

"An Ode to Bafana Bafana"

Soccer (football) is among the most popular sports in South Africa. It is a sport of the people that is mainly played in the streets and stadiums of the townships. South Africa's national team is called "Bafana Bafana". Though it did not qualify for the last World Cup in Germany in 2006, South Africa hosts the next one in 2010. Stadiums have been rebuilt or newly built in every major town or city all over the country. Phaswane Mpe (see p. 49) wrote a poem about the international team of South Africa in 1998 called "An Ode to Bafana Bafana". – Phaswane Mpe: *Brooding Clouds*, Scottsville/RSA: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008, pp. 168, 70.



1 ai

we sang...
 we sang shosholoz
 sent you off with rhymes
 of joy & hope stifled
 by our knowledge of your youth
 in matters of world cups
 we brooded over the deprivations
 & depravities of apartheid
 of amabokoboko
 beating ireland with scores
 of fists that frightened the irish
 made them fearful
 of scoring their own goals
 to fill oceans of nationhood
 flowing within their literature
 james joyce forgot about the artist
 as a young man
 & focused his sharp gaze
 on you bafana bafana
 playing your first round like boys

stranded in a zoo
 of noisy spectators screaming au revoir
 benny mccarthy magic
 & no wonder boys
 there was no madiba magic
 spurring you on from the maddening crowds
 of noises of shosholoz
 uprooted from its south african soil
 & stranded in the green lands [...]

you lost bafana bafana
 but we knew you were stimela's franky
 wanting to go to the city
 it is enticing & menacing that hillbrow
 that you would go to
 softly now boys...
 tread softly as you wade your way
 towards 2002
 a big leap towards 2006 and beyond
 when we might watch from heavens
 as you soar like eagles [...]



Pure joy of life:
Bafana fans
at the first
game of the
Confederations
Cup, 14 June
2009

Vocabulary

8 deprivation (n.): s.th. you need or usually have that you are prevented from having - **9 to deprave** (v.): *fml.* to be an evil influence on s.o., esp. s.o. who is young or not very experienced - **34 enticing** (adj.): very pleasant or interesting so that you feel strongly attracted - **34 menacing** (adj.): making you expect s.th. unpleasant - **37 wade** (v.): to walk through water that is not deep

Explanations

Introduction: **bafana:** means "boys", the name of the national soccer team - **1 ai:** exclamation of surprise, pain or dismay - **3 shosholoz:** popular South African "working

song" sung at rugby matches by Springbok supporters - **10 amabokoboko:** African name for the international rugby team - **11 beating Ireland:** South Africa beat Ireland in two Rugby test matches in 1998. The results were 37-13 and 33-0. These were devastating defeats for the Irish. - **17 James Joyce** (1882-1941): Irish writer. He wrote the novels *Ulysses* (1922) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), among other important works. - **24 Benny McCarthy:** popular South African soccer player - **26 Madiba:** affectionate nickname for Nelson Mandela (see p. 27) - **32 stimela:** popular South African jazz group headed by Ray Phiri - **32 Franky:** an allusion to US-American singer and actor Frank Sinatra (1915-1998) - **34 Hillbrow:** see p. 47

AWARENESS

- 1 Do you know any players in the South African football team? Do you know any South African players in Germany? Who are they, and which teams do they play for?

COMPREHENSION

- 2 What is the name of the national rugby team given in the poem?

ANALYSIS

- 3 What is an ode? Why does Mpe use the form of an ode?
- 4 What literary devices can you find in the poem? What is their function in the poem?
- 5 Why does the poet mention a) James Joyce (l. 17) b) Franky (l. 32)?
- 6 What is meant by "madiba magic" (l. 26)?

OPINION

- 7 How important is football (soccer) in your country? Do you think it is overrated? Give reasons for your opinion.

PROJECTS

- 8 Imagine the final of the World Cup (2010 or later) is your national team against Bafana Bafana. Write a newspaper article or radio report about the game.
- 9 Find out about the two most famous South African soccer teams: Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs (<http://www.orlandopiratesfc.com/> and <http://www.kaizerchiefs.com/>).
 - a) What do they have in common? b) Which other nicknames do they have and what do they mean? c) How are they seen by their supporters? Explain why their supporters view the teams as they do.