

STAGE
2

Changing their Skies

Stories from Africa

Retold by Jennifer Bassett

Introduction

This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.

The stories

The Rubbish Dump is set near an international airport in Malawi. Joey is a small boy who loves the planes that land and take off near his home. He spends much of his free time at the airport watching the planes and the passengers. There is a large rubbish dump near his house, and Joey makes friends with Mazambezi, the rubbish collector. This old man collects the rubbish from the airport and brings it, in an old wheelbarrow, to the rubbish pit. Mazambezi gives Joey a broken toy plane. Joey keeps this a secret from his mother because she has forbidden him to go near the rubbish pit. The friendship between Joey and Mazambezi is strengthened as they discover that they both love the planes and the world which they reveal, through the rubbish the planes leave behind.

Cardboard Mansions tells the story of Dadi-Ma, who lives with her grandson in a flimsy shanty house in South Africa. She has had a hard life, coming to South Africa from India as a young woman, and losing her husband and three of her sons to tuberculosis. She moved to Port Elizabeth to look after her youngest son, Sonny, and his sickly wife. The birth of Chotoo, her grandson, brings new meaning to Dadi-Ma's life, and she becomes the centre of his world, especially after the death of his mother. Sonny is imprisoned after a fight, and Dadi-Ma can no longer pay the rent. She looks back to a happier time, when she lived with a friend near Durban, in a house with fruit trees in the garden. Dadi-Ma decides to return to her friend in Stanger, and give her grandson the healthy lifestyle she wants for him. She takes Chotoo to Durban on the train, but the city has changed, and the house where she lived with her friend has been pulled down. The story ends with Dadi-Ma falling ill, while Chotoo realises that things will never be all right again.

Leaving is set in Tanzania, and tells the story of a mother who has brought up five children alone after the early death of her husband. She is ambitious for her two youngest children, and sells the family store to move to a quieter part of town, to allow them to study more easily. An ex-teacher visiting from America inspires Aloo, the youngest son, to apply to



study medicine at a university in America, instead of accepting the offer from his local university to study agriculture. Aloo wins a scholarship to an American university, and is devastated when he realises his mother won't allow him to accept it. But eventually, after a discussion with one of the school officers, his mother comes to accept the idea. The narrator, Aloo's sibling, describes a new awareness of the mother as a person who has always put her children first. Aloo's first letter home, from his stop-over in London, describes his excitement at seeing the city. The story ends with the contrast between his new freedom and his mother's sadness, not knowing whether her son will return.

Background to the stories

The Rubbish Dump was written by Steve Chimombo who was born in Malawi in 1945. He was educated at the University of Malawi, and then at universities in England and the United States. He was Professor of English at the University of Malawi and is a well-known poet. He has also written plays, novels, children's books, and collections of short stories.

Cardboard Mansions was written by Farida Karodia who was born in 1942 in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. She was a teacher in Johannesburg and Zambia, but when the South African government cancelled her passport in 1968, she emigrated to Canada. In 1994, after the end of apartheid, she returned to South Africa.

Leaving was written by M. G. Vassanji who was born in Kenya, to an Indian family, in 1950. He was brought up in Tanzania but now lives in Toronto, Canada. He often visits Africa and India. His first novel was published in 1989 and he has since published five more novels and two collections of short stories, dealing with the life of Indians living in East Africa.

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Pre-reading activity

Picture match

Match the pictures with the words and the story titles



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title



Words Title

Words

- They made baskets to sell, they had chickens and sold eggs . . . They were poor, but they were not hungry.
- Joey heard the sound of aeroplane engines, and stared at the sky.
- Aloo could not hide the excitement in his voice. 'They teach everything there,' he said.
- They began to walk down the street. On both sides were large houses behind high walls..
- When Joey looked back, Mazambezi was looking through the rubbish in the wheelbarrow.
- 'And why do you want to go away, so far from us? What kind of son are you?'
- 'Here,' the old man said, 'have a piece of cheese. Maybe it came from South Africa.'
- Chotoo sat down on the step next to Dadi-Ma, sitting close to her side, where he felt safe and comfortable.

