

Cry, The Beloved Country Book Notes

Cry, The Beloved Country by Alan Paton

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Author/Context

Alan Paton was a political activist and a devout Christian, and these two concerns are constantly in the background, and sometimes the foreground, of his most famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Until 1948, he worked as the principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, a place much like the reformatory where Absalom stays. That year, he says, a life-changing event occurred: the publication of *Cry*. It was a great success—many people were deeply moved by it, politically and spiritually—and it allowed him much more professional freedom. Paton resigned his principalship and decided to try to write full-time. Soon after, another momentous event took place. The Afrikaner Nationalists came to power, and brought with them the notorious policies of racial separateness (called, in their language, apartheid). This meant that Paton, a white man, was hated and disdained by many people around the world who thought that apartheid was unfair, because he benefitted from apartheid, even though he opposed it. In his autobiography, *Journey Continued*, Paton gives an admittedly oversimplified account of what made many South Africans want to completely avoid the other races of their country. He writes that South Africa was colonized by Dutch and British merchants, and these were later joined by European (Dutch, German, French) farmers called Boers, or Afrikaners. The Boers resented the Dutch and British rule, so they moved north, away from the colonies. To do so, they pushed the indigenous tribes off their land (they had guns, after all, and the tribes did not) giving the tribes tiny bits of land as compensation. Slowly, a small, white minority of the population began to control almost all of the land. The tribal peoples were forced into such poverty (their land was overcrowded and could not be farmed successfully) that they had to work for the white people just to stay alive. South Africa continued to develop in this way, until native crime and white prejudice got so bad that people began to say it would be better if they were separated entirely—right down to the churches and schools. Thus, the idea of apartheid was born.

Paton was strongly against racial prejudice: his parents had raised him as a devout Anglican, and he believed that love and compassion, not political power struggles, were the only hope for South Africa. Though he recognized that white people were to blame for many of South Africa's problems, and white people sometimes come off badly in the book, Paton largely avoids simplistic ideas about race. Instead, he tries to show people as individuals, trying to transcend their races in order to promote brotherhood. *Cry* thus focuses on one case of native crime (Absalom Kumalo killing Arthur Jarvis) and its effects on the individuals who knew both those men. The book implies that South Africa will be saved one person at a time, whenever people like James Jarvis forgive people like Stephen Kumalo, and whenever people like Stephen Kumalo reach out in Christian kindness to people like James Jarvis. These ideas came from Paton's own experiences with black and white South Africans: he knew that they were individuals with their own hearts and minds, and should be treated as such. *Cry* is admired for its beautiful language, but it is more famous for its worth as a political treatise. Paton intended it as a novel that could easily be applied to South Africa's real situation at the time of writing.

Cry has been made into a movie, starring Sidney Poitier as Msimangu, as well as a stage production, and even a musical. Paton's other books include *Too Late the*



Pharalope, a lyrical analysis of South Africa's problems similar in some ways to *Cry*, and a memoir of his life with his first wife Dorrie, *For You Departed*. He also wrote many essays, poems and stories about South Africans. It can perhaps be said that *Cry* is Paton's most complete expression of ideas that haunted him all his life: racial prejudice, Christian compassion, and the possibility of renewal for a nearly destroyed but much loved land.

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Plot Summary

The Reverend Stephen Kumalo, a poor black Anglican parson, lives with his wife in the small village of Ndotsheni in South Africa. Many of his relatives have moved to Johannesburg, a huge and dangerous city, never to be heard from again: his brother, his son, and his sister are the most missed. Johannesburg is the place where many poor black people have gone to try to earn a living, since there are gold mines there. The countryside is over-plowed, but the cities are overcrowded. Black people have been kept poor by the few, but greedy, white people in South Africa, and now many black people have turned to crime. Yet there are also many people, both white and black, striving for change, for justice.

One day Stephen gets a letter from a parson in Johannesburg. Reverend Msimangu writes that Stephen's sister Gertrude is sick. Stephen also wants to know what has happened to his son, Absalom, in Johannesburg, so he agrees to go there, although it will be very expensive.

In Johannesburg, Stephen finds that his sister has become a prostitute. She repents when she meets him, and moves into the place he is staying, near Msimangu's Mission House. Stephen and Msimangu become good friends as they search for Absalom, though it becomes increasingly clear that Absalom has not been leading a good life. Then, a respected white man named Arthur Jarvis, who worked for racial equality, is murdered by black boys. Arthur was raised near Ndotsheni, so Stephen knows him and his father by sight, and is very upset about the murder. As it turns out, Absalom is the killer, though he had two accomplices, one of whom is Matthew, the son of Stephen's brother John. Absalom feels terrible about what he has done, and vows to only tell the truth from now on. But Matthew and the other boy lie, saying that they were not part of the murder. The judge believes them, and Absalom is sentenced to hang alone. This is in spite of the great efforts of the church in Johannesburg, who help Stephen so much—with prayer, money, and advice—that he is overcome with gratitude. Msimangu, especially, does everything he can to help Stephen, though he brushes off any thanks, saying that God is directing him, that is all. Stephen tries not to fall into despair over the hopelessness of his situation, and reaches out to the needy people around him. Gertrude has a son, and when she eventually runs away from the Mission House at night, Stephen takes over his care. Absalom has a lover who is pregnant, and Stephen brings the girl to live with him in Johannesburg, then takes her back to Ndotsheni. She is a source of joy for him, because she was leading an immoral life, but with his direction, has become a kind and good person.

Meanwhile, Stephen meets James Jarvis, Arthur's father, by accident. James, who never cared much about political issues, has been reading his son's writing. He commits to a life of justice and compassion, inspired by his dead son's words. He also pities Stephen, who comes from a poor village, and has been broken by the wickedness of those close to him. James can see that Stephen, too, believes kindness and truth to be all-important. James begins to help Ndotsheni. He sends a teacher there to help them understand how to grow successful crops. He pays for a new church to be built. He



buys milk for the young children who need it. Though they are not friends-Jarvis is a reserved man who does not display emotions easily-they help each other recover from their losses. Though Stephen is old, he knows that the land will one day be restored. This comforts him more than anything, because he loves his beautiful land deeply. Throughout his terrible journey, it comforts him and gives him strength.



Major Characters

Stephen Kumalo: Main character of the story. A pastor who takes his relationship with God and the state of South Africa very seriously. He sees that the poverty, injustice, and lack of morality in his country is threatening to become irreversible. He loves his beautiful land, and worries over what will happen to it. He also loves its people—both blacks and whites. Though he recognizes that white people are responsible for some of South Africa's problems, he does not hate them as a group. More than anything, he loves his own family. When he finds out that his son has become part of everything he hates about South Africa, it nearly kills him. He also berates himself for his own failings: at times he is jealous, selfish, or angry, and he hates himself for it. But his belief in the goodness of God, and the individual kindness he encounters, renew his spirit. He is a kind and gentle man who is repeatedly challenged by the cruelty and brutality of the world around him.

John Kumalo: Stephen Kumalo's younger brother. He moved to Johannesburg and now owns a successful carpenter's shop. Though he speaks out for justice for the 'natives' (black South Africans, who are overwhelmingly poor, and make up the vast majority of citizens) he is also afraid. He loves his money and power, loves that people will listen to him, but knows that if he says anything too controversial he will be put in prison. He is one of the country's great orators, but he never lets his speeches get too intense. His instinct for self-preservation is too high, and it makes him afraid to endanger himself, even for a good cause. It also makes him lie to get his son out of trouble—even if that means making things worse for Stephen and his own son, Absalom.

Absalom Kumalo: Stephen Kumalo's only child. He went to Johannesburg to find Stephen's sister, but never returned or even wrote to his parents. When Stephen finds him, he has been thrown out of several houses for bad behavior, spent time in a reformatory, gotten a young girl pregnant, and, just when he seemed to be turning his life around, robbed and murdered a kind, well-respected white man. Absalom is young, immature, and irresponsible, but being caught, paradoxically, brings out the best in him. He admits to the murder, and tells the truth from then on. He somberly accepts the fact that his 'friends' deny being at the murder scene. Though he is terrified of his execution, he eventually comes to terms with it, and arranges for all of his money to be given to his child when it is born. He slowly becomes an adult. This may be the only positive effect of the way he has lived: for the most part, he has acted foolishly, and in many ways, his life seems pointless. This is something very difficult for his father to accept.

Theophilus Msimangu: Stephen's greatest friend in the novel. He is the one who informs Stephen of his sister's immoral life in Johannesburg, finds him a place to stay there, and goes to great lengths to help him find his son. He relates well to Stephen, because both of them grapple with feelings they consider sinful. Msimangu often says that he himself is not a good man, but God has put His hands on him. Stephen is comforted by his friend's warm, genuine, generous nature, and they talk freely together, even though they haven't known each other long.



