Amazwi Amasha: New Approaches to Sustainable Poetry Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

At many South African schools poetry is considered to be a "problem genre", with both teachers and learners viewing it as "difficult" and as a genre that lowers schools' pass rates in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) (Matric) examination. For this reason, schools tend to shy away from prescribing poetry at the Further Education and Training (FET) level (that is, in Grades 10-12). This article argues that the poems that are prescribed for English First Additional Language (EFAL) classes are difficult for learners to relate to because of having been written in contexts that are temporally and geographically distant from the learners' life-worlds. In addition, many learners may not understand the particular variety of English that is used in canonical poetry. A new teaching anthology, entitled *Amazwi Amasha (New Voices)*, containing South African post-1994 poetry, is in the process of being compiled to address the problem of learners' alienation from their prescribed poems. This anthology forms the topic of this article. The theory and methodology underpinning the selection of poems and the design of learning activities to accompany each poem are described, along with the selection of themes that are relevant to young South Africans. The argument concludes that a more multimodal, interactive approach to teaching and learning poetry can help tap into the resources of this capacious and fascinating genre.

Introduction

This article discusses what the anthologists believe the strengths are of a new teaching anthology of post-1994 English South African poetry. It is the intention of the editorial team to pilot the poems and teaching exercises to determine their effectiveness in English Home Language and EFAL classrooms. This article discusses the principles and processes involved in the compilation of a new anthology, which has not been published yet, of South African poetry in English for teachers, teacher educators, and secondary school learners, and demonstrates that there is both a need and a market for such an anthology. The prospective title of the anthology is *Amazwi Amasha (New Voices)*. It showcases how the voices of younger poets, whose work was published after the South African transition to democracy in 1994, and new approaches to the learning and teaching of poetry can re-centre this genre as vibrant and culturally relevant. By including innovative learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) in the anthology, the compilers aim to reposition poetry, not only as a component of language learning and teaching, but as an integral part of learners' experiences across the curriculum.

The compilers of the anthology are members of the research team of the South African Poetry Project (ZAPP). ZAPP is a funded community engagement project, dedicated to fostering a love of poetry among secondary-school teachers and learners, and encouraging learners to write their own poetry. The editorial team was spurred to compile a new anthology of South African post-1994 poetry by several factors. First, the poems that are currently prescribed for EFAL are largely irrelevant to the life-worlds of the current cohort of learners. Cooper (2020:15-16) and Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020:2) agree that poetry from radically distant cultural contexts is alienating for learners, and it is a logical conclusion that learners do badly when responding to such poems. The prescribed poetry list includes approximately 50% Euro-American poems, which were written in contexts that are distant from South Africa. While poetry written in the Global North deals frequently with what may be called "universally relevant" themes related to being human, it also refers to places, natural phenomena, and socio-economic conditions that are not relatable for South African learners. For example, the problems of pollution of urban spaces, climate crisis, and economic inequality are much worse in South Africa than in most European and North American countries.

The second catalyst for the compilation of a new anthology is that the overwhelming majority of the South African poems that are prescribed for secondary-school learners in Grades 10-12 date back to the struggle era of the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, lay people frequently assume that black South

African poetry is synonymous with struggle poetry. The struggle is noteworthy in that it saw an unprecedented upsurge of poetry by black poets, many of whom did not write pastoral poetry or poems that fit into predetermined formats, such as the sonnet or the ode. Rather, they tended to write angry poems featuring urban landscapes, and to use diction that is colloquial, direct, and would be out of place in poetry of the Western Canon (cf. Bloom, 1999). Struggle poetry is, therefore, significant, both historically and in terms of the literary movements of the time. However, young people in the early twenty-first century know about the struggle only from history and South African literature books, which they do not always find relatable or relevant at all (McKinney, 2009). A third motivation for compiling a new anthology is to extend the reach of South African poetry into secondary schools. Many schools opt not to teach poetry at NSC (Matric) level, believing, along with many teachers and learners globally, that the genre is "difficult" and will lower their pass rates (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006:71; Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015:511-512; Newfield & Byrne, 2020:6-9). If this happens (lowering of pass rates) , the schools will be identified by their provincial Department of Education (DoE) as underperforming schools and this leads to a form of micro-management, where school management and teachers must commit to improvement plans throughout the year (Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2018:5; Phiri, 2024 in process). Although there is no accurate national account of the schools that teach poetry at Matric level, researchers agree that poetry is not a popular choice (Maungedzo, 2023; Phiri, 2024). As a counter to this belief, the poems in *Amazwi Amasha* have been chosen specifically to address themes that are relevant to the challenges that learners face. Each poem is accompanied by a set of suggested classroom activities, which diverge strikingly from the usual processes of identifying and decoding figurative language and poetic strategies, and instead, employ multimodal strategies to enhance teachers' and learners' experience and understanding of poetry. These activities encourage a personal, enjoyable, and creative engagement with poetry, as opposed to analysing only rigid and "difficult" poetic conventions. It is hoped that a more creative and personal experience will increase learners' and teachers' confidence in engaging with poetry in the classroom and will, subsequently, improve learners' marks.

