



Talk to the peach tree

Sipho Sepamla

Let's talk to the swallows
visiting us in summer
ask how it is in other
countries

Let's talk to the afternoon
shadow
ask how the day has been
so far

Let's raise our pets to our
level
ask them what they don't
know of us

words have lost meaning
like all notations they've

Talk to the paralysing heat
in the air
inquire how long the
mercilessness will last

Let's pick out items from the
rubbish heap
ask how the stench is like
down there

Let's talk to the peach tree
find out how it feels to be in
the ground

Let's talk to the moon going
down





Siphiso Sepamla

centered [his] poetry
around life in the

townships and
expressed the anger
and frustration of the
urban, educated
black, increasingly
hemmed in and

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03064227808532726>

urban sensibility,
perfectly suited to
finding the chinks in
the regime's fibrous
armour and thrusting

"Sepamla, (Sydney) Siphiso"
"Contemporary Poets."
Encyclopedia.com. 16 Jan.
2023 <<https://www.encyclopedia.com>
>.

1932 – 2007; Soweto; poet, novelist,

Afternoon shadow... ASK
HOW

Pets... ASK THEM

Paralysing heat... INQUIRE
HOW

Rubbish... ASK HOW

Peach Tree... FIND OUT
HOW

Moon... ASK IF

...the devil himself

What is the aim of
having a conversation

Let's talk!



context

- Sepamla is voicing his opinion on the political talks that took place between opposing parties before the end of Apartheid
- Negotiations lead to the successful dismantling of the Apartheid system
- Democracy - 1994
- Series of ridiculous questions to inanimate objects/ animals/ ending with asking the important question

On 14 September 1991 the apartheid government and 18 other organizations including trade unions, political organizations and churches signed the National Peace Accord (NPA). All parties committed themselves to a peaceful process of negotiation up to the democratic elections. Subsequent to the signing of the NPA, in 1991 a negotiating forum known as Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was set up. On 20 December 1991 the first plenary session of CODESA convened at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park and appointed working group to deal with specific issues. In early 1992 De Klerk called for a

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/negotiations-and-transition>





Take note



FORM

Free
verse
poem

Couplets
and last
stanza
three



STRUCTURE

Certain stanzas follow
same pattern

Indented lines indicate
a commentary on the
content



DICTION

Colloquial
and
conversa-
tional



TONE

From
casual to
more
serious and
then
relieved



THEMES

Open and honest
dialogue is needed
for change

It is essential to see
things from
another's

Introduces the
theme of
conversation/
dialogue

Talk to the Pear

Recurring image in
Sepamla's poetry
And a symbol of
the natural world



Let's talk to "us" visiting us in summer

ask how it is in other countries

Conversational and colloquial
Includes the reader/another party
"us"

Small but hardy bird who travels thousands of kilometres and would be able to bring news of outside SA

South Africa was largely cut off from the world (sanctions)
People of colour limited means to travel
Attempt to find out about people who are different

Positive connotation
'good times'
When things are going well in SA?



Afternoon = towards the
end of day/ coming up
to the ending of
Apartheid?

Slightly ominous
image
Segregation/oppression
haunting people

ask how **the day** has been
so far

An ordinary/mundane
question
Contrasts to the real issue
But also an attempt to hear
others' experience

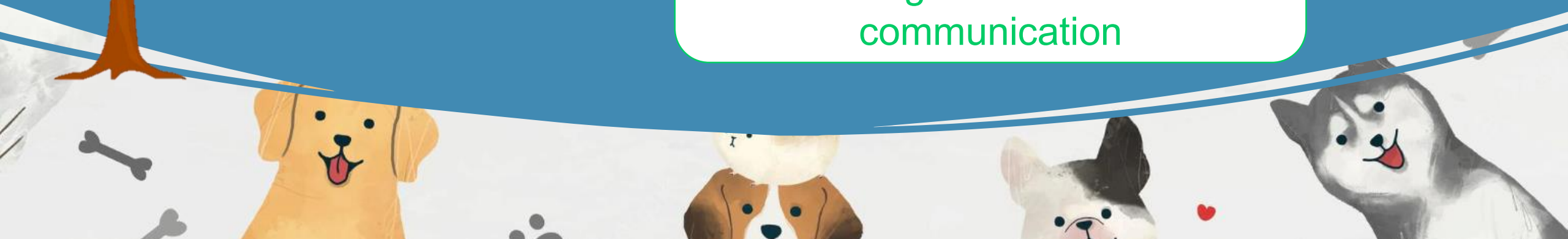


Dual meaning =
physically lift or
elevate to our
intelligence

Another seemingly nonsensical
comparison though people do
have deep connections to their
pets

ask them what they don't
know of us

Alluding to lack of understanding
between vastly different parties
owing to barriers to
communication



