



Books and Bricks: How a School Rebuilt the Community

Sindiwe Magona

Cornelius Van Wright, Illustrator

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A powerful, uplifting story, Books and Bricks emphasizes the importance of both community and education.

Having herself grown up in South Africa under the brutal racial inequalities of apartheid, author Sindiwe Magona shares the inspiring true story of one school's transformation in *Books and Bricks: How a School Rebuilt the Community*.

The voices of the street call out to the students of Manyano School, carrying tempting offers: drop out and join the revelry! Such opportunities are rampant in Brown Veld Township until one day a new voice comes along, offering something altogether different.

Eleven-year-old Salmina never misses a day of school. The building may be crumbling, with broken glass in the yard and vandals lurking in the shadows, but it's better than the fighting and hunger at home. Besides, her mother and teachers know that black children will be leaders one day, if only they receive an education. When a series of thefts robs the school of a priceless opportunity, the community, led by a charismatic new principal, bands together in an extraordinary way.

Salmina's story is amazing in its simplicity and effectiveness. When the principal, Mr. Williams, invites parents to use the classrooms and schoolyard for projects and brainstorming, many unemployed fathers use the only skill they have—brickmaking. Drawing from an actual, award-winning project conducted in 1994 at Zerilda Park Primary School in Cape Town, including the life of Dr. Allistair Witten, the inspiration for Mr. Williams, the book provides in-depth details of the project that has been celebrated worldwide for its impact on poverty reduction and community development.

Black-and-white sketches from Cornelius Van Wright, coupled with a fun, rhythmic sprinkling of slang, showcase South African customs and culture. A variety of appendices are included, both for clarity and further exploration, from a glossary of Afrikaans words to maps of Africa, a biography of Nelson Mandela, and discussion questions appropriate for sixth graders like Salmina.

A powerful, uplifting story, *Books and Bricks* is a reminder that “No nation can advance or thrive if it does not make the education of its children a priority.”

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (Children's SIP 2017)

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