Scholarship on poetry in EFAL classrooms in South Africa

Kearney's (2008), Cooper's (2020), and Mavhiza and Prozesky's (2020) research on poetry teaching in South African classrooms suggests that teachers generally teach poetry mechanistically, as difficult, condensed writing, on a dead, flat piece of paper. Furthermore, learners and teachers consider poetry as dull, difficult, and divorced from their South African life-worlds (Kearney, 2008; Cooper, 2020; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020). The assessment-driven Curriculum Assessment Policy

Statement (CAPS) (and its associated Annual Teaching Plan (ATP)), which leads to this teacher-centred drilling approach is the main reason for these negative attitudes (Cooper, 2020; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020:4-5).

The teaching of literature generally also faces various challenges in South African classrooms. Maungedzo's PhD thesis (2023) highlights these and underscores the necessity to reconsider literature pedagogy, as also propagated by Cooper (2020) and Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020). Maungedzo (2023) finds that CAPS does not provide sufficient advice to teachers in selecting and teaching literary texts that are sensitive to the needs of multicultural and multilingual learners. Furthermore, the exposure to literature in the CAPS is too limited and vague in terms of enhancing critical analysis skills, literary essay-writing skills (although recently added), and creative writing skills for those who want to study English at university. CAPS encourages personalised responses to literary texts, but in reality, the summative assessments and quantified outcomes require positivistic and parroted responses from learners (Cooper, 2020; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020; Maungedzo, 2023).

What further hinders the learning and teaching of poetry in the South African classroom is that teachers prefer short stories and drama over novels and poetry. Novels are considered as taking too long to read, and poetry, as stated earlier, is seen as too difficult (Maungedzo, 2023). The overly full and time-constrained CAPS curriculum does not allow for deep and personalised learners' responses, which are required for the understanding and appreciation of literature. Drama and short stories are viewed as easier to teach (e.g. role-play can be used in drama), and they do not take as long to read. This entails that EFAL learners are not sufficiently prepared to engage personally with or to enjoy literature, despite the fact that CAPS (2011:16) for the FET EFAL [1] sets this out as one of its outcomes.

A major challenge seems to be a question of pedagogy, as Kearney (2008), Cooper (2020), Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020), and Maungedzo (2023) point out. Maungedzo's (2023) study involved two English FAL Subject Advisors/facilitators, ten English FAL FET Phase educators, and (in the final sample) 29 English FAL Grade 12 learners. The teachers believed in the holistic enriching experience of literary education, but their teaching approaches did not always encourage this. Teaching for tests, and the over-crowded CAPS curriculum mean that many teachers resort to teacher-centred approaches. Furthermore, many teachers are not confident in teaching poetry because they did not

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[1] Further Education and Training (FET), which includes Grades 10 to 12. English First Additional Language is a subject for learners whose mother tongue is not English in the South African schooling system.

study it in their post-school degrees and the pressure to produce high pass rates at Matric makes them decide to choose the "easier" genres of short story and drama (Cooper, 2020:16; Maungedzo, 2023). Importantly, Maungedzo's (2023) study emphasises the generally restrictive and claustrophobic environment in which teachers and learners engage with literature in the classroom. Cooper (2020:10-13,17) indicates that South African teachers do not teach poetry as a unit of meaning, but focus on its constituent parts, like figures of speech and literary devices, in a line-by-line analysis. Kearney (2008:266-267, 272-273) agrees with this and states that this linear approach to poetry teaching at South African schools fractures the unitary meaning of the poem and destroys the learners' experience of the poem as an "organic whole" (272). This mechanistic pedagogy is employed to prepare learners for one-correct-answer-only assessments (Kearney, 2008:266-267; Cooper, 2020:13-15).

Phiri's PhD research draws similar conclusions. Maungedzo (2023) and Phiri have both spent much time and energy on teaching poetry in schools where they were employed, and both lament the fact that the genre does not receive more attention. The perception that it is "difficult", which leads teachers and learners to shy away from poetry, is also documented by Newfield and Maungedzo (2006:71), Newfield and D'Abdon (2015:511-512), and Newfield and Byrne (2020:6-9). These authors note that poetry is downgraded in EFAL classrooms, because it has a bad reputation and when it is taught learners simply memorise content to pass their exams. They recommend a more multimodal engagement with poetry, which helps learners connect the study of poetry with their life-worlds and emotions. Learners' responses and enjoyment of poetry are heightened if they are allowed to use their different senses (Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020). Closely related to poetry's multimodal quality is its spoken-word and performative qualities (Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015; D'Abdon, 2016; Newfield & Byrne, 2020). Poetry was and is "written" to be spoken and shared in multimodal spaces. Therefore, learning and teaching poetry should be a multisensory engagement with the text.

