

Lilian Masediba Ngoyi

under house arrest



Bailey's African History Archive

Lilian Masediba Ngoyi (1911 - 1980)

Lilian Masediba Ngoyi was fondly known as MaNgoyi. She was the first president of the African National Congress Women's League and the second president of the Federation of South African Women. She was one of the leaders in the 20 000 strong women's march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 to protest the extension of passes to African women. She was arrested and charged with high treason together with 155 other resistance leaders at the end of 1956. She was re-arrested while out on bail during the Treason Trial in the course of the 1960 state of emergency, and was held in solitary confinement. She was first banned in 1961. The banning order expired and was lifted between 1973 and 1975 but was then re-imposed. The restrictions placed on her made her life miserable and also made it hard for her to earn a living.

She managed to get a pittance through sewing and dressmaking. Her husband had died when her daughter was three years old. Her banning orders prohibited her from attending meetings, and she was confined to the area in which she lived. She died after suffering for some time from a bad heart condition in 1980 at the age of 68.



Radima Moosa, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Sophia Williams delivering the petition to government as part of 20 000 strong anti-pass campaign march to the Union Buildings Bailey's African History Archive, 9 August 1956

Personal Letters as Sources

Working with personal letters is an excellent way of encouraging learners to want know about people and events in history. They can potentially create and emotional empathy with people lived in the past.



Get a discussion going with your class about why we write letters to our friends and family. You'll probably find yourself talking about email, Facebook or MySpace, which take the place of old-fashioned letters today. Try to draw out the following observations from your learners:

- we feel a need to keep up with our friends' lives
- it's important to keep a sense of connection with them even if you don't see them because they live far away
- it's great to feel that you're a part of a community of friends.

Ask your learners what kinds of things they might say in letters to their friends that they wouldn't say in other forms of writing. If you're feeling brave ask them if they think boys and girls write about different sorts of things!

Letter A: Letter from MaNgoyi to Belinda Allan, March 1976

I want to meet be at it 5th March 76
My dearest Belinda,
Thanks very much for your informative letter. I'm feeling much better in health. I had have also taken a resolution that my daughters troubles are just but part of my domestic worries. I must say I've been after writing about them to you, then I feel very much relieved did get a letter from Peter Ranga in which he was telling me that he is a vice President of the Bank of America, and I showed that letter to the manager of a bank this week, who did change his cheque, but wrote that a letter asking him next time to send a bank draft as personal cheques could not be changed in his letter he said he was going away for 60 days but he will write. The other Prof. one who has relatives in Geneva wrote, asking me what help I needed and I wrote back to say financial and he also promised to send me some seeds but this he has not yet done. Belinda you and Donald I shall never forget for you are practical. You know my Dear. My position and some of my colleagues in the struggle is difficult for this month we are not a happy lot, but the Government with bans of no gatherings are a problem of earning one living especially to people who were sewing, one knitting. I cannot demonstrate any thing or sew for any body as three people are a gathering. We feel so small to say thanks all the time. But we are forced by circumstances beyond our control. I said your letter was informative because the news were rather good I'm highly pleased to learn you might get a house of your own, and our Dear Allan will now around. No Dear she must get to parks to get a different breeze from his surroundings. How I envy you. With the little changes in this country we too are allowed to extend our houses. How I envy you. With the the largest is 10 by 9. Some of us who are employed children or visitors can afford to build or extend their houses. Part of I had match-boxes R600. I would buy

Letter B: Magistrate's Letter in response to Lilian's application

H.O. REF. NO. 2/1/497

11/5/2/1/24
/MZS
838-8346.1.1.1

MAGISTRATE,
JOHANNESBURG
26 March, 1971

26 March, 1971.

Mrs. Lilian Masediba Ngoyi,
9870B, Orlando West,
JOHANNESBURG.

Madam,

Your application dated 26 March, 1971, refers.

PERMISSION is hereby granted for you to receive sympathizers at your place of residence during the period 26 March, 1971, to 4 April, 1971, (inclusive) and to attend the funeral of your late mother at Doornkop Cemetery on Sunday, 4 April, 1971, leaving in a procession from your home on Sunday morning. This permit is issued on condition that you make no speeches at the abovementioned gatherings and that you leave the cemetery immediately after the conclusion of the burial service and return to your home.

Yours faithfully,

O.G. GUSH

GEHEIM

DIE AFDELINGSBEVELVOERDER,
VEILIGHEIDSPOLISIE
PRIVAATSAK 29, JOHANNESBURG.

Afskrif vir u inligting.

U WA/VP.4/676 gedateer 26.3.71. verwys.

JOHANNESBURG.
26.3.71

O.G. GUSH
LANDDROS

Letter C: Lilian's letter about the death of her mother

9870 B-Nkunga Street
Orlando West 2
P.O. Phirima
20th -06-71

My Dearest Belinda

I have had a terrible blow. I lost my mother. She passed away on the 26th March 1971 at daybreak and was buried on the 4th of April 1971. Despite my troubles, the funeral was beautiful and everything went well...

