

Boesman and Lena

Author	Athol Fugard
Published by	Buren
Published in	1969
Price	Approximately €12
Genre	Postmodern
Length	55 pages
First staged	at the Rhodes University Little Theatre, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa, on 10 July 1969.
Summary	<p>It is a historical play which is set in Eastern Cape, South Africa, during the apartheid era.</p> <p>The play tells the story of a coloured¹ African couple in their mid-fifties, Boesman and Lena, which have been wandering through the bleak mudflats of the Swartkops River near Port Elizabeth all day. Burdened with all their belongings they are looking for a safe place to pitch their tent. Exhaustedly, they settle, build their shack and prepare to go to sleep when a black African approaches them. Boesman and Lena take the stranger in and Lena starts to talk to the black man although he does not speak her language. During the night, he passes away and Lena and Boesman continue their journey instantly as they are afraid of being interrogated by the police.</p> <p>Historical dimension:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set in South Africa during the apartheid.• Displays the living condition of coloureds (poverty, homelessness).• Mirrors political and social conditions (racial segregation, forced removals).
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only two acts, no scenes → no natural subdivisions• Climatic action (matches the Freytag model); closed concept of space and time

¹ According to apartheid laws, people of mixed race were called 'coloured'

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Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic character constellation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → coloured vs. black people → superiority / suppression • different types of characters (multi- /monodimensional) • characters represent their respective race (coloured, black), play depicts their living conditions during the apartheid era <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → play is of general importance
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living conditions of coloured people under the apartheid • Loss / search of identity; isolation • The relation of the different races enforced by the apartheid laws. • Theatrical conventions at the time (racial segregation) <p>Related topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Africa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ History ➤ The rainbow nation • Variations of English • Colonialism • Racial segregation (South Africa vs. United States) • Theatre vs. film (the difference of presentation) <p>Theatrical dimension:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illusionist theatre • Challenges theatrical conventions (segregated audiences) • Insights about the medium theatre: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Language illustrates the theatre's audience relatedness (expressions in Afrikaans need to be reduced modified in a performance outside South Africa). ➤ Collaborative nature of drama; artistic liberties ➤ Dissemination of knowledge (historic information; in the context of SA → inform the illiterate)
Available Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are two film versions (1974, 2000). • There is no paperback version available.
Helpful Secondary Literature	<p>McLuckie, Craig W. "Power, Self, and Other: The Absurd in Boesman and Lena." <i>Twentieth Century Literature</i> 39.4 (1993): 423-29. <i>JSTOR</i>.</p> <p>Angotti, Vincent L. "Review: Boesman and Lena." <i>Educational Theatre Journal</i> 23.4 (1971): 467-70. <i>JSTOR</i>.</p>
Language	English with expressions in Afrikaans; colloquial language.
Semiotics	"Boesman" as a political label (telling names; the title prescribes the hierarchical order)

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Suitable Age	15 +
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing film and text • Role play • Statues
Teachability Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to read • Text is not very long • Students might be interested in a topic related to Africa for some reason. • Allows traditional structural analysis
Teachability Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is not available in paperback
Overall Evaluation	I would definitely try to integrate the play in class as soon as the topic allows this, and recommend this to everyone else.