



Study Guide

for the

2026 National English Olympiad

(A4 - Printable)

The theme of the 2026 Olympiad is
'Victim or Victor'.

The examinations will be based upon the anthology
We Have a Choice
compiled by Hillary Lewis-Soma.

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The South African National English Olympiad is a non-profit project that was established in 1976. It is a joint enterprise of the South African Council for English Education (SACEE) and the Grahamstown Foundation.

This study guide has been created by Hillary Lewis-Soma for publication by the Eastern Cape Branch of the South African Council for English Education, for use by candidates in the 2026 English Olympiad.

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THE AIMS AND APPROACH OF THE OLYMPIAD

The English Olympiad aims to enrich young people through the study of English, while encouraging learners to explore the English language and its literature beyond the scope of the normal school curriculum.

In providing learners with an opportunity to prepare for the Olympiad through a process of self-study and self-motivation, the English Olympiad encourages them:

- to take responsibility for their own learning;
- to think critically and creatively;
- to be empowered through the rigours of academic writing;
- to see the relevance of what they study – both to themselves and to the world around them;
- to question their assumptions and to explore alternative ways of thinking and of experiencing the world in which they live;
- to express those experiences in critically and creatively written responses to the English Olympiad examination questions; and
- to substantiate their opinions with close reference to the texts prescribed for the Olympiad.

PART 1 : GENERAL INFORMATION & ADVICE FOR CANDIDATES

THE SYLLABUS – THEME AND PRESCRIBED READING

The theme for the 2026 Olympiad is 'Victim or Victor'. The examinations will be based on the anthology *We Have a Choice*, which contains excerpts from various literary texts.

Home Language (HL) candidates should familiarise themselves with all the excerpts in the anthology.

First Additional Language (FAL) candidates may omit *A Man for All Seasons*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*.

All candidates must, however, be able to demonstrate their personal understanding of the texts they have studied.

THE EXAMINATIONS

There will be two English Olympiad examinations in 2026 – one for candidates who have entered the Home Language (HL) competition and one for the First Additional Language (FAL) candidates.

Both examinations will be written on **Tuesday, 3 March 2026**.

[Note: The date of the examination is based on the time needed to assess scripts, moderate the assessments and process the results before the end of April, so that the Top 10 HL and the Top 3 FAL achievers may be invited to attend the Olympiad Prize Giving ceremony which is to take place during the midyear National Schools' Festival in Grahamstown/Makhanda.]

Schools may start the examination/s at any time between 11:00 and 14:00, provided candidates are allowed three hours to write. In addition, invigilators should allow sufficient time for administration at the beginning of the session, as well as 15 minutes for candidates to read the examination instructions and the questions thoroughly before they start writing.

Examination Rules

Candidates must obey the following examination rules that the invigilators will be required to enforce:

- Candidates may take the following into the examination venue:
 - pens, pencils, rulers, erasers
 - a clean copy of the anthology, *We Have a Choice*
 - a dictionary. [If the school cannot provide every candidate with a dictionary, candidates may supply their own.]
- Because the Olympiad is an open-book examination, candidates may only underline and/or highlight or place labels or 'Post It' markers on the text already printed in the anthology. They may not make any other notes or annotations of any kind in the anthology, or in their dictionaries.
- Candidates may not take any other papers, documents, cell phones or digital retrieval devices into the examination venue.
- NB - This Study Guide may NOT be taken into the examination venue.

The HL and FAL examination papers will require candidates to answer:

- one question from **Section A**
- one question from **Section B**

For an idea of the kinds of examination questions you should expect, see the 2025 question papers at <https://olympiad.nationalartsfestival.co.za/>.

Section A: Discursive Essay (60 marks)

This section will require a thorough understanding of the texts in the anthology. The recommended length of your essay will be 450 to 550 words.

Each of the questions will require an answer in the form of a formal essay with an introduction, logical argument/reasoning in the body of the essay and a conclusion. Logical/sensible paragraphing and substantiation (quoting and clear referencing) to support the ideas presented will be essential.

Section B: Creative Response (40 marks)

This section will require candidates to compose a creative or transactional piece of writing related to or inspired by one or more texts in the anthology.

There will be a choice of genres, which may include poems, letters, dialogues, diary entries, newspaper reports and reviews. The recommended length of poems will be between 150 and 250 words. For all other genres the length of the responses should be between 250 and 300 words.

RESULTS

The ranking of the Top 20 Home Language (HL) candidates and the Top 5 First Additional Language (FAL) candidates will be announced during the official English Olympiad prize-giving to be held during the 2026 National Schools' Festival in Makhanda/Grahamstown. The ranking of the Top 100 HL and Top 20 FAL candidates will thereafter be published on the Olympiad website, and will also be announced via a media release. Individual results and certificates will be sent to schools shortly after the prize giving.

Classification of Results

On the basis of the above criteria, the assessment of each script will lead to to one of the following classes of achievement:

Diamond	90%–100%
Gold	80%–89%
Silver	70%–79%
Bronze	60%–69%
Merit	50%–59%
Participation	Less than 50%
Unclassified	Examination incomplete

ASSESSMENTS

SECTION A

In Section A, answers will be assessed in accordance with the criteria below.

Content:

Understanding	Does the candidate clearly understand the question?	These are fundamental criteria. Not adhering to these criteria will mean that the answer cannot be highly rated.
Relevance	How well does the answer relate to the question?	
Insight	Does the answer show an engagement with and understanding of the text/s?	
Substantiation	Are statements and arguments appropriately supported by textual reference?	These are the distinguishing criteria for ranking answers that fulfil the fundamental criteria listed above.
Coherence	Is the answer logically structured?	
Creativity	Does the answer show originality and freshness of thought ('spark')?	
Critical thinking	Do the responses reflect the critical awareness normally associated with academic writing?	

Language and Style:

Language	How accurate is the language in terms of grammar, punctuation, spelling and paragraphing? (It is important that these should not detract from the answer.)
Style	How concise is the style? Is the register appropriately formal but nevertheless conveys a distinctive own voice?

SECTION B

In Section B, answers will be assessed in terms of the criteria below.

Content:

Relevance	Does the answer show understanding of the question and does it clearly relate to the question?
Appropriateness	Are the content, tone and structure appropriate to the genre and suitable for the intended audience?
Creativity	Does the answer show originality and freshness of thought ('spark')?

Language:

Accuracy	How accurate is the language in terms of grammar, punctuation, spelling and paragraphing? (Importantly, whether or not these detract from the answer.)
Style	Is the style and register appropriate to the genre?

