

children speak

To gain an insight into how children in South Africa perceive themselves and their society, we asked a number of teachers from schools throughout the country to have their Std 9 and 10 pupils write diaries that would reflect a week in their lives. We chose the week in which 16 June fell in the hope that the diaries would reflect an awareness of the significance of that particular day.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct the exercise in black schools as many were closed. However, we did get a response from individual black students.

Responses among the white students varied enormously - the majority not showing any awareness of the significance of 16 June. In fact the extracts that we have printed do not mirror in proportional terms the great number of diaries that make no reference to Soweto Day.

We have changed the names in the following extracts but for the rest we have quoted them verbatim - spelling and all!

Jenny. Johannesburg.

Woolworths was a mad-house. It is Friday the 16th so people should stay at home. What a wish! When I was walking from school to Woolworths today I saw a dreadful sight. About ten security guards were chasing this black boy about my age. They grabbed him and shoved him head first into the back of a bakkie. How dare they treat another person like that? I wonder if they would have treated a white guy with slightly more respect? My Mum has just called me and told me that I have about half an hour to get ready for a cocktail party we're going to. My 23 year old friend, Jane, is going to England for 3 months so this is her farewell.

Sipho. Grahamstown.

I enjoyed the day as there was no school because of the exams we were writing. I went to town where we ate at the Spur with my friends. When I came back from town I did not even eat my supper as I was still full. After this I went to a talk on 'Soweto Day' in town. I felt it was very good especially the people who were singing. When I came back from this talk I actually told my friends who did not go what happened. I felt they had missed much they needed to know.

Julia. Grahamstown.

Today was so exciting cause I got a letter from my Dad in Texas. He sent me a R200 postal order. He says that he is really enjoying his over-seas trip. I really miss him.

Felicity. Johannesburg.

I'm sitting here listening to the radio and again I'm wondering how people can listen to Kylie Myngio, Rick Astley, Jodi Watley, FYC etc. And especially that club music at the Thunderdome and all those larny places. I'm into metal, I used to be punk but there is more to metal than punk, although I still do like punk. But I suppose we are all intiteled to our own opinions on music etc and on life, but I was just wondering.

Sean. Grahamstown.

Soweto Day. A sad day, by all accounts, in South Africa. The Black Sash school's gathering I attended this evening made me feel so sad, so angry, and so ashamed. Why are people so cruel to each other? Why can't we accept each other for what we are? I find that so terribly, terribly sad.

June 16th means so much to many people. To others, it is just another day. I wonder if those responsible for the outrage have ever spared a thought for what they did. I suppose not.

But I am optomistic that, one day, things will change, for the better. I hope and pray, that one day we will

10 000 pupils riot in Soweto

The Argus Correspondent JOHANNESBURG. — More than 10 000 angry Soweto High School pupils rioted and stoned a large contingent of police at Pheleni junior secondary school in Orlando West early today.

At least one pupil was shot as police fired hundreds of rounds into the air.

Many of the 50 police cars which rared to the scene of the riot had their windcreens smashed by the rampaging students

The Argus CITY LATE

CAPE TOWN, WEDNESDAY JUNE 14 1990

Action to solving problems?

SA welcome for

Here we print two entire diaries - one from Grahamstown and one from Khayelitsha outside Cape Town.

Tony. Grahamstown.

Monday 12th

I have just got a boody English assignment. I have to write this silly diary! Not much happened looking forward to the science EXPO next week. I hope I can finish my project in time! I wonder what Janet is think about?

Tuesday 13th

Oh boy I've just flunked my Maths Test. Boy is Robertson going to be on my case! Well quite frankly he can shove it! Damn got a Chemistry Test tomorrow. What a ball-ache! Janet must really think I'm an idiot!

Wednesday 14th

Am I having a great week or what? I've just flunked my Chem Test! Oh, well on the brighter side I suppose my English presentation did go well. In fact it went rather well! Suppose it compensates for the 35% for the essay! God I hate school!!! Janet!

Thursday 15th

Shit, my boody Afrikaans test was a bitch! Today I bunked the road run for the first time and guess what the boody coach arrives for the first time the whole term!! Oh F—k the EXPO is only six days away and my project isn't half finished!! This has got to be the worst week of my life! I've really screwed things up between Janet and I, DAMN!!