All the quoted literature agrees that, sadly, poetry teaching and learning in South African schools is primarily stale. The editors of *Amazwi Amasha* have taken notice of these findings, and this publication therefore presents poetic voices whose themes resonate with learners' life-worlds. Younger poets, who speak to the concerns of young South African learners, are included. Activities linked to these poems are multimodal in nature as they engage a variety of semiotic resources in appreciating poetry. Additionally, *Amazwi Amasha* addresses the value of poetry to enhance critical thinking skills. We argue that poetry can be used to teach across the curriculum. Barbara Chatton's *Using Poetry across the Curriculum: Learning to Love Language* states:

> Poets for the young have led the way in suggesting that students can handle the big, tough ideas. Poetry about war and peace, about how we treat our environment, and about how we treat one another invites us to ponder these hard issues with our students. Poetry that allows them to think like scientists, like historians, and like artists will enrich their lives. (2010:xx)

Similarly, Bintz and Monobe (2018:39) argue in *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Using Poetry to Integrate Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum* that: "Intellectually, [poetry] supports abstract thought, provides a means for students to represent and communicate 'complex ideas in symbolic ways' (Graves, 1992, p. 163) in a limited amount of space".

The mechanistic teaching of poetry in the classroom usually consists of an introduction to the poet's life, the teacher reading the poem, and the learners answering a long list of questions on the poem. The teacher-centred and only-one-correct answer approaches entail that the learners do not experience the poem on a personal level, as the focus is on analyses for assessment purposes (Kearney, 2008:266–67). The focus is mainly on identifying technical aspects like figures of speech, and not on how figurative language is woven to create a poem's effect (Newfield & Byrne, 2020:7). The anthology wants to move away from this linear approach to a holistic consideration of poetry as a multi-sensory experiencing of literature. This includes using poetry to teach other subjects, for example Science, Geography, History / Politics, and Life Orientation, especially mental health and humour.

Theoretical foundations

Broadly speaking, the compilation of *Amazwi Amasha* has been undertaken in the light of the fourth United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Sustainable Development, n.d.). More specifically, the choice of poems and the design of activities in the anthology are based on three theoretical paradigms: the theory of multimodality, the theory of decoloniality, and the theory of translanguaging. The compilers based our decisions on the theory of multimodality, initially developed by Gunther Kress and Theodore van Leeuwen.[2] One of the foundations of multimodal theory is that "[d]iscourses are socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality. By 'socially constructed' we mean that they have been developed in specific social contexts" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001:4). This idea contradicts received wisdom about poets,

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[2] Later multimodal theorists include Carey Jewitt (2016), Jeff Bezemer (Bezemer and Kress 2015); and Kay O'Halloran (Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran 2016).

teachers, and learners as solitary beings, creating art with words on their own, or creating meaning in solitude (possibly inspired by great artists, critics, or theorists). If we accept that all discourses, including poems, learners' homework, and the CAPS document, are socially constructed, this means that there is no such thing as one correct meaning of even a line or an image in a poem. Instead, any attempt at making meaning is always conducted in a specific context where there are many forces at play, including the person's family, their economic and political standing, the physical environment where meaning is being made, and so on (Newfield & Byrne 2020:4, 6). The second principle of the theory of multimodality that is relevant to the compilation of the anthology is that meaning making draws on a plurality of semiotic resources, usually in combination with one another (cf. Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran 2016:3). Therefore, when a teacher asks a secondary-school learner to analyse a poem on a page, there is much more than the printed word at stake. The learner's and teacher's prior experiences of poetry, whether in their first language or an additional language, as well as the poem's possibly being performed either online or by the teacher, all come into play. Poetry's multimodal qualities make it uniquely suited to the exploration of the various senses, and its rhythm, rhyme, and repetitive quality allows for scaffolded learning. The performance of poetry (either through dance, video, or the spoken word) is particularly important in an educational context, since poems take on new life in these ephemeral yet vibrant events. Poetry's openness to performance and its affordances of aural and verbal experiencing create a multi-sensory expression (Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015; D'Abdon, 2016; Ndlovu, 2020). Multimodal learning and teaching, which include audio, gestural, linguistic, spatial, and visual modes, accommodate more learning styles in the classroom, as learners are able to acquire learning and skills through their exposure to visual, aural, verbal, and kinetic systems of meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2016). When poetry is performed, it engages a range of semiotic resources, including proprioception, mobility, gesture, sound, and cadence, making a poetry performance an all-encompassing experience. Sadly, though, learners in South African schools often encounter poetry only on the page, limiting their experience of it radically and causing many students to agree with a young learner that poetry is "boring" (focus group discussion with learners, 2023).

The second theory that has influenced the anthology's compilation is decoloniality. Decolonial theorists, such as Walter D. Mignolo (2007, 2011); Anìbal Quijano (2007), Ramòn Grosfoguel (2002, 2008), and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2015), have highlighted the necessity for scholarship from the Global South to "delink" (Mignolo 2007) from colonial epistemologies and worldviews. The corollary to the process of delinking is that scholars and artists from the Global South need to claim and receive more attention. *Amazwi Amasha* enacts decolonial principles by foregrounding and

celebrating Othered voices that were previously silenced, especially those of young black women and recent South African poets (Mignolo, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2017; Mashile, 2018; Santos, 2018; Shava and Manyike, 2018; Jansen and Walters, 2022).