Story Titles

- The Rubbish Dump
- Cardboard Mansions
- Leaving

To the teacher

Aim: To encourage students to predict the setting and themes of the three stories

Time: 30 minutes

Organization: Put the students into pairs after they have read the cover and the introduction. Give one copy of the worksheet to each pair. Ask them to discuss and predict which story belongs to which

picture, and then match the words to the pictures.

They may need to use a dictionary to check some of the more unusual words. Check the answers with the whole class. The important thing is to begin thinking about the stories, not the accuracy of the answers.

Key: 1hj, 2ck, 3bi, 4aj, 5gi, 6fk, 7ei, 8dj

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While reading activity

Getting it right

There are eleven mistakes in this text. Find them and correct them. The first one is corrected for you.

Dadi-Ma was a young woman when she ~~died~~^{arrived} in South Africa from India. Her husband died young, and she went to live with a friend, Ratnadevi. They worked hard but they were not surprised. There was a big garden with lots of fruit trees, and the air was clean. Then Dadi-Ma's youngest daughter, Sonny, living in a shanty house in Port Elizabeth, sent for her. Sonny's wife, Neela, was too ill to take care of her basket, and Dadi-Ma took care of them all. Then Neela died, and Sonny loved his job.

One day Sonny got into a fight and was soon in prison. Dadi-Ma had no money to pay the rubbish and the owner, Mr Naidoo, told her to go. She had a little knife hidden in a secret place and she and her grandson, Chotoo, went by car to Durban. But everything in Durban was different. Ratnadevi's sari was not there.

A woman came out of one of the small houses, and Dadi-Ma described Ratnadevi's house. 'They pulled it down a long time ago,' the man said. Dadi-Ma felt a pain inside her body, and Chotoo was afraid of losing her.

To the teacher

Where: At the end of 'Cardboard Mansions'

Aim: To summarize, revise reading, to check text in detail

Time: 20 minutes

Organization: This activity gives a summary of 'Cardboard Mansions'. There are eleven factual mistakes in it and the first one has been corrected as an example. Give each student, or pair of students,

a copy of the summary and ask them to read and correct as many mistakes as possible. They can create their own summaries of other stories, with mistakes for other students to correct.

Key: surprised: *hungry*; daughter: *son*; basket: *baby*; loved: *lost*; rubbish: *rent*; knife: *money*; car: *train*; sari: *house*; small: *large*; man: *woman*

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After reading activity

Match words and phrases with each of the ten characters

Put these words or phrases next to the most appropriate person.

built himself an aeroplane	filled the doorway
seventy-three years	scholarship
squeak, rattle, thump not a good husband	prison
promise me ... promise me	cleaning the big bedroom
wheelbarrow	a big adventure
small for his years	sewing machine
school officer	loved the noise and the roar
just a young girl	medicine
fruit trees	always ill

WORDS/PHRASES

Joey	
Dadi-Ma	
Mazambezi	
Chotoo	
Mr Velji	
Joey's mother	
Aloo	
Sonny	
Aloo's mother	
Neela	

To the teacher

Aim: To focus students' attention on the characters of the three stories

Time: 20 minutes

Organization: Give each student, or pair of students, a copy of the chart and ask them to identify which words and phrases go with each character. Go through the answers as a class and then ask students to talk more about the characters.

Key: Joey: loved the noise and the roar/built himself an aeroplane; Dadi-Ma: fruit trees/seventy-three years; Mazambezi: squeak, rattle, thump/wheelbarrow; Chotoo: small for his years/a big adventure; Mr Velji: school officer/wise face; Joey's mother: filled the doorway/cleaning the big bedroom; Aloo: scholarship/medicine; Sonny: prison/not a good husband; Aloo's mother: sewing machine/promise me ... promise me; Neela: always ill/just a young girl