

WRITERS SPACE

APRIL 2024 EDITION

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EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB
Chief Editor

Dear reader,

In the words of William Shakespeare; “a smile cures the wounding of a frown”. Shakespeare gives the smile metaphor as the antidote of the affronted; under this impression I would add that a smile, is a two-lane stretch, can be a voluntary or involuntary action. It can be a tool to mask or unmask a world beyond your face. It only depends which lane you walk, you don’t have to be happy to smile.

There are many reasons why we smile and there are many ways how people smile. While a smile occurs in responding to an event, stimu-

lus or memory that registered series of happy hours. Some flashbacks are those that we look back at and smile on their perils.

In this 88th edition, we behold a delicate theme condensed with fragility and sensation. Dear reader you will realize that ‘SMILE’ is a word and concept that is pregnant with doctrines so fixed and fluid. You will learn that smiles are everywhere. You will be reminded that they are in the celestial dance of the moon, in the nurturing embrace of the earth, in the empathy of the human heart and in the divine wonder of the universe.

You will finally understand that each smile is a piece of the divine, a manifestation of love and light amidst life’s intricacies.

Furthermore, one of our admired writers contends that a smile is a bonus, not a right. But if you pay a little attention to the human condition, you will know it can’t resist. Today some heroes are remembered as protagonists who lived a fable of laughter, kindness, and the power of their smiles have erected the sanctuary for the living despaired.

Wishing you a happy reading.



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Children's Literature



WHERE DO SMILES COME FROM?

Stephen A. Kube
Cameroon



Once upon a time in Ilai-kom, the seat of the Kom Fondom, Foin Njinabo sits with his family at night to pass on the wisdom of sages who came before him and to ponder life's big questions. One evening, Fulai Nange, the Fon's 3-year-old daughter, looked up at the night sky and asked, "Where do smiles come from?"

A hush fell over them. Then Nange's grandmother Nini Mbel-Chia smiled and breaking the silence, she said, "Nange, smiles come from many places. When the moon smiles, it lights up the night sky and fills us with

wonder. When the earth smiles, it blooms with beautiful flowers, lush green trees, and chirping birds. And when people smile, it warms our hearts brightens our darkest nights. Even the universe smiles, you know. When it does, the heavens are filled with its dazzling stars like tonight.”

Nange’s father, the Fon, chimed in, “Let’s not forget, animals like Titi the cat and Ngong our dog, fill our hearts with love and laughter, when they smile. When this happens, our faces light up and our cheeks form a dimple that makes other people do the same. We call this a smile. All this, reminds us of the simple joy in the world around us. And that’s how smiles came to be.”

From then on, Nange understood that smiles are all around us, making the world a brighter and happier place for everyone. She promised to always smile to make the Fondom happy and colourful.

The next day, Nange went into the Aku (forest). Everywhere she looked, she saw the earth smiling back at her through vibrant blossoms, the shimmering sunlight piercing through swaying trees, and the playful animals. Nange realized that these natural wonders were a testament to the earth’s radiant smile. This reminded her to appreciate the simple joys in life and made her smile too.

As Nange grew older, she realized that every smile had a story. Whether in moments of triumph or hardship, a smile showed resilience and hope. When she saw strangers sharing smiles, it filled her with warmth and

hope. In her quiet moments, Nange, imagined the universe smiling down upon her, reminding her of its vast wonders and mysteries waiting to be discovered. This cosmic smile reminded her of the awe and inspiration that lay beyond the confines of her everyday world.

Nange also found comfort in the smiles of the family pets. Their loyalty and genuine affection taught her the value of simplicity and love. Whether it was the wagging tail of a dog or the purr of a cat, she felt the unconditional love in their expressions, free from the worries of human emotion.

Smiles were everywhere, she would remind herself - in the celestial dance of the moon, in the nurturing embrace of the earth, in the empathy of the human heart, in the divine wonder of the universe, and in the pure, heartfelt joy of animals. She understood that each smile was a piece of the divine, a manifestation of love and light amidst life’s intricacies.

Glossary:

Foin (synonymous with The King), is the first declension of Fon. When someone says King Njinabo, in the Kom language it will be Foin Njinabo. So, “The King”, becomes, “The Fon” or simply “Foin”. Fons rule over Fondoms.



A TALE OF BEAKTON

THE CLEVER

Genowere Fortunate
Uganda



Once upon a time, in the whimsical land of Quirktopia, there lived a peculiar chicken named Beakton. Now, Beakton wasn't your ordinary chicken. No, no, he had a penchant for wearing oversized top hats and monocles, and he would often be found reading books upside down just for the fun of it.

One sunny morning, as Beakton strutted through the village square, he overheard a group of animals chatting excitedly about a legendary treasure hidden deep in the Enchanted Forest. The treasure was said to grant the finder three wishes, and everyone was abuzz with tales of the riches it held.

Beakton, being the curious bird that he was, decided that he simply must find this treasure. He bid farewell to his fellow feathered friends and embarked on his quest into the Enchanted Forest.

As he ventured deeper into the forest, Beakton encountered all sorts of obstacles—a mischievous squirrel who tried to trick him with riddles, a talking tree who demanded a song in exchange for safe passage, and a grumpy troll who guarded the entrance to a mysterious cave.

But Beakton, with his quick wit and sharp beak, managed to outsmart each challenge that came his way. He solved the squirrel's

riddles with ease, sang a hilarious chicken-themed song that left the tree chuckling, and even managed to out-polite the grumpy troll, who was so taken aback by Beakton's manners that he stepped aside without a fuss.

Finally, after a long and arduous journey, Beakton reached the heart of the Enchanted Forest, where the legendary treasure was said to lie. He found himself standing before a shimmering pool of water, its surface reflecting the lush greenery of the forest around him.

Suddenly, a voice boomed from the pool, echoing through the trees. "Who seeks the treasure of the Enchanted Forest?" it asked.



Beakton puffed out his chest proudly and replied, "It is I, Beakton the Clever! I have come to claim the treasure and make my three wishes."

The water rippled and shimmered, and a wise old turtle emerged from the depths. "Very well, Beakton the Clever," the turtle said. "But first, you must answer a riddle. Get it right, and the treasure shall be yours. Get it wrong, and you shall never lay eyes on it."

Beakton nodded eagerly, ready to prove his wit once again. The turtle cleared its throat and posed the riddle: "I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?"

Beakton pondered for a moment, scratching his beak in thought. Then, a mischievous glint appeared in his eye as he exclaimed, "An echo! An echo is the answer!"

The turtle's eyes twinkled with approval, and with a nod, it granted Beakton access to the treasure. The pool of water parted, revealing a glittering chest overflowing with gold coins, shimmering jewels, and otherworldly trinkets.

Beakton gasped in awe at the sight before him. He knew that he had to choose his wishes wisely. After much contemplation, he made his first wish—to bring laughter and joy to all the creatures of Quirktopia. In an instant, a wave of merriment swept through the land, and the animals danced and sang

with glee.

For his second wish, Beakton wished for a never-ending supply of corn kernels for all the hungry critters in the forest. And just like that, bushels upon bushels of golden corn appeared, ready to be shared by one and all.

As for his final wish, Beakton decided to use it to help others in need. He wished for the Enchanted Forest to be forever protected from harm, ensuring that its beauty and magic would endure for generations to come.

