




STUDY NOTES

Beverley Coburn Gail Simon

The Madonna *of* Excelsior



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The Madonna of Excelsior Study Notes

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INTRODUCTION

The Madonna of Excelsior is the quintessential South African novel. It spans the lives of two generations during and after apartheid. The characters are real, the heroes and villains authentic and human. All their flaws and virtues are laid bare for the reader to examine, to criticise, to empathise with and, ultimately, to accept or reject.

About the author

Zakes Mda was born in Herschel, South Africa in 1948. He has studied and worked in Britain, Lesotho and South Africa. He is currently a professor of creative writing at the University of Ohio and he divides his time between the United States and South Africa. Mda is celebrated as one of the most influential novelists of contemporary South African writing.

Historical and political background of the Excelsior incident

In 1971 in Excelsior, a tiny town in the Free State, fourteen white men were accused of having had sexual relations with five black women. They were accused of contravening the Immorality Act – a law that forbade sexual relations between white people and people of colour.

This incident caused a great scandal not only in the very conservative Afrikaner community of Excelsior but internationally as well. The small town was flooded with reporters from all over the world. South Africa was at the height of apartheid and the incident provided the media with a lot of sensationalist material.

The characters

Niki (the Madonna of the title)

Niki's beauty and initial innocence make her the perfect target for abuse by white Afrikaans males as well as by Pule her husband. She represents the "fallen" Madonna in that she loses her innocence and, because of the abuse inflicted on her, she learns to harbour grudges against those who have wronged her.

Popi (the illegitimate daughter of Niki and Stephanus Cronje)

Popi has to struggle with her identity and come to terms with herself. She does not fit into the black world, nor does she fit into the white one. She finds consolation in the church and she becomes politically active, thereby finding a sense of belonging in the new democratic South Africa.

Stephanus Cronje (husband of Cornelia and father of Popi and Tjaart)

He is one of the pillars of the Afrikaans community, a staunch member of the National Party and a devout worshipper in the Dutch Reformed church. He is not true to his political and religious obligations when faced with Niki's beauty and desirability.

Tjaart Cronje

Tjaart, too, has issues about his affiliations. He represents the "new" generation of Afrikaner – not too sure of where he fits in or what is expected of him. He is insecure and unsettled and seems to find peace only on his deathbed, when he and Popi attempt a reconciliation.

Johannes Smit (a local farmer)

He is a sexually inadequate man whose pathetic attempts to seduce Niki evoke a mixture of revulsion and pity. He is a victim of the distorted conservative and hypocritical values of Afrikanerdom.

Adam de Vries (lawyer)

He is a political animal – a little man who needs to over-compensate for his lack of size. He can recognise an opportunity and he compromises his principles in pursuit of power.

Reverend François Bornman (Dominee)

Although he preaches Christian values, he is a liar and a hypocrite. When he is exposed, he displays his cowardice by attempting suicide.

Viliki (son of Niki and Pule)

Viliki is politically naive and very idealistic. He is, at heart, an artist, and his enthusiasm for politics soon wanes when he falls in love with the seller of songs – the illegitimate daughter of Reverend Bornman and Maria. He is not a strong character – he is easily swayed and lacks commitment.

Sekatle

He befriends the young, impressionable Viliki. He is very shrewd and he wants to enrich himself under the guise of having the interests of the poor at heart.

Father Claerhout

He is referred to as the trinity (an allusion to the Christian concept of the three-in-one divinity). Father Claerhout is a man, a priest and an artist.

Father Claerhout is in Excelsior but not a part of it. He is the visionary/ the holy man. He highlights the hypocrisies of the Afrikaans Christian Community. He is the opposite of Reverend François Bornman, the dominee who distorts religion to suit his own needs.

Style and structure

Narration

Mda speaks through the “we” narrator. The voice of this narrator is even-handed in the treatment of both blacks and whites in the novel. Nobody is all bad or all good. They are all treated with restraint and the narrator is not blind to their faults. Father Claerhout, a Belgian Catholic priest, and the narrator are the observers of life in Excelsior. The priest depicts events as he sees them, on canvas. The narrator, the “we” in the novel, thinks about and comments on events as he shares them with us, the readers. These two voices connect the horrors of the past with the reality of South African post-apartheid life – neither of which was or is ideal.

Structure

The novel is loosely in two parts. The first part is largely Niki’s story and the second part is the story of her children, Popi and Viliki, in post-apartheid South Africa. Mda moves through time and events very quickly, interweaving the past with the present.

Each chapter begins with a description of one of Father Claerhout’s paintings. Once Niki and Popi are established models for him, this painting is always centred on some version of a black madonna. The paintings are of average, daily South African life but are raised by the narrator to the divine in an intricate mixture of colours and images.

These expressionist paintings reflect the bizarre, distorted values of apartheid and *specifically* the events in Excelsior.

Themes

Themes are the main ideas. The following are the most important themes that are dealt with in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. More detail is given in the notes for each chapter.

- The abuse of power
- Racial oppression and hypocrisy
- Revenge, reconciliation and redemption
- Struggle for identity
- Inadequacy of the traditional white Afrikaner male
- “The sins of our mothers”.

Note for the teacher

All the questions and activities contained in this workbook comply with the general learning outcomes and assessment standards required by the National Department of Education. Studying literature covers many of the Assessment Standards in Learning Outcome 2 for English HL.

Studying *The Madonna of Excelsior* will help the learner in reading for understanding and evaluating critically (LO2). The learner will have the opportunity to ask questions (AS1.1), summarise main and supporting ideas (AS1.5), distinguish between fact and opinion and motivate his/her response (AS2.3).

The learner will be able to understand the writer's, the narrator's and the characters' viewpoints and find evidence from the text to support these viewpoints (AS2.5), as well as grasp the socio-political and cultural background of texts (AS2.6), be able to explain the writer's conclusion and compare it with his/her response (AS2.8) and be empowered to give and motivate personal responses (AS2.10).

The learner will be sensitive to how language devices/images shape and reflect values and attitudes of a society (AS3) and will recognise key features of texts and be able to explain how they contribute to meaning (AS4).

NOTES AND SHORT QUESTIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

CHAPTER 1 Women, donkeys and sunflowers

The description of the painting in this chapter is a Free State landscape, awash with vibrant and striking colours. Niki and a five-year-old Popi have just left Father Claerhout's house. Niki had gone there to offer her services as a model. She had heard from other women in the township that the priest paid his models well. The visit was unsuccessful, as Father Claerhout didn't need her just then.

Focal points

- “All these things flow from the sins of our mothers.” – a crucial idea. There is no such thing as a fresh start. One's sins will haunt one as well as follow one's children. Niki's infidelity will shape Popi as she is the result of that infidelity.
- Popi looks different – has blue eyes and flowing hair; she is clearly coloured.
- Niki is struggling to make a living.
- Father Claerhout is established as the artist, the kind, gentle man who “loved all children” irrespective of their colour.

1. Explain why “the distorted people” doing their “daily chores” would fill Popi “with excitement in their ordinariness”. [2]
2. “She was going to **hitch-hike all the way** to the black township of Mahlatswetsa.” What does the highlighted evidence in this quotation reveal about Niki's situation? [2]
3. Explain why Niki would be nervous while speaking to the priest. [2]
4. Explain the meaning of “Woman and girl melted into God's own canvas”. [2]

CHAPTER 2 The garden party

The concertina player in the painting becomes the musician at the De Vries house, playing traditional “boeremusiek”. The description of that concertina player is unflattering. Niki waits with Popi outside the De Vries house in the hope that they will get food. Tjaart Cronje, a twelve-year-old boy, gives them a piece of cake. His mother confronts Niki and the reader becomes aware that there is tension between the two women.

Focal points

- The concertina player as he is described in this chapter is representative of the white Afrikaner male.
- Afrikaner children are described as healthy, happy and content.
- Niki recognises the guests at the party.
- Tjaart Cronje is introduced.
- Tjaart's observation that Popi is "a hotnot child", "a boesman"
- Cornelia Cronje's obvious hatred of Niki.

1. The concertina player's hands are described as "bananas" and his eyes like "brown slits". The men at the party are "Sleepy-eyed" "with big groping hands". In the context of the novel, why do you think Mda has chosen to depict them in these unflattering terms? [2]
2. Identify three things that confirm that this is an event that is typically and exclusively Afrikaans. [3]
3. Suggest a reason why Mda shows how accurately Niki can identify each of the men. [2]
4. Identify the irony in "All pillars of the local Afrikaner community". [2]
5. How do Tjaart's circumstances differ from Popi's? [4]
6. **Extension activity:** Write a one-act play of the scene when Cornelia confronts Niki. Write the script for the scene. Give stage directions and do not use the existing dialogue. Present your play for your oral mark. There should be three people who have speaking parts.

CHAPTER 3 All these madonnas

Father Claerhout is in his madonna phase and Niki and Popi are his established models. The madonnas are sensuously drawn and their colours are strong and vibrant. Things are looking good for Niki as she and Popi have been modelling for Father Claerhout for a month. Niki feels comfortable with him and her nakedness does not bother her.

Focal points

- The sensuality of the paintings
- Father Claerhout views these women as fertile, perfect goddesses.
- Father Claerhout is different from the Afrikaner men. He reveres women.

1. The Madonna is traditionally depicted as white. Why does Mda describe these madonnas as “burnt umber” and “brown”? [2]
2. How is the nakedness of the madonnas described in this chapter? [3]
3. Explain what Popi means by “they will live forever because such things never die”. [2]
4. Niki remembers the garden party where she had been humiliated. How does this lead to her easily discarding her clothing “until her smooth body glowed”? [3]

CHAPTER 4 In the very beginning, there were three naïve girls

The action of this chapter takes place at an earlier time than the earlier chapters. Niki and her girlfriends, Maria and Mmampe, are collecting cow dung. A farmer, whom Niki recognises as her father’s sometime employer Johannes Smit, stops them. Maria and Mmampe know him and laughingly refer to him as “hairy buttocks”. He offers the girls money and Niki hesitates at first. He chooses her over the other two and he instructs her to go into the field. There he violates her and Niki runs home, sickened. Johannes Smit comes back, totally smitten and, although Niki tries to avoid him, he is persistent and he pays her. He uses her as a vehicle to regain his failing manhood and “his thirst for her could not be quenched”.