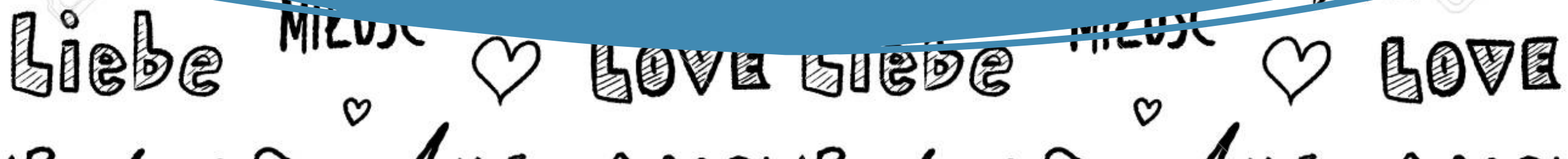
Can be powerful
means of
communicating

words have lost
like all notations they've
been misused

If the definition of a word
is unclear, communication
is ineffective
Also words without action
are meaningless

Systems of writing/
ways of decoding the
world

Words have immense power – in the
wrong hands they are weapons
Apartheid government used nuances
of language (e.g. separate
development)



Sexist and
negative
connotation
Unpleasant
onomatopoeia
and alliteration

most people w
a whining woman can
overstate her case

Sometimes a position of
weakness in dialogue

Alluding to another weakness
in communication
Nagging/exaggeration/overly
emotional



talk to the paralysing heat

Strong diction
Limited from taking action

Oppressive heat
Could allude to danger/anger

The only stanza of this style that omits the 'Let's' indicating it is more serious

inquire how long the
mercilessness will last

Sense of desperation
Probably an oft asked question by people who are oppressed

Reference to the unacceptable treatment of people of colour?
Reality of racism



Non-specific
If referring to people =
dehumanising

Things that have been discarded
People of colour treated as less than human
Connotations of dirt and decay

ask how the stench is like
down there

Emotive with negative
connotation
Extremely awful smell
(terrible conditions)

Suggestion of being looked
down upon
Allusion to oppressor vs
oppressed?



Let's talk to the peach tree

Titular line

Peach trees are beautiful
and bear nourishing and
delicious fruit

find out how it feels to be in the ground



Seeking to understand the
experience of others
Essential for 'fruitful' dialogue

Being grounded/ having a
solid foundation could
relate to belonging
Not experienced by
displaced and
disenfranchised people of
colour

A romantic image
Also a celestial body with higher position
and the ability to see things from a more
global perspective

ask if it isn't enough eyeing
what's been going on



Suggestion of asking
for more than one
deserves/ more than
others have

Very colloquial phrase
reminding us that this is
a comfortable 'chat'

come on

let's talk to the devil

Colloquial but
slightly more
forceful
Still including
the reader in
the call for
action

Finally a
'person'
Epitome of
evil =
Apartheid
government
The source of
all distress

it's about time

Sense of relief that the
long-awaited conversation
is finally taking place



CONTEXTUAL Questions



**HERE ARE SOME TYPICAL EXAM QUESTIONS
YOU CAN EXPECT:**

1. Comment on the poet's choice of line 15 as the title of the poem. (2)
2. Explain the significance of lines 7 and 8. (2)
3. Account for the indentation of stanza 3, 4 and 10. (2)

Approaching Contextual Questions



- ✓ Let the **mark allocation** guide the length and detail of your response
 - One mark per point
 - All responses should include an explanation + reference to the poem + link to the question
 - PEEL
- ✓ Look for the **verb (instruction word)** and allow that to dictate how you approach the question
- ✓ Make sure you know **where (line/stanza)** you need to focus for each response
- ✓ Make sure you know what **aspect of the poem** needs to be addressed.