I wish we were nearer each other, as it might help to talk to you in person, but there is another source of strength that's open to all of us. And, this is it. Our souls can never be imprisoned. I will write again, soon.

Thanks a million

Yours Lily.

Letter D: Lilian's Letter about 1976

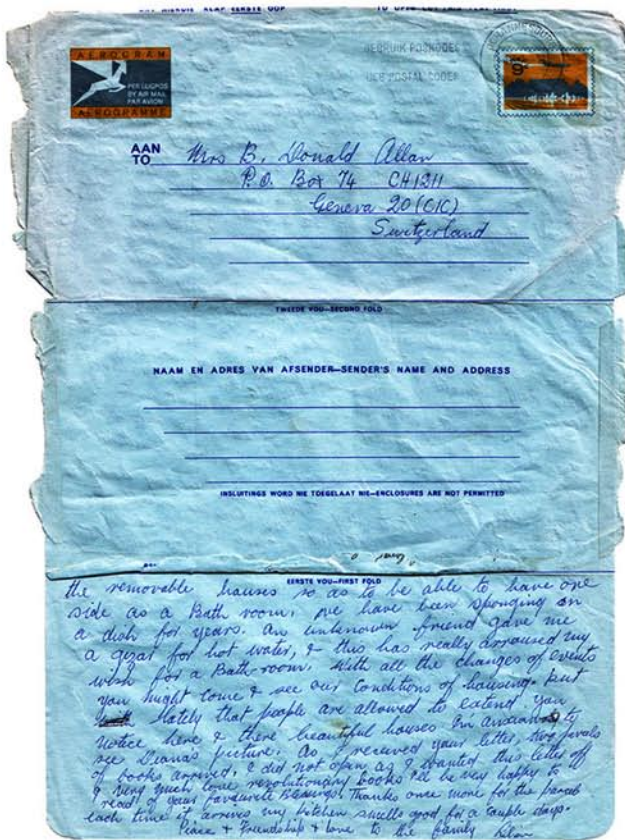
24 June 1976

Dearest Belinda and Donald

Surely, you are anxious to know what is happening. Students and just some children were on a protest march. They do not want Afrikaans, unless it is a subject. Suddenly teargas was used and shootings of children.... People were dying like flies. Buildings were burning, so you must still use the known address. Because our post office is burnt down. .. I can still hear bullets ringing in my ears. Could you imagine the army shooting dead children... I will write when my nerves have cooled down.

Thanks Dear
Lilian.

Now get them to read the letters. Explain that MaNgoyi's friend Belinda was a woman named Belinda Allan, who was a member of Amnesty International. She belonged to the Riverside branch which is in New York City. Look in the box for some questions you can ask learners to respond to after they have read the letters. The learners will be working with historical sources, but hopefully also having fun. Don't expect very rigid answers, although they should always support what they say. There may be more than one answer to some of the questions.



An example of the aerogrammes that MaNgoyi sent to the Allens

Letter A

- Why didn't MaNgoyi think she would be able to get a passport to go to her friend's wedding?
- How do you think MaNgoyi was feeling when she wrote this letter?
- Why do you think that the 'January parcel' may have been delayed?
- Why do you think that MaNgoyi wanted a picture of her friend's wedding so badly?
- What does the fact that MaNgoyi writes 'Thanks love' and then 'yours sincerely' tell us about her relationship with Belinda?

Letter B

- Look for all the signs that tell you this is an official letter.
- Why didn't the magistrate want MaNgoyi to make speeches?
- How do you think she felt when she received this letter?

Letter C

- Note the date of this letter!- What is MaNgoyi's mood now?
- Do you think that MaNgoyi is saying everything she would like to say in this letter? Why/Why not?

Letter D

- How do you think MaNgoyi was feeling when she wrote this letter?
- What role would MaNgoyi have played in 1976 had she not been under house arrest?

Other Ideas

- Would you think that this woman was dangerous if you met her? The apartheid government did!
- How can personal letters be historical sources? What do they tell us about the past that other sources do not? Why should we know about how MaNgoyi felt during her long banning? What kinds of personal letters would you not trust? These letters were found in Lilian Ngoyi's 'Police File'. Why do you think the police kept them? Do you think it is possible that the police could have destroyed some of her letters?
- Make your own old-fashioned airmail letter and write to a friend overseas. Pretend that you live in a very repressive country and are under house arrest. Try to tell your friend what is happening to you – but be careful because the police will probably intercept

Ngoyi assisting with the preparations for a meeting Bailey's African History Archive, March 1956



Lilian Ngoyi's Memorial outside her house in at 9870 Nkungu Street in Mzimhlophe, Soweto

Criteria for Assessment:

The learners are able to make reasonable deductions in response to the questions asked using the letters.

Curriculum links – Grades 10 & 11

LO 1: AS 3 & 4

LO 3: AS 3

Grade 11 content link – with resistance to apartheid theme