Detailed Assessments

The Call for Entries for the 2026 Olympiad made provision for a maximum of two candidates per school to apply for detailed written comment on their scripts, subject to an additional fee per detailed assessment, and further subject to the requirement that applications for detailed assessments had to be submitted, with the requisite fee, before the closing date for entries.

The requested detailed assessments will be sent to the candidates via their schools after the Olympiad results have been released in July 2026.

Please note that **examination answer scripts** are not returned to candidates or to schools.

IMPORTANT TIPS FOR CANDIDATES

1. Please **READ THE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS** carefully to ensure that you understand them clearly. In the past many candidates have written good essays, but have not fared well in the Olympiad because they have misinterpreted questions or have only provided partial answers.
2. Please **WRITE LEGIBLY**. Examiners cannot award marks for answers that they cannot read. You will have three hours for the examination, so you should have sufficient time to write neatly.

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Each candidate (other than those whose work is 'Unclassified') will receive an English Olympiad certificate via his/her school.

The top five Home Language candidates will receive the following cash prizes:

1st Prize R25 000, 2nd Prize R20 000, 3rd Prize R15 000.

The remaining candidates in the Top 20 of the Home Language competition and the Top 10 in the First Additional Language competition will receive cash prizes of lesser value.

The Top 10 HL candidates and the Top 3 FAL candidates will be invited to attend the National Schools' Festival in Grahamstown/Makhanda in July 2026, free of charge, with free accommodation and meals.

The Top Home Language Grade 9 pupil will be awarded a minimum prize of R1 000, provided he/she has achieved a Gold Certificate or higher.

Top 10 First Additional Language (FAL) Candidates The top ten candidates in the First Additional Language examination will also receive cash prizes. The top FAL candidate will receive a prize of R7 500.

Rhodes University Scholarships

The Top 42 Home Language and the Top 8 First Additional Language achievers in the 2026 Olympiad will be offered free tuition scholarships for their first year of any programme of study at Rhodes University after successful completion of their matriculation examinations, subject to their meeting the University's normal entry requirements.

PREPARATION FOR THE EXAMINATION

The value of the English Olympiad lies not only in preparation for an examination. Participation in the project allows candidates to experience learning in a different way from most of the formal learning that they encounter at school. It is hoped that the experience will encourage candidates to continue to read and to appreciate a wide range of literature as they approach adulthood.

The Olympiad is based upon a process of self-preparation. Your teachers are therefore not expected to play an active role in your preparation for the examination, but they may guide you through the preparation process. In the past many of the more successful candidates have formed study groups in which they have shared ideas about the prescribed texts and their answers to the questions in the study guide. You may ask your English teacher for advice on how to establish a study group, but they should not participate actively in such sessions.

The Olympiad assessment takes the form of an 'open book' examination, but you need to ensure that you engage thoroughly with all the texts in the anthology well before the examination. You may have your anthology with you in the examination **provided you have not made notes in the book or highlighted any of the text**. You therefore need not memorise any passages or key quotes that you may wish to use in the examination, but unless you have familiarised yourself thoroughly with each of the works in the anthology, you may have difficulty in finding an appropriate passage when you are under pressure during the examination.

SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS IN PART 2 OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

will be posted on the English Olympiad website one month before the 2026 Olympiad examination, at <https://olympiad.nationalartsfestival.co.za/>

SECTION A - DISCURSIVE ESSAY

A strong discursive essay observes the following guidelines:

Language Conventions

- Write in a formal style, but your essay should not read like a textbook. You should rather allow your own voice to be heard in your argument.
- Do not use contractions (e.g. can't), as they are too informal for this kind of writing – and do not use clichés, slang or colloquialisms.
- Avoid second person pronouns (you and your), as this may create the impression that you are preaching to your reader.
- Always refer to the contents of a text in the present tense.
- Underline titles of longer works (plays, novels and memoirs), and use inverted commas for titles of shorter works (poems and short stories.)
- Refer to authors by their last name, eg Shakespeare, not William.
- Make use of connectors (eg: 'first', 'furthermore', 'in addition', 'nevertheless', etc.) to add structure and flow to your essay.
- Introduce quoted words and phrases by making them part of your sentence. Do not insert them randomly, even if they are relevant.

Essay Structure

Introduction: The introduction is a general statement of the topic, restructuring the question to read like a statement. It should include the titles of the relevant texts and the writers' names. A good introduction also elaborates on the premise of the essay by outlining of the argument to follow.

Body:

- This may consist of three or four paragraphs, or possibly more, but each paragraph should contain only one main idea.
- Each paragraph's main idea is usually in its first sentence: this is your topic sentence. The sentences that follow should expand, illustrate or support the main idea, analysing the text and using suitable quotes.
- Use connectors (as previously mentioned) to help your essay to flow from one paragraph to the next.
- Remember to 'signpost' by linking each major point back to the topic.

Conclusion:

- The conclusion is a basic summary of the main points of your essay.
- There should be no new information in the conclusion.

SECTION B - CREATIVE RESPONSE

Section B will call for creativity. The format of the answers will vary. For example, the questions may ask students to write a letter, a dialogue, a poem or an alternative ending to a story. Candidates are expected to follow the formats that they have been taught at school. Where students have not yet been taught or are not familiar with certain formats, it is advisable not to attempt those questions.

In terms of register and style, it is important that students understand what the question requires. Questions may require candidates to write from the perspective of a particular character from the anthology. It is important then to 'get inside a character's mind' by paying attention to how they speak, how the character interacts with others and what their actions are.

Some questions ask candidates to write a piece in the style of a writer featured in the anthology. Here it is important to look at the writer's piece to understand the register, diction and typical sentence construction used in their writing. Other questions may ask candidates to write from the perspective of an outsider (e.g. a journalist) and to report on an incident in the anthology.

For the Section B questions, subtle referencing to themes, elements and characters found in the anthology will elevate the quality of the work – and the results achieved.

PART 2 - NOTES, QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES ON THE TEXTS

The following notes refer to the texts in *We Have a Choice*, the anthology of prescribed reading upon which the 2026 English Olympiad is based.

