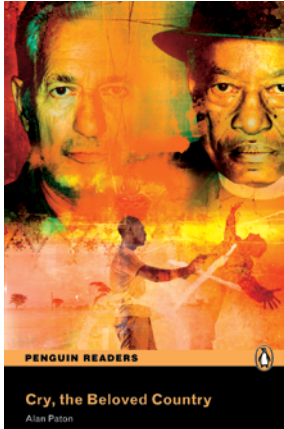




# Cry, the Beloved Country

Alan Paton



## About the author

Alan Paton was born in Natal, South Africa, in 1903. His mother was a white South African teacher and his father was a Scottish civil servant. Both parents were deeply religious. This influence comes out in Paton's books, which explore themes such as forgiveness, a very important aspect of their Methodist teaching.

Paton studied science at a university in Natal. His love for Natal encouraged him to explore the whole of the province on foot where he walked as much as thirty miles a day over difficult ground. The intimate knowledge he gained of his country is evident in his writing.

After university, Paton worked as a science teacher at a high school for boys. His students were the sons of rich white South Africans. Paton sympathized with the black people of his country and decided to do what he could to improve their situation. He became principal of a prison for young black boys (called a 'reformatory') and under his guidance prisoners' conditions improved. He also began to explore racial and social problems in his writing.

In 1953, Paton helped to establish the Liberal Party in South Africa. Fifteen years later, the ruling Afrikaner National Party declared it illegal. Throughout these years, Paton continued writing. As well as books, he wrote serious essays for liberal magazines, just as Arthur Jarvis did in *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

## Summary

*Cry, the Beloved Country* is a story of courage and endurance, set against a background of racial injustice in South Africa. It was published in 1948, the year in which the system of apartheid was established in that country.

It tells the story of Stephen Kumalo, a black Christian church minister, who leaves his homeland to search for missing members of his family in the squalid townships of Johannesburg. Eventually, he finds them all, but at a terrible cost to himself: his brother has lost his faith and learned how to hate; his sister has lost her dignity and turned to prostitution; and his son has murdered a white man, Arthur Jarvis, a well-known opponent of apartheid. Despite the despair Kumalo experiences, the book ends on a hopeful note.

## Book 1

**Chapters 1–5:** The hills of Ixopo are fertile and well looked after by their white farmers, but the valley of Ndotsheni – where Stephen Kumalo, a local black church minister, and his people live – is dry and neglected. There is a drought; most of the young have left to find work in Johannesburg, leaving behind only women and old men.

Stephen receives a letter from a Mr Msimangu, a fellow minister in Johannesburg. The letter asks him to come to the city quickly. His sister, Gertrude, is sick. Anxious to see her, and also to find Absalom, his son, and John, his brother – neither of whom he has seen since they left for the city – Stephen decides to go. He has to take nearly all his and his wife's money to finance the trip.

During the train journey, Stephen becomes increasingly nervous: stories of the dangers of life in Johannesburg fill him with fear. On arrival, he is cheated by a young man at the bus station who offers to buy him a ticket, then runs off with the money. Luckily, he meets a friend of Msimangu's who takes him to the Mission House.

Msimangu tells Stephen that his sister, Gertrude, is morally, rather than spiritually, sick. She sells illicit alcohol, works as a prostitute, and has a little boy. Both mother and son need to be saved from the situation. He knows nothing of Absalom, but his brother, John, is well known as a radical politician. Stephen is upset by the news. He is taken to a Mrs Lithebe's house, where accommodation has been arranged.

**Chapters 6–11:** Stephen and Msimangu call on Gertrude. At first, Stephen is angry at the shame she has brought on the family, but then, seeing her remorse, he is more forgiving. Gertrude tells him that Absalom was close friends with John's son. He should know where he is. They then take Gertrude back to Mrs Lithebe's.



## Cry, the Beloved Country

John is pleased to see his brother, but Stephen can tell that he has become bitter and cynical and no longer believes in God. However, he is cheered when John tells him that Absalom was working for a company in the city.

When Stephen and Msimangu enquire at the company, they find that Absalom is no longer there. His old landlady then tells them she had to ask him to leave because he brought bad company to the house. She gives them his new address in the township of Alexandra, but Absalom is not there either. A taxi driver friend of his tells them that he moved to a place called Shanty Town.

In Shanty Town, there's more bad news from the woman Absalom stayed with: he was taken to a reformatory for being in possession of stolen goods.

