



**Address by Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor MP, at the
launch of the “Learning African History – freedom fighters 2” and
“Great African Artists” series, Pretoria, Monday 20 November
2006**

“Lives of our struggle leaders”

Mr Michael Neu- Ner (Awareness Publishing MD)

Authors

Distinguished guests

It gives me great pleasure to launch two new educational series.

The first is about great leaders of the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

The second is about great South African artists who dedicated their lives to translating their visions of life into various forms of art.

It is appropriate to launch these series as the school year draws to a close.

This year is particularly significant in the history of South Africa in that it marks the anniversaries of so many important historical events that helped to shape our path to freedom and democracy.

The Department of Education committed itself during 2006 to participate in the national commemoration of the anniversaries of events of historical significance under the national theme: “The Age of Hope – From Struggle to Freedom.”

My predecessor as Minister launched the first series of “Learning African History - Freedom Fighters Series 1”.

The Department of Education was so impressed that we encouraged Awareness Publishing Group to produce another.

For our own part, the Department continues to promote history in the classroom through the social-science learning-area in grades 1 to 9, and history in grades 10 to 12.

We have made sure that South African history is at the centre of our national curriculum.

In so doing we have made sure that children learn about the history of their country. In addition, we are encouraging young people to begin to write their own histories in the language of their choice - for example through the recently held Nkosi Albert Luthuli Young Historians’ Competition.

For me, as for many others, it is important for our learners and educators to read the biographies of those who triumphed over poverty and hardship under apartheid, in a society that seemingly offered no hope to the majority of young people.

The people, whose life stories are told in both the Freedom Fighters Series and the Great African Artists series, are wonderful role models for our learners and educators.

Most of the stories show how dedicated individuals overcame their circumstances through willpower, commitment and perseverance.

Many of them were encouraged by others, often teachers, who took the time to support them and work with them to achieve their goals.

This is what we ask of all our educators and learners today.

We also ask our educators to encourage reading and our learners to take time to read.

The Department has embarked on a well-publicised campaign to remind teachers that reading is fundamental to the achievement of academic success and the acquisition of essential life skills.

I fully endorse the philosophy of Awareness Publishing Group that children need to read books because they want to - without having to be persuaded to do so.

I fully endorse their belief that books need to be written in such a way that children find them irresistible.

Chris van Wyk, who is here tonight, wrote both Freedom Fighter series. He is a fine poet, novelist and short-story writer, who adds his own "lived experience" to the lives of the struggle leaders he recreates so colourfully.

His book, *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy – a Childhood Memoir*, about growing up under apartheid is a wonderful example of how South Africa's rich history can be captured through the eyes of a child – his book is an inspiration to our young people.

Teachers need to pay close attention to the issues of memory and identity.

As we move forward to embrace a common South African national identity, learners will come to understand that a variety of group or sub-group identities based on class, race or religion are compatible with a commitment to a broader national South African identity. That is what we mean by promoting an inclusive ideology in our schools. Not that we should all be the same, but that we should respect diversity and draw courage and pride from it.

Any notion of fixed exclusive identities carried over from the past will take time to erode as we grow in our understanding of the richness of our history and the complexities of who we are.

Donve Lee, the author of the Great African Artists series, is an artist in her own right - she is the author and illustrator of numerous children's story books.

You can see immediately from the Great African Artist series that she is committed to encouraging creativity in children.

She has shown that artists, whatever their circumstances, were able pursue their personal visions of creating art.

These books offer a rich resource for teachers and learners alike – not only in the arts and culture learning area but across other learning areas, such as social science and language.

The Department places great importance on arts and culture within the national curriculum. Learning about art and culture contributes to a holistic education for all learners.

The uniqueness of this learning area can best be seen in the opportunities that it provides to nurture and develop the creativity of learners.

Through arts and culture activities, learners can explore, experience and express thoughts, ideas and concepts within an atmosphere of openness and acceptance.

What better way to inspire our young learners than to give them the opportunity to read about the lives of artists, living in circumstances so similar to their own lives.

Who can fail to be moved by the life story of Bonnie Ntshalintshali, who was stricken by polio as a young child, who left school in Grade 10, who went on to become guest artist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and who ultimately became a world-famous ceramic artist.

Ms Ntshalintshali's untimely death at 32 years of age was a great loss to South Africa.

Who can fail to be inspired by the extraordinary story of Dumile Feni, or indeed Noria Mabasa, or George Pemba?

I wish the publishers every success with both the Freedom Fighters Series 2 and the Great African Artists series and trust that more series will follow.

I thank you