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## Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



### Cry, the Beloved Country

by Alan Paton

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Biographical Notes on Alan Paton

Alan Paton, a white man born in South Africa in 1903, dedicated much of his life to improving the lives of native South Africans during the period of racial segregation known as Apartheid. A religious man, he believed in Christian values and the power of God to improve conditions in South Africa.

Paton, of British heritage, learned to speak both Afrikaans (the language spoken by the Dutch settlers) and Zulu. In love with his homeland—its beautiful countryside and rich traditions—Paton wanted all South Africans (Afrikaans, Zulu, and English speaking) united for the good of the country.

Accepting the job as warden of the Diepkloof Reformatory, Paton believed he could make a difference in the lives of the young natives and set about transforming the reformatory from something that was dirty and dismal to a place that had a purpose other than detention. It was from these and other first-hand experiences that Paton wrote *Cry, the Beloved Country*. When published in 1948, it became an immediate success. Paton died in South Africa in 1992 before the social changes he ardently worked for were instituted.

All references come from the Scribner's Edition of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, copyright 2003.

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to*

1. point out how the novel's protagonist, Stephen Kumalo, changes during the course of the story with regard to the following:
  - his relationship with his son, Absalom
  - his struggle with his faith in God
  - his views on the destruction of the tribal system and whether it can be mended
  - his understanding of James Jarvis
2. write a character profile for James Jarvis and point out how he grows and changes over the course of the novel, specifically with regard to the following:
  - his understanding of his son, Arthur
  - his acknowledgement of his own role, as a white man, in the destruction of native culture
  - his views on native crime
  - his understanding of Stephen Kumalo
  - his concern for the people of Ndotsheni
3. discuss the following symbols in the story, explaining the meaning and significance of each:
  - red earth as a symbol for the destruction of the tribal way of life
  - the lamp burning outside of the church in Ndotsheni as a symbol for hope
  - the "brightness" of Arthur Jarvis and his son as a symbol of life and rebirth
4. infer information about characters and events when such information is not explicitly stated.
5. discuss aspects of the author's writing style, which include the following:
  - short phrases to illustrate English as a second language for many of the characters
  - the use of a beginning dash to punctuate the dialogue in place of quotation marks
  - the use of repetition for emphasis
6. identify and define the following literary devices used in the novel:
  - anaphora
  - apostrophe
  - epistrophe
  - foreshadowing
  - irony
  - metaphor
  - sarcasm
  - simile

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What do Gertrude's new clothes symbolize? Why does she leave them behind when she returns to her immoral life? Why do you think she chooses to return to that life?
2. "But they were feeding an old man with milk, and pretending that he would one day grow into a boy."

What does this metaphor say about the government's efforts to help the chief? How much power does the Zulu chief have to help his people?

3. Compare the lives of the following native women. Why are they different? Do the women themselves have the power to change their circumstances? Give reasons for your answers.
  - Mrs. Kumalo
  - Absalom's girlfriend
  - Gertrude Kumalo
  - Mrs. Lithebe
4. Discuss the difference between third-person omniscient and third-person limited point of view. Which narration is used most often in the first paragraph of each chapter? Why?
5. Discuss the following statement: Religion is important to the story because Christian values and faith help the characters endure their suffering, guide the characters into decent lives, and promote hope for the future of South Africa.
6. How does James Jarvis help the natives of Ndotsheni begin to rebuild their lives, giving them hope for the future? Do you think they could they have managed it without his assistance? Why?
7. Why are many of the white citizens of Johannesburg reluctant to support social programs that aim to reduce native crime?
8. List the reasons many of the young natives are leaving their homes to make new lives in Johannesburg. What impact does this migration have on South African culture and economy?
9. What is the author's opinion of power? How can it be beneficial? Conversely, how can it be a corrupting influence? Cite events from the story to support your answer.
10. Trace Stephen Kumalo's growth over the course of the novel with regard to the following:
  - his relationship with his son, Absalom
  - his struggle with his faith in God
  - his views on the destruction of the tribal system and whether it can be mended
  - his understanding of James Jarvis

# Cry, the Beloved Country

## Book I

### Chapter 1

#### VOCABULARY

**bracken** – a large fern  
**desolate** – abandoned; without life  
**forlorn** – sad, miserable  
**maize** – corn  
**unshod** – without shoes

1. What do the first two lines of the book tell the reader about the author’s opinion of Africa?

“There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.”

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2. Define *kloof*, *titihoya*, and *veld*.

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3. Briefly describe changes in the landscape between the lush hills and the valley below.

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4. One of the novel’s major themes is the destruction of both the African countryside and the tribal way of life. How might the red earth symbolize this destruction?

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**Chapter 4**

VOCABULARY

**alighted** – stepped off  
**Anglican** – relating to the Church of England  
**bewildering** – confusing; puzzling  
**courteously** – politely  
**decent** – honest; good; respectable  
**decently** – properly; tastefully  
**endurance** – the ability to withstand something  
**falter** – to hesitate; stumble  
**immense** – huge; enormous  
**kraal** – [Afrikaans] an enclosure for animals; a pen or corral  
**pilgrimage** – a journey; mission  
**procession** – a group that moves onward in an orderly manner  
**rearing** – raising high

1. Kumalo learns that many of his fellow passengers are headed for Johannesburg to find work. In what field are most of them hoping to find employment?

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2. Why is Kumalo afraid to cross the street?

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## Chapter 9

### VOCABULARY

**corrugated** – grooved or ridged  
**perplexed** – puzzled; confused  
**severely** – harshly, sternly  
**tamper** – to alter illegally or wrongly  
**travail** – hardship; labor; stress

Chapter 9 is the first of three chapters that do not contribute directly to the plot line. Instead, it helps the reader understand life in South Africa in general through short scenes unrelated to Kumalo's search for his son. Many critics believe the overall concept of the deterioration of black character and traditions is presented in Book I. Be sure to keep that in mind when answering these questions.

1. For what reasons do native people from all over the country move to Johannesburg?

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2. Briefly describe the housing available in Johannesburg for black people.

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3. How do black people get a house?

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4. What is Shanty Town? Is it a healthy place to live?

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5. What is done to try to eliminate Shanty Town? Why are the government's efforts unsuccessful?

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