

Where I Became Discussion Guide

Where I Became is a documentary film about the education journey of 14 women, the scholars from South Africa, who received a full scholarship to attend college in the United States.

Narrated in their own voices, the film recounts their experiences growing up in South Africa under the system of racial segregation called Apartheid. The oppressive apartheid system offered lesser education opportunities to non-whites. Drawing on determination and resolve, these scholars left their homes and families to pursue education and a better life.

Thuma Mina: *Send Me*

In the opening of the film, Nolwandle and her best friend Tandiwe walk in a parade of alumnae at their 25th reunion at Smith College. As the music of a marching band fades out we hear Hugh Masekela's "Thuma Mina", which means "Send Me" in Zulu.

Thuma Mina is a contemporary song with themes that originate in South African churches. It has been used by the African National Congress and by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in his campaigns. It is a cry for people to volunteer, and to reach out to those less fortunate. Hugh Masakela wanted to inspire South Africans to embrace people struggling with addiction, abuse, suffering from poverty, and AIDs.

Music and protest songs were an important part of lifting the spirits of people fighting in the anti-apartheid movement. *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*, one of the most famous songs from the struggle, became South Africa's national anthem. Throughout history, music has played a key role in bringing inspiration and relief to those in need, or working against injustice.

Q: Can you give examples, such as political movements or humanitarian causes, where music has played a role in inspiring people to rise up and make a difference through action?

Q: Does music play a role in inspiring you to contribute to your society?

Apartheid and Bantu Education

The apartheid system, as described in the film by Dr. Nomazengle A. Mangaliso, had its roots in segregation under British rule and was codified in 1948 when the Nationalist Party came to power. It created a racial hierarchy which benefited white people.

In 1953 the Bantu Education Act segregated students by race into separate schools. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, a Dutch-born South African, was a professor of sociology and psychology, who became a politician and implemented many of the policies and laws of this system of racial segregation and oppression, including the Bantu education system. He believed education should be limited for the majority Black population, so that they would not aspire beyond menial labor.

Q: Why did the apartheid government target the education system?

Q: What do you expect are some of the consequences on a society when access to education is restricted?

Resistance and Youth

In the fight against apartheid, individuals and communities in different countries and continents took up causes to support the anti apartheid struggle. Connected only by a shared conviction, their collective efforts ultimately brought an end to apartheid.

Q: What are some issues today that connect individuals and communities in taking action?

Getting an Education

Today, South Africa is a diverse society with many ethnicities and twelve official languages. When the scholars in *Where I Became* were growing up, apartheid had been in place for over forty years, and the racially segregated Bantu education system was entrenched.

To try to get an education and overcome such a system took tremendous generational and personal effort and sacrifice. Some scholars were educated in government schools, others attended private boarding schools. Her race, and where she lived, were determining factors in what kind of education she could receive. Scholars lived in townships, suburbs, homelands, and in exile outside of South Africa. The scholars talk

about the struggle to get an education. For some, families chose “freedom first and then education;” for others it was “education first, then freedom.”

Q: What did it mean to choose freedom first or education first?

Q: What would you choose and why?

Many of the scholars were living in the United States and attending Smith College, or recently graduated, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and ran to be the first President of a free South Africa. Some scholars saw opportunities in the United States, and for others they decided to return to South Africa.

Q: What are some of the reasons they stayed in the US? Why did some return to South Africa?

Q: Imagine that you have the choice to stay in a foreign country and build a career, or return to your home country, which offers less immediate opportunity, but great potential to create the society you envision. What would you choose, and why?

Race and Identity

Race is a social construct that defines and categorizes people based on physical characteristics such as skin color or hair texture. When the scholars arrived at Smith College, they were identified as International Students. Once on campus, some of the scholars chose to join the Black Students Association, and became aware of the sensitive and complex issues of race in America. Vivi pursued African American Studies as a path to understanding the struggle of Black people in America. Desiree understood that being away from home gave her the distance and perspective to understand her life under apartheid.

Q: What might be some of the comparisons between African American culture, and Black South African culture? Why might these distinctions be culturally significant?

Q: How did the experience of studying at Smith College change how the scholars perceived themselves?

Q: How does race play a part in your identity, if at all?

Women in Leadership

The participation of women in professional and economic activity is an ongoing journey of transformation. Nolwandle articulates how important it is for women to "lift as we rise," stating that we cannot be the only woman at the table and think that is okay. At 1:21:17, Heather reflects on the qualities of a great leader: "You really have to have heart... it's also about being courageous... and your willingness to get uncomfortable and really to say, 'I'm prepared to lose everything I have, because I believe so firmly that walking this path is gonna make it better for more people.'"

Q: What does leadership mean to you? What types of leaders do you observe in your community?

Q: In your opinion, what qualities should a leader possess?

Q: How can people in leadership roles empower women and individuals from all different backgrounds to achieve their goals and become leaders?

Becoming

The title of the documentary, "Where I Became," is stated by Nolwandle. Through these words, she expresses the impact of her education at Smith College on her sense of self, her ability to become who she wanted to be, and the empowerment she obtained from her education.

Q: What does the title of the film mean to you? How do you think about "becoming" in your life and what your journey will be?

Q: What barriers do you feel might be in your way, and where do you see a path forward?

Q: How has your education affected you in "becoming" who you are? How would you like to continue and expand your personal journey on "becoming?"

Q: What are some ways to help others along the way?