

## **Living Books for South Africa**

These are widely available (usually in-print) books of ‘literary character’ (not textbooks) covering content of particular interest to the South African learner. They may be useful as part of a course of study or to supplement/substitute the content of existing literary curricula (e.g. AmblesideOnline.org). They are also just fun to read, but there is no attempt to create balance between subjects as there is in a curriculum outline, and no attempt to cover important subjects of global interest (which are adequately covered elsewhere). It does not cover all books of this type, but it has enough to get you well started.

The list was created as I looked for books to share with my own children, from many hours of browsing bookshops and reading book reviews and bibliographies. We are a Christian family, speaking English at home, learning Afrikaans as a first additional language and isiXhosa as a second additional language. That perspective is reflected in the list.

I have attempted to classify approximately by age, but many books could be moved up or down an age group and I have been somewhat arbitrary in indicating this. I have added notes about books where I thought they would be helpful, but again the presence or absence of notes is somewhat arbitrary; I have not even read all the books on the list. I have tried to provide purchase/download links where books are not readily available in bookshops. (If I can find it on loot.co.za, I consider it readily available.)

### **Before School/Grade R**

*Jamela's Dress* and sequels by Niki Daly

*The Herd Boy* by Niki Daly

*Huppelkind* by W.O. Kuhne [AFR]

*My First Book of Southern African Wildlife* ed. Erroll Cuthbert [and others in the series – sometimes called the SASOL books]

### **Foundation Phase / Form I / Grade 1-3**

#### **Language Learning Resources**

bookdash.org provides free pdf picture books, usually translated into several South African languages. This lets you begin with immersion style learning even if the teacher is not comfortable reading and translating directly (as the translations are provided in the other edition of the book).

Xhosa Fundis sell ‘teacher flash cards’ which are useful for learning oral phrases in the context of an interesting illustration. (Phrases and translations are on the back of the picture for the teacher’s use.) Their other products may also be of interest.

#### **Geography**

*My First African Adventure* by Riaan Manser [You may want to skip the page about voodoo markets in Mali. We found occasional errors in the inset maps, but tracking the story on our own map worked well.]

*Ashanti to Zulu* by Margaret Musgrove

#### **Natural History**

*Oom Kallas and the Tortoises* by Claerwen Howie

*Vumile and the Dragon* by Claerwen Howie

*African Critters* by Robert Haas [there are a number of animal deaths, but handled gently]

*Veld Sketchbook* by Jeff Huntly [originally a newspaper column for adults, but appealing to a wide age range] available from [kirstenbosch book shop](#)

Antjie Krog’s *Feetjie* books (see Literature)

#### **Biography**

*Shaka* by Diane Stanley [OOP, but available for Kindle or to borrow with a free account on [archive.org](#)]

*Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela abridged by Chris van Wyk [other picture book biographies by this author are OOP, but commonly in libraries]

*Die Groot Afrikaanse Heldeboek* by Piet Grobbelaar [AFR]

*Graca's Dream* by Melissa Fagan et al [very short and simple] free from [bookdash](#)

*Our Story: The People, Clans and Events that Shaped Southern Africa* series ed. Terence Ball [These are school readers for English as an additional language, and the literary quality, while acceptable, is not as inspiring as other choices on this list. However I was excited to find this content in literary form for children at all!] [order online](#)

### History

*Our Empire Story* – Part IV: South Africa by H.E. Marshall [free online](#) [This book is dated; much of it is fairly even-handed, but I found the imperial bias in some chapters hard to stomach. (I would minimally cover Moshoeshoe and Cetshwayo from an additional source.) There is almost no coverage of non-European history. Terms that are unacceptably racist today are used throughout and will need to be replaced. There are more options for slightly older children, but I am not aware of a better in-print history ‘spine’ for this age group. Note that if you follow the AmblesideOnline history rotation, you don’t need a spine for SA history in Form I.]

### Literature

*Nelson Mandela’s Favourite African Folktales* [Preview by tale for sensitive young readers.]