At the reformatory, they meet a kindly white employee who tells them that Absalom was a good inmate and was released to go to Plimville and look after his girlfriend. She is pregnant and they were due to get married. The employee also helped Absalom by finding him a job. More hopeful, Stephen and Msimangu go to Plimville.

But in Plimville, Absalom's girl tells them that he left both his job and the house three days before and has not come back. She has no idea where he is.

Back at the Mission House, they get news of the murder of a well-known white anti-apartheid supporter called Arthur Jarvis. The suspects are three native boys who were seen near the victim's house and later broke in.

**Chapters 12–17:** Stephen and Msimangu return to Absalom's former addresses. The police have been there before them. It seems Absalom is a suspect in the murder.

Stephen feels sure his son is not guilty. There was nothing in the boy's nature to indicate he would be capable such violence. But then he gets news that Absalom and his companions have been arrested. One of them is John's son. Stephen and John visit the boys in prison. Absalom admits that he shot and killed Arthur Jarvis. He didn't mean to. He was frightened. He is unwilling or unable to answer his father's questions about why he turned to a life of crime. John is now happier. He tells Stephen that he will employ a good lawyer. The police will not be able to prove that his son was involved, and now that Absalom has confessed, they will be happy to charge only him. Stephen regards this as a family betrayal. A lawyer friend of the Mission House takes Absalom's case for free. Stephen is grateful but depressed. His son is a stranger to him and the cause

is hopeless. He gives Absalom's girl the news and asks if she still wants to marry him. She says yes. Stephen's plan is to take her back to Ndotsheni where she can bring her child up decently. In the meantime, she will stay at Mrs Lithebe's.

### Book 2

**Chapters 1–6:** James Jarvis, Arthur's father is on his farm in Ixopo, when the police arrive to tell him his son has been killed. His wife is terribly upset. They fly to Johannesburg. Arthur's brother in law, John Harrison, meets them at the airport. He tells them of all the good work Arthur did to help the blacks. Like Stephen, James feels he didn't really know his son, but his wife is very proud of his work. Ironically, he was writing an essay on native crime when he was shot. Sympathy for his death has come from all sectors of the community. James reads one of his son's essays. It talks of the unacceptable aspects of white rule: in particular, the policy of separating mine workers from their families and not replacing the tribal systems, destroying any firm set of moral values. Arthur believed this was a major cause of black crime.

The trial of the three accused begins. Absalom tells the court that he only carried the gun in order to frighten the occupants of the house. He did not intend to kill anybody. He is unable to answer the prosecuting lawyer's vital question: 'Then why was it loaded?'

**Chapters 7–11:** Stephen visits James and tells him that Absalom was responsible for Arthur's death. Seeing Stephen's genuine remorse, James is not angry and the two men seem drawn together by the tragedy.

Meanwhile, Mrs Lithebe complains to Gertrude about the people she brings to the house. Gertrude is sullen and resentful and seems unwilling to give up her old ways.

In court, the day of judgement arrives. The judge dismisses the charges against Absalom's companions but finds him guilty and sentences him to death. Stephen takes Absalom's girl to the prison where she and Absalom are married. After she leaves, Stephen says an emotional farewell to his son and tells him to be strong.

He then goes to see John. Angry at John's willingness to let Absalom take the blame for the crime he wants to hurt him. He lies by telling John that one of his friends is a police spy and can't be trusted – just like Absalom's 'friends'. This last remark angers John and he tells Stephen to leave the house.



## Cry, the Beloved Country

At Mrs Lithebe's, Msimangu tells Stephen that he is leaving the Mission House to head a religious community. He gives Stephen all his money to take back to Ndotsheni. Stephen feels Msimangu is the best friend he has ever had. But next morning, Gertrude has disappeared and Stephen has to leave without her.

### Book 3

**Chapters 1–4:** Back in Ndotsheni, Stephen immediately wants to leave because of the shame that Gertrude and Absalom have brought on the family. A friend convinces him to stay, telling him that everyone is very happy that he is back.

The drought still rages. Stephen prays in church for an end to it. On the way home, he meets a tired-looking young white boy on horseback and offers him a drink. The boy asks for milk but Stephen says there is only water. The boy asks what the people do without enough food or milk. 'They die', says Stephen.

The next day, Stephen receives a large quantity of milk. It has been sent by Arthur's mother, Mrs Jarvis, along with a message saying that it will be supplied as long as the drought lasts in Ndotsheni.

