



IBBY SA

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IBBY SA Box 847 Howard Place 7450 South Africa

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Books for Africa newsletter email booksforafrica@iafrica.com

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- ✿ IBBY SA is the South African section of IBBY.
- ✿ IBBY is the **International Board** on **Books** for **Young People**.
- ✿ IBBY SA's area of interest is everything to do with South African books for children and young people.
- ✿ If you are a **member** of IBBY SA, you are also a **member** of IBBY.
- ✿ IBBY's **2004** World Congress was hosted by **IBBY SA** in **Cape Town**.
- ✿ The **2010** World Congress will be in **Santiago de Compostela**, Spain.

Hartlik welkom! Geniet die nuusbrokkies en die artikels wat volg.

O amohlehile! Re tshepa hore o tla thabela ho bala pampitshana ena e fupereng tse thahasellisang le tse susumetsang.

Wamkelekile! Sithemba ukuba u kuthanda ukufunda eli phepha eli futshane eli neendaba.

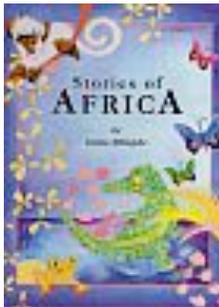
Come on in, and enjoy what the newsletter has to offer by way of news and thought-provoking ideas!

Index: [Publishing Africa for the world](#)
[IBBY Zimbabwe visits IBBY SA](#)
[Vinnig Vra Kompetisie](#)

[Percy Fitzpatrick Prize](#)
[Something Else Good out of Zimbabwe](#)
[Call for Bloggers](#) [Reviews](#) [End](#)

Publishing Africa for the World

[Back to Index](#)



*The debate that began in the October 2008 newsletter continues. It was sparked off by a letter from **Ross Smith** in Canada, in which he lamented the fact that Gcina Mhlophe's *Stories of Africa* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press)*

contained no map of Africa, no clue that Africa was not one country, and no indication of the country of origin of each story.

*There was a reply from **Fourie Botha** in the December 2008 newsletter.*

We have now received the following from a still-bewildered Ross Smith:

Ross Smith: I looked up on the internet the response [in the December IBBY SA newsletter] to my letter about a lack of verification of the story sources in Gcina's

book. The tone of the response indicates that the letter was not well received as it does not really address my question as to where the stories originated. The letter seems to be defensive rather than an acceptance that several stories have been presented as African without any references to location and source and the provision of such important information would have added to the value of the book.

My question was, 'Where do the stories come from?' and that has still not been answered. Are the names of the characters widely recognized in Africa that that would locate the stories?

We asked for a response from people working in the areas of public libraries and book selling. Here are the comments received in response:

Lona Gericke, children's librarian: I think that Ross's enquiry is a very valid one. Gcina Mhlophe is a storyteller, and in the introduction to the book she states:

'Most of the stories in this book are taken from well-known traditional tales that the people of Africa have been telling to each other since the world began.' She also refers to them as 'stories from her childhood, which recur in different versions in many parts of the world'.

This is all very well, but also very vague. It was the responsibility of her editor to place these stories in the right context, geographically or otherwise, and if the editor again did not consider this important, there should be some footnote or comment to state that Gcina Mhlope is informally sharing some of the stories from her childhood that she loves.

I personally can understand that an international audience would appreciate more information about the origin or location of these stories. It is always interesting and informative when one has the contents of a book enhanced by a more 'scholarly' editing hand.

This book is clearly just a slight collection of ten of Gcina's favourite stories; informally presented, with no explanatory notes, etc.

Ross is so right.

Veronica Behm Croucher, public librarian:

I actually think that the Author's Note in the book itself says it all. This reads:

'Most of the stories in this book are taken from well-known traditional tales that the people of Africa have been telling to each other since the world began. Some of these stories from my childhood recur in different versions in many other parts of the world. This is proof to me of the way in which humans have always tried to make sense of life's mysteries and used stories to explain them to each other.'

I think that Gcina's emphasis is on the universality of stories. These are, after all, the stories which she grew up with.

Johanna de Beer, Book Selector, Western Cape Provincial Library Service:

Very often one reads a book and wants to know more. And you wish that you could have chatted to the editor *before* the book was published. The features that Ross Smith would have liked to see in Gcina Mhlophe's *Stories of Africa* are ones that many would like to see, but I don't think that they are *major* flaws of the book and feel that by Ross writing this letter, her book is being singled out unfairly.

In front of me is a new publication, *African myths* by Neil Morris, in the 'Stories from around the world' series published by Franklin Watts, a reputable publisher of children's non-fiction in Britain. I thought it might be useful to see if it included the features that Mr Smith notes are missing from *Stories of Africa*.

- There is a map of Africa – it only shows a few rivers and lakes, but no political boundaries.
- There is no indication as to the country or language of origin of each of the myths that are retold here. A 'Who's who in African myths' is provided and so one can work out where some stories come from, e.g. the creation myth entitled 'In the beginning' comes from the Yoruba people in West Africa, but as to which specific country, no answers or clues are provided. No similar clues are provided for 'King of the beasts', a story about a lion.
- If one seeks further information, three websites and three titles are listed at the back of the book. The books are Jane Bingham's *African art and culture*, Geoffrey Parrinder's *African mythology*, and *Tales from Africa* by Kathleen Arnott. There is no indication whether these titles authenticate the retellings contained in *African myths*.