And so, Beakton the Clever returned to Quirktopia a hero, his top hat slightly askew but his heart brimming with pride. The animals hailed him as a savior, and from that day on, Beakton's name was spoken of in hushed tones of reverence and admiration.

And so ends the tale of Beakton the Clever, whose wit and wisdom brought joy and abundance to the Enchanted Forest and all who dwelt within it. His legend lived on, a fable of laughter, kindness, and the power of a clever chicken with a heart as big as his dreams.



HAMBIE-A PURR-FECTLY MYSTERIOUS TALE

Nande T.S Kamati
Namibia



Synopsis:

A man gives his children a young wounded animal to nurse back to health. The animal is one they have never seen before. The children are never sure whether to call it a dog or cat. Before they can learn what sort of ani-

mal they have been caring for, it is returned to its home. Only years later do the children learn the true nature of their once beloved pet.

Hello friend, my name is Niilwa. It looks like

it's my turn to tell you a story. This story is about my daddy's dearly loved childhood pet...Want to hear it? Here it goes.

Daddy told me that when he was about six years old, their house in the village of Tsandi was always full of pets. They had everything from dogs, cats, parrots to pigs and miniature horses. He said that their house looked like a zoo. That's probably because they owned an animal hospital.

Grandpa was a vet-e-ri-na-rian, that's somebody that helps sick animals to get better again. Sometimes, Grandpa would bring little animals' home from the animal hospital to take extra care of them until they could return to their owners.

One day, he brought home a wounded baby animal for daddy and his sister to take care of. This one unlike the others, stayed much longer. Daddy named it Hambie.

He said that it was the oddest-looking creature he had ever seen. Hambie looked somewhat like a dog with his sharp teeth and strong claws. Sometimes he looked like a cat with his pointy ears and whiskers. One time Daddy's sister, Aunt Vilma's friends came over to the house to see Hambie. They asked her what type of animal Hambie was. Aunt Vilma told them that Hambie is simply a dog-cat.

Aunt Vilma's friend's burst into laughter, because they had never had of such an animal.

Amongst Hambie's favourite things to do was playing with Grannie's balls of knit-

ting yarn whenever Grannie wasn't in there house. He loved kicking the yarn about and unwinding it. Granny would scold him when he did that.

He also enjoyed splashing around in the duck pond. Daddy said that the ducks didn't like it much when he would do that.

Daddy loved taking walks with Hambie in the village, to show him off to the other kids. But the strangest things would happen whenever he did so. Dogs would moan softly or fiercely bark whenever Hambie passed by and parents would rush their kids in the house whenever they saw Daddy and Hambie approaching.

What's worse, daddy said that his buddies stopped visiting him at home because of Hambie. None of them showed up for Daddy's 7th birthday party. That made Daddy very sad.

"Their moms and dads just wouldn't let them come to our house," Daddy explained.

Daddy would often ask Grandpa why Hambie got such bad reactions, but all grandpa would say was, "Hambie is different from the other pets, Boyboy. He's one special little creature. Your friends might not understand that now but they will one day. Trust me they will."

When Hambie got a little older and better, Grandpa, much to Daddy and Aunt Vilma's disapproval, decided to return him to his home. Grandpa said that it wasn't safe for Hambie to live with them anymore.

Daddy and Aunt Vilma watched on tearfully as Hambie was loaded up into a cage at the back of a car by men in green clothes.

“The men in the green clothes then drove off with my Hambie,” Daddy said.

Daddy never understood why Hambie could not stay with them until many years later, when Grandpa took him and Aunt Vilma for a safari drive.

They wound through the wildlife park until they came a large herd of zebras grazing in the savannah. Behind the zebras the branches of an acacia tree full of birds could be seen. Grandpa pointed in the direction of the herd of zebras, “There’s your friend,” he said. Daddy suddenly became confused. He was certain that Hambie couldn’t have been a zebra. He couldn’t remember Hambie having any black stripes.

“Hambie is a Zeb—” before daddy could

finish his sentence, a loud and mighty roar came from behind the zebras.

“ROOAAAR!”

The roar seemed to cause the earth to vibrate. Daddy said their car shook for a little while. The roar sent the zebras fleeing. The birds in the acacia tree all took flight, not one was left. When none of the animals were left, a lone figure rose up from underneath the acacia tree. The lone figure let out another roar, mightier than the one before.

“ROOOAAAAAR!”

It was then that Daddy came to recognise his dear old pet.

“So that’s why he couldn’t stay?!” Daddy is said to have exclaimed, “Hambie is a lion!”



SMILE

Birungi Vivian
Uganda

What are you?
Many look for you
Some find you and some don't.
Why are you so difficult to maintain?

Those who find you feel
Happiness, joy, peace.
But those who don't find you feel bad.
What can I do to find and keep you?

What are you?
You make one forget their sorrows
You make a day shine brighter
You promote unity among those who have you
You change a person's life.

You create memories,
Memories of happiness
That unites and reconciles people
And put them together as a family.





AMAHLE: A GIRL WHO LOST **AND FOUND HER SMILE**

Moipone Thandeka
South Africa



Amahle was a very adorable and confident young girl. She had a very beautiful smile. At the age of 5 she lost her baby teeth (or milk teeth). When her adult teeth started to grow, the two front teeth were close together and her canine teeth were also sticking out of her mouth. Problems began when Amahle

started first grade. Some children in her class started making fun of her teeth. They would call her mean names and say that her teeth were ugly and she should never talk. This made Amahle feel very sad and she lost her confidence. She stopped smiling and whenever there were pictures taken at school, she

would always keep a serious face. When she had to speak in class, she would cover her mouth to hide her teeth. Amahle learned to hide her teeth and as a result, she lost her smile.

Amahle used to come home from school upset because her classmates teased her about her teeth. On these days, she would sit on her mother's lap where she felt safe and loved. Her mother would tell her, "Always remember, you are beautiful just the way you are. You are valuable and important, no matter the shape or pattern of your teeth."

Amahle began to accept and appreciate her teeth. Even though the teasing did not stop at school, she never stopped encouraging herself. Whenever she had a moment to stand in front of the mirror, she would recite her mother's words over and over again. She would even smile, something she rarely did even when she was by herself.

As she continued this practice, her confidence began to grow, and she started to speak without hiding her teeth at school. It was not easy, but Amahle was slowly learning to accept herself just as she was.

One day during the school holidays, Amahle's mother took Amahle to a dentist to get braces. When they arrived at the dentist's office, Amahle asked her mother, "Why are we here?" Her mother replied, "We are here to fix your teeth." Amahle felt excited at first, but then her mood changed. "But mama, I was starting to accept and love my teeth just the way they are. I was learning not to let

the bullies in my class define my beauty." Amahle's mother hugged and reassured her, saying, "It's okay, my dear I am proud of you for standing up to your bullies. Eventually, you would have needed to fix them. And guess what? That day is today. Now you know how to stay strong when people discourage or tease you. You know how to find courage and love parts of yourself that the world may not love or accept." Amahle happily went in to see the dentist and the dentist have her braces to fix her teeth.

After schools reopened, Amahle returned wearing her braces. Her braces had slowly started fixing her teeth. She now had more confidence and confidently spoke without feeling the need to hide her teeth. When they had another photo shoot at school, Amahle happily smiled. She was able to smile freely around others again. She had regained her confidence back. Amahle smiled again.