A letter from Msimangu arrives from Johannesburg. Absalom will hang in fifteen days' time. Saddened by the news, Stephen looks out the window and sees James Jarvis and his men measuring the ground near his church. There are dark clouds in the distance: the drought may soon be over. Stephen goes out to meet James. It starts to rain and the two men take shelter under the church's leaking roof. A few days later, James sends an agricultural expert to Ndotsheni to teach the people new farming methods. He also intends to build a dam to prevent the worst effects of any future drought.

**Chapters 5–7:** Stephen receives news of the sudden death of James' wife, Mrs Jarvis. He sends James a letter of condolence. James replies saying that one of his wife's last wishes was that a new church be built in Ndotsheni. All the things that she wanted to do to help Stephen and his people were to be done in honour of her son.

At first, the people of Ndotsheni are unsure about the new unfamiliar farming methods. But gradually, there is an increasing sense that things will get better.

The day before his son's execution, Stephen goes off alone into the mountains. He meets James on the way. James tells him that he is leaving Ixopo for Johannesburg to live with Harrison and his daughter-in-law. Stephen thanks him for all he has done to help the community.

After he leaves, Stephen gives thanks for all the good people he has met following his family tragedy. Then, overcome by sadness at the loss of his son, he falls asleep.

He wakes at dawn, shortly before the hour of his son's execution. He removes his hat and prays.

As the sun rises, Stephen feels a new sense of hope about Ndotsheni's future.

### Background and themes

*Cry, the Beloved Country* explores the relationship between whites and blacks during the apartheid era. Apartheid was the legal separation of the two communities. Parts of cities became 'white only'; relationships and marriages between whites and blacks were illegal; and certain forms of transport and jobs were also classed as 'white only'.

The apartheid system lasted for forty years, but in the mid-1980s international sanctions and unrest within South Africa took effect. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and four years later, he became president in the country's first all-race elections.

Paton was writing *Cry, the Beloved Country*, just before the apartheid system was established. The great distrust between whites and blacks, which existed then, forms the background to his book.

One of the main themes in the book is the difference in status between the white and black races, and how different people deal with this. The two main black characters in the book are both ministers: Stephen Kumalo and Theosiphus Msimangu. They have strong Christian beliefs and treat everyone, white or black, with courtesy and respect. They want to change the situation in their country, but only by peaceful means. However, Stephen's brother John has lost his faith, hates the whites, and encourages violent protest. The main white character, James Jarvis, is also very tolerant, and his help for and belief in the black community, which killed his son, brings hope at the end of the book.



# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Discussion activities

### Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask the students to work in small groups and discuss their responses to the following questions:
  - One of the themes of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is how economic and social problems can affect families. What are the possible negative results of these problems? Which ones do you think the book will focus on?
  - One of the main problems faced by the main character's community is drought. What other environmental problems affect farming communities today? What improvements have been made to help deal with these problems over the last fifty years? What else can be done to help?
- Guess:** Ask students to look at the picture on the cover of the book. *How does it make you feel? What do you think is being said? Does the title of the story give you any more ideas about what might happen in the book?*

### Book 1

#### Chapters 1–5

##### Before reading

- Pair work:**
  - How do you think the system of apartheid affected white and black people in South Africa? Discuss with your partner.
  - Imagine twenty-four hours in the life of a black worker. What problems did he or she face every day?

##### While reading

- Write:** Stop reading at the end of the first paragraph of Chapter 3. Stephen Kumalo is about to take a long journey to a large city he doesn't know. Ask students to: (a) imagine the thoughts he has about Johannesburg during the journey, and (b) what will happen when he gets there.

##### After reading

- Group work and role play:** Have students form groups of four. Ask students to imagine the conversation at the Mission House between Stephen Kumalo, Msimangu, Father Vincent, and one of the other priests. Stephen talks of the drought in Ndotsheni, the disappearance of young people from the area and the destruction of the tribal system. The others talk of the problems of life in Johannesburg. Write down their conversation, practise it, then act it out in front of the class.

### Chapters 6–11

##### Before reading

- Guess:** what does Stephen discover about his son, Absalom's, life in the city before he meets him. Write down your predictions. Were they correct?

##### While reading

- Discuss:** Stop at the end of paragraph 2, page 23. John says: 'It is here in Johannesburg that the new society is being built.' How will John Kumalo explain what is happening? Discuss this in pairs and share your ideas with the rest of the class.