Focal points

- Ease with which the whites could violate blacks without punishment
- Johannes Smit portrayed as an inadequate, lecherous man
- The law does not protect blacks.
- Niki’s traumatic introduction to sex
- The hypocrisy of apartheid – Johannes Smit (a pillar of the community) breaks the very law (the Immorality Act) he supposedly supports.

1. Suggest why it is important that the three girls are “naïve”. [2]
2. The writer spends a lot of time in this chapter on describing Niki’s looks. Why? [3]
3. Discuss why it is significant that Johannes Smit is referred to as “the squat hairy gorilla” and “hairy buttocks” in contrast to Niki’s body that had “the fullness of the moon” and “she was blooming into such a unique flower”. [4]
4. Give three reasons why these girls are helpless in the presence of Johannes Smit. [3]

5. How does Johannes Smit's behaviour in this chapter illustrate the abuse of power? [2]
6. **Extension activity:** Write Niki's diary entry after this traumatic event.

CHAPTER 5 The wedding

Niki marries Pule, who leaves the following morning to go to Welkom to work on the mines. Niki starts to work at the Cronje butchery. Johannes Smit comes into the butchery frequently, pretending to buy something, but it is really only to see Niki. He offers her money but she rejects his gifts. Niki is pregnant with Pule's child, Viliki.

Focal points

- Mda honours African culture by giving exposure to wedding ceremony.
- Migrant labour: Pule leaves to go back to Welkom to the mines.
- Johannes Smit's continued pursuit of Niki
- Irony of Johannes Smit joining the Herstigte Nasionale Party: this is an ultra-conservative party that was bitterly opposed to any liberal attitude to blacks.
- Niki feels strong enough and empowered enough as a married woman to reject Johannes Smit's advances.

1. How is Pule described in this chapter and what is Mda's intention in doing so? [3]
2. Explain the significance of the fact that Johannes Smit cried "real tears". [2]
3. Sex as an abusive tool is a recurring idea in the novel. How is sex described between Pule and Niki as opposed to her experiences with Johannes Smit? [4]
4. Discuss the implications of the words "Madam" and "girls" as they are used in this chapter. [2]

CHAPTER 6 She is holding the sun

A drought cripples the area and Johannes Smit is too busy trying to save his farm to pester Niki. She looks after Tjaart, the Cronjes' son. Her own child, Viliki, must walk by her side while she carries Tjaart who has "grown addicted to her back".

Focal points

- Painting depicts Niki as powerful.
- The drought-stricken farmers portrayed as real people, showing real emotion and vulnerability – illustrates Mda's even-handed treatment of blacks and whites.

1. There is a drought in the area. How is Niki linked to this event? Use the description of the painting to help you answer this question. [3]
2. Johannes Smit is crying. What do you think Mda's intention is in sharing this detail? [2]
3. Johannes Smit "forgot about Niki". What in this chapter suggests to us that this is no comfort for Niki? [2]

CHAPTER 7 The pan

It is Sunday and Niki has to leave the comfort of her own church to go to the white church in town. She has to wait outside until the service is finished. She has agreed to look after her employers' son while they go to a "volkskongres". When she gets home, Pule is waiting for her, seething with anger. He demands his cooked lunch and once she tries to prepare something for him, he destroys her offering. He accuses her of infidelity. This incident reminds Niki of a previous incident where he had accused her of the same thing and then he had struck her. She had left him to go to Thaba Nchu. He pleaded for her to come back. She did return, only to find that Pule was on the brink of sleeping with a woman he had picked up. They resolved their differences, but Niki sees similarities between Johannes Smit and Pule. Both men abuse her in their own way. There is tension in their marriage. Arguing is a common occurrence between them, as Viliki tells Tjaart. The pan that Niki uses to prepare Pule's food is, for her, symbolic of oppression. "The pan yoked her to all the previous women in his life."

Focal points

- The twisted morality and hypocrisy of the white church
- The pettiness and small-mindedness of the apartheid laws, for example, black and white people worshipping in separate churches.
- Pule's changing nature – "After being drained by gold, he brought back to Excelsior a body that had gone dry of smiles."
- Problems in the marriage
- Niki seen as victim
- Abuse.

1. Why does Mda stress Niki's beauty and desirability? [2]
2. Niki is "on time for the service" but she has to listen to it from outside the church. Why? [2]
3. Explain the twisted interpretation in "God's Word teaches us, after all, that He willed into being separate nations, colours and languages." [3]
4. "It was good, my baas." Comment on how something can be good if she had to listen to it from outside the church. Comment also on Niki's use of the word "baas". (2+2) [4]
5. Comment on the implications of the fact that Pule works so far from home and only comes home on long weekends. [3]
6. Niki is illustrated as a victim in this chapter. Offer three pieces of evidence to support this interpretation. [3]

CHAPTER 8 The big sky is bereft of stars

Pule decides to punish Niki by not coming home on the long weekends. He feels this punishment will assert his masculinity. He sends her money and gifts instead and for a while these are a small comfort to her. She continues to work at the butchery and one can only assume that her working is a way to combat her loneliness. One day, at the butchery, Cornelia Cronje strip-searches her, accusing her of hiding meat under her clothes. She is publicly humiliated and her nakedness ignites the sparks of desire in both Tjaart and Stephanus Cronje. Niki still does not resign and the chapter ends on an ominous note. "She was biding her time" and "she was nursing an ungodly grudge".

Focal points

- The inadequacies of Pule as a man and as a husband and father
- Prejudice
- Abuse
- Lust
- Revenge.

1. Explain "You are right, my friends. I have spoilt her by going home every long weekend" in the context of Pule as a man, as a husband and as a father. [3]
2. Discuss how Cornelia Cronje's treatment of Niki is typical of the time. [2]
3. Explain what the writer means with the description "raping her with their eyes". [2]

4. How do you think this community would explain and, possibly, justify “Afrikaner boys of the Free State platteland to go through devirgination rites by capturing and consuming the forbidden quarry that lurked beneath their nannies’ pink overalls”? [3]
5. What do you think Niki knew that “we did not know”? [2]
6. **Extension activity:** Years later Niki tells a friend about that terrible day in the butchery. Write that conversation.

CHAPTER 9 The cherry festival

It is the annual cherry festival at Ficksburg. Johannes Smit has a cherry liqueur stall next to Stephanus Cronje’s biltong stall, which Niki is looking after. The festival has a parade of the cherry queen, singing children and a coon carnival. The atmosphere is very festive, light and colourful. Niki is harrassed by an irritable Johannes Smit who threatens to visit her. She rejects his advances and when she wants to go back to Excelsior, Johannes Smit tells Stephanus Cronje that she is his “padkos”. Stephanus Cronje immediately understands that this means that she and Johannes have been intimate. He takes her for a drive in his bakkie and he shares his frustration with her. He is angry that Johannes Smit is having the opportunity to sleep with Niki and he isn’t. She strings him along and she knows that this is driving him mad with desire. They have sex and Niki’s promise of revenge is fulfilled. Cornelia Cronje’s husband is now hers.

Focal points

- Things look innocent, bright and cheerful but there is ugliness just below the surface.
- Johannes Smit is a lonely, unfulfilled person, hiding behind vulgarity.
- Stephanus Cronje is mad with lust for Niki.
- Niki uses sex as a weapon.
- Stephanus Cronje is portrayed as weak and inadequate.
- Revenge.

1. What insights into the Afrikaner community do we gain from the descriptions of the cherry festival? [3]
2. How does Mda evoke sympathy for Johannes Smit? [3]
3. Discuss how the three men in Niki’s life all contribute to her abuse. [3]
4. How does Niki’s silence fuel Stephanus Cronje’s desire? [2]
5. Explain how Niki sees the scene between her and Stephanus Cronje as an act of revenge. [2]

CHAPTER 10 A barn full of moans

Five men, Stephanus Cronje, Reverend Bornman, Groot-Jan Lombard, Klein-Jan Lombard and Johannes Smit meet five black women in the barn on Johannes Smit's farm. This is something that is done regularly, every two weeks. In the barn these people have orgies. Stephanus Cronje is unwilling to "share" Niki with the others. She is clearly the object of intense desire. Niki has given herself wholeheartedly to these escapades and she gains satisfaction from knowing that she is getting her revenge on Cornelia Cronje. Niki acknowledges that she has missed a period.

Focal points

- The painting reflects a madonna with a baby – a sign of things to come.
- The sexual licentiousness of the barn activities is emphasised.
- Niki is portrayed as a woman who has been "created" by the men in her life.
- Niki takes delight in her revenge.
- The pregnancy.

1. Explain the paradoxical behaviour of these farmers in the barn within the context of their background. [4]
2. "And she was using it consciously to get what she wanted." Explain this statement. [2]
3. Offer three examples of how the men are portrayed negatively. [3]
4. Why does Niki push Stephanus away from her so abruptly? [2]

CHAPTER 11 Big eyes in the sky

Niki has a difficult time giving birth to her baby. When the child is born, she is so beautiful that she is christened Popi, which means doll. Stephanus Cronje avoids Niki and she is clearly not going to get any support there. Pule confronts her about who the father is and then stops sending her money. He descends into heavy drinking and silence – this is something that happened to many migrant workers who were away from their homes. Niki is forced to continue being Tjaart's nanny. Stephanus Cronje is panicking because he cannot afford for his wife to find out about Niki.

Focal points

- Popi's birth is painted as a nativity scene.
- The birth is a difficult one – the child conceived in sin just adds to Niki's already complicated and painful life.
- Niki is seen as a caring, loving mother – no longer the vengeful, angry woman.
- There is evidence of other cases of adultery and miscegenation.
- Niki's marriage breaks down.
- Niki is abandoned by the men in her life.

1. The artist paints Popi's birth as the nativity. What is the significance of this? [2]
2. Why is it significant that Popi's birth is so difficult? [2]
3. Explain the meaning of "It was a bursting of forbidden sluices that we were all talking about in Excelsior." [2]
4. Comment on the significance of Cornelia Cronje's words "You people never know when to stop" and "You must ask your husband to take you to the hospital to close you up." [2]
5. Offer three examples that reinforce the idea that Niki has been rejected by those around her. [3]
6. **Extension activity:** Write Niki's letter to Pule in which she begs for his forgiveness and explains the events leading up to her pregnancy.

CHAPTER 12 A truly coloured baby

Rumours abound that police are rounding up women and their babies in the township for questioning and to be examined by a doctor for any traces of "whiteness" or "mixed blood". Niki learns that Mmampe has been arrested. Niki decides, in a desperate attempt to save herself and her child, to roast Popi so that she can be black! Niki is nevertheless arrested. While in jail she learns that Mmampe has confessed to the police and that she has implicated the other women too.