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The Role of African Children's
Literature in Shaping the Youth





Creative Nonfiction



PLEASE DON'T ASK ME TO **SMILE MORE**

Winnie Wekesa
Kenya

In my country, we love and loathe deadlines in equal measure. We hate being told by which date we should do things, but then we don't do anything unless the deadline for the thing is tomorrow. In a similar rush against time, in mid-October 2022, I was in a queue at a Safaricom shop near me. Behind me was my friend J, enduring the long queue, fatigue, and boredom with me.

The government through the Communications Authority had threatened to deactivate and permanently switch off our SIM cards had we failed to register them. The handsome gentleman at the helm of the authority had given a stern warning of unfavour-

able consequences to follow: no access to calls, texts, or even mobile money. I only bring up his pleasant looks because a few years back, he had caused a little bit of commotion at the electoral commission. His charm, charisma, and striking good looks had the electorate in a chokehold as he gave presser after presser of the then-ongoing 2017 presidential elections. It ended in tears, of course, but why keep a tally of past transgressions? We are a generous people, after all. Despite his less-than-honorable discharge from the commission, he was now a boss again at an equally big job, giving us no peace.

In a parallel queue to ours, a man, loud, 5'9 ft tall at least, pot-bellied, and in a shirt a size too small, approaches the counter. The lady at the counter gives him a pleasant hello to which he responds enthusiastically, "Pouwa sana!" A little too strong, but okay, I think to myself. Maybe he is just a bit extra today.

But then he proceeds to tell her for the entire room to hear, "Msichana mrembo kama weve na hata huwezi smile?" meaning "A beautiful girl like you, and you won't even smile?" The girl looked on embarrassed, mumbled something to herself, and then as professionally as she could, proceeded to ask him how she could be of help that

day. The man just laughed out loud, as if he had just accomplished the funniest act of the day.

At this point, I'm livid, I'm breathing furiously, rolling my eyes to kingdom come. When I turn back, I meet J's eyes. She has that knowing look she gives me when we both observe outrageous behaviour in public. Also, this is very close to home. She knows my own experience in retail when I was a corporate worker on the girl's side of the counter. She leans in and whispers, "This is just like that lady who name-dropped your CEO!" Laughter erupts between us. We look around guiltily, but we don't apologize to the room.

We are trying to do better and that also means not apologizing for existing or having a human moment.

In the case J is referencing, I was working a shift at my old job, handling customers, paperwork, stamping things, basically working for the man. A lady approaches my counter, she is visibly older, perhaps in her early or mid-forties, well-dressed, a working lady by any definition. I say hello to which she responds by saying she is all right. She states her business of the day, I proceed to request her account information and identification which she provides, and I continue to check her account before I offer service. As I work, I can



tell from the reflection on the glass between us that she is looking intently at my face. I look up as if by reflex and she asks.

“What is your name?”

“Kristin,” I reply.

“How long have you worked here, Kristin?”

“Three years Ma’am.”

“Three years and you can’t smile when greeting me?”

Shock. Silence.

“Eh?” she demands

“I’m sorry Ma’am.”

“Do you know who Gideon Weru is?”

Panicked. “Yes, Madam.”

“Who is he?”

“My boss... mad-?”

“Your boss’ boss!” she interjects.

“That’s correct, Madam.”

“I should have you know that Gideon, your CEO, is my friend,” she continued. “Do you know what a call from me, complaining about your bad service would mean for you?”

I nod. And immediately correct that gesture by, “Yes madam, I am very sorry” and force a smile.

Intimidated, I proceeded to serve her the best way I could, but she must have left dissatisfied. She will never know that that very

morning, I had a loved one admitted to the hospital in critical condition. Just before I said hello to her, I was mid-prayer in a whisper, a Hail Mary really, pleading for a miracle. I couldn’t get time off so I was working while my heart was breaking.

Later that day of the sim card registration, when reflecting on my day, I wondered what the girl this man was demanding a smile from was going through. Perhaps she was late on rent or was heartbroken, or grieving, or maybe she had severe back pain from her menstrual cramps. But work called, and she had to show up. Maybe she cried at the toilet booth during her lunch break from all the pressure on her shoulders. We will never know.

I don’t subscribe to the notion that ‘*The customer is always right*’. And preaching it repeatedly doesn’t make it true. Customers, like employees, are human beings. We all go through hard times. And if we expect others to show us kindness during our difficult times, we owe it to each other to extend a little grace at all times. As long as no offense has been committed in business, we are not owed anything more than good service. A smile is a bonus, not a right.

While we smile often, especially when doing business, please don’t ask me to smile more. But if you pay a little attention to the human condition, you’ll know I can’t resist yours. If you smile first, I will smile back. It’s incredibly automatic. And so deeply kind. It may even save my life.



SMILES, REPLICAS OF IT **AND WHATNOT**

Mamello Stephen Rotheli
Lesotho

With the exception of only a few tricks a human being can make, I reckon there is nothing as lethal as a good smile can be. There is just something irresistible about a beautiful smile, so much that all sense dissipates from the mind of the beholder upon the sight of one.

The exceptional use of a toothbrush, some toothpaste, and overall care and guarding of one's set of teeth are just some of the few tricks that make for a seductive smile. Hence why, apart from the concern for good oral health, some people invest their time and money to enhance their teeth—only so that they can afford the cutest of smiles too. These

things that we find to be extraneous ornamentations like plating some of their teeth with gold is one of the things other people resort to in order to beautify their smiles and it oftentimes serves the purpose. Well, at the very least when it is not overdone.

It is only a pity that no matter how cute a smile can be, there is no telling for certain what lurks beneath it. It can be just about anything. It can be merriment and vivacity. It can be love or lust. It can be hatred or anger. And yet again, it can be some other feeling. Smiles can be used to enshroud pain, a lethal yearning for revenge, or just about any other villain-

ous intent. I bet it's okay for me to say a smile can be a vehicle for the advancement of one's own interests. And yet even after I have shown here, the darker side of what should not be veiling anything but elegance, magnificence, and grandeur, it still would, just as it always has, fool even the best of us. You probably are muttering how ironic that is. Nonetheless, it may as well be. By the way, I find it completely moronic of us. Isn't it?

Quite an alarming number of betrayals have been proven to have never been foreseen, because how else would you have even the tiniest grain of suspicion that sabotage is probable or in the pipeline when the enemies, more often, front their contempt with warm smiles?

Smiles have led to the ruination of many alliances. It has been so since most probably the beginning of time. It still is the case to this day. What I find most fascinating about a frown is that it is hardly ever used for deception.

Whenever disaster befalls as a result of sabotage, in any

given aspect of our lives, we tend to cast our eyes towards our foes whose stance is unquestionable and suspect it to be a precipitate of their villainous intents, while oblivious or naive to the fact that our deadliest and most advantaged enemies are usually among us, infiltrating our safe spaces while veiling their scorn with convincing smiles.

Smiles are supposed to be an exhibition of love and affection, but it's saddening how confusing they can be when you are someone with issues of trust and are always trying to decipher what could be veiled underneath. Oftentimes, people smile the widest when they are expecting something from the other person. But that doesn't necessarily signify affection. I needn't even emphasize what that simply goes to show. I mean, really, it is a no-brainer.

