

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Cry, the Beloved Country

by Alan Paton

written by Debbie Price

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Cry, the Beloved Country

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the significance of the novel within the context of South African history and politics.
2. trace the development of complex and intertwining themes found in the novel, including:
 - a. the injustices created by a white-controlled society in a majority black country
 - b. the breakdown of the tribal culture and the traditional African family
 - c. the erosion and destruction of the land
 - d. the causes and impact of “native crime”
 - e. the rural migration to the cities
 - f. the corrosive effects of fear
 - g. the importance of Christian charity
 - h. love as the hope for personal and societal redemption.
3. identify the characteristics of a social realism novel.
4. analyze the use of the omniscient third-person narrator.
5. analyze the use of intercalary chapters and other literary devices
6. recognize the following plot components:
 - a. exposition
 - b. conflict
 - c. rising action
 - d. climax
 - e. resolution
7. analyze the significance of the novel’s title and its relationship to the novel’s central themes.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. offer a close reading of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

Introductory Lecture

The Author

Alan S. Paton (1903-1988) was a South African writer, reformer, and founder of the country's Liberal Party, which opposed apartheid. As author of the groundbreaking, *Cry, The Beloved Country*, he became one of the first writers to call international attention to the status of native South Africans under a repressive white rule.

Edward Callan, a Paton biographer, first met the author in 1948 shortly after *Cry, the Beloved Country* was published in the United States and remained his friend until the author's death. Callan, who published three books about Paton and his famous novel, remembers the author as a very short man with a powerful voice and enormous courage.

"He was," Callan said in an interview in 2009, "a great public speaker, better even than he was as a writer."

Paton's upbringing, no doubt, influenced the development of his strong moral compass. He was born in Pietermaritzburg in the Natal Province in eastern South Africa, a region once known as Zululand. As a young boy, he was surrounded by reminders of the fate that had befallen the Zulus, defeated by the British a little more than two decades before he was born. Paton's sympathetic portrayal of the Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo suggests that he was raised to respect and understand the tribal peoples.

Paton's father was a recent Scottish immigrant; his mother's English ancestors had lived in South Africa for three generations. Born less than a year after the British defeated the Dutch Boers, Paton grew up in a household and region that held the Dutch-descended Afrikaners in low regard.

Paton's parents were devout Christians and rather strict, a combination that produced mixed results in their young son. While Paton grew up to question and oppose authority, he also became deeply religious. Christian symbolism and themes of Christian charity run throughout his work. His parents also inspired in him a love of nature and a reverence for the land. Paton often said that his earliest and fondest memories were of the beauty of the South African countryside. Some of his most lyrical writing can be found in his descriptions of the land, such as in the opening paragraphs of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.

Paton attended the Natal University College, where he studied mathematics and physics. After graduation, he taught, first at the Ixopo High School for White Students and then at a Pietermaritzburg high school. While in Ixopo, he met and married Dorrie Francis in 1928. That marriage lasted until her death in 1967. During his Ixopo years, Paton wrote two unpublished novels about white South African life.

Cry, the Beloved Country

CHAPTER ONE

1. How do the author’s opening lines establish one of the main themes of the novel?

2. What does the author’s description of the South African hills and valley tell us about his viewpoint?

3. When Paton describes the grass-covered hills as lovely beyond “any singing of it,” what image does the words *any singing of it* suggest?

4. Why are these “the valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children?”

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Which details at the beginning of this chapter show that Kumalo's life in the village is primitive?

2. What theme does the character of Mrs. Lithebe represent?

3. What purpose does the conversation between Kumalo, Msimangu, and other priests at the Mission House serve?

4. Who is Father Vincent and what is different about him?

5. What purpose does Father Vincent serve in the narrative?

CHAPTER TEN

1. What is Kumalo's relationship with his sister?

2. Why is the boy important to Kumalo?

3. Why is Msimangu not surprised when they learn that Absalom Kumalo was arrested and sent to a reformatory?

4. Why has Stephen Kumalo also dreaded this outcome?

5. How does the author use the character of the young man at the reformatory to articulate his view on native crime and justice?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Why does the young man from the reformatory seek out Kumalo at Mrs. Lithebe's house? What's the significance of his visit?

2. Why does Father Vincent say that sorrow is better than fear?

3. What is the significance of Kumalo's story about a man sleeping in the grass while a storm gathers above him?

4. What does Kumalo mean when he tells Father Vincent that Absalom is a stranger?

5. How are Christian themes presented in this chapter?

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. What do the letters and invitations on Arthur Jarvis's desk show about the man?

2. What is the significance of the artwork on the walls of his study?

3. What does Arthur Jarvis's library reveal about the slain man?

4. What is the significance of Arthur Jarvis's interest in the works of Abraham Lincoln?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. What coincidence brings Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis together?

2. How do the men react upon meeting each other?

3. How does Kumalo tell Jarvis who he is?

4. What Christian principle does Jarvis demonstrate?

5. What details show that Jarvis feels compassion for Kumalo?

6. What motif is present in Jarvis's description of his son?

CHAPTER THIRTY

1. Compare Kumalo's return train trip with his trip to Johannesburg.

2. What is significant about the way that Kumalo's wife greets his nephew and Absalom's wife?

3. What does the drought represent?

4. What is significant about the way the villagers respond to Kumalo?