#	Title	Author	Page
1	A Man for All Seasons (Not for FAL)	Robert Bolt	7
2	The Merchant of Venice (Not for FAL)	William Shakespeare	8
3	The Ballad of Reading Gaol	Oscar Wilde	9
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8	Life Plus 99 Years - Introduction	Erle S. Gardener	13
9	Life Plus 99 Years	Nathan F. Leopold Jr	14
10	Beyond Reasonable Doubt (Not for FAL)	Jeffrey Archer	15
11	To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	16
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13	The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs	Albie Sachs	18
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15	We the People		
16	Number Four – The Making of Constitution Hill	Lauren Segal	19
17	I Have Life	Alison Botha with Marianne Thamm	20

A Note to Candidates in the 2026 English Olympiad

The information on the writers and the texts, and the 'Points to consider' in this section, are intended to provide some background and guidance, and to encourage consideration beyond the mere content of the various excerpts in the anthology. Each of the texts in the anthology should nevertheless be read carefully and should be considered in depth, as you may need to refer to them in the examination.

Because it is important to understand the context within which a particular narrative takes place or the circumstances within which a piece has been written, the notes include biographical information on the writers.

Working in a group, or when studying the texts by yourself, do not confine yourself to consideration of the specific questions in the study guide. Also think about the overall structure, theme and the tone of the writing, as well as the text, the sub-text and the context.

Read critically, and bear in mind that the theme of the 2026 Olympiad is 'Victim or Victor'.

Enjoy your reading and your preparation for the examination.

General Remarks

Many of the authors whose work appears in the anthology illustrate the choices they made in their lives. Try to find some of the links or similarities in these passages. You do not have to respond to all of these questions/prompts, but the more thinking you do, the better you will perform in your Olympiad examination.

Remember - the choices you make do matter.

1. *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt (1924–1995)

(NOT for FAL)

Robert Bolt left school in 1941 at the age of 16 – without a school leaving certificate. While working in an insurance office, he chose to begin night classes to enable him to go to university, and passed his entrance exams with distinction. This was a choice that benefitted him for the rest of his life.

Britain was at war, so after a short period at the University of Manchester Bolt enlisted in the Royal Air Force and was sent to South Africa for flying training, but air sickness intervened, so he transferred to the army, and served as a commissioned officer in West Africa until 1947, when he resumed his university education.

Armed with a Manchester degree in history and a teaching diploma from the University of Exeter, he began his career teaching English and history. Shortly thereafter he started writing plays, the most successful of which was *A Man for all Seasons*. This play presents a clash between the Lord Chancellor of England (Sir Thomas More) and King Henry VIII. In essence, the king wanted the Pope to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Henry stated that he believed that the marriage was wrong in the eyes of God because Catherine had previously been married to his older brother, who had died. Henry wanted to marry Anne Boleyn, in the hope that she would give him a son. At that time, England was Roman Catholic, so even the king needed the Pope's permission, but the Pope refused.

Frustrated by this, and wanting more control over religious matters in England, Henry decided to declare himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England through the Act of Supremacy. This move allowed him to have his marriage annulled and to marry Anne Boleyn, but it also meant a huge shift in power from the Pope to the King.

Sir Thomas More was an ardent Catholic, and therefore could not agree. He refused to take the Oath of Supremacy, so he was arrested, imprisoned in the Tower of London, and seven months later, after much interrogation, he was executed.

Bolt shows Thomas More as a person who was not just religious, but someone with strong morals and a clear sense of what he believed in. He thought his principles were more important than anything, so he made a choice, at the cost of his own life. Bolt uses a character called the 'Common Man' to explain things to the audience and to help them understand the historical details in the play.

Bolt also wrote the screenplay for the Oscar-winning film version of *A Man for all Seasons*, and for a number of other historically based films, such as *Doctor Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Although he had a stroke in 1979 and was partially paralysed, causing him to give up a smoking habit of 80 cigarettes a day, Bolt returned to writing again in 1980. He died 15 years later.

Points to consider

- Thomas More had to make a very difficult choice in standing up to King Henry VIII. What helped him to make this choice? Discuss this with other candidates.
- More died for his beliefs. What were his alternatives, and why did he not choose any of them?
- We are all the Common Man. Ponder the significance of this.
Does this limit us from being an Alison, a More, a Mandela, or a Sachs?
- Are we superior beings?

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2. *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

(NOT for FAL)

During his lifetime Shakespeare's plays were performed on stage for all to enjoy. Even poor people could get standing room in a theatre for one penny. When the London theatre season ended, players went on tour to remote towns to perform. The RSC (the Royal Shakespeare Company) still does this, touring many parts of the world. Thousands of people, including many tourists, annually see Shakespeare's plays at the Globe Theatre in London and at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Since 2000 the number of productions of Shakespeare's plays has greatly increased, and the RSC uses modern media to communicate information about the production of the plays to schools - not only in England, but throughout the world.

Several South Africans (including Janet Suzman, Anthony Sher, John Kani and Sello Maake Ka Ncube) have been involved in training and acting with the RSC and have even produced some of Shakespeare's plays in South Africa at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town (*The Tempest*) and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg (*Othello* - produced by Janet Suzman). An African adaptation of *Julius Caesar* called *Cezar*, was well received at the Market Theatre and at the Grahamstown Festival.

In a recent *Othello* programme booklet, the RSC wrote, "... for such an influential and globally revered figure, Shakespeare's life was decidedly unspectacular." However, there is no other playwright in the world that can claim to equal his talent and productivity. He has given us such an interesting range of characters, emotions, qualities and humour to enjoy.

We salute you, William Shakespeare!

The play "The Merchant of Venice"

Venice was the Manhattan of Shakespeare's era. When he wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, Venice was the fourth largest city in Europe after Naples, Paris and London in England. It was also the biggest financial centre, and the Rialto in Venice was the equivalent of Wall Street today.

Jews and other ethnic minorities played an important part in the economy of Venice. Antonio, a merchant, would have traded from there, sending his ships to North Africa, India and Mexico, so when his young friend Bassanio, to whom he is devoted, approaches Antonio for money to enable him to woo and impress the young heiress Portia, Antonio is forced to make a difficult choice. His money is invested in his ships at sea and will only become available when they return, so Antonio stands surety (provides guarantees) for Bassanio against a loan from Shylock. Because the money is desperately needed, Antonio agrees to an unusual condition stipulated by Shylock: if the money is not paid back on the agreed date, Antonio will have to pay a pound of his flesh to Shylock.

Unfortunately, Antonio's cargoes are lost at sea, so the bond and agreement go to court for a decision, where the vengeful Shylock demands his pound of flesh. Portia, dressed as the lawyer, is there to defend Antonio. Gratiano, Bassanio's friend, is there to support him.

This where the extract in the anthology begins.

Points to consider

- What is it that ambitious people may have to relinquish so that their dreams or goals might materialise?
- Is Shylock's demand reasonable? Justify your answer.
- Do you think this play is anti-Semitic in its judgment of Shylock? Explain your response.
- Consider the hypocrisy of some of the Christian characters in the play. Refer to examples.