Translanguaging was the third theoretical lens for the compilation of the anthology. The theory of translanguaging, pioneered by Leketi Makalela (2016, 2019), among others, helps us to understand how learners' home literacies (which are not likely to be in English) are linked to school literacies. Translanguaging is conceptualised as the "deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015:283). It is also defined as a practice in which a speaker receives information through the medium of one language and makes meaning of it and applies it through the medium of another language. For instance, reading and listening (receptive skills) are done in one language, while speaking and writing (expressive skills) are done in another, allowing bi/multilingual learners to grasp content being taught. By drawing on the learners' home literacies in the activities suggested in the anthology, the text contributes to the increased relevance of the poetry curriculum. Multiple languages (English integrated with Afrikaans, Sesotho, and Sepedi, as well as "tsotsitaal"[3]) are used in the anthology to help learners understand the themes conveyed in the poems. The use of multiple languages encourages learners to draw on various languages and cultural contexts in responding to the poems.

These themes address the challenges that they experience as adolescents, including urban life, violence, emotional trauma, love, gender confusion, and many other matters (as the compilers know from our teaching experiences at schools). This links with the concept of poetry as therapy (Jeffs and Pepper, 2005; Deshpande, 2010; Kreuter & Reiter, 2014), where the metaphorical quality of poetry allows the patient/learner to symbolise and internalise traumatic experiences, and helps with intergenerational healing (Deshpande, 2010). The anthology addresses several themes that are relevant to the Life Orientation curriculum, which aims to prepare learners holistically for meaningful adult lives. Therefore, it enacts the principle of poetry across the curriculum.

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[3] Tsotsitaal is a "pidgin", or a language that includes words and phrases of other languages. However, as Louis Molamu points out: "Tsotsitaal remains … a sufficiently important symbol of identity to ensure its continued use among Black people on the Reef. It is however possible that other lingua francas, such as iscamtho, which is spoken in many parts of Soweto, may come to replace Tsotsitaal" (2003:4).

Methodological principles

In this section, we will enumerate and explore some of the principles that guided the choice of poems for the anthology as guided by the three theories mentioned previously. Younger South African poetic voices, for instance Puno Selesho, Busisiwe Mahlangu, and Katleho Shoro, who address themes and concerns that are relevant to young adults (Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020; Phiri 2024), were included. The activities in the anthology mine the performative, the political, the embodied, and the African or indigenous qualities of the poems. Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020) address these themes in their study with Grade 11 EFAL learners. They found that involving learners in multimodal activities, and encouraging them to write their own poems, led to "learners' increased engagement and joy in poetry classes", which "can support and rejuvenate the teacher's efforts" (Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020:21). Therefore, it is hoped that the learners will relate to the young poets and multimodal activities included in the anthology. Another example of a similar project is the *Thebuwa* anthology, which consists of poems written by young high school learners (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). *Thebuwa* is a multimodal assemblage of poetic experiences. It represents a multi-semiotic physical and symbolic cloth that mirrors Grade 10 learners' learning in the EFAL classroom (see Fig. 1). Learners added their own traditional praise poems to the multilingual "speaking"-cloth design: "Each poem is thus both an individual item and a thread in the collective tapestry of identity" (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006:77).

Amazwi Amasha also "speaks" of individual and collective identities that learners can explore multimodally in engaging with the poems. Poems were chosen according to whether poets had established careers in writing and publishing South African poetry. These poets included Keorapetse Kgositsile, Lisa Combrinck, Myesha Jenkins, Gabeba Baderoon, Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, Finuala Dowling, Jim Pascual Agustin, Lebogang Mashile, and Makhosazana Xaba. It was considered important to include newer voices, who had also achieved literary acclaim, such as Diana Ferrus, Natalia Molebatsi, Marí Peté, Puno Selesho, Katleho Kano Shoro, and LLM Mbatha. Poems were included that showcase literary and poetic innovation, as well as social and topical relevance. This integration of younger and older post-1994 poetic voices is an attempt to do justice to the dream of the "rainbow nation" (Møller, Dickow & Harris 1999; Sall 2018) by representing a diversity of authors by race, gender, and geographical location.

Fig. 1: The *Thebuwa* cloth (Denise Newfield, personal communication)

Special attention is given in the choice of poems to poets who are usually marginalised, for example, black women, who were severely oppressed under Apartheid and afterwards, and who have used poetry as a collective weapon to make sure their voices are heard (Mashile, 2018). Therefore, the poems create an eclectic pattern woven of various approaches.