Focal points

- Fear
- The effects of paranoia regarding race
- The irrationality of the "mixed blood" theory
- The conditions in the jail
- Exposure.

1. Discuss the implications of a doctor being employed to carry out mixed blood tests. [3]
2. Give three examples of how terror is inflicted on these women. [3]
3. Niki's attempt to blacken Popi's skin is irrational, yet we can understand her response. Justify Niki's actions. [3]
4. Examine the conditions in the cell. How do these conditions contribute to the process of dehumanising people? [2]

CHAPTER 13 Glory

Father Claerhout's painting depicts Niki and Popi frolicking freely in the wide-open spaces. The reality is very different. Conditions in prison are unspeakably unpleasant. Niki hears that Stephanus Cronje has taken the coward's way out – suicide. Excelsior is overwhelmed by the scandal-hungry press. Adam de Vries is representing the white farmers in the trial. The inequalities are glaring. The white accused are out on bail of R200 each while the black women remain in jail. Each of the accused white men who arrives at court has a history of violence, racism, hatred and hypocrisy. The black women are led into the courtroom and their "crime" is made public. Each has to stand facing her co-accused. However, Klein-Jan Lombard, a policeman who is known in the township as a man who slept with black women, is free. The women all plead guilty and they are granted bail of R50 which none of them is able to pay. They stay in prison.

Focal points

- Justice is not even-handed and all are not equal before the law.
- Conditions in prison are unnecessarily harsh.
- Adam de Vries revels in the spotlight.
- Stephanus Cronje commits suicide.
- Dominee François Bornman's history of intolerance and right-wing attitudes highlights his hypocrisy.

1. Explain why Father Claerhout paints Niki and Popi so that they evoke compassion. [2]
2. While Niki is in jail, "She saw things happening to her as if she had another life outside of her body." Why does Niki have this reaction? [3]
3. Carefully read all the references to Adam de Vries and then comment on what these reveal about him. [3]
4. A female spectator dressed in a Voortrekker costume exclaims "Sies!". What significance does this spectator have in the story? [3]

5. Discuss the obvious incongruities in the dominee's behaviour and attitude towards Dukakis. [3]
6. How is justice served in Excelsior? [2]
7. **Extension activity:** As a crime reporter write a 200-word article for your newspaper about the first day of the trial.

CHAPTER 14 A sunburnt Christ

The traditional Catholic symbols – Christ on the cross, a beatific nun and rapturous believers – are all turned into a mournful scene instead, a scene where the believers are “bent forward from invisible burdens”, Christ is brown and the nun has bare breasts and black nipples and is pregnant. Niki is in discomfort because of the skin-lightening creams she has been using. It is clear that the narrator scorns the entrepreneurs like the Krok brothers who make a fortune from the ignorance and insecurities of blacks. Niki is uninterested in the political message behind these creams and is annoyed by Susanna's commentary. There is a delay in the court proceedings and it transpires that Reverend Bornman has attempted to commit suicide, but that the attempt failed and that he merely lost an eye instead. Adam de Vries informs the court that bail for four of the women will be paid as the women have withdrawn charges against them. Niki is the only one for whom bail has not been paid. She has to return to jail in Winburg. Reverend Bornman repents and blames blacks for his sins. “The devil had always used the black female to tempt the Afrikaner.”

Focal points

- The distortion of religious principles
- Exploitation
- Cowardice
- Punishment.

1. The sunflowers are turning their backs on the sun. Explain the metaphor in this. [2]
2. What point is Mda making about the Krok brothers and their skin-lightening cream? [2]
3. Do you agree with Maria's view that her lover, Reverend Bornman, “had proved to be just as cowardly as Niki's lover”? Justify your answer with evidence from the text. [3]
4. What happened in order for these women to be freed? [2]

CHAPTER 15 An outbreak of miscegenation

In the entire region of Excelsior and the outlying areas, reports of contraventions of the Immorality Act are being publicised and scores of offenders are being prosecuted. In a frenzied witch-hunt Afrikaner is turned against Afrikaner. Ironically, this fuels the young Afrikaner boys to continue where their elders have left off and they too indulge in “what their fathers were eating on the sly”. The trinity paints the black women not as fallen women, but as pious, virtuous nuns.

Focal points

- The accounts of violations of the Immorality Act – its pettiness and cruelty
- Exploitation
- The narrator’s attitude towards these men.

1. What is the significance of the italicised newspaper reports? [2]
2. Explain why the narrator uses the term “Golden Age of Immorality” and says “this Golden Age was like a plague”. [3]
3. Identify the irony in the events described in this chapter. [2]

CHAPTER 16 The kamikaze of the geese

The accused are all pronounced free. Adam de Vries is happy that justice has been served. The trial has caused a nationwide debate that has reached as far afield as parliament, where the scrapping of the Immorality Act is considered. Niki returns home to a ransacked shack. She has nothing left other than her much-hated pan. Finally anger consumes her and she realises that she, in not giving evidence, has allowed these white men to go free, and her ruin is complete.

Focal points

- Bribery and corruption
- The white accused continue to absolve themselves of guilt.
- The changing demographics of Excelsior
- Niki’s ruin.

1. Explain the figurative meaning of the title of this chapter. [2]
2. Comment on Maria’s and Mmampe’s responses as opposed to Niki’s. [3]
3. How was justice thwarted because the Attorney-General did not use section 212 of the Criminal Procedures Act? [2]
4. In what way has Niki been “duped”? [2]

CHAPTER 17 The blue madonna

Niki and Popi are at the trinity's house being painted. Popi's face is now the madonna's. Mother and daughter have had an altercation and we can see that this is not the first time. There is tension between mother and child and it transpires that Niki is a harsh, inflexible parent. Popi has learned to create a hard shell around herself. She hates her looks and she knows that she is an outcast – she is not black enough for the township children. Niki relies heavily on the trinity to look after her and he is the first male not to take advantage of her. She admires him but she also has a vested interest. Without his money, she will starve.

Focal points

- The madonna in this chapter is clothed – no hint of sensuality – pure and virginal.
- Niki's anger manifests itself in her parenting.
- Popi's physical differences cause her to be an outcast – a “Boesman”.
- Niki's reliance on the trinity is highlighted.

1. What message do you think the trinity conveys in making this madonna look like Popi, fully clothed and blue? [2]
2. In this chapter, in what ways do we see that the sins of the parents are visited upon the children? [4]
3. Name three things that happen to Popi that contribute to her thinking, “She was only good for her mother's ashly yard.” [3]
4. Viliki associates with older boys like Sekatle. What might this hint at? [2]

CHAPTER 18 Rites of passage: Tjaart goes soldiering

The trinity's painting depicts a fourteen-year-old Popi who desperately tries to disguise her colouredness, the source of her unhappiness. Viliki's friendship with Sekatle does not please Niki as she thinks he is a bad influence on Viliki. Sekatle earns a little money taking photographs. Popi has started menstruating but regards the bleeding as a punishment. Niki insists that she should no longer play with the younger girls. Popi feels more comfortable with them as they do not tease her about being a “boesman”, but accept her as she is. Niki also warns her about boys. Niki withdraws from the community into a life devoted only to her children. While collecting cow dung one day, she overhears some young women gossiping about Tjaart and learns that he has joined the army. As Niki is on her way home, Johannes Smit sets his dogs on her.

Focal point

- Rites of passage for Popi, Niki and Tjaart.

1. Explain Popi's "rite of passage". [2]
2. What does Niki's warning to Popi about boys and men reveal about her own attitude towards men? [2]
3. Why do you think Niki has withdrawn from the community? [2]
4. What two "rites of passage" has Tjaart undergone? [2]
5. Offer two reasons for Niki's plea that Popi should be nice to Tjaart. [2]

CHAPTER 19 Rites of passage: Viliki goes soldiering

Niki's relatives and the women from the church celebrate Popi's graduation into the church. Popi is sad that Viliki is not there – he is involved in underground political activities. Viliki now has nothing to do with Sekatle whom he despises for having joined "the system". When he comes home Viliki teaches Popi about the freedom struggle.

Tjaart returns home on leave from the army. He enjoys the praise and encouragement from the Afrikaans community for risking his life to fight against communists and terrorists.

Focal points

- Popi's confirmation as a new member of the church
- Viliki's soldiering and idealism
- Sekatle's opportunism
- Tjaart's indoctrination – his pride and determination to fight the enemy.

1. Which other rite of passage does Popi undergo? [2]
2. Why does Popi enjoy singing at church? [3]
3. Why is Niki secretly glad to see her relatives? [2]
4. What is Viliki's rite of passage? [2]
5. Why does Viliki despise Sekatle? [2]
6. Why does Popi cherish the evenings when Viliki is home? [2]
7. Examine the irony and hypocrisy of Reverend François Bornman's teachings about the Bible and apartheid. [5]
8. **Extension activity:** Write the speech that the leader of the church union might have made to welcome Popi into the church and to congratulate her.

CHAPTER 20 Blessings

The family is celebrating Niki's fortieth birthday. Pule is there too. He has returned, not only for Niki's birthday, but because he is ill and can no longer work on the mines. Viliki is greatly displeased with his father who deserted them and now wants them to care for him. Popi makes a speech to thank Niki and congratulate her. Sekatle arrives with Captain Lombard who arrests Viliki. Viliki is detained for six months, during which time he is interrogated under torture. Pule dies. Viliki feels no remorse.

Focal points

- Popi's speech for Niki's birthday
- Pule's return
- Viliki's arrest.

1. Account for Niki's "old and battered" appearance even though she is only forty. [4]
2. Describe and account for Viliki's attitude towards his father. [2]
3. What do you think of Pule? Does he evoke any sympathy in you? Motivate your response. [4]
4. What prompts Popi's bitter outburst regarding Tjaart? [4]
5. What is your opinion of Sekatle? Justify your opinion. [4]

CHAPTER 21 Poskaart/postcard 1

Twenty-one year old Popi turns nostalgically to the three blank postcards she has kept since she last modelled for the trinity. She cherishes them as a happy reminder of her childhood. Niki expresses her disappointment that Viliki is always away, even now when she believes it is unnecessary as the ANC has been unbanned and the leaders released. Niki fears that Popi is also becoming a politician like Viliki. Just as Popi's peeling spot is a taboo subject between Popi and Niki, so the Excelsior 19 case is never mentioned at Afrikaner dinner tables. The conversation turns to politics and Johannes Smit's refusal to attend the dinner party. He regards the National Party leaders and supporters as traitors who have sold out to the communists, an opinion shared by Tjaart Cronje. Adam de Vries tries to reassure Tjaart that power-sharing is not the same as selling out. He points out the difference between "good black people like Sekatle" and "bad ones like Viliki". Cornelia remembers Popi with bitterness as Niki's "coloured brat" who is "a more beautiful version of Tjaart".