Nevertheless, I think that of all the gestures a person can ever create with their face, a smile is the grandest. Nothing beats a good smile. The warmth and trust the sight

of one generates is immeasurable. That's what makes it a lethal weapon if you were to worm your way into someone's heart or to have them let their guard down so as to undetectably await an opportune moment to pounce because regular and well-timed smiles compound trust. But when they aren't well-timed, formed reservedly, and shown sparingly, they can give off some pretty creepy vibes. Nobody wants to have anyone smiling at them all the time for no apparent reason. It is why anyone who drifts through life smiling at everyone is considered to be a complete fool. And when smiling at every living and non-living thing is not in their nature, and they at least smile excessively at a certain person, it could, among many things, mean that they are sucking up to the other person because of some selfish need or some yearning for validation, or favoritism over the others particularly in some group settings. The irony is that when smiling is done in excess, the eventuality is often that it can grow to be ut-

terly annoying and cause discomfort. There has to be some art to it. Too much of anything, no matter how good that thing can be, goes to become bad. Heck yeah, even too much good can be bad. Sugar tastes sweet. But if not used in moderation, it can spoil what should have been some good-tasting edibles. Take salt or spices for instance, if not sprinkled sparingly, they can spoil the entire dish. The same basic tricks of cooking are applicable to socializing.

The nicest thing about a smile is that, for the fact that it makes for a good mask of emotion that can be projected on the face, it works wonders whenever we are in no mood or least comfortable opening up to others about our plights. We can endure some nearly unbearable pain with fortitude and calmness and there is nothing else I know that can do better at veiling the chaos within than a smile. The pain can be excruciating, and we may feel like weeping silently or bursting out into sobs, but still, amidst and despite whatever mishmash of turbulent feelings we

may be nestling, I have learned that we have in us the incredible fortitude to chin up and plaster a smile that would sell to others that we are at our happiest or doing fine at least.

It is special to be able to smile—incredibly so. Not many of us are still able to. Some probably have forgotten how to smile and feel strange having to form a smile because it has been so long since they had anything to smile about. There is not much to smile about as of late. It is therefore special to afford to smile, notwithstanding how trivial the cause of a smile may be, so long as it still manages to move one to smile.

Obviously, it would be farther from the truth if my encapsulation were that all smiles are bad. It's people who are, and there's no hope of redemption for us. But if we could smile just a little bit more, and while at it do it genuinely, and authentically, doing away with the pretenses, that would probably be our saving grace.



African Teen WRITERS Awards

THIRD EDITION

The African Teen Writers Awards is now accepting submissions from teens aged 13 to 16. We are accepting submissions in either poetry or prose.

There is no entry fee for this award.

Theme: **A RIGHT TO PEACE**

Submission Link:

www.africanwritersawards.com

Submission Date:

Submission of entries is open from March 15 until July 1, 2024.

PRIZE DETAILS

1st poetry prize - \$100

1st prose prize - \$100

2nd and 3rd - Certificates
(poetry and prose)



This Award is sponsored by
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Writers Space Africa - Rwanda



African Writers
Conference



Flash Fiction

UNTETHERED SOUL

Amina Dattijo
Nigeria

You know what I see when I try to recall you? It's not the gaping maw that was your mouth as you lay on the dusty road. Not your necklace of blood, not the bits of flesh clinging to the hot sand, not even the scattered teeth gleaming under the sun. No, all I remember is that smile. The one that chased away the shyness in me the first time I saw you. The one that made me blurt, *can I buy you a drink?*

And every day after, I coveted the gift of that smile. I agreed to adopting Milo, though we could hardly afford dogfood; he kept the smile on your face. I ate boiled beans and bread, though it felt like shoving sun-baked plastic down my throat, because you laughed at the face I made after every swallow. I didn't mind the bug-infested studio; it meant being near you all day.

My memory of D-Day keeps blurring. You said *only old people do that* when I wore my seatbelt. I didn't mind the teasing; you were

smiling as you said it. I can't remember who tilted their face towards the other first. I don't remember who screamed first. But the sight of your body hurtling out the window, the shudder of the car as it collided with the herd, and afterwards, trying to separate cow-flesh from human-flesh, those I clearly remember.

Later, as you lay dying on the hospital bed, even though the bandages around your jaw hid your face, I knew you were smiling. Your eyes had that twinkle they get whenever you smiled. And I smiled back, even as I prayed for an afterlife, so I could worship you again.



WARD

B

**Ndawedwa Hanghuwo
Namibia**

Anna loved telling her patients jokes and light hearted stories to distract them from their troubled minds that led them to psychiatry Ward B.

Imms was a new patient, a man who was the lone survivor of a bus accident. He didn't speak much, he merely stared out of the window, as tears silently fell from his eyes. He sat in his usual spot, a bench by the window. Since it was night time, his view was a lamp that illuminated the outside of the ward. Anna's first attempt for a smile from him was going to be the joke she used on new patients.

"A horse walks into a bar and the bartender asks, why the long face."

Silence.

"They were right." Imms voice boomed. It scared Anna as she was not expecting a reaction. His big eyes peered into hers.

"The other patients said that that is the joke

you will start with." Imms pointed out. Anna chuckled at how predictable she was.

"Why make people smile?" Imms asked, his attention back to the window.

A while back, Anna was on a bus in tears after a terrible break up. As she moped in her seat, a child who was a few seats away peaked over his chair, smiled and waved at her. His goofy smile made her smile and for a moment, she forgot about her pain. She was calm and happy.

After that day, she decided to pay it forward. "Smiling is a natural feel good remedy. It helps in hard times."

With his lips in a thin line, Imms nodded slowly.

"I'll get you to smile soon." Anna promised and started to walk away. She looked over her shoulder and saw the corners of Imms' lips slightly turn upwards. But, it was just for mere seconds.

6th Edition

Wakini Prize for CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

THEME
Guardians of Peace

Word limit 1200 Words or less.

Requirement The story should be for children between the ages of 6 and 12.

Submission Date March 15 until July 1, 2024.

■ **There is no entry fee.** ■

Winner receives \$200
1st Runner-up receives \$150
2nd Runner-up receives \$100



This Award is sponsored by
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submit your entry at
www.africanwritersawards.com

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African Writers
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Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Adedokun Ibrahim





In this edition, Lise Nova Berwadushime interviewed Adedokun Ibrahim, who is the winner of the 2023 African Teen Writers Award (Poetry).

Lise: Hello, Ibrahim, it's my pleasure to have you today. Please tell us about yourself. Anything you would like people to know about you.

Adedokun Ibrahim: Well. I'm Adedokun Ibrahim, a 17-year-old, Nigerian by nationality. I was raised and home-schooled in Lagos within a family of 16. I grew up learning almost everything from my parents, spending so much time with them carved so many parts of me. And my siblings too, we were all raised with love

and the teaching of Islam.

As a young boy, I do not remember what I wanted to be, (laughs), I changed my profession many times as a young boy, you did too, I know.

Lise: Definitely! I did for sure hahaah!!

Adedokun Ibrahim: You see! Anyway, during my early teenage years, I picked interest in writing, I found my elder brothers writing poetry, short stories and I fell along the line too. And I've been so passionate about it all. I ask Allah to

ease the journey I have ahead of me.

Lise: Wow! That's lovely. If you can remember well, when exactly did you start writing?

Adedokun Ibrahim: I started writing at the age of 12, yeah. I would write stories in short note books with so many pages, (although I never get to complete any of the stories before I move on to a new one), then show my brothers. Their words of encouragement and lessons to get better at writing never lacked for once.

Lise: Hashtag, "supportive brothers" hahah. Can you recall the themes you felt drawn to at that young age?