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3. 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' by Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

Oscar Wilde, an Anglo-Irish novelist, poet and critic, came from a very well- established family in Ireland. His father was a successful surgeon and his mother was a writer and a literary hostess. Oscar received his tertiary education at Trinity College in Dublin, and thereafter at Oxford.

Wilde's poetry, plays, letters, essays and articles were well received and he became a popular and well-known literary figure. It was no wonder that, when on a lecture tour in America, in reply to a customs officer's question as to whether he had anything to declare, he replied, 'Only my genius.'

He was happily married to Constance Lloyd and they had two sons, but his private life did not prove to be as successful as his literary one. He unwisely became involved in an illegal intimate relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, a superficial young aristocrat who was intent on becoming part of Wilde's successful literary circle. This led to Wilde's downfall. He was tried and found guilty of gross indecency, and was sentenced to two years of hard labour, most of which he spent in Reading Jail.

His wife, though still loyal to him, moved with their two sons to Switzerland, using the surname Holland to avoid association with the scandal.

While in prison, Wilde was allowed to write his now famous letter to Lord Douglas, who had abandoned him. The letter was titled 'De Profundis' which means 'from the depths'. A very long letter, it shows that although he wished he had not allowed Lord Douglas as much power in his life, he also wished that he had not been so taken in. Lord Douglas later falsely claimed that he had not received the letter, but this has been refuted by reliable sources. A sympathetic warden kept the pages safe while Wilde wrote it and returned the finished letter to Wilde when he was released.

Wilde's health suffered greatly as a result of his time in jail. When he was released he wrote the ballad which is in your anthology. England was never home to Wilde after his disgrace, trial, and time in jail. Sick and dispirited, he ended his days in Europe. However, he had a major spiritual epiphany. When he died, his wife and his sons were with him. His family's efforts helped greatly to publish his work and restore his good name in the literary world.

'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' is a poignant poem that explores themes of guilt, injustice, and the need for prison reform. There is much repetition throughout the poem which helps to show some of the monotony of prison life. The ballad also illustrates the empathy Wilde shows towards the suffering of his fellow prisoners. The poem offers deep commentary on the human condition and the societal implications of crime and punishment.

Points to consider

- Society's views of Wilde's behaviour were very different then from now. Discuss this with your fellow candidates.
- How much did his experience in prison change Wilde's life?
- How does Wilde describe the brutality of the penal system, and the hypocrisy of society's justice system?.

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4. The Face of Justice by Caryl Chessman (1921–1960)

When Caryl Chessman was a child, his strict Baptist parents moved the family to California. His father habitually failed to remain employed and then attempted suicide twice during 1929.

Chessman's mother was paralysed in a motor car accident. As a child, Chessman was an asthma sufferer and also caught encephalitis which left him physically very weak. After recovering, he started to rebel against his parents' strict upbringing by committing petty crimes. As a teenager during the Great Depression in the 1930s, he stole food to feed the family. His crimes increased steadily, ranging from petty theft to burglary.

In 1937, at the age of only 16, Chessman was caught stealing a car – the first of several. Then in 1941 he was arrested in connection with a number of gang-related robberies and shootouts with police, and he spent five years in prison. His final downfall came with two indictments for kidnapping with bodily harm which, at the time, was a capital offence in California. He maintained that he had been framed and coerced by authorities, which influenced the jury. During his time on death row in the San Quentin State Prison (for nearly 12 years), he filed dozens of appeals and petitions. He wrote many letters and essays, and four books which attracted international public interest in his case and a worldwide movement to spare his life. Many prominent persons were part of this movement.

Pat Brown, the governor of California, was inundated with appeals from noted authors such as Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradley, Norman Mailer, and the poet Robert Frost. There were also letters from well-known public figures: Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife; Marlon Brando, an actor; and revivalist minister Billy Graham, among many others.

Chessman's appeals and stays of execution ran out in 1960, and he was executed in the gas chamber at San Quentin in that year. His 1954 memoir, the rights to which he sold to Columbia, was adapted for the big screen in 1955 and released to the public in cinemas as *Cell 2455 Death Row*. Chessman's time on death row was, ironically and sadly, probably the most secure in his life. His productivity as an author is proof of this, and his works contributed to the abolition of capital punishment in many states in the USA.

Glossary of Terms

Torquemada: the surname of the first inquisitor in the Spanish Inquisition –
nowadays linked to agonising methods of torture

egomania: obsessive egotism or self-centredness

psychopath: a mentally unstable person with an antisocial personality
marked by a lack of remorse and a tendency towards violence

patriarchal: male-dominated

miasma: noxious (putrid, poisonous) smells

Points to consider

- Chessman felt he had been framed. Why would a guilty man spend so much energy on appeals?
- What do Chessman's appeals show about his character?
- Think about all the writing Chessman did while in jail. People all over the world were reading his books and made appeals on his behalf.
- Do the difficulties of his childhood offer sufficient extenuation to justify a life sentence, rather than execution?
- You may know the true story of Rubin Carter, which was made into a film called *Hurricane*. Prisoners are not always the guilty ones.

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5. *Lifer* by William Doyle (1942–), with Scott O'Dell (1898–1989)

Scott O'Dell was a highly acclaimed American author, best known for his historical fiction for young people. Before gaining recognition for his contributions to children's literature, O'Dell also wrote novels and non-fiction for adults. His most famous work, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960), won the Newbery Medal and established his legacy as a master storyteller. His writing explored themes of survival, nature, and the human spirit, often drawing inspiration from historical events and settings, particularly those of California and Mexico. His collaboration with William Doyle on *Lifer* represents an early period in his literary career.

William Doyle is an accomplished author with a diverse body of work. Among his notable publications is the book *Lifer*, published in 1954 and co-authored with Scott O'Dell. The title of the book suggests a focus on the experiences of individuals serving life sentences or enduring long-term incarceration.

Doyle came from a good home where his mother went out of her way to keep him on the straight and narrow. He was her favourite child, whom she loved dearly. However, when he became a teenager, he began to mix with the wrong company, and when a policeman was shot and killed, Doyle was arrested, tried and sent to jail for life. There he was more selective about the people he trusted. His life sentence was cut short because during a prison riot he saved many lives, including the lives of some of the prison guards. His actions were not, however, recognised until Warden Crane died, but not before the Warden tried to exact his final, mean revenge. Crane vindictively ordered one of the guards to take Doyle, at night, without his mattress and stripped of his clothes, down to a cell in 'the hole', where prisoners were sent as punishment. Doyle had not done anything wrong, but this 'punishment' lasted for 19 days and nights during which he had to stand naked on a steel floor with no food or warmth.

