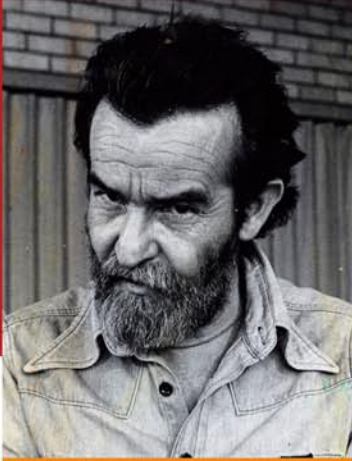


Athol Fugard

'just real'



Sunday Times

Resistance through theatre – Reviews as Sources

In this lesson plan, learners will be asked to think about how theatre can speak to people in powerful ways that are not always possible through other media. By reading reviews and assessments of Fugard's plays, learners will appreciate the kind of impact that they had on audiences living under apartheid.



Athol Fugard (1932 –)

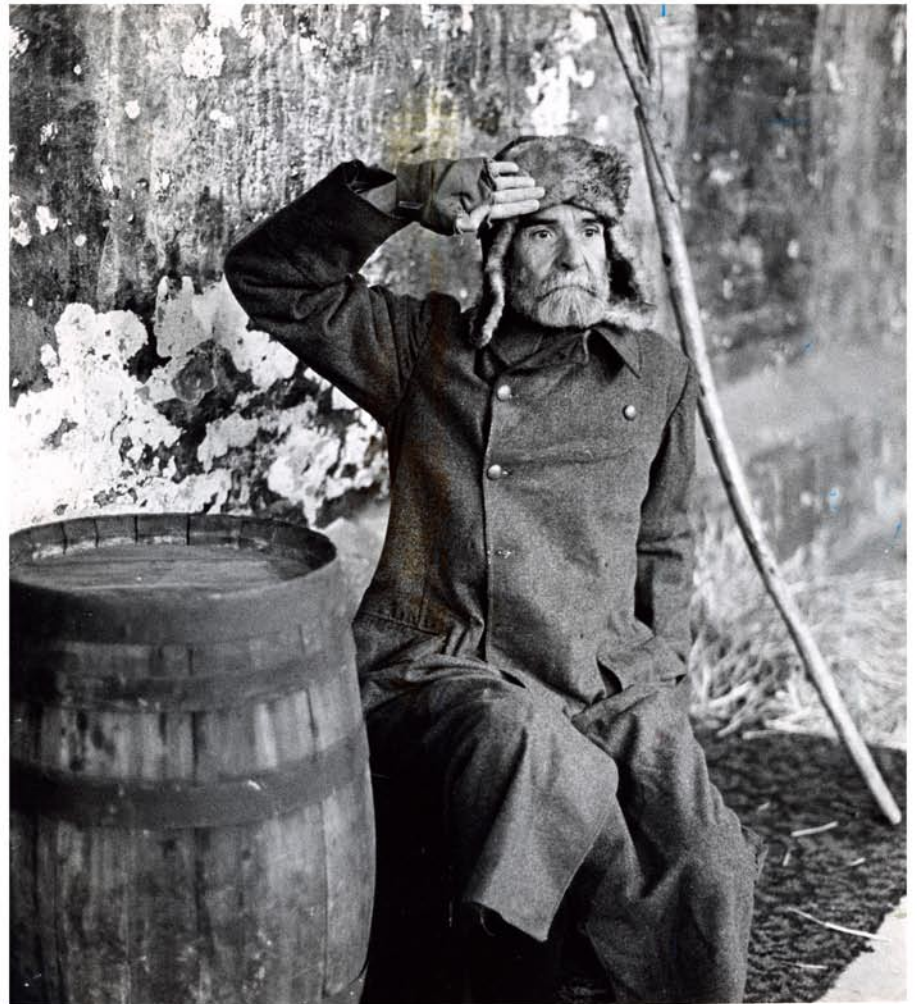
His first name was Harold but he chose to be called by one of his middle names – Athol. He was born in Middleburg in the Cape Province to an Afrikaans-speaking mother and an Anglo-Irish father. The family moved to Port Elizabeth in the 1930s, where Athol went to school. His mother took over the St George's Park Tea Room, which became the setting for *Master Harold and the Boys*. Fugard later used family scenes from this period in his play *Hello and Goodbye*.