Amazwi Amasha is arranged thematically. The themes were chosen according to the experiences of teachers, ex-teachers, and teacher educators on the editorial team. For this reason, and the logistical difficulties of arriving at a representative sample, a needs analysis was not conducted among learners.[4] The poems can be taught across the curriculum, in line with several theorists who have commented on poetry's relevance to a range of educational disciplines (see Bintz and Monobe, 2010; Chatton, 2010). These include education; community and xenophobia; crime and violence; gender and gender-based violence (GBV); politics; landscapes/cityscapes; heritage and culture; identity and language; love, life, and death; mental health; values and spirituality; and humour. Educational topics that include language and literature, science and mathematics, history and geography, art and music, and life orientation, are set in dialogue with young-adult concerns

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[4] The team remains open to the possibility of conducting a needs analysis.

through the anthology's thematic organisation. Learners' real-world experiences and concerns are therefore addressed through vibrant and relevant poems, which "speak their language". "Life in Soweto" by Precious Madladleni is an example of a poem in colloquial language or "tsotsi language" in which young adults frequently communicate:

The place of ghetto

and Pantsula 4 life

of amagents and abobabe

it's a loxion kulcha

you'll never get in the country

seeing amabhuzwajee and amabujwa

Abocheeseboy and abocheesegirl

speaking the tsotsi language

and amagents hola athi 7

And the language of amabhuzwajee

goes like this

It's only alphabets and numbers

l 1 2 C U B 4 6AM LUV YA

[Glossary]

amagents and abobabe - streetwise boys and smart girls

amabhuzwajee and amabujwa - middle class/classy/swanky/in vogue; from "bourgeois"

Abocheeseboy and abocheesegirl - classy boys and classy girls

hola athi - township form of greeting

Close reading was used to analyse the poems, and these analyses formed the basis for designing the classroom activities, which accompany each poem. These activities encourage a multimodal and multilingual engagement from learners and assist teachers in immersing learners holistically in the learning process through the senses and various languages.

Findings about the Anthology: Words, Worlds, and Wounds

In this section, we consider the anthology through the alliterative lens of multilingual words, multi-faceted worlds, and multi-layered wounds. The "words" represent the many languages that are used by South African poets to write their works, and those that are used by learners studying and writing poetry at school. The "worlds" gesture towards the multicultural and multidimensional spaces that are occupied by South African poets and learners. The "wounds" are the traces of trauma that have been passed on intergenerationally to current South African citizens, including secondary-school learners.

Multilingual words

South Africa is an irreducibly multilingual country, with 12 official languages. Nevertheless, English as the language of the coloniser dominates education and commerce, often to the detriment of indigenous languages. Many of the poems selected for inclusion in *Amazwi Amasha* include languages other than English, although it is an anthology of primarily English poetry. There is an uneasy relationship between English and other South African languages, which is humorously, but pertinently, highlighted in Katleho Kano Shoro's "Sesotho sa ka will not be written in italics":

> Sesotho sa ka will not be written in italics.
>
> Next to English, Sesotho sa ka, too,
>
> will have her back up straight
>
> because I have decided to make it
>
> a back-up-straight kind of poem.

Sesotho sa ka will not be written in italics.

Not unless italics is the theme of the poem

or that exact line needs to

slant so that when I recite it I know to lean back and emphasise more…

Sesotho sa ka will not be written in italics.

The poem beautifully illustrates the equal value of an indigenous South African language (Sesotho) to that of English, which is the preferred Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in South Africa. The poet cleverly reverses the role of italics as a conventional indicator of foreign phrases. Italics is also used to foreground important statements: in this instance, the Sesotho language. Through this poem, learners explore the rich linguistic and cultural languages of South Africa in a language or Life Orientation classroom. They write their own original poems about the languages that they know. Other poems in the anthology that include South African indigenous languages are Vangi Gantsho's "I Expect More from You", Marí Peté's "Troebel / Troubled", and Thando Tshabalala's "Soweto for Young Freaks".

Multi-faceted worlds

The anthology illustrates a multifarious world of experience, as represented through the myriad South African cultures. One such example is "Lifesong" by Zena John:

I wrapped myself within the African continent

Tugging at its northern-most point

Tweaking its southern tip

To reach a comfortable belt of awareness

Home

I danced with the South Asian sub-continent

Giving flights to centuries of bell-jingling footsteps

Toyed with the moon glistening on its holy waters

And found my soul

Hidden

In its duet with the sun

The poet, a South African Indian woman of Mauritian origin, merges the rich images of Hindu spiritual dances with those of African spirituality. She is the daughter of both, and her spirit twirls with them under a communal sun. Her ancestral Hindu dance is accompanied by a song, and the dance and music together represent a multimodal outpouring of "bell-jingling" sound, and "glistening" visions, all "wrapped" and "Hidden" in the bosom of the two mothers. Learners explore their spirituality and sense of belonging through studying this poem. The poem can also be used in History and Geography classrooms to explore different continents, as well as South Africa's demographics and history of immigration, i.e., the Indian indentured labourers who came to South Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Similar to John's poem, "I've Come to Take You Home" by Diana Ferrus embodies the black experience in South Africa, and gives it a loud voice:

I have come to take you home, home!

Remember the veld,

the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees?

The air is cool there and the sun does not burn.

