

Reading for Information

from No More Strangers Now: Young Voices from a New South Africa

Interviews



Use with “Six Feet of the Country,” page 1342.



READING 9A Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author’s viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion. **9B** Explain how authors writing on the same issue reached different conclusions because of differences in assumptions, evidence, reasoning, and viewpoints. **9C** Make and defend subtle inferences and complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns. **9D** Synthesize ideas and make logical connections among multiple texts representing similar genres and support those findings with textual evidence.

Nadine Gordimer’s “Six Feet of the Country” presents a white man’s perspective on black South Africans during apartheid. Now you will read the perspectives of two teenage South Africans—one a black female and the other a white male—on what apartheid was like for their families and how South African culture has changed since apartheid was abolished. These interviews were published in 1998.

Skill Focus: Identify Perspectives

A person’s **perspective**—that is, the way he or she looks at a subject—is shaped by his or her experiences, beliefs, and values. Consequently, people who have had different experiences or come from different cultural backgrounds often have very different perspectives on the same topic. As you read the two interviews that follow, identify each teenager’s perspective on apartheid and apartheid-free South Africa by taking note of the following:

- what the teenagers tell you about their backgrounds and experiences
- any direct statements of their beliefs, opinions, feelings, or perceptions
- the reasons each gives to explain particular events, attitudes, and circumstances

Keep track of this information on a chart such as the one shown here.

	<i>Background Information, Experiences, Direct Personal Statements, Explanations</i>	<i>What These Tell Me About His or Her Perspective</i>
<i>Mhlana</i>		
<i>Abrahamson</i>		

After you have identified each teenager’s perspective on apartheid, write a short summary of each viewpoint and explain why each teenager reached different conclusions on the topic.

No More Strangers Now:

Young Voices from a New South Africa



BREAKING THE CHAIN

Nomfundo Mhlana

I GREW UP on a white person's farm, where my father worked with the sheep in the fields and my mother cleaned the white person's house. My parents never even got a whole day off; they worked all 365 days of the year. **A**

When I was small, I saw the bad way the whites treated my parents. When the farmers went to work, for example, they wanted my mom to take care of their babies. My mother and the white babies began to love each other—when my mother was playing with the baby, the baby would laugh—but when the babies got older, their parents would tell them, “This is a black, and she is working for us. She is not like us.” They didn't really see us as the same kind of human beings. . . .

As a child I felt bad about being black. When I saw the way our parents worked for the whites, I thought the whites were superior to us and that their white skin made them rich. I would look at the color of my skin and then look at the whites' color, and I would think, I wish I was white.

Growing up on that farm, I didn't go to school until I was ten years old. The whites discouraged my brother and me from going to school because they were worried that we would get some knowledge and then want change. If I went to school, maybe I'd never come back and work in the farm kitchen. . . .

We lived far from where the whites lived because the whites didn't want the noise from the black workers. I always wanted to go inside the “big house” because I could see outside there were grasses and flowers, so I thought that the inside of the house would be very interesting. But I was never allowed to go into the house because the whites thought that if I came in there, my shoes would make the house dirty or I would steal something. . . . **B**

A IDENTIFY PERSPECTIVES

In this first paragraph, what does Mhlana tell you about her background?

B IDENTIFY PERSPECTIVES

Reread lines 15–24. What events and circumstances does she explain here? What reasons does she give to explain them?

**C IDENTIFY
PERSPECTIVES**

What beliefs does Mhlana state directly in this paragraph? What facts does she provide to support her opinions?

**D IDENTIFY
PERSPECTIVES**

How does Mhlana feel about herself and her future now?

Now that Mandela is president, I think our society is more equal, but I also think whites still have apartheid in their hearts. They pay workers more because the democratic government says they must and because they're afraid of the law. But they still think they are better than us. We now live on a different farm than when I was a child, and my parents still have to call the whites *baas*. They still
30 don't pay workers enough money. My parents have six children, and they would like to live in a nice house, but they only have enough money for food. **C**

But I do have hope that some whites are changing their minds. The whites on the farm now will come into our house and drink some tea with my mother. They also have a daughter who is nineteen, like me, and we are friends. . . . I'm now going to a school that was started by white farmers' wives, for children on the farms like me. The farmers at our place think it's okay that my brother and I are in this school, and they say that education is the best thing to have. In fact, they came to a party when the school first opened.

I will not work on the farm like my parents. They were illiterate and living in
40 the times of apartheid, and working on the farm was all they could do. But my education will give me an advantage; it will help me get better jobs than they could. . . .

When I was small, I was jealous of whites; I wanted to be like them. But now I feel hope that I will have a bright future, and I am proud to be black. When I meet a white person who gives me respect and treats me like an equal, I treat him the way he treats me, but that does not mean I wish to be like him. I wish to be just like I am. **D**

Nomfundo Mhlana, center, helps her mother prepare a meal in their three-room house.





