

Fhazel Johannesse
a young man's thoughts before June the 16th
Some more challenging questions!

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After taking power in South Africa in 1948, the National Party systematically worked on its plan of social engineering which it called Apartheid. The goal was to divide every aspect of the country along racial lines, and create homelands for the Black population.

In 1953 the Bantu Education Act introduced this plan into the schools. The aim was to educate the Black youth into becoming permanent servants. "There is no place for the African in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour," stated Dr H.F. Verwoerd, the architect of Bantu Education. "It is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim, absorption in the European community."

Initial protest against Bantu Education was minimal, with only the Catholic Church mounting spirited opposition. By the 1970s, however, the Apartheid system itself was beginning to show cracks. Furthermore, the rapidly developing industrial state needed educated youth. The schools that were created in Soweto to meet this demand, however, became the melting pot for opposition to Bantu Education.

On 16 June 1976, high school children from Soweto began a protest march for a better education system. Their banners centred on their hatred at being forced to undertake 50% of their schooling through the medium of Afrikaans which they regarded as the language of oppression.

The police intervened, attempting to disperse the youth by means of teargas and live bullets. The resultant massacre of the youth became the rallying point for rolling mass-action that would eventually see the end of the hated Apartheid system. June 16 (Soweto Day) is now a public holiday in South Africa, under the title of Youth Day.

1. This poem is essentially a dirge, a song of sadness to be sung at a funeral.
 - Whose funeral is he lamenting? (2)
 - Comment on the words which the poet uses to highlight this sadness. (4)
2. The poet writes as though he himself were personally involved in the historic event.
 - Explain how this is so. (4)
3. "for my sunset is drenched with red"
 - Comment on the rich imagery of this line. (4)
4. "strummed by an old man with a broken brow"
 - Comment on the image used in this line. (4)
5. Is there any purpose to writing a poem that uses no punctuation, and which ignores the usual rules of grammar? (4)
6. Why does the poet couch the poem in the future, giving the impression that he is writing his thoughts before all the tragic events took place? (4)

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