Doyle writes that it was his anger at this unjust treatment that saved him, but the experience hardened him. Two months of care in the prison hospital helped him to recover physically, but his mind was cynical, bitter and brutal, even in his attitude to his friends, whom he spurned. When he was close to madness, his friends managed to get word to his mother who left her sick bed to visit him. When he saw his mother's frail and wasted body, he was ashamed of himself and of what he had put her through for so many years. He prayed sincerely for forgiveness and then apologised to all those in the prison who had experienced the sharp edge of his tongue.

Soon after this, Warden Crane died. The next Warden made sure that Doyle's merits during the prison riot were recognised and he was paroled. Thus, he could return to a positive life like the one he had had in childhood.

Doyle's literary contributions span various genres, including historical non-fiction and biographical works. He is known for his ability to bring historical events and figures to life, often collaborating with prominent individuals on projects. His writing style is known for its clarity and narrative drive, making complex subjects accessible to a wide readership.

Points to consider

- Can we reach our full potential if we do not have faith in ourselves? What helps us to develop this potential?
- How important are our parents in our early years? Discuss.
- Why was that period in 'the hole', when Doyle was burning with anger, so helpful to him?

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6. 'Trial by Jury (at the Old Bailey London)' from *The Spell of London* by H.V. Morton

H.V. Morton (1892–1979) has brought pleasure to many armchair travellers. It was between World War I and World War II that he was hailed as 'the world's greatest travel writer'. He wrote 50 books and many articles for newspapers, magazines and journals.

During WWI, Morton served with the Warwickshire Yeomanry and during WWII British Prime Minister Winston Churchill commissioned him to help with the war effort by boosting morale through his writing and reporting. Thus he chose to write and inspire his nation under threat as well as to serve it on the battlefield. He became well known internationally with his eye-witness account, in 1923, of the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun, an Egyptian pharaoh, who ruled from approximately 1332 to 1323 BCE.

Morton's style is easy to read: with a good eye for detail, he wrote from the point of view of the "little people", which drew the reader to identify with both the narrator and the characters. His works were immensely popular. His first book, *The Heart of London*, began his enduring love affair with that city, which he called 'a splendid theatre, where the human comedy and tragedy of the human heart are acted day and night.'

Some of Morton's other books are: *A Stranger in Spain*, *Traveller in Italy*, *In Search of South Africa*, *In the Steps of St Paul*, *In Scotland Again*, *Ghosts of London*, *Atlantic Meeting* and *Waters of Rome*.

Points to consider

- Morton wrote 'Trial by Jury' to portray his view of London. He wrote to inform and entertain the public. Note how he succeeds in building the tension and emotion in this passage.
- Say whether you think this is a story well told. How does Morton accomplish this?

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7. *Famous Trials* by Frank McLynn (1941–2025)

Highly regarded writer and historian Frank McLynn was educated at Oxford and the University of London. He lived and wrote in England, and lectured at many universities in Africa, South America and the USA. Before he became a full-time writer, he held research and teaching positions at St Antony's College in Oxford, and at the University of Strathclyde.

McLynn wrote more than 20 books, earning acclaim for his detailed and often critical approach to biographical writing. He is particularly known for his in-depth biographies of influential historical figures, including Napoleon Bonaparte, Robert Louis Stevenson and Carl Jung. Also, Genghis Khan and his conquests, his empire, and his legacy; and Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome (portrayed in the film *Gladiator*). McLynn's writing is characterised by its rigorous academic approach, delving deeply into his subjects' lives and presenting sometimes controversial portraits.

His writing style is often described as accessible and engaging, aimed at a wide audience. Beyond biographies, McLynn has explored broader historical themes, with works covering periods such as the Jacobite risings, the Spanish Armada, Hitler and, closer to home, European exploration of Africa, and significant military campaigns. His ability to present vast amounts of information in an engaging narrative earned him a dedicated readership and numerous accolades, including the 1985 Cheltenham Prize for Literature.

McLynn died on 30 January 2025 at the age of 85.

Points to consider

McLynn is an historical writer. This biography was written in 1995, long after the event. It was verified by the BBC to be factual. His writing is neither sensational nor biased to achieve personal gain. Shakespeare, however, had to write for gain to support his team of actors and the playhouse through his patrons, so the *Merchant of Venice* mirrors the opinion that many English people had of the Jews, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* shows the bias the English people held towards Scotland and their king.

- What do the public want and what are they fed through the media? – the truth, accurate facts or sensationalism?

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8. *Life Plus 99 Years* - Introduction by Erle S. Gardner (1889–1970)

Erle Stanley Gardner was an American lawyer and author, and one of the most prolific detective story writers of the 20th century. It was his boredom with some of the dull, routine practice of law versus the enjoyment of trial work in the courtroom, which led him to choose writing the detective novels for which he became so well known.

His most successful series was about Perry Mason, a fictional lawyer and crime solver, who became the main character in over 80 novels, starting with *The Case of the Velvet Claws* in 1933. There were probably many of these books in prison libraries. His novels were published under many different pseudonyms, but he also wrote non-fiction books on travel, Western history and forensic science.

His methodical approach to writing, often dictating thousands of words daily, allowed him to produce an astonishing volume of work, earning him a vast readership. One wonders when he found time to sleep.

His introduction to *Life Plus 99 years* in the anthology gives the reader much food for thought.

Points to consider

- How much do you agree with Gardener's statements in his introduction?
- Write your own opinion on the following:
 - rehabilitation of prisoners
 - punishment of prisoners
 - What are prisons for?
 - We are all to blame for the creation of crime.

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9. *Life Plus 99 Years* by Nathan Leopold Jr (1904–1971)

There is a short biography of Nathan Leopold Junior and Richard Loeb in the 2026 anthology. Both of these boys were highly intelligent: Leopold could already speak at 4 months of age, and Loeb graduated from Michigan University when he was 17 years old. They were both born into wealthy Jewish families and were heirs to a combined fortune of 15 million Dollars. Leopold's mother was overly protective of him, especially from rough boys because he had had such a sickly childhood. She even sent him to a girls' school, and it was apparent that he had been assaulted by one of his governesses.