So *Stories of Africa* is not alone in not having these added extras. I think Mr Smith's criticisms of Gcina Mhlophe's book can apply equally to very many collections of folktales and myths that are published for children, both here and abroad.

I have not studied *Stories of Africa* closely and do not have a copy in front of me, and so I can't comment on her book specifically. I have no idea if she addresses

any of the issues he raises in a foreword, for example. Apparently both the author and the publisher have been given the opportunity to respond to Mr Smith's remarks, but have not yet done so.

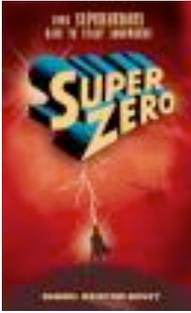
As a South African librarian, I am used to reviewing and considering children's books published in other parts of the world. Many of them are published for their own home market and do not travel well to suit our specific needs – we often feel that a book is 'too American for us'.

From some of his criticisms, it appears that *Stories of Africa* may just be 'too African' for Mr Smith and to suggest that a collection of stories *published in Africa, primarily for an African audience*, should 'dispel that Africa is not a country' is most very definitely barking up the wrong tree.

Penny Hochfeld, Head of Children's Books at Exclusive Books: I do think that stating in which country stories originated enhances a collection. If I think of Nick Greaves's series of traditional tales about African animals, the information on the provenance of the stories certainly added to my reading pleasure. While I don't think that this information is necessary 'for authentication', I think that it can reinforce our own (African) awareness of the different countries and languages and tribal traditions on our own continent – and certainly it would inform and enlighten international readers. But whether Gcina's stories are 'authentically' African (or maybe South African?) or not, does not in any way detract from their magic

Percy FitzPatrick Prize

[Back to Index](#)



The English Academy of Southern Africa is happy to announce that **Darrel Bristow-Bovey** has been chosen as the winner of the 2008 Percy FitzPatrick Prize for Youth Literature, for his book **SuperZero** (Tafelberg: 2006).

The prize is awarded for an original literary work in English designed to interest children between the ages of 10 and 14.

The panel of adjudicators noted that **SuperZero** is a well-constructed, well-written and consistent novel, which is full of suspense and avoids clichés and stereotypical characters.

The prize will be awarded later in the year.

IBBY Zimbabwe Visits IBBY SA

[Back to Index](#)



Keith visits the Praesa reading club in Langa township

Keith Munyengeterwa, a lecturer in librarianship in Bulawayo, has started IBBY Zimbabwe. He visited Cape Town in January 2009. **Here is his report on his visit:** building a model library.

I had the chance to attend an IBBY SA Executive meeting. I managed to interact with the members of the Executive and share ideas on how best to run our new section in Zimbabwe.

A visit to Biblionef SA was arranged for me and this was enlightening. I had a chance to have a look at the books that Biblionef donates to selected schools in South Africa. The books are in the different languages spoken in that country.

Another project undertaken by the organisation is the container library. This project is unique: shipping containers are refurbished to be used as a library. Various schools have benefited from this project. The costs involved are minimal compared to

Praesa is also involved in issues related to children's literature as well as promoting a reading culture at an early stage in a child's development. The organisation has set up reading clubs in certain communities and these clubs have proved to be popular with the children from the area.

The visit to South Africa has been beneficial and educational as well. Most of the projects undertaken by the above organisations can also be

applied to our Zimbabwean situation.

Lastly, my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to IBBY SA's Chairperson Robin Malan (who was my 'guiding angel' throughout my visit to Cape Town) and to everyone at Biblionef SA and Praesa who assisted in making my visit a success.

Something Else Good out of Zimbabwe

[Back to Index](#)

The following extract is from an article that appeared in full in 'Focus on International Library and Information Work Vol. 39, No. 3, 2008' pp. 96-100:

The Gwanda Slam

Murray McCartney, a co-director of Weaver Press, Harare, Zimbabwe

The country that twenty years ago boasted chart-topping literacy rates, and schools that were the envy of the continent, is in a state of educational decay. As domestic budgets get tighter, it comes as no surprise that book-buying slips further down the list of priorities: students can't afford them, schools can't afford them, libraries can't afford them.

How, then, are children to be encouraged to read? *What* are they to be encouraged to read?

A recent event jointly organised by a library and a publisher in the rural south-west of Zimbabwe offers a lively example of what can be done when there is a sufficient supply of imagination, commitment and resources. [...]

Weaver Press decided to mark its tenth anniversary with a series of events, one of which was a collaboration with the Edward Ndlovu Memorial Library (ENML) in Gwanda. [...] Gwanda is a small town of around 30,000 inhabitants, and is the capital of Matabeleland South, one of the poorest provinces in the country. [...] Gwanda was chosen as the venue for an anniversary 'short-story slam' in early

October 2008.