Fugard won a scholarship to the University of Cape Town for philosophy but decided to hike up Africa and to work his way round the world on a steamer instead. In Cape Town he married Sheila Meiring, who was an actress and became a writer. They have a daughter, Lisa.

After the Sharpeville massacre, Fugard wrote *Tsotsi*, his only novel which was published 20 years later, and *The Bloodknot*. In 1963, Fugard worked with the Serpent Players in Port Elizabeth on adaptations of famous plays. He also wrote *The Coat and Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. *Lesson from Aloes* draws on the experiences of these years.

In 1968 *People are Living There* premiered in Scotland, but Fugard was unable to go to see it because the government confiscated his passport after the BBC aired *The Bloodknot*. *Boesman and Lena* was first performed in 1971. In the same year Fugard founded the experimental Space theatre in Cape Town. *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were performed here in the early 1970s. In October 1976 the Market Theatre opened in Johannesburg providing Fugard with a new base.

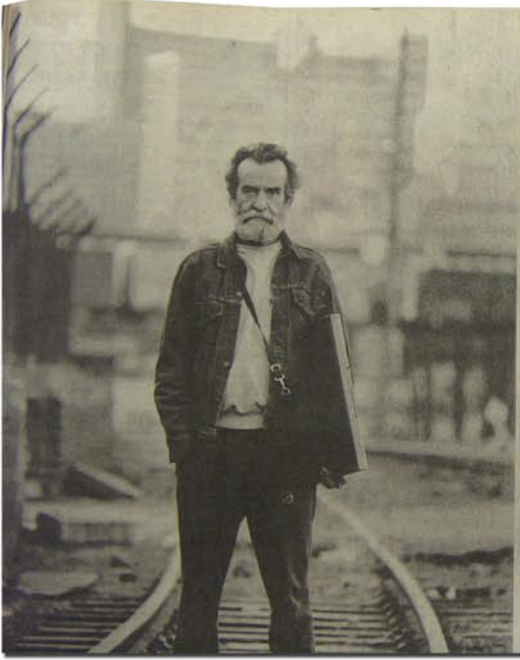
Fugard has carried on writing plays – in 1990 – *My Children! My Africa!* opened in three countries. The award winning film based on Fugard's novel *Tsotsi* was released in 2005.



Athol Fugard in his play "A Place With The Pigs" Sunday Times, 7 August 1992

'My relationships with women have always been the decisive and sustaining ones... I believe my writing reflects this. Whenever there is a woman present – a Lena, a Milly, a Hester, a Miss Helen, a Gladys Bezuidenhout – hers is always the dominant and affirmative voice.'

Athol Fugard, *Cousins: A Memoir*. Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994, pp. 10 & 11



John Michell

THE works of Athol Fugard may be timeless but the man himself is not.

He is constantly looking back and ahead like a thief on the run. Delving into the past, itching to break into the future, he scurries down the tracks of time. Tucked under his arm is his stolen treasure — the present.

Few writers, of any nation or historical period, capture the truth of their time as perfectly as Fugard. He is a visionary as well, playing games with consequences, always a pulse-beat ahead of his audience.

He is obsessed with South Africa — in love with her, in hate with her, caressing salt into wounds. He is a craftsman of literature and spends months moulding his plays into life. He is so caring about people and personalities that all his characters become real.

Not Hollywood real, not grand theatre real, not larger than life or anything that's easy to put your finger on. Just real.

So where has he been, this beady-eyed, 55-year-old prophet, and where is he going? Looking back on the milestones of his life, he sets them out as though they were scenes from a play.

First we meet the Fugard aged 10. His name is still Hally, short for Harold which is also his father's name. This is the year he will change it to Athol. He is insecure, eager to please, slightly bookish, introspective.

"Family securities were a little hard. I wasn't into sport and wasn't one of the boys. It was already apparent that I was going to be a loner."