Leopold adopted a philosophy based on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, believing his words: 'a superman is, on account of superior qualities inherent in him, exempted from the ordinary laws which govern men. He is not liable for anything he might do.' He and Loeb had known each other from childhood and became inseparable. Loeb had already committed many petty offences and together the two young men committed many more, going as far as arson. For these crimes they were never caught.

They decided they would 'commit the perfect crime' and spent seven months plotting it. They would kidnap and murder Bobby Franks, Loeb's second cousin, a 14-year-old. They would send a ransom note to his parents. This they did. They killed him and stuffed their victim into a shallow culvert not far from the town where they lived. Unfortunately for them, it was not the perfect crime. Leopold dropped his unusual glasses at the site; they were easily identified as his, and the boys were almost immediately arrested. Loeb confessed first, and then Leopold.

The boys' parents hired Clarence Darrow, a famous lawyer, to defend them. Darrow was totally opposed to capital punishment, and he saved their lives. He insisted that his two clients should plead guilty, knowing it would be the only way to save them from the death penalty. He was right. The trial lasted 32 days, drawing huge crowds and worldwide interest. Darrow's concluding address to the court lasted 12 hours and was very convincing. He argued that there were extenuating circumstances to be considered. The judge agreed with Darrow's argument, sentencing both boys to life imprisonment for the murder, and 99 years for the kidnapping.

In prison they did sociological research together and expanded the prison's school system, adding a high school and junior college curriculum.

In January 1936 Loeb was killed by a fellow prisoner.

Leopold broke many of the prison rules and was suspected of helping some prisoners to escape. His autobiography, published in 1958, was on New York's best seller list for 14 weeks, but some felt it was written solely to improve his public image and to make it possible for him to get parole.

This he did get in March 1958, but his life thereafter showed that he had not really changed his ways. In order to be paroled he had to be sponsored, and this was done by the Brethren Service Commission in Puerto Rico, which was offered him a job as a medical technician in a hospital there, probably through contacts he had made in jail. After his release he was worked as a laboratory and X-ray assistant in Puerto Rico, and later joined an urban renewal and housing agency. He also conducted studies on leprosy at the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine, and was an active member of the Natural History Society of Puerto Rico.

Nathan Leopold Junior died of a diabetes-related heart attack in Puerto Rico in 1971, at the age of 66.

Points to consider

- If you had been alive at the time of the trial of Loeb and Leopold, what verdict would you have wanted and why?
- Why do you think Clarence Darrow accepted the role of defence lawyer for the two boys?
- Leopold's writing is very different from that of McLynn's. It was suggested that his aim in writing the book was to portray himself in a better light in order to get parole. Can you find examples in the text to show that he wanted a more favourable portrayal of himself?
- What did you think of his actions after his parole, when he lived in Puerto Rico?

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10. *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* by Jeffrey Archer (1942 -)

(Not for FAL)

Lord Jeffery Archer is known today as one of the best storytellers of fiction. He has had a rather chequered career, but has always bounced back. He is a maverick loved all over the world, despite his mistakes, from which he has grown and perhaps found plots for his novels. To date, 320 million of his books have been sold in about 120 countries and they been translated into 23 languages. But his life has not always been like this.

His father was somewhat of a rogue who left England under a cloud, but this did not dampen Archer's spirits, nor his ambition. A very public man, both his achievements and his mistakes are well known to the British public. If one is in the spotlight, there is no doubt that the media will find you.

His first choice of career was to go into politics, and he was a member of parliament from 1969 to 1974. Later, he was the deputy chairman of the Conservative Party from 1985 to 1986. He had a remarkable gift as a charming orator, which helped him to raise large sums money for various good causes, culminating in his being awarded a life peerage in 1992.

One of his more fortunate partnerships was with his wife Mary, whom he met while at Oxford. She became very successful in her own right, well recognised for her understanding of solar energy and for her wonderful command of the English language. They have a family of two sons, one in the literary field and the other in finance.

Lord Archer's fortunes changed in 1974 when he lost over £420 000 in a fraudulent investment scheme. He wrote his first book, *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less*, in the autumn of 1974, to avoid bankruptcy. At this stage he was writing in the peace and quiet of a home in the countryside of Oxford, belonging to Lord and Lady Owen. She liked his book, and introduced him to Viking Publishers.

In 1975 the rights to the book were sold and his efforts and life took a turn for the better. He was able to start paying off a debt of £350 000, which he settled in 19 months. His second book was *Shall we Tell the President?* At the time Jackie Kennedy-Onassis was a consultant to Viking. Since the name of the president in the book was Edward M. Kennedy, Jackie resigned because the subject of the book was too close to her own tragedies. This brought him unexpected publicity.

Archer wrote his first play, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, in 1987, and it ran at the Queen's Theatre in London's West End for more than 600 performances.

His career as an author brought Jeffrey Archer great financial success, but also attracted a spotlight which highlighted the perjury that he had committed in court during a libel case in 1987. In 2001 he was sentenced to four years in prison for perverting the course of justice. Once again, he took advantage of his circumstances and wrote three diaries of his experience. His sentence was cut short after he had served only two years.

Archer retained his status as a peer and remained active in the House of Lords until 2024. His publisher has indicated that the last book in the William Warwick series, *End Game*, will be published in 2025.

A man of many talents, Jeffrey Archer's activities on the sports field, particularly at Oxford, where he excelled in athletics, prepared him to be an opportunist, an optimist, and one with a great sense of sportsmanship.

Points to consider

- Archer had many opportunities to further his career in politics and in writing. Name some of these and show how he used them.
- Did his fortunes change because he was careless and carefree, or because he relied too much on his charm?
- Do you think that Sir David and his wife were cowardly in making the choices they did about dying?
- The relationship between Sir David and Mrs Rogers is tense and rather complicated. Give reasons for this.
- In June 2025 the Assisted Dying Bill was passed in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. Consider the implications of this for terminally-ill patients and their families, as well as doctors, nurses and care givers.

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11. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1926–2016)

Harper Lee was born in a small town in southern Alabama. Her father, a prominent lawyer, and the town became material for her book. Her mother was fragile and used to play the piano for hours or sit on the front veranda in a daze. Perhaps that's why a mother does not feature in her book.

Lee was a tomboy, who enjoyed beating up the boys in her neighbourhood. One of them was Truman Persons, who later became known as Truman Capote. As an adult she worked for him, doing research for his famous book *In Cold Blood*.

Lee attended a local Methodist school for a year and then went to Alabama University, but realised that practising law, as her father did, was not going to provide the freedom of expression she wanted. She wrote articles and short stories, submitting them to school and University newspapers. After her senior year, she spent a summer at Oxford as an exchange student.