Adedokun Ibrahim: Crime fiction. A lot of things around me back then made me love the theme so much. I remember reading a couple number of novels back then with the theme.

Lise: I see. Before we move to questions related to the award you won, allow me to ask you this one question. Why do you call yourself a writer?

Adedokun Ibrahim: Beautiful. I call anyone who writes to pass on a message to the people, or heal through his writings a writer. And I see myself walking towards this path of passing something on to the world, so I call myself a writer.

Lise: Awesome. I like how you just put it in simple yet deep words.

Adedokun Ibrahim: Thank you.

Lise: Now, please tell me about your journey to Africa Teen Awards/poetry category. What made you go for it?

Adedokun Ibrahim: (Smiles) One of the tough times of writing is submitting to journals, contents, keeping high hope while dealing with rejections. I

dealt with tons of them.

Lise: I know...

Adedokun Ibrahim: One of the people who kept their hopes alive by me, apart from my brothers was a lady called Thuwaybah. She sent me the African Teen Awards submission link. I remember surfing through some of my poems, and I submitted immediately that night. I was motivated to submit right away because the contest was themed free. And I had just written the beautiful piece then.

Lise: Wow! I have read "This Poem Leads Back Home" and I liked that part where you used your mother tongue. Why that poem? What does it mean to you personally?

Adedokun Ibrahim: Well, I chose the poem because I felt this is Africa, and it's a great thing to write about culture or language, since we care so much about it. The poem fitted right within those. It means so much to me because I was raised communicating with the Yoruba language and I love that. It gets at me when I mix with other people who feel a kind of shame speaking in their mother tongue or even pretend, they only understand English just to

be classed 'the educated ones'. So, I composed the poem based on a scene I witnessed, a neighbour who cautioned his kid from speaking in Yoruba language and only wanted him to speak English.

Lise: This is relatable even in my country. The "educated" are those who speak French or English, then misspell their own language hhhh

Adedokun Ibrahim: Hahaha. I don't call that education. Brain washed to bite off your own pride.

Lise: I know right. Now tell me, Ibrahim. How did you feel when you knew you were the winner of Africa Teen Awards?

Adedokun Ibrahim: A very great moment to recall. For weeks I kept my hope alive. You know.....there were other great writers who submitted for this same contest. On that great day, I informed my family the winner will be announced. I was out throughout the day, and on my way back home, I checked the YouTube channel to follow the program live, later on, I heard my name, I rewinded so many times to confirm before I announce to my people. I couldn't scream or jump as I

wanted to because I was on the highway. Getting home, I informed my sleeping brother, (laughs) he asked me to swear so he could believe, and it turned out to be true. In fact, my mother prostrated to thank God. It was a beautiful day. Alhamdulillah.

Lise: To God be the glory. I can feel the excitement you had. Ibrahim, what is your next move regarding your writing career if I may say so?

Adedokun Ibrahim: I really want to improve my writing generally, you know, winning contents is not the peak, I have to improve to write more beautiful pieces that will grant me publications in more esteemed magazines.

I also want to become a Foyle Young Poet, and have a poem in The Poetry Foundation, I'm rooting for that space. I ask Allah to guide me through.

Lise: Wishing you God-speed on that. Thank you for your time, Ibrahim. I wish you success in your future endeavours

Adedokun Ibrahim: Thank you so much too, and have a great day.



The Wanjohi Prize

FOR AFRICAN POETRY

PoeticAfrica is pleased to present the maiden edition of The Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry.

The Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry is in honour of the remarkable contributions of Benny Wanjohi to African poetry.

Requirements

- No specific theme.
- Submit only one poem.
- The poem should not exceed 30 lines.
- We are looking for poems with originality, creativity and rich use of poetic devices.

Submission date

April 1 to July 1, 2024

Prize

The winner receives \$100.
First runner-up receives \$50.

Submit Here

www.writersspace.net/poeticafrika

PoeticAfrica



Benny Wanjohi
(Co-founder, PoeticAfrica)





Chief Editor's Note

“ How does your heart beat when the image of your lover flashes in your mind? Does it beat faster or slower? Is it just normal? I know Single Pringles might not relate, and that is okay.

Heartprints do not discriminate. The poems in this Issue offer you tablets of love in diverse forms. At a point in life, you must have been loved by someone—family, friend, lover, or even a stranger. These moments of love must have left you with unforgettable memories, which this Issue seeks to document.

If you stick around, you will witness the interactive conversation between our interviewer, Nyasili Atetwe, and Scholastica Moraa, a mother and poet with three titles.

Also, brace yourself up for a controversial lecture by Testimony Odey. Is poetry truly God? You will find out as you read.

It is the month of love. We hope your heart beats faster as you consume these gems of lovely poems. We hope you remember and celebrate those who leave marks of love on your heart.

”

PoeticAfrica is Africa's first trilingual poetry magazine published quarterly. The magazine showcases rich and diverse poetry in English, Kiswahili, and French from all over Africa to the world.



Poetry



ADULTHOOD

Yero Fatima
Nigeria

Slowly, at dusk, the curtains are drawn
The show for the day is over
Now the mask can be taken off
Softly, in the dark, the girl in me cries
Reminding my adult body of how hollow she feels
Of how much it stings
Telling her we are not ready for this stage
“Let’s go back to the glamour”
“Where we care less”
“And our worry was for our baby doll and buckets of sand”
Like mother to daughter
She comforts her
This is our life now
The soul is bruised but our body isn’t
We are broken but beautiful
And that is what humans see
Beauty
So, let’s showcase it
When it’s dawn
we conceal this sleep deprived,
Red stained eyes
Put on a smile
And the curtains are raised again
The show continues....



ANCESTRAL SMILE

Joseph Ikhenoba
Nigeria

We are the seedlings of both worlds
 Beaten by paltry rain and golden sun.
 We have seen the hyenas
 Squeaking afar, mocking our first fruits
 And throwing the seeds on our faces.
 We have seen our huts mutilated
 Turned into firewood of hyenas' feasts.
 We have seen seedlings of our red earth
 Cast into shreds and torn among thorns.
 We have seen the radiant orange full moon
 Knitted into crescent dim light.
 Blessed with nectars
 Yet the pollen grain withers.
 The hummingbird sucked it all
 As the petals fluffed in patchy garment.
 At a distance, vultures gathered
 To feed on pallid carrion.
 However, even though the sun is dark
 And the wind billowed in smoke screen
 We will never stop playing the drums
 Stamping and thumping to ancestral rhythm
 Enshrouding our heads under palm trees
 To imbibe the spirits of our ancestors
 With every smile, lynxes' eyes.



BLOSSOMS AMIDST DESOLATION

Akuei M. Adol
South Sudan

For us, children of the camp, joy abounds.
Drums echo through the twilight, wild and free,
spinning our souls in a frenzy, smirks unbound,
surrendering us to jubilation, a dance of glee.

But now, hunger creeps with a cruel grip,
through the haunting world's economy, it snakes.
Our smiles fade like petals in the snow,
and scarcity replaces what once lit our stakes.

Our eyes, once gleaming with vibrant visions,
now mirror the anguish of our sorrow.
The campsite, once a sanctuary – now a prison,
yet hope persists, a flicker in denial.

Our tiny frames, fragile like wilting flowers,
bear the weight of our plight, burdened and strained.
Our laughs transformed, masks of hidden powers,
strained, yet resilient, in despair not contained.

