

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

# Cry, the Beloved Country

by Alan Paton

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# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Biographical Notes of Alan Paton

Alan Paton, a white man born in South Africa in 1903, dedicated much of his life to improving the lives of the native South Africans during the period of racial segregation known as Apartheid. A religious man, he believed in Christian values and the power of God to improve conditions in South Africa.

Paton, of British heritage, learned to speak both Afrikaans (the language spoken by the Dutch settlers) and Zulu. In love with his homeland— its beautiful countryside and rich traditions— Paton wanted all South Africans (Afrikaans, Zulu, and English speaking) united for the good of the country.

Accepting the job as warden of the Diepkloof Reformatory for African Juvenile Delinquents, Paton believed he could make a difference in the lives of the young natives and set about transforming the reformatory from a dirty, dismal place to a happier, healthier place. It was from these and other first-hand experiences that Paton wrote *Cry, the Beloved Country*. When published in 1948, it became an immediate success; unfortunately, Paton died in South Africa in 1992 before the social changes he ardently worked for were instituted.

All references come from the Scribner's Paperback Fiction Edition of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 1995, copyright 1948.

# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Objectives

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

1. point out how the novel's protagonist, Reverend Kumalo, changes in the course of the story although he is sixty years old at the opening.
2. discuss why the following characters appear to most readers to be representatives of personality types rather than fully developed characters:
  - Reverend Msimangu
  - Gertrude Kumalo – Reverend Kumalo's sister
  - John Kumalo – Reverend Kumalo's brother
  - Absalom Kumalo – Reverend Kumalo's son
  - Arthur Jarvis
3. support or refute the idea that the Reverend Stephen Kumalo is a tragic hero by referring to the text.
4. write a character profile for James Jarvis, Arthur's father, and point out how he grows and changes in the novel.
5. comment on the following symbols in the story:
  - red earth as a symbol for the destruction of the tribal way of life
  - clothes as a symbol for a person's lifestyle.
6. infer about characters and events when these meanings are not explicitly stated.
7. discuss the author's style of writing which includes the following:
  - short phrases to illustrate English as a second language for many of the characters
  - the use of a beginning dash to punctuate the dialogue in place of quotation marks
  - use of repetition to say the same thing in slightly different words.
8. discuss the following uses of language in the novel:
  - sarcasm
  - metaphor
  - irony.
9. comment on the role of black women in South Africa and their lack of opportunity to improve the conditions of their lives.

# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define the following terms: veld, kloof, titihoya, umfundisi, repression, robot, pro deo, Afrikaner, republic, nationalism, assessors, inkosikazi.
2. What do Gertrude's new clothes symbolize? Why does she leave them behind when she returns to her sinful life? What type of person may she represent?
3. How much power does the Zulu chief have to help his people? What does the following metaphor say about the government's efforts to help the chief? "But they were feeding an old man with milk, and pretending that he would one day grow into a boy." Does the chief seem to you to be a person or a type of person?
4. Why is Kumalo sarcastic when Father Vincent suggests he pray and rest after Kumalo returns from visiting his son in prison? "Kumalo stood up. I trust that is so, he said, but I have no hope any more. What did you say I must do? Yes, pray and rest."
5. Compare the lives of the following native women. Why are they so different? Do the women themselves have the power to change their circumstances?
  - Mrs. Kumalo
  - the young pregnant girl
  - Gertrude
  - Mrs. Lithebe
6. Discuss the difference between third-person omniscient and third-person limited point of view. Which narration is used most often in the first paragraph of each chapter? Why?
7. Find five examples of epithets. Critics believe Paton uses these in place of names so the characters can represent "groups" rather than individuals. For the five epithets you find, explain what "group" each is supposed to represent.
8. Discuss the following statement: Religion is important to the story because Christian values and faith help the characters endure their suffering, guide the characters into decent lives, and promote hope for the future of South Africa.
9. How does John Jarvis help the natives of Ndotsheni begin to rebuild their lives, giving them hope for the future? Could they have managed it without his assistance? Is he presented as a fully developed character or as a representation of a type?
10. Why are many of the white citizens of Johannesburg reluctant to support social programs whose aim is to reduce native crime?

### Chapter 3

1. What favor is asked by the man who helps Kumalo with his bag?

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2. Why are there mostly black travelers on the train? What is the “little lie” Kumalo tells the people on the train? What does the “lie” say about Kumalo’s character?

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3. By now, you have an idea of what happens in the book. Explain what the title means and what literary term is used in it.

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6. Support the following statement: Msimangu does not respect Stephen Kumalo.

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7. What is the “truth” about power that Msimangu says the white men do not understand?

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8. Despite the corruption of both blacks and whites by power, Msimangu thinks there is still “hope” for South Africa to overcome its problems. What is the “hope” Msimangu sees for South Africa? What is his greatest fear?

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9. What information about Absalom does Mrs. Ndlela withhold from Kumalo?

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**Book 2****Chapter 18**

1. Support or refute the following statement: Mr. Jarvis understands the problems with the native farms but does not see any easy solution.

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2. Define “Afrikaner.” Briefly describe van Jaarsveld.

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3. What do you think is Mr. Jarvis’ opinion of the white man’s responsibility to help the native population at this point in the story? Support your answer by citing passages from the chapter.

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