

<https://aderie.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/born-a-crime-trevor-noah.pdf>

On the themes of:

- Sight vs. Blindness
- Appearance vs. Reality
- **Search for Identity**
- Duty/Responsibility

Xhosa = "Ho-SA"

Chapter 1:

- **Noah's mother's** turn to Christianity paradoxical + perfectly logical:
 - Paradoxical: she adopts the same ideology used to justify oppressing her, but it's logical because religion offers her a means of coping with that oppression.
 - The comically hyperbolic fact that she takes Trevor to three churches every Sunday suggests that she is much more devout than most white people, but also seriously disciplined and comfortable traversing the racial fault lines of divided South Africa.
- Africans interpret Christianity in different ways:
 - Mixed-race congregation: the possibility of different races celebrating together, bound by a common belief.
 - White congregation: centrality of education in the white culture that enjoys the privilege to access it
 - This is surprising given that Noah can "out-Bible" quiz the more advantaged kids at Church
 - Black church: how suffering and poverty are defining features of blacks' experiences under apartheid
- **Noah's mother** doesn't practice Christianity and speaks English to Trevor at the expense of her indigenous Xhosa traditions and language
 - She instead sustains both, which serves as a model for Noah to bridge different cultures by refusing to renounce either in favour of the other

Chapter 2:

- Racism is simply false: people from all groups are fundamentally capable of loving one another, and "in many cases, want to love each other"
 - **race often divides communities but it's not like there's a physical barrier. With the right mindset and drive, it can be overcome, much like how Noah's mother fights against racial barriers in South Africa**
 - The attempt to turn mixed-race people into a distinctive category further shows that racial groups are hazy, socially constructed categories rather than facts of nature.
 - Patricia's fearlessness again helps her defy the laws designed to manipulate her through fear and violence, reflecting the fundamental absurdity of a system that defines human life based on race rather than common humanity.

- **When Trevor is born, his mother recognizes** how little value the government's birth certificate has in determining his value but still recognizes the value it has in determining how he is treated by their country
 - She marks him as not a coloured child to take advantage of the fundamental flaws of apartheid's assumption that race is some biological and fundamental trait that warrants unusual treatment
- We see racism seep even into architectural design with Soweto
 - Only has two roads to make bombing the ghetto easier
 - Clearly affects the black people living in the area and treats them as animals
- **Ultimately, his mother sees her identity not as a black or Xhosa or Zulu person, but as a South African and hopes to inspire Trevor to believe that, just like her, "This is my country. Why should I leave?"**

Chapter 3:

- Trevor explains how apartheid has combined the three facets of American racism into one: forced relocation to reserves, slavery, and segregation
- South Africans see Indigenous and Western beliefs about crime, punishment, and social life as compatible, unlike the British / American views
- When Trevor's family tries to hold a prayer to appease whatever witch has left a soiled newspaper in their home, it illustrates Trevor's belonging to a community of individuals who see Indigenous + Western beliefs as compatible

Chapter 4:

- Trevor relates to people who are racially different from him but think he is "coloured" by speaking the same language as them
 - In contrast, he has difficulty relating to black people that look like his family feel foreign because of the way they speak English
 - This is a play on the fundamental bases of apartheid, which divide people based on racial and then language differences, but Trevor often sees it in reverse
- Trevor as a lighter child has everyone in Soweto associate him with white individuals, and his light skin has shaped his identity, even if he doesn't recognize it.
 - When he breaks his cousin's eardrum, everyone is beat except for Trevor because his grandma **"do[es]n't know how to hit a white child"**
- Trevor doesn't recognize racism and fails to see how he is any more than the other black children, even though the black children revere him because of his skin colour
 - His identity as a coloured person places him at the intersection of these communities; enjoying the oppressive privileges of being white while being persecuted for being black
- Apartheid works through a "divide and conquer" strategy that seeks to exploit differences between the majority to make them fight each other and become easier to rule
 - **By learning all major languages, Trevor and his mother is able to "bridge the race gap", threatening the basis of apartheid. Trevor and his mother are clearly expressing their identity as not black or coloured, but as citizens of a diverse country**

- He's about to be mugged when the people realize that he speaks Zulu and is clearly one of them. He's using language to overcome any barriers assigned to him at birth
- Even after apartheid ends, black students and families struggle to escape the poverty apartheid left them in as acquiring good education is tough
 - Trevor has been shielded from most of this through a good education and is able to use his language to overcome a lack of community at school by conversing with the black students in their language while knowing English to converse with the white students
- He ultimately doubles down on his identity as a black person when he chooses to switch to the non-advanced "B" class at school, where he makes a statement that he is black.