Focal points

- Niki's naïvety/ignorance/gullibility
- Popi's suffering
- Hypocrisy of the white Afrikaners
- Political division among white Afrikaners
- Opportunism of people such as Adam de Vries and Sekatle.

1. Compare Niki's and Popi's responses to the picture on the postcard. [4]
2. Niki is naïve and ignorant about political issues. Find evidence from this chapter to support this view. [4]
3. In what sense is Popi a "prisoner" or a victim? [2]
4. Explain the reference to Reverend Bornman's "empty eye-socket". [2]
5. How is the hypocrisy of the white Afrikaners revealed in their conversations at the dinner party? [3]
6. In what sense are Adam de Vries and Sekatle opportunists? [3]

CHAPTER 22 Sweet stalactites

Father Claerhout's painting depicts a young coloured woman playing a penny-whistle to earn a few coins. On the streets of Excelsior, too, a young coloured woman busker entertains the passers-by. Popi is instructed by Viliki to cash a cheque for him at Volkskas bank. Apparently this money is to be used for "Movement work". Popi expresses her disapproval of Viliki's choice of bank, a bank established for the Afrikaner, and where, even now, apartheid structures are still in place. Popi sees Tjaart in the bank but he doesn't even notice her. Neither Popi nor Tjaart recognises the family resemblance. However, the whispers among the people indicate that the rest of the community does. On the way home Popi encounters a large group of demonstrators led by Viliki. Popi is assaulted by the police. Popi's painful experience on the day of the demonstration fires her with the determination not to be a mere bystander any longer.

Focal points

- Popi's identification with the young coloured woman busker
- Popi's disapproval of Viliki's political compromise
- No change of heart among most Afrikaners – apartheid structures and attitudes still in place in Excelsior
- Peaceful march met with police brutality
- Popi's determination to become politically active
- Niki uses healing powers of honey to treat Popi's wounds.

1. Why does Popi hate the penny-whistler? [1]
2. How does Popi attempt to disguise her colouredness? [2]
3. The italicised lines indicate Popi's thoughts as she remembers her earlier conversation with Viliki. What appear to be her concerns? [2]
4. Popi leaves the bank fuming. Why is she so angry? [4]
5. Explain the political divisions that have arisen in the Afrikaner community. [2]
6. a) Describe the actions of the police reservists. (2)
- b) What does this behaviour reveal about the mentality of the police? (2) [4]
7. a) Why does Viliki regard Sekatle as a "sellout"? (4)
- b) In the light of later developments, why is Viliki's criticism of Sekatle ironic? (2) [6]
8. The bees and their honey is a recurring motif (image) in the novel. What might they symbolise? [2]
9. **Extension activity:** That night Popi decides to record her feelings about the events of that day. Write her diary entry.

CHAPTER 23 Daymare

It is the first sitting of the new Excelsior Town Council which comprises black members – and they are in the majority! Popi anxiously arrives to take up her seat. She feels intimidated by her unfamiliar surroundings and is further distressed when she is treated rudely by the town clerk, and is seated alone opposite the Boers who talk among themselves, ignoring her. Popi had devoted herself to becoming a "Young Lion", even canvassing farm workers before the elections and confronting farm owners who had evicted their workers. Now she is a town councillor and Viliki is the new Mayor of Excelsior.

Focal points

- Popi's anxiety, sense of inferiority, humiliation, anger as a new councillor
- Composition of new Excelsior Town Council
- Popi's devotion to the Movement and rights of farm workers
- Viliki is elected Mayor of Excelsior.

1. Explain why Popi feels that she is being imprisoned and that there is no escape. [3]
2. What contributes to Popi's feelings of inferiority and discomfort? [4]

3. What is the purpose of the repetition of “girl” in “nanny-girl”, “kitchen-girl” and “council-girl”? [2]
4. Explain what is meant by “The Movement had become her [Popi’s] lover”. [1]
5. How does Niki react to Popi’s involvement in the Movement? [2]
6. Compare Tjaart’s reaction to affirmative action with that of people like Lizette de Vries. [4]
7. In what sense does Niki believe that all her children are being taken away? [3]
8. What caption or headline might have accompanied the photograph in all the major national newspapers of “Viliki Pule, Mayor of Excelsior, barefoot, sitting on a chair outside the shack, wearing the mayoral chain”? [2]
9. **Extension activity:** Write the minutes of the first meeting held by the new Excelsior Town Council.

CHAPTER 24 Everybody is a hero at one time and a villain at another time

Father Claerhout’s painting of a mother lying beneath two barren peach trees is a metaphor for the lives of Niki, Popi and Viliki. Popi and Viliki have entered politics. Although they present a united front, there is a rift developing between them. One of the causes of argument is Viliki’s allocation of two RDP houses to himself. Popi refuses a house and continues to live in a shack with her mother. A further disagreement arises when Viliki does not support Popi’s proposal that the minutes of council meetings should be recorded in English, not Afrikaans. Another argument ensues when Sekatle applies to join the Movement. Niki begins to resent Popi’s frequent absences. Popi is very busy attending council meetings or Movement meetings, as well as singing at funerals. Popi calls Niki to assist with the removal of a hive of bees in the town hall. Niki takes the bees home to start a hive of her own. Their encounter with Tjaart Cronje as they leave prompts Niki to caution Popi not to fight with Tjaart.

Focal points

- Growing rift between Popi and Viliki
- Viliki’s abuse of power and Popi’s moral stance
- The language debate
- Animosity between Popi and Tjaart
- Niki’s way with the bees
- Niki’s fear that all her children are being taken away.

1. Why is Niki, the “raw sienna mother” depicted in the painting, described as a dreamer? [3]
2. “And she spends her red days lying naked on the red soil”.
 - a) Father Claerhout’s paintings of naked black women are not erotic. How does he portray them? (1)
 - b) How do the white Afrikaner men view the nakedness of black women? (1) [2]
3. Popi’s and Viliki’s lives are like the peach trees “without bearing fruit”.
 - a) Explain why Niki might feel this way. (2)
 - b) Explain the reference to the “rebirth” of Popi and Viliki. How have they been “born again”? (2)
 - c) Why is their “rebirth” “void”? (2) [6]
4. We are told that “Popi continued to sing for the Methodists and for the dead at funerals”. Why is singing at church important to Popi? [3]
5. Popi and Viliki presented a “united front” but disagreed on several issues, one of which was the allocation of RDP houses.
 - a) What action does Viliki take in this regard and what does this action reveal about his character and/or values? (2)
 - b) What does Popi do in this regard and what does her behaviour reveal about her character and/or values? (2) [4]
6. Popi and Viliki argue about the use of Afrikaans in the council meetings.
 - a) Explain Popi’s argument. (2)
 - b) Explain Viliki’s argument. (2)
 - c) What is Tjaart’s opinion? (2)
 - d) What does Lizette de Vries think? (2)
 - e) Offer your own opinion on the matter. (2) [10]

CHAPTER 25 The war of the unshaven legs

The establishment of a squatter camp just on the outskirts of Mahlatswetsa Location causes great division among members of the Movement as well as among the Afrikaners. Popi exposes the money-making scheme of Sekatle, “the hero of the squatters”. The council votes to move the squatters, by force if necessary. The squatters, under the leadership of Sekatle, refuse to move, so Viliki, the mayor, is forced to send in the bulldozers. Both Popi and Viliki suffer humiliation – Popi a personal one from an insult by Tjaart, and Viliki a political one from the toyi-toying crowd chanting that he is a sellout.

Focal points

- Shifting political alignments
- Sekatle's role as the champion of the poor
- Open hostility (on a personal level) between Popi and Tjaart.

1. What might be the significance of "fiery red" in the description of the young man in the painting? [2]
2. Briefly discuss the shifting political alignments in Excelsior. [5]
3. How does Popi expose Sekatle's money-making scheme? [2]
4. Popi campaigns for a library in the location. Explain how this erupts into a row and hurtful personal insults. [4]
5. Why is Tjaart's attack on Popi ironic? [2]
6. **Extension activity:** Debate the following motion: Squatters should be legally allowed to erect shacks on unoccupied land.

CHAPTER 26 The Seller of Songs

The image of the busker in the painting merges with reality and we are introduced to the Seller of Songs who, we are told, is the coloured daughter of Maria (Niki's friend) and Reverend Bornman. Her playing for Viliki outside his house enchants him and this is the start of a passionate love affair of which Niki and Popi do not approve. Popi's spirit has been so crushed by Tjaart's taunts about her hairy legs that she confides in Niki who quietly defends Tjaart. A petrol bomb is thrown through Viliki's window. Sekatle is targeting him, firstly, for forcibly removing the squatters and, secondly, for bringing the reputation of the Movement (and that of Sekatle) into disrepute.

Focal points

- Viliki's passion for the Seller of Songs
- Relationship between Popi and Lizette de Vries
- Sekatle's vendetta against Viliki.

1. What opinion do you have of the Seller of Songs? On what do you base your opinion? [4]
2. How do you respond to Viliki's behaviour after he becomes involved with the Seller of Songs? Justify your response. [4]
3. Would you agree that a friendship seems to be developing between Popi and Lizette de Vries? Explain your answer. [3]

4. **Extension activity:** Viliki reports the petrol-bombing incident to the police. He is asked to provide the police with a written statement. Write Viliki's statement, which should include all the facts of the case as well as Viliki's suspicions of Sekatle's involvement.

CHAPTER 27 Serenity rests on her like a heavy log

The accordion player depicted in the painting is "of the new world". Viliki has also become an accordion player and accompanies his lover, the Seller of Songs, on her penny-whistle. Sekatle succeeds in having Viliki suspended from the Movement. Viliki is also forced to resign as mayor. Ironically, Lizette de Vries, a National Party member, is voted in as mayor. The former oppressors are again in power in the town. Strangely, most township residents (still under the impression that "white is right") are not bothered by this. Viliki loses interest in council affairs. On the other hand, Popi carries out her council duties (especially concerning the library) with great enthusiasm. Niki continues to resign herself to a life of loneliness.