REDISCOVERING THE NATION

Mark Abrahamson

THE MAJORITY of South Africans were oppressed during the time of my upbringing, but I was in a very protected environment and was kept away from the violence and the atrocities that were being committed. I think a lot of people outside South Africa have this perception that it was so violent that someone was getting shot around every corner, but it wasn't like that in my area. I've never seen a man killed before, even though just twenty kilometers away in the townships, young kids were being subjected to some *oke* walking into their house and gunning their parents down. **E**

There were just such strong barriers between our two environments. As a kid
10 I remember being at parks in our area and thinking to myself, Now why is that black person there? He shouldn't be there. It wasn't because I had anything against that person; that was just the normal way it was. . . .

We weren't just sheltered; there was also an active hiding of the truth, propaganda, by the apartheid government. They knew that if we were able to analyze the true situation, sooner or later we would have come to the conclusion that it was wrong. The government controlled the television stations, for example, and the news became a joke after a while because it was so propagandist. If there was any violence in the townships, it was blamed on African forces fighting each other and not on white government intervention, which is what it was.

20 You also didn't really hear about the ANC. Whenever you did, it was through the news, "these people are messing up our land" kind of thing. And I hadn't seen pictures of Mandela, because you weren't allowed to have a picture of him anywhere around. He was made out to be a scary, violent character. "If he ever comes out," the government told us, "it will be the end of South Africa; we'll be thrown into civil war." I remember when I finally saw him released from prison on TV, it consciously came to mind: Why'd they put that funny old man in prison for so long? What could he have done? . . .

But things have changed. We weren't told the truth for so long, but now we're hearing it all. We're starting to hear about the brutal attacks on people, to see
30 pictures like the one of three policemen with their feet on a black man that they killed like it's a trophy. I've been shocked by what's come out, but I think it's necessary to hear it. What happened in our past is a wound. If we don't first put

E IDENTIFY PERSPECTIVES

What does Abrahamson tell you about his background in this paragraph?

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes An affix at the beginning of a word is a **prefix**. The prefix *inter-* means "between or among." The root *ven* means "to come." What do you think *white government intervention* (line 19) means?

Language Coach

Greek Affixes The suffix *-oid* comes to the English language from Greek and means “related to” or “having the appearance of.” The word *paranoid* also has a Greek prefix: *para-*, meaning “beyond.” The root *noos* means “mind.” Based on this, what does *paranoid* mean? What other English words have the ending *-oid*?

F IDENTIFY PERSPECTIVES

What does Abrahamson believe is the prevailing attitude among black South Africans toward whites?

antiseptic on the wound, if we don't dig up our skeletons, literally and figuratively, it's never going to heal properly.

There's an age of rediscovery in South Africa at the moment, of finding out what's really out there, of getting to know everyone who is living here and consciously trying to live in harmony. We're the generation that's the bridge from the previous South Africa to a new one. Therefore I think it's crucial to become involved in this transformation, so that you have the sense of actually making a
40 difference. . . .

There's a fear now, especially among the more paranoid whites, that we're moving from a white supremacy to a black one, that black people are going to come knocking on our door, saying, “We're gonna divide your house in two.” But that isn't what's happening. It seems there's this incredible feeling of forgiveness on the part of black people. It's like, “You know these white people have been terrible to us, but we're just going to show them that we're not made of the same stuff.” I think we must be quite thankful for this atmosphere because as far as I'm concerned, black people have every right to turn the whole thing around and say, “Three hundred years we've been under this oppression, now it's your turn for the
50 next three hundred.” F

Some white people are leaving South Africa, but I have no intention of doing so. I think if I was to be scooped up and put in Europe or America, I would be able to survive, but I would be very homesick for South Africa. Not many people have the privilege to be living in a country that is changing so rapidly, and I feel quite proud of my land, and I know that I belong here. I see our future being a positive one. I would like to be able to look back on my youth and say to myself, I was, even in a small way, somehow part of this success.

Mark Abrahamson plays the piano for his parents in their living room.



Comprehension

1. **Recall** Where did Nomfundo Mhlana grow up? In what kind of environment was Mark Abrahamson raised?
2. **Summarize** Abrahamson says that some white people are leaving South Africa. What does he say he plans to do, and why?

Critical Analysis

3. **Analyze Perspective** As a young adult of 19, what is Nomfundo Mhlana's perspective on being black? How did she used to feel about being black? Aside from simply growing up, what events and interactions might have contributed to this change?
4. **Compare Perspectives** It is easy to see how Mhlana's and Abrahamson's perspectives differ. In what ways are their viewpoints similar? Explain your answer, citing evidence from the texts.



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Read for Information: Clarify and React to an Opinion

WRITING PROMPT

In "Breaking the Chain," Nomfundo Mhlana says that she believes "whites [in South Africa] still have apartheid in their hearts." Clarify what she means by this, reviewing what you've learned about apartheid from Gordimer's "Six Feet of the Country" as well as from the two interviews. Then tell whether you agree, disagree, or partially agree with her statement. Support your opinion with evidence from the interviews and your own reflections about human nature.

To answer this prompt, follow these steps.

1. Consider what you learned about white people's attitudes toward blacks during apartheid from "Six Feet of the Country" and from the two interviews. Use this information to clarify what Mhlana is saying.
2. Keeping in mind what you read in the two interviews, decide whether you agree, disagree, or partially agree with her statement.
3. Support your answer with details from the two interviews as well as comments about your own experiences and insights.