Arthur Jarvis: A respected, just, kind-hearted white man, who desperately wanted to help bring justice to South Africa. He revered Abraham Lincoln, and was a learned and thoughtful man. He was well-loved by black and white South Africans alike. Absalom Kumalo and two friends murdered Jarvis while robbing his house. Thus, Arthur is at the center of the tragedy of the book: he who was trying to help poor black people avoid lives of crime, was murdered by a young black man who was not altogether bad, just corrupted by the system Arthur was trying to change.

James Jarvis: Arthur Jarvis's father. He has never concerned himself much with the 'natives'-he was rich enough not to have to see them except as servants-but when his son dies he makes an effort to understand his life's work. Reading his son's speeches and essays, he is moved by the problems between black and white South Africans, and this leads him to try to help Stephen Kumalo's village. He gives up his feelings of hate and fear, and steadfastly acts only in compassion.

Minor Characters

Mrs. Kumalo: Stephen's wife. She is never named, and this reveals some of her role in the story. She is a kind, understanding, long-suffering woman, but she has little identity apart from her husband. She is a good wife: she takes care of her husband, loves her son desperately, and wants to do right in the world. She, like her husband, knows that South Africa is largely a destroyed country, and sees that her village is crumbling. Yet unlike Stephen's, her thoughts are never revealed to the reader. She merely grieves over these things quietly.

Gertrude Kumalo: Stephen's sister. She is twenty-five years younger than he, and much less responsible. On some level she would like to be 'good'-to settle down, take care of her son, work consistently and give back to her community-but she doesn't know how to do this. She suggests that she might become a nun, but then disappears from the house, never to be seen again. No one really knows where she has gone, but it seems doubtful that she has joined a convent.

Sibeko: His daughter has gone to Johannesburg, and has not been heard from for a year. Sibeko is worried and asks Stephen to find out about her for him. She worked for Margaret Jarvis' niece, who fired her because she was acting immorally. The niece says that she does not care where Sibeko's daughter is now.

Mrs. Lithebe: A kind, patient, upright religious woman, who boards Kumalo and takes care of him, Gertrude, Gertrude's son, and Kumalo's daughter-in-law. She tries to teach the two women to lead moral lives, and she has a deep respect for Kumalo, because she can tell he is a good man.

Father Vincent: Father Vincent is a foreign Anglican priest who befriends Stephen at the Sophiatown Mission House. He helps Stephen by praying with him and helping him think about peaceful things including the beauty of the land. Eventually, Father Vincent also helps Stephen find a lawyer when Stephen finds his son in prison.



Gertrude's son: Though Gertrude neglects him and he is a quiet, serious boy, Kumalo loves playing with him, and making him laugh. When Gertrude leaves Mrs. Lithebe's house secretly, the boy asks about her at first, but soon forgets her. He happily moves to Ndotsheni.

Matthew Kumalo: Son of John Kumalo, cousin of Absalom, and nephew of Stephen. He was with Absalom when he robbed and killed Arthur, but does not admit it. He is protected by his father. Neither of them are willing to accept that they have dodged responsibility, laying it at the feet of their more honest relatives.

Dubula: A friend of John Kumalo, and part of his political circle. He, according to Msimangu, is the one that the white people are most afraid of, because he is not afraid. He will do anything for justice-even sacrifice himself.

Mrs. Mkize: She housed Absalom and Matthew Kumalo. She is a sullen, fearful woman who will not admit to her own role in her tenants' immoral lives.

Pleasant-faced man: A white man who works at the reformatory at which Absalom stayed. He cares about Absalom, but he is also cynical. He is angry with both Absalom and himself when he finds out that Absalom has gone back to an immoral lifestyle. Yet he still tries to help him, for Stephen's sake as well as his son's.

The girl: Absalom's lover, the mother of his child. She is simple, and does not expect much from the world. Her 'immorality' seems to come more from this than from actual wickedness: she lives with a man unmarried, but she commits no crimes that the reader knows of. When Kumalo takes her under his wing, she is grateful, and wants nothing more than to be a good, respectful daughter-in-law.

Mr. Carmichael: The lawyer who defends Absalom for free. A somber, upright man, he is interested only in truth and justice. He wants to do his job well, and advance the standing of black South Africans. He is not concerned with being friendly.

Margaret Jarvis: She was closer to her son Arthur than her husband was, and she is devastated by his death. She understood what he was trying to do, and she supports James in trying to continue their son's efforts. Still, she was sick before her son died, and his murder is too much for her to bear: she dies soon after.

Johannes Pafuri: The third boy who broke into Arthur Jarvis' house. Though Johannes chose the time and the place for the robbery, and used the iron bar to knock out the servant, he denies all of this. When the judge finds in his favor, Johannes is pleased and self-righteous, as though this is just.

The chief: A self-important, proud man who is more concerned with displaying his power than with learning about ways to help Ndotsheni. He brushes off Kumalo, then tries to impress Jarvis, probably because he is a rich white man, more than because he wants to restore Ndotsheni.



The small white boy: Arthur Jarvis' son, and James Jarvis' grandson. He is mature, intelligent, and good-natured. He comes to see Ndotsheni and talks freely with Stephen, laughing easily and bringing joy to the priest. Yet when he hears that children are starving in Ndotsheni, he goes to his grandfather and asks him to give milk to the village. He is a happy, carefree boy, but he understands grief and struggle also.

The agricultural demonstrator: James Jarvis pays him to come to Ndotsheni and help the villagers learn to work the land successfully. He is happy to do it, because he wants money for himself, and independence from white people for his own people. He loves his country and wants to see it restored.



Objects/Places

The Mission House: The place where Kumalo meets Msimangu and Father Vincent. Among them, he finds kindness he never could have imagined, and it is a place he can go for comfort when his life seems to be ruined.

Shanty Town: Black South Africans in Johannesburg are so poor, and the city so overcrowded, that they are forced to live in a neighborhood built out of spare pieces of metal and other materials. No one knows what they will do when the winter comes. Shanty Town is an example of South Africans' inability to confront a problem. They build places where people can live right now, knowing that it can't last.

Arthur Jarvis' study: Full of books and his own writings, Arthur Jarvis' study is an eye-opening place for his father James, who never thought much about 'the native problem'. The study is a place where James can go to understand his dead son, and learn how to continue his work toward racial justice.

The sticks: The sticks are for a dam that James Jarvis is having built for Ndotsheni. They represent his mysterious kindness: for a while no one in the village knows what the sticks are for, but they know that they are not supposed to touch them.



Quotes

Quote 1: "There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills" Chapter 1, pg. 3

Quote 2: "they go to Johannesburg, and there they are lost, and no one hears of them at all." Chapter 2, pg. 9

Quote 3: "she has many husbands." Chapter 5, pg. 23

Quote 4: "One day in Johannesburg, and already the tribe was being rebuilt, the house and soul being restored." Chapter 6, pg. 32

Quote 5: "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find that we are turned to hating." Chapter 7, pg. 40

Quote 6: "All roads lead to Johannesburg." Chapter 9, pg. 52

Quote 7: "Now God be thanked that the name of a hill is such music, that the name of a river can heal" Chapter 10, pg. 62

Quote 8: "for who is not silent when someone is dead, who was a small bright boy?" Chapter 11, pg. 72

Quote 9: "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear." Chapter 12, pg. 80

Quote 10: "Have no doubt it is fear in his eyes." Chapter 14, pg. 96

Quote 11: "You see, my brother, there is no proof that my son or this other young man was there at all." Chapter 14, pg. 101

Quote 12: "we do what is in us, and why it is in us, that is also a secret. It is Christ in us, crying that men may be succoured and forgiven, even when He Himself is forsaken." Chapter 15, pg. 110

Quote 13: "I could be willing." Chapter 16, pg. 115

Quote 14: "Why else do we live?" Chapter 17, pg. 119

Quote 15: "Old man, leave him alone. You lead him so far and then you spring upon him." Chapter 17, pg. 122

Quote 16: "What does that matter?" Chapter 18, pg. 133

Quote 17: "It is not permissible to add to one's possessions if these things can only be done at the cost of other men. Such development has only one true name, and that is exploitation." Chapter 20, pg. 45



Quote 18: "The truth is, our civilization is not Christian; it is a tragic compound of great ideal and fearful practice, of loving charity and fearful clutching of possessions." Chapter 21, pg. 155

Quote 19: "In a land of fear this incorruptibility is like a lamp set upon a stand, giving light to all that are in the house." Chapter 22, pg. 158

Quote 20: "this thing that is the heaviest thing of all my years, is the heaviest thing of all your years also." Chapter 25, pg. 180

Quote 21: "there was a brightness in him." Chapter 25, pg. 181

Quote 22: "And then what will happen to the carpenter's shop, that brings in eight, ten, twelve pounds a week?" Chapter 26, pg. 185

Quote 23: "Nothing is ever quiet, except for fools." Chapter 26, pg. 190

Quote 24: "I shall care for your child, my son, even as if it were my own." Chapter 29, pg. 205

Quote 25: "I am a weak and sinful man, but God put His hands on me, that is all." Chapter 29, pg. 215

Quote 26: "Something deep is touched here, something that is good and deep." Chapter 30, pg. 220

Quote 27: "Forgive us all, for we all have trespasses." Chapter 30, pg. 224

Quote 28: "I have learned that kindness and love can pay for pain and suffering." Chapter 30, pg. 226

Quote 29: "When you go, something bright will go out of Ndotsheni." Chapter 33, pg. 248

Quote 30: "that is a small angel from God." Chapter 33, pg. 255

Quote 31: "Although nothing has come yet, something is here already." Chapter 34, pg. 266

Quote 32: "One thing is about to be finished, but here is something that is only begun." Chapter 36, pg. 272

Quote 33: "But when the dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret." Chapter 35, pg. 276



Topic Tracking: Kindness

Book 1, Chapter 5

Kindness 1: Msimangu believes that loving compassion is the only thing that will save South Africa. He knows it is more powerful than any other emotion, because it is unselfish, but he knows how fragile love is, and how difficult it is to be kind to and forgive those who hurt you. He is afraid that white people might take so long to bring justice to South Africa that by the time they do black South Africans will hate them.