Focal points

- Viliki's political apathy and indifference
 - Popi's continued devotion to her council duties
 - Evidence of Sekatle's powerful influence
 - Excelsior Town Council again under National Party rule.
-
- 1 a) Why is the accordion player depicted in this painting described as "frail", "delicate", "having a painful gait" and "as if he will break into two" under the "weight of the song" and the "weight of the accordion"? (3)
 - b) What message about the "new world" in South Africa might the painting be conveying? (2) [5]
 - 2 a) What is unusual about the combination of musical instruments played by Viliki and the Seller of Songs? (2)
 - b) What might the figurative significance be of this unusual combination? (3) [5]
 3. What prompts Viliki to praise his lover for being "wise"? [2]
 4. We are told that Sekatle "managed to keep his hands clean" and that "nothing linked him to the bombers". What does this tell us about Sekatle's character and/or values? [3]
 5. What evidence is there to suggest that Sekatle is extremely powerful and influential? [2]

6. Explain what Mda means by “Niki continued to loom large in Popi’s life”. [2]
7. Make sense of the paradox contained in the title of this chapter, “Serenity rests on her like a heavy log”. [2]
8. **Extension activity:** Write a letter to the editor of *The Friend* newspaper expressing your opinion on the resignation of the mayor, Mr Viliki Pule, and the election of Mrs Lizette de Vries as the new mayor.

CHAPTER 28 Immersions

The painting of a funeral procession reflects the reality of Aids on the local community. Many people, including mothers and children, are dying of the disease. Popi is kept very busy singing at funerals. Sekatle has succeeded in getting both Popi and Viliki expelled from the Movement. However, they continue as town councillors. The Cronje family continues to lament the increasing isolation of Afrikaners and their betrayal by moderate Afrikaners like Lizette de Vries. Popi and Lizette encounter Johannes Smit at the tractor show. Popi is aware of gossip about her origins but has never been told the truth, nor has she ever asked.

Focal points

- People of location immersed in death and Aids
- Popi immersed in anger and singing at funerals
- Viliki immersed in Seller of Songs
- Tjaart and Cornelia immersed in anger because of affirmative action
- Johannes Smit immersed in farming
- Popi aware of gossip about her origins but knows nothing
- Niki immersed in serenity of the bees.

1. Explain the Basotho people’s adage that these days death is “the daughter-in-law of all homesteads”. [4]
2. Offer an explanation for the use of the term “Afrikaner tradition” to refer to the increasing occurrence of tragedies in which whole families are killed by their fathers. [4]
3. Explain how the Pule Comrades become again the “plain Pule Siblings”. [2]
4. How does Popi’s response to their expulsion from the Movement differ from Viliki’s? [4]

5. Tjaart Cronje “was immersed in anger”, “an immersion he shared with Popi”. Do you think the source of their anger is the same? Explain your answer. [4]
6. What prompts Johannes Smit to refer to Popi as “feisty”? [3]
7. Offer an explanation for the fact that Popi, an intelligent young woman, does not wish to know the truth about her origins. [4]
8. In what sense have the bees brought Niki serenity? [2]

CHAPTER 29 An old love affair

The relationship between Adam de Vries and Viliki seems unusual given the history of this town. Although they are political adversaries, there is a friendly rivalry between them. People wonder what de Vries and Viliki have in common. According to the narrator (the “we”), there is nothing strange about their relationship. It is a sign of the old “love affair” which has always existed between blacks and Afrikaners. We are told that the relationship blacks have with Afrikaners is different from the one they have with the English, whom they consider to be hypocrites. At least the Afrikaner is honest about hating black people!

Focal points

- Relationship between de Vries and Viliki likened to “old love affair” between Afrikaners and blacks
 - Friendly rivalry between political adversaries
 - Old racist attitudes prevail.
1. Why does Viliki find it disturbing and confusing that Adam de Vries still has the old South African flag hanging in his office? [2]
 2. Describe and account for de Vries’s attitude to his supposed role in bringing about the new South Africa. [3]
 3. Describe the secretary’s attitude toward Viliki. [2]
 - 4 a) How would you describe Viliki’s attitude to Adam de Vries’s politics? (2)
 - b) What evidence is there to support your view? (2) [4]
 - 5 a) What is the attitude of the right-wing Afrikaner to the relationship between Adam de Vries and Viliki? (2)
 - b) What does the Movement think of it? (2)
 - c) What is the attitude of the “we” narrator? (2) [6]
 - 6 a) Identify the signs of poverty under which blacks still suffer. (2)
 - b) Identify the signs of racism to which blacks are still subjected. (2) [4]

CHAPTER 30 Poskaart/postcard 2

It is Christmas Day and Popi is reflecting on Father Claerhout's paintings as she gazes at a postcard depicting Mary and Jesus. We are told that the usually festive mood of Christmas no longer exists in the location. Popi's anger fills her with the need to visit the trinity "to bathe her troubled soul" in his paintings. Niki (the Bee Woman) spends all her days watching the bees at work. They have a calming effect on her. She no longer withdraws from the community but invites everyone to share her honey. Popi joins Niki who finally confides that she has done many wrong things in her life, hinting at the connection with Tjaart. Tjaart's anger, too, is eating away at him. He admits that Popi is one of the causes of his anger. There is much bitterness and resentment in the Cronje home. On the other hand, we see the love and gentleness shared by Niki and her daughter as Popi allows Niki to unwrap the turban hiding her hair, which still causes Popi great unhappiness.

Focal points

- Popi's anger eats away at her – feels urge to visit the trinity
- Niki finds peace among the bees – generosity replaces bitterness
- Tjaart's anger eats away at him too – Popi partly the cause
- Hatred and resentment mar Christmas lunch in Cronje home
- Popi still bitter about the "curse" of her hair, but Niki and Viliki appreciate the beauty of her colouredness.

- 1 a) What are the signs that "Christmas had lost its lustre"? (3)
b) Offer a reason for the change. (2) [5]
2. What might be the figurative significance of the bees in Niki's life? [3]
3. Viliki and Popi feel differently about their mother's work with the bees. How do their attitudes differ? [2]
4. Account for the anger that consumes both Tjaart and Popi. [4]
5. Explain Popi's statement: "The pain of my whole life is locked in my hair." [3]

CHAPTER 31 Sometimes there is a void

Popi visits Father Claerhout's studio. She sees a painting depicting a young woman ("not a madonna" – there is no baby). The questions in her eyes are likened to questions in Popi's eyes. Popi's visit has a healing effect. She feels energised, exhilarated, drained of anger and bitterness, but the emptiness in her heart remains.

Focal points

- Popi's anger has healed but a void remains.

1. How has the trinity's work changed now that he is an old man? [2]
2. What is unusual about Popi's meeting with the trinity? [3]
3. Although Popi feels free of anger, she still feels empty inside. What might be able to fill this void in her heart? [3]

CHAPTER 32 Profound nostalgia

Niki is happy that Viliki and Popi return to the nest. Popi and Viliki express fears for the future – that ardent fighters in the struggle for freedom now trample on the rights of their own people and that the arrogance of power turns into racial arrogance. Although they argue about capitalism versus socialism, Viliki and Popi have reconciled as siblings. The Afrikaners also wallow in nostalgia, looking back to the days when the Afrikaner ruled supreme.

Focal points

- Niki, Popi and Viliki's nostalgia
- The nostalgia of the Afrikaner.

1. What are Popi and Viliki nostalgic about? [2]
2. Why are they disillusioned about the new South Africa? [2]
3. Explain the Afrikaners' nostalgia. [4]
4. **Extension activity:** Debate the issue of capitalism versus socialism.

CHAPTER 33 Betrayal by the elders

Viliki and the Seller of Songs have adopted a new lifestyle as itinerant musicians. This has given Viliki a new sense of freedom – freedom from politics and power struggles. Popi (also no longer on the council) has taken a job harvesting cherries, a job she does with passion. Niki continues with her bee-keeping. Viliki accuses Sekatle (new mayor of Excelsior) of nepotism. He is also critical of the attitudes of the people who wait for the council or the government to do things for them. Tjaart accuses de Vries and Smit of betraying the elders because they are working to support emerging black farmers. He is so emotionally overwrought that Jacomina has to take him to hospital.

Focal points

- Viliki's new-found freedom
- Popi's new life
- Disillusionment of both blacks and whites of the younger generation, who accuse their elders of betrayal.

1. The narrator (the "we" – the voice of the people) considers Popi to be "foolish". Why? What is your opinion in this regard? [3]
2. Why did Popi take to harvesting with a passion? [2]
3. What is the symbolic significance of Niki's being called "The Bee Woman" or even the "queen bee"? [2]
4. Have Niki's old friends, Mmampe and Maria, changed at all since their youth? Explain your answer. [2]
5. When Adam de Vries expresses his disappointment that Viliki is no longer a dedicated community builder, Niki just smiles vaguely "as if she knew something that the rest of the world did not know". What do you think she knew? [2]
6. Explain why the attitudes of white people like de Vries who wanted "to guide the black man to civilisation" are condescending and patronising. [4]
7. Why is Viliki disillusioned about post-apartheid South Africa? [2]
8. What precipitates Tjaart Cronje's emotional breakdown? [3]

CHAPTER 34 A season of whispers

Tjaart is suffering from an unknown illness and wants to see Popi. Niki is happy that Popi has freed herself of the shame of being coloured and that Tjaart wants to make peace. Niki and Johannes Smit reach an uneasy truce, although Smit fails to apologise or ask for forgiveness. In an awkward but poignant meeting Tjaart finally tells Popi that Stephanus Cronje is her father too. Tjaart tries to make peace with Popi.

Focal points

- The elders' failure to recognise/acknowledge the source of Tjaart's illness
- Popi and Niki finally find joy and love in each other as they both experience freedom from guilt and shame.
- Johannes Smit's failure to ask for forgiveness
- Unchanged racist attitudes in the Cronje home
- The awkward but poignant meeting between Popi and Tjaart.

