AN INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLEY NAIDOO

How did you come up with the idea for No Turning Back?

By 1993—when the political transformation of South Africa was beginning to take shape, with the first democratic elections due in 1994—I spent six weeks running free drama and writing workshops, mainly with young people, in which we not only explored their sense of identity but raised the issues of street children. What would the "new" South Africa mean for a child living on Jo'burg's dangerous streets? Could young black and white people make friends while such enormous differences of circumstance remained?

Street children are found throughout the world, and many of the problems they face are the same, wherever they are. I intended my plot to reflect not only Sipho's dislocation and his struggle for survival at a physical and emotional level but also the upheaval of political change in the wider society.

Did you base any of the characters in *No Turning Back* upon your own childhood?

No Turning Back is very much a novel of the 1990s, and its characters reflect its time. However, perhaps some aspects of Judy reflect the child I would like to have been. Judy very much represents the desire amongst those young white South Africans to forge new relationships with their black compatriots. Her father, Mr. Danny, is under pressure from his daughter to "do the right thing," but essentially his thinking has been forged under the racist apartheid state. He is full of contradictions, which many young South Africans recognize all too well.

What are the biggest challenges that you feel South Africa still faces today?

The biggest has to be reducing the phenomenal differences between the life experiences of rich and poor. Millions of South African children still require decent schools, houses, and clinics. Millions of children live with parents who are unemployed or whose pay is as abysmally low as during apartheid days. As a writer and educator I would like to see a major focus on education to provide all South African children with the kind of resources that will help them transform their future lives. Part of that focus on skills, knowledge, and understanding has to include addressing conscious and unconscious racism—the legacy of the past.

When and how did you first begin writing? What inspired you to begin writing for younger audiences?

I wanted to talk to children directly, including my own two children who were born in exile, here in England. I knew it was important first to touch the heart, and then the head would follow—with questions. I would like to feel that my South African fiction can provide a space for young South Africans—as well as children internationally—to explore the terrible damage that racism does to people's relationships with each other as well as their own potential to imagine and create alternative, interdependent futures. **Beverley Naidoo** grew up as a white South African under apartheid. She joined the active resistance to apartheid and was exiled to England, where she wrote her first children's books, *Journey to Jo'burg* and *Chain of Fire*. She now lives with her husband and daughter in Dorset, England.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOREEN RAPPAPORT

How did you become interested in writing *Escape from Slavery*?

I am drawn to true stories of courage, to people who defy the odds and risk all for what they believe in. There is nothing more sacred than freedom. The idea that African Americans, who were taken from their countries and families and shipped to a strange world where they were not allowed to learn to read and write, who knew nothing beyond the confines of the plantation or factory or cramped quarters where they lived, dared to risk the unknown and possible death to taste freedom, inspires me. It gives me courage. We all need role models of courage.

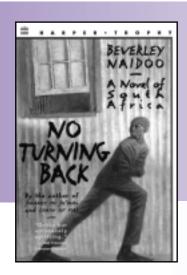
How do young people respond to the book?

They love the adventure in it. They can't believe the courage of the two girls who escaped by themselves and made their way to their grandparents in Cabin Creek, Indiana. They feel empowered by the daring and danger of Eliza's run across the river. They are amused at Henry "Box" Brown's ingenious crate and the Crafts' plan. They can feel Jane Johnson's fear in facing her owner in court.

In featuring these lesser-known heroes of the Underground Railroad, do you hope to shed a different perspective on history?

Yes. When I began my research, I did not know the extent of the participation by African Americans as conductors on the Underground Railroad. Most of the history books I had read in college focused on white abolitionists. The majority of the abolitionists were black. That's the first new perspective. The second is for kids to see how ordinary people have extraordinary courage, how they may have instances in their lives when they take courageous stands.

Doreen Rappaport is the author of several children's books, including the I Can Read book *The Boston Coffee Party*. She lives in New York City.



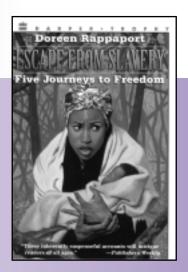
NO TURNING BACK: A NOVEL OF SOUTH AFRICA by Beverley Naidoo 1998 Notable Children's Trade Book in Social Studies (NCSS/CBC) Short Listed for the *Guardian* Fiction Prize and the Smarties Book Prize

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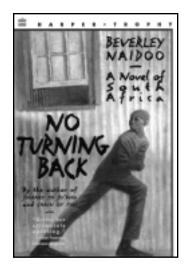
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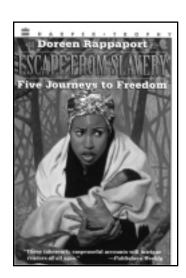


http://www.harperchildrens.com/schoolhouse ISBN 0-06-449392-X

A Guide to Teaching About Freedom Struggles with Beverley Naidoo's NO TURNING BACK: A NOVEL OF SOUTH AFRICA

