Youth Day

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In South Africa, 16 June is a public holiday called Youth Day.

This story is about the history of the public holiday, and what happened on that day in 1976.

"Do you know what happened on Youth Day in 1976?" Grandmother asks her grandchildren, Buhle and Vusi.

"History happened on June 16 in Soweto!" she tells them.

"It was the morning of 16 June 1976. It was my last year of school.

That day changed history," continues Grandmother.

"We were learners from different schools in Soweto.

We were planning to march from our schools to Orlando Stadium. We planned a peaceful march."

"Why were you marching?" asks Buhle.

Grandmother explains, "The apartheid government was forcing us to learn in Afrikaans. We were against that law. We felt very angry!"

"We took a stand to free Black South African students.

We wanted better education.

We wanted equal education for all in South Africa."

"Then what happened?" Vusi asks.

"We were marching to Orlando Stadium for a gathering. Thousands of learners joined in. We were so excited!" Grandmother remembers.

"As we were marching, the police attacked us!

They threw teargas. Their dogs attacked us!

We tried to stay calm and keep on walking."

"Then they started shooting!

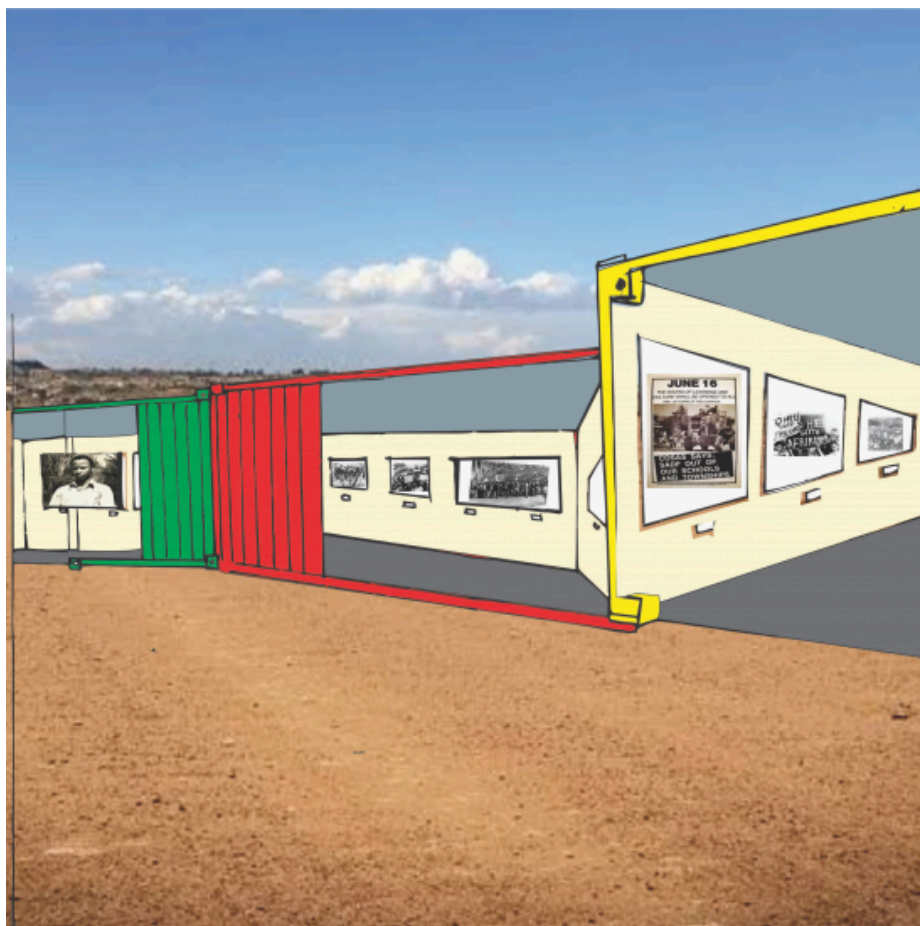There is a famous photograph that shocked the whole world.

A photograph of Hector Pieterson carried by his friend," says Grandmother sadly.

"How did it end?" asks Buhle and Vusi in a whisper.

Grandmother replies, "The Soweto protests spread countrywide. More students and workers joined in.

People around the world supported the protests."

"The Soweto uprising was important in the fight against apartheid. We called that day 'Soweto Day'. It became a public holiday in 1995."

In the 1990s, there were exciting art exhibitions about the youth uprising," Grandmother remembers.

"Every year on National Youth Day, South Africans honour the young people killed in the 1976 protests."

"We commemorate the youth who helped to end apartheid," Grandmother says, proudly.

"On Youth Day there are events, gatherings and concerts around the country."

"We should not forget the history of our country," ends Grandmother.

She smiles and hugs Buhle and Vusi.

——Questions

1. Who is telling this story, and who is listening? How do you know?

2. Where were children in Soweto marching to on 16 June 1976?

3. Why were they marching?

4. When did 16 June become a public holiday, and why?

5. Explain what 'peaceful demonstration' means.

6. What does the word 'commemorate' mean? Name three South Africans who are commemorated.

7. Share with the class some of the key events in the history of South Africa.

8. Have you heard about 'Gen Z'? What are their characteristics?

——Books in this series

- Freedom Day
- Heritage Day
- Human Rights Day
- Reconciliation Day
- Women's Day
- Workers' Day
- Youth Day

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