CONTEXTUAL Questions



1. Comment on the poet's choice of line 15 as the title of the poem. (2)

Although the poet could have chosen any line for the title, the choice of the one about the peach tree shows us that he considered this an important idea (P). The speaker asks the peach tree “how it feels to be in the ground” (Eg), which links to the concept of feeling like one belongs (Ex), which was something most citizens were missing (P) before South African became a democracy (Ex). This links to the main message of

CONTEXTUAL Questions



2. Explain the significance of lines 7 and 8.

(2)

Lines 7 and 8 speak about the limitations of words (P). This is significant to the message of the poem, which is that we need to engage in meaningful conversation. (P) When the speaker says that “words have lost meaning” (Eg) and are not an effective form of expression (Ex) and have been “misused” (Eg). We see that just because people are speaking, does not mean that they are solving anything (Ex). This is important to the

CONTEXTUAL Questions



3. Account for the indentation of stanza 3, 4 and 10.
(2)

The indented lines show that the speaker is providing a commentary on what has been written previously. (P) While the other stanzas follow the same structure of asking questions to various objects/things (Eg), these stanzas show the speaker's feelings more accurately. (Ex) The speaker discusses the efficacy of words ("lost meaning") (Eg) and ends off with his feeling about talking to "the devil" (Eg) providing an effective end

CONTEXTUAL Questions



4. Discuss the effectiveness of the stylistic choices in “Let’s”.

(3)

With “Let’s”, the poet uses repetition, colloquial register and inclusion. (P) The contraction (Eg) creates a more informal feel (P), as if the speaker is addressing the reader in casual conversation (Ex) and the reference to ‘us’ (Eg) further makes us feel included (Ex). The fact that this is repeated at the beginning of six of the stanzas (Eg), shows us its importance. (Ex) These choices are all effective to help the reader to get a sense for the

CONTEXTUAL Questions



5. Comment critically on how the imagery lines 11 – 14 contrasts with the first three stanzas. (3)

Lines 11 to 14 use noticeably more negative imagery than the beginning of the poem. (P) The use of images such as the “paralysing heat” (Eg) and items taken off the “rubbish heap” (Eg) jar the reader into realising that the content of the poem may not be as pleasant as we first thought (P). This is about a more serious issue – the end of the “mercilessness” of Apartheid rule. (Ex) By using this more emotive diction, the speaker is showing us the hardships of people who lived under the heat of

CONTEXTUAL Questions



6. Critically discuss the tone of the final line.
(3)

The tone of the final line is one of relief (P). The speaker feels that this conversation, which, in the context of the poem, marked the way to a peaceful transition to democracy, was something for which people had waited (P) for a long time (Ex) and it was “about time” (Eg). We can also see, though, that it took courage to start this talk, as the devil (Eg) is an imposing figure, as were the Apartheid leaders (Ex). The tone leaves the reader with a



Essay Question

In an essay of 250 – 300 words, discuss how the poet uses diction and register to convey the importance of

Approaching ESSAY Questions



- ✓ Allow the two/three stylistic aspects in the question to guide your paragraphing
- ✓ In the introduction and conclusion, rework the wording from the question to give focus
 - Introduction should include the context of the poem and its message
 - More confident pupils can use synonyms of keywords
 - Try to bring own commentary
- ✓ PEEL each paragraph
 - **Point** (topic sentence using stylistic element from the question)
 - **Example** of this element from the poem
 - **Explanation** of the example
 - **Link** the example back to the topic using the wording from the question
- ✗ Avoid overly long quotations



In an essay of 250 – 300 words, discuss how the poet uses diction and register to convey the importance of conversations in reconciliation.

Introduction:

Sipho Sepamla's poem, "Talk to the Peach Tree" speaks to the negotiations that took place between the National Party and opposition organisations that ultimately lead to South Africa's new era of democracy. In the poem, he uses diction and register to convey the importance of conversations



In an essay of 250 – 300 words, discuss how the poet uses diction and register to convey the importance of conversations in reconciliation.

Paragraph 1:

Sepamla uses a combination of positive and negative diction when addressing the concept of reconciliation via dialogue. Negative words such as “whining” show that not all communication is constructive. This is reiterated by “words have lost meaning”, which suggests that words can fail to help us if they are not used correctly. The seemingly odd questions the speaker asks (even though most cannot answer back), illustrates the importance of



In an essay of 250 – 300 words, discuss how the poet uses diction and register to convey the importance of conversations in reconciliation.

Paragraph 2:

Sepamla's choice of register contributes greatly to our understanding of the role of conversation in bringing people together. The speaker's language is colloquial and inclusive. The repeated use of "us" shows that he is speaking to a group of people, who are all included in the conversation. Conversational language such as "Let's", "how... is like down there" and "what's been going on" helps the poem to feel accessible to the reader. It almost



In an essay of 250 – 300 words, discuss how the poet uses diction and register to convey the importance of conversations in reconciliation.

Conclusion:

In Sepamla's poem, there is powerful use of diction and register to show that the inequalities of Apartheid South Africa needed to be resolved through effective conversations where people felt included and where their perspective considered valuable.