Chapter 5:

- Apartheid helped to confuse individuals about their identity by stripping them of any geographical or racial community outside of a family. **Noah's mother's search for belonging forces her to travel across South Africa to find a place where she can belong, ultimately ending up on her own and fending for herself.**
- **Noah's mother** is strong and resilient, which helped her fulfill the ideals assigned to her with her name, "She who gives back". She wishes to **give Noah the freedom to choose his own identity and not be beholden to anyone by giving him** "a name with no meaning whatsoever in South Africa, no precedent in my family. It's not even a Biblical name".

Point of View:

- Showing you the eyes of a young person,
- The blurbs at the start give a more adult view of the story

Themes:

- Refusal to follow illogical rules; Trevor breaks rules that don't make sense to him, just like how his mom broke rules of apartheid
- Lots of learnings for Trevor:
 - What healthy relationships look like
 - Deliberation, rather than violence, as a way to resolve conflict
 - His curiosity is a gift but can easily be destructive
- Racial inequality;
 - Labelling Japanese as white to stay on good terms with the Japanese gov't and Chinese as black
 - house burning down is a small setback for white family bc insurance

Chapter 6:

- **Government labels Japanese as white and Chinese as black to import Japanese products and stay on good terms with the Japanese government**
 - **Shows how apartheid is baseless - apartheid isn't based in any biological truth - rather, is based purely in gov't self-interest**
- Trevors' refusal to follow rules that don't make sense and seeing the contradictions between the school's rules and commonly adhered principles:

- **Trevor's antics with fireworks and knives speaks to his mother's love for putting up with him as well as a curiosity as to whether rules have logical bases**
 - His pranks at school are banned but don't ultimately gravely harm others. Parallels can be drawn between the rules that ban his pranks and apartheid - laws that enforce apartheid have a significant impact on black families but still exist
- **He sees contradictions between rules and the principles everyone should adhere to;**
 - his friend outs him in the confessional as the one who drank the juice and ate the crackers before mass and the priest tells administration, even though confession is private
 - He can't take communion bc he isn't catholic, but Jesus should be able to save even non-Catholics
- This prompts his second visit to the psychologist
- **He interprets the rules for himself, so he sees the people who set them as crazy, just as they see him as crazy**
- His third visit to the psychologist is because Trevor brings a knife to school to deter his bully from beating him up
 - The principal asks "whether [he] really wants to be at Maryvale next year", implying that Trevor needs to "shape up", and Trevor takes this literally, just as he takes the school's religion literally and says that he doesn't want to be there
 - **His mother is fine with him leaving; Trevor is thinking on his own and they realize that "Catholic school is not the place to be creative and independent". Just like apartheid, the school is full of illogical rules and he has learned "to challenge authority and question the system", refusing to let authority constrain him**
- He says that "Catholic school is authoritative just like the church"
 - Authoritarian rules
 - "Catholic school is not the place to be creative and independent"
- Patricia finds unique ways to educate and manage young Trevor; when he wants a toffee apple, she sends him off to get it and then pretends not to know him - the cashier assumes that patricia and trevor can't be related because of the diff. In their skin colour
- Patricia (Trevor's mother) makes him write formal letters to her when they are about to get into a verbal argument - **Trevor learns to resolve conflicts through deliberation rather than argument**
 - Also seems to help him out in his life now as a talk show host
- Trevor recognizes that his mother's punishments are not out of her rage but rather her love for him and to impart her wisdom to Trevor
 - His spanking at school is so weak that he laughs in the middle of it, making the principal believe something is wrong psychologically. A psychologist says that he's just "creative and independent and full of energy" suggests that his

comfortable, private school is more focused on preserving traditional thought instead of fostering independent thought

- Patricia starts dating Abel when Trevor is 6, and they are renting a white family's garage. Trevor shows the maid's son how to burn his name into wood with a magnifying glass and they end up burning the shed and house down
 - **Trevor learns that his curiosity can be destructive**
 - **The white family's insurance saves them from the event, which would have derailed a black family's life, which emphasizes how inequality is based on knowledge and institutions in addition to differences in material wealth**
- The maid's son tells everyone that Trevor caused the fire, and Patricia is too shocked to discipline him. Patricia and Trevor recognize that he has learned his lesson (which is the goal of punishment) and Trevor learns that taking responsibility is better than fear or shame, which can be debilitating.
- Abel is kicked out of the garage because the white people have no repercussions to strip black people's rights away

Chapter 7:

- During a recent soccer match, a security guard beat a cat to death on live television like "any sensible black person" (because it was a witch). It created a media outcry among white animal lovers, and the man "had to pay some enormous fine." Of course, Noah notes, "white people had spent years seeing video of black people being beaten to death by other white people," and yet now they are furious at the violence. Anyway, "in South Africa, black people have dogs."
 - A difference in cultural logic between White and Black people in South Africa;
 - Black ppl see killing a cat as "sensible", but most White people saw it as animal cruelty
 - Whites clearly see **animals as more deserving of rights than black people**, showing how apartheid's racism has stripped Whites of their basic humanity, empathy, and social recognition toward "other groups"
- **Patricia and Trevor get two cats, go out and come home, only to find their cats beheaded, tied to the family's front gate, with a sign that reads "Witch" in Afrikaans**
 - **coloured people largely take from white Afrikaner culture, but their beliefs are more complex, influenced enough by the native belief in witches to logically see the cats as a threat.**
 - **Trevor and Patricia clearly have more in common with the coloured community than they realize**
- Patricia and Trevor instead get dogs, which typically serve as a "poor-man's alarm system" instead of "members of the family". Trevor and Patricia still grow close to their dogs Fufi and Panther. **Fufi doesn't respond to commands at all, which makes them think she is "dumb as shit" but Panther responds to commands, which makes them think Panther is smart. When a burglar kills Fufi, a vet tells Trevor and Patricia that Fufi was deaf, which speaks to how little Trevor and Patricia understood about something they loved**

- "Fufi was my first heartbreak. No one has ever betrayed me more than Fufi. It was a valuable lesson to me. The hard thing was understanding that Fufi wasn't cheating on me with another boy. She was merely living her life to the fullest. Until I knew that she was going out on her own during the day, her other relationship hadn't affected me at all. Fufi had no malicious intent. I believed that Fufi was my dog but of course that wasn't true. Fufi was a dog. I was a boy. We got along well. She happened to live in my house. That experience shaped what I've felt about relationships for the rest of my life: You do not own the thing that you love."
- Fufi jumps over the fence and the neighbours think Fufi is their dog and Patricia and Trevor have to bring vet documents and puppyhood photos to buy her back.
- **This is a learning experience for Trevor where he matures and learns that relationships must be mutually beneficial and not for one's personal gain at the other's expense**

Chapter 8:

- Patricia asks Trevor to find his father years later (time skip), they've both grown and accomplished things in their lives; Patricia has raised Trevor without a man's help and Trevor has started a career of his own, but Patricia still believes that Trevor can benefit from rekindling a relationship with Robert
- Trevor's only memories of Robert were that he has an older sister whom he's never met and that Robert is a chef. When he did know him before, he had to refer to him as "Robert" instead of "dad" for risk of being found out. After apartheid is over, there's potential for them to form a new relationship
- Like Patricia and Trevor, Robert is fiercely independent; he insists on living according to his own rules and subverting the apartheid system (which also explains why he illegally leased Patricia a room in the first place). **Robert's successful restaurant, like Trevor's birth, proves that no amount of institutional separation or cultural hatred can ultimately succeed in holding groups apart; fundamentally, many people (although not all people) are social, curious, and want to build relationships with those unlike them.**
 - However, there are groups that don't like this curiosity and the neighbours get the gov't to shut it down
- Despite being the owner of a successful restaurant, Robert doesn't partake in lavish shows of wealth even if his celebrations are more luxurious than Patricia's
 - **He shows his affection for Trevor by simply making time for him, even though their time together is more or less silent**
- Abel's alcoholism and abuse become present in Trevor's life after he burns the house down, and he is controlling in the sense that he doesn't want Trevor and Patricia to have any contact with Robert.
 - Robert's absence may create a negative relationship between Trevor and his father, but Patricia only says good things about him and pushes Trevor to meet him
 - "When a parent is absent, it creates a space and it becomes easy to fill that space"