Our sunken cheeks speak of dreams extinguished,
by ruth-less famine, a thief in the night,
leaving behind a barren and dismal earth,
for us, children of the camp.

Yet deep within us, a light remains distinguished,
Yearning to re-ignite our lost smile, against the dark's blight.



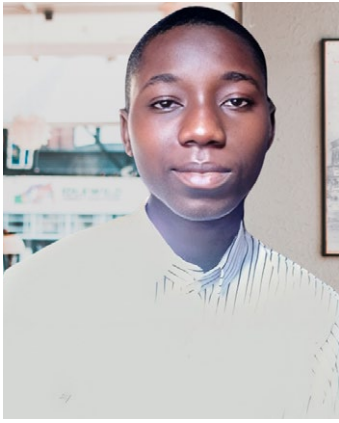
THE CURVED LIPS

Abdullatif Khalid
Uganda

There's a certain curve
On your lips that tell a tale,
It is a story of joy and hope,
Unfolding without miscarry.

It's a curve that speaks of love,
Of kindness and delight
It's a curve that says "all is well"
And makes the world feel right.

It's a curve that fills my heart
With comfort and glee
It's a curve that tells me "grin"
And sets my soul at ease!



THROW UP MY FACE

Muheez Olawale
Nigeria

The strong tides of life have swept me off my feet,
Now I am drowned in the ocean of misery life has dumped me in,
A fog of hopelessness clouds my face,
My heart has become heavy like a million-pound metal,
Seated at the bottom of the ocean,
A smile found its way to my face only ages ago
Yet I yearn and pray for these smiles to come again
But a frown has been engraved on my face for too long,
My reddened eyes have seen the rainy seasons
They aren't afraid to see the dry seasons,
My cheeks with my tears
My nose is the endless stream of mucus,
My mouth is filled with songs of lament,
My knees are bruised from my incessant praying,
Let a passing angel throw upon my face a smile,
A feather would wonder why it is heavier than my heart
A passing angel comes that night,
Scintillates my room, whispers the secret to my sleepy head,
For as long as I stamp smiles on the faces of those around me
I shall be cured of my miseries with smiles.



MIMI

Catherine Mponda
Tanzania

I revive from the dirt I buried myself
Stinking stains of doubts, insecurity, and fear.

I revive from the abyss of no good I often find myself
Where I break into bits and pieces
As though the fall of galaxies at Thanos snap
An abyss of what was, what is and what is to be.

I revive from the storms of actions and reactions
I stumbled on day in and day out
Actions and reactions of opposers, faultfinders, psychopaths
More often than not, my mind, my weapon of destruction.

Today and in this moment,
I rise with a smile so radiant and beautiful
Lighting up the darkest of skies
A smile wrapped in shades of confidence
Strengthened by affirmations of my unique being
And in the stamina of calm, positive reaction.
Today, my mind, my weapon of glory.

I revive above me, her, him, they and them
With a memorable smile
a formidable display of my blessed dental formula.

I revive.

TODAY AND ALWAYS: A SECRET PLACE SYMPHONY



Nelson Okeke
Nigeria

Just as a desert land
Sings songs of petrichor
When kissed by drops of
Long awaited rain,
My soul resonates
With verses of
Harmonized ecstasy
When I see You.

When I see You
Showing up in trickles
Smiles decking your
Haloed face,
As you glow in my rather
Darkened secret place.

Oh, how it suits my sores,
My self-inflicted prints of
Disdain and despair.
How it washes
The fear that carpets
My heart's ocean floor.

So, give me this a billion
Times more.
I would trade the world
To feel God's smile on my wounds
in my secret place today and again.

A TASTE OF A SMILE

Kirabo Vicky
Uganda

At times, I sob my heart out
Reckon on the power of a wave that can pound
A power of a storm that can drill
A power of a speech how it is coherent
A power of a bullet that can kill
But, the power of a smile
can revive a lost soul to illumination.
So, smile to make the day bright.



We are pleased to announce the 7th African Writers Awards.
This year's award is for **SHORT STORIES**.

The winner of this award will receive the grand prize of \$500.

Requirement

The primary setting of your story must be in Rwanda.

Story length

3,000 to 5,000 words.

Submission Date:

March 15 until July 1, 2024.

Submit Here:

www.africanwritersawards.com



This award is sponsored by
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**African Writers
Conference**



Short Stories

BIRDS THAT SING **TOO LOUDLY**

Valerie Tendai Chatindo
Zimbabwe



Some say it was a genetic mutation which did it. Though others would claim it was the white lady. The one who not only reared them but apparently taught them to

sing. The strange one who kept to herself and confined her existence as well as her husband's, to that old dilapidating house they called a home. The one which was

obviously never cleaned, for everyone knew the lady and her husband were too old for such feats. Nearly stooping to the ground, those who peeked through their parted

curtains and past that falling apart fence, often spotted them walking about along the borders of their fenced yard. Always, the spectators observed from far off. These white people; an enigma in an ever-changing Zimbabwe to their native neighbors.

The white lady had a maid once but she had had to eventually let her go because they could no longer afford to pay her. And then of course there was that other thing which we'll talk about later. This happened almost two years ago by the way, the letting go, and people could only imagine how bad things were for them in the years that came after. They had no kids, no relatives, no one to take care of them in their elderly state. Just their house, the neighbors who remained wary of them, the rusted letterbox with their name barely visible and of course, the aviary.

The aviary where the magic came to be.

After the Robs, as their neighbours called them, let Sisi Chipu go only one other person had been in that house and that was the boy

who occasionally roamed the neighborhood going from house to house asking for handouts. The day he rang that bell attached to their gate everyone who was home that day stopped whatever they were doing to grow the size of the whites' eyes as they turned in the direction of that house. Over their Durawall and through their curtains, all waited in anticipation, doubtful that anyone would emerge. Mrs. Rob had emerged, with slow hesitant steps she had taken almost thirty minutes to walk to her gate, open it and lead him back. She had actually invited him in!

He says that she offered him a plate of sadza with sour milk. The sadza he said was crusted around the edges, showing that it was days old and the milk almost putrid. According to him, that boy who goes from house to house, after he left his plate untouched, she had simply sealed his plate and placed it in the fridge amongst many other plates. She never threw anything away and that was another one of her issues with Sisi Chipu. Of course, after he recounted that set of

events to the neighbors, they finally decided to call someone, anyone, who could help Mrs. Rob who clearly was suffering not just financially but mentally as well. They figured that if they reached out to members of the white community, they might know what to do about their situation. And sure, enough help had come and she and her husband were placed in a home which was known to be for white people and of course the black elite. Not a place for ordinary black people like them. Still, relief surged through the neighborhood and the people breathed and slept a little easier even past the embarrassment of finding out they were actually the Roberts. Either way. For a while everyone forgot about the dilapidating house and their guilt until the birds started to sing.

Ruva Rondodzai was the one who heard it first. A bunch of voices coming up behind her out of the blue one morning. The flock of sparrows had flown past her singing....an Anglican Shona hymn? The neighborhood was informed that very day and for the

most part they all speculated and concluded that it was a work of witchcraft. That Ruva had been confronted by some sort of phantom sent by a jealous relation from her rural home. And for a few days they believed that explanation until someone else encountered the singing flock.

No one could really figure out how they sang in unison. How they sang as perfectly as a choir of fifty human beings. These tiny little sparrows and their singing flock. The flock that attracted attention and became the talk of the town.