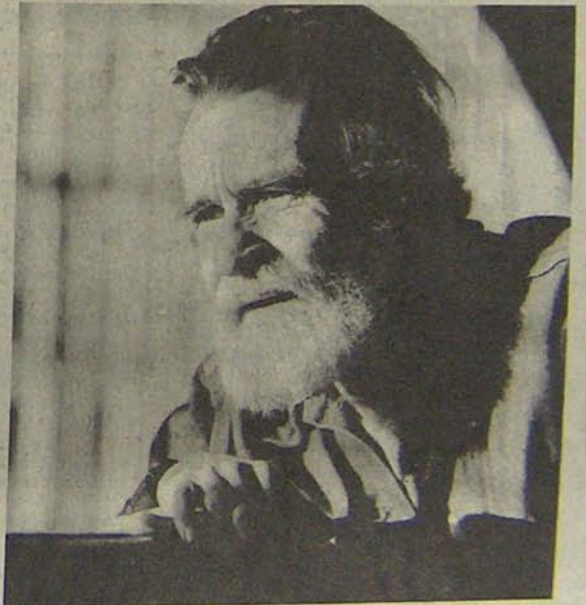
A decade later, Fugard is at sea.

"Oh boy, I was a sailor and the world was throwing it at me faster than I could deal with it. Trying to write the great South African novel because I hadn't discovered the theatre. But I knew my life would be to do with words."

Round about 30, Fugard is settling back into much the same personality as he was when a child. Insecure, eager to please, ditto, ditto. But something is starting to happen.

Soon he is at the hub of the old Space Theatre in Cape Town, working frantically with Brian Astbury and Yvonne Bry-

Odyssey of a loner on the tracks of love and hate



ATHOL FUGARD . . . a pulse-beat ahead of his audience.

Little Hally's road to



Athol Fugard as he appears in a scene from "The Guest". Fugard wrote the script and appears in the main role - that of Eugene Marais *Sunday Times*, 30 July 1976



Athol Fugard with his cast for his play "My Children! My Africa!". Left to right Rapulana Seiphemo, Kathy-Jo Ross, Athol Fugard and John Kani *Sunday Times*

Source B: 'Don't do it, brother!'



Athol Fugard on "Sizwe Bansi is Dead" in The Observer Sunday 8th August, 1982

Source C: Stupid Act



Tied in blood

PLAY: BLOOD KNOT
ACTORS: John Kani and Marcel van Heerden
DIRECTOR: Barney Simon.
VENUE: Market Theatre, Johannesburg.
REVIEW: Victor Metsamere.

In *Blood Knot* Kani and Van Heerden, with their flawless acting, show how warped the system of apartheid really is.

The two actors continue the struggle which was started by author Athol Fugard and actor Zakes Mokae when the play was first performed at Dorkay House in Johannesburg in 1961.

The man who was the "third eye" on that day, Barney Simon, is steering them, and the three are doing a marvellous job.

The Immorality Act, which has since been "scrapped", was still in force then, forbidding sex across the colour line.

In the play that Act is shown to have been stupid, born out of fear that mixed marriages would spell the end of the white race.

Kani plays Zacharia while Van Heerden portrays Morris, two brothers.

The climax of the play is reached when an irritable Zacharia explodes because he has

Review of 'The Bloodknot' in the Sowetan, 19th January, 1988

Learner Activities

- In *Source A*, we read that Fugard was in love and hate with South Africa. What does this mean? You might have to read the other sources and then come back to this one.
- What does the author of *Source A* mean by saying that Fugard's plays were not 'Hollywood'?
- Why is Fugard shown on train tracks in *Source A*?
- In *Source B*, why was Fugard so happy with what happened at the New Brighton performance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*? Surely he should have been cross with the audience for shouting out during his play.
- *Source C* is a film review. The reviewer says that *The Bloodknot* shows how warped and stupid apartheid is. It was written in 1988. Wasn't the writer afraid of getting into trouble?

Other Ideas

Write a review of a film or a play on a South African topic. Say whether or not you think it is 'Hollywood'. (Does it follow the typical Hollywood story-line/ have the typical Hollywood characters?)



Athol Fugard as 'Boesman' in Film *Sunday Times*, 9 July 1973

Criteria for Assessment

- Learners will be able to explain that while Fugard loved his country and fellow citizens, he hated the political system.
- Learners will demonstrate appreciation for Fugard's achievement in making his characters and their situations seem real
- Learners will show awareness that by the late 1980s some apartheid legislation had been repealed. Apartheid did not have much time left.

Curriculum Link – Grades 10 & 11

- LO 1, AS 2
- LO 2, AS 2
- LO 3, AS 3
- Grade 11 Content Link – What was the nature of resistance to apartheid?