Friday 16th

Weekend thank God!! I can't believe my luck I passed my Maths, with 74% nog al. My Afrikaans teacher must really love my! We got the 'goat' tests back and she's credited me with an extra 10 marks! I passed my Chem as well, 60% is alright! Accounts was a disaster 91%, I should have got 100%.

I don't believe I have to do community service on Fridays, talking to the geriatrics, well I suppose anything is better than marching at cadets! EXPO, damn. Janet, double DAMN!!

Saturday 17th

Oh, well my problems with the EXPO have been cleared up, thank God! Why the hell does the weekend fly so fast? Janet!

Sunday 18th

Shit! I can't believe Dorothy was in an accident! Quite a shock to the system. Mother didn't take it very well! I had the strangest feeling of indifference after I heard they were alright! God how I wish Janet was here to share this with me! Sorry. □

join together across the world. Perhaps I am an idealist. So what? At least I try to see the brighter side.

Louise. Johannesburg.

One more day till weekend yay! Boy do I need it next weeks going to be a killer! School was the usual terrible work work work! Afterwards we went to the shops to change sisies shoes (too small) got home to find Wild Geese 11 on M net so I watched it (lank violent) stayed at home and watched Police Academy later on. Les phoned and we spoke crap as usual.

PS: Dog got troun out into the cold for awhile because he weed on the carpet!

Thembekile. Khayelitsha. Cape Town.

Today I went to a service. This may not be important. What really is important, is that I did not tell my parents. Wanted to but I could not. You know how parents can be after all it was 'June 16'. They can never think positive. Nor why should they take it that it is only a service. They think we want to start unrest. Of course we are the one who always starts them. Never, it can't be their bosses sons who wants to sjambock us. I really think we will make better parents than them, Don't you think so?

Betty. Johannesburg

We woke up at 7am and started getting dressed, when I discovered that I had only packed one school sock and had left my shoes at Rachel's house. I went to school with stockings from the day fore and takkies that I'd worn to 'The Wave'. I thought that Rachel would have realised that I'd left my shoes at her hose, but when she came to school, she discovered that she was wearing one of my shoes and one of her own. I watched Police Academy tonight, it was hysterical - well worth watching if you need cheering up.

Valerie. Johannesburg.

Soweto Day.

This morning it was mentioned in assembly, but it did not affect us. I think most of the pupils forgot about it when they walked out of the hall. It is probably only for the black community.

Vanessa. Johannesburg.

I am getting to hate S. A. more and more each day. I don't know why I hate it so much. The people are alright I guess. I just can't relate to them the way I could with my friends in England. Its getting to the stage when I am counting the days before I leave. I know, I know I'm taking a very negative attitude, but I've been here for over a year and I still haven't adapted. And to tell the truth I don't think I ever will.

Jane. Johannesburg.

June the sixteenth! Soweto Day! I waited for today to pass, with apprehension, half expecting myself to be caught up in a sudden riot. But my Friday was peaceful and yet I know there was unrest in the townships with however many peoples becoming victims to the violence. But the sad thing is that we hear about so much violence on the TV that I have become almost immune to its effects. When I hear about deaths, its just other people, other lives. Anyway some people say that the world is over-populated in the first place.

Jason. Johannesburg.

An important day in South African history. Went to school, as per normal. Got picked up after school, went home had bite to eat and got on my bike and rode up to the squash courts to watch Bev play squash. Unfortunately she lost (just). Came home went with my dad to have photos for Star taken. Came home and made arrangements with Bev to go and see a movie 'TAP'. Enjoyable evening.

Susan. Johannesburg.

I woke up to the report of an army massing, for a day of unrest and violence. In assembly, Mr Smith spoke on the meaning of the day, and

Thabo. Khayelitsha. Cape Town**12 June**

It's about 8.30pm. It's been a awful day to me 'cause in the morning we had to rewrite a question which was not clearly asked by the time we were writing the mathematics paper for the mid year exam. That question I know I didn't do good not at all good.