Book 1, Chapter 8

Kindness 2: Kumalo and Msimangu see white people helping black people on the street, driving them places because of the bus boycott. Kumalo is deeply pleased, because he knows this is an important step. Msimangu is moved almost beyond words.

Book 1, Chapter 13

Kindness 3: Though Msimangu has just inspired a large crowd of people, he will take no compliments. He only tells Kumalo that he has been trying desperately to help him, and is thankful that his spiritual words have been successful.

Book 1, Chapter 14

Kindness 4: John is afraid only for himself and his son, but Stephen sees his suffering and feels nothing but pity and sympathy for him. In fact, it makes him forget his own suffering for a while.

Book 1, Chapter 15

Kindness 5: Like Msimangu, Father Vincent is unself-consciously kind. He wants only to help ease Kumalo's suffering, and to help him know God. Though he hardly knows the man, and they are very different people, he devotes himself to helping Kumalo.

Book 1, Chapter 16

Kindness 6: Though he is sometimes sidetracked by his own fear and pain, Kumalo pours his heart into helping the girl. He remembers the kindness of Father Vincent, as he prepares to bring the girl to a happier place than she has ever known.

Book 1, Chapter 17

Kindness 7: Kumalo, who has learned to expect little from people, especially white people, is awestruck at the kindness of Mr. Carmichael. This is one of his first encounters with kindness that comes from a desire for justice: Mr. Carmichael is not being kind because he likes Kumalo-he does not even know him-he is being kind because he believes it is the right thing to do.



Book 2, Chapter 25

Kindness 8: James Jarvis has never thought much about natives, but the more he reads about his son's crusade for racial justice, the more he feels compelled to be kind to people of all races. When Kumalo tells him that his son killed James' son, James is not angry-in fact, he sees that Kumalo is torn apart by what has happened, and feels deeply moved. He is a powerful, intimidating man, but he tries only to help Kumalo feel less afraid of him.

Book 2, Chapter 29

Kindness 9: Stephen goes to John, who has hurt him so much, with nothing but compassion in his heart. But when he sees that his brother is a clever, selfish liar, he cannot resist hurting him. Even though he only points out what John himself has done, when John throws him out of the shop, it is Stephen who feels guilty. He would like to have a limitless capacity for kindness.

Kindness 10: Jarvis and Msimangu offer parallel kindnesses: they each give a large sum of money to a good cause, and they are both happy to do it. They also both do it in a modest way: Jarvis makes Harrison wait until he is gone to open the envelope, so he won't have to accept thanks. Msimangu rejects any idea that he is a good man: he believes God is acting through him, that is all.

Book 3, Chapter 31

Kindness 11: When Arthur's son is received kindly by Kumalo, he listens to his host's troubles and takes pity on him. He tells James, his grandfather, to bring milk to the village, and without questioning the situation, James does it. He has committed himself to a life of kindness, and the boy is a further link between Kumalo and James.



Topic Tracking: Race Relations

Book 1, Chapter 5

Race Relations 1: Kumalo and Msimangu begin to hint at something that concerns everyone in Johannesburg: racial injustice. White people prosper while black people live in poverty, and many black people have become criminals. Msimangu argues that, even though white people forced black people into poverty, they are not responsible for the terrible ways that many black people have responded to this injustice. He seems to say that black people must take responsibility for their own situations.

Book 1, Chapter 8

Race Relations 2: Msimangu and Kumalo are awed to see white people helping black people so openly. They feel a mixture of hope and fear: they want to believe that things can change, but they also realize how ruined their country is. They know that if anything can help South Africa, it is these individuals, acting alone, out of a sense of justice that does not concern itself with race.

Book 1, Chapter 9

Race Relations 3: There are so many poor black people in the Johannesburg area that they must move to a makeshift town called Shanty Town, where the buildings are so flimsy that they could not stand the rain or winter. South African whites have created this poverty, and now they have no idea how to solve it, and black South Africans now seem to have little choice but to live in poverty or turn to crime (most likely both.)

Book 1, Chapter 11

Race Relations 4: South Africa is clearly troubled, and one cannot deny that a major part of this trouble is racial. Arthur Jarvis was a rich white man who tried to help the poor black people of his country, but he was still a rich white man nonetheless, and was killed for his money. No matter how much Arthur might have wanted the same things as his killers, their different races stood between them.

Book 2, Chapter 19

Race Relations 5: James and Arthur were divided about "the native question," as are John Harrison and his father. But James is still proud of how many people, of both races, loved and respected his son. He can see that this goes beyond any single issue.

Book 2, Chapter 20

Race Relations 6: Arthur articulates what many people in the book think about: all the reasons for South Africa's current state. He acknowledges that much of it has to do with race, and argues that white people are largely responsible for the destroyed tribes and the "wicked" natives.



Book 2, Chapter 21

Race Relations 7: Arthur exposes the two-faced religious viewpoint that has allowed white people to enslave black people in South Africa for so long. He proclaims that they cannot hide behind the idea that black people were meant to be servants, when it is so clear that it is white people, not God, who has made them so.

Book 2, Chapter 23

Race Relations 8: Racial tensions are heightened whenever the great wealth of South Africa is discussed. White people own stocks, controlling the gold that black people dig from the mines. Many of these white people are so greedy and insulated that they do not even realize that the people who bring them their gold are too poor to buy any shares of it. Thus, the greatest piece of the South African economy depends on racial inequality.

Book 2, Chapter 26

Race Relations 9: Even though John Kumalo has very little to say-he is not prepared to actually lead a revolution-the white government has let him know without a doubt that, if he were to make trouble, they would put him away immediately. The two races are standing on opposite sides of a canyon, and the white policies have arranged it so that they will never meet in a peaceful or orderly way. Any black person who wants change will have to fight for it.

Book 3, Chapter 35

Race Relations 10: Kumalo rejects ideas of race and politics in his discussion with the young teacher. He only wants people to love each other, instead of being ambitious and greedy, trying to crush others with their power. When he looks at people as individuals, rather than members of a race (the teacher sees Jarvis as "the white man," while Kumalo only sees a kind friend) Kumalo is able to utterly reject racism.



Topic Tracking: Redemption

Book 1, Chapter 3

Redemption 1: Kumalo is upset with himself for lying to the people around him, pretending that he is more sophisticated than he is. He is also worried about whether what he will find in Johannesburg might be beyond help. He reads his bible in the hope that it will set him, an imperfect man, on the right path, and it calms his spirit.

Book 1, Chapter 5

Redemption 2: Kumalo and Msimangu talk honestly about Kumalo's family's problems, and though at first he is ashamed, it makes him feel better. Msimangu tells him that the real problem is not what the white man has done to the natives, but the fact that the natives have not been able to recover. Msimangu believes that the answer lies not in rebuilding the tribe, but in deciding what to do now that the tribe is gone.

Book 1, Chapter 6

Redemption 3: Gertrude wants to change her life, though she is afraid that it is too late for her. Still, she wants her son to have a better life, and knows that her brother will try to make this happen. At first, Stephen is very angry with her, but once he sees that she is trying to change, he is able to forgive her, and they reunite through prayer.

Book 1, Chapter 7

Redemption 4: Kumalo is beginning to realize that, despite the shame he feels about his sister and brother's sins, Msimangu's kindness heals those wounds. Though both of them are more inclined to keep their problems private, they are starting to see that talking to friends helps them.

Book 1, Chapter 10

Redemption 5: Just talking about Ndotsheni makes Kumalo feel good, and hearing him talk so lovingly makes Gertrude and her son feel good as well. When he is reminded of places he loves, he finds the strength to face what he hates and fears. The love of his land heals him.

Book 1, Chapter 13

Redemption 6: Looking out on his homeland and then listening to Msimangu's preaching, Kumalo is restored. His spirit is lifted, and the worries of every day life can not touch him as deeply as before. His love for the land, and the love he hears in Msimangu's voice, remind him of the simplest joy and beauty.

Book 1, Chapter 15



Redemption 7: Father Vincent tries to help Kumalo see that there is always hope for change, but right now, Kumalo feels hopeless. Vincent tries to explain that while fear holds one in prison, sorrow at least allows one to decide what to do. Sorrow can be rebuilt into joy. Kumalo begins to see it.