The idea of such a 'slam' – based on the brisk and lively tradition of rap poetry presentation – was inaugurated by Weaver Press in 2006 to launch one of its short-story anthologies in Harare. Several of the book's authors were asked to choose a story other than their own and give a one-minute justification of their choice followed by a one-minute reading. The winner was chosen on the basis of audience applause, and – measured by participant enthusiasm, if not huge sales – the event was a great success.

For the Gwanda Slam, the library's director was asked to pass copies of four Weaver collections to five schools in the area a month ahead of time, and invite a team (four students and a teacher) from each school to attend.

The morning was given over to presentations from Weaver Press about the business of publishing, and from two authors about the writer's perspective. [...]

After lunch it was time for the Slam itself, and the participants reassembled around the open-rectangle tables, exchanging excited glances and holding their well-thumbed, book-marked volumes in front of them.

They had taken their preparation very seriously, but what followed had none of the solemnity that might attend such an activity on the school room.

Many of the readings were from humorous stories, and elicited impromptu laughter

from the audience; some were a little risqué, and did the same; the ringing of the one-minute 'Time!' bell often cut a reader off in mid-sentence, adding a sense of drama to the enjoyment.

The one-minute 'justifications' varied considerably. To an extent, the exercise represents a minor essay in literary analysis and criticism, and too much can't be expected from students who've had limited exposure to the art.

A few of the presentations (from teachers as much as students) took a slightly 'righteous' line, praising a story for dealing with social issues such as HIV/AIDS, or the abuse of women. Others remarked on narrative excitement, or humour. Some spoke less of why they themselves had enjoyed the story and concentrated instead, in a welcome instance of literary evangelism, on 'Let me tell you why *you* should read it ...'

An interesting by-product of the process was the equal standing of the students and their teachers. How often, after all, do they 'compete' equally with each other in a public forum? When does a fourth- or fifth-form pupil get the chance to 'beat' her teacher at his own game? The mood of the occasion drew the sting from such questions.

Of the three winners (the prizes were a T-shirt for the reader and a poster for the school), two were students, one a teacher; honour was preserved and good humour ruled the day. [...]

The response of the participants was uniformly positive. They were diverted, to be sure, but more importantly they were for a brief period given respect and recognition: they were able to be active rather than passive; their preparation and presentations were applauded by their peers, their teachers and others; and their enthusiasm for reading was given serious validation.

Having gone through this first experience, there is no reason why the event cannot be replicated, either in a library or in the schools. [...] The essential ingredients are simple: books, and people.

IBBY SA would love to do a replica BookSlam, in any language.

If any Cape Town publisher would like to join us in the venture, with the right kind of books for a high school readership, please contact Robin at booksforafrica@iafrica.com .

VinnigVra Kompetisie / QuickQuiz Competition

[Back to Index](#)

The answer to the question posed in the October 2008 newsletter was: It was a wire-and-bead brooch made to mark the 2004 IBBY World Congress held in Cape Town that was exchanged in Copenhagen for a year's membership of IBBY SA. The

winner was **Xavier Nagel**, and he received a couple of books courtesy of IBBY. And you know what? We forgot to have a VinnigVra Kompetisie / QuickQuiz Competition in December 2008. And you know what else? Nobody seemed to notice!

However, undeterred, here's the first VinnigVra / QuickQuiz for 2009:

Name **TWO South African children's book series OR publishing imprints OR one of each that are named after non-human creatures.**

Send your answer (remember, TWO names) to booksforafrica@iafrica.com and we'll reward the first correct answer with a book from one of the creatures. Remember to give your postal address.

Call for Bloggers

[Back to Index](#)

We have received a request from **Amil Hemrajani** the founder and president of the website Big Universe: <http://www.BigUniverse.com>
A World of Online Children's Books

Amil is currently looking for bloggers for the site who can **write interesting blogs about children's picture books from around the world.**

The blogs must be written in English, but they can be from anywhere in the world.

He would like to hear from anyone who is interested in participating.

Please contact Amil at: Amil Hemrajani amil@biguniverse.com +1 703 801 2645
Skype: biguniverse

You can see a couple of the most recent blogs at:
<http://www.biguniverse.com/connect>

Resensies / Reviews

[Back to Index](#)

**For full reviews of the following books, please go to our website:
Vir die volle resensies van die volgende boeke, gaan asb. na ons webwerf:
www.ibbysa.org.za**

Pasop vir die feetjies! deur Jaco Jacobs (LAPA, 2008) – *Lona Gericke*

Borrels deur Jaco Jacobs (LAPA, 2007) – *Lona Gericke*

Seesand, sonbrille en sokkelaars deur Nerine Ahlers en Alet Steenkamp (LAPA, 2007) – *Lona Gericke*

Verdrinking van Josua van Eden, Die deur Carina Diedericks-Hugo (Umuzi, 2008) – *Lona Gericke*

St Valentine's Day

[Back to Index](#)

Have a **love-filled** day.

Surprise your loved one by reading them something!

XxX

End

[Back to Index](#)

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