Soon they evolved into local celebrities, these singing wonders, and even secured a record deal. The money never went to the elderly couple, no one really knows where it went at all. Still, they were a sensation. The talk of the town. 'Local Celebrities'. Some called them tiny little miracles and others called them an abomination but still they sang on. They continued to live in the aviary of that old dilapidating house, coming and going at whim. Never flying solo but as one. Never fighting amongst themselves but existing in peaceful harmony. Never doing any person any harm but simply existing to sing. All they ever did was entertain the people of the town with their beautiful little voices.

That being said.

It came as no surprise when the birds went quiet one morning. They didn't go about their routine that day. The one where they flew from their home at 8 in the morning while crafting musical bliss. That day as people walked the streets they weren't met with a singing flock. They did not stand to

stare in amazement and shake their heads asking how these birds had learnt to sing the songs of their native tongue. There were no pointed fingers, surprised laughs and whispers. The birds did not show up. Even those that claimed to hate them took special note of their absence. Only days after would a curious child look into the aviary and see the dead birds with their twisted necks and broken wings.

They had done no harm and caused no offence. All they had done was sing but perhaps they had sung too loudly for some.

BOOTS FOR THE KING

Ken Mwangi
Kenya

Nasiche applied red lipstick over her swollen lips. She smiled as a throbbing pain pulsed through them. She replayed "TLC's unpretty" track on her phone as she drew the eye pencil over her puffy eyes. She smiled once again at the mirror. The white of her eyes barely visible. They matched her red lipstick. Perfect. She thought to herself.

Someone unlocked the gate. She glanced at her watch. It was 5:38 pm. Her husband was home. He always arrived on time. She could hear his familiar heavy footsteps walking through the bungalow compound. It was always quiet in this neck of the woods. She counted his footsteps before he got to the house...9...10...11. He opened the door. She stood

up immediately and adjusted her skirt. She tried to control her shallow breathing that was now evident. She shut her eyes momentarily before heading to the living room. She wanted to meet him on the corridor. Hug and kiss him and take off his coat. She was late. The heavy footsteps concluded their journey in the kitchen.

He turned on the kettle and made coffee for both of them. Nasiche sat down in the living room. Tension in her thighs. 1.. 2.. stir...1...stir. She was at it again counting away how many teaspoons he used. For no reason at all. His coffee was always good just the way she liked it. She noticed some red roses on the coffee table. She was afraid to ask...

"These are for you." Sitonik, her husband, spoke. He read her inquisitive mind.

He stretched out his tired arms and gave them to Nasiche.

"Thanks." she responded timidly.

He slumped back into his seat sipping his coffee, his Adam's apple dancing conspicuously at every gulp of beverage. He still had his boots on. Never in a hurry to take them off. Her chest tightened. A familiar feeling crawled through her skin. She stared at his boots grinned and looked away. Nasiche bought him army boots for his birthday one year ago. She thought he would love her more but he loved his boots more. They gave him a new dose of mas-

culine juice. Nasiche regretted it. He was a mechanical engineer at the tea factory plantation and it increased a spring in his step.

She sipped her coffee gingerly. Her lips hurt like hell. Sitonik stared at her as she struggled. He said nothing. He went to the kitchen and came back with a straw. "Here you'll need this." She was halfway through and politely declined his offer. But he insisted.

"I went all the way to the kitchen..." His words had an inkling of a threat. A foreboding. Nasiche took the straw and continued with her drink. Sitonik returned to his seat and took out his phone scrolling through it. "What did the Doctor say?" He queried his wife.

"It should be okay. The jaw that is." Nasiche replied with her gaze fixed on the floor.

"Aah very well." Sitonik responded with satisfaction in his voice.

He took off his boots and placed them aside just in time for their three-year-old son to play his favourite boot game. "Dad boot!" he called

out playfully as he tried to slip into his father's shoes. He stumbled to the ground. And his father laughed at him.

"Doesn't he look cute, Nasiche?"

"Ya he does...babaa be careful you'll hurt yourself," his mum called out with a concerned voice.

It was approaching dusk. Nasiche excused herself to go prepare supper for the family. The Father-son bonding continued for about an hour and then silence. The only audible sound being the sizzling and steaming of dishes on the cooker. Nasiche chopped away onions only to recognize heavy footsteps approaching her from the living room. Sitonik had put on his boots.

"Uhhh dear... supper is almost ready. Are you heading somewhere?"

"Nasiche, you stepped out of the house today..." Sitonik stated in a matter-of-fact way. His tone was terse.

She stopped cutting onions and held her breath. Her Pulse raced,

"Ya...I had to have my jaw checked," her voice betraying her unease.

"Nasiche..." Sitonik snarled.

She looked up and stared at the wall in front of her. Traumatic images of Sitonik's boot stuck on her neck flashed through her mind. She lost count on how many times her world darkened as she lay sprawled on the floor. She could taste the sole of his shoe. As those ugly boots tore through her body and soul. Leaving her unconscious and bleeding and her helpless son screaming in horror as he tagged at his fathers' trouser. She cursed the day. She opened her wallet and her heart to buy those boots, but even more she cursed the day she met this monster.

Tears welled up under her bruised eyes. Her lips trembled. "This time Nasiche... this time," she mumbled under her breath. She continued cutting onions. Her face turned resolute and cold. Holding the kitchen knife tighter in her grasp as Sitonik marched towards her.



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AFRICAN WRITERS AWARDS 2024 JURY

African Teen Writers Awards



Corona Cermak
(Tanzania)



Tamunomieibi Enoch
(Nigeria)



Patricia Peace Ejang
(Uganda)



Adedokun Ibrahim Anwar
(Nigeria)

Wakini Kuria Prize for Children's Literature



Nahida Esmail
(Tanzania)



Halieo Motanyane
(Lesotho)



Namse Udosen
(Nigeria)

African Writers Awards (Short Stories)



Patrick Nzabonimpa
(Rwanda)



Sabah Carrim
(Mauritius)



Verah Omwocha
(Kenya)



Anthony 'PenBoss' Onugba
Chief Judge



Affluent Authors

CREATE



Liza Chuma Akunyili
@iamlizachuma

As a writer, nothing substitutes your creation process; not publicity, event management, engaging with the readers, absolutely nothing substitutes your creation. The bane of 21st creation is watering down the creation process so you can ‘package’ your work.

Great stories have been messed up because there was a contract that pressured the writer to create within a certain time limit without

reviewing the conditions under which the previous parts of the stories were written.

I am telling you to show up online and show up frequently but I am also saying if you compromise the quality of your creation process, it wouldn't count that you came online. To create is to never break up with your muse, to engage with newer ways to see the world, and to know you are an artist before you're a content creator.

To create is to enjoy your art even if no one ever sees it, to be invested in each work till there's nothing else you can take or add to it and to be utterly vexed with everything that interferes with your creative juice.

To create is to remember why you started creating and to evolve in wonder as you go. There is writing for creation's sake and then there's writing to meet a content calendar. One takes away the soul of

the artist. The more I've sat down through niche mastery classes (as a student and coach), the more I have realized three things.

The beginning is never the time to niche down. Refuse the pressure to be a poet, a novelist or a researcher too soon because there's a whole world out there for you to explore.

The labels make us want to always show up the same way everyday but as a writer, every piece is rewriting who you think you are. So, if you stifle that process in an attempt to niche down, you might miss out on your evolution just to end up with a pretty label.

You don't niche down on a subject matter.