Book 1, Chapter 16

Redemption 8: Kumalo finds some relief for his pain in his compassion for the girl. He begins to see that acting well in the small ways he can, rather than worrying foolishly over things he cannot change, will bring him and those around him out of the darkness.

Book 2, Chapter 22

Redemption 9: There seems to be some hope left for Absalom, because he promised himself, before he was even caught, that he would never do anything bad again, or lie again. He seems to be following this rule, because he is taking full responsibility for what he has done. However, he says that he is trying to do good now because he is in trouble, so it is unclear whether he is truly serious about it or not.

Book 2, Chapter 24

Redemption 10: James seems to find strength in his son's words of conviction. He no longer feels anguished over Arthur's death, he simply tries to understand his son's mind-which means understanding issues he has never thought about before. When he leaves the house by the back door, it seems that he is now walking a new path in his life.

Book 2, Chapter 29

Redemption 11: The double good deeds of Msimangu and James produce redemption on both sides. James pours his heart into helping the natives, thus forgiving his son's killer and continuing his son's work, while easing his own heart and lessening the damage done by Absalom. He has not allowed hate and fear to generate hate and fear. Msimangu, meanwhile, does everything he can to bring Kumalo out of his own prison of grief, at the same time connecting with God through his good deed.

Book 3, Chapter 30

Redemption 12: Kumalo is healed by the welcome of his village, and by praying in his own church. He is especially comforted by admitting the sins of his family, which shame him, in front of all his congregation. Once he has done it, these sins do not seem so horrible anymore, and it seems that a new life can begin.

Book 1, Chapter 1

The story begins: "There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills" Chapter 1, pg. 3, first describing the intense natural beauty of this rural South African landscape, then hinting that, when one enters the hills, the beauty breaks down. The fields are overworked, and there is famine and drought. The men, young men and young women have all left this place, because it cannot support them anymore.



Book 1, Chapter 2

A small child in the village runs to the pastor's house, holding a letter to deliver to him. The Reverend, Stephen Kumalo, welcomes her into his home, receiving the letter then kindly telling her to ask his wife for some food. He is reluctant to open the letter. It is from Johannesburg, where three of his close relatives have gone, never to be heard from again. His sister Gertrude, twenty-five years younger than he, went to find her husband, who had gone there and disappeared. His brother John also moved to Johannesburg, and hadn't been heard from since. But the most painful disappearance is that of his son, Absalom, who as a young man went to find Gertrude and has not returned. Kumalo's wife urges him to open the letter, and she herself finally does so. It is from the Reverend Theophilus Msimangu, who writes that Gertrude is very sick. He assures Kumalo that he will find him a place to stay in Johannesburg, and urges him to come. Kumalo is afraid-Johannesburg is a huge, terrifying city, and he does not know Msimangu, does not know what he might find there. He is angry with his relatives for not writing. He frets, "they go to Johannesburg, and there they are lost, and no one hears of them at all." Chapter 2, pg. 9 In addition, he and his wife are very poor. Finally, they decide that they will use the money they were saving to send Absalom to school for the trip instead. Kumalo goes to pray, and his wife sits alone in silent suffering.



Book 1, Chapter 3

Kumalo waits for the train to Johannesburg. Though this can be enjoyable-the countryside is beautiful, and the train is an interesting novelty-Stephen is preoccupied. How much will his sister's sickness cost? Is Johannesburg as frightening as he has heard? He knows of someone who was killed in traffic there. He waits for a train with a friend, who timidly asks him for a favor on behalf of a man named Sibeko: Sibeko's daughter went to Johannesburg to work for the daughter of a man named Smith. Sibeko has not heard from his daughter for a year, and asks Kumalo to find out about her. Kumalo asks why Sibeko did not ask Kumalo for the favor himself, and his friend replies that Sibeko is not of their church, so he was embarrassed. Kumalo tells him that he will help anyone in their community, no matter what their religion might be. Then, on the train, he mumbles to himself, trying to make the peasants around him think he often goes to Johannesburg. He wants to impress them. But he is afraid, as the train leaves the station. He fears what might be in store for him in Johannesburg, and he is disappointed in himself for trying to impress the humble people around him. He opens his bible, hoping to find comfort there.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 1



Book 1, Chapter 4

The journey continues, and Kumalo looks out on a wonderful, destroyed, and frightening landscape. He sees beautiful hills, and dry, lifeless soil, and huge gold mines where many of the poor natives (black South Africans) live. Kumalo is a Zulu who speaks some English, and he cannot pronounce the names of the towns he passes through: they are Afrikaans, whose language he has never heard spoken. He sees bigger and bigger towns, each time thinking they must be Johannesburg, but the other people on the bus laugh at him: Johannesburg is far bigger, they say. When they finally get there, Kumalo is terrified. The city is huge, and the countless neon lights are too much for him to understand. He cannot figure out how to cross the street. A young man asks him if he needs a bus ticket, and Kumalo gives him a pound to get one for him. He waits and waits, but the young man never comes back. Finally, he asks another man where the young man has gone, and the man explains that Kumalo has been cheated. He asks him where he is going, and Kumalo tells him Sophiatown, to see Reverend Msimangu. The man knows Msimangu, and takes him to Msimangu's Mission House. When he meets Msimangu, Kumalo finally drops his false confidence, and admits his confusion and fear. It makes him feel better to do this, and he immediately likes Msimangu. They relax together, deciding to wait a bit before discussing the reason for Kumalo's visit.



Book 1, Chapter 5

Msimangu tells Kumalo that he can stay with Mrs. Lithebe, a kind woman who will charge him cheap rent. At dinner that evening, Kumalo meets a rosy-cheeked English priest who, he learns, is named Father Vincent. Kumalo talks about the beautiful land of his home-and about its problems with overworked soil and drought, and the many people who leave the tribe to go to the city. The others at the table assure him that it is like that everywhere: there is no sense of community, and crime is out of control. After dinner, Msimangu privately tells Kumalo Gertrude's story: he looks at him gravely and says, "she has many husbands." Chapter 5, pg. 23 He continues: Gertrude makes bad liquor and sells it, and she has been in prison more than once. He tries to be kind, but he wants to tell the truth. Kumalo is shocked. They agree that communities are falling apart all over South Africa. Msimangu tells him that Gertrude's son is with her, which is another reason he sent for Kumalo. He tells Kumalo that things are bad now not because of what white people have done-though that was the original cause-but because the natives have not been able to recover from what whites have done to them. He tells him that his brother John has left the church, because the church has been no help in solving the problems of Johannesburg, and this hurts Kumalo. Msimangu apologizes for talking so much, and says that Father Vincent would like to talk about this subject at a later time. Kumalo asks Msimangu to pray for him, and they both go to bed. Kumalo cannot believe he is in Johannesburg.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 2

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 1

Topic Tracking: Kindness 1



Book 1, Chapter 6

Gertrude lives in Claremont, a very poor area. Walking around there, Kumalo is disturbed by its filthiness, and the number of children wandering the streets. Kumalo goes to visit her, and she is shocked and afraid. At first, she will not let him in-she seems to be hiding things in her house. Kumalo questions her harshly: why didn't she write? Has she really been in prison? Where is her son? When it is clear she is not sure, he explodes at her. He does not want the neighborhood to hear, but he wants her to know she has shamed her family. She begins to cry loudly, saying she wants to leave, and Johannesburg is a bad place. She says she wants to go back to Ndotsheni, but that she is too wicked to be there. He pities her, and they pray earnestly together. He then asks her about Absalom. She tells him that she doesn't know much, but she knows that he was friendly with their brother John's son, so John might know where he is. He brings Gertrude to stay with him at Mrs. Lithebe's house, happy that his family seems to be reuniting. He thinks, "One day in Johannesburg, and already the tribe was being rebuilt, the house and soul being restored." Chapter 6, pg. 32

Topic Tracking: Redemption 3



Book 1, Chapter 7

Gertrude has saved no money, though it is rumored that people in her profession are rich. Stephen buys her and her son some new clothes, because he is embarrassed by the way they look. He is writing to his wife about his adventures so far when Msimangu comes up the walk. They go to visit Stephen's brother John. He has many friends in his office, he has grown fat, and he does not recognize Stephen. He tells him that his wife left him ten years ago, and he lives with another woman now. He has not written because things are so different in Johannesburg that they are difficult to explain to someone living in Ndotsheni. In Johannesburg, he has made something of himself. He is not subject to an ignorant chief here. Johannesburg, he says, is the future. There is something happening here that is stronger than the tribe or the church. He says that the natives, who hold the entire South African economy together by working in the mines, are demanding fair pay for their work. Stephen is overpowered by his brother's great speech, but Msimangu is skeptical. He wonders whether John's wife left him because he cheated on her. John begins to get angry, but Stephen cuts off the fight when their tea is brought in. Stephen asks about his son Absalom, and John seems to be uncomfortable. He tells him that since his own son, Matthew, did not like his "second mother" and her children, so he left home, and Absalom went with them. John does not know exactly where they went, but he gives Kumalo an address of a factory where they were working in Alexandra. Once Msimangu and Stephen leave, Msimangu tells Stephen that though much of what John said was true, John has been corrupted by his wealth and power. He is not really willing to sacrifice himself for justice, even though he could do much good, since he is such a great speaker. Msimangu says it is difficult to avoid being corrupted by power, unless you are full of love. Then, you have power because you are not seeking power. He believes that love is the only thing that will save South Africa from its racial struggles. He tells Stephen, "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find that we are turned to hating." Chapter 7, pg. 40