1. The elders are described as “respectable”. Explain the irony of this. [4]
2. Tjaart blames his illness on “the lies of the elders”.
 - a) How does Gys Uys interpret this? (3)
 - b) What do you think Tjaart might mean? (2) [5]
3. Explain Niki’s reaction to Popi’s joke about being coloured. [2]
4. Johannes Smit attempts to make peace with Niki. What does this conversation reveal about the character of Johannes Smit? [3]
5. Although Popi’s visit to Tjaart is awkward, it has its poignant moments. Explain. [3]
6. Do you think Popi has finally accepted Stephanus Cronje as her father? Justify your response. [2]
7. Explain the last line: “It was a season of whispers”. [2]

CHAPTER 35 From the sins of our mothers

A painting depicts four women representing the “real new millennium”. Niki takes us back to earlier scenes of cosmos flowers, sunflower fields and the barn – now fallen into disuse. Popi now admires herself in the mirror, celebrating her beauty. The final image is of Niki and Popi walking under a swarm of bees – the symbol of diligence, sociability, healing and wisdom.

Focal points

- The painting
- Niki’s memory of the barn
- Popi’s celebration of her beauty
- The symbol of the bees.

- 1 a) What is meant by the “**real** new millennium”? Focus on the highlighted word. (4)
- b) How does the painting reflect the concept of the “real new millennium”? (5) [9]
2. What might be the figurative significance of the “disused” barn that stands as a “monument” to the past? [4]
3. Identify all the signs of Popi’s transformation. [5]
4. Examine the irony contained in the reference to the trinity’s paintings. [3]

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. The first statement in the novel is also its last. How does this statement convey one of the main themes of the novel?
2. Who is the “Madonna of Excelsior” and why is she portrayed as such?
3. Chapter 24 has the title “Everybody is a hero at one time and a villain at another time”. Who do you consider to be the heroes in the novel, and why? Who do you think are the villains, and why?
4. Although Niki is a victim of oppression and abuse, and deserves the reader’s sympathy, she is also guilty of compliance and apathy. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain why.
5. Critically discuss the following statement: The novel is a protest against racial injustice and an indictment of apartheid, but, more importantly, it is about the abuse of power.
6. Mda’s treatment of both blacks and whites is even-handed. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

CHAPTER 1

1. Popi is vibrant and appreciates everything around her; can relate to what the people in the painting are doing. [2]
2. She is poor. Life is a struggle. [2]
3. Wonders if priest will ask her about the child and then pass judgement. [2]
4. Narrator views these beings as holy; landscape is beautiful – as are mother and child. [2]

CHAPTER 2

1. Shown as repulsive – they grope and touch women in an ugly way. [2]
2. “vastrap”, “tiekie-draai”, “boeremusiek”, “concertina”, “volkspele” [3]
3. Niki knows them intimately. They are more to her than employers. [2]
4. They are not pillars of the community – are cheating on their wives; not true to their so-called political philosophies. [2]
5. He is surrounded by friends; allowed to be a child; is part of a community; in an environment where he feels he belongs. [4]

CHAPTER 3

1. He wants the reader to experience his own reverence for them; to break the stereotype of the white-only depiction of the madonna. [2]
2. They are described as voluptuous, fecund, beautiful. They are sensual creatures, at peace with their sensuality. [3]
3. Their beauty is so pronounced and innocent that it cannot be erased; it is too powerful to be forgotten. [2]
4. Niki realises the power of her nakedness; now she also knows that she can use this power to her advantage; she knows that her nakedness and beauty will make up for humiliation she suffered at garden party. [3]

CHAPTER 4

1. Stresses naïvety – violation is all the more pronounced. They were so innocent and were robbed of that innocence by an unscrupulous man. [2]
2. We need to be aware of her beauty so that the violation she suffers is in stark contrast with that beauty. Sets up a motif of the novel: Niki’s beauty, rather than helping her, becomes a way to torture her. [3]
3. Johannes Smit is repulsive to look at; coarse and unrefined. There is something unjust about a repulsive creature like Smit slobbering all over a young beautiful girl like Niki, who is at the height of her beauty. [4]
4. He has a whip and money, and he is white. [3]

5. Johannes Smit is an inadequate man; can only bully those weaker than himself; abuses his “power” as a white during these times to prey on black girls. [2]

CHAPTER 5

1. Pule is a strong, dignified man; has standing in his community. Mda contrasts him with the white men who are so obviously his inferiors. [3]
2. Shows Johannes Smit was really fond of Niki. He feels that he has lost something precious. [2]
3. Sex between Pule and Niki – by mutual consent; tender, sensuous and respectful. Sex between Niki and Johannes Smit – crude, forced and humiliating (even for Johannes Smit, although he might not realise it). [4]
4. Cornelia Cronje is the “Madam” – the superior – purely because she is white. Black women are demeaned by being called “girls” – not addressed by their full names or afforded the dignity of their names. [2]

CHAPTER 6

1. Sun is depicted as majestic and powerful. Niki, by association, is also powerful. She is the reason that “plants are wilting”. [3]
2. Perhaps Johannes Smit is not all bad. He is human. We are allowed to see another side to the man. [2]
3. Tjaart Cronje takes his place as her tormentor/abuser. There is always some man ready to step into another abuser’s shoes. [2]

CHAPTER 7

1. It makes her “fall” all the more poignant. She is so beautiful, yet she is surrounded by so much ugliness. Despite abuse handed out to her, she is untouched by it – not marred by the cruelties inflicted on her. [2]
2. She is black. There is no place for her in a white man’s house of God. [2]
3. A reference to the story of Noah’s sons who laughed at their father’s drunkenness and then Ham was punished in that his descendants were forever to be the labourers. Ham was dark in colour and the Dutch Reformed Church, a vehicle of the Nationalist government, used this as “proof” that their racist policies were justified. [3]
4. It was not a good message! Niki is denied this message, this religious experience, because she is black. She is asked what she thought of the sermon even though it was impossible for her to give a meaningful answer, as she had to listen to it from outside the church. The word “baas” is synonymous with oppression. Blacks were forced to use this term for their white “master”. It diminished the stature of black people. [4]

5. Pule is, essentially, a migrant labourer, separated from his family for long periods. Migrant labourers often establish second families closer to their workplace – Pule likely to do the same. It is very difficult to maintain normal marital relations under these circumstances. He sees Niki too infrequently. Loneliness is going to affect them both. [3]
6. She is the victim of racism; has to stand outside the church while her employers are inside; has to sacrifice her Sunday to look after Tjaart, her employers' child; is unfairly accused of laziness by her husband because she has not cooked a Sunday meal. [3]

CHAPTER 8

1. Pule – insecure man, accuses his wife of infidelity (always the first accusation he levels at her); decides to “punish” her by denying her his presence, as he feels this will save him face among his friends; does not take Viliki into account; is childish and asserts masculinity in a petulant way; becomes an absentee father. [3]
2. Cornelia Cronje is a product of her time and place. She does not see anything wrong in treating Niki as she does. This was nothing unusual in these times. Blacks were automatically suspected of theft. [2]
3. They are greedy; have had a glimpse of the forbidden fruit; consumed by lust. There is violence in the way they look at her. [2]
4. There is nothing wrong with white Afrikaner boys having a little harmless fun. Black women were put on earth especially for that purpose – to be at the disposal of the Afrikaner. They were certainly not going to have anything more to do with them other than that. [3]
5. She knew that her time for revenge would come; she had the sexual power to ensnare Stephanus and, on a slightly different level, Tjaart. [2]

CHAPTER 9

1. Community orientated; stand together as a community – thoroughly enjoy these festivals which are attended by everybody. [3]
2. Shows him to be desperately lonely. He is unkempt – the description of the ill-fitting safari suit is poignant. [3]
3. Her husband, Pule, abandons her to a life of loneliness. Johannes Smit harrasses her relentlessly. Stephanus Cronje wants to sleep with her to rediscover his flagging manhood. [3]
4. She does not answer his feverish questions about what she has been doing with Johannes Smit, thereby allowing him to give vent to his fantasies by putting them into words. Niki's silence drives him mad with desire. She is not admitting to or denying anything. It is a deliberate ploy to “catch” him. [2]

5. Distances herself from the man having sex with her; instead sees him as Madam Cornelia's husband. This means that her revenge is complete because she has taken Madam Cornelia's husband. She, the lowly black woman, has triumphed over Cornelia Cronje. [2]

CHAPTER 10

1. Uninhibited; coupling with black women; breaking the law of the land and being unfaithful to wives. Their church is supposedly everything; they live by the book; have deep reverence for religion; they are leaders of their community. Yet they choose to ignore all of those things and just indulge in pleasures of the flesh – in absolute contrast with their religious teachings/lifestyles/the principles of Calvinism. [4]
2. Niki is absolutely aware of her own sexuality and the power it exerts over these men; she has lost her innocence and wants to use this asset against these men so that she can control them. This is the only weapon that she has; it allows her to feel empowered. [2]
3. Their childishness around partner-swapping – they behave as petulant, selfish children behave (Johannes Smit and Stephanus Cronje); the sexual perversions that are distasteful (Groot-Jan Lombard's armpits); the bodies of the whites are seen as ugly, fleshy. [3]
4. She realises that she is pregnant and is very angry. He is the cause of her woes. [2]

CHAPTER 11

1. Shows that Niki is still innocent. She is the Mother Mary – the madonna. Narrators do not judge her; view her as holy/perfect/without sin. [2]
2. The sins of the parents are visited upon the children. Niki is punished with a difficult, painful birth. [2]
3. News of countless across-the-colour-line liaisons has been exposed; clear that all throughout the area these illegal relationships have been going on – as though the sluice gates of a dam have been opened. [2]
4. Cornelia's prejudiced attitude: black people are breeding machines. [2]
5. Pule rejects Niki; Stephanus Cronje has avoided Niki ever since she told him of the pregnancy; Niki's own community hold her responsible for her husband's rejection of her. [3]

CHAPTER 12

1. Highlights the lengths to which the paranoid apartheid regime would go – hire a doctor to practise pseudo science. (Reminiscent of the Nazi regime and its preoccupation with race.) [3]

2. Homes are raided in the middle of the night; police arrive in convoy of vans; use violence and kick down doors; are heavily armed. [3]
3. Her fear makes her do irrational things. She does not want her child or herself to be captured and imprisoned. Niki, too, falls victim to the race paranoia except now her baby is not black enough. [3]
4. Women all crowded in a cell together, along with their babies; insufficient ablution facilities; cell in virtual darkness. Conditions disorientate women, confusing them – making them vulnerable. [2]

