

Selection 1

Remember Sharpeville

Dennis Brutus (c. 1960)

What is important
about Sharpeville
is not that seventy died:
nor even that they were shot in the back
retreating, unarmed, defenseless

and certainly not
the heavy caliber slug
that tore through a mother's back
and ripped into the child in her arms
killing it

Remember Sharpeville
bullet-in-the-back day

Because it epitomized oppression
and the nature of society
more clearly than anything else;
it was the classic event

Nowhere is racial dominance
more clearly defined
nowhere the will to oppress
more clearly demonstrated

what the world whispers
apartheid declares with snarling guns
the blood the rich lust after
South Africa spills in the dust

Remember Sharpeville
Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom
Remember the dead and be glad

Selection 2

Where the Rainbow Ends

Richard Rive (1955)

Where the rainbow ends,
There's going to be a place brother,
Where the world can sing all sorts of songs,
And we're going to sing together, brother,
You and I,
Though you're White and I'm not.
It's going to be a sad song, brother,
'Cause we don't know the tune,
And it's a difficult tune to learn,
But we can learn it, brother,
You and I,
There's no such tune as a Black tune,
There's no such tune as a White tune,
There's only music, brother,
And it's music we're going to sing,
Where the rainbow ends.

Selection 3

A Game of Guessing

G.M. Kolisang (1958)

I adjusted my tie and put on my hat,
And walked out of my rusty shanty home.
I caught the 8.30 a.m. Booth Camp bus.
I heard the street clock strike nine,
Entered an elegant, stately shop.
'Yes, John. What do you want?'
Amiably said the lady behind the counter.
'How,' I asked, 'did you know my name, Madam?'
I in return, did courteously ask,
Thoroughly satisfied by her amazing ingenuity.
'Oh! Of course I guessed it,' was her positive reply.
'Then, Madam, you are, I am convinced, surely
capable
Of guessing what it is I want.'

Name: _____

Selection 4

Because I'm Black

Herbert Dhlomo (1949)

Because I'm black
 You think I lack
 The talents, feelings and ambitions
 That others have;
 You do not think I crave positions
 That others crave.

Psychology
 And Zoology
 Have proved that Race and blood are a fiction...
 All men are Man;
 Diversity means not disunion—
 It is God's plan;
 White blood and black in test transfusions
 Answer the same.
 They harbour childish vain delusions
 Who better claim.
 Because the people eat and sing
 And mate,
 You do not see their suffering.
 You rate
 Them fools
 And tools
 Of those with power and boastful show;
 Not fate, but fault, has made things so—
 Beware! The people, struggling, hold
 The winning card;
 And when they strike they will be bold—
 And will strike hard!

Selection 5

The God of Formal Ways

Ezekiel Mphahlele (1950)

I made a god,
 And now he rules with iron rod;
 I worship in his formal ways,
 His name I praise

I swear and lie
 To them and my own self—to buy
 A nod of favour and approval—
 Still so formal!

He must implore,
 While knocking at compassion's door;
 I show him, yet within's despise—
 Such form is vice!

My beaming smile
 Is just to aid my flatt'ring style
 The mirthless laugh a social stunt
 Not to be blunt.
 O God of Form,
 You baffle reason, lull the storm
 Of passion, and the pain of truth
 You lie to soothe!

Made by me,
 You split me into two, and see!
 I sweat and chafe against your chains;
 I've lost my brains!

You know it well—
 I'd crush your power and break your spell,
 You know I may not just decide—
 There lies my pride!

Selection 6

Rise Up

Desmond Dhlomo (1955)

Oh land of warrior bold and brave!
Where once you did your spearheads wield
Your own dear land you strove to save
Now crumpled down, and do you yield?

O Chaka¹ great thy name I fear;
How like a god you strode this strand;
I praise you and this land once dear
Where once you strode with Black war band.

And I poor son, from your dust rise
And seek once more a once-dear land
—No assegais² nor war-like cries—
But crave on earth a worthy stand.

Rise up! swarthy Chaka's train,
'Tis time that you should show in deed
That you be brave, have evils slain
And love and peace you seek to breed.

Rise up! 'tis not by magic hand
You'll win a name in lands abroad
But through great toil and trusty stand
You'll live as if all time afford.

¹ Chaka = Shaka, a Zulu king famous for his military skill

² assegai = throwing spears used by Zulu warriors

Selection 8

How Long, O God?

Walter N.B. Nlapo (1950)

Burst forth my heart complaining
Yours can't be joyful song.
Sorrows you have been restraining
Within yourself for long!

Like flame let your feeling's flower
Cry aloud, let earth hear
Your mighty voice with all its power,
Tell the pains of many a year.

I'm black but I'm kingly, and even
God knows; a slave I cry,

Selection 7

The Contraction and Enclosure of Land

St. J. Page Yako (1958) translated from Xhosa

Thus spake the heirs of the land
Although it is no longer ours.
This land will be folded like a blanket
Till it is like the palm of a hand.
The racing ox will become entangled in the wire,
Too weak to dance free, it will be worn out by the
 dance of the yoke and the plough.
They will crowd us together like tadpoles
In a calabash ladle. Our girls
Will have their lobola¹ paid with paper,
Coins that come and go, come and go.
Blood should not be spilled, so they say
Nowadays, to unite the different peoples,
Until we no longer care for each other,
As a cow licks her calf, when love
And nature urge her to do so.
Can money bring people together?
Yes, a man may have words with his son's wife,
His son need no longer respect her mother.

Yes, we fold up our knees,
It's impossible to stretch out,
Because the land has been hedged in.

¹ lobola = "bride price" paid by man's family to woman's

And for fatherland grieving;
And stars shed tears in the sky.

God! must my tears flow forever?
Hear me in my tears
before I cross Lethe river¹
To land of no fears.

¹ The legendary Lethe River erases the memory of those who cross it.