On her return from England, Lee moved to New York to become a writer. She told people she met that she was writing a book. They thought her rather strange. She worked at three different jobs consecutively: one in a bookstore, one as a reservation agent for Eastern Airlines and then as an agent for the British Overseas Airways Corporation. Through her friend Truman, she met a couple, Mr and Mrs Michael Brown, who believed in her ambition. The husband had just received a large fee for his work on a musical production. They gave her a large cheque as a Christmas present, the equivalent of a year's salary at BOAC. The accompanying note said, 'You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please.'

Lee started a small portfolio of short stories, which she handed to Maurice Crain, a publishing agent. His suggestion was, 'Go write a book.' Two months later she returned with fifty pages of a manuscript called *Go Set a Watchman*. Later, people believed that this had been the draft for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Editors at Lippincott, seeing her potential, encouraged her to revise her manuscript, paid her a small advance and linked her with Tay Hohoff, an experienced editor, who worked with her to prepare her book for publication.

While this was happening, she accepted Truman's offer to help doing research for his shocking book about the murder of a farm family. At night, after interviewing the locals about the grisly murder of this unfortunate family, she gave her reports to Truman. Later she read and edited his manuscripts. She did not get much thanks or credit when the book was published and became such a successful murder story.

She did not need to bask in his limelight though. When *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 it was an instant success and by 1970 had sold 20 million copies. Sales doubled by 1988. At that stage her book was being read and taught in 74% of American high schools.

In 1961 she won the Pulitzer Prize for her book and the paparazzi flocked to her home town. Although Lee tried to be as invisible as possible, she finally told a reporter that what she wanted most was to write about how fast the simplicity of small-town life was being gobbled up by investors who cared more for money than for the lives and feelings of small-town folk.

Harper Lee died in 2016 at the age of 89.

Points to consider

- Consider the effectiveness of Atticus as a parent to Jem and Scout. Give your opinion, supported by reasons taken from the text.
- How did his role differ from that of the other parents mentioned in the anthology?

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12. *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once dismissed Nelson Mandela as a terrorist. That was her view. After the Rivonia Treason Trial in the 1960s, when Mandela was shut away in a maximum-security prison on Robben Island, the National Party government ‘hoped he would disappear into a limbo of amnesia’, writes Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his introduction to Zapiro’s 1999 book *Nelson Mandela – A life in Cartoons*.

In the first cartoon, cartoonist Zapiro presents a very young Mandela sitting on a bench in the front row in a classroom in Qunu in the Eastern Cape. The lady teacher is holding a page which has the answer to a question written on the blackboard behind her: 'What will I be?' Talking to the headmaster, she says: 'This one (Mandela) can't make up his mind. He put down: lawyer, activist, freedom fighter, prisoner of conscience, president, nation builder, visionary, reconciler and twentieth century icon.' Tutu concludes the introduction by saying, 'He is God's gift to South Africa and he is our gift to the world.'

History has shown the change from terrorist to President and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, shared with former President F. W. De Klerk. Then, and more especially now, we see wars and civil unrest in many countries in the world. Mandela made the choice to forgive past atrocities and sufferings of his people. What an example he has given each one of us and others around the world!

Nelson Mandela has been widely praised for leading South Africa through its transition to full democracy; for initiating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; for his vision for the newly built Constitution Hill, where South Africa's well-debated Constitution can be implemented. Here the people can be considered and heard from the heart.

Few countries have a constitution like South Africa's that protects people from injustice, torture and indignity. Perhaps it could only have arisen from the flames of suffering that freedom fighters experienced in prisons.

Points to consider

- Margaret Thatcher dismissed Mandela as a terrorist. How did he prove her wrong?
- What was it about Nelson Mandela's speeches during his trial in Pretoria that made them so moving?
- Justice de Wet decided not to impose the supreme penalty which would have been death. This was quite unexpected. What may have led him to impose a life sentence rather than the death penalty?

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13. *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*

14. *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter*

15. *We, the People*

by Albie Sachs (1935–)

Born in Johannesburg in 1935, Albie Sachs started his legal career in 1957 as an advocate in Cape Town, working mainly in the field of civil rights. He was a dedicated member of the ANC. As a result of police harassment, which included a term of imprisonment in the Maitland prison, in 1966 he went into exile in England, where he completed a PhD at the University of Sussex and taught law at the University of Southampton.

He was the first Nuffield Fellow of Socio-Legal Studies at Bedford College, London and Wolfson College, Cambridge. In 1977 he became Professor of Law at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique, later serving as Director of Research in that country's Ministry of Justice.

After almost being killed in 1988 by a car bomb planted by South African agents, he returned to England. In 1989 he worked in the Law School and the Dept of International Affairs at Columbia University, New York.

In that same year he became founding director of the South African Constitution Studies Centre, based at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London. In 1992 the Centre moved to the University of the Western Cape, where he was made a Professor Extraordinary. He was also appointed to an honorary professorship in the Faculty of Law at the University of Cape Town.

As a member of the ANC's Constitutional Committee and of its National Executive, he took an active part in the negotiations for South Africa's new Constitution. After the country's first democratic elections in 1994, he was appointed to the newly established Constitutional Court by President Nelson Mandela.

The author of many books on human rights, Sachs has been awarded honorary doctorates of law by the universities of Southampton, York (Toronto), Antwerp and London, and by the William Mitchell College of Law in Minnesota. For a number of years he has been a member of the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee and he helped to draft the International Declaration on the Human Genome.

Albie Sachs has written extensively on culture, gender rights and the environment. His book *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* was dramatised for the Royal Shakespeare Company and was broadcast by the BBC. Another autobiographical work, *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter*, premiered and was screened at the Durban International Film Festival in 2014.

Despite all his accolades and his service record to his country, Albie Sachs remains the most humble person one could wish to meet. In encounters with him, one is impressed by his gift of listening to the common people.

Points to consider

- In the front of his book *The Free Diary of Albie Sachs*, Sachs writes this about his journey: "Jail–Fail–Fall–Fell–Feel–Feet–Fret–Free".
How do these words show his view of his journey? Work out how they mirror Sachs's life? Make use of all three textual passages to illustrate your answer.
- Do you think his choices were noble ones? Justify your response.
- *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* is a very personal exploration of his journey at this time. Consider the significance of the title.
- How did his handling of the results of the bomb blast affect you? What did the blast and the extract in the anthology tell you about his character?
- How did the attitudes of Nelson Mandela and Albie Sachs, when they were in prison, differ from those of other prisoners in this anthology?
- Before reading the anthology, had you realised how much effort and preparation there had been to make your life more fortunate and democratic? Discuss your response with other candidates.
- Do you think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was effective, or a good idea, or a disastrous solution? Explain your response.
- How does the planning of the Constitution and the Constitutional Court protect us, the people? Include yourself in this question.