*Fynbos Feetjies/Fairies* by Antjie Krog (available in English and Afrikaans editions)

*Vetplant Feetjies/Fairies* by Antjie Krog

Various folktale collections by Phyllis Savory [Seem to be intermittently in print, or try [archive.org](#)]

--- OOP, but common in libraries:

*Sannie Langtand* and sequels by Alex d’Angelo

*The Mantis and the Moon: Stories for the Children of Africa* and others by Marguerite Poland [Be aware that this author also writes fiction for adults.]

### **Intermediate Phase / Form II / Grade 4-6**

#### Geography

*Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* by William Burchell [free online](#) [very long, usually published in two volumes]

*A Popular Account of Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* by David Livingstone [free online](#) [or another book about Livingstone’s travels]

#### Natural History

*Veld Sketchbook* by Jeff Huntly [originally a newspaper column for adults, but appealing to a wide age range] [kirstenbosch](#)

Burchell (see Geography) and parts of Duvenage (see Biography) could also be counted in this category.

#### Biography

*Robert Moffat, Africa’s Brave Heart* by Irene Howat [focused on Moffat’s Christian spirituality]

*Die Groot Afrikaanse Heldeboek* by Piet Grobbelaar [AFR]

*Inventors, Bright Minds, and other South African Science Heroes* by Engela Duvenage (originally published in Afrikaans) [A number of the stories in the medical section involve AIDS research and do not shy away from the details of how HIV is transmitted; you may wish to use selected chapters.]

*The Voyages and Adventures of Vasco da Gama* by George Makepeace Towle

*Our Story: The People, Clans and Events that Shaped Southern Africa* series ed. Terence Ball [These are school readers for English as an additional language, and the literary quality, while acceptable, is not as inspiring as other choices on this list. However I was excited to find this content in literary form for children at all!] [order online](#)

Burchell and Livingstone (see Geography)

#### History

*Dinosaurs, Diamonds and Democracy* by Francis Wilson [The first few chapters deal with evolution and prehistory, but could be skipped if that’s a concern.]

*The South African Story* by Ron McGregor

*Our Empire Story* by H.E. Marshall [See discussion under Form I.]

## Literature

*Jock of the Bushveld* by Sir Percy FitzPatrick

---I am hesitant to predict what might be in print from the below at any given time. Most of these are common in libraries and there are often some in bookshops. Be aware that most of these authors have written for a variety of age groups and reading levels.

*A Cageful of Butterflies* and other novels by Lesley Beake

Various novels by Jenny Seed

Various folktale collections by Phyllis Savory [[archive.org](http://archive.org)]

Various novels by Martie Preller [AFR]

Various novels by Jenny Robson

## **Upper Years (Grade 7+)**

### Geography

*Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* by William Burchell [free online](#)

*A Popular Account of Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* by David Livingstone [free online](#)  
(carried over from Form II)

### Natural History

*The Abundant Herds* by Marguerite Poland and Hammond-Tooke, illustrated by Voigt

*The Annotated Old Fourlegs* by JLB Smith with annotations by Mike Bruton

### Biography

*Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela

*No Future Without Forgiveness* by Desmond Tutu

Jan Smuts [there are a few biographies in print to choose from]

*The Fishy Smiths* and/or *Curator and Crusader: the life and times of Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer* by Mike Bruton [both about scientists working on the Coelacanth, which is also covered in *Old Fourlegs* above]

*The Children of Soweto* by Mbulelo Mzamane [seems to be intermittently in print and in some libraries]

### History

See recommendations from Francis Wilson here:

<https://sites.google.com/site/francisaylmerwilson/books/general-notes>

## Literature

*Mhudi* by Sol Plaatjie

*Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton

*The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Schreiner

Various novels and short stories by Nadine Gordimer [read her Nobel Prize lecture [online here](#)]

Various novels by J.M. Coetzee [watch/read his Nobel Prize lecture [here](#)]

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (Nigerian)

Various novels by Marguerite Poland

Various novels by Barrie Hough [AFR]