



The child who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga

INGRID JONKER

Background

- ▶ Ingrid Jonker is one of South Africa's most well-known poets.
- ▶ Born in 1933, died 1965
- ▶ The poem reflects on the pass laws in South African history
- ▶ Was originally written in Afrikaans
- ▶ Was read by Nelson Mandela in the SONA in 1994.



**The child who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga (translation 1968)
(translated by Jack Cope and William Plomer)**

The child is not dead
the child lifts his fists against his mother
who screams Afrika shouts the scent
of freedom and the veld
5 in the locations of the cordoned heart

The child lifts his fists against his father
in the march of the generations
who are shouting Afrika shout the scent
of righteousness and blood
10 in the streets of his warrior pride

The child is not dead
not at Langa not at Nyanga
not at Orlando not at Sharpeville
not at the police station in Philippi
15 where he lies with a bullet through his brain

The child is the shadow of the soldiers
on guard with rifles saracens and batons
the child is present at all gatherings and law-giving
the child peers through house windows and
into the hearts of mothers

the child who wanted just to play in the sun at
Nyanga is everywhere

the child grown to a man treks all over Africa

21 the child grown to a giant travels through the whole
world

22 Without a pass

Some special literary devices

ENJAMBMENT

- the poet cuts off a line before its natural stopping point

ANAPHORA

- the poet repeats the same word or words at the beginning of lines

ALLUSION

- the poet refers to something but doesn't provide readers with all the details that they need to understand it

Structure and form



consists of four stanzas and ends with a one-line coda



Uneven sets of lines



Free verse – no rhyme scheme



Written from the third-person point of view



Uses the iambic rhythm (daa-dum) that resonates with the footsteps of protest

Word play

Veld

- Savannah/grasslands

locations
(two meanings)

- A place or
- the areas created during apartheid

Cordoned

- Fenced off

Saracens

- Armoured vehicles

Title

The Child who was Shot Dead by Soldiers at Nyanga

Symbol of the innocent children who were killed by soldiers under Apartheid in SA.

Protest poem against Apartheid

Draws a common idea that violence in a country destroys innocent members of society. This damages the country and its future.

The Child represents all children



Stanza 1

In the first stanza of *'The Child Who Was Shot Dead by Soldiers in Nyanga,'* the speaker begins by noting that "The child," the most important symbol throughout the poem, is "not dead." The child becomes a symbol of resistance and hope. The speaker describes how this child raised his fists against his elders and screamed for "freedom," seeking out a new way of living. The "locations of the cordoned heart" is a symbol for the areas of Africa affected by the cruel apartheid laws of the period.

The child **is not dead**
the child **lifts his fists against his** mother
who screams Afrika shouts the scent
of freedom and the veld
in the locations of the cordoned heart

The speaker repeats the phrase "the child" throughout the poem.

Anaphora

The phrases "is not dead", "lifts his fists against his..." and "who screams Afrika" are repeated.

Repetition

Stanza 2

The second stanza begins with a repetition of the second line of the poem. This time, the child raises his fists against his father. His father is present in the march of generations. It portrays the march of South Africans against the “pass laws”. In one of these demonstrations at Sharpeville, several children were killed. The incident moved Jonker to pen down this piece.

**The child lifts his fists against his father
in the march of the generations
who are shouting Afrika shout the scent
of righteousness and blood
in the streets of his warrior pride**

Images like “fists” and “blood” are ways to ensure readers understand the child’s purpose and the passion behind his words.

The speaker notes that the child stands up to his father and screams for justice for those lost under apartheid. The child is resisting and pushing back against a system that was incredibly unjust and unimaginably brutal.

Stanza 3

The third stanza begins with a repetition of the first line that acts as a refrain. It is meant for the sake of emphasizing the idea concerning the child's death. He is not dead. The brutal forces cannot kill him or others like him present in the townships such as Langa, Nyanga, Orlando, and Philippi.

**The child is not dead
not at Langa not at Nyanga
not at Orlando not at Sharpeville
not at the police station in Philippi
where he lies with a bullet through his brain**

Irony: The child is not dead but also lies with a bullet in his head.

The repetition of 'not' represents what cannot be erased.

POINT OF INFORMATION:

Langa township is located in Cape Town, South Africa. On 21 March 1960, several anti-pass protestors were killed there on the same day as the Sharpeville massacre.

Nyanga is a township in the Western Cape, South Africa. The residents of Nyanga also joined the national call to protest the Apartheid laws passed in 1960.

The title of the poem refers to a child of Nyanga who was killed by the soldiers.

The last line tells readers that the child lies with a bullet in his head at the Philippi police station. This image depicts the horrific rule of the apartheid regime.

Stanza 4

According to the poet, the child is omnipresent. He can easily slip into all the meetings and legislations. It seems as if he is overseeing everything and informing his countrymen about the things, they were unaware of. He peeps through the windows and into the hearts of mothers. The child does so in order to infuse the spirit of anger inside the mothers who were silent. They cannot remain silent. They must speak up, stand up, and snatch what they deserve.

**The child is the shadow of the soldiers
on guard with rifles saracens and batons
the child is present at all gatherings and law-giving
the child peers through house windows and into the hearts of mothers
the child who wanted just to play in the sun at Nyanga is everywhere
the child grown to a man treks all over Africa
the child grown to a giant travels through the whole world**

The child conveys to his people that he wants nothing bigger than their demands. He just wanted to play in the sun of Nyanga, nothing else. Children should be playing – not involved in politics. But, after his death, the whole country has become his playground. Now, he has transformed into a man and treks through Africa. The “giant” being his legacy.

All the lines of the fourth stanza begin with the phrase “**The child**”. Jonker uses this device for the sake of emphasizing her ideas. According to her, the dead child is now the “shadow of soldiers”. It means he is walking the same brutal path to avenge the deaths of others like him. The shadow is also a connotation of memories.

CODA

The coda at the end is an important part of the poem. It refers to the pass laws which were a form of internal passport system designed to segregate the population, manage urbanisation, and allocate migrant labour. According to the poet, the dead do not require a pass. Does it implicitly highlight the fact that one must die in order to move across his own country? The irony is that people of colour could not in the apartheid era. Only the dead could.

Without a pass

Gives the final punch in the poem. The child can travel wherever they wish.



The child does all this without permission, including becoming a “giant” who travels through the whole world. The sense of freedom the child embodies goes far and wide throughout the world without permission or any allowances. This is another way of exploring how powerful the anti-Apartheid movement was.

Themes

Protest and resistance

Anger and frustration

Brutality

Freedom

Tone and mood



The tone is bold and expressive of firm determination.



In the first three stanzas of the poem, the tone is emotive, nationalistic, and firm.



This uncompromising tone changes to an ironic one in the following lines regarding the movement of people.



The mood of the text is angry, protesting, and unrelenting.