I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,

your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,

the proteas stand in yellow and white

And the water in the stream chuckles sing-songs

As it hobbles along over little stones.

I have come to wrench you away,

away from the poking eyes of the man-made monster

who lives in the dark with his clutches of imperialism,

who dissects your body bit by bit,

who likens your soul to that of satan

and declares himself the ultimate God!

I have come to soothe your heavy heart,

I offer my bosom to your weary soul.

I will cover your face with the palms of my hands,

I will run my lips over lines in your neck,

I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you

and I will sing for you,

for I have come to bring you peace.

I have come to take you home

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where the ancient mountains shout your name.

I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,

your blankets are covered in buchu and mint —

the proteas stand in yellow and white,

I have come to take you home

where I will sing for you,

for you have brought me peace,

for you have brought us peace.

This poem refers to the tragic story of Saartjie Baartman. She was a Khoisan woman who lived during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She was born in the Cape and later paraded as an exotic performer in London and Paris. She died in Paris in 1815. Her remains became a museum "exhibit", and her body dissected for "medical" research. Ferrus's poem convinced the French government to return her remains to South Africa. Saartjie was brought home in 2002 and buried in her beloved Gamtoos valley. This poem speaks of the early trafficking and enslavement of black Africans by colonial powers. It sensitively reaffirms the dignity of the Khoisan who were persecuted by both African and white colonial communities. The poem reconstitutes Saartjie's scattered parts and interns her as a whole person in a beautiful verdant grave, guarded and covered by hill, tree, grass and flower, perfumed by "buchu and mint", and sung to by lulling streams. Ferrus's poem is a praise poem to Saartjie and to her people who have suffered at the hands of the imperialist "monster". It succeeds in reassembling memory that has been desecrated "bit by bit" through colonial dehumanisation.

The poem can be used in the language classroom, as it has striking examples of nature metaphors. It can also be used in the History and Geography classrooms, to illustrate the Eastern Cape Frontier history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the local geomorphology and flora of this province. It can also serve as a text for learning about sexual and medical exploitation in the Life Orientation classroom. It additionally fosters an appreciation for one's community and heritage,

specifically for South Africa's rich cultural and literary tapestry. Therefore, this text is relevant for various topics across the curriculum.

"Bladed Spurs" by Jim Pascual Agustin, a Filipino living in South Africa, has also been included in *Amazwi Amasha* to broaden the thematic and cultural horizons in the anthology. The poem deals with the dark world of animal fighting. It is written in an almost conversational tone, which emphasises the stark everyday reality of animal cruelty. The images foreground the poet's empathy with the roosters' plight, as it "burned with a metallic shine" into his consciousness. The silence of the roosters and the young man looking after them emphasises the tragic circumstances of the animals. Their voicelessness also increases the poem's dramatic effect, as the relatively calm existence of the roosters in the cages under the house precedes the mayhem and death unleashed in the ring. The young man has no say in this fate of the "dumb" creatures and his fate is also sealed: in looking after the doomed creatures.

This poem can be used to introduce the topic of caring for the environment in the Life Orientation class, as the themes of giving voice to the voiceless and oppressed, and animal ethics, can be explored. This poem also includes examples of chickens' anatomy that may be explored in the Natural Sciences and Life Sciences classrooms.

Multi-layered wounds

Physical and emotional trauma is part of the South African psychological landscape, especially after our Apartheid history and the way it dehumanised, diminished, and brutalised the majority of the country's citizens. Therefore, many of the poems in the anthology explore this theme. Vox Lilium's "Shades of Depression" describes a common experience among young South Africans in extremely vivid terms:

> Diving headfirst into the deep,
>
> swallowing the cold unforgiving bleak black waters, taking it in as it surrounds you,
>
> covets you and like a demon in the dark it devours you.

This imagistic poem uses the metaphor of drawing in cold, dark water to represent the effect of depression. Mental illness is malevolent, unrelenting, and does not stop until the hapless person who has "dived" into it is completely destroyed. Writing poetry is therapeutic as it assists individuals

to process trauma and gives meaning to pain through self-expression (Jeffs & Pepper, 2005). Therefore, many activities in the anthology encourage teachers to allow learners to write poems either to help them deal with personal trauma or to empathise with others.

Busisiwe Mahlangu's "Lost Shelves" addresses the problem of Alzheimer's and dementia, which afflict many South Africans. Her compassion, not only for her grandmother, but also for the families of dementia patients, is palpable as she turns to pages of poetry to express her sorrow:

> The pages are missing inside my grandmother   torn
>
> and wet memory washed away   There are stories
>
> she keeps on her fingertips   Tucking them in under
>
> her nails each night
>
>
> Her name falls off her tongue -   another page
>
> snatched out of her book   Her back is the spine
>
> curling into a rainbow   the only reminder she has
>
> that the freedom promised came   although it forgot us
>
>
> My grandmother forgot   she is a book without
>
> language   she is history cleaned off the floors
>
> She holds an empty page   her life is   a blank
>
> on a sheet   a pause   a quiet between the wind
>
> Her husband reminds her of their wedding day
>
> playing the moment back with a song

she remembers the bells and the ginger beer

but not his name   not his face   she only knows

his voice   it belongs to a man who once touched her

bones   moved to their breaking

We fill the space with the past   We condense

seventy years inside a four-roomed house

We are holding grandmother's face close to her eyes

We watch her turn from paper to tree   and all that

she lost is just leaves   and this is autumn

Have you seen an empty library breathe?