CHAPTER 13

1. Father Claerhout as one of the narrators is sympathetic to Niki's plight. He is highlighting the cruelty of the situation in which women and their babies are imprisoned for doing nothing wrong. The painting helps reader's understanding of the injustice of proceedings. [2]
2. This reaction is a very typical response to trauma. The only way that Niki can cope with the horrors of prison is to remove herself from herself; look at herself from afar. [3]
3. He is an egocentric, power-hungry, little man – in both stature and mindset – thrives on press; sees this as his chance to gain fame. [3]
4. She is the embodiment of Afrikaner conservatism; expresses her disdain and horror that white Afrikaner men could stoop so low as to have relations with black women, who were seen as inferior people by the Afrikaners who supported apartheid. [3]
5. Reverend Bornman was instrumental in getting rid of Dukakis because his son, Ari, dared to kiss Jacomina. The dominee viewed them as sinful because they were foreign, not of the volk. He was intolerant of them because they were different. Yet, he is the one who slept with black women, in contradiction to his supposed "morals". He is a hypocrite. [3]
6. Justice is not even-handed. Justice received by blacks is invariably harsh; whites are not made to suffer unnecessarily. [2]

CHAPTER 14

1. Justice in Excelsior is absent. The sunflowers cannot reach for the light of the sun, because it is not pure; tainted by the injustice of the system. [2]
2. Blacks are exploited on every level. Wherever one turns there is someone, in this case the Krok brothers, waiting to abuse them. The lightening creams were very dangerous to use, but despite this they were sold to black people. The Krok brothers did not care that many women suffered serious skin damage, as long as they made money. [2]

3. Yes. Both of these men could not face up to what they had done, so they chose suicide instead. There is nothing noble about their choice. They abandoned their responsibilities – to their immediate families, to the women they abused and to their communities. [3]
4. The women were bribed with freedom so that they would not testify against the men. [2]

CHAPTER 15

1. Give unbiased accounts of events in the area. [2]
2. Being ironic: it was not the “Golden Age” – it was the dark age! There is nothing golden/good about the Immorality Act. It became like a sickness because wherever one went, immorality was rife. The Golden Age of Immorality bred unrestrained sexual behaviour. [3]
3. The very law that was instituted to keep the Afrikaner pure led to his moral decline. [2]

CHAPTER 16

1. The accused women commit figurative suicide. They agree not to testify against the men, which leaves them with nothing – will always be known as the guilty ones. [2]
2. Mmampe and Maria are a lot more hardened than Niki; resigned to their fate; accept their lot. Niki is outraged – angry that they have been treated so unfairly. [3]
3. This act stated that a witness can be forced to testify. The authorities conveniently chose to ignore this. The men were therefore pronounced innocent of all charges. [2]
4. Victim of empty promises; persuaded not to testify when she was at her most vulnerable; bribed with the possibility of freedom. [2]

CHAPTER 17

1. Popi is not going to be a victim as her mother was. This is the dawning of a new age. She is going to remain innocent and undefiled. [2]
2. Popi is an outcast; leads a lonely existence; ostracised by her community; does not fit in anywhere. Popi and Viliki grow up in a single-parent home with very few resources; have been abandoned. Popi’s appearance is a constant reminder that she is the offspring of the Excelsior 19 incident. [4]
3. She is called “Boesman” by the township children; her mother treats her harshly and often unfairly; people comment on her looks all the time. [3]
4. Viliki is looking for a male figure with whom he can identify; looking for acceptance outside of the home. [2]

CHAPTER 18

1. Has begun to menstruate; grow hair on her legs (like white women). [2]
2. Niki does not trust men as she has been abused, degraded and deserted by men. [2]
3. The shame and disgrace of her involvement in the Excelsior 19 case and the birth of her coloured child, Popi, has led to her isolation. [2]
4. He has had sex with local black girls; has joined the army. [2]
5. She considers Tjaart to be like one of her children, so wants them to be a “happy family”; Tjaart and Popi are half-siblings. [2]

CHAPTER 19

1. Becomes full member of Young Women’s Union of Methodist Church. [2]
2. Her beautiful voice earns her much admiration – boosts her self-esteem (not judged by colour). [3]
3. Niki welcomes their visit – signifies she has been forgiven for disgracing the family. [2]
4. Joins underground movement fighting for freedom from apartheid. [2]
5. Sekatle works with oppressors to enrich himself. [2]
6. Viliki teaches her freedom songs; tells her about struggles in other parts of Africa. [2]
7. He professes to be Christian, yet treats black people inhumanely and is racist. He supports apartheid (and all its laws, e.g. Immorality Act) yet contravenes those very laws by enjoying inter-racial sex. [5]

CHAPTER 20

1. Niki has lived a life of hardship and poverty, doing hard manual labour; has been abused by men (Pule as well as white men); has used harmful skin-lightening creams on her face. [4]
2. Vilike resents his father for having deserted the family; now, when he is ill, he expects their help. [2]
3. Own opinion. [4]
4. Popi is jealous that Niki is so attached to Tjaart, a white boy whose parents ill-treated her; also angry that Niki does not understand the political implications of Tjaart’s military service – that he is guilty of attacking innocent black schoolchildren. [4]
5. Sekatle is a traitor; a sellout – for betraying his old friend to the enemy, in order to benefit only himself. He is callous, self-serving, opportunistic. [4]

CHAPTER 21

1. Niki interprets it literally; disapproves as it does not depict traditional view of Mary and Jesus as white. Popi understands its metaphorical significance. Strangely, she does not appear to identify with the racial issue pointed out by Niki. [4]
2. Niki does not fully understand the implications or consequences of the transition to democracy – she does not realise the struggle for equality and justice continues. She is gullible and easily influenced by propaganda broadcast by SABC via Radio Bantu. [4]
3. Endure racist insults from her own community; forced to hide her “colouredness”; ashamed of her different looks. [2]
4. He lost his eye in his failed suicide attempt. [2]
5. Their self-righteousness allows them to believe God has forgiven them – Oupa Groot-Jan remembered as “a true hero of the Afrikaner people”, “a great Afrikaner patriot” rather than as perpetrator of sexual abuse. [3]
6. Both motivated by self-interest: Sekatle works with his former oppressor as their front man; De Vries patronises blacks like Sekatle, because he knows he can use them to further his own political career. [3]

CHAPTER 22

1. Popi identifies with her – they are both coloured; feels embarrassed and ashamed that the busker is bringing disgrace to all coloured people. [1]
2. Wears a “doek” like a turban to hide her long straight hair; wears slacks or a long black skirt to hide her hairy legs. [2]
3. Worried that Viliki is becoming dishonest about money meant for Movement activities; feels he is compromising his political beliefs by making use of Afrikaner institutions such as Volkskas Bank. [2]
4. She sees that whites are still racist and regard themselves as superior. She is angered by Jacomina’s patronising treatment of her and Niki. It annoys her that white people assume black people do not have surnames. She is jealous of Tjaart who has claimed her mother’s affections. [4]
5. Police reservists, consisting mostly of Conservative Party members such as Tjaart and Johannes Smit, do not have faith in SA Police (employees of Nationalist Party government, represented by people like Adam de Vries). [2]
- 6 a) Open fire indiscriminately, beat people and kick them.
b) Violent, cruel, brutal oppressors. [4]
- 7 a) Sekatle enriched himself by working for “the system” (the Afrikaner bosses); is responsible for betraying Viliki to police (led to Viliki’s arrest and six-month detention).
b) Later, as mayor, Viliki abuses his power by allocating himself two RDP houses. He also enforces a decision to bulldoze squatters’ shacks. [6]

8. Bee – traditional symbol of healing, sociability and wisdom. In the context of the novel as a whole, the bee might represent redemption and reconciliation. [2]

CHAPTER 23

1. Popi is intimidated by the suffocating presence of whites but realises she cannot afford to lose face. [3]
2. She is in unfamiliar surroundings, sitting directly opposite Tjaart Cronje and facing a row of old white Afrikaners in a dirty, stuffy council chamber. [4]
3. Emphasises the inferior position and humiliating treatment black women were subjected to – not regarded as worthy of adult status. [2]
4. She devoted herself completely to politics and was not interested in male company. [1]
5. Niki is worried Popi will end up as old maid; also feels she has lost the emotional bond she and Popi shared. [2]
6. Tjaart – resents the presence of blacks on town council as another example of whites being forced out of traditional positions; does not believe black people can do the jobs as well as whites. Lizette de Vries – more moderate; prepared to adapt to the new political situation. [4]
7. Popi – devoted her life to political affairs; often away singing at church or at funerals. Viliki – always away fighting in the struggle (as comrade); he is too busy to spend time with his mother (as mayor). Tjaart (surrogate son) – sent off at eighteen to do army service; now, as a right-wing politician, not even aware of her existence. [3]
8. Remember, this photograph would have appeared in a national newspaper with a predominantly white readership. [2]

CHAPTER 24

1. Niki has isolated herself from community and lives in her own solitary world; indifferent to and unaware of political developments; her life revolves around her children and she dreams of being protected and cared for by them. [3]
2. a) He portrays them artistically and naturally, with dignity and respect.
b) White Afrikaner men view nakedness of black women with lust; treat them in degrading and humiliating ways. [2]
3. a) Niki has cherished hopes and dreams for them, but her children are a great disappointment to her. Viliki is always away and Popi is not interested in finding a husband.
b) They have new identities as leaders of the new South Africa.