Relating to the whole day things were quiet normal and I have spend the whole day at my grandmothers house 2,5 km from where I live. Tomorrow on the 13th I'm going to offices at Rondebosch to ask for details about the camp we are going to attend later this month. The class boycotts in our township has made it difficult for us to continue with the vac school and we have held a meeting and we took a resolution of postponing the vac school but to continue with the camp.

13 June

The 1st thing I did in the morning, I planned all the things I'm supposed to do; I know I should have done that yesterday but what's the point? As planned I did went to the vac school offices.

I was very dissapointed when the co-ordinators told me that the camp had also been cancelled, reason the vac school didn't want to stand in the way of students seeing that there has been some detention of students recently and also there was speculation going on that the vac school should completely stop untill everything is settled or the ...(illegible) returns it's normality and so the major issue was that we don't know what's going to happen after the 16th of June maybe school busses can be stoned. I spend the whole day there because I was also filling up some application form for bursary.

14 June.

I went out for a jogging. I usually do this twice a week but during school-days I only jog in the evenings. Went to a local library to loan some some of the books I've been longing to read, it was my chance now since we have finished writing back from last year my everyday life has changed didn't like books so much I was always bussy with the SRC things.

My stepmother arrived from work with a plastic bag full of groceries. She is preparing for tomorrow as shops and all other businesses are going to be closed for the whole day. The only thing she left was paraffin for the heater and I had to go and buy it at our local stores.

15 June

This day was rather a different day from the start because at about 3.35am we were woked up by a strong knock we looked throughout the window Oh! No! I was shivering in a second the knock was of a police outside there we dozens of soldiers standing with their firearm ready to blow, they formed a line stretching about 25m from my home and there were vans. Father opened the door I could read his mind. he was sure that they were looking for me, but I being relaxed I knew I had nothing to fear. They came in and searched first my room then everywhere in the house. Daddy asked them what they were looking for. They said 'weapons' and that they were doing this everywhere in that morning. They came out bear handed. We went back to sleep and in the morning I went to the cafe as usual to get some bread and milk - by the way this is our daily morning food. We call it the second cause because we eat bread after we have had porridge or oats that's one of the diet you will find mostly in our society for breakfast. As on the way I met my neighbour daughter. She said she was surprised to see me for his elder brother and all the youth of my age have been detained by the police in about that time they had come to our house. I figure it out maybe it's because the following it going to be the 16th. But what confused me is

that this girl told me that the reason they were detained was because they were suspected of being involved the gang fight which is these days our everyday part of life. but what intrigued me was why did they take everyone from 12 years up to older people of about 28 years old.

At about 10am I washed my clothes. As was in the process my neighbour came to me and told me that his brother and all the other have been released except for a few boys who are suspected of gangsterism are still held.

During the day I was paid a visit by my friend who's now at UCT he told me that they had just finished writing exams. At my location the atmosphere was starting a (12h00) everyone talked about the 16th some were happy they were not going to work, people at the stores they were buying things that they are going to need for tomorrow mainly bread and flower for baking bread.

16 June

I woke up at about 9am its a clear day than the usual days of 16th June because it usually rains in this day but as I said the day is crystal clear. Our stepmother prepared a nice breakfast for us and she didn't go to work. I went outside and took a stroll to the robots about 100 m from home. It was really quiete. The day seemed to be delicate anything could have happen but to my astonishment there street was deserted with taxis, buses only private cars were on the road, shops were closed. I took a walk to NX 12 to visit my relatives I think I'm very communal whenever I feel lonely I like to visit my relatives and share something new with them. When I arrived I had bad news that the person I've come to visit is in hospital she had had an accident of being a victim of a stone throwed by coloureds people when she was in a taxi one her way home from work. I'm going to visit her in hospital tomorrow.

I went home again, on my way it was rather lonely like there was some funeral. I was lucky enough to see one being made to drink water with OMO soap powder, reason he had been spotted drunk by the observers and he later vomit all the drink he had been drinking, for shebeens were told yesterday not to serve any liquor and it's a custom in days like these that people should abstain from liquor for the whole day. I guess those spotted couldn't bear it no longer not to drink on a Friday. □

The following resolution, adopted almost nine years ago, underpins an ongoing concern for the adequate and equal education of all South African children and for the education crisis - still with us - which gave rise to Soweto Day.