Moving the air around it to survive   Ever seen

a book that can't be read   A line you cannot colour into

Have you ever seen dementia in a body   Ever lived

a life you cannot point at

Between the shelves in the library

I hold the books that know the place my grandmother sunk

into   every line I read is the language she lost   The

language lost is replaced   with terms and symptoms

that bend better in English   Alzheimer's is writing a new

book with her body without her voice

She is holding the air like that   like one day her body will

disappear like her mind did   She is enveloping her words

in steel   engraving herself somewhere   grandmother

watching pages of her diary float off her body

Grandma, there is still a book that has your name clear on the

Cover

I am a book that will never forget you   I will never forget you

The blank spaces inserted between many of the phrases in "Lost Shelves" point to the aporias in memory and highlight the absence that constitutes the loss of a beloved family member. It is likely that South African learners will be able to understand the feelings expressed in this poem.

Multimodal activities

Multilingualism considers the reality of multilingual classrooms in South Africa and the diversity of life-worlds, as learners come from various backgrounds, classes, ethnicities, and religions. Similarly, the classroom activities in *Amazwi Amasha* allow for a multimodal tapestry of experiencing poetry, as they engage learners in creating soundscapes, visual artworks, performances, and multimedia works. The learners' contexts are prioritised as they are frequently required to place themselves imaginatively into the poems.

The anthology includes various multimodal activities linked to the poems and which can be used to create dynamic learning spaces in various learning areas. "Acid Man and Lady Base" by Philip Mirkin is the first poem selected for inclusion in the anthology to indicate how the poems can be used to teach across the curriculum. Philip Joshua Mirkin taught Science for 30 years at secondary school level but found that learners were not fully or enthusiastically engaged with the subject. In order to encourage learners to engage, he wrote a poem about an experiment and found that learners responded well. He advocates a holistic approach to teaching, which engages learners on many levels, not only on a cognitive or rational level:

> Of these the ancient alchemists spoke
>
> Who knew them both as active folk.
>
> Base born of metal and acid her mate
>
> Have needs that only the other can sate.
>
>
> To find their nature, for what they strive,
>
> We place in sets of test-tubes five
>
> Magnesium, milk and copper sulphate,
>
> Crushed chalk and oil, our sacrifice, our bait.
>
>
> Acid brighten, dissolve and boil,
>
> To lift from solid its heavy toil.
>
> In one quick act his halide sword
>
> Or brimstone fire has form destroyed.
>
>
> Slower working, to hold and bind

Our lady's fruits, though soft in kind,

Take what is loose, unbound and free

And ground it. Give it presence to be.

When together these two we place,

The drive, the need, the hot embrace

Seems like a fight to dominate the lover.

Inanimate opposites attracting each other.

Then left to cool and crystallise,

As children born of their parents' demise,

Small shining beads, salt crystals delight,

To fructify the Earth as solidified light.

This poem personifies acids and bases and depicts them as being in a relationship in order to make abstract concepts more concrete to learners. Acids and bases are opposites chemically. An acid is a compound that increases the amount of hydrogen in an aqueous solution, while a base increases the amount of hydroxide ions in an aqueous solution. Giving these elements faces assists learners to grasp the concepts. Various activities have been designed and based on this poem for inclusion in the anthology. For instance, learners can roleplay two lovers' multimodal dance and can therefore recreate their understanding of this chemical reaction. While preparing for this chemical dance, learners answer questions that scaffold their understanding of chemistry, such as:

- Write the symbols for Hydrogen and Hydroxide Ion from the Periodic Table of Elements. [Bloom's Level 1: Knowledge]
- What kind of compounds are magnesium, milk, copper sulphate, chalk, and oil? [Bloom's Level 1: Knowledge]

- When you mix an acid with a base, a reaction happens called *neutralization*. How does the poet describe the role of the acid and the base in this process? [Bloom's Level 4: Analysis]

- According to the poet, what is left over after this acid base reaction? [Bloom's Level 4: Analysis]

The references to Bloom's Taxonomy after each question ensure that the activities address cognitive skills that learners need for academic success.

