

# Cry the beloved country analysis assignment



Summer Assignment Topic A - Cry, the Beloved Country Alan Paton's work is significant in that it highlights and analyzes, from both white and black perspective, the racial boundary and its effect on society as a whole. This boundary, as Paton emphasizes, has a diverse affect on different groups of people, as well as individuals. The way that those individuals react, in Paton's book, defines whether or not those individuals are viewed as the enemy or the victim. While their initial reactions may be different, their final reactions are the same; that is, they find spiritual reassessment and moral reconciliation.

Stephan Kumalo is often displayed as the protagonist of the book, even though Paton emphasizes racial differences by using the points of view of many different individuals. Throughout his journey to find his son, Absalom, Kumalo is seemingly fighting an inner battle. Kumalo can be seen slowly diminishing, mentally and emotionally, as the outcome keeps taking turns for the worse. The first time where Kumalo weakens, is when he receives the letter from Msimangu concerning his sister, Gertrude. As he ventures to Johannesburg, however, the situation slowly deteriorates, Kumalo transforms from respected leader to a "frail old man".

It seems as if Kumalo will deteriorate towards death, as foreshadowed by his final meeting with his son, but Paton eloquently reveals, that even though Kumalo is angry and blames others for his son's death, his concern for the larger issue, that is the relationship of blacks and whites, spares him and leads to his spiritual reconciliation that is central to the themes of the story. Even though Kumalo and his son have been wronged, their understanding of

the injustice and acceptance and resolution of their own sins spare them suffering, in life and death.

It is not until about halfway through the book that the reader learns of James Jarvis, the father of the man Absalom has killed. While it is clear that a great injustice has been done to Jarvis, the untimely death of a son is of great inopportunity; it is the way that Jarvis reacts that defines him as a heroic character in the novel. Even though Kumalo is black and Jarvis is a white man, the two find themselves on very similar ground; they have both lost a son in ways that are not only literal, but in a figurative way.

Jarvis realizes that he does not even know his son, while Kumalo had not talked to Absalom since he left for Johannesburg so long ago. This fact instantly causes them to be connected, for not only did they have similar relations to their sons, but also the fate of one was intertwined with the fate of the other. When Kumalo goes to look for his sister and comes in contact with Jarvis, he realizes that he is frightened of him reasons being because he is a victim of his heir, but also due to his whiteness. When Jarvis sees this, he begins to realize how unjust the society he lives in is.

This combined with the fact that Jarvis didn't get to know Arthur or his writing until after his death causes Jarvis to have a change of heart and forgive Kumalo and the black race, ultimately assisting them against their struggle for equality. Jarvis's willingness to forgive and help sets his soul at peace and defines his moral and spiritual reconciliation. While a reader may not see Absalom as a victim at first, the displays Absalom makes, both in confessing and in groveling at his father's feet, leads us to realize that

Absalom is ignorant and innocent, revealing himself to be a product of the environment he lives in.

Therefore, he is not only representative of himself, but the black race living in Johannesburg, which grows up in the same abusive, unjust society. We can therefore conclude that the black youth of Johannesburg are almost as innocent, reacting to the pressures and contradictions of their environment. It is significant, then, that Absalom is hanged even though the judge takes sympathy upon him; while the judge may want to set Absalom free, the laws demand that he take the maximum sentence for his crimes.

Paton strategically organizes his syntax and diction so that the reader concludes that the laws, like Absalom, are a product of the environment, and are therefore, paradoxical. These circumstances make it clear that Absalom is a victim and has many outlets to blame in order to evade death. However, he accepts full responsibility and now understands the circumstances of the black people. Even though he eventually comes to the same conclusion as his father, to forgive and understand, he's a little too late. Paton does this to compare the older and younger generations and their fate; while the older may have been able to do something to change their environment, the young people of Johannesburg who discover the truth will be snuffed out before they are able to induce significant change, hence the fates of both Arthur Jarvis and Absalom. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is a magnificent insight into the world of injustice of not just Africa, but other unjust societies as well. Paton emphasizes that even though there are many to blame for such a society, the thing that sets the people apart from good and bad is their

ultimate recognition, peace, and activism to prevent such a thing from spreading, hence their moral and spiritual reconciliation.

Jarvis achieves this by forgiving Kumalo and helping to make the Africans' lives better. Kumalo does this through sincere remorse for Jarvis' son, Arthur Jarvis. His remorse signals his change of heart in relation to race. Absalom achieves reconciliation in part by taking the blame for the crime, serving his sentence with dignity, and demonstrating, through letters, his remorse and understanding. Paton's central theme of spiritual freedom and clarity is ultimately tied by forgiveness and understanding. Paton hints that it is only through this way that South Africa can recover and unite.