



Hottentot Venus - That's what they call me

Monica Clarke

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This is the story of the life of an ordinary young woman, written in simple language. It will give young people above the age of 13 a chance to discuss their future in a world which increasingly erodes their rights, and will give them the opportunity to consider their capacity to live their dreams and gain power over their own lives.

In the year 1810 Saartjie Baartman was stowed away on a ship by a British army surgeon and his South African business partner and taken to Britain and then to France to be put on display in exhibition halls. She thought she was going overseas to be a nursery maid. She ended in bonded labour.

Does this still sound familiar today?

This book introduces the young thinker to the concepts of grooming of young people for favours, and of fraud and exploitation, which are often excused by allegations of collusion.

Genital mutilation is addressed, for the size of Saartjie's genitalia was at the bottom of the weird exhibition of her body. It is hoped that after students have considered Saartjie's life, they will not find funny the myths about the sexual prowess of black persons, which are still laughed about in open jokes in pubs today.

Students are given a chance to reconsider the British involvement with Apartheid, and are given an opportunity to objectify the myth that the British had nothing to do with it.

And they might be amazed to discover that black people have been part of British history for centuries, for in 1810 it is recorded that they looked to themselves for assistance and organisation, rather than to their white friends, whilst only the efforts of abolitionists like Wilberforce are publicly known.

A taste is given into rituals of indigenous life, such as the rain ceremony, burial and initiation ceremonies. And a peep is given for teens into what it is like when a young girl starts menstruating, and into childbirth. Through other insights into the lives of the South African indigenous people, the student interested in the proper recording of history will learn that Saartjie's story is also the story of all colonized aboriginal people the world over: one of a constant stream of human rights abuses.

Most of Saartjie's human rights were eroded, as can be seen when one reads The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the countries in the United Nations in 1948. (Long after Saartjie's death, but rights which she was nevertheless born with):

No 3 The right to live in freedom and safety

No 4 Not to be enslaved or to enslave

No 5 Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us

No 6 We all have the same right to use the law

No 12 Nobody should harm our good name

No 13 We have the right to go where we want to in our own country and to travel abroad as we wish

No 22 We all have the right to a home, enough money to live on, to enjoy the arts and make use of our skills


No 30 Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us.

Saartjie was bullied and coerced: She was pinched and poked. She was trafficked and put into bonded labour. Students would have heard that human trafficking and bonded labour are now on a frightening increase more than 200 years after Saartjie's death.

Saartjie vocalises for us the experiences of displaced people and refugees when she describes what it is like to be a foreign national in a strange land.

The basic language used in this text, written through the eyes and mouth of Saartjie herself, makes easy reading for young teens as well as the less-educated reader. Many of those readers do not know Saartjie's story. For them this book is written.

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