They find the factory in Alexandra, but Absalom has left a year before. A worker there who was friendly with him tells them that he heard Absalom was living in a house in Sophiatown. When they get there, a kind woman tells them that Absalom no longer lives there. She searches for a letter from him, and as Kumalo is playing with her children, Msimangu notices that she looks at Kumalo with pity. He asks her about this privately, and she tells him that she sees he is a priest, and she had to kick his son out of her home because she did not like his friends. The letter's return address is in Alexandra, so the two pastors set out for that place. Kumalo tells his friend that, although his journey is not a happy one, he enjoys being with him.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 4

Book 1, Chapter 8

The next morning they leave the Mission House and start out for Johannesburg. But when they start to get on the bus, they meet Dubula, one of John Kumalo's friends. He asks them not to take the bus, because the government has raised the fares, despite the low wages the black people who ride the bus earn (white people mostly own cars). They agree, even though Kumalo is old and the trip is far to walk. Msimangu tells Kumalo that if John is the one with the voice, Dubula is the one with the heart: the government fears him, because he is not afraid to really try to change things. After a while, a white man picks them up and takes them to Alexandra. They see that he went out of his way to do it, and are amazed. Msimangu begins to talk again about the problems in Johannesburg and its surrounding towns: the crime is terrible, and sometimes even old women are robbed and killed. Yet there are good things too: one night, two friends of his heard a knock at their door. Outside they found a white woman who had been beaten and abandoned by a white man. The couple went to a nearby house where a white man lived, and asked for his help. Together they helped her. Msimangu explains that Alexandra is not entirely a bad place. When they find the address they are looking for, Mrs. Mkize opens the door. She is sullen and afraid, and tells them that Absalom and Matthew left a year ago, but will say nothing more. Msimangu tells Kumalo to go up the street, then secretly returns to the house. He tells Mrs. Mkize that he knows she is not telling him something. Finally, she tells him that Matthew and Absalom brought stolen items to the house late at night. They left, she thinks, because they were going to be caught soon. She says they were friendly with a taxi-driver, and tells Msimangu where this man lives. Thanking her, he finds the taxi driver, who is afraid, but tells him that Absalom has moved to Orlando to live in a small neighborhood called Shanty Town. Kumalo and Msimangu take the taxi home together. They see many black people walking home from work because of the bus boycott. They also see many white people driving the black people, even though they are threatened by the policemen. Kumalo is pleased to see it, and Msimangu is overcome with emotion.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 2

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 2

Book 1, Chapter 9

"All roads lead to Johannesburg." Chapter 9, pg. 52 Johannesburg is the only place to go for many people who need work, or a place to live, or a place to keep secrets. But Johannesburg is unable to support so many people. There are no rooms left, and few jobs pay enough to live on. There is an endless waiting list for housing, and the people who have houses are so poor that they are forced to rent to people they do not like or trust. Many people feel it was better in the rural villages: there may not have been much food, but it was shared by the community. Because there is nowhere else to go, Shanty Town is built. It goes up overnight, very cheaply, but the buildings will not be able to stand rain or winter, and there are still many problems for the poor: one woman's daughter dies because a doctor cannot be reached in time. No one can come up with permanent solutions.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 3



Book 1, Chapter 10

Kumalo waits for Msimangu to take him to Shanty Town, and plays with his sister's son. Gertrude is respectful to him, but they are not close. She talks with Mrs. Lithebe about women's concerns, mostly. But sometimes Kumalo tells stories of his village, and the boy and Gertrude listen happily, because they can tell how much he loves it. They all feel better, in this destroyed place, to hear about well-loved places, no matter how near destruction they are. "Now God be thanked that the name of a hill is such music, that the name of a river can heal," Chapter 10, pg. 62 they think.

Msimangu takes him to Shanty Town. The people there still talk about ordinary things, even though they are clearly living in an unlivable place. They meet someone who knew Absalom, and she tells them he stayed at a certain house. The woman at that house tells them that Absalom was sent to a Reformatory. Kumalo is horrified, but Msimangu tells him that he should not give up hope: he has heard good things about the place, and they may have been able to help Absalom. And when they get there, a young pleasant-faced man speaking Zulu tells Kumalo that his son was successful at the reformatory (though he told them he had no family), and they released him a month ago. This was partly because he had gotten a girl pregnant, and they seemed to want to get married. The man asks them to wait a while, then takes them to Pimville where Absalom and the girl are living. But the girl tells them that Absalom left four days ago, and she has no idea where he is. She clearly does not expect anything from anyone, and this angers the young man and Msimangu, and makes Kumalo sad. He tries to speak to the girl, but the others tell him that she is hopeless-she will find another man who will probably use her and leave her again, and there are many, many women like her. They leave, and the young man tells them he will search for Absalom. Msimangu apologizes for speaking so harshly to the girl, and Kumalo understands-but asks to be taken to see her again.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 5



Book 1, Chapter 11

On their way back to the Mission House, Msimangu tells Kumalo he thinks that Kumalo should rest for a while. He wants to take him to Ezenzeleni, which is a beautiful place where white people help blind black people, and Msimangu is going there to preach.

That evening at dinner, Kumalo talks more with Father Vincent about their homes- Ndotsheni and England-but they are interrupted by a terrible newspaper headline. Arthur Jarvis, a well-known white city engineer who has been trying hard to help black South Africans, has been shot and killed, probably by natives. A housekeeper was hit over the head, and has not yet regained consciousness: the police hope that he will identify the killers. Father Vincent tells him that this is the son of James Jarvis, and Kumalo recognizes the name: the Jarvises live above Ndotsheni, and he vaguely remembers Arthur as a child. The news upsets Kumalo deeply, "for who is not silent when someone is dead, who was a small bright boy?"Chapter 11, pg. 72. The pleasure that they found in talking about their homes is now gone.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 4



Book 1, Chapter 12

Everyone is afraid, and no one can enjoy their beautiful land. Many voices rise anonymously, suggesting different solutions for the troubles of their country. Some say that what is needed is more police protection. Some say the natives need better schooling. Some say that natives and the white people should be separated completely—down the parks they play in on the weekends. No one knows how there can be peace when there are so many more black people than white. White people do not want to give up their power, nor do they want to mingle with the natives. No one wants to think about these problems too much. "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear." Chapter 12, pg. 80

The woman who had to kick Absalom out of her house comes to see Msimangu. She tells him that the police have come to her house looking for him, and she sent them to Mrs. Mkize. Msimangu is upset about what this might mean for Kumalo, but he knows that the law must be obeyed. He starts out to Mrs. Mkize's house, but Kumalo finds him leaving. He is so grateful to learn that Msimangu was going to try to deal with this himself, that Msimangu cannot be frustrated with him. They go back to all the houses they have just been to, and the police have been to all of them. Things look bad. The pregnant girl is afraid, but she agrees to call the Mission House if she hears from Absalom. Kumalo is nearly sick with shock.



Book 1, Chapter 13

In Ezenzeleni, Kumalo is left alone to look out over the hills. This makes him feel better, somehow. He tries not to be afraid that Absalom killed Arthur Jarvis. He wonders whether his son might marry the girl, and prevent his grandson from being born illegitimately. He wonders how someone could kill another person. He cannot believe that his son could ever do it. He thinks about South Africa: he knows that the tribe is broken, and that huge changes are taking place, and he is awestruck and afraid. Msimangu calls him to lunch, and tells him he must not focus on these horrible thoughts any longer.

In Ezenzeleni, white and black people work together to help the blind. Msimangu preaches to them, and Kumalo is astonished at the beauty and power of his friend's voice. He feels that Msimangu is speaking to him, helping him find compassion and strength within himself. Some people have said that Msimangu is foolish, because he brings happiness to people who are unjustly suffering. But for Kumalo, Msimangu is a blessing, and he tells him so. His friend only replies that he tried in every way to help him, but only the word of God worked, so they should be thankful.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 6

Topic Tracking: Kindness 3



Book 1, Chapter 14

Back in Sophiatown, Gertrude is selling her old belongings when the young man from the reformatory and Msimangu come up the walk. Stephen is terrified at what news they might bring, but he greets them. They tell him that Absalom did indeed murder Arthur Jarvis-though he was with two other boys, one of whom is Matthew Kumalo. Kumalo is anguished. He wants to go to see his brother, then to prison to see his son. He asks Msimangu to linger behind him for a moment, and tell Gertrude and Mrs. Lithebe the news. The women wail and sob, according to their custom.