Doreen Rappaport's ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY: FIVE JOURNEYS TO FREEDOM





Courage Meeting Challenges Survival Turning Points

THEMES

READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Compare and Contrast Draw Conclusions Identify Problems and Solutions Make Judgements and Decisions

In these two powerful books, award-winning authors Beverley Naidoo and Doreen Rappaport evoke the lives of blacks in two very different times and places. While black South Africans in *No Turning Back* attempt to find better lives today in poverty-stricken, post-apartheid Johannesburg and enslaved blacks in *Escape from Slavery* seek freedom along the routes of the Underground Railroad, these books both convey what it is like to fight for equality in societies that discriminate on the basis of skin color. Based on real-life stories of homeless black youths in South Africa and historical accounts of the 19th century slave escapes, the fiction novel *No Turning Back* and nonfiction stories in *Escape from Slavery* expertly capture these groups' struggles to achieve freedom and a better life in societies where equal rights for all is not a reality.

NO TURNING BACK

SETTING THE SCENE

No Turning Back is set in 1994, a tumultuous time for South Africa, a country on the verge of its first democratic elections but still reeling from widespread poverty and social instability. It has been only four years since the overturning of **apartheid** laws that enforced the segregation of white and nonwhite South Africans. Under the laws of apartheid, all political power was controlled by the white minority, which makes up just one third of the population. Black South Africans were denied the right to vote for the country's leaders. They could own land only in designated areas called **homelands**, and they could live and work outside these areas only with passes. Most blacks were forced to live in slums called **townships** on the outskirts of cities. While the white minority controlled the economy, black South Africans suffered from widespread poverty, malnutrition, and disease. South Africa began to change in the early 1990s, when President F. W. de Klerk abolished apartheid laws and freed Nelson Mandela, the long-imprisoned leader of the African National Congress.*

No Turning Back focuses on Sipho, a 12-year-old Johannesburg boy who runs away when life has become unbearable in the home of his mother and violent stepfather. Fleeing from his poverty-stricken community, he joins a gang of *malunde*—homeless people—and discovers the hardships that come with living on the streets.

READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Compare and Contrast

Draw a chart and have students compare and contrast characteristics of the township where Sipho lived with his mother and stepfather; the community of Hillbrow; and the suburban town, Rosebank. What is the racial makeup of each community? What are the socio-economic differences among these three neighborhoods? How is the legacy of apartheid still apparent in these Johannesburg communities?

Make Judgements and Decisions

Ask students to identify a difficult decision Sipho must make during the novel. Poll volunteers to decide whether Sipho made the right decision. Why or why not?

For Discussion

- Why does Sipho run away from his mother and stepfather? Why is he so nervous about being returned to his mother once he's on the street, even though he misses her?
- How is Sipho's friend Jabu different from the rest of the malunde boys? Why does Sipho feel more comfortable around Jabu and willing to open up to him?
- Consider Lucas's comment about the men in the van who violently abduct the *malunde* boys and dump them at

a lake outside of town: "The others could be their [the police's] friends . . . the kind of white people who didn't want any change in the country . . . who wanted to keep black people down forever and who didn't want them to vote in the elections for a new government" (page 71). What does this passage reveal about the political climate since the repeal of apartheid? How much has changed and how much change is still needed in South Africa?

- Sipho joins the *malunde* and must quickly learn a new set of rules he never knew living at home. What are some of the rules he must learn in order to survive? How are these rules different from those of the shelter?
- Why does Sipho decide to leave Mr. Danny's home even though he must return to the streets? How much influence does David's behavior have in his decision to run away?
- Do you think Naidoo's ending conveys a feeling of hope for the future? Do you feel Sipho will eventually rejoin his mother and sister? What do you think will happen to his stepfather?

^{*} For more information about South Africa and apartheid check out these books at your local library or bookstore: *The Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* by Nelson Mandela. Boston: Little, Brown, 1994. ISBN: 0-316-585-6 (Little Brown & Co.) *A History of South Africa* by Leonard Thompson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0-300-06543-4 (paperback) *History of Southern Africa* by J. D. Omer-Cooper. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 1994. ISBN: 0-435-08095-4

