

OPINION

- 6 Which demands of the Freedom Charter were most important? Give reasons for your opinion.
- 7 The apartheid government considered the Freedom Charter to be a "Communist document". Find reasons for this opinion.

PROJECT

- 8 Find out about the restrictive legislation of the apartheid regime that was established in the 1950s. Have a look at the main laws that were passed during this time. Which areas of life were affected by it?
- 9 Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Each group should find at least three laws and discuss them in class. What did they mean for ordinary people? To what extent were these laws an essential part of the segregation process?

7

James Matthews

"The Park"

James Matthews (*1929) is a writer of fiction and a journalist. His short story "The Park", which was first published in the quarterly magazine *Présence Africaine* in 1962, shows the effects of apartheid from the perspective of an African boy who passes a playground on his way from home to the white customers of his mother, who washes their clothes. – Jean Marquard (ed.): *A Century of South African Short Stories* (Craighall/RSA: A.D. Donker, 1986), pp. 317f., 323-326.

1 He looked longingly at the
children on the other side of
the railings; the children
sliding down the chute,
5 landing with feet astride on
the bouncy lawn; screaming
as they almost touched the
sky with each upward curve
of their swings; their joyful
10 demented shrieks at each
dip of the merry-go-round.



A picture from old apartheid times

15 He looked at them and his body trembled and ached to
share their joy; buttocks to fit board, and hands and feet
to touch steel. Next to him, on the ground, was a bundle
of clothing, washed and ironed, wrapped in a sheet.

20 Five small boys, pursued by two bigger ones, ran past,
ignoring him. One of the bigger boys stopped. "What are
you looking at, you brown ape?" the boy said, stooping
to pick up a lump of clay. He recognized him. The boy
had been present the day he was put out of the park. The
boy pitched the lump, shattering it on the rail above his

head, and the fragments fell
on his face. [...]

25 As he walked he recalled
his last visit to the park. Without hesitation he had
gone through the gates and
got onto the nearest swing.
30 Even now he could feel that
pleasurable thrill that
travelled the length of his
body as he rocketed himself

higher, higher, until he felt that the swing would up-end
him when it reached its peak. Almost leisurely he had
allowed it to come to a halt like a pendulum shortening
35 its stroke and then ran towards the see-saw. A white
boy, about his own age, was seated opposite him.
Accordionlike their legs folded to send the see saw
jerking from the indentation it pounded in the grass. A
40 hand pressed on his shoulder stopping a jerk. He turned
around to look into the face of the attendant.

"Get off!"



Typical apartheid notice board

The skin tightened between his eyes. Why must I get off? What have I done? He held on, hands clamped onto the iron attached to the wooden see-saw. The white boy jumped off from the other end and stood a detached spectator.

"You must get off!" The attendant spoke in a low voice so that it would not carry to the people who were gathering. "The council say," he continued, "that us blacks don't use the same swings as the whites. You must use the swings where you stay," his voice apologizing for the uniform he wore that gave him the right to watch that little white boys and girls were not hurt while playing.

"There no park where I stay." He waved a hand in the direction of a block of flats. "Park on the other side of town but I don't know where." He walked past them. The mothers with their babies, pink and belching, cradled in their arms, the children lolling on the grass, his companion from the see-saw, the nurse girls – their uniforms their badge of indemnity – pushing prams. Beside him walked the attendant.

The attendant pointed an accusing finger at a notice board at the entrance. "There. You can read for yourself." Absolving him of all blame.

He struggled with the red letters on the white background. "Blankes Alleen. Whites Only." He walked through the gates and behind him the swings screeched, the see-saw rattled, and the merry-go-round rumbled. [...]

A thought came to his mind almost at the end of the meal. He sat spoon poised in the air shaken by its

magnitude. Why not go to the park after dark? After it had closed its gates on the old men, the children, and nurses with their prams! There would be no one to stop him.

He could think no further. He was lightheaded with the thought of it. His mother's voice, as she related her day to his father, was not the steam that stung, but a soft breeze wafting past him, leaving him undisturbed. Then qualms troubled him. He had never been in that part of town at night. A band of fear tightened across his chest, contracting his insides, making it hard for him to swallow his food. He gripped his spoon tightly, stretching his skin across his knuckles.

"I'll do it! I'll go to the park as soon as we're finished eating. He controlled himself with difficulty. He swallowed what was left on his plate and furtively watched to see how the others were faring. Hurry up! Hurry up! [...]"

In front of him was the park with its gate and iron railings. Behind the railings, impaled, the notice board. He could see the swings beyond. The sight strengthened him.

He walked over, his breath coming faster. There was no one in sight. A car turned a corner and came towards him and he started at the sound of its engine. The car swept past, the tyres softly licking the asphalt.

The railings were icy-cold to his touch and the shock sent him into action. He extended his arms and with monkey-like movements pulled himself up to perch on top of the railings then dropped onto the newly turned earth.

The grass was damp with dew and he swept his feet across it. Then he ran and the wet grass bowed beneath his bare feet.

He ran towards the swings, the merry-go-round, see-saw to chute, hands covering the metal.

Up the steps to the top of the chute. He stood outlined against the sky. He was a bird; an eagle. He flung himself down on his stomach, sliding swiftly. Wheeeeeee! He rolled over when he slammed onto the grass. He looked at the moon for an instant then propelled himself to his feet and ran for the steps of the chute to recapture that feeling of flight. Each time he swept down the chute, he wanted the trip never to end, to go on sliding, sliding, sliding. [...]

Feet astride, hands clutching silver chains, he jerked his body to gain momentum. He crouched like a runner then violently straightened. The swing widened its arc. It swept higher, higher, higher. It reached the sky. He could touch the moon. He plucked a star to pin to his breast. The earth was far below. No bird could fly as high as he. Upwards and onwards he went.

A light switched on in the hut at the far side of the park. It was a small patch of yellow on a dark square. The door opened and he saw a figure in the doorway. Then the door was shut and the figure strode towards him. He