His brother John is as jovial and self-important as always, until Stephen gives him the news. John is afraid, and drops his happy attitude. He is concerned about his own son. "Have no doubt it is fear in his eyes." Chapter 14, pg. 96 They go together with the young man and Msimangu to the prison. There, they are taken to separate rooms. Kumalo cries, holding his son, but Absalom seems unhappy and uncomfortable. He will only agree quietly with everything his father says. He says that he confessed when he was approached by the police. He tells his father that Matthew and another boy were with him. Stephen demands to know why he was carrying a gun, and asks many more questions, but Absalom cannot answer him or defend himself. He begins to cry, but it is unclear whether he cries for himself or for the people he has hurt. The young white man tries to act indifferent, but he is pained. Kumalo will not leave his son alone: he demands to know why. Absalom tells him it was the other boys' fault, or it was the devil. He finally agrees to marry the girl. Outside, Stephen meets his brother, who reveals his plan: he will hire a lawyer to convince the court that Matthew was not at the crime scene. He says, "You see, my brother, there is no proof that my son or this other young man was there at all." Chapter 14, pg. 101 Stephen is shocked, and the young man is so depressed and angered by this scene that he lashes out at Stephen, telling him that working at the reformatory is as noble as working as a priest. He drives away, and John too leaves his brother standing alone. Stephen remembers that Father Vincent offered to help him, so he decides to go to Father Vincent.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 4



Book 1, Chapter 15

The young man comes to visit Kumalo. He feels bad for getting so angry, and he tries to keep his temper now, but Kumalo is such a good man, and yet so utterly helpless, that it infuriates him. Still he is patient: he tells Kumalo he must have a lawyer: not because the truth should be hidden, but because John can't be trusted. They go to see Father Vincent, who tells them about a lawyer who will only take a case that is entirely honest. He also agrees to marry the girl and Absalom, if it can be arranged in prison. Father Vincent tries to be hopeful, but Stephen is in despair. He wishes that someone in Johannesburg had cared about his son, had realized that he had loving but ignorant parents. He does not believe that Absalom can be helped now. Vincent tells him to go home and rest, and pray for Gertrude and the girl, but to leave Absalom's case to him and Msimangu, because he is too upset to think clearly about it. Kumalo is grateful, but Vincent only says, "we do what is in us, and why it is in us, that is also a secret. It is Christ in us, crying that men may be succoured and forgiven, even when He Himself is forsaken."Chapter 15, pg. 110

Topic Tracking: Redemption 7

Topic Tracking: Kindness 5



Book 1, Chapter 16

Kumalo visits the girl the next day. She welcomes him uncertainly. He tells her that Absalom has killed a white man, and her shock and grief are childlike and touching. He asks her then whether she wants to marry his son. At first, she cannot really answer: she wants to do what is best. But he wants to know whether she really wants to be Absalom's wife. She says she does, and he begins to ask her about her life. She tells him that her mother was often drunk and her father left them, so she left home as well. She has lived with two other men besides Absalom, and each of them were "caught" (presumably imprisoned). Kumalo is angered and grieved at her sad life, and he wants for some reason to hurt her. He asks her if she has ever had a murderer before. She cries, and he backs off, but then attacks her again: will she take another man now? What if he himself wanted her? She is so afraid and confused that she says, "I could be willing." Chapter 16, pg. 115 She becomes so upset that he pities her, and comforts her, and apologizes. He asks her whether she really wants to go live in a quiet, faraway town, and she excitedly says yes. He tells her he will find a place for her to live near the Mission House, and leaves her, feeling somewhat recovered.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 6

Topic Tracking: Redemption 8



Book 1, Chapter 17

Mrs. Lithebe thinks about the suffering and kindness of Kumalo. She pities him, and knows he is a good man. He asks her to let him bring the girl to stay in the house, and she simply says, "Why else do we live?" Chapter 17, pg. 119 The girl is very happy to be in the house, but she and Gertrude sometimes laugh together in a careless way. Mrs. Lithebe cautions her against this: she does not want Kumalo to be hurt anymore, and is afraid the girl will disappoint him. The girl understands immediately and promises to be more careful.

Kumalo goes again to see his son. Matthew and the other boy are denying that they were at the murder scene, and Absalom is angry and frightened. He is happy to be getting a lawyer, and to be able to marry the girl. But Stephen will not leave him alone: he wants to show him how stupid he was to have such friends. He asks over and over why Absalom would have such friends, forcing him to reveal his foolish choices. "Old man, leave him alone. You lead him so far and then you spring upon him." Chapter 17, pg. 122 Absalom is afraid for his life. Mr. Carmichael, the lawyer, comes to see Absalom, and Stephen must leave.

Later, when Kumalo and Father Vincent are having tea, Mr. Carmichael comes to see them. He tells them that he is taking the case pro deo. He believes that Absalom shot Arthur out of fear, not meaning to kill him. He will try to convince the judge that the other boys were there as well. In private, Kumalo asks what the case will cost. When he learns that pro deo means that it will cost nothing, he is in awe of the unbelievable kindness of Mr. Carmichael, a white man.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 7



Book 2, Chapter 18

Above the hills of Ndotsheni, James Jarvis watches his fields being plowed. He is unhappy with what he sees: there has been no rain for a long time, and the soil is hard. He considers the problems of the village below. The people are ignorant of farming methods, and their oxen are weak so they plow downhill, even when they shouldn't. But if the people were educated, they would not want to work on farms. Also, the white people need black farmers to work their land, but no black man would do this if he had the choice. James thinks about his son Arthur: he wanted him to take over the family farm, but Arthur had other ideas, and has done well for himself in Johannesburg. James looks over the hill and sees the police chief coming up to meet him. At first he thinks little of it, but then the chief tells him he has bad news. James knows immediately that his son is dead. He asks if they caught the native yet, then wonders, "What does that matter?" Chapter 18, pg. 133 He is in shock, and worried about how his wife, Margaret, will deal with the terrible news-she is not strong to begin with. The police chief has arranged a plane to take James and his wife to Johannesburg immediately, if they want to go. James agrees, and goes to tell his wife the news privately. As the police chief calls to signal the plane, he hears her crying in the next room.

Book 2, Chapter 19

John Harrison, Arthur Jarvis' brother-in-law, meets them at the airport in Johannesburg. He invites them to stay with him. He tells them that Arthur's wife and children are at his mother's house. They go to the police station to answer questions, then Margaret goes to bed, grieving. Harrison tells James that Arthur was a wonderful, intelligent, thoughtful and just man, who thought more about the plight of black South Africans than anyone. James knows very little about his son, but he is proud of him, and is comforted to hear about his life. Arthur was fearless, and totally committed to the cause of the natives. James is somewhat skeptical: he doesn't believe much in causes, religious or political. He goes up to bed, and talks with his wife about their son. They are proud of how many people are grieving over his death, and confused about why such a thing should happen to a man like him.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 5



Book 2, Chapter 20

James sits in Arthur's office, awed at how many books his son owned. Many of the books are about South Africa, and there are also many invitations from various groups, asking Arthur to attend parties, meetings, etc. He reads his son's unfinished manuscript, which lists the reasons that South Africa is so troubled today: white people took over, and forced the natives into smaller and smaller areas, overworking their land. Then they lured the natives to the city with hopes of work in the mines, and underpaid them, so that they could not become educated or move up in life, and could not leave the mines. "It is not permissible to add to one's possessions if these things can only be done at the cost of other men. Such development has only one true name, and that is exploitation." Chapter 20, pg. 45 He writes that white civilization has destroyed the black way of life. James reads his son's unfinished work-the one he was writing when he murdered-twice. Then he reads Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (Arthur had many, many books on Lincoln) and leaves the house in a stupor, thinking of the bright child that is now his dead son.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 6



Book 2, Chapter 21

At the funeral, James sees how many people of different races loved his son, and he feels proud. He worries about his wife, but he has somewhat recovered from the pain and shock. He talks that evening with Harrison's father, who asks him if the natives who killed Arthur have been caught. Jarvis tells him that they are still waiting for the housekeeper to regain consciousness. Harrison talks angrily about the native problem: none of the white householders knows what the servants are up to, so no one can feel safe. Jarvis is not very interested in blame or vengeance.

