

## Make it Happen

## Life is like a suitcase

**T**HE beautiful suitcases on this page were made by a group of refugee children who live in Johannesburg (see the story "Starting Over" on page 2).

These children wanted to share their stories so that others could learn about their situation. Instead of putting pen to paper, they chose a unique way of telling their stories — suitcases.

A suitcase is something we take on a journey and these children have been on very long journeys, from the places where they were born to Johannesburg, so their lives are a bit like suitcases.

Each part of their suitcase tells about a different aspect of their life journey. If you looked inside a suitcase, you would find the story of where they have come from, told with pictures and drawings of the homes, family, friends and pets they left behind. Small clay objects that remind them of their past, as well as a beautiful handmade journal, are stored inside.

The outsides have been decorated with pictures, mosaics, beads, sand and handmade prints, and tell the stories of their lives right now, in South Africa. These refugees are like any other

children: they have big dreams for their futures. So they used the outside of their suitcases to depict these hopes. They also wrote about their dreams in their journals.

The focus of this year's World Refugee Day, on June 20, is "Refugee Youth Building a Future". Looking at their suitcases, you can tell that these children have lots to offer South Africa — now and in the future! The suitcases will soon go on show in Durban. It is hoped that the exhibition will help South Africans learn more about the refugee children who are living in our country.

## Case study

Make your own suitcase-autobiography.

## You will need:

- An old cardboard suitcase;
- Paints, crayons, pastels;
- Paintbrushes and pencils;
- Wood glue;
- Beads, broken glass or tiles, foil and fabric;
- Old magazines;
- Photographs;
- Small objects that remind you of your life; and
- A window strip (see below).

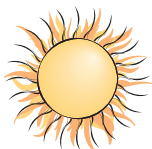
## What to do:

1. Start with your life as it is today. Think about all the things you do, like going to school, playing with your friends, and so on. Choose the most important things you want to share with others about your life right now. Use the window strip below to organise these events (the windows let you and others "look in" on your life). Sketch these events in the windows.

2. Decorate the outside of your suitcase in a way that reflects the "windows of your life" now.

3. Next, remember special events or momentous occasions in your life. Use a window strip to select the most important memories you want to share — eg, your first day at school or a visit to the beach. Decorate the suitcase inside with materials that remind you of these things. Then fill the case with small items — eg, a sea shell, an old photograph, a school report and so on.

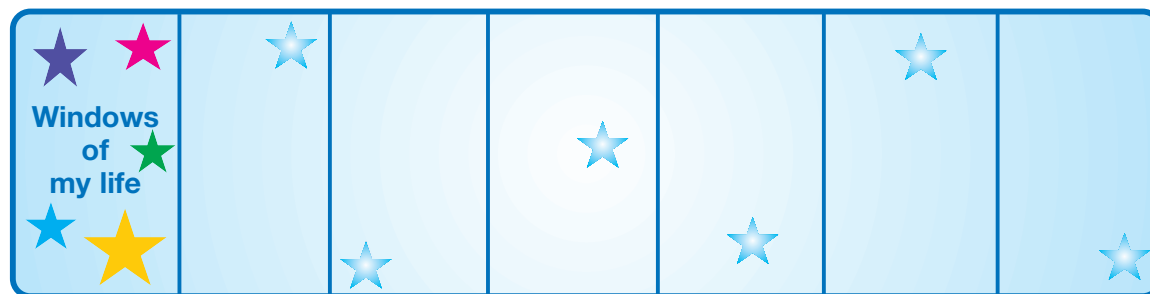
4. Finally, think about what you want for your future. Find magazine pictures and use these to decorate any areas that still need to be filled. When your suitcase is finished, you can share your story with your teacher, friends and family.



**BLUE SKIES:** Leaving the past behind and looking to the future  
Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA



**LIFE IN A BOX:** These cases have stories to tell  
Picture: SUZY BERNSTEIN



The United Nations High Commission for Refugees is the agency whose mandate it is to protect refugees

## Remembering Soweto 1976

IN 1976 I was living in the Free State town of Welkom. My boyfriend had gone off with an old flame, leaving me to lick my wounds and wonder who I was going to take to the matric dance.

It was also the year in which television was introduced in South Africa. Alongside the delightful escapism of *The Villagers*, images of children in Soweto running chaotically in clouds of dust, burning buildings and buses, flashed across the screen.

Something was seriously amiss in the old Transvaal. I shudder to recall the voice of the very presentable Michael de Morgan (if I'm not mistaken) delivering the government spin on the 8pm news.

In essence, it went something like this: The cause of the "unrest" in Soweto was that black school children were ungrateful. We, the taxpayers, gave them schools and they simply burned them down.

A little confusing and disturbing,

## Straight Talk



by Emilia Potenza

but far away enough to allow me to turn my attention back to my broken heart and the pressure of the final exams. Until I found myself at Wits University the following year, where I was presented with a more reliable interpretation: that the Soweto uprising

had turned the tide of resistance to apartheid.

As part of a campus outreach project in 1977, I enrolled with the SA Institute of Race Relations to teach maths to black matriculants on a Saturday morning. Walking through the streets of Braamfontein on my way to class one day, I heard somebody calling my name.

Glancing back, I couldn't see anyone I knew. Again I heard my name being called, and again I was unable to identify the caller. When a young man appeared alongside me, with a smile on his face, I realised that it was Moses, one of my maths students.

The shocking truth dawned on me that I hadn't seen him because he was black. After growing up in Welkom, surrounded by the compounds of 14 gold mines and where the ratio of blacks to whites was 10 to one, I didn't see black people. I didn't see black people because, until that moment, they had been of no consequence to me.

Within months, I was confronted with the horrific reality of the inequality and oppression of the society I was living in, of the lies or half-truths that had kept me ignorant of the murder of Steve Biko that September, of the banning of a string of progressive organisations and of the dawn of the darkest and most repressive days of apartheid.

The 1980s saw members of my family and friends going into exile, close friends and comrades doing time in detention, the townships on fire, and the assassination of some of the most talented and extraordinary leaders — including Matthew Goniwe.

He motivated all those he came into contact with through civic and education structures in the Eastern Cape, and he counterposed the call for "liberation before education" with innovative forms of organisation.

I often think about what an inspiration it would be if Matthew Goniwe was a senior politician in government today.

Let us pay tribute to all those who have fought for a better society and a better education for all, inspired by the courage of the youth who sacrificed their lives in the June 1976 Soweto uprising.

They have handed the baton to us. Let us honour them by continuing to build a fairer, more equal society in whatever way we can.

## Answers to your policy questions

Potenza is an independent education consultant who specialises in curriculum and teacher development. If you have any queries concerning education policy and the implementation of the revised National Curriculum Statement, write to her at ReadRight Q&A, PO Box 1746, Saxonwood 2132; e-mail [readright@sundaytimes.co.za](mailto:readright@sundaytimes.co.za); or fax (011) 280-5150/1. Include your name, the grade and/or learning area you teach, the name of your school and its address and contact details.