The Black Sash believes that South African education reflects the inequalities and exploitation of its society and therefore does not seek to extend the white system of education to all schools, but recognises the need to develop and establish education in a truly democratic society, based on the will of ALL THE PEOPLE.

Whereas it is considered imperative to express solidarity and to show respect toward the school children who died or were imprisoned during and after the Soweto uprising in 1976, it is proposed:

1. That members of the Black Sash observe June 16 as a day of mourning;
2. That they encourage others to do the same;
3. That members lobby school principals and teachers to encourage pupils to observe June 16 as a day of mourning.

Black Sash Resolution, National Conference, 1981

the reading and prayer were centred around this. The bus was an hour late.

This is what Soweto Day meant to me. This and perhaps a moment of dismal realization. Perhaps a thought spared for those who died. That's it, nothing else.

To many of my fellow South Africans, June the 16th, 1976 was the start of a long, seemingly endless period of fire, guns and fear. And each year the dawning of this day brings the remembrance of tragic death and miserable suffering.

I live a mere ten minutes drive from this world and yet it seems light years away. My only exposure in my safe and protected environment is the TV, paper and radio - who knows if any of these are to be believed? It is no wonder that this country is so torn, when these two worlds live side by side, and yet never face to face. (Somehow the trivial occurrences of the day didn't seem worth putting down on paper.)

Nancy. Johannesburg.

Stayed at home today as we had to fetch mom from airport. She arrived at 12.15 from Mauritius. Sat listening about her holiday and got jealous. Went to Martin's house at about 7pm as he's leaving for Cyprus tonight. Found out that I might be going to Greece in October or December.

Kathy. Johannesburg.

Soweto Day today. I think it should be a public holiday. I'm sure even the AWB supporters wouldn't mind taking the day off! I often think about how it would be living in a township, living with a constant threat of violence. I'd like to find out for myself what it's really like, instead of getting these distorted views from the press. I think it absolutely ridiculous that people be judged by thir skincolours! I could go on about my political views, but I often get the feeling that adults don't appreciate kids telling them political feelings. They think we are just repeating daddy's words once spoken at the dinner table.



Anthony, Johannesburg.

Today was 'Soweto Day' and as far as I know, there wasn't any unrest. This makes me feel glad because violence only serves the purposes of evil, making people angry and resulting in the stirring of hostile feelings between the various races and cultures.

My mother and I were supposed to go shopping this afternoon but the stores were chaotic since nobody had arrived for work. I'm not angry or upset though, I just sat down in front of the television and relaxed. It was marvellous to rest and collect myself after such a hectic week.

Carinne, Johannesburg.

I can't believe it. Jane Brown played against me at netball. I haven't seen her since Std 4, she recognised me. I use to hate her.

Adrian, Johannesburg.

Oh boy. What a day! My day consisted of chaos, chaos and chaos. And just to add some more spice to it, more chaos. I nearly got run over by a truck, saw an accident, watched the police arrest somebody, a black which they dragged out of the bushes and treated disgustingly and then at work (I) was attacked by a swarm of customers. Due to the lack of black staff I had to go on a till. When after about two hours I got off the till I found out that my promotion had come through and I am now a full-fledged and fully qualified pay-point-controller or 'PPC' as we say. I was so excited and I carried my duty out with much satisfaction. I am so excited and I cannot wait to get to work tomorrow.

Robert, Grahamstown.

We are all doing cadetts today. Its compulsory from now. Frankly I don't care. Cadetts wasn't too bad. They always do that, make the first day easy. Then they drill you into the ground.

Lillian, Johannesburg.

'Soweto Day'. A day to be remembered by blacks all over South Africa. The thought of those riots

makes me heartsore. I am a bit ignorant about the politics of today. Sometimes I wish I knew more but then I'm also sometimes grateful that I don't. I only wish that people from overseas would not come down on us so hard. There must be something done - and only we the people of South Africa can do it. After all we may be different colours but the colour of all our blood is the same!

Nick, Johannesburg.

Straight after school, I did a bit of work on my plane before Mrs Day came to fetch me to take me to Geoff's house. We went to Northcliff to play Ten Pin Bowling and had dinner at Steers to celebrate his birthday. The six of us spent about R30 in total on arcade games as well. I've haven't had this much fun with my primary school friends. □