The next morning, the Harrisons tell James that Arthur's housekeeper has recovered, and has testified that there were indeed three men at the crime scene, and that the police hope to find them all soon. James goes to read more of his son's writing, fighting the urge to fall into despair. Arthur writes about Christianity and racial prejudice: white people, he says, have become convinced that God made black people to serve them. They look to the immoral natives and say they could not handle any power, then look at the moral natives and pity them. He writes, "The truth is, our civilization is not Christian; it is a tragic compound of great ideal and fearful practice, of loving charity and fearful clutching of possessions." Chapter 21, pg. 155 James sees where Arthur stopped, knowing that these were the last words he wrote. He sits for a moment, proud and anguished. His wife comes in, and he shows her the manuscript, prepared for her tears.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 7



Book 2, Chapter 22

The courtroom is a serious place. Judges are given the utmost respect, because everyone believes they are incorruptible. "In a land of fear this incorruptibility is like a lamp set upon a stand, giving light to all that are in the house." Chapter 22, pg. 158 The trial begins: Absalom pleads innocent to the charge of murder, saying he did not mean to kill, and Matthew and the other boy, Johannes Pafuri, plead innocent. Absalom is questioned, and relates the events of the day of the murder. He says that they chose the day because Johannes said no one would be in the house. Johannes brought along an iron bar, and when the servant cried out for Arthur, Johannes hit him over the head with it. Then Arthur appeared in the doorway, and Absalom shot him in fear. The three of them left separately, and met again at Mrs. Mkize's house. The judge interrupts, asking Absalom why he had a revolver. Absalom replies that he had it to frighten people, and to use in case someone shot at him. He would not have used it on a decent person, he says-he only shot Arthur because he was afraid. He tells the judge that Johannes had the iron bar for frightening people too; that was all it was supposed to be used for. The Prosecutor continues, asking Absalom if the others are lying when they say that no murder was ever discussed at Mrs. Mkize's house, and Absalom says they are. He says that Mrs. Mkize was afraid and told them all to leave. He buried his revolver and prayed for forgiveness. The Prosecutor seems shocked by this. Absalom says that he wandered about for a few days, terrified, and then the police came asking him where Johannes was. He confessed then, and told them that Johannes and Matthew had been with him, but he was the one who had killed Arthur. He says he decided never to lie or do anything evil again. He says that he repented because he was in trouble. On the way out of the courthouse, Kumalo notices James Jarvis, and cannot look at him.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 9

Book 2, Chapter 23

Gold has been discovered in a little town called Odendaalsrust, so the trial is not so high-profile anymore. Many white men are excited, because their stocks are skyrocketing. There is more gold here than there was in Johannesburg. But many people are not so happy about the gold: the miners, for example, whose pay will not increase, and activists, who argue that the money should go to public services, rather than just making a few people rich. Some people want another Johannesburg in Odendaalsrust, saying that rich people give back to society, making everyone richer. But many people say the wealth of the country must be shared to improve that country, and to make its people happy, and that one Johannesburg on earth is quite enough.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 8

Book 2, Chapter 24

James goes back to his son's study. He marvels again at the books on so many different subjects, and read another of Arthur's manuscripts. This one talks about what it is like to be South African. It is easy, Arthur writes, to know how beautiful the land is, and how rich in culture, without knowing any of the secret hates and fears. He says that his parents taught him well and were kind to him, but he learned nothing about his country from them. At first this angers James, but he shakes it off and reads on. His son writes movingly about his decision to fight for justice, mainly because he cannot imagine doing anything else, even if he was hated by everyone who knew him. James reads these words carefully and then leaves the house, avoiding the bloodstain on the floor—not agonizing over it, just avoiding it.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 10



Book 2, Chapter 25

One of Margaret Jarvis' favorite nieces, Barbara Smith, married a man from Springs (this is the woman who brought Sibeko's daughter to Johannesburg). Margaret and James spend the day with them, and then they go to town and leave James alone at their house. There is a knock at the door, and Stephen Kumalo is outside. When Kumalo sees James he sits down on the steps, as though he is ill. James does not know what is happening, but he sees the man is a parson and so tries to be kind to him. Kumalo finally recovers, and asks about Sibeko's daughter, but Barbara Smith is out with Margaret, so she cannot be asked where her servant is now. Jarvis recognizes Kumalo as the parson who lives near him in Ndotsheni, and when he mentions this, Stephen nearly collapses again. He chokes on his words. Jarvis urges him not to be afraid, and Kumalo tells him, "this thing that is the heaviest thing of all my years, is the heaviest thing of all your years also." Chapter 25, pg. 180 Jarvis sees this is about his son's death, but he does not understand until Kumalo tells him that Absalom killed Arthur Jarvis. Jarvis tells Kumalo that he is not angry with him. Barbara Smith comes back, and Kumalo says he came to see her-he had no idea, of course, that Jarvis would be there-and then James asks him how he recognized him. Kumalo says that he has seen him riding past the church. He has seen Arthur also: "there was a brightness in him." Chapter 25, pg. 181 Jarvis agrees; he is so moved that he wants to end the conversation quickly, and calls Barbara Smith in. She says in English, not knowing that Kumalo understands, that Sibeko's daughter was good at first, then started behaving immorally and had to be sent away: she does not know or care where she is now. Jarvis relays this information to Kumalo, leaving out the part about her not caring. Kumalo leaves, and Jarvis finds his wife, who walks like Kumalo-like she is old and beaten by life.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 8



Book 2, Chapter 26

A crowd listens to John Kumalo speak. Those who understand him know that he has no courage or brains to back up his beautiful speeches, but the policemen are afraid of him, because they do not see he will never go far enough to cause trouble. John asks for justice, but he does not push the people to truly demand it, because then they would become disorderly, and he would be sent to prison. "And then what will happen to the carpenter's shop, that brings in eight, ten, twelve pounds a week?" Chapter 26, pg. 185 Stephen hears his brother speak, and is awestruck by his power. James Jarvis hears it also, and says he does not care for this sort of speech: it is unclear whether he means a speech calling for racial justice, or a speech that uses many words without really saying anything.

There may be a strike, and if there is it will be devastating. Imagine if every black South African stopped working, if all the schools and churches closed! But when the strike comes, this does not happen. The natives are not organized, and they are easy to control, and a few are killed and the rest driven back into the mines. South Africa's problems are complicated, and no one wants to think about them. Still, those who think that the trouble has died down after the strike are wrong. "Nothing is ever quiet, except for fools." Chapter 26, pg. 190

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 9



Book 2, Chapter 27

Mrs. Lithebe talks to Gertrude about her behavior. It is not exactly wrong, but it is too careless, especially when her brother, a priest, has suffered so much already. Gertrude says she wants to leave Johannesburg because she does not know what to do there, but Mrs. Lithebe tells her that even in Ndotsheni she will find people ready to corrupt her. Gertrude will not accept responsibility: she says the problem is Johannesburg. Someone comes up the walk, so they stop talking. It is a woman with a newspaper. The top story is another murder of a white householder by a native. This is very bad for Absalom's case: the judge will read the paper and is likely to think that, since the problem of native crime is so serious, it should be punished severely. They hide the newspaper from Kumalo when he arrives, and they eat dinner at home because the Mission House will be full of the news. Then they go to a church meeting, where a woman talks about becoming a nun. Later, Gertrude tells Mrs. Lithebe that she is inspired: she is thinking of becoming a nun too. Mrs. Lithebe is happy, but wants to make sure Gertrude is serious before telling anyone. Gertrude tells the girl also, and makes her promise to take good care of her son if she should join a convent.



Book 2, Chapter 28

It is the day of the sentencing at Court. The judge reviews the case: Absalom has not denied his guilt. The servant who was hit with the iron bar has identified Pafuri by his twitching eyes, but the defense argues that many people have such a tic. Also, Absalom only said that Pafuri and Matthew were with him after the police questioned him about Pafuri. Maybe he came up with a plan to implicate the other two boys in the crime then. Mrs. Mkize's testimony is too unreliable to mean anything. There is not enough evidence to convict Matthew and Pafuri, so they must go free. But Absalom cannot be found innocent just because he was corrupted by an unjust society. The law or the society can be changed, but people must still answer to the laws that exist. The judge cannot believe that Absalom could enter a house with a loaded gun, with no intention to kill. He also sees no reason to offer mercy: Absalom was of age, and made his own decisions. Thus, he sentences him to death. The crowd cannot sit quietly anymore; they cry out in torment.



Book 2, Chapter 29

Kumalo, the girl and the others go to the jail for the marriage ceremony. They talk aimlessly about nothing, and agree it is good for Absalom to be married, and then Kumalo says, "I shall care for your child, my son, even as if it were my own." Chapter 29, pg. 205

When he realizes what he has said, he nearly bursts into tears, but Absalom changes the subject, telling his father about some money he has saved. He says he would like his son to be named Peter. Then he mentions the other two boys: they are being tried for another case, but he is the only one going to Pretoria (to be hanged). He begins to weep uncontrollably, so that when Kumalo has to leave, he and the prison guard must pull Absalom away from his father.

Stephen goes to see his brother John. He tells him that he is not there to reproach him, and John denies having done anything wrong. Stephen avoids this topic, asking instead about his brother's politics: does he hate white people? John denies it, but not very convincingly. Then Stephen feels the urge to hurt his brother. He tells him that he has heard someone was sent to his shop to spy on him—a lie. John is afraid, then Stephen draws a parallel between someone who would spy while pretending to be a friend, and what Matthew did to Absalom. John is furious, and throws Stephen out of the shop. Stephen is ashamed and angry with himself: he went there to reconcile with his brother, not to hurt him.

The Harrisons take James to the train station, and James gives the young Harrison an envelope, telling him to open it when he is gone. Harrison is amazed at the sight of a ten thousand pound note, and a letter telling him to do everything he and Arthur wanted to do.

