



Gcina Mhlophe, extraordinary storyteller

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This storybook is about Nokugcina Mhlophe.

She was born in 1958, in KwaZulu-Natal. She was raised by her grandmother.

Her grandmother used to tell her stories in isiZulu. She told Gcina many stories from a very early age.



Gcina's grandmother told her stories in such a way that she could see the pictures in her mind.

Gcina would listen carefully while her grandmother told a story.

When Gcina was ten years old, her mother took her to live in the Eastern Cape.



Gcina grew up with very little entertainment and no television. She grew to love reading books.

She started to write stories and poetry in isiXhosa.

At the same time, she was busy with her schoolwork and helped at a church.



One day, a church minister invited her to join him and his wife at their home.

The next morning after breakfast, the minister asked Gcina to go with him to a meeting in a nearby village.

The meeting was at the chief's place.



The meeting was about the cattle being allowed to go into the mealie fields.

While she was there, she saw a man in a bright traditional dress.

The man was an imbongi. An imbongi is a traditional praise poet and singer who performs at African ceremonies.



Gcina was impressed by the way the imbongi used his skill and the language. She was introduced to the chief and the imbongi.

When the imbongi shook her hand, she felt like a poet.

Gcina decided to become a praise poet.



By 1979, Gcina moved to Johannesburg, where she worked as a domestic worker. She looked after four naughty children!

One day, she decided to keep them quiet by telling them a story.

The story was about Nanabuhlele, the big monster of many colours that lives in water.



She didn't know if the children would like her African tales, but soon they were shouting, "Tell us another story!"

She decided to follow a career of writing stories.

She wanted to encourage children's interest in the stories of their grandmothers.



She started to write children's books, plays, and many stories and poems.

One of her first stories was, 'My Dear Madam.'

This story is about her life as a domestic worker.

Another important story from this time is 'Love Child', about Gcina's life.



Gcina wanted to protect the art of storytelling. With this goal in mind, she started the Zanendaba Institute.

Zanendaba is an isiZulu word meaning 'come with the news' or 'tell me a story.'

The Zanendaba Institute trains people who are interested in storytelling and writing.



Gcina started the Nozincwadi Mother of Books Campaign in 2001.

Gcina encourages reading by telling stories and writing children's books.

She started visiting rural areas in South Africa to share the importance of reading. She also gave books to each school she visited, for their library.



Gcina acted the lead role in an award-winning play, called 'Have you seen Zandile?'

The play is about a little girl who lives with her grandmother in Durban, and then Zandile's mother takes her to rural Eastern Cape.

Gcina wrote this play based on her experiences.



This is what Nokugcina Mhlophe said about her career:

“I tell stories in order to wake up stories in other people, because I truly believe that every living being has got a story to tell.”

Do you have any story to tell us?

—Questions

1. Who is Gcina Mhlophe?
2. What made Gcina want to become a poet?
3. What made Gcina start writing stories?
4. Find a story written by Gcina and read it out loud.
5. Write a story about anything that happened in your life.
6. Why do you think reading is important?
7. What activities do you do in your free time?
8. What talent do you want to be remembered for?

—This storybook was created and written in Tshivenda, as part of the Zenex Ulwazi Lwethu reading materials project in 2021.



Ulwazi Lwethu is a Zenex Foundation funded and initiated project to develop a series of graded and leisure African language readers and teacher support materials. This project is targeted at teaching and supporting learners in the Foundation Phase to improve their home language reading and understanding. The readers have been originated in nine African languages in collaboration with Molteno Institute for Language and Literacies, Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development, Room to Read South Africa, and Saide. All resources are developed as Open Education Resources (OER).



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