



BOOKS

Barbara Johannesson

reviews

LEARNING AFRICAN HISTORY:
FREEDOM FIGHTERS I

by Chris van Wyk

(Awareness Publishing, R121.95)

This series of 10 books gives brief biographies of prominent African freedom fighters: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Helen Joseph, Oliver Tambo, Seretse Khama, Desmond Tutu, Steve Biko, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Albert Luthuli and Chris Hani.

The carefully crafted stories contain rich imagery and are based on thorough research. Although written for children, these books are suitable for anyone interested in the history of southern Africa. In fact, they are highly recommended for adults — if you are familiar with our past, the stories will provide new insights and opportunities for reflection. And if you need a quick, light and entertaining introduction to some of the people that helped create our democracy, these books will give you a kick-start.

The books are also recommended for high school learners. Sadly, the numbers of learners who choose to take history in grades 10 - 12 are dropping. Encouraging learners in grades 8 and 9 to read short biographies like these helps learners to engage more empathetically with the past, and may inspire them to choose to continue their study of history.

To write a biography of Winnie

Madikizela-Mandela is very brave. At first, I thought, "Oh no, here we go — how has the author managed to fudge the controversy that surrounds her? Is this just another hagiography?" But the controversy is tackled head-on, and provides a good example for history textbook writers of how to write about struggle history without triumphalism.

Oliver Tambo is one of the many freedom fighters who fought all their lives to end apartheid. Today South Africa is free, but Oliver Tambo did not live to see our democratic South Africa. Here is a moving extract from the last chapter of the biography of Oliver Tambo:

"Tambo came back to South Africa, proud and happy. He had kept the ANC alive for 30 years! But Tambo had been ill for several years from working too hard and in 1993 he suffered a stroke and died. He was 76 years old. At his funeral Tambo was compared to Moses of the Bible: from the mountain top he had seen the Promised Land, but had not entered it himself."

These hardcover books are very durable, and are beautifully produced in full colour on high-quality paper. The series is packed in a strong slip-case, and is ideal for school libraries. The books contain many large historical photographs and there is a helpful glossary of terms, a timeline and an index at the back of each one.

For more details you can contact:
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