- c) Viliki fails to live up to his vision of just and democratic society; begins to abuse his power. Popi's attempts to bring about new moral and political order are frustrated. They enter the "suave", morally corrupt and empty world of politics. [6]
- 4. Her beautiful voice earns her much admiration – compensates for her lack of self-esteem about her looks; helps her to forget taunts of being called a "boesman". [3]
- 5 a) Allocates himself two RDP houses – shows he is corruptible as he begins to abuse his power as mayor.
- b) Refuses to take advantage of her position (continues to live in shack with Niki) – shows she is principled, has integrity and is honest. [4]
- 6 a) Does not wish to use Afrikaans – sees it as the language of the oppressor.
- b) Believes Afrikaans was appropriated and misused by the oppressor, and is actually the language of coloured people.
- c) Thinks the attempt to remove Afrikaans is a communist plot to eliminate the Afrikaner.
- d) Makes moderate and realistic proposal: Sesotho should be used as it is spoken by all Excelsior inhabitants – black, white and coloured.
- e) Justify your opinion. [10]

CHAPTER 25

- 1. Heated passions and anger of the toyi-toying crowd. [2]
- 2. The issue of the squatters raises interesting and unusual political alliances. Votes on the matter of evicting squatters are not based on racial divisions. Just as there is a division between moderate whites and right-wingers like Tjaart Cronje, so among blacks there are moderate blacks like Viliki and hard-liners like Sekatle. [5]
- 3. When Popi negotiates with squatters to move to an alternative piece of land, she discovers Sekatle has extorted protection money from them. [2]
- 4. Tjaart states that council cannot afford to establish a library for township people who don't even pay for basic services. He adds that it would be a waste of money anyway, as black people can't read. When Popi explains this would help to encourage a culture of reading, Tjaart launches a vicious personal attack on Popi, accusing her of having no culture because she doesn't shave her legs like all sophisticated white women. [4]
- 5. Resorting to personal insults in a professional situation is inappropriate and vulgar; therefore he is the one who is unsophisticated. [2]

CHAPTER 26

1. Some possible answers:

- Sympathetic – described as a “waif”-like figure who wears tattered felt hat and threadbare blanket; rejected by family because coloured, and forced to earn meagre living by busking; talented musician and seems to have a rather cheeky personality – able to enchant Viliki.
 - Unsympathetic – promiscuous for so readily giving in to Viliki’s seduction. [4]
2. He is a dreamer who succumbs to her enchantments. However, he lacks accountability and integrity as he fails to attend council meetings on the pretext that he is ill. [4]
3. Yes. Lizette shows compassion by trying to help Popi deal with her embarrassment and humiliation. Popi feels better. [3]

CHAPTER 27

- 1 a) Finds it difficult to play accordion (an instrument not traditionally Sesotho, but Afrikaans); seems burdened (“weighed down”) with the effort.
- b) The “new world” is still dominated by Afrikaners; blacks are still burdened by old Afrikaner ways. [5]
- 2 a) The accordion is associated with Afrikaans boeremusiek, whereas the penny-whistle is traditionally played by black musicians.
- b) The blend of Afrikaans and Sesotho music might signify new South Africa and merging of cultures. [5]
3. She has accepted that she is coloured; is prepared to speak about it openly. [2]
4. He is hypocritical and dishonest – like a gang leader who gets others to do his dirty work and allows them to take the rap, while at the same time pretending to fight for justice for them. [3]
5. He succeeds in getting Viliki suspended from the Movement and forces his resignation as mayor. [2]
6. Although Popi is very involved in council affairs, especially in the library, she is constantly aware of Niki’s influence on her life. [2]
7. Serenity usually suggests peace, harmony and tranquillity. A heavy log, however, would suggest something burdensome. The paradox, therefore, suggests that Niki has come to a calm, yet resigned, acceptance of her loneliness. [2]

CHAPTER 28

1. In previous years death was associated with old age or miners returning home to die of lung disease. These days almost everyone is a victim of Aids, especially mothers and children. [4]
2. Such tragedies happen so often they have almost become part of Afrikaner customs. The tendency for them to occur mainly in Afrikaans families may have something to do with the Afrikaner's Calvinist upbringing, with much emphasis on duty of patriarch (father) to provide for his family. When unable to do so, his sense of failure and guilt drives him to commit desperate acts of murder and suicide. [4]
3. Sekatle succeeds in getting Popi and Viliki expelled from the Movement, especially after they had voted for Lizette de Vries as mayor. They are no longer considered worthy of being called "comrades". [2]
4. Although Viliki is no longer interested in politics, he still insists on remaining a member of the Movement, which Popi thinks is pathetic. Popi is happy they are now free to vote according to their consciences and do not have to toe the political line. [4]
5. Politically, the cause of their anger differs. Tjaart resents the effects of affirmative action on his life and that power is now in hands of blacks. Popi is angry about the way she and Viliki have been treated by the Movement and that people like Sekatle have so much power. Personally, however, perhaps both Tjaart and Popi share the same anger and bitterness about the sins of their parents, which have never been openly confronted, and which have caused much suffering. [4]
6. He still uses racist terminology by distinguishing between the township library and the white library in town. Popi cuttingly reminds him both libraries belong to all the people of the town now. [3]
7. If she were to acknowledge the truth, she would have to accept her colouredness, something she has tried so hard to disguise; would have to come to terms with her mother's sin and learn to forgive her for causing her (Popi) so much suffering; would have to accept she is not Pule's daughter; would be forced to acknowledge Tjaart as her half-brother and a white man, Stephanus Cronje, as her father. [4]
8. Niki finds contentment in watching the bees at work. They become the focus of her life as she recognises their diligence and sociability. [2]

CHAPTER 29

1. Seems contradictory – de Vries purports to support the new South Africa. [2]
2. Self-righteous/arrogant/smug/self-congratulatory – takes credit for helping to bring about the new South Africa, even long before FW de Klerk. [3]

3. Hostile/cold/rude/condescending – still views the black man as inferior. [2]
4. a) Viliki distrusts him – he regards him as politically expedient, but at same time he is not bitter and is even slightly amused.
 b) Viliki jokes with de Vries; makes fun of him; treats their political discussions in light-hearted manner. [4]
5. a) They think de Vries is Viliki's puppet, dancing to tune of blacks. They cannot understand what an Afrikaans lawyer and a township boy have in common.
 b) They think Viliki is de Vries's puppet, with his hands in the pockets of rich Afrikaners.
 c) There is nothing strange about it – it is a sign of old love affair between Afrikaners and blacks. [6]
6. a) They desperately need disability grants and pension pay-outs to survive.
 b) Blacks not allowed in the hotel pub – have to drink outside. [4]

CHAPTER 30

1. a) Children are no longer dressed in new "Christmas" clothes; lunch just ordinary Sunday lunch; children loiter in the streets and adults get drunk.
 b) Perhaps, now in post-apartheid South Africa, people recognise that Christmas is a European celebration. [5]
2. The bees have a calming effect, healing her bitterness. Worker bees represent diligence and Niki, too, now finds pleasure in her work with bees. It is appropriate that Niki ("madonna" or "mother earth" figure) should find an affinity with nature. [3]
3. Viliki is frustrated that she does not approach it as a business venture. Popi believes bees provide Niki with an important connection with her ancestors. [2]
4. Personal bitterness: it is a result of their unspoken, unacknowledged sibling status and the sins of the parents; hostility on political level: Tjaart is a right-wing Afrikaner unwilling to accept changes. [4]
5. Her hair represents her colouredness, for which she has been subjected to racist insults, teased by her peers, whispered about by community, and which contributed to her lonely, unhappy childhood. It is also a cause of her anger with Tjaart, and sometimes with Niki. [3]

CHAPTER 31

1. He no longer paints, not even nudes, but does only charcoal drawings. [2]
2. Although he recognises her, he makes no reference to the past. Popi also does not speak. There is an unspoken understanding between them. [3]

3. Acceptance of her colouredness; acknowledgement of Tjaart as her brother; reconciliation between Popi and Tjaart; forgiveness for Niki and Stephanus. [3]

CHAPTER 32

1. They are nostalgic about the days of the freedom struggle when they were all united against apartheid. [2]
2. Politicians are motivated by self-interest, desiring only power and wealth. [2]
3. They yearn for the old days when they had power; they feel alienated and betrayed by the new generation of Afrikaners. [4]

CHAPTER 33

1. Popi did not take advantage of her position on council to benefit personally from an RDP house. Your opinion? Perhaps you consider her politically naïve and not pragmatic. Perhaps you respect her principled stand and her integrity. [3]
2. Popi needs to immerse herself in work; perhaps working with nature fulfils that need; perhaps work is an escape from having to confront her personal issues – she admits that she needs to fill the void in her heart. [2]
3. Just as worker bees swarm around the queen bee, so Niki had men swarming around her, the honey-pot. [2]
4. No. They are still weak-willed, easily-influenced characters, ready to benefit from opportunities for financial gain. [2]
5. Perhaps she knows her son best – that he is a dreamer and an idealist at heart, not a scheming politician. [2]
6. These attitudes are based on the assumption that black people are primitive, uneducated, stupid and ignorant, and therefore need a helping hand from their more civilised, more sophisticated superiors. [4]
7. He feels most black people have not taken the initiative to uplift themselves, but wait for handouts from government. [2]
8. He is shocked at Johannes Smit's "treachery" and the betrayal of people like de Vries, who want to work with blacks to improve the country. His wife's suggestion that he, too, should embrace the new South Africa finally causes him to explode. [3]

CHAPTER 34

1. The elders purport to be pillars of society but are self-righteous hypocrites. They support apartheid politics which considers blacks as racially inferior, yet enjoy forbidden fruit of interracial sex. [4]

2. a) He interprets it in a political sense – young people were used to fight the war of apartheid, only to be betrayed by their elders, who sold out to the black majority.
 b) Tjaart may be referring to his father's sin and the Afrikaans community's denial of the sins of their forefathers. [5]
3. She is delighted that Popi has freed herself of shame about being coloured. [2]
4. He is not truly repentant, but merely looking for a way to assuage his guilt. Assuming Niki is guilty too, he demonstrates a lack of understanding of his sin against her. [3]
5. Popi is still treated as inferior. She reluctantly agrees to visit her "mortal enemy". Tjaart is fully aware of her anger and tries to appease her with his gentle jokes to which she grudgingly responds. His gift, although a reminder of his insult, is his humorous way of asking Popi for forgiveness. He appears to be genuinely repentant. His sincere desire for reconciliation and acknowledgement of their kinship evokes the reader's sympathy. [3]
6. No. She corrects his "our" father to "your" father and concedes only that she has heard whispers. When she leaves she claims not to know why Tjaart wished to see her. [2]
7. The Excelsior community is in denial and afraid to confront the truth of its past. [2]

CHAPTER 35

1. a) The "new millennium" probably refers to the new South Africa and post-apartheid euphoria, whereas the "real" new South Africa emerges only when people realise that true democracy and equality have not yet been achieved, requiring a more sober, realistic view of the future.
 b) The women are portrayed as powerful – walking upright and with great dignity and grace. It emphasises that the role of women in post-apartheid South Africa must be addressed. [9]
2. Signifies the end of oppression of black women by white men and the end of unjust and cruel apartheid laws; also stands as a reminder of the sins of the apartheid masters. [4]
3. Popi admires herself (her blue eyes and long straight hair) all day in the mirror; wears short skirts to show off her long brown legs shimmering with golden hairs; smiles at the admiring stares of people who used to despise her. [5]
4. Although the trinity painted only what he observed and did not meddle in the affairs of the people, his paintings nevertheless contained critical commentary on the injustices of apartheid. [3]