16. *Number Four – The Making of Constitution Hill* by Lauren Segal (1966–)

In 2002 the JDA (Johannesburg Development Agency) sent out a request for proposals to appoint a dedicated team to take forward the founding concepts of Heritage, Education and Tourism (HET). Ochre Communication, a leading TV company, won the contract on the basis of its feasibility study and business plan for the Constitution Hill site in Johannesburg.

At the time, Lauren Segal was working as a producer for Ochre, and she became the lead writer for the book publication entitled *Number Four – the Making of Constitution Hill*. With an honours degree in History and a Master's degree in Film and Television, she was extremely well qualified for the task.

Lauren's experience and qualifications made her the perfect person to undertake this enormous undertaking as lead writer. She led the HET group in writing various sections of the book.

At one point in the book she writes, 'We are storytellers at heart, and from our first visit to the site in Hillbrow we felt the magnetic pull of the place and the amazing possibilities for revealing the histories of the buildings.'

After the completion of this vast project, she served as the Director of the Constitution Hill Trust that was initially chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa.

In South Africa, Lauren was a founding partner in the company 'Trace', a research, design and exhibition company.

In the years following, as Director, Lauren designed *A Prisoner in the Garden* (for the Mandela Foundation); *Gandhi* for the City of Johannesburg (a celebration marking the centenary of the passive resistance movement led by Gandhi); *Siya Khumbula* for the Centre of Violence and Reconciliation; and she later worked on a permanent exhibition on Nelson Mandela for the Gaborone National Museum. She was also the director of a multimedia campaign to celebrate the centenary of the *Sunday Times* newspaper.

Outside of South Africa, Lauren has been a consultant on heritage projects in Northern Ireland (the Maze/Long Kesh Prison) and others in Morocco, Lebanon and Kenya. She has written several books, including *Soweto - a History*; *Number Four*; *Mapping Memories*; and *Pivotal Moments*.

Probably one of Lauren Segal's greatest challenges has been a personal one: she has survived cancer four times. Lauren writes about this challenging journey in her book *Cancer: a love story*, in which she shares her experience for the benefit of others.

Points to consider

- Do you realise what a talented and remarkable person Lauren Segal is? Explain your response.
- What does the remodelling of Constitutional Hill mean in our country?
- Is it important for us to know our country's past and who paid a price for our freedom? Discuss.

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17. *I Have Life: Alison's Journey*, as told to Marianne Thamm by Alison Botha

Alison Botha's life was relatively peaceful when she was young. Born in Port Elizabeth, she was very close to her mother who gave her confidence in herself through unconditional love. She also instilled in Alison a deep sense of faith. Her parents divorced when she was 10. Alison spent her high school years at Collegiate Girls' High School, where she became head girl. After school, she studied at the then Port Elizabeth Technikon, worked for a while as an insurance broker and then went overseas for four years.

After her return, on 18 December 1994, she was kidnapped by two young men, Frans du Toit and Theuns Kruger. They attacked, raped and mutilated her after driving her to a remote area. She survived death through her serene and calm character, grace, willpower and belief that her death under those circumstances could not be the final memories her mother would have of her. The doctor and anaesthetist who were with her that night called it a miracle that she survived her wounds. Survive she did; through many operations, counselling and rehabilitation.

Alison's amazing qualities under attack and her lack of bitterness captured the attention of South Africa and of people in other countries. In 1995 she received three encouraging tributes: a Rotary Paul Harris award for 'Courage beyond the norm'; The Femina 'Women of Courage' award and the Port Elizabeth 'Citizen of the Year' award.

Writing her story with ghost writer Marianne Thamm served as therapy to aid her recovery. She wanted to show that she did not accept that she was a victim, but rather a victor. She did not even want to be angry with her attackers because that would give them power over her. As Alison recovered, she wanted to share her experience, so she became an inspirational speaker addressing schools, businesses and other centres where people needed to hear her story and be inspired, in South Africa and overseas.

When her story was made into a film she said: 'To have my story and ultimate triumph shared on the screen would mean that so many people would see the power of choice that we each have and they might also choose to triumph over their own life's hardships.'

(See the trailer of the film at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3949952/> .)

2024 was an anxious year for Alison. Her attackers had been paroled from a life sentence which had been reduced to 25 years and Alison feared they might come after her. The judge who passed the original life sentence had stressed that it should run until their deaths since they were a danger to society. He was right, because they had already planned another crime. The newly-appointed Minister of Correctional Services, Dr Petrus Groenewald, revoked the parole, sending Du Toit and Kruger back to jail for the rest of their lives. This incident, those close to Alison think, brought on a brain aneurysm that she suffered in September 2024. Following two operations, she is learning to walk again at a rehabilitation facility and at home.

Alison has had huge encouragement from people all over South Africa, with financial support coming in after reports by Marianne Thamm, and also in *Daily Maverick*, Facebook, Instagram, Jacaranda FM and other media.

Alison, a single mom, is much better lately, and her boys are a far more important reason for what she can do for them now.

Marianne Thamm, ghost writer in the planning and writing of Alison's story, is a very well-known journalist. Born in England, she was the child of a German father (who had been a prisoner of war there) and a Portuguese mother. They immigrated to South Africa, where she lives in Cape Town with her family after having been educated at the Pretoria Technikon. She lists her professions as journalist, broadcaster, author and stand-up comedian. She has performed on stage as a comedian at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town and in a number of smaller towns in South Africa.

Points to consider

- Alison has become an inspiration, not only to women, in many countries in the world but especially in our own. What are your feelings about her experience?
- Do we all have the ability to rise above our difficult circumstances? Explain your response in detail.
- Why do you think *Alison's Story* was especially chosen to conclude the anthology?

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Further Reading

If you find any of the excerpts in the anthology particularly intriguing or enticing, you may enjoy reading a copy of the full text.

Most of the books from which the extracts have been taken are still in print, and many are available from bookshops in South Africa. They may also be ordered online – or they may even be available from a second-hand bookshop or in your local library.

WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST FOR THE 2026 OLYMPIAD

*And remember –
success isn't about winning;
it's about the consistent process of learning through
participation.*

*It's an ongoing journey, not a destination. Enjoy it.
The experience you will have gained throughout this
process will be more valuable than the outcome itself.*