SETTING THE SCENE

The stories in *Escape from Slavery* are set in the early to mid 1800s, a period in the American South when slavery had become an institution that white landowners were determined to protect. Enslaved people were forced to work as miners, carpenters, factory workers, and house servants. Many others worked in the fields on large plantations helping to raise and harvest cash crops, including cotton, one of the most lucrative crops for plantation owners. In 1800 there were almost 900,000 slaves in the United States; by 1860 there were 4 million. Many slaves risked their lives to escape from slavery to freedom. The Underground Railroad was the figurative term used to describe the organized system of escape routes and network of people who helped lead slaves to free land. Most routes led from the South to the Northern states and eventually to Canada. The fugitive slave was considered "freight," and the "conductors" were people, white and black, who guided runaway slaves from one hiding place to the next. The "stations" along the way were the places in which slaves hid: barns, attics, storerooms—any safe spot that would conceal an escaped slave from bounty hunters and law officers. In this pre-Civil War era the nation was fiercely divided on whether to outlaw slavery. Many of the members of the Underground Railroad were abolitionists—antislavery activists—who fought and risked imprisonment to end slavery.*

READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Identify Problems and Solutions

On the Underground Railroad fugitive slaves and the people helping them must often come up with quick solutions under pressure. As students read, ask them to identify problems that each of the following encounter and the solutions that they come up with: Henry Brown in "A Shipment of Dry Goods"; Bessie Watkins in "Free Like the Wind"; and Ellen and William Craft in "Two Tickets for Mr. Johnson and Slave." Ask students if they would have acted differently in a similar situation.

Draw Conclusions

As students read, have them draw conclusions about why various characters act the way they do. For example, why does C. Bullit, the store owner in "A Shipment of Dry Goods," help fugitive slave, Henry Brown? Why does William Still, a free black man in "Pretending," risk imprisonment to help runaway slaves?

For Discussion

Lead a discussion about the dialogue in *Escape from Slavery*. How do whites and blacks address each other? As students read, ask them to consider why the author used the term "nigger." How is the term used by whites in *Escape from Slavery*? Why do you think blacks use the term? Is this term used and perceived differently in the 1800s from its uses today? Explain.

- How are the lives of free blacks different from those of enslaved blacks? Do free blacks also face discrimination and unequal treatment? How is James Smith treated by the white store owner in "A Shipment of Dry Goods"? How is William Still treated in "Pretending"?
- The Fugitive Slave Act stated that slaves must be returned to their masters even if they had escaped to a free state. How does this law make the job of the Underground Railroad more difficult?
- How is a slave's life controlled by his or her master? In the story "Two Tickets for Mr. Johnson and Slave," why doesn't Ellen initially want to get married or have children? Why do you think enslaved people risked punishment to run away in pursuit of freedom?

^{*} For more information about slavery in America check out these books at your local library or bookstore:

From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans by John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. 7th edition. New York: Knopf, 1994. ISBN: 0-679-43087-3 *The Slave's Narrative*, edited by Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. ISBN: 0-19-503276-4 (hardcover) ISBN: 0-19-503277-2 (paperback)

ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Language Arts

- Read through the poem "A Gift from God: Being a Street Child," at the beginning of *No Turning Back*. For the class, give a reading of the poem and then explain how you feel it relates to Sipho's story.
- In the story "Pretending" from *Escape from Slavery*, William Still, the black abolitionist, interviews the escaped slaves he meets on the Underground Railroad because "he wanted his people to have a record of their courage." Conduct and record an interview with someone in your life who you feel is courageous and took steps to change his or her life or the lives of others. Play your interview for the class.

Social Studies

- In both books blacks face severe discrimination from whites, regardless of governmental laws. Research a black or white figure and write a report on how this person fought to end discrimination and segregation and how he or she helped promote equal rights for all people.
- Slavery has existed throughout history. Break up into groups, each of which is to choose one society in history in which slavery has existed (other than nineteenthcentury America). Explain in a presentation to the class the reasons (economic, social, religious) slavery was part of that society. How long did slavery exist in this society? How was slavery eventually abolished?
- Research the current state of South Africa in the international section of the newspapers in your library or review recent articles on the Internet. What role do the African National Congress, President Nelson Mandela, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu play in the articles you read? Report your findings to the class.
- Write a report comparing the period in South Africa after the repeal of apartheid to the period in American history after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, when racial segregation was made illegal. Write about the difficulties both nations faced and still face in promoting racial integration and equal rights.

Art

Segregation and unequal rights weigh heavily on black South Africans in *No Turning Back*, while slaves in *Escape from Slavery* are willing to risk severe punishment to be free of their masters' control over their lives. Think about what the term "freedom" means to you and then create a poster on freedom. Your poster can be in any style (suggestions: a collage with clippings from magazines; a painting or drawing; a poem). Make it your own!

Science

Cotton was a major cash crop that fueled the pre-Civil War Southern economy in the United States. Research and give a report to the class on how cotton was farmed during the early to mid 1800s and to what markets cotton was sent. Be sure to include how the invention of the cotton gin was influential in cotton farming. Using an overhead projector show a map that indicates where cotton was most abundantly farmed in the Southern states.

Drama

Choose a chapter from *No Turning Back* or a story from *Escape from Slavery* and write a dramatic scene, filling in your own dialogue whenever necessary. Stage your scene for the class.

