuse saw it in that long, long-ago dream: A great raging whirling would come," and sees Mxolisi and the Girl as caught up in a microcosm of that storm—enacting "the deep, dark private yearnings of a subjugated race," consummating in an "inevitable senseless catastrophe," like Nongqawuse's promised cleansing hurricane.