- Trevor finally gets his father's address after sending letters since Robert isn't listed on Trevor's birth certificate (apartheid)
- "While I was eating he got up and went and picked up this book, an oversized photo album, and brought it back to the table. 'I've been following you,' he said, and he opened it up. It was a scrapbook of everything I had ever done, every time my name was mentioned in a newspaper, everything from magazine covers to the tiniest club listings, from the beginning of my career all the way through to that week. He was smiling so big as he took me through it, looking at the headlines. 'Trevor Noah Appearing This Saturday at the Blues Room.' 'Trevor Noah Hosting New TV Show.' I felt a flood of emotions rushing through me. It was everything I could do not to start crying. It felt like this ten-year gap in my life closed right up in an instant, like only a day had passed since I'd last seen him. For years I'd had so many questions. Is he thinking about me? Does he know what I'm doing? Is he proud of me? But he'd been with me the whole time. He'd always been proud of me. Circumstance had pulled us apart, but he was never not my father."
- **Robert shows his love with actions and routine, and Trevor's apprehensiveness is replaced with affirmation - after years of questioning whether his father had cared for him at all, Trevor learns that his father had been compiling a "scrapbook of everything [Trevor] had ever done". Ironically, even though Trevor knows almost nothing about his father, now his father has a record of almost everything Trevor has ever done.**
- Trevor wants to interview his father, but Robert quickly sees their conversation as more of an interrogation.
 - **Trevor learns that love means respecting and cooperating with someone's boundaries, even when it means things like not asking questions about their past. With his father, Trevor has to temper his curiosity and build a relationship centered on time and effort.**
- "My mother used to tell me, 'I chose to have you because I wanted something to love and something that would love me unconditionally in return—and then I gave birth to the most selfish piece of shit on earth and all it ever did was cry and eat and shit and say, 'Me, me, me, me me.' " (77)

Chapter 9:

- Trevor explains that South Africa's first mixed-race people were born after Dutch colonists raped indigenous hunter-gatherer Khoisan women. Over generations, Khoisan people intermarried with slaves the Dutch imported from around the world, creating the population later known as "coloured". The colonists completely destroyed original Khoisan population, and colored people have largely lost track of their heritage; they are culturally much closer to white Afrikaners than black natives.
 - **Trevor introduces a distinction here between looking "coloured" (a racial assignment) and being "coloured" (an ethnic assignment). The coloured ethnic group is both every race (bc they're so mixed) and a single race because the gov't declares them to be. They are aligned with the colonizers (because of their linguistic and cultural connections to Afrikaners) and with**

colonized people (because of their genetic heritage and lower place in the apartheid hierarchy)

- Just like Trevor, even the designation “coloured” has no basis and reveals the illogical nature of apartheid racism
- Born a coloured person but raised in a black family, Trevor has influences of both black and white culture. This leaves him as an **“insider as an outsider” among black people, who do not assume he is part of their group but later learn that he speaks their language, and an “outsider as an insider” among coloured people who assume that he will be culturally coloured but discover that he isn’t**
 - These parts of his identity come to the forefront when there is a “giant mulberry tree growing out of someone’s front yard” on Trevor and Patricia’s street in Eden Park. The other children pick its berries and play under it, but Trevor has no friends there despite the children looking like him. He realizes that “it is easier to be an insider as an outsider than to be an outsider as an insider”—in joining a world that is not his own, Trevor always finds more acceptance among those he is joining than among his own “tribe.”
- “Colored people had it rough. Imagine: You’ve been brainwashed into believing that your blood is tainted. You’ve spent all your time assimilating and aspiring to whiteness. Then, just as you think you’re closing in on the finish line, some fucking guy named Nelson Mandela comes along and flips the country on its head. Now the finish line is back where the starting line was, and the benchmark is black. Black is in charge. Black is beautiful. Black is powerful. For centuries colored people were told: Blacks are monkeys. Don’t swing from the trees like them. Learn to walk upright like the white man. Then all of a sudden it’s Planet of the Apes, and the monkeys have taken over.”
 - In an effort to give further status to white people, the **apartheid gov’t makes coloured ppl “almost white”**, granting them the privilege that comes with being white if they apply to gov’t and disallow their families. There is also fluidity among the categories of colored, Indian, and even black—**people could be promoted and demoted; sometimes white people can even be demoted to colored. The coloured community is also taught to be very racist against black people, with the reasoning “that it was the black people who were holding them back”**
 - Beyond explicitly using white, coloured, and black as levels of status, the gov’t is using a “divide and conquer” approach to spite coloured people against their black ethnicity by giving them selective privileges
- This makes Trevor’s position weird: **he’s born coloured but raised black. Some coloured people hated his blackness; he spoke African languages, and others hated his whiteness, his English education and his inability to speak Afrikaans**
 - **As the product of two wildly different cultures, coloured ppl have defined a very distinctive culture that is superior to blacks but inferior to whites, as dictated by apartheid. Trevor is an exception to this rule, who is both whiter and blacker than them, and yet insufficiently coloured**
- A coloured girl “borrows” Trevor’s bike so that an older coloured boy can steal it but Trevor’s cousin, Mlungisi, notices and gets the bike back. This isn’t an isolated incident -

