

What Would I Miss?



A story by the children of Grahamstown.

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I live in a village where the boys still look after the cattle – like they have always done. The hills still roll gently across the edge of the sky – like they have always done. And the people smile when they greet you – like they have always done. I live in the village where Mr Nelson Mandela lived when he was young.

I am a boy like he was, and I do the same things that he did long ago. I look after my father's cattle and I stick-fight with the other boys. We make clay oxen at the river and we slide on the smooth rocks on the hills, just like he did.



Sometimes I think about the things that are the same, about Mr Nelson Mandela and me, and the things that are different. Then my heart beats a little faster. I don't know if I would be brave enough to be like him, or strong enough ... or wise enough. I am only a boy.

What would it be like if some people came and took me away? What would I think if they put me into a van and drove me away to another place; a place that my ancestors did not know? What is it like to be in prison, to not be free? I think I would be afraid, and I would be sad.





At night, I would lie awake in my prison and I would think about the things I would miss.

My home where my dad was born.

The green mealie fields, the mountains and the rivers.

The sound of the sheep in the afternoon.

The soup that mother makes for us when the nights get cold.

The smell of coffee in the morning in the sun.

Then I would be angry.



But I would remember the people who had gone before me. I would remember how they waited in prison and how they talked and learned and wrote in secret. I would remember how they were strong.

I would think about their thoughts when they were prisoners and their sadness. Did they think about their mothers and the time when they were young, like me? Did they remember the sounds of the cattle coming home to the kraal in the evening, and the way their hooves kicked up the dust on the road, and the way the cattle shone when the sun was low, and they were beautiful?

Did they miss their friends and the running and the playing and the sound of the sticks cracking one on the other and the calling of the other boys and the walking home with the scent of the dust and the grass and the smell of home?

Did they remember the cold splash of river water and riding on the backs of calves?

Did they think about the girls with their beads and their smiles and the way that they walk when they bring water?



And did they remember the stories their grandfathers told them, and the smell of tobacco and the warm laughter of men who were free?

Did they dream of the milk when it is warm from the cow, and the stars on black nights when the moon is asleep? Did they think of the scent of the earth when the plough turns it over and the green of the mealies when they first poke through the earth? Did they?

I think they did.



What would I miss?

What would I miss if I wasn't here?

The sun on my back while I sit on the hill, watching
my father's cattle.

The fur on my dog's back when I touch him.
Blue and white beads trickling through my fingers when my
mother is working.

FREEDOM

What would I do when I got back from prison?

Run and run on the green land of my home.

Warm my hands at the fires of my ancestors.

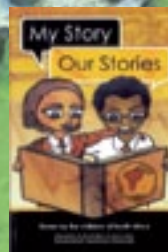
Just sit – and be here.

Freedom!

What would I miss?

Supporting the story

After reading, spend time discussing the story. Share your views and feelings, and compare your feelings with those of the main character. What would you miss about your home if you had to go away for a long time? Re-tell the original story, focusing on the storyline and narrator's viewpoint. Come up with a new main character and re-tell the story from this new character's point of view. Get a friend to write the story as you verbalise it. Now re-read the story and fix it up – does it make sense? Fix the grammar and punctuation and perhaps re-write some of the sections. Now break it up into sections, assign pages to them and make up your book. Don't forget to illustrate the pages.



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