Sizwe Bansi is Dead

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ATHOL FUGARD

Athol Fugard was born in 1932 in Middelburg, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. His father was an Englishman, while his mother was an Afrikaner, a member of South Africa's white minority population whose mostly Dutch ancestors colonized the country in the 18th century. After attending but not graduating from the University of Cape Town, he worked outside South Africa in 1953 and 1954, during which time he began writing. After returning to South Africa, Fugard worked as a clerk in a Native Commissioners' Court—a court where white judges passed judgments on Black South Africans—and came to realize how racist South Africa's laws and society were. Fugard married the actress Sheila Meiring in 1956 and in 1957, they settled in Johannesburg. In the late 1950s, Fugard wrote several plays that took South African racism as a theme and worked with Black South African actors to produce them. From 1960 to 1962, while also writing his famous early play *The Blood Knot* (1961), Fugard drafted the novel that would become *Tsotsi*. He did not try to publish it, however, and after ceasing work on it he refocused on his playwriting. In 1973, the National English Literary Museum (NELM)—a museum for South African literature in Grahamstown, South Africa—began collecting Fugard's manuscripts and papers. NELM's Fugard collection ultimately included the unpublished drafts of *Tsotsi*. In the late 1970s, a South African English professor named Stephen Gray found *Tsotsi* in NELM and persuaded Fugard to let him revise it for publication. *Tsotsi* was finally published in 1980. Although *Tsotsi* is Fugard's only novel, Fugard has continued writing plays continuously from the late 1950s through the present day.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead (1972) was written and originally performed under apartheid, a set of segregationist, white-supremacist laws active between the late 1940s and early 1990s in South Africa. Among other things, apartheid law required Black South Africans to carry an identity document called a passbook and limited where they could live and work. Though the play does not explicitly state what year it is supposed to take place, it makes several telling references. One character compares himself wearing factory safety gear to "Armstrong on the moon," a reference to the U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong (1930–2012), who became the first man to walk on the moon in 1969. Later in the play, characters criticize "Ciskeian Independence." Ciskei was a "Bantustan," a term referring to areas that South Africa's segregationist apartheid government demarcated as homelands for indigenous African populations. Ciskei was demarcated in 1961 and declared self-governing in 1972, a declaration that coincided with the government forcibly relocating many Black South Africans to Ciskei. The reference to Neil Armstrong indicates the play must take place after 1969, while the reference to Ciskeian Independence suggests it's probably intended to take place in 1972, when Ciskei was declared self-governing, the same year *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* was written.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* includes an extended monologue by the title character, an oppressed Black man in apartheid South Africa, insisting that he is a man like other men. William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596–1598) may have influenced Sizwe's monologue, as Shakespeare's play likewise includes a famous speech by the title character, the Jewish merchant Shylock, insisting that he is as human as the antisemitic Christians who oppress him. The playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) may also have influenced *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*; Brecht wrote political plays that frequently broke the fourth wall, calling attention to their artificiality to keep the audience focused on the political realities the plays were addressing rather than on their fictional elements. *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* breaks the fourth wall in a similar way: the characters speak to the audience and mention the names of the playwright and the original cast directly while making political arguments against South African apartheid. Athol Fugard wrote *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* in consultation with Black South African actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, who also starred in the play's original production. Fugard co-wrote another play with Kani and Ntshona, *The Island* (1973), which similarly represented the racism and injustice of South Africa's apartheid regime. Other famous works of theater that critique anti-Black racism in South Africa include Mbongeni Ngema and Hugh Masakela's musical *Sarafina!* (1988) and Craig Higginson's play *The Dream of the Dog* (2007).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Sizwe Bansi Is Dead
- **When Written:** 1972
- **Where Written:** Port Elizabeth, South Africa
- **When Published:** First performed 1972
- **Literary Period:** Postmodern, Contemporary
- **Genre:** Play
- **Setting:** Port Elizabeth, South Africa

- **Climax:** Buntu convinces Sizwe Bansi to steal the murdered Robert Zwelinzima's identity.
- **Antagonist:** South African apartheid

EXTRA CREDIT

Collaboration: Though Athol Fugard is usually listed as the author of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, he collaborated with the actors Winston Ntshona and John Kani to create the script. Winston Ntshona played Sizwe Bansi in the play's original production, while John Kani played both Styles and Buntu.

Political Censorship and Retribution: After a 1976 production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, the actors Winston Ntshona and John Kani were jailed due to the play's criticisms of South Africa's apartheid government (and specifically Ciskeian Independence), though protests led to the actors' release about two weeks later.

PLOT SUMMARY

In apartheid South Africa, in a township of the city Port Elizabeth, a young Black photographer named Styles enters his studio and begins reading aloud newspaper headlines. When he reaches a headline about a new automobile factory opening, he recounts how he worked for six years in a Ford factory under a racist white boss named Bradley. Eventually, Styles realized that as long as he worked the factory job, other people would control what he did all day except for the six hours he was able to sleep. He quit the factory job and became self-employed, which made him feel like a real man.

Styles claims his **photos** document people whom history would otherwise forget. He recalls how he once photographed a middle-aged man with an educational certificate the man spent seven years studying for; another time, Styles photographed a 27-person extended family because the family's elderly grandfather had always wanted a family portrait. Styles himself has only a photo by which to remember his father, a Black man who served in South Africa's army during World War II but was stripped of his uniform and rights as soon as he returned home.

A nervous-seeming Black man enters Styles's studio, identifies himself as Robert Zwelinzima, and asks for a photo he can send home in a letter to his wife Nowetu. Styles does a photo-portrait of the man, arranging him with a backdrop and props so that he resembles a wealthy businessman. Then Styles convinces the man to do an additional walking action shot, which the man can send to his wife as a promise he's coming home to her. When Styles takes the action shot, the photo suddenly comes alive—and the man in it begins narrating and acting out the letter he plans to send to his wife.

The man's letter reveals that his original name was Sizwe Bansi. He came to Port Elizabeth looking for work: his rural hometown lacked job opportunities, but he needed to support his wife and children. The Port Elizabeth police raided the house of the friend with whom Sizwe was staying and discovered Sizwe didn't have permission as a Black man under apartheid law to travel there. The police sent Sizwe to the Labor Bureau, where white men examined and stamped his **passbook**. To avoid the police, Sizwe went to stay with a friend of his friend's, Buntu. Buntu, unlike Sizwe, could read; he explained to Sizwe that the passbook stamp ordered Sizwe to return home. Sizwe proposed various ideas for evading the police and starting a business in Port Elizabeth. Buntu, hard-nosed, shot them all down.

Then Buntu bought Sizwe drinks at an illegal bar. On the way home, Buntu and Sizwe discovered a man stabbed to death in an alley. They learned from the dead man's passbook that his name was Robert Zwelinzima and he had legal permission to look for work in Port Elizabeth. Buntu suggested Sizwe steal the dead man's passbook and identity, so Sizwe could stay in Port Elizabeth and get a job. When Sizwe protested he didn't want to be a "ghost," Buntu argued apartheid had already made Sizwe a ghost—Sizwe might as well exploit the situation to care for his family. At last, Sizwe agreed.

Sizwe ends his letter by telling Nowetu that if everything goes well, he'll send her money and see her soon—though he previously expressed doubts to Buntu that he could get away with impersonating Robert Zwelinzima for long. Narration finished, Sizwe resumes his walking pose. Styles takes a final photo of him.

CHARACTERS

Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man – Sizwe Bansi is a nervous yet hopeful Black South African man living under apartheid. He comes from a rural area around a small city, King William's Town. Married to Nowetu, Sizwe believes being a man means supporting her and their children—but he cannot find work near home. He travels to a larger city, Port Elizabeth, to find a job. When white authorities discover Sizwe's **passbook** does not prove that he's allowed to be in Port Elizabeth, they stamp his passbook, but Sizwe, who cannot read, doesn't know what the stamp says. A friendly acquaintance, Buntu, informs Sizwe the stamp orders him to go home. That the authorities are indifferent to Sizwe's responsibilities as a husband and father shows how officially imposed racial identities interfered with Black South Africans' ability to fulfill their personal identities. Sizwe suggests burning his passbook and becoming a gardener or potato-seller—but Buntu shoots these ideas down, pointing out that Black men in South Africa are legally required to carry passbooks. Sizwe's ideas illustrate the irrepressibility of dreams even among oppressed people, while Buntu's responses show how apartheid's laws and economic hierarchies limited Black people's options. When after a night

of drinking Buntu and Sizwe discover a dead man in an alley, Buntu suggests Sizwe take the dead man's passbook, which includes a permit for seeking work in Port Elizabeth. Though Sizwe hesitates to give up his name, he ultimately steals the dead man's identity and becomes "Robert Zwelinzima" for his family's sake. That an official identity document becomes Sizwe's means of avoiding oppression shows how documentation can be misleading rather than informative when it comes to trying to understand oppressed people's lives. Under the name Robert Zwelinzima, Sizwe goes to the photographer Styles's studio so he can get **photographs** taken to accompany a letter he's sending to Nowetu explaining that he has taken a new identity and gotten a job. The photographs, with which the play ends, indicate the fulfillment of Sizwe's dreams but perhaps also their impermanence—since Sizwe doesn't know how long he can get away with being Robert Zwelinzima.

Styles – Styles is a young, fashionable, funny Black photographer in apartheid South Africa. He is casual friends with Buntu and takes **photos** of Sizwe Bansi when Sizwe, under the name Robert Zwelinzima, enters Styles's studio wanting photo-portraits he can send his wife Nowetu. For six years before he became a self-employed photographer, Styles worked in a Ford automobile factory under a racist white boss, Bradley, who made Styles feel like a "tool" and a "circus monkey." Realizing that the factory's racist environment and the official identity *employee* were destroying his self-esteem, Styles quit the factory and became his own boss, turning his photography side gig into his main occupation. Self-employment makes Styles feel like a "man"—illustrating how important fulfilling one's personal identity and following one's dreams are in the world of the play. Although Styles does take photos for **passbooks** and other official documents, he believes his photography's true purpose is to memorialize marginalized people's dreams and aspirational self-images. When he photographs Sizwe, he represents him first as a successful businessman and then as a happy husband traveling to reunite with his wife. These representations illustrate how good Styles is at identifying other people's dreams—Sizwe really does want to make money, support his family, and see his wife again—but also how precarious and perhaps illusory the dreams Styles memorializes are, since Sizwe's job will vanish if the white authorities realize he is using a dead man's passbook.

Buntu – A native of Port Elizabeth, Buntu is well known for helping friends and acquaintances; he lets Sizwe Bansi stay at his house while Sizwe is looking for work in the city and avoiding the white authorities. A married man, Buntu hired Styles to take his wedding **photos**. As Buntu's wife uses contraception, she and Buntu have only one child. The child stays with Buntu's mother because Buntu and his wife work too much to do regular parenting—showing how apartheid South Africa's racist laws and economic hierarchies limited Black people's options and hindered them in fulfilling personal identities like family roles. Buntu, who can read, informs Sizwe that the white authorities have stamped his **passbook** to order him to return home. When Sizwe suggests various vague schemes for destroying his passbook and getting work, Buntu shoots him down, showing both Buntu's practicality and his pessimism. Then Buntu offers to take Sizwe to an unlicensed bar and buy him drinks, revealing Buntu's generosity. On the way home from the bar, Buntu and Sizwe discover a dead man in an alley—and Buntu urges Sizwe to take the dead man's passbook, which contains a permit for seeking work in Port Elizabeth. That Buntu urges Sizwe to attempt this identity theft, despite Buntu's usual pessimism, indicates his desire both to help Sizwe and to thwart racist apartheid laws. After coaching Sizwe on how to pretend to be the dead man, Robert Zwelinzima, Buntu becomes exhausted at the prospect that the police may catch Sizwe, wishes Sizwe luck, and leaves him alone. Buntu's final reaction to Sizwe's identity theft suggests that Sizwe's dream of employment under a stolen identity may ultimately be an illusion due to the racist apartheid government's power.