Kumalo and his newfound relatives are leaving the next morning, so there is a small and somber party at Mrs. Lithebe's house. There are many speeches about the goodness of everyone there, and finally, the evening ends. Msimangu privately tells Kumalo that he is forsaking all of his worldly possessions, and since he has no dependents, he is giving his money to Kumalo. Kumalo bursts into tears, saying that he has never known anyone like Msimangu. Msimangu says, "I am a weak and sinful man, but God put His hands on me, that is all." Chapter 29, pg. 215 Kumalo goes home and prays for a long time. The next morning, he wakes to find that Gertrude is gone. She has left her son and the clothes Kumalo bought her behind.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 9

Topic Tracking: Kindness 10

Topic Tracking: Redemption 11



Book 3, Chapter 30

On the train to Ndotsheni, Kumalo shows the excited girl all of the towns along the way. But he does not want to talk to anyone else, because he knows they will ask about his family and his travels. Once in Ndotsheni, he is very happy to be home. His wife welcomes him and Gertrude's son and the girl, and the girl cries with gratitude. "Something deep is touched here, something that is good and deep." Chapter 30, pg. 220 Everyone in the town is glad to see him, and this makes him very happy. Yet he also hears that the drought is so bad that no one knows what they will eat in the coming days. Inside the church, he knows he must pray with the people. They sing passionately and simply, and he prays for rain. Then he cannot avoid praying for his family. He asks for forgiveness on Gertrude's behalf, and when he hears a gossipy woman moan, he adds, "Forgive us all, for we all have trespasses." Chapter 30, pg. 224 Later, Kumalo talks with a friend. He tells him that though Absalom may be given mercy, he is condemned to hang. He tells him that Gertrude has deserted her family. He wonders whether he should even stay in Ndotsheni. His friend tells him that everyone in the town has grieved for him, and wants him to stay. Kumalo says he believes in God, despite all the cruelty in the world, because "I have learned that kindness and love can pay for pain and suffering." Chapter 30, pg. 226 The friend goes to tell Sibeko that his daughter is lost, but Stephen is careful to mention that Jarvis did not tell him that Barbara Smith did not care where she was. He wants Sibeko to know that Jarvis tried to protect them from this cruel sentiment. Inside the house, Kumalo says good night to the girl, and shows his wife the money Msimangu gave them. They will buy new clothes, and a stove. He begins to tell her about everything that happened in Johannesburg.

Topic Tracking: Redemption 12



Book 3, Chapter 31

Kumalo prays for the restoration of Ndotsheni, but he knows something more has to be done. He goes to talk to the chief of the village about it. The chief listens to Kumalo, but he has little to say, except that he has thought about Ndotsheni's problems and that they are difficult. Kumalo is humble, but he presses the issue. The chief does not even want to think about these problems—he would rather smile and pretend something has been solved. He says he will see the Magistrate, and Kumalo knows he will get no help from the chief. He prays for the chief, and for Ndotsheni. Then he goes to see the headmaster of the school, who merely tells him about all the farming techniques he knows. But all this information is not helping Ndotsheni, and Kumalo is discouraged. He goes home, and is shocked to see a small white boy riding his horse up to the house. Kumalo knows he is Arthur Jarvis' son. The boy is bold, and asks to see inside Kumalo's house. He asks him for milk, and is ashamed of himself when Kumalo tells him there is no milk in Ndotsheni. The boy is light-hearted and mature, and he tries out his Zulu vocabulary on Kumalo, who enjoys the lesson very much. They talk, then the boy asks what they do without milk. Kumalo tells him that the children die, and the boy goes away on his horse solemnly. The next day, cans of milk arrive from James Jarvis. They are to be given only to small children. Kumalo is struck dumb, and then he begins to laugh with joy.

Topic Tracking: Kindness 11

Book 3, Chapter 32

Soon four letters come: one from Absalom to the girl, one from him to his parents, one from Msimangu and one from Mr. Carmichael. Kumalo knows this last one will be about whether mercy has been granted. It has not. Kumalo sits silent until his wife comes to him, telling him it is not good act this way. The letter from Absalom tells them that he knows he will die, and he knows that if he were back in Ndotsheni, he would not leave it again. Kumalo and his wife look outside and see giant storm clouds. Then Stephen, watching the plain, sees Jarvis, the magistrate, and the chief all arrive at one place in the distance. They place some sticks in the ground, and it is clear that the chief doesn't know what is going on, but is pretending he does. No one is to move the sticks under any circumstances. The magistrate mentions privately to another man that Jarvis must be going crazy: soon, he won't have any money left. They all notice the heavy storm clouds. After a while, Jarvis comes to Kumalo and asks him if he can take shelter in his church. They go there together in the pouring rain, and wait in the leaky church in silence. Jarvis asks if there will be mercy for Absalom, and when he learns that Absalom is to die in two weeks, he says he will remember him on that day. Jarvis leaves, and Kumalo sits alone, silent.



Book 3, Chapter 33

It is rumored that the sticks are for a dam, but no one knows how one could be built with the village's tiny stream. Jarvis is out of town, and no one comes for the sticks for a long time. Everyone seems fairly happy in Ndotsheni. One day the white boy comes again, to speak Zulu with Kumalo. Kumalo tells him, "When you go, something bright will go out of Ndotsheni." Chapter 33, pg. 248 The boy is not embarrassed-- he laughs. They laugh together, and Kumalo's wife is confused. She cannot believe her husband is friendly with the son of the man Absalom murdered. The man and boy enjoy each other until the boy sees that his grandfather is coming home, and rides off.

Outside the church is a young man, who says he is the new agricultural demonstrator. He has been hired by Jarvis, and he knows how to work the soil in Ndotsheni so that it will not be weak and hard. At dinner that evening, he lists some of his plans. They will build a dam for the cattle to drink from, and they will fertilize the soil with manure. The young white boy comes back on his horse to say good-bye to Kumalo, telling him he will return soon to learn more Zulu. After he has gone, Kumalo tells the others, "that is a small angel from God." Chapter 33, pg. 255 The agricultural expert tells Kumalo that his village can likely be restored, though it will take time and hard work.



Book 3, Chapter 34

The village is preparing for a religious confirmation when the man who usually brings the milk from Jarvis arrives early. He tells them that Margaret is dead. Kumalo is deeply upset, and he finally writes a letter of condolence to James, worrying over what is the right thing to say. He simply thanks James and his wife for everything they have done, and says he will pray for both of them.

After all the young people of the village have been confirmed, Kumalo sits alone with the Bishop. The Bishop suggests that Kumalo might leave Ndotsheni, because of all his troubles, and because he lives so close to James Jarvis. Kumalo will do what the Bishop asks, but he thinks he will die if he leaves the town he loves. Just then, a letter from Jarvis arrives. It says that one of his wife's last wishes was that a new church be built in Ndotsheni. Also, she was ill before her son was killed. (James does not want Kumalo to feel that Absalom caused her death.) Kumalo cries out in joy, and the Bishop agrees that it seems that Kumalo should not leave Ndotsheni. Stephen goes back to his house, where he finds people making a wreath for Mrs. Jarvis' funeral. They work very hard on finding the right flowers and making a card.



Book 3, Chapter 35

The people work hard on their land, but no changes are visible yet, and there have been many sacrifices. Many people would complain if they did not feel so indebted to James. Yet people can see that the changes are good, even if they have not produced anything yet. "Although nothing has come yet, something is here already." Chapter 34, pg. 266
The agriculture teacher worries that the people will not have enough patience to last the many years it will take before anything really changes in their land. He does not want to depend on Jarvis anymore. Stephen scolds him: Where would any of them be without Jarvis? He does not want to have a political discussion; he only wants to spread love and compassion, and to see his village restored.

Topic Tracking: Race Relations 10



Book 3, Chapter 36

The day before his son is to die, Kumalo tells his wife he is going to walk up the mountain. He has done it twice before—once when Absalom was sick as a young boy, and once when he was considering giving up the priesthood for a store that would pay much more. He has done it once in secret also, when he was tempted to commit adultery. He wants to look at his beautiful country. On his way, he meets Jarvis accidentally. Jarvis tells him he is going to live with his daughter-in-law in Johannesburg. He asks him about the young boy—does Kumalo think he is like Arthur? Kumalo agrees that he is. He does not really remember Arthur, but he sees that James needs to hear it. Then James asks where Kumalo is going. When he tells him, James says, "One thing is about to be finished, but here is something that is only begun." Chapter 36, pg. 272 Stephen goes up the mountain. He tries not to think about all the ways Absalom's life might have been different. He prays for forgiveness for all of his sins, and he thanks God for all the kind people he met in Johannesburg. He sleeps, knowing he is old and his life is nearly finished. He knows he will not see Africa restored, but he has hope, even though he knows many people are against change in their country. He sleeps again and wakes suddenly, afraid that he is too late—he has heard that men are hanged at sunrise. But he is just in time. He thinks about what Absalom is doing and feeling right now. He waits silently until the sun rises. "But when the dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret." Chapter 35, pg. 276