There are myriads of people who can write poetry or write fiction. So, when you say "I am a poet" you're saying you're the same with about a million other people.

You niche down on your style: your way of viewing things and telling them. This

is the reason you can hear someone read out a play and identify the author without seeing the book title; their thought pattern, the delivery, the wit, the engagement, etc. You don't find this sweet spot by studying but by creating so much until the pattern becomes evident.

Your audience isn't static

We cannot have marketing campaigns except we know whom to target. However, many creatives are becoming imprisoned to the target audience they chose.

Well, you could handle this in two ways:

- Pick an audience, create for them and watch how they consume your work.
- Create and let the work determine its audience by watching those who gravitate towards it.

You have to be intentional to service the audience that consumes your work and cheers you on. It would be silly to disrespect your audience because to be fair, they are the reason your author-

ing has any profit. Yet, you must be honest and acknowledge when your audience has started hijacking your creation process by insisting you create a certain way or within an unrealistic timeline.

To balance your creation process with marketing. Know your strength and play on it. Some people write ten thousand words in five to ten hours and are content to do so in one sitting.

When I was a younger writer, I remember watching people in a freelance group have word targets everyday and they delivered as long as they never spoke to the clients themselves (the admin handled that).

Do you research and write or do you research while writing? Do you upgrade your vocabulary before sitting to write or do you search for synonyms and better expressions while writing? Do you write short pieces consistently or do you write long pieces sporadically? Do you write in silence or do you write live

(with your audience reading and commenting as your work improves).

If you know your strength and your technique, you can play on it. Example: if you enjoy writing and getting live reactions, you shouldn't be creating in isolation. You should be writing and building a fandom around your work with your audience contributing their quota and dialoguing about your work.

That audience becomes your publicist, your critique and your content curator (they would always bring inspiration to you). This is user generated content at its creative best. Platforms like Goodreads blew up with this technique. By the time the books were completed, authors had enough media buzz to compete with other authors who were already published.

Imagine having twenty-five thousand people talking about a book that hasn't even been fully edited? Successes like this come from knowing your strength and playing on

it.

For example, if you enjoy isolation during your creative process and that's nothing to be ashamed of. However, your audience does not know what is happening and are imagining that you've quit your career or generally do not regard them.

To keep them engaged without distracting yourself, get an administrator if you can afford it. Now, this person can engage as you, through your social media accounts or they can be digital media bestie that the audience can go to find updates about you.

Many publication companies do this; talk about the book, engage the audience and keep the traffic going, giving the writer the space and time for isolation. The benefit of doing this with a single friend instead of an entire organization is they don't pressure you to finish at a specific timeline except you're stalling of course. Finally, you can get on social media by yourself when you're not in your creative space.

Have a live Q & A session with your fan base

Create faceless video content where you tell the behind the scene process. Make random posts without a schedule that reassure your audience that you're making something. The larger you get and more reliable you are, the less likely your audience are to panic when you get into creative isolation.

The goal is not to be online. The goal is to create something worthy of your time and ours. Let me know how you're using this information by reaching out on Twitter @iamlizachum.



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WSA Magazine **REVIEW**

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ALL MAMA DOES

A Children's Literature by Sisanda Mqadi, South Africa



Reviewer
Akuei M. Adol
(South Sudan)

Diana Baumrind's study on parenting styles emphasizes how a mother's nurturing, supportive, and authoritative parenting approach contributes to a child's well-being. Mothers who display warmth and responsiveness raise children with higher self-esteem, better academic performance, and improved social skills.

"All Mama Does" is a compelling narrative that tells of a loving and nurturing mother named Khanyi. Her daily life and interactions with her kids are filled with tenderness, showcasing the true love and care she pours into their lives; reminiscent of family scenes found in movies like 2006 film "The Pursuit of Happyness."

Furthermore, Mama's house is not just a physical dwelling but a sanctuary of generosity where the aroma of freshly baked cookies envelops every corner, inviting memories of shared moments and comfort akin to those experiences when watching Mrs. Weasley in the "Harry Potter" series. Every morning, Mama greets her children with a smile, reflecting the maternal devotion shared by most parents around the world.

The use of sensory details, such as the scent of freshly baked cookies, the sound of raindrops, and the image of Mama's apron as a canvas adorned with flour smudges, adds depth to the story.

The portrayal of Mama as a storyteller, chef, gardener, and bedtime magician highlights her diverse skills and roles as a mother. Each scene captures a different aspect of her motherhood journey, from nurturing creativity in the kitchen to fostering a love for nature in the garden.

Beyond the surface-level activities, the story delves into the deeper lessons Mama imparts to her children: kindness, empathy, and resilience. She is not just a caregiver but a mentor and role model, guiding her children with wisdom and grace.

In conclusion, the tale is a touching tribute to motherhood, celebrating the everyday love that a mother brings into her children's lives. It captures moments of joy, learning, and growth, making it a delightful read that resonates with readers of all ages.

MOTHERHOOD

A Creative Nonfiction by Louise Venter, South Africa

Reviewer

Joyce Mohlalefi
(Lesotho)



God's creations are awe-inspiring. He took his time to create a woman who is a helper and nurturer. Women go through many challenges in life, one of which is motherhood. Louise Venter's story depicts the challenges that a child is constrained to face when his/her mother battles an illness or disease.

The story follows Venter as she and her family adjust to their new reality when their mother shows signs of dementia. Dementia is a condition that affects older people and causes them to lose their memory. Venter's mother was a beautiful, intelligent, and fiercely independent woman, so her diagnosis came as a shock to everyone.

The story captures the emotions of pain and grief that Venter and her family experienced as they watched their mother's health decline. Venter writes about the moment she received a call from her brother telling her of their mother's state at the hospital. She describes the feeling of helplessness, fear and pain that

she felt.

Venter also writes about the challenges of caring for her mother at home. She and her family had to make many adjustments, including selling their mother's house and moving her in with them. Venter moving her mother's furniture and possessions reminded her of when she was a little girl and her mother would kiss her knee and tell her "You're going to be okay." This moment shows how a mother's love can heal and comfort her children.

Venter's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of mothers in our lives. She writes about her mother as "a presence larger than life, a formidable force in the world, now reduced to a tiny childlike figure with hunched shoulders bent low over a walking frame." This imagery creates a strong emotional connection with the reader and helps them to understand the challenges that Venter and her family faced.

BOND BEYOND THE GRAVE

A Poem by Ikobeng Gracious, Botswana

Reviewer

Neville O. Kgoropu
(Botswana)



Message: The central theme revolves around the enduring nature of maternal love and the lingering grief that accompanies the loss of a child. The message emphasizes the depth of a mother’s love, which transcends even death, and the struggle to come to terms with the loss.

Language: The poem employs rich imagery and evocative language to convey the depth of emotions experienced by the speaker. Phrases like “tiny stars,” “knitted strings,” and “shooting star passes” create vivid visual imagery that enhances the reader’s understanding of the speaker’s emotions.

Structure: The poem follows a struc-

tured form with consistent stanzas, allowing the ideas to flow seamlessly. The repetition of certain phrases, such as “My love belongs to you,” adds emphasis and reinforces the emotional intensity of the poem.

Rhythm: While the poem lacks a strict rhyme scheme, it maintains a rhythmic flow through the use of poetic devices such as alliteration and assonance. This rhythmic quality adds to the musicality of the poem and helps to engage the reader.

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