Bradley – A white South African man who speaks with a heavy Afrikaans accent, Bradley supervised Styles when Styles worked at a Ford automobile plant under dirty, dangerous conditions. Bradley's racist treatment of Styles—which Styles began to internalize—illustrates how apartheid's economic hierarchies and official identities like *employee* limited Black South Africans' options and damaged their sense of self.

Nowetu – Sizwe Bansi's wife Nowetu stays in King William's Town and takes care of their four children while Sizwe looks for work in Port Elizabeth. Due to limited job opportunities in the rural environs of King William's Town, Nowetu cannot find work. Though Nowetu does not actually appear in the play, much of the play involves Sizwe narrating a letter he is writing to her, and Sizwe's desire to provide for her and their children motivates much of the play's action.

TERMS

Apartheid – In South Africa, apartheid was a white supremacist social structure, enforced by various laws, which persisted from roughly 1948 to 1993. Under apartheid, South Africans were divided into four racial groups: white, Indian, Colored (meaning people of mixed race), and Black/African. For most of apartheid, it was illegal for a white person to marry or have a sexual relationship with a non-white person. The law also forced people to live in racially segregated areas—relocating large swathes of the population to areas that had been legally designated for their race. Additionally, it was only legal for Black people to work in "white" parts of South Africa if they had a special pass. If the police found a Black person in a "white" area without a pass, they would arrest that person, who could

then be incarcerated and/or deported back to a "Black/African" area. After decades of protest against apartheid by Black-led political organizations such as the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, various South African political groups negotiated the dismantling of the apartheid system between 1990 and 1993. In 1994, South Africa held its first election in which people of all races were allowed to vote, and famous anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela became president.

Township – In South Africa under apartheid, the term "township" usually meant a city neighborhood or suburb where non-white people—Black/African, Indian, or Colored (meaning mixed-race) —lived close to but segregated from "white" areas of the city. Technically, however, the term "township" could also refer to an all-white area.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACIAL HIERARCHIES AND WEALTH INEQUALITY

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, a play set in apartheid South Africa, illustrates how wealth gives individuals agency in capitalist societies. South Africa's apartheid laws enforced a racist social hierarchy by not only restricting Black South Africans' legal rights but also preventing them from accumulating wealth, which would allow them more agency and ability to help one another. The play's title character, Sizwe Bansi, leaves his rural home in King William's Town because he can find no employment opportunities there but wants to support his family. When he travels to the urban area of Port Elizabeth, however, he discovers that he lacks the permits that South Africa's white-run bureaucracy legally requires of a Black man who wants to live and work in a new place. By restricting where Sizwe can work, apartheid law prevents him from earning money and deprives him of the ability to support his family. The play's other main characters, Buntu and Styles, have also suffered economic hardship and compromised agency due to apartheid's racist hierarchies. For instance, the (presumptively white) people who employ Buntu's wife as a live-in maid only allow her to return home on weekends. Buntu's child lives with Buntu's mother; it's implied that Buntu and his wife work too much to look after the child. This situation shows how Buntu's family can't choose to stay together because they lack the wealth that could allow them to do so. Meanwhile, Styles used to work in an automobile factory where white bosses forced him to work under dangerous conditions for 18 hours a day; it was only when he quit that job and began working as a photographer for (the play implies) an exclusively non-white clientele that he began to feel like a person in control of his life. Through its examination of the hardships its central characters endure, the play demonstrates that a person needs money to have agency in a capitalist society; as such, the play ultimately suggests that hindering Black South Africans who tried to accumulate wealth was one of the central ways that apartheid laws reinforced white supremacy.

OFFICIAL IDENTITY VS. PERSONAL IDENTITY

The three main characters in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, all Black men living in apartheid South Africa, each have two identities: the official identity that South Africa's white-supremacist state imposes on them, and the personal identity they derive from their sense of self. The play illustrates how racist official identities encroach on and damage Black South Africans' personal identities. One character, Styles, worked in an automobile factory for six years; his supervisor Bradley, a white South African, used racial slurs to refer to Black people and called them "monkeys." Eventually, Styles internalized the image of himself as a "circus monkey" and started referring derisively to himself in that way. It was only when he quit working in the factory and became a self-employed photographer that he considered himself a "man." Another main character, Sizwe Bansi, considers himself first and foremost a husband and father—meaningful personal identities. Yet because apartheid South Africa has imposed on him an official identity as a Black resident of King William's Town—an oppressive, racist official identity that his **passbook** enforces—he is not legally allowed to move in search of work to support his family. It is only when Sizwe switches passbooks with a dead man, symbolically "killing" his official identity, that he has a chance of supporting his family and thus protecting his personal sense of self. Finally, Sizwe's acquaintance Buntu is likewise a husband and father—yet due to Buntu and his wife's difficult work and financial situations, which their (implicitly white) employers and apartheid law impose on them, they rarely see each other or their child. Thus, the play suggests that the official identities apartheid imposed on Black South African people robbed them of a sense of self and, in so doing, alienated them from the personal identities that gave meaning and purpose to their lives.

ACTING AND TRUTH

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead suggests that there are two kinds of acting. The first kind of acting tries to deceive its audience into believing it isn't acting, just reality. The second kind of acting, however, draws attention

to its own artificiality and thus reminds its audience what reality is. At various points in the play, all the major characters act to deceive some audience. When Styles, an ambitious Black South African man, works in an automobile factory, his white boss Bradley demands that Styles and the other Black workers act happy during the factory owner's visit, even though the factory is dirty and dangerous. Bradley orders Styles to translate his orders to the other workers, and Styles uses this opportunity to mock Bradley while pretending to translate faithfully. In the same vein, when unemployed Black father Sizwe Bansi steals a dead man's **passbook**, an identity document that will give him the right to work and thus help him support his family, he and his acquaintance Buntu rehearse different scenarios in which Sizwe will have to pretend to be the dead man; this acting prepares Sizwe to deceive people, especially police officers.

While the play's characters use acting to deceive each other, they also use acting as a tool to draw the audience's attention to the artificiality and fictionality of the play. Styles, Sizwe, and Buntu all talk directly to the audience, "breaking the fourth wall." At one point, frustrated by the apartheid laws that prevent him from supporting his wife and children, Sizwe even asks a woman in the audience how many children the man beside her has and whether he's a real man. At other points, Sizwe and Buntu mention the names of the actors who portrayed them in the original performance (Winston Ntshona and John Kani) and the first name of the playwright (Athol). By constantly pointing out that the characters are actually actors who occupy the same reality as the audience, the play reminds the audience that the apartheid laws and racial injustice the play represents are real too. Thus, the play uses the artificiality of acting to highlight the reality of oppressive white supremacy in apartheid South Africa.

DOCUMENTED REALITY VS. LIVED REALITY

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, a play set in apartheid South Africa, suggests that documents are rarely reliable tools for understanding marginalized people's lives. The play opens with a Black South African photographer, Styles, reading newspaper headlines aloud. When he reaches a headline about a new automobile plant, he comments that he used to work at an automobile factory—and while he read a lot of headlines about factory owners planning to better the conditions in which Black employees worked, those headlines never resulted in real changes, like raises. Though Styles takes **photographs** both for official documents like **passbooks** and for personal keepsakes like family portraits, he argues that his real calling is documenting the existence of "my people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books." Yet Styles isn't trying to document the strict reality of the people he photographs; instead, he uses props and backdrops to record their aspirations and "dreams." Moreover, he's running a business; while he may photograph the simple people, he's photographing simple people who have enough money to pay him, which suggests that there may be another population of people too poor to be documented at all. Thus photographs, which may seem to record visual reality, can invent alternate realities and exclude impoverished realities. In the same vein, another character, Sizwe Bansi, uses a dead man's passbook—an identity document the government uses to monitor and limit Black South Africans' movements—to steal a new legal identity; though the passbook is supposed to document reality, it ends up serving as a tool to hide Sizwe Bansi's identity. The play thus calls into question the legitimacy of seemingly trustworthy documents like newspapers, IDs, and photographs for understanding the lives of oppressed people.

DREAMS

In the play *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, set in South Africa under apartheid, there exists a third category between truth and lies: dreams. Although dreams aren't true, they could become true—and so they motivate people, even oppressed and relatively powerless people, to try to change their reality. Yet at the same time, oppression compromises people's ability to realize their dreams; thus, it's unclear whether dreams are healthy motivators or cruel false hopes under oppressive political conditions such as apartheid. One of the play's characters, a Black South African photographer named Styles, considers the **photographs** he takes a method of validating his customers' dreams. He recalls one customer, a 48-year-old man who hadn't received a good formal education but went on to earn a completion certificate after taking a correspondence course for seven years. The man wants Styles to take a photo of him with the certificate and declares his intention to keep taking correspondence courses until he's a real "graduate." Given the man's age and the years it took him to earn the first certificate, it isn't clear whether he ever will become a graduate—yet his dream, by motivating him to continue studying, makes it a possibility, albeit a dim and distant one. Similarly, when a newly employed man, Sizwe Bansi, comes to Styles's studio, Styles takes one picture of Sizwe dressed as a successful businessman and another of Sizwe mid-walk, as though travelling to visit his wife and children. The play later reveals that Sizwe stole a dead man's **passbook** to access more employment opportunities and support his family; thus, the photographs Styles takes of Sizwe clearly represent a dream he is trying to achieve. Sizwe's dream has already motivated him to take major, dangerous action (stealing the dead man's passbook), which demonstrates the importance of dreams to the characters' lives despite dreams' ambiguous status between the real and the fake. Yet the play ends on a note of uncertainty about how long Sizwe can get away with impersonating a dead man, leaving ambiguous

whether Sizwe's dream has genuinely improved his prospects in life or given him false hope and put him in terrible peril.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PASSBOOKS/REFERENCE BOOKS

In *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, passbooks represent the racist refusal of South Africa's apartheid government to recognize Black South Africans' human dignity and individuality. This refusal deeply harms the play's Black characters, but they also find ways to exploit it. In apartheid South Africa, passbooks (also called Reference Books) were an identity document that the law required Black South Africans to carry. The government used passbooks to monitor and restrict Black South Africans' travel, places of residence, and employment. The play first mentions passbooks in the stage directions, when the Black photographer Styles advertises on his studio's name-board that he can take **photographs** for people's Reference Books. Styles later claims the real purpose of his business is not to churn out passbook photos but to memorialize his clientele's dreams, affirming their humanity—yet Styles still clearly advertises passbook photos. Styles's advertising for passbook photos suggests that economic concerns have coerced him into complicity with South Africa's white-supremacist government, tainting his personal aspirations as a photographer. On the other hand, Styles, a young Black man, has found a way to earn money from the racist passbooks, showing how Black characters do not merely suffer oppression but actively seek to survive and thrive under oppressive conditions.

The character Sizwe Bansi's troubles reinforce and deepen the symbolism surrounding passbooks. Sizwe moves to a city, Port Elizabeth, to look for jobs because he wants to support his family. Yet when the authorities discover from Sizwe's passbook that he does not have permission to be in Port Elizabeth, they order him to return home—showing their indifference to his dignity as a human being and as a father seeking to support his children. After Sizwe and his acquaintance Buntu find a passbook containing a Port Elizabeth work permit on a dead man's body, Buntu convinces Sizwe to take the dead man's passbook—an identity theft that will allow Sizwe to stay in Port Elizabeth and get a job. The identity theft relies on the white-supremacist government's blindness to Black individuality: Buntu and Sizwe are assuming that white authorities rely almost solely on passbooks to identify Black people and won't notice the difference between Sizwe and the dead man unless the police have reason to fingerprint Sizwe. Sizwe's original passbook cruelly thwarts his aspirations, showing apartheid's refusal to treat Black South Africans as full citizens or human beings with dreams—yet Sizwe eventually uses a new passbook to trick the government, again showing how Black South Africans did not suffer oppression passively but avoided or resisted it.

PHOTOS

In *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, photographs represent Black South Africans' dreams—dreams that South Africa's white-supremacist apartheid government cannot destroy, although it can make their realization uncertain. The play introduces the symbolism of photography through the character Styles, a self-employed Black photographer. Before becoming a full-time photographer, Styles worked for six years at an automobile factory under a racist white boss, Bradley, who made him feel like a "tool" and a "circus monkey." Though Styles's family didn't understand his dream of becoming a photographer, he chased it because he suspected being his own boss would make him feel like a "man"—and indeed, in the present of the play, he seems far more fulfilled than he was in the automobile factory. Having fulfilled his own dream, Styles believes the purpose of his photographs is to document and memorialize other marginalized people's dreams: he takes photos to commemorate the late-life educational certification of a man who didn't receive good schooling as a young person; to document the 27-person extended family of an elderly patriarch who always wanted to own a family photograph; and to illustrate the triumph of Sizwe Bansi, an unemployed man who wants to support his wife and children and finally gets a job after stealing a dead man's **passbook**, which contains a work permit. In each case, the characters' dreams are somehow uncertain or compromised. The man with the educational certificate wants to become a "graduate, self-made" through correspondence courses, which, given his late middle age and full-time work, may not happen. The elderly patriarch dies before Styles has developed the family photos. Finally, Sizwe may not be able to get away with stealing a dead man's identity for very long. Thus photos represent both the persistence and the vulnerability of Black South Africans' dreams under apartheid.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Township Plays* published in 1993.

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead Quotes

STYLES: I worked at Ford one time. We used to read in the newspaper . . . big headlines! . . . 'So and so from America made a big speech: ". . . going to see to it that the conditions of their non-white workers in Southern Africa were substantially improved."' The talk ended in the bloody newspaper. Never in the pay packet.

Related Characters: Styles (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

While reading the newspaper, the young photographer Styles has come upon a headline announcing a new automobile factory opening in South Africa. Talking directly to the audience, Styles explains why the news annoys him: money invested in South African factories never trickles down to "non-white" South African workers. This quotation establishes three things about Styles.

First, although Styles lives in apartheid South Africa where Black people are legally discriminated against, he sees "improv[ing]" the "conditions" in which Black South Africans work and live not only as a matter of changing laws or media attitudes, subjects for "the bloody newspaper," but as a matter of increasing Black wealth, of "the pay packet." In Styles's view, South Africa's apartheid government keeps Black South Africans oppressed not only through the law but through limited economic opportunities and poverty.

Second, Styles doesn't trust official documents like newspapers to tell the truth about oppressed populations. The kind of people likely to be quoted in newspapers can make all kinds of claims about "non-white workers in Southern Africa," but in Styles's experience, newspaper reports don't correspond to oppressed people's lived reality.

Third, although Styles is a fictional character, he can see the audience—he's talking directly to them, informing them of things he already knows, like that he used to work at a Ford automobile factory. By speaking directly to the audience, Styles establishes that he exists in the same reality as the audience—and thus encourages them to take his claims about politics and economics as true and relevant to their own lives.

STYLES: That was my moment, man. Kneeling there on the floor . . . foreman, general foreman, plant supervisor, plant manager . . . and Styles? Standing!

Related Characters: Styles (speaker), Bradley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Reminiscing about when he worked at a Ford automobile factory, Styles recalls a time the factory was scheduled to receive a visit from the company's owner, Henry Ford the Second. His white bosses, including his racist immediate supervisor Bradley, painted warning lines and signs in the factory to pretend they'd been protecting Black workers' safety; when Bradley asked Styles to help him translate the warning signs into an indigenous African language, Styles ended up standing over his white bosses while they painted.

This passage suggests an imperfect parallel between South Africa's racist hierarchies and global capitalist hierarchies. As Styles has to cater to the desires of racist white bosses who don't care about Black workers' safety, so minor white bosses in South Africa cater to the desires of major white capitalists like the U.S.-based Henry Ford the Second. The difference is, of course, that South African white supremacy and economic oppression put Styles in physical danger, whereas global capitalist hierarchies merely make Styles's white bosses look venal and foolish.

That Styles enjoys standing over his kneeling white bosses, including the racist Bradley, illustrates how much he dislikes figuratively having to "kneel" for these white men—that is, work for them and do what they say—all the time. His great pleasure at this unusual role reversal suggests how damaging to his self-esteem, and perhaps his very sense of self, reporting to racist white people has been.

STYLES: 'Gentlemen, he says that when the door opens and his grandmother walks in you must see to it that you are wearing a mask of smiles. Hide your true feelings, brothers. You must sing. The joyous songs of the days of old before we had fools like this one next to me to worry about.' [*To Bradley.*] 'Yes, sir!'

Related Characters: Styles (speaker), Bradley

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 153–154

Explanation and Analysis

Styles is recounting how Bradley, his racist white boss at the

Ford factory, demanded Styles translate a speech for the Black workers into an indigenous African language. When Bradley demanded that the Black workers sing and look happy during the company owner Henry Ford the Second's visit, Styles informed the workers they had to conceal their "true feelings" in a language Bradley didn't understand and pretended to Bradley he was translating his words exactly.

This passage illustrates how economic inequality between white and Black South Africans under apartheid infringed on Black workers' personal identities and forced them to play-act for white people. Styles and the other Black workers can't directly protest their white boss Bradley's racist and ridiculous demand that they, a group of adults at work, engage in childlike, cheerful singing for the benefit of a white visitor—because if the workers don't do what Bradley says, they could lose their jobs and thus their ability to support themselves. This inequality requires Black workers to wear a "mask" and "hide" their authentic feelings, to suppress their true selves and play-act demeaning roles.

Of course, Styles also uses play-acting as a form of resistance: he pretends to Bradley that he's translating Bradley's speech faithfully, while he in fact insults Bradley and speaks honestly to his fellow factory workers. Thus, in the play, acting is double-edged: it can be a form of acquiescence to oppression but also a way of subverting oppression.

STYLES: I took a good look at my life. What did I see? A bloody circus monkey! Selling most of his time on earth to another man. Out of every twenty-four hours I could only properly call mine the six when I was sleeping. What the hell is the use of that?

Related Characters: Styles (speaker), Bradley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

Styles is explaining to the audience why he decided to quit his job at the Ford automobile factory. His explanation suggests two reasons for quitting: an anti-capitalist reason and an anti-racist reason.

First, Styles takes the implicitly anti-capitalist view that when a worker sells his labor to someone else, he's effectively losing "his time on earth," which now belongs to someone else, his employer. If employers set wages low enough that workers have to spend 18 hours a day working to survive—and have to sleep the other six—workers have effectively lost their lives trying to support their lives. That is, of course, counterproductive; as Styles asks rhetorically, "What the hell is the use of that?"

Second, Styles's choice of language suggests he had an anti-racist reason for quitting the Ford automobile factory, where he worked under a racist white boss, Bradley. Bradley used to call Black people he disapproved of "monkeys." By working at the Ford factory under Bradley's supervision, Styles came to see himself as a "circus monkey." In other words, working under Bradley forced Styles to internalize Bradley's racism and thereby damaged Styles's sense of self. Thus Styles quit the Ford factory to free himself from both external racism and internalized racism.

STYLES: This is a strong-room of dreams. The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never get statutes erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds. People who would be forgotten, and their dreams with them, if it wasn't for Styles. That's what I do, friends. Put down, in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children's children will remember a man . . .

Related Characters: Styles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Speaking directly to the audience, whom he calls "friends," Styles explains his vision for the photography studio he opened after he quit the Ford factory. A "strong-room" is a safe place, usually fireproof, used to store valuable items. When Styles says that his studio is a "strong-room of dreams," then, he's claiming both that his studio protects people's dreams and that dreams are inherently valuable.

Styles contrasts the "simple people" he photographs with people who get "statues" and "monuments" dedicated to them; thus Styles is implicitly also contrasting the photographs he takes with official memorials and documents like the newspapers he criticized earlier for not representing oppressed people's lives accurately. Styles is implying that his photos constitute both a memorial to

dreams and a kind of alternate history, one that takes into account oppressed people in a way that official histories don't. Moreover, his photographs focus not on people's official identities, the way statues and monuments do, but on their personal identities and relationships: these photographs are intended not for the public at large but for the subjects' "children's children."

By directly addressing the audience as his "friends," Styles reminds them that they are watching a play, a work of art that is "put down [...] on paper" just like his photographs. The play may call attention to itself at this moment, breaking the fourth wall, to suggest a parallel between Styles's photographs and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*: both are works of art trying to represent the personal lives of marginalized people whom official histories usually ignore.

STYLES: Something you mustn't do is interfere with a man's dream. If he wants to do it standing, let him stand. If he wants to sit, let him sit. Do exactly what they want! Sometimes they come in here, all smart in a suit, then off comes the jacket and shoes and socks . . . [*adopts a boxer's stance*] . . . 'Take it, Mr Styles. Take it!' And I take it. No questions! Start asking stupid questions and you destroy that dream.

Related Characters: Styles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

Styles has broken off in the middle of a story about a customer at his photography studio to explain his philosophy of photographing people: he believes the photographer should "do exactly what" the customer desires, even if it doesn't seem to conform to reality. For example, if a customer who comes in "all smart in a suit," implying that he's a well-to-do office worker, wants to be photographed as a boxer, Styles will photograph him as a boxer.

Previously, Styles has suggested that his photos represent marginalized people's dreams *and* constitute an alternate history that includes marginalized people in a way official histories often don't. Yet this passage suggests that if Styles has to choose between representing his customer's dreams and representing their historical reality, he always chooses their dreams—which casts doubt on his photographs as a reliable source of historical information about his clients.

Styles's willingness to prioritize dreams over reality also suggests that while some dreams Styles documents are achievable aspirations, some—like the well-to-do office worker's desire to be a boxer—may be mere delusions, so that Styles's photographs not only memorialize aspirations but also feed false hopes.

STYLES: You must understand one thing. We own nothing except ourselves. This world and its laws, allows us nothing, except ourselves. There is nothing we can leave behind when we die, except the memory of ourselves.

Related Characters: Styles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Styles has just finished a story about a grandfather who brought his 27-person extended family to Styles's studio to fulfill a dream of a long-time family portrait but died before Styles developed the photos. He then tells the audience, whom he addresses as "you," what he believes the moral of this story to be: "We own nothing but ourselves."

How to interpret this quotation depends on what Styles means by "we" and "you." By "we" he may mean Black South Africans. In that case, when he says that "this world and its laws" prevent "us" from owning anything "except ourselves," he means that the legal and economic oppression that South African apartheid law inflicted on Black South Africans prevented them from accumulating wealth or having positive officially sanctioned identities, so that they could rely only on their personal senses of self for self-worth. When he says "you," he may be contrasting the audience—which, depending on the production, will not consist entirely of Black South Africans—with the "we," trying to communicate a truth about a particular marginalized group's oppression to an audience that hasn't shared that oppression.

On the other hand, by "we" Styles may mean human beings in general. In that case, he may mean that due to the world's *physical* laws—e.g. that possessions decay and everyone eventually dies—people don't really own anything except

themselves and can't leave anything behind "except the memory of ourselves." When he says "you," he is not contrasting the audience with the "we," but reminding the audience they are part of the "we"—subject to death just like the grandfather whose story he's just told.

By leaving ambiguous whether "we" means Black South Africans or humanity in general, the play subtly insists on Black South African's human dignity and reminds the audience that dreams and memories are as important to Black South Africans as to any other human group.

STYLES: Here he is. My father. That's him. Fought in the war. Second World War. Fought at Tobruk. In Egypt. He fought in France so that this country and all the others could stay Free. When he came back they stripped him at the docks—his gun, his uniform, the dignity they'd allowed him for a few mad years because the world needed men to fight and be ready to sacrifice themselves for something called Freedom [...] When he died, in a rotten old suitcase amongst some of his old rags, I found that photograph. That's all. That's all I have from him.

Related Characters: Styles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163–164

Explanation and Analysis

Styles is explaining a photograph of his father to the audience. His language suggests that official histories of the Second World War (1939–1945) fail to account for the experiences of marginalized people like his father. South African soldiers fought with the Allies against the Nazis in Africa and Europe; in official histories, this fact aligns South African with "stay[ing] Free" and "something called Freedom."

Yet shortly after the war ended, South Africa's white supremacist government began passing apartheid laws to limit the legal rights of its non-white citizens, especially Black South Africans. South Africa's turn from fighting for freedom to stealing freedom is symbolized in Styles's father, a Black South African soldier, being stripped of his military status, his positive official identity, "at the docks"—as soon as he was back on South African land. Official histories that count South Africa among the Second World War's freedom-loving good guys fail to represent the history of marginalized people within South Africa itself. Black South Africans who served in the military might end their lives in legal oppression and poverty, owning a "rotten old suitcase" and "old rags," as Styles's father did.

Though Styles doesn't say so explicitly, this story suggests a more personal motivation for his desire to memorialize oppressed people's dreams and histories. Because his own father had his "dignity" taken from him and died in anonymity, with only one photograph to memorialize him, Styles may want to give dignity back to marginalized people by affirming their dreams and to make sure they have memorials their families can treasure.

STYLES: Always helping people. If that man was white they'd call him a liberal.

Related Characters: Styles (speaker), Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man, Buntu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

A potential customer who identifies himself as Robert Zwelinzima has just entered Styles's studio. When taking the man's information, Styles recognizes his address and asks whether the man is staying with Buntu; when the man says he is, Styles praises Buntu and quips, "If that man was white they'd call him a liberal."

Though a joke, Styles's comment suggests that South African racial hierarchies mean people's behavior is interpreted differently according to their race. Because Buntu is a Black man, his "always helping people" is interpreted as a merely personal characteristic. If Buntu were white, on the other hand, his helping people would mean he was "a liberal"—that is, his helpfulness would be interpreted as a political attitude and a form of activism.

This difference in interpretation according to race suggests a reason why official histories tend to ignore marginalized people: interpreters assume that the behaviors of powerful groups (in this case, white South Africans) are politically motivated and important, whereas the behaviors of oppressed groups (in this case, Black South Africans) are merely personal and thus not historically relevant.

MAN: I don't want to leave Port Elizabeth.

BUNTU: Maybe. But if that book says go, you go.

MAN: Can't I maybe burn this book and get a new one?

BUNTU: Burn that book? Stop kidding yourself, Sizwe! Anyway, suppose you do. You must immediately go apply for a new one. Right? And until that new one comes, be careful the police don't stop you and ask for your book. Into the Courtroom, brother. Charge: Failing to produce Reference Book on demand. Five rand or five days.

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man, Buntu (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 171–172

Explanation and Analysis

Buntu has just informed Sizwe, who can't read, that the stamp in Sizwe's passbook—an identity document South Africa's apartheid government used to monitor and control Black South African men—is telling him to leave Port Elizabeth and return to his rural home near King William's Town.

The exchange illustrates how apartheid law limits Black South Africans' economic opportunities, damages their personal identities, and hinders them in fulfilling their dreams. Sizwe has come to Port Elizabeth because he can't find a job near his hometown; he's looking for work so that he can support his wife and children. Yet the impersonal and racist apartheid system doesn't care about Sizwe's poverty, his personal identity as husband, father, and provider, or his dream of employment. The passbook simply "says go" without any white authorities inquiring into Sizwe's personal circumstances or aspirations.

Moreover, the exchange makes clear that Sizwe cannot avoid the racist official identity the passbook represents. It is illegal for him to travel around without one. If he doesn't have one, he'll be fined (a "rand" is a South African currency) or jailed (for "five days"). Sizwe's only options are to obey or to find a means of changing his official identity somehow.

BUNTU: I'm also married. One child.

MAN: Only one?

BUNTU: *Ja*, my wife attends this Birth Control Clinic rubbish. The child is staying with my mother.

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man, Buntu (speaker), Nowetu

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

After talking about Sizwe's work options, Sizwe and Buntu discuss their family situations. Buntu's comments reveal that while he seems better off than Sizwe, he has had similar problems as a Black South African trying to enact a personal identity as husband and father.

Buntu has already told Styles that his wife's employers, who pay her for domestic work, only allow her to come home on weekends; now he reveals his child "is staying with [his] mother." The context implies Buntu and his wife work too many hours to take care of the child themselves and so must rely on the child's grandmother for round-the-clock childcare.

Moreover, Sizwe and Buntu's exchange about Buntu having "only one" child and Buntu's negative reference to "Birth Control Clinic rubbish" suggest that Buntu wants more children but may not be able to afford them. As Sizwe's poverty and unemployment have separated him from his wife Nowetu and their children, so Buntu's economic difficulties have forced him to spend most of his time apart from his wife and to have fewer children than he wants—negatively impacting his personal identities of husband and father.

BUNTU: That's it, brother. The only time we'll find peace is when they dig a hole for us and press our face into the earth.

Related Characters: Buntu (speaker), Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

When Sizwe asks Buntu why Black South Africans experience so much trouble, Buntu tells a story about a Black farm worker named Outa Jacob who had to travel from farm to farm seeking employment from white farmers

during a drought until he died. Buntu concludes by giving the story's moral: Black South Africans will only find peace in death. This story suggests that Buntu is pessimistic about political change in apartheid South Africa. He says "that's it" as if Outa Jacob's itinerant work and sad death are the sole story Black South Africans can expect for themselves.

Yet the way Buntu describes death—having one's face "press[ed] [...] into the earth" at the bottom of a "hole"—suggests that he doesn't view stasis after a life of injustice as truly peaceful. His words suggest a lack of resignation at the status quo and an anger at South Africa's apartheid state. These repressed feelings foreshadow his idea, later in the play, that Sizwe Bansi should steal a dead man's passbook to trick the apartheid government and fulfill his dream of employment in Port Elizabeth.

[*Our man is amiably drunk. He addresses the audience.*]

MAN: Do you know who I am, friend? Take my hand, friend. Take my hand. I am Mister Bansi, friend. Do you know where I come from? I come from Sky's place, friend. A most wonderful place. I met everybody there, good people. I've been drinking, my friends—brandy, wine, beer . . . Don't you want to go in there, good people? Let's all go to Sky's place.

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Sizwe is drunk outside an illegal township bar serving alcohol without a license to Black South Africans. He addresses the audience directly and invites them to come inside with him. This passage both reveals Sizwe's unhappiness with his official identity and suggests a different kind of social organization to the audience than the oppressive, racist, hierarchical apartheid culture represented in the play.

Sizwe's passbook contains his hometown (King William's Town) and his full name. Here, happily drunk, he rejects the hometown that official government documents like the passbook impose on him and adopts a new one, claiming, "I come from Sky's place." He also insists on a new, more respectful version of his name, introducing himself not as Sizwe but as "Mister Bansi." Sizwe's playful adoption of a new identity in this scene shows how oppressive he finds his inability to choose where he lives and the lack of respect usually showed him as a Black man in apartheid South Africa.

Sizwe, talking directly to the audience, invites them to "Sky's place." Presumably Sky is the name of the bar's proprietor, yet the name sounds suggestive, like a euphemism for heaven or some far-off utopia. In Sky's place, Sizwe can drink whatever alcohol he wants (apartheid law placed restrictions on Black South Africans selling and buying certain kinds of alcohol) with whomever he wants—including the play's audience, whatever their races. Thus, while on one level Sky's place is only an illegal bar, on another level Sizwe is inviting the audience to imagine a racially equal society by directly inviting them to enter this apartheid-law-defying place with him.

MAN: It will tell you in good English where he stays. My passbook talks good English too . . . big words that Sizwe can't read and doesn't understand. Sizwe wants to stay here in New Brighton and find a job; passbook says, 'No! Report back.'

Sizwe wants to feed his wife and children; passbook says, 'No.'

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man, Buntu (speaker), Nowetu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After Buntu discovers a dead man in an alley, Sizwe persuades him to search the dead man's body for a passbook, which will contain his address, so that they can try to return the body home. Musing about the information passbooks contain, Sizwe laments his passbook's ability to order him around in "good English." His lament emphasizes how apartheid South Africa's racist indifference to Black individuality prevents Black people from fulfilling their dreams.

Sizwe personifies the passbook, claiming that it "talks" in "big words" he can't understand and that it "says, 'No'" to Sizwe's desires. By personifying the passbook, Sizwe makes it stand in for racist white South African authorities and their indifference to his individual goals. Sizwe's goals are

either unobjectionable (he wants to live in a particular city, Port Elizabeth) or socially beneficial and ethically good (he wants to work to support his wife Nowetu and their children). Yet the passbook, embodying racist white indifference to his plight, doesn't engage with Sizwe's dreams and aspirations: it simply denies them and orders him to do something else.

Sizwe's inability to explain himself to or negotiate with his passbook shows that apartheid can't be negotiated with; for Sizwe's dreams to be realized, apartheid law must be subverted, broken, or destroyed.

MAN: [*Turning away from Buntu to the audience.*]

What's happening in this world, good people? Who cares for who in this world? Who wants who?

Who wants me, friend? What's wrong with me? I'm a man. I've got eyes to see. I've got ears to listen when people talk. I've got a head to think good things. What's wrong with me?

[*Starts to tear off his clothes.*]

Look at me! I'm a man. I've got legs. I can run with a wheelbarrow full of cement! I'm strong! I'm a man. Look! I've got a wife. I've got four children. How many has he made, lady? [*The man sitting next to her.*] Is he a man? What has he got that I haven't . . . .?

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man (speaker), Buntu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Buntu has been trying to convince Sizwe to flee the murder scene, abandoning the dead man's body. Sizwe asks Buntu whether Buntu would abandon Sizwe's corpse under similar circumstances and then, turning to the audience, demands to know what's wrong with the world. In this monologue, delivered directly to the audience, Sizwe challenges them to consider their own personal and official identities and whether they are meaningfully different from Sizwe's.

Sizwe tries to be friendly and respectful toward the audience, calling them "good people," "friend," and (when addressing a female audience member) "lady." Yet at the same time he insists to them that he's a "man," with eyes, ears, a head, and legs, like the vast majority of able-bodied people; his insistence suggests he isn't sure everyone in the audience recognizes the common humanity he shares with them. When he points out a particular couple in the audience and asks the woman how many children the man with her has, Sizwe is at once insisting he's a father just like other men and demanding the audience consider what makes them different or more deserving than Sizwe, whose life contains so much oppression and suffering.

In sum, by "breaking the fourth wall" with his interactive monologue, Sizwe forces the audience to recognize that they share a common human identity with him and that some may share similar personal identities (e.g. worker, father). Yet Sizwe's official identity, imposed on him by the apartheid government, means he's treated badly in a way the audience members (depending on their race and nationality) may never have been. Thus Sizwe's monologue confronts the audience with how they may have benefited from real-world injustice and ignored the suffering of the oppressed.

MAN: [*handing it over*]. Take it, Buntu. Take this book and read it carefully, friend, and tell me what it says about me. Buntu, does that book tell you I'm a man?

[*Buntu studies the two books. Sizwe turns back to the audience.*]

That bloody book . . . ! People, do you know? No! Wherever you go . . . it's that bloody book. You go to school, it goes too. Go to work, it goes too. Go to church and pray and sing lovely hymns, it sits there with you. Go to hospital to die, it lies there too!

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man (speaker), Buntu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182–183

Explanation and Analysis

Buntu has recovered the dead man's passbook and asked to see Sizwe's passbook too, without, however, explaining why he wants both. After Sizwe hands over the passbook, his subsequent comments to Buntu and to the audience demonstrate how oppressive he finds the passbook, which imposes official identities on Black South Africans that undermine both their human dignity and their individual dreams.

When Sizwe hands over the passbook, he asks Buntu, "does that book tell you I'm a man?" Clearly, the question is

rhetorical: Sizwe is pointing out that while the passbook contains official identifying information about him, it's a tool of an oppressive white-supremacist legal system, apartheid, which refuses to recognize that Sizwe is as much a human being as any white South African.

To the audience, Sizwe explains how the passbook and the apartheid system it represents interfere with Black South Africans' personal identity formation. His rhetorical question, "People, do you know? No!", suggests that the audience consists either of white South Africans or people from other nations, who may not understand how difficult life under apartheid is for Black South Africans. Then he lists all the different spheres of life where the passbook haunts Black South Africans: education ("school"), employment ("work"), religious observance ("church"), and even sickness and death ("hospital").

By listing all these different spheres of life, Sizwe makes clear to the possibly ignorant audience how the racist official identity imposed on Black South Africans by apartheid passbooks haunts and harms Black people who are just trying to learn, support themselves, and go about their private lives. Once again, the play is breaking the fourth wall to confront the audience with a political truth about real-world apartheid South Africa.

and about the play's worldview. First, while pessimistic Buntu has previously suggested that Sizwe return home and accept his miserable fate, Buntu now takes action to help Sizwe trick white authorities and subvert apartheid law. Buntu's actions here reveal that although pessimistic, he is not emotionally resigned to Black South Africans' racial oppression and poverty under apartheid: he actually does want to help Sizwe achieve his dreams any way he can.

Second, this exchange suggests that in the play's view, the only way for a Black South African man to succeed is for the official identity imposed on him by the white-supremacist apartheid government to die. The death of Sizwe's official identity, which makes room for his personal identity to flourish, is symbolized by the "burn[ing]" of Sizwe's passbook. The possible realization of Sizwe's dreams under a different identity is symbolized by Buntu transferring Sizwe's photograph—which represents his dreams—into the dead man's passbook, which contains a work permit.

The highly symbolic transfer of Sizwe's photo from his original passbook to the dead man's passbook suggests both that the only way for a Black South African to succeed is to subvert or break apartheid law and that official documents like passbooks don't necessarily tell the truth about oppressed people's lives and personal identities.

BUNTU: It's your only chance!

MAN: No, Buntu! What's it mean? That me, Sizwe Bansi . . .

BUNTU: Is dead.

MAN: I'm not dead, friend.

BUNTU: We burn this book . . . [*Sizwe's original*] . . . and Sizwe Bansi disappears off the face of the earth.

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man, Buntu (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Buntu, now in possession of both the dead man's passbook and Sizwe's, goes home with Sizwe and begins transferring Sizwe's photograph into the dead man's passbook. When Sizwe protests, Buntu tells him, "It's your only chance!"

This statement of Buntu's reveals something about Buntu

BUNTU: When the white man sees you walk down the street and calls out, 'Hey, John! Come here' . . . to you, Sizwe Bansi . . . isn't that a ghost? Or when his little child calls you 'Boy' . . . you a man, circumcised, with a wife and four children . . . isn't that a ghost? Stop fooling yourself. All I'm saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want, what they've turned us into.

Related Characters: Buntu (speaker), Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Sizwe, hesitating to steal the dead man's passbook, has admitted to Buntu that he's afraid to die and become a "ghost" of someone else—or in other words, Sizwe admits that he's afraid to lose his personal identity. Buntu's response argues that the official identities imposed on

Sizwe by the racism of South Africa's apartheid society, represented by his passbook, are already destroying his personal identity.

To prove his point, Buntu first asks a series of rhetorical questions about what it means to be a "ghost." He suggests that when "the white man" calls Sizwe "John"—that is, when any white person calls Sizwe by a generic name for a Black person rather than his actual, individual name—that kills Sizwe's personal identity and makes him a ghost. Similarly, when a white child calls Sizwe "boy," infantilizing him in a racist fashion, that kills Sizwe's personal identities of adult, husband, and father, making him a ghost.

Buntu concludes his argument by suggesting that since apartheid racism already treats Sizwe like a ghost, he might as well "be a real ghost." In other words, Buntu wants Sizwe to exploit apartheid's indifference to Black individuality and take on the official identity of a different Black man who's legally allowed more work opportunities. This argument illustrates Buntu's anger at apartheid racism and legal oppression; it also suggests that there are different ways to fight oppression—you can protest it officially, but you can also use its blind spots to trick and subvert it.

BUNTU [*angry*]. All right! Robert, John, Athol, Winston . . . Shit on names, man! To hell with them if in exchange you can get a piece of bread for your stomach and a blanket in winter.

Related Characters: Buntu (speaker), Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

After Sizwe has agreed to assume the dead man Robert Zwelinzima's identity, Buntu calls him "Sizwe" in conversation and Sizwe reminds Buntu to call him Robert. The quotation above, Buntu's response, once again breaks the fourth wall to confront the play's audience with questions about personal identity and economic security.

The names Buntu lists aren't random. "Robert" is the first name of the dead man whose passbook Buntu and Sizwe found, while "Athol" is the first name of the white South African playwright who wrote *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (Athol Fugard), and "John" and "Winston" are the first names of the Black South African actors who starred in the play's original production (John Kani and Winston Ntshona). By listing the fictional character "Robert" together with real people "Athol," "John," and "Winston," Buntu suggests that the same economic hierarchies and racial oppressions that exist for characters in the play exist for the real people who created the play—and for the play's audience. He thus encourages the audience to use the play's political worldview as a lens to analyze real-life politics.

Having encouraged the audience to take his political argument seriously, Buntu then argues that "names" should matter less to people than "a piece of bread" and "a blanket in winter." In other words, Buntu is saying that personal and official identities matter less than food and shelter, the preconditions of physical survival for any human being. This claim is somewhat ambiguous. Buntu could mean that identity is just less important than survival, or he could mean that a universal identity—that of a physically vulnerable human being—preexists and outweighs in importance both individual identities (like being "Sizwe" as opposed to "Robert") or official identities (like being a particular race or a particular nationality).

MAN: A black man stay out of trouble? Impossible, Buntu. Our skin is trouble.

Related Characters: Sizwe Bansi/Robert Zwelinzima/Man (speaker), Buntu, Nowetu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

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Explanation and Analysis

When Sizwe asks Buntu how long Sizwe can get away with pretending to be Robert Zwelinzima, Buntu tells him that as long as he "stay[s] out of trouble" and the police don't fingerprint him, he can be Robert indefinitely. Sizwe replies that it is "impossible" for him to stay out of trouble because Black people's "skin is trouble." This response suggests that Sizwe can't escape the racist official identities imposed on him by apartheid even when using another man's passbook—so Sizwe can only achieve his dreams permanently if apartheid ends.

Sizwe has taken a dead man's passbook, an apartheid-era identity document representing white-supremacist

indifference to Black individuality and the imposition of racist official identities on Black South Africans. Because the dead man has legal permission to seek work in Port Elizabeth, his passbook will allow Sizwe to chase his dream of getting a job and supporting his wife Nowetu and their children. Yet Sizwe believes he won't be able to get away with the identity theft for long—not because racist white authorities will immediately be able to tell the difference between one Black man (Robert) and another (Sizwe), but because the police will inevitably pick him up and fingerprint him just because he's Black. Thus Sizwe's "skin" itself constitutes another kind of official identity—troublemaker, criminal—imposed on him by a racist white system, one he can never trade in for another.

Sizwe's dream of getting a job and supporting his family is wholesome and legitimate. But apartheid law will inevitably prevent him from fulfilling his dream, merely because he's Black, even if he tries to work within the passbook system to take on a different identity. Thus the play illustrates that apartheid must be destroyed, not merely subverted, for Black South Africans to have a chance at fulfilling their legitimate dreams and aspirations.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SIZWE BANSI IS DEAD

In the South African township of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, a youthful man named Styles walks into Styles's Photographic Studio, whose sign advertises **photos** for both celebrations and official documents like **Reference Books**. Styles wears a dustcoat but also sports a bowtie. He has a newspaper in hand. Sitting down at a table, Styles begins reading headlines aloud. After reading about plans to expand a car factory, he comments that expansions never translate into more money for workers. He used to work for Ford, and every time a U.S. or British bigwig made a speech about helping "non-white workers," the papers ran stories, but the workers wouldn't be paid better.

Styles seems to be doing well economically: he runs his own photography studio and dresses sharply, wearing a bowtie to work. Yet his commentary on the headline about Ford suggests that before he was self-employed, he worked under much worse conditions because he was "non-white"—alluding to the racism and economic oppression people of color suffered under white bosses during South African apartheid. That Styles advertises for Reference Book photos is also an allusion to racial oppression under apartheid—Reference Books or "passbooks" were identity documents used to monitor and restrict the movements of Black South African men—and shows that Styles has figured out how to make money off apartheid law, illustrating Black resistance to white supremacy but perhaps also Styles's minor complicity in the passbook system. Styles's criticism of speeches in newspapers suggests that official history and documentation often fail to capture oppressed people's lived reality. Meanwhile, his monologue to the audience—there are no other characters onstage—draws attention to the fact that an actor, a real person, is saying these politically loaded lines. By breaking the fourth wall, the play forces the audience not to dismiss Styles's words as fiction but to consider whether they're true.

Styles recounts how once, "Mr Henry Ford Junior Number two or whatever" announced he would visit the factory where Styles worked. The workers were excited because a visit from someone important often meant a small bonus. One morning when Styles entered the factory, the machines were off, and a sign announced Ford would visit that day. The General Foreman, Mr. Bradley, summoned all the workers together. Mimicking Bradley's Afrikaans accent, Styles recalls how Bradley told the workers to clean the factory instead of doing line work. All the bosses were yelling, "Come on, boys!" and ordering the workers to completely, thoroughly clean the factory.

Henry Ford (1863–1947) founded Ford Motor Company; his grandson Henry Ford II (1917–1987) was CEO of the company during the period of time the play's events are likely supposed to take place. Notably, the workers are excited about the visit not because Henry Ford II is famous or important but because they may get a bonus, which indicates they aren't usually paid well and economic concerns are at the front of their minds. The (presumably white) bosses call the (presumably Black) adult workers "boys," implying a racist power dynamic where Black men have to accept a demeaning, infantilized identity foisted on them by white bosses in order to keep their jobs.

After the workers had cleaned the factory, Bradley painted both a white line on the floor and a warning about the tow motor. Styles laughs at the memory, noting that this was the first time he'd seen such a warning in six years working at the factory. Then Bradley painted a yellow line with a warning about not smoking and a green line with a warning about needing eye protection.

Bradley painted warning lines and signs in preparation for an important person's visit—which means no such signs existed before. This fact reveals that the white supervisors don't care about the Black employees' safety; Bradley is painting the warnings as an act to fool the company's CEO into thinking local South African managers treat Black workers better than they actually do.

After painting the green line, Bradley called Styles over. Mimicking Bradley's Afrikaans accent, Styles repeats Bradley's question about how to translate "Eye Protection Area" into "your language." When Styles translated it for him, Bradley initially accused him of joking, but Styles said he was serious. Bradley then ordered Styles to spell the translation. Laughing at the memory, Styles recalls how Bradley and other higher-ups were kneeling on the floor while he stood over them and spelled out the words.

Afrikaans is a language spoken by a minority of white South Africans. It evolved from the Dutch spoken by the Dutch people who colonized South Africa in the 18th century. The most common indigenous African language in Port Elizabeth, where the play is set, is Xhosa; that is likely what Bradley means by "your language." Styles's amusement at the memory of Bradley and other white supervisors kneeling while he stood indicates that such an event was unusual. The white supervisors' desperate desire to fool the company owner into thinking they cared about Black workers' safety briefly flipped the usual power dynamic between white supervisors and Black workers.

The bosses demanded the workers go shower, which was unusual for a Thursday morning. After the workers showered, the bosses gave them new overalls and new tools. The bosses also gave Styles, who worked in a particularly dangerous area of the factory, "a new asbestos apron and fire-proof gloves to replace the ones [Styles] had lost about a year ago." Styles compares how he looked in his new gear to Armstrong on the moon.

The U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong (1930–2012) was the first human being to walk on the moon in 1969. By comparing himself in an "asbestos apron" and "fire-proof gloves" to a famous astronaut, Styles reveals how alien safety equipment was to his experience in the factory. That revelation, together with the detail that Styles lost his last safety equipment a year before, shows how careless about Black workers' safety the white supervisors are and how desperately they are trying to hide the usual dangerous working conditions from Henry Ford II.

Once the workers showered and dressed, Bradley demanded Styles translate a speech to the other workers. Bradley orated about how important Mr Henry Ford the Second's visit was, how he wanted the workers to act cheerful and sing during the visit, and how they needed to show Mr. Ford they were superior to "those monkeys" in Harlem who went on strike, whom he called a racial slur. To the other workers, Styles mocked Bradley, said Mr. Ford was a "bastard" who "own[ed]" them, warned them to hide their true feelings, and said that as "South African monkeys," they had to act "better trained" than their U.S. counterparts.

Bradley's speech to the Black workers is overtly racist: after calling Black New Yorkers in Harlem "monkeys" and using a racial slur to describe them, he demands the Black South African workers perform a childlike, singing happiness for Mr. Ford. Evidently Styles feels he cannot protest Bradley's racism, because Bradley is his supervisor and could fire him. Bradley's ability to impose his racism on Black workers due to their need for jobs shows how official identities like "employee" can damage people's personal identities (like "human being") under oppressive conditions. Yet Styles manages to get back at Bradley, using Bradley's ignorance of indigenous African languages to pretend to translate for him while in fact mocking Bradley and Mr. Ford and acknowledging the disturbing, racist work situation where important white company men act like they "own" Black workers.

The workers worked very slowly, singing. Styles saw Bradley and other higher-ups grooming themselves, not suspiciously monitoring the workers like usual. Then three cars arrived. All the higher-ups ran to greet them. (In the present, Styles mockingly mimes how the higher-ups obediently made way for Mr. Ford.) Styles thought to himself how the higher-ups were "playing [his] part." He saw a very tall man take three steps into the factory, glance around, and walk out without talking to anyone. After the cars drove away, the white higher-ups demanded the workers work extra fast to make up for lost time. Styles bemoans that he worked at the factory for six years.

Styles's comment that the white South African supervisors were "playing [his] part" for Mr. Ford suggests an analogy between apartheid's racial hierarchies and global capitalist hierarchies: just as Styles had to show deference to his white South African supervisors because they had more power, money, and legal rights than he did, so his white South African supervisors showed deference to Mr. Ford, who in turn had more power and money than they did. By calling this deference "playing" a "part," Styles suggests that people with less power often act in front of—and intentionally deceive—people with more power.

Styles, reading the newspaper again, notes an advertisement for Doom. He recalls how one day when he worked for Ford, he realized he didn't control his own existence or time because he spent all his waking hours working for someone else. He decided to become a photographer, a job he already did on the side at celebrations. His wife and parents didn't understand his ambition; when he declared self-employment would make him "a man," his father retorted that he was already married and circumcised.

Doom is an insect-killing spray; clearly the newspaper advertisement for Doom has reminded Styles of something, but it isn't clear yet what or why. Styles's recollection that his factory job ate up his whole life shows how keeping a whole class of marginalized people—in this case, Black South Africans—poor can be a way of controlling them politically: people who have to work constantly to make ends meet live under their bosses' control and have no time to organize or protest. Styles's belief that becoming a self-employed photographer would make him a "man" shows how official identities like "employee" or "boss" as well as more personal, private identities like "husband" or "adult" affect the characters' senses of self. Finally, that Styles aspires to become a photographer introduces an association between photographs and people's dreams that will continue throughout the play.

Styles applied for a vacant room, which he planned to turn into a photography studio. Though it took several months for officials to approve his application, he eventually got a letter telling him the studio was his. When he entered the vacant room, he found it dilapidated and dirty. He cleaned it thoroughly, feeling good about being his own boss, only to see cockroaches on the walls. Thinking of Doom, he went to a Chinese man's shop and bought two tins. In the present, Styles mimes shaking the tins, firing them off at the cockroaches, and "*put[ting] them into their holsters*."

Styles had to undergo a months-long application process to rent his studio—and when his application was approved, the studio turned out to be in terrible condition; these details reveal how excessive bureaucracy and poor material conditions oppressed Black South Africans trying to work and accumulate wealth under apartheid. Yet Styles's playful recreation of using his insect-killing spray like a sheriff's guns in a Western shows how his dream of becoming a photographer helped him meet challenges with imagination and good humor.

Styles imagines that after he went home, the remaining cockroaches had a secret meeting and performed "a general inoculation" against Doom. When he came back the next morning, he tried to spray the cockroaches dead but had run out of Doom. When he told a friend about his problem, the friend told him to get a cat—township cats hunt insects because no one has enough money to feed them milk or meat, and the poor boys have killed the mice. The friend then gave him a cat, who ate the cockroaches.

Styles's joke about the cockroaches holding secret meetings and "inoculat[ing]" themselves against Doom shows how he maintains his sense of humor even in adversity. The revelation that township cats eat insects because no one can afford to feed them, meanwhile, illustrates the poverty in which apartheid forces Styles and other Black South Africans to live.

Styles, broadly indicating his studio, expresses his pride. He claims his studio isn't some rote operation churning out **photographs** for official documents like **reference books**. Styles claims to use photography to commemorate people with dreams whom history would otherwise forget.

Styles contrasts reference book photos with photos that commemorate marginalized people's dreams; in so doing, he associates passbooks with official identities imposed by the government and the photographs he takes with personal identities and aspirations. Yet Styles is after all running a business; while he may commemorate some people that history would otherwise forget, he likely does not commemorate those people too poor even to buy photographs—a detail that suggests the limits of visual documentation like photographs for representing the complete reality of marginalized people.

Styles points to a **photograph** on display and explains how the man it depicts came to the studio one day and asked for Styles to photograph him standing. Styles notes that he always photographs people how they want to be photographed, so as not to interfere with their "dream." The man asked Styles to photograph him with an educational certificate. He explained that his boss told him he needed more education if he wanted a promotion, so he had been taking a correspondence course for over seven years and finally finished. He was planning to keep taking courses until he was a "graduate, self-made!"

That Styles always photographs people how they want to be photographed suggests he does not so much document marginalized people's realities as their aspirations, what he calls their "dreams." It is unclear from the story Styles tells whether these dreams are important motivators or cruel illusions. The boss of the man Styles photographed may simply have been using the man's lack of education as an excuse not to promote him (or give him a raise)—so that the correspondence course may represent a false hope of advancement. On the other hand, the man's tenacious quest for education is admirable, which suggests that dreams really do motivate people to accomplish good things.

Styles continues examining the **photographs** on display. He calls one photograph his "best." One day, a 27-person extended family—from tiny children to an ancient grandfather—came into the studio. One of the grandfather's sons explained to Styles that the grandfather has always wanted a family photograph. Styles arranged all 27 family members with much difficulty. Then, trying to get them all to smile, he encouraged them to say cheese. All 27 people said cheese, and the noise got so loud that people in the street started saying it too. Styles kept reorganizing the family and taking new photos; in total, he did 10 different family portraits.

Here, Styles's photography really does memorialize people's personal identities—their family relationships—in contrast with the official identities imposed on them by government documents like passbooks. Styles doesn't explain why he considers a photograph of the family his "best," but perhaps it is because the grandfather's dream was simply to have a photograph—so that Styles was able to memorialize and to fulfill the grandfather's dream at one and the same time.

The next week, the grandfather's son came to retrieve the **photos** and told Styles the grandfather died and would never get to see the family portraits. Styles told the son to be thankful for his father's life and went over the family portraits with him; the portraits caused the son to cry but also to smile. Once the son exited the studio, Styles imagined him passing around the photos to people in mourning. He reflects that "we" only own "ourselves" and after death persist only in memory. He says he knows this because his own father died.

The grandfather died before he could see his dream of a family photo-portrait realized, which illustrates the uncertain, potentially illusory nature of dreams and aspirations. Styles's claim that "we" only own "ourselves" is ambiguous. He may mean that "we" (as in Black South Africans) live in poverty due to racial oppression and so only have power over personal identities, nothing else. On the other hand, he may mean that "we" (as in human beings) have only "ourselves" because possessions are transitory and all lives end in death.

Styles indicates a **photo** of his own father on display. He explains how his father fought in World War Two, for the freedom of South Africa and other countries. When he shipped home from the war, his weapon and uniform were taken from him "at the docks," as well as "the dignity they'd allowed him for a few mad years." Styles found the photo of his father after he died; it is the only memento Styles has of his father.

Ironically, Styles's father represented South Africa as a member of its army fighting for freedom abroad—but as soon as he returned home, literally "at the docks," authorities took this positive official identity from him, and the "dignity" it implied, due to his race. That a photograph is the only memento Styles has of his father shows that photos do have an important role to play in commemorating marginalized people, even if they cannot document marginalized people's whole reality. Although Styles does not say this explicitly, it is possible that his dream of photographing marginalized people and affirming their personal identities and aspirations derived from his father's experience of having his official identity and "dignity" stolen by South African authorities.

Styles, noting another **photo**, is about to tell a story about a woman whose husband was arrested when someone knocks on the studio door. He says, "Tell you about it later," and asks the knocker to come in. An uncertain-seeming man enters wearing a suit that doesn't fit and holding a hat inside a plastic bag. Styles, smiling, says to the audience, "A Dream!" He asks the man for his name and address. After pausing, the man—seeming scared—identifies himself as Robert Zwelinzima and says he's staying at Fifty Mapija street. Styles asks whether he's staying with Buntu; Robert says he is. Styles speaks approvingly of Buntu's kindness and quips, "If that man was white they'd call him a liberal."

When Styles says, "Tell you about it later," there are no other characters on stage. Clearly, then, he's addressing the audience—which means that he hasn't been talking to himself but has been aware of spectators this whole time. By "breaking the fourth wall" and acknowledging the audience, the play makes clear that its audience inhabits the same politically unjust, white-supremacist political system that its play represents in fiction. By calling his new customer "A Dream!" Styles suggests the customer will want some aspiration memorialized—but, perhaps without meaning to, also suggests there is something illusory or unreal about this "Robert Zwelinzima." Finally, Styles's joke about his and Robert's mutual acquaintance Buntu—that if he were white, he'd be "a liberal"—suggests that white people get political credit for helping Black people in a way that Black people don't when they help other Black people.

Styles asks Robert how many **photos** he wants and how he wants to pose. Robert replies that he only wants one photo and has no preference about poses—but as Styles begins arranging props, Robert tentatively puts on his hat. Styles praises Robert's suit and asks where he got it. When Robert says Sales House, Styles makes a joke about how Sales House doesn't recover suits from customers who can't make payment installments. He and Robert both laugh. Setting up the photo equipment, Styles asks Robert what he'll do with the photo. Robert says he plans to send it to his wife, Nowetu, in King William's Town.

Robert's tentativeness about how he wants to be photographed suggests he has an uncertain sense of self. He and Styles develop a rapport praising Sales House for not repossessing suits from poor customers, which suggests that poverty is a common experience over which the two men can bond. Finally, that Robert is sending a letter home to his wife suggests that he's had to move for work—economic concerns have separated him from his family.

When Styles praises Robert's family-mindedness and asks where Robert works, Robert says Feltex. Robert is getting stiff and nervous, so Styles encourages him to smile. Trying a smile, Robert takes a pipe from his pocket to use as a prop. Styles suggests that they use the **photo** background to make Robert look like an important employee. He adds a world map to the background of the photo and gives Robert a cigarette to hold along with his pipe. After instructing Robert on how to pose, Styles photographs him.

Styles does not attempt to photograph Robert as he is—stiff, nervous, and economically insecure—but as an important, self-assured employee. This shows that Styles is more interested in affirming people's dreams and aspirational selves than in documenting them as they are. It also suggests that Styles has correctly guessed what Robert's dream is: to appear employed and successful to his wife. Yet the silly details in the photo—for example, Robert is holding both a cigarette and a pipe—suggest that the dream-image Styles is creating is flawed, perhaps divorced from reality.

After telling Robert he's finished, Styles suggests Robert get more than one **photo**. He suggests a postal worker might open his letter looking for money and throw away the contents. Then Styles asks whether Robert wants a "movie," that is, a photo of Robert mid-action, pretending to walk home to his wife Nowetu, for instance, so that she and his children can see the photo and look forward to a future visit from him. When Robert agrees, Styles flips the background world map over; on the other side is a fictional high-tech city. He gives Robert a walking-stick and a newspaper as props, insisting on the newspaper even when Robert says he can't read. Styles guides Robert through a posed walk, tells him to freeze, and photographs him.

Styles's representation of Robert is getting more divorced from reality: he convinces Robert to pose in front of a science-fictional city backdrop and insists Robert hold a newspaper even though he can't read. These details show how even though photographs simply record visual data, they can document reality in misleading ways—and how dreams, represented by photographs, can be cruelly illusory as well as positively motivating.

When the camera flashes, all the lights go out and a spotlight finds Robert—replicating the **photo** Styles has just taken. Robert begins to narrate the letter he has written to Nowetu. He says he has something very exciting to communicate: "Sizwe Bansi is, in a manner of speaking, dead!" In a flashback, Robert is staying with a friend named Zola in Port Elizabeth and looking for a job—where he finds much competition from other unemployed men from rural areas—when an official stamps his **passbook** and orders him to leave Port Elizabeth within three days.

In this scene, the photograph of Robert "comes alive" and begins narrating a letter. This highly stylized, artificial transition draws attention to the play's status as a work of fiction—which focuses the audience's attention on which parts of the fiction may be false (e.g., particular characters' names and stories) and which are true (e.g., the oppressive political context being represented). Since photos have represented dreams and aspirations throughout the play, the photo coming alive also suggests that Robert's dream has somehow been realized or come true. Because the audience doesn't know who Sizwe Bansi is or what it means to be dead "in a manner of speaking," however, the play still has not revealed exactly what Robert's dream is. Yet Robert does say he wanted work and that his passbook, representing his official identity, prevented him from getting it—which suggests that questions of employment, documentation, and identity will be important to the fulfillment of his dream.

To avoid the official, Robert goes to stay with a friend of Zola's named Buntu. At Buntu's house, "Robert" introduces himself to Buntu as Sizwe Bansi. Buntu explains that they're alone in the house—his wife works as a round-the-clock maid and is only allowed to return to her own home on weekends. While Buntu washes up and changes out of his work clothes, he asks Sizwe about his situation. Sizwe explains that he's not allowed to stay in Port Elizabeth, only King William's Town. The authorities discovered him during a raid on Zola's place and brought him to the Labor Bureau. There, a white man examined his **passbook**, and then someone else came and stamped his passbook.

Here the audience learns that "Robert" was originally called Sizwe Bansi, the man "Robert" declared dead at the beginning of his letter. It is not yet clear whether Sizwe faked his own death or underwent some other identity transformation in order to become "Robert." Buntu's economic and family situation—his wife's job only allows her to return home on weekends—shows how poverty and economic inequality can prevent people from enacting personal identities like "spouse" or "family member." Finally, Sizwe's memories of the Labor Bureau, in which white people interacted more with his passbook than with him, show how racist, oppressive, and de-individualizing the official identity represented by the passbook is.

Buntu asks to see Sizwe's **passbook**. When Buntu asks whether Sizwe understands the stamp, Sizwe explains that he can't read. Buntu tells Sizwe that the stamp ordered him to return to King William's Town and appear before the Bantu Affairs Commissioner for "Influx Control"—and he was supposed to do this by yesterday. Sizwe says he doesn't want to go home; Buntu replies: "if that book says go, you go." When Sizwe suggests destroying the book, Buntu points out that he'd need another one—if the police catch him without a passbook, he'll be fined or jailed. And even if he got a new book, the Labour Bureau would just stamp it in the exact same way again. Eventually the authorities would force him to return to King William's Town.

"Bantu" is a group of indigenous African languages, some of which are spoken in South Africa. A "Bantu Affairs Commissioner" would be a bureaucrat in charge of dealing with South Africa's indigenous Black population. "Influx Control" was a South African apartheid policy restricting the movement of Black people into cities. Essentially, the passbook is ordering Sizwe to stay out of cities and report to a bureaucrat in his rural hometown. As a marker of his official identity, Black South African, the passbook doesn't care about Sizwe's personal identity of husband and father or his dream of supporting his family. When Sizwe suggests destroying his passbook and going without an official identity, Buntu points out that the law makes having an official identity unavoidable.

Sizwe suggests he may get a job as a gardener. Buntu informs him that "little white ladies" who advertise jobs like that in the papers only want employees whose papers are good and know things about flowers. When he asks whether Sizwe knows any white men who'll hire him, Sizwe replies that he doesn't know any white men. Buntu says that's a shame, because if Sizwe could get a white man to write a letter saying he'd employ Sizwe, Sizwe could go through a complicated process with bureaucrats in King William's Town and Port Elizabeth to maybe get the right stamp and the right letters he would need to apply for a "Residence Permit."

A "Residence Permit" is official permission allowing Sizwe to live in Port Elizabeth. This passage is mocking the convoluted, almost impossible process Sizwe would have to undergo to obtain such a permit—a process that depends almost entirely on Sizwe having a potential white boss, revealing how apartheid law forces Black workers to be dependent on white people, even when those white people, like the "little white ladies" Buntu mentions, have silly or unfair employment requirements.

Sizwe suggests that maybe he could start a small potato-selling business. Buntu asks where Sizwe would get the money to buy the potatoes. He also points out that Sizwe couldn't get a license to sell them because of his stamped **passbook**. At last, Buntu tells Sizwe he should return to King William's Town and get a job in the gold mines. Sizwe retorts that working in the mines doesn't pay well and is very dangerous: "I don't want to die," he tells Buntu.

This passage shows how Sizwe's opportunities to get a job and earn money are limited both by his preexisting poverty (he couldn't afford to buy potatoes to resell) and by racist apartheid laws represented by his passbook (no authorities would give him a license to sell potatoes). The only work available to Sizwe is poorly paid and physically dangerous mining work, highlighting the limited options and economic exploitation suffered by Black South Africans under apartheid.

Struck by Sizwe's desire to live, Buntu sits down and questions Sizwe about his wife Nowetu and his children. He learns that Sizwe has three sons and a daughter and his wife Nowetu can't work because their home is too rural to have job opportunities. Buntu shares that he and his wife have just one child because his wife is on birth control and that the child stays with Buntu's mother. Though Buntu is from Port Elizabeth, he had a difficult time getting the stamps in his **passbook** that allowed him to get a job and a house.

Though Buntu seems better off than Sizwe, this passage reveals they have similar problems. Both men are separated from their wife and children due to economic concerns: Sizwe has left his family to look for work because his hometown has no job opportunities, while Buntu rarely sees his wife and lives apart from his child due to his and his wife's demanding work schedules. Sizwe and Buntu's shared problems show how the racist official identities imposed on them by the government, represented by the passbook system, inhibit their attempts to live out personal identities of "husband" and "father."

Sizwe asks, "Why is there so much trouble?" Buntu tells him about a speech a preacher gave at a funeral Buntu attended in a rural area for a man named Outa Jacob. The preacher explained that Outa Jacob had worked for the same *Baas* for a long time, but when that *Baas* died, the *Baas*'s son fired him. Outa Jacob went to work at another farm, but the farmer's wife and Jacob's wife had some conflict, and Outa Jacob had to seek work elsewhere. Yet because of poor farming conditions, farmers weren't hiring. This pattern continued until Outa Jacob died. Buntu concludes: "The only time we'll find peace is when they dig a hole for us and press our face into the earth." Buntu asks whether Sizwe has heard of "Sky's place." When Sizwe says no, Buntu suggests they go and offers to pay Sizwe's tab. Buntu exits.

The word "Baas" is Afrikaans for "boss." Buntu's story of Outa Jacob suggests that white South African bosses will overwork, exploit, and discard Black South African workers from those workers' births until their deaths. Black South Africans' only chance for "peace" is in a grave "hole" with their faces "press[ed] [...] into the earth," a horrible image of stasis and suffocation hinting that a supposedly peaceful death is really just a defeat. This story both emphasizes white South Africans' economic exploitation of Black South Africans and reveals that Buntu is pessimistic about the situation ever changing.

Alone onstage, Sizwe narrates his letter to Nowetu again, explaining how even mentioning Sky's place hurts his head, how the place served "first-class booze," and how the staff called him "Mister Bansi." Remembering this, Sizwe laughs.

In various ways at various times, South African apartheid law restricted the sale of alcohol to and by Black people. The audience can infer that Sky's place is a "shebeen," an establishment selling alcohol without a license to a township clientele—otherwise it would not be selling "first-class booze" to a Black South African man. Previously, the play has suggested that its characters have both personal identities and official identities imposed on them by the apartheid government. Sky's place gives Sizwe the polite name "Mister Bansi," suggesting yet another identity—identity that is neither personal nor official but dependent on social context. Sizwe's amusement at the polite "Mister Bansi" identity suggests that he isn't used to being treated respectfully.

In a flashback, Sizwe is standing outside Sky's place, drunk. He offers the audience his hand, introduces himself as Mister Bansi, says he comes from Sky's place, and invites the audience to follow him inside. Then he starts yelling for "Mr Buntu." Buntu enters a little tipsily, looks at the audience, and asks where Sizwe met them. Sizwe claims he just stumbled upon them. Sizwe and Buntu discuss what a good time they've had. At one point, Buntu calls Sizwe "Sizwe." Sizwe acts offended, claiming Sky's place has turned him into "Mr Bansi." With joking good humor, Buntu apologizes and calls Sizwe Mr. Bansi.

In this scene, Sizwe and Buntu notice and talk about the audience. Once again, by "breaking the fourth wall," the play emphasizes that its tale of injustice under apartheid exists in the same reality as anyone comfortably watching the play from theater seats. Sizwe's desire to be "Mr Bansi" indicates his unhappiness with his present identity, perhaps subtly implying a desire to be someone else and thus suggesting why Sizwe later becomes "Robert."

Buntu tells the audience that in Sky's place, a Member of the Advisory Board asked Sizwe his thoughts on "Ciskeian Independence" because Sizwe's from King William's Town. Sizwe cuts in to call Ciskeian Independence "shit." Then Buntu laughingly recalls another man who asked whether "Mister Bansi" was in Port Elizabeth on "official" business. Sizwe insists that he will remain in Port Elizabeth.

Ciskei was a "Bantustan," an area within South Africa that the apartheid government reserved for indigenous Black Africans and to which it attempted to forcibly move some Black South Africans living elsewhere in the country. "Ciskeian Independence" likely refers to South Africa's 1972 declaration that Ciskei was a separate, self-governing indigenous nation within South Africa. When Sizwe calls Ciskeian Independence "shit," he may be suggesting that it is a ploy by the South African government to segregate the nation further and to keep Black South Africans from getting jobs in urban areas. Buntu thinks the question about whether Sizwe's business is "official" is funny because Sizwe is in Port Elizabeth illegally—which is as unofficial as it gets. Sizwe's insistence that he'll stay in Port Elizabeth indicates that he means to defy the law.

Buntu checks his watch, suggests they go home, and asks Sizwe to lead. Sizwe asks whether Buntu is implying Sizwe can't figure out the way. Buntu denies this. Sizwe heads off in the wrong direction. After Buntu corrects him, Sizwe manages to go the right way for a while but then gets turned around again. Buntu asks Sizwe to stop for a moment so he can urinate. Bantu exits but sprints back a moment later, telling Sizwe they need to leave. He explains that while he was urinating on what he thought was trash, he realized it was a bloody corpse that *tsotsis* must have murdered.

Though Sizwe believes he can navigate around Port Elizabeth, he can't—at least not when he's been drinking—which suggests that his dream of becoming an urban worker may still be far from reality. "Tsotsi" is a South African slang term for a gang member; the playwright Athol Fugard published a novel called Tsotsi in 1980. When Buntu and Sizwe suddenly encounter a corpse, the play suggests that economic deprivation has made the township dangerous.

Sizwe, hesitating, tells Buntu they should go to the police. Buntu says if Sizwe, "drunk, **passbook** not in order," goes to the police, they'll pin the murder on him. When Sizwe pleads with Buntu to at least bring the corpse home, Buntu says he doesn't want to lug a corpse around at night and doesn't know where the man lived. Sizwe points out that the man's passbook will have his address. After pausing unwillingly, Buntu goes to fetch the passbook.

Buntu believes the police will assume Sizwe is a murderer simply because he is a Black man who has been drinking illegally and who doesn't have the right documents. This belief suggests that another quasi-official identity or stereotype the white-supremacist state has imposed on Black South African men is "criminal." It also suggests that documents like passbooks, far from showing who marginalized people like Sizwe really are, can lead to their being misunderstood and unfairly punished. Despite the threat from the police, Sizwe still wants to do something for the murdered man—revealing the nervous Sizwe's compassion and courage.

While Buntu is gone, Sizwe notes that his **passbook**, like the dead man's, "talks good English," forbidding him to live where he wants or get a job to feed his family. As Bantu returns with the dead man's passbook, Sizwe laments that when the authorities first required the passbooks, they suggested the passbooks would be helpful to people. Bantu reads aloud from the passbook, saying the dead man's name is "Robert Zwelinzima," a Xhosa man who's currently unemployed but has a permit to look for work in the area.

Though the passbook is inert paper and Sizwe is a living man, Sizwe personifies the passbook as a speaker that can talk better and more powerfully than he, so powerfully that it can thwart Sizwe's dreams of finding employment and supporting his family. Sizwe's personification of the passbook emphasizes how the official identity it represents can damage and overwrite Black South Africans' personal identities and senses of self. The dead man's name is Robert Zwelinzima, the name Sizwe gave Styles earlier in the play—suggesting that Sizwe is going to take on the dead man's identity. "Xhosa" is an indigenous African ethnic group common in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, where both Sizwe's hometown and Port Elizabeth are located.

When Buntu sees that the dead man lived in "Single Men's Quarters," he refuses to go there at night. As Sizwe doesn't understand what Single Men's Quarters are, Buntu explains it's a barracks-like living situation where it will be impossible to find the dead man's room and where the other lodgers may beat them up. He tells Sizwe he's going to return the **passbook** to the man's body, and then they're going home. Sizwe asks whether Buntu would leave Sizwe's corpse in an alley covered in urine if *tsotsis* stabbed him to death. Buntu stops heading back toward the corpse. Sizwe claims that he no longer gives "a damn about anything" and wishes he were dead.

Sizwe's question to Buntu about whether Buntu would treat his corpse in the same way he'd treat this stranger's hints at Sizwe's moral worldview. Sizwe seems to believe they have a duty to the dead man as a fellow human being even though he's a stranger to them, so that it would be as horrible for them to ignore his corpse as it would be for Buntu to ignore his friend Sizwe's corpse. This belief in turn suggests that the apartheid government's repressive official identities, symbolized by the dead man's passbook, is warping Buntu and Sizwe's moral responses and senses of self by making them afraid to do anything about the corpse. It may be disgust at this oppressive, warping context that makes Sizwe claim he no longer gives "a damn" and wants to die.

Sizwe asks the audience who treats other people well or desires other people anymore. He asks whether there's something wrong with him, since no one seems to want him. Fiercely removing his clothing, he declares he's a man, smart and physically strong, who has fathered four children. Pointing at a male audience member, Sizwe asks the woman next to him how many children he has and whether he's a man. Buntu walks to Sizwe, holding the dead man's passbook, and asks to see Sizwe's. Sizwe, giving Buntu his **passbook**, asks whether it says Sizwe's a man. Turning to the audience, Sizwe laments how the passbook follows you everywhere, even to church and to the hospital when you're dying.

Sizwe not only acknowledges the audience's existence but challenges them to consider whether they're any more deserving of respect or human dignity than he is. By directly addressing the audience, Sizwe forces them to think about how they have suffered or benefited from the racial and economic hierarchies that the play represents. When Sizwe asks Buntu whether his passbook says he's a man, meanwhile, Sizwe seems to suggest that the apartheid-imposed official identities passbooks represent damage not only personal identities like "father" and "husband" but even very general categories of belonging like "man" or "human being." In simple terms, Sizwe recognizes that apartheid's passbook system dehumanizes him.

Buntu picks up Sizwe's clothing and orders Sizwe to follow him. Back at Buntu's house, Sizwe watches Buntu tear the photos from each **passbook** and glue them into the wrong passbook. Alarmed, Sizwe tells Buntu to stop, but Buntu says it's Sizwe's "only chance." The police will find the corpse the next day without a passbook and never identify him; meanwhile, Sizwe can take on the corpse's identity and get a job at Feltex, where Buntu has a connection. When Sizwe tells Buntu he doesn't want to "lose [his] name," Buntu retorts that, if so, he'd better start walking to King William's Town now. When he's back, he can "cough [his] bloody lungs out with Ciskeian Independence."

Although previously Buntu has criticized and dismissed Sizwe's dreams, in this passage he tampers with official identity documents to give Sizwe a "chance"—revealing that despite his pessimism, Buntu has desperately wanted to help Sizwe and resist apartheid all along. Sizwe is afraid of losing his "name," which suggests that he fears his personal identity depends on his official identity, his passbook—without an official identity, he may lose who he is. Buntu responds by pointing out what keeping his official identity entails: rural living, unemployment, and possible forcible relocation to Ciskei. Interestingly, both Buntu and Sizwe seem to take it for granted that the white authorities won't notice a different person is going by the name Robert Zwelinzima, which implies that white authorities are only tracking official documents and don't really understand or care about Black South Africans' reality.

Sizwe asks what will happen to his wife, Nowetu, and their children if he's dead. Buntu says Nowetu can marry the new Robert Zwelinzima, who will finally be able to support the children. When Sizwe admits he's scared to be "another man's ghost," Buntu says living under white control with a **passbook** in a place where white children can call him "boy" already makes him a ghost—so he might as well exploit his ghostliness.

Buntu says that living with a passbook in a country where every white person, including white children, can treat you with disrespect has made Sizwe a "ghost"—which implies that an oppressive official identity like "Black South African under apartheid," represented by the passbook, can so damage people's personal identity or sense of self that it figuratively kills them and turns them into ghosts. Given this awful situation, Buntu believes that Sizwe should take advantage of his damaged sense of self to become someone else, someone with more opportunities.

Buntu sees that he has partially persuaded Sizwe and acts out a scene in which a white man at Feltex is handing out pay packets to workers named John Kani, Winston Ntshona, and Fats Bokhilane. Finally, Buntu calls out Robert Zwelinzima, gives Sizwe an "*imaginary pay-packet*," and urges him to open it. Then he mimes tearing it open himself and counts out the money.

John Kani and Winston Ntshona are the names of the actors who performed in the original production of Sizwe Bansi is Dead. *Fats Bokhilane was another actor in the same troupe as Kani and Ntshona, the Serpent Players, who worked with playwright Athol Fugard. By including actors' real names in its script, the play again makes the audience confront the fact that they inhabit the same reality as the economic and racial oppression the play represents. Meanwhile, Buntu tries to clinch his persuasion of Sizwe by acting out a pay-day, a tactic that emphasizes both the power of acting and the centrality of economic deprivation to Sizwe's life and motivations.*

Now Buntu pretends to be a salesman at Sales House and asks Sizwe's name. Sizwe says his name is Robert Zwelinzima. Then Buntu asks for his address, workplace, income, and Native Identity number. When Sizwe can't remember the Native Identity number, Buntu grabs the dead man's **passbook**, reads the number aloud, and makes Sizwe repeat it aloud after him. Afterward, Buntu again pretends to be a salesman asking for a customer's Native Identity number. Sizwe haltingly reproduces the dead man's number. Buntu is pleased.

A Native Identity number is a unique number included in a passbook to distinguish a particular passbook holder from all other passbook holders. That Sizwe can simply memorize another man's Native Identity number and thus assume his identity shows how official identities don't track personal characteristics or essences and how official documents may actively misrepresent the reality of marginalized people.

Now Buntu pretends to be a preacher at a sermon Sizwe is attending wearing a new suit. Buntu gives a sermon while Sizwe interjects "Amen" and "Hallelujah." After the sermon is over, Buntu approaches Sizwe and asks for his name, address, and Native Identity number so he can register for the church's burial society. Sizwe again manages to reproduce Robert Zwelinzima's name, address, and Native Identity number, albeit with difficulty.

Earlier in the play, Sizwe lamented that the official identity represented by his passbook followed him everywhere, even to church. Now he and Buntu are acting out Sizwe's future impersonations of another man at church. On the one hand, this scene is liberating: it shows Sizwe breaking free of his passbook's oppressive control of his behavior and limitation of his options. On the other hand, he hasn't broken free of the system—a passbook still follows him to church—but merely subverted the system through identity theft. Thus it isn't clear to what extent Sizwe's new identity fulfills his dream of being free from his passbook and to what extent it constitutes another form of damage to his sense of self.

Finally, Buntu pretends to be a policeman and seizes Sizwe from behind. When Sizwe looks scared, Buntu tells him to affect a blank face. Then he questions Sizwe about his name and workplace and demands his **passbook**. Sizwe says he's Robert Zwelinzima and works for Feltex, then he hands over the passbook. When Buntu has examined the passbook and handed it back, Sizwe agrees to become Robert Zwelinzima. Buntu says that Sizwe has to do this if he wants to live. When Sizwe says he's dead, Buntu jokes that this means the real Robert Zwelinzima is alive.

Sizwe conceives of becoming Robert Zwelinzima as a death. Thus the play discourages the audience from interpreting Sizwe's theft of Robert's identity as a straightforward victory: Sizwe gains options and economic agency from taking Robert's passbook, but he also loses some pride or sense of self. Thus the play suggests that the apartheid system needs to be overthrown, not merely tricked or subverted, in order for Black South Africans to have truly good options.

Getting serious again, Buntu says that if he had the chance to achieve his heart's desire and help his wife and children, he'd give up his name. Sizwe asks whether he means it. Buntu says he might keep his name if he didn't have anyone else to support, but not if he had a wife and four children who needed him: "no, Sizwe," says Buntu. When Sizwe tells Buntu to call him Robert, Buntu says: "All right, Robert, John, Athol, Winston . . . Shit on names, man!" He says names mean less than food or shelter or fulfilling one's manly obligations. Moreover, he doesn't think they can have pride in their original names if that means accepting white racism and degradation.

Yet again, the script mentions the names of the original productions' actors, "John" and "Winston"; this time, it also mentions the playwright, "Athol." By suggesting that John, Winston, and Athol exist in the same reality as Robert, Sizwe, and Buntu, the play argues that the political situation it represents is essentially true, even if it represents that situation using fictional characters. By claiming that individual names matter less than preserving one's life and supporting one's family, meanwhile, Buntu argues that individual identity matters less than survival, familial obligations, and the rejection of white supremacy.

Buntu tells Sizwe that the original Robert Zwelinzima's soul is wishing them success. Sizwe asks how long the charade can last. Buntu says it can last as long as the police don't fingerprint him. Sizwe says he'll be caught eventually: "A black man stay out of trouble? Impossible, Buntu. Our skin is trouble." When Buntu points out that Sizwe desired this, Sizwe agrees he does. Buntu, exhausted, wishes Sizwe luck and leaves.

On the one hand, Buntu and Sizwe seem sure that no white authority will notice Sizwe isn't Robert; this certainty suggests that the white authorities don't care about Black individuality and rely on faulty official documentation to represent Black reality to them. On the other hand, when Sizwe says "our skin is trouble," he seems to predict that the police will eventually realize who he is, not because they'll notice he isn't Robert, but just because they'll eventually arrest him for something and fingerprint him. This prediction suggests that the white apartheid state foists an official or stereotypical identity of "criminal" on Black South African men that they cannot escape even by taking on a different individual identity. Thus the play suggests that Sizwe's aspiration to gain employment and support his family may turn out to be a pipe dream, even now that he temporarily has an identity with permission to work in Port Elizabeth.

Sizwe examines his new **passbook** and pockets it. Then he finds the walking stick, newspaper, and pipe elsewhere and resumes narrating the letter to Nowetu. He tells her he'll come home for Christmas, that he'll bring the family to Port Elizabeth to visit if he can get a Lodger's Permit, and that he'll be sending her money every week if things work out. He finishes the letter. Then he resumes posing as he did for Styles's "movie." Back in Styles's studio, Styles looks at Sizwe through his camera, asks for one more **photo**, and tells Sizwe to smile. The camera flashes.

By ending with a photo, symbol of dreams and aspirations, the play suggests that Sizwe's dreams have at least temporarily come true. Yet by never representing Sizwe's reunion with his family, the play leaves ambiguous whether identity theft will get Sizwe all he wants—namely, the ability to support and live with his family—or whether apartheid's racial oppression will catch and crush him before that happens.

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