##### After reading

- Write:** Write a letter from Stephen Kumalo to his wife about Absalom. Most of the news is bad, but you don't want to worry her too much. What good things can you mention? Make a list using this table:

Good things:	Bad things:

### Chapters 12–17

##### Before reading

- Discuss:** In this section, someone is asked to marry. Who? What does that person say?

##### While reading

- Pair work:** Stop at the end of Chapter 14. Imagine the conversation between John Kumalo and his son, Matthew. Why did John Kumalo look happier at the end of the conversation? Act out their conversation in pairs.

##### After reading

- Write:** Write the missing names in Stephen Kumalo's family tree:  
Stephen's parents: Mr and Mrs Kumalo  
Stephen and his wife: (a) ..... and (b) .....  
His sister: Gertrude  
His sons: (c) ..... Matthew
- Check:** You are the lawyer defending Absalom. What can you find in this last section to show the good things about his character. How will you present your arguments to the court? When you have decided, do this in class.

### Book 2

#### Chapters 1–6

##### Before reading

- Discuss:** In this section, you will read about all the good work Arthur Jarvis did to help black people. What do you think this work was? Discuss your ideas with your partner, write them down, then check as you read.



# Cry, the Beloved Country

## While reading

- 14 Read carefully and research:** In Chapter 1, the author writes:  
'a boy with education did not want to work on the farms ...'  
Is this still true today?  
Is there a place for educated people in South Africa's farming areas?  
Think about the world's trading problems and, together with your partner find out what you can about issues like poverty, fair trade, the effects of farming on the environment etc. on the Internet.  
How can educated people in rural areas improve the situation? Present your ideas to the class.

## After reading

- 15 Write:** James Jarvis reads Arthur's essay on the causes of black crime. Ask students to work with a partner. They imagine the essay, re-write it, and read it out to the rest of the class. Use examples from the book.

## Chapters 7–11

### Before reading

- 16 Guess:** You will read about a meeting between two fathers. One of the fathers is white, the other is black. Who were they? How did they feel about each other?

### While reading

- 17 Role play:** think about Gertrude's experiences at Mrs Lithebe's house. How is her life different to what it was before? Was she happier then, or is she happier now? What do you think?  
Now imagine she is speaking to one of her old friends about her new life.  
What do they ask her?  
What does she reply?  
What does she want to do in the future?  
With a partner, act out the conversation.

### After reading

- 18 Write:** At the end of Book 2, Gertrude disappears. Write diary entries for the things she did in the twenty-four hours after she left Mrs Lithebe's house.

## Book 3

### Chapters 1–4

#### Before reading

- 19 Guess:** How does Stephen Kumalo feel when he gets back to Ndotsheni?  
What does he want to do?

#### While reading

- 20 Read carefully:** Read Chapter 2 carefully, up to the end of Kumalo's conversation with the white boy on the horse. When Stephen asks the boy why he is staying in Ndotsheni, the boy says that it is for a 'special reason.' What do you think this is?  
Use examples from the text to explain your answer.

## After reading

- 21 Present:** What are some of the things that the people of Ndotsheni can do to guard against the effects of drought in the future?  
Make a list and present your ideas to the rest of the class.

Effects of drought	Action

## Chapters 5–7

### Before reading

- 22 Guess:** In this section two people die. Stephen reacts differently after each death. Who dies? How does Stephen react?

### After reading

- 23 Check:** Look carefully through this section again.  
*What can you find in the text to show that there is hope that black and white people may one day live together without fear?*
- 24 Group work:** Give each student the name of a different character in Book 3. Ask the students to write a description of the way their character thinks. They must not write a physical description of their character or mention that character's name.  
Can the other people in the group guess who each other's character is?

### Extra activities

- 25 Research:** Ask students to research, prepare and give a presentation on one of the following topics:  
(a) Racial prejudice today.  
(b) The problems of farming in developing countries.  
(c) Family pressures in modern society.
- 26 Artwork:** Ask students to describe, and draw an invention of their own which might help improve an aspect of farming in developing countries. Students then turn their drawing into an advertising poster for their inventions.
- 27 Discuss:** Have students complete these sentences and discuss their answers in small groups.  
(a) If I were Absalom, I wouldn't have .....  
(b) Msimangu leaves the Mission House to start a new religious community because .....  
(c) ..... was the worst character in the book.  
(d) Gertrude should/shouldn't have .....  
(e) If the author had to describe his book in one sentence, he would write:

### Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).