"your smile" by Zama Madinana also lends itself to an exploration of the different semiotic systems:

> no face mask can
>
> imprison
>
> the beauty
>
> of your smile
>
> no eskom
>
> can cut
>
> the power
>
> of your smile
>
> it is warm
>
> as the durban sun
>
> your smile is sweet
>
> like a mambazo song

As a pre-reading activity, learners are asked how the title of the poem makes them feel, and to explain their emotions through body language and facial expressions. Reading activities focus on learners' reading the poem and then listening to a variety of poems by iconic South African group *Ladysmith Black Mambazo*. This will lead to their choosing the song (aural modality) that fits the poem best. The image of the mask is used to scaffold activities across the curriculum. The metaphor of the mask can be used to explore the imagery in the poem. The mask as a metaphor for personality formation is also relevant for the Life Orientation classroom.

The poem can be used in various learning areas to stimulate debate and research. For Social Sciences, History, and Life Orientation, learners do research on an indigenous society in Africa that wear masks as part of its cultural practices. In Economics subjects, the role of Eskom in South

Africa's economy is explored and possible reasons for the poet to refer to Eskom in the poem are foregrounded. In Fine Art, and Design, learners are asked to draw a picture of "your smile" that is described in the poem. They then label the drawing with words and phrases from the poem. In the Technology classroom, learners explore the reason why so many power plants fail in South Africa.

Similarly, "purple has style", by Raphael d'Abdon contains a play on sound and colour that can be explored multimodally in the classroom:

> my city, usually
> ugly, in spring
> becomes
> the prettiest place
> on the planet.
>
> sunday,
> 6 am,
> prince
> in my earphones,
> a spliff
> between fingers,
>
> i walk through the
> purple tunnels of
> brooklyn, tshwane.
>
> purple is music
> purple is wind
> purple is snow
> purple is the rising sun
> purple has a sound
> purple has a name
> purple has eyes
> purple has wings
> purple has ears

purple has a voice

purple has style

purple rains

purple pops

purple yawns

purple sings

purple cries

purple glides

purple dances

purple rises

purple falls

purple lives

purple dies

purple on rooftops

purple on cars

purple on fences

purple on sidewalks

purple on roads

purple on road signs

purple on dustbins

purple on flowers

purple on my head

purple on my shoulders

purple on my shoes

purple in my mouth

purple in in my lungs

purple in my thoughts

purple in my blues

and the old ladies walking their tiny dogs,

and the runners in their fluorescent clothes,

and the bougainvillea,

oh yeah, the bougainvillea,

make all this look

even prettier.

fucking colonisers,
i hate to say it, but:
when you brought purple to this land
you keep raping every day,

you nailed it.

The repetition of "purple" in the poem creates a frothy, fun, musical sound. These repetitions are good examples of literary language for the language classroom. This poem can be spoken or rapped in the classroom by foregrounding the poem's sound effects, Prince's music, and rock phrases like "oh yeah". This activity engages the more vocal learners who prefer the oral and aural modes of expression. Additionally, learners make a list of all the descriptive nouns and verbs in the poem and use these as writing activities. The colour purple also paints a picture of the cityscape. This forms part of a drawing and colouring/painting activity in the Fine Arts classroom. The poem serves as an introductory activity when the topic of urban spaces is discussed in the Geography classroom. Furthermore, the teacher's reading of the poem may evoke more interest in the theme of plant life (e.g., jacaranda trees and the bougainvillea) in the Natural Sciences or Life Sciences classrooms. The final stanza broaches colonisation, and its political ("rape") and ecological effects on the colonised through introducing alien plant species. Reading this stanza in the History or Social Sciences classroom highlights the complex and controversial impact of colonisation.

Conclusion

The editorial team intends in our work with secondary school learners to assess the effectiveness of the selected poems and their associated exercises. Until this has been done, any evaluation of the anthology's success must be provisional. Some of the anthologists are teacher educators, who will pilot the anthology in their modules. The hope is that the richness of the anthology will convince the Department of Basic Education (which, up to now, has not been involved in the anthology's compilation), to prescribe it for the EFAL classroom.

The poems selected for inclusion in *Amazwi Amasha* have been selected to address the three barriers to secondary school learning. We have chosen up-to-date poems, which were written in the

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same epoch as most learners were born in; they depict themes that face many adolescents and young adults in South Africa in the early twenty-first century; and the language they employ is accessible to twenty-first-century learners who are steeped in social media and accustomed to multilingualism and translanguaging. They are dynamic artefacts of learning, showcasing language and themes which address learners' life-worlds, experiences, and concerns. Musawenkosi Khanyile's poem, "Before I Die" stresses the life-long relevance of poetry as a uniquely creative way to communicate ephemeral experiences and honour the self in context:

> sky of many words
> teach me how to listen
> to a poem written by the sea
> i want to learn the ways of water
>
> teach my ears how to swim
> through stale rivers
> that fail to recite
> the ocean's fresh air
>
> sky of my grandmother's song
> teach my voice how to hold
> the storm in your dance
> so I can read my way out of
> this avalanche of ignorance
>
> teach my stomach
> how to be resilient
> against the hunger
> that consumes patience
> urging my pen
> to follow mediocrity
>
> mother of many skies
> teach my eyes how to listen
> because I doubt we can improve

upon your blank page

teach me how to write the rain
on dry palms of your sea
because there are no more words
to hide my violent emptiness

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