Trevor is bullied by the other coloured kids all the time, who throw mulberries at him and call him “Bushie! Bushman!” When he tells his mom, she laughs because she realizes that the red liquid on his face is mulberry and not blood

- “Bushman” is an ironic slur for Trevor since his people, the Xhosa, are a Bantu tribe while coloured people are descended from Khoisan people, who were typically called “Bushman”.
- **His mother’s laughter suggests that she knew that Trevor would lead a hard life as a victim of racist attacks from black, white, and coloured people. This knowledge must have motivated her parenting, helping Trevor become a “chameleon” to blend into both black and white communities**
- Abel comes over soon after and while he hasn’t been violent to Patricia or Trevor yet, Trevor is well aware of his temper. Patricia urges Trevor not to tell Abel the story, but he does anyway, hoping to get back at the kids who bullied him. It works, and Abel beats the “ringleader” with a stick. At first, Trevor is overjoyed but soon he sees the “look of terror on the boy’s face” and realizes that Abel is “a grown man venting his rage on a twelve-year-old boy.” Abel makes the boy come over and apologize, and Trevor recognizes himself in the boy. Abel and Patricia later get into a fight and the boy’s father comes over. Abel intimidates him and threatens him: “Don’t fuck with me. I will kill you.”
 - **Trevor knows that he chose to escalate the situation and it quickly got out of his control. He sees the severity of Abel’s anger and even identifies with the bully, helping him realize the threat Abel poses to their family. Just like with South Africa’s government, violence perpetuates itself in a cycle, turning victims into perpetrators, and it becomes clear to Trevor that violence is neither a healthy nor a productive way to resolve conflict.**
- “He was a kid, I was a kid. He was crying, I was crying. He was a coloured kid in South Africa, I was too” (125)

Chapter 10:

- Patricia often “[tries] to teach [Trevor] about women” and **how to love properly by showing healthy, generous, non-possessive, non-antagonistic love to Trevor.** There are hints that her own relationship with Abel is incredibly unhealthy, but she hopes to instill in Trevor what healthy relationships can be, even insisting that Trevor put his wife before her. there are plenty of lectures about sex, too.
- When Trevor experiences Valentine’s day for the first time, he’s confused and others suggest that he ask the only coloured girl at the school, Maylene. **He accepts that he is supposed to like Maylene simply because she is the only other person who looks like him.** He goes along with the other students dividing themselves up based on race
- Trevor follows his social script when he chooses who to love and this is precisely why his Valentine’s Day falls apart. **Maylene is also following the social script and follows what their society deems to be valuable in a partner (whiteness + status).** While Trevor sees how such romantic scripts and expectations disadvantage him, this shows how children are socialized into them from a young age.

Themes:

- Values of friendship

- His adventures in bad friendships
- His presence as an outsider in the white community
 - He's only friends with the domestic workers' children, who seem to get into trouble or are unscrupulous. This might be a form of racial bias or inequality;
- Chameleon
 - He never really finds a place in a community
 - "The weed dealer"
 - Only valued for the high he can temporarily provide
 - Instead of weed, he offers his humour
 - He can't "overstay" his welcome - even the idea of worrying about "overstaying" a welcome is revealing - *friends* don't worry about overstaying a welcome 15 minutes or even an hour in (Trevor knows this too)
 - Trevor experiences a language barrier
 - Trevor is well aware of his ability to be part of a variety of groups - this is a strength and even keeps him alive (I'm referencing that time that he gets out of being jumped by speaking Xhosa)
 - When he can't use languages to blend into communities, he loses that ability to be part of *any* group. Language kept him alive and not knowing Pedi's dialect can become a challenge to his survival. He only has two options after that: learn the language or take a chance that he won't need to know that language to survive.
- Lingering implicit systemic bias in the legal system against black people
 - Teddy's extreme punishment + how he evades capture
- Trevor is inexperienced when it comes to romantic relationships, following a social script
 - You would expect him to see how problematic the social script is, but his inexperience with relationships and infatuation with the idea of a relationship (social script) pushes him to ignore the warning signs

Chapter 11: We really see Trevor making the most of his situation and being the cultural "chameleon"

- Trevor's mother is an expert at conserving gas
 - She turns the car off at every stoplight, coasts her way through every downhill stretch, and even has Trevor push the car "six inches at a time" when they are stuck in bad traffic. He just hopes none of the kids from school can recognize him.
 - Patricia conserves gas not only because the family is poor, but also because of her more general attitude toward expenses: she decides what is absolutely necessary and refuses to spend on anything else.
 - She deeply values their trips in the car, which is just another reason for her to stretch out the gas for as long as possible
- Trevor goes to a "Model C" high school, a part public, part private school and "a near-perfect microcosm of post-apartheid South Africa," with students of all race and classes "as integrated as they could be given that apartheid had just ended."

- Trevor notes that his segregation is by place first and race second since most people still live in the same disadvantaged places as they did during apartheid; the apartheid-era rules still structure South African society under democracy. Integration doesn't happen overnight
- Trevor still can't find a community at school - colored kids hate him "for being too black" and white kids accept him but are too preoccupied with "things that required money," so he instead hangs out with "the poor black kids" from the townships, who hang out separately on weekends
 - Like in middle school, even though he is the poster-child for integration, Trevor is forced to choose a group and ends up with the black kids, which makes sense given his family and upbringing.
- Trevor makes money by being "the tuck shop guy." He's also late every day because he has to walk so far to get to school, but he is the fastest, most shameless kid in school. He always is the first in line for the tuck shop (cafeteria) after assembly. Other students pay Trevor to buy them lunch so that they don't have to wait in line and he starts taking orders every assembly. He gets so many orders that he decides to take only 5 "high bidders" per day. He pays off his lunches and can now ride the bus home
 - Trevor decides to shape his own social life rather than letting his lack of a clear place in the school's social scene turn him into a pariah. He takes a tongue-in-cheek pride in his detentions and turns his outsider status into a money-making opportunity at lunchtime. This points once again to his ability to connect with a wide variety of people, regardless of background or race. This also serves as a stepping stone for him in the business world.
- "I was like a weed dealer, but of food. The weed guy is always welcome at the party. He's not a part of the circle, but he's invited into the circle temporarily because of what he can offer. That's who I was. Always an outsider. As the outsider, you can retreat into a shell, be anonymous, be invisible. Or you can go the other way. You protect yourself by opening up. You don't ask to be accepted for everything you are, just the one part of yourself that you're willing to share. For me it was humor. I learned that even though I didn't belong to one group, I could be a part of any group that was laughing. I'd drop in, pass out the snacks, tell a few jokes. I'd perform for them. I'd catch a bit of their conversation, learn more about their group, and then leave. I never overstayed my welcome. I wasn't popular, but I wasn't an outcast. I was everywhere with everybody, and at the same time I was all by myself."
 - **Trevor uses humor just like he uses language:** it allows him to become what he previously called "an insider as an outsider." Just like with his name, he can be anything only because he is nothing in particular; his freedom is both a blessing and a curse.

Chapter 12: Trevor talks about how regret can be debilitating, and brings up his missteps and what he's noticed about social structures

- "I don't regret anything I've ever done in life, any choice that I've made. But I'm consumed with regret for the things I didn't do, the choices I didn't make, the things I didn't say. We spend so much time being afraid of failure, afraid of rejection. But regret is the thing we should fear most. Failure is an answer. Rejection is an answer. Regret is an

eternal question you will never have the answer to. "What if . . ." "If only . . ." "I wonder what would have . . ." You will never, never know, and it will haunt you for the rest of your days."

- Trevor knows as an adult that regret can be debilitating, a lesson he learned from when he burned the white family's house down. While taking responsibility and moving on is a better way to deal with failure than wallowing in pain and regret, being willing to accept failure is a better way to deal with uncertainty than wallowing in indecision and guaranteeing regret for oneself. Patricia's attitude proves to be powerful again in approaching decisions with a willingness to take responsibility and/or fail can prevent people from feeling apprehension or fear in the first place.
- Trevor is an ugly high schooler, with horrible acne, no money for a haircut, and, thanks to his mother, clothes three sizes too big that he never grows into. He quickly learns that "cool guys get girls, and funny guys get to hang out with the cool guys with their girls." He would "upset the natural order of things" if he tries anything.
 - Although he's one of the "funny guys" despite being an outsider and self-proclaimed hideousness, Trevor feels that he should continue to fall in line with other people's romantic expectations and be grateful for his status in the social hierarchy (somewhat like colored people were expected to feel grateful under apartheid for not being black).
- Trevor becomes friends with Johanna, who is popular, and her beautiful but shy friend Zaheera. He always makes them laugh and develops "the hugest crush on Zaheera," so he crafts a "foolproof" plan: he will become her best friend and, after three years, she will realize that he is "the guy I was supposed to be with all along," like in the movies. She confides in him about other boys and they start talking on the phone every day after school. And then, at the beginning of the next term, she abruptly immigrates to the United States—and Johanna tells Trevor that Zaheera had "such a huge crush on you." Trevor feels "three successive waves of heartbreak" and a profound regret at never asking Zaheera out.
 - Trevor's plan works, but he's convinced himself that he will fail and he never talks to Zaheera about his feelings. While Fufi taught him that love is not possessive and Maylene taught him about the role social expectations play in relationships and his status in the school hierarchy, Zaheera teaches him the virtues of being honest even when he expects failure and the ultimate unreliability of the same romantic expectations and scripts he learned about on Valentine's Day.
 - Maylene + Lorenzo experiences blind him when he comes to relationships
 - Social scripts too

Chapter 13: Trevor sees some extreme examples of others' bias against black people even after apartheid has ended; his best friend's life is significantly affected by minor shoplifting incidents and adults around him are so fixated on the distorted colour of the accomplice that they can't see him as the accomplice.

- Trevor explains that his family manages to move into a white neighborhood by buying a house from the one family "that Does Not Give a Fuck." (Every white neighborhood has one.) They end up in *Highlands North*, a middle-class area where Trevor is "the only

black kid” among the many Jewish people who “don’t flee. They’re done fleeing. They’ve already fled.” In this new neighborhood, it is difficult to make friends because “everyone lived behind walls,” with the houses closer to “fancy maximum-security prison[s],” surrounded by electric wire. **The only friends Trevor can find are the children of domestic workers.**

- “I was like a Peeping Tom, but for friendship.”
 - Patricia prematurely bought her way into a comfortable suburban colored neighbourhood (Eden Park) and now moves her family into a white neighborhood where black families are not *expected* to live. While she has good intentions of challenging social expectations for a better life, Trevor is isolated and confused; he needs to be invited behind a white family’s walls of their “fancy maximum-security prison” to make any friends at all, and he won’t be invited because he’s not white.
 - Another analogy of his to show a
- Trevor does make a friend at school, Teddy, who is also “naughty as shit” and they shoplift together from the mall a few times to steal liquor-filled chocolates. One day, a cop sees them and chases after them, recruiting 11 others to join him in giving chase. The boys make it to Trevor’s neighbourhood, and Trevor knows a gap in the fence that he can squeeze through to get to the end of a dead-end street and escape. Teddy goes another way, and Trevor squeezes through the gap, goes home, and waits for Teddy, who never shows.
 - What he liked about Teddy: Someone who finally made him feel “normal”, both were pretty naughty, which played into each others’ favour
 - Trevor apparently learns to stop playing with fire but he remains “naughty as shit” and gets himself into trouble again. It is telling that a dozen cops chase the two boys for shoplifting instead of just ensuring that they leave the mall and never come back: it suggests that they see Teddy and Trevor not as unruly children but as despicable criminals, and it’s unlikely that they would have received the same treatment if they were white.
- Teddy’s parents visit Patricia and explain that he has been arrested for shoplifting—Patricia insists Trevor must have been involved, but he denies it and believes he has gotten away with a “solid alibi.” Trevor gets called to the principal’s office, where the principal, three mall cops, and a teacher are waiting. They explain that Teddy has been expelled and ask if, as Teddy’s best friend, Trevor knows anything about the matter. He denies it—and then the police pull out security camera footage. Trevor is shocked; they play the video back and it clearly shows him, shoplifting with Teddy.
 - Expulsion is a serious and extreme punishment for shoplifting and it would likely destroy the future Teddy and Trevor may have dreamed of. This is the first case where we’ve seen explicit bias from the legal system to disproportionately affect black people. Expelling Teddy might have “strengthened” the legal system by making an example out of shoplifters to deter others, but perpetuates a cycle of poverty and violence in black families - Teddy is going to face serious challenges in his future life that may prevent him from providing for himself or his family.

While Teddy covers for Trevor, Patricia does not—as always, she puts honesty and responsibility before convenience or blind loyalty.

- The teacher asks Trevor if he “know[s] of any white kids that Teddy hangs out with.” Trevor is confused, but realizes that in the black-and-white footage, Trevor looks white and Teddy looks black. The adults ask Trevor over and over if he knows who the white accomplice could possibly be—but never see that it is obviously him. They are “so fucked by their own construct of race that they could not see that the white person they were looking for was sitting right in front of them.”
 - This episode shows Trevor how others and the world see race (which is unsurprisingly different from his more nuanced perspective, given that he learned about race’s fuzziness early on). They are so fixated on the color of the skin on the tape that they don’t look past color to see Trevor’s face or realize that the black-and-white footage distorts color. Surprisingly and a little ironically, Trevor gets away with crime because he isn’t white.

Chapter 14:

- South Africa has 11 different official languages (English, Afrikaans, Zulu Xhosa, Tswana, and more). There are dozens more local African languages too small “to demand recognition”. People are constantly communicating in multiple languages, sometimes at the same time, translating as needed and somehow managing to keep the country functioning.
 - South Africa’s linguistic diversity reflects its cultural diversity (many local languages are officially recognized) and its need for political integration (business and government rely on English). All communication is cultural negotiation, and although Trevor is fluent in a variety of languages, he can still by no means understand everything said in his country.
- Trevor has “a mini-empire” by the end of high school: using the computer he convinces his mother to buy him “for school,” he pirates CDs to sell at school. He also looks at plenty of pornographic photos.
 - Just like how he became the “tuck shop guy,” Trevor exploits his weird, outsider-insider status to continue making money and friends at the same time.
- Prom is approaching. All Trevor knows about this “strange ritual” is that it is usually when people lose their virginity, and as usual he does not expect to have a date for it.
 - Trevor is once again uncomfortable about his romantic prospects as another high school “ritual” forces him to interact with girls.
- Trevor has a new friend, Tom, a son of a domestic worker, who is a “real hustler” and a habitual liar. One day, Tom takes Trevor out to a black settlement in the “middle of nowhere” called Hammanskraal for a talent show and tells Trevor to bring his Timberland boots - the “only decent piece of clothing [Trevor] owned,” which all his peers envied. At the talent show, Tom announces Trevor as “a rapper all the way from America” and forces Trevor onstage. Trevor refuses, but Tom insists that he’s doing it for a girl and that “they’ve already paid me the money.” Tom tells Trevor that “these people don’t speak English,” and Trevor gets by with rough lyrics and the crowd goes wild.
 - Just because Trevor has the right boots and speaks English, which is enough people that he is famous and American. This shows how arbitrary status and

power are for this community and Tom puts profit and self-interest above all else, even his friends. Trevor has a different philosophy and strives to combine money and people in mutually beneficial ways, without taking advantage of the people with whom he does business.

- Tom promises Trevor that he can get him “the most beautiful girl you’ve ever seen,” as a date in exchange for a better commission on the CDs and some free music. Trevor agrees but repeats that “it’s not going to happen.”
 - After the last incident, Trevor knows that Tom can’t be trusted; his promise is, as always, too good to be true. However, Trevor takes him up on his offer out of desperation since he doesn’t believe that it’s possible for him to have a beautiful date at the dance
- Tom shows up a few weeks later and takes Trevor to Johannesburg, where they see a girl leaning over the balcony (“the girl’s sister” whom Tom is hoping to sleep with), a really, really enormous, fat woman, and Babiki, Trevor’s date. Tom introduces them and works out the logistics for the dance.
 - **Surprisingly, Tom follows through and Trevor finally gets the chance at romance that he has desperately wanted; for the first time, he feels like any other normal student rather than the outsider-insider he usually is at school.**
 - Tom is also thinking about his own self-interest, and he coordinates the entire interaction between Trevor and Babiki, which soon proves transformational in their relationship.
- Tom and Trevor visit Babiki’s family more in the next few weeks; they are from the smaller Pedi tribe and try to look rich by buying expensive clothes despite their poverty, which is not uncommon in South Africa. Trevor and Babiki never see one another alone, but he is “in heaven,” feeling like he finally has a girlfriend. But with the dance nearing, he begins to worry. For one, he lacks a car—Abel agrees to loan him one that he is fixing up, and then, after Babiki comes over for a visit, Tom persuades Abel to loan Trevor his BMW.
 - Babiki and her family cope with their poverty in opposite ways from Trevor and his mother: they buy expensive things to project an image of wealth but lack money for their necessities. This is in contrast to Patricia’s spending; she refuses to buy Trevor new clothes even though they can afford books and live in a comfortable suburban home.
 - Trevor fawns over Babiki from a distance even though they’ve never spoken and, as if he’s blinded by his infatuation (much like on Valentine’s Day), he sets about making preparations for what he imagines as a perfect realization of his peers’ romantic scripts.
- Trevor needs new clothes, especially since Babiki is so fashion-obsessed; he has terrible taste but convinces his mom to pay for a **new outfit**. He enlists Sizwe, his other CD reseller, to give him a **makeover**. He buys one expensive leather jacket and various cheap articles to round out the outfit. Then, Sