

Usually the boys played among themselves, but we sometimes allowed our sisters to join us. Boys and girls would play games like ndize (hide-and-seek) and icekwa (touch and run). But the game I most enjoyed playing with the girls was what we called khetha, or choose-the-one-you-like. This was not so much an organised game, but a spur-of-the-moment sport that took place when we accosted a group of girls our own age and demanded that each select the boy she loved.

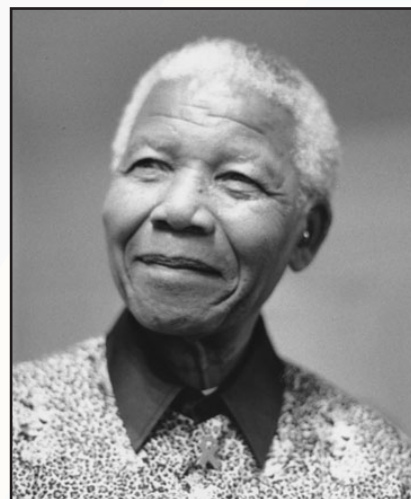
Our rules dictated that the girl's choice be respected and once she had chosen her favourite, she was free to continue on her journey escorted by the lucky boy she loved. But the girls were far cleverer than us and would often confer among themselves and choose one boy, usually the plainest fellow, and then tease him all the way home.

The most popular game for boys was thinti, and like most boys' games it was a youthful approximation of war. Two sticks, used as targets, would be driven firmly into the ground in an upright position about one hundred feet apart. The goal of the game was for each team to hurl sticks at the opposing target and knock it down. We each defended our own target and attempted to prevent the other side from retrieving the sticks that had been thrown. As we grew older, we organised matches against boys from neighbouring villages, and those who distinguished themselves in these battles were greatly admired.

After games such as these, I would return to my mother's kraal where she was preparing supper. Whereas my father once told stories of historic battles and heroic Xhosa warriors, my mother would enchant us with Xhosa legends and fables that had come down from numberless generations. These tales stimulated my childish imagination, and usually contained some moral lesson. I recall one story my mother told us about a traveller who was approached by an old woman with terrible cataracts on her eyes. The woman asked the traveller for help, and the man averted his eyes. Then another man came along and was approached by the old woman. She asked him to clean her eyes, and even though he found the task unpleasant, he did as she asked.

Then, miraculously, the scales fell from the old woman's eyes and she became young and beautiful. The man married her and became wealthy. It is a simple tale, but its message is an enduring one: virtue and generosity will be rewarded in ways that one cannot know.

On the first day of school, my teacher gave each of us an English name and said that from then on that was the name we would answer to in school. This was the custom among Africans in those days and was undoubtedly due to the British bias of our education. That day the teacher told me that my new name was Nelson. Why this particular name was bestowed on me I have no idea. Perhaps it had something to do with the great British sea captain Lord Nelson, but that would only be a guess.



# Questions

## Language analysis

Find and highlight these words in the text. Draw a line between the words from the text and their closest synonym.

escorted

fellow

distinguished

enchant

stimulated

bestowed

proved themselves

accompanied

inspired

given

boy

captivate

## Structural analysis

1. What type of text is this?

2. a) What do you notice about the way the information has been ordered?

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b) Why is it structured in this way?

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3. What tense is it written in?

4. What person is this written in? Why?

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## Questions

1. Why are the words 'hide-and-seek' and 'touch and run' in brackets?

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2. What does the term 'accosted' suggest about the way the boys approached the girls?

Why did they approach like this?

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3. Why did the girls pick the 'plainest fellow'?

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4. Why do you think Nelson's mum told him these stories?

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5. Why were African children given English names?

6. Why was the name that the teacher selected apt? Tick one.

Because Mandela loved the sea.

Because Mandela became a great leader and captain for his country.

Because Mandela's teachers were British.

Because Nelson was a good name.

7. Place these events in the correct order (1 – 5). One has been done for you.

The girls would pick the plainest boy and tease him on the way home.

His mother tells him a tale about virtue and generosity.

His teacher gave him an English name.

Occasionally, his sisters joined in with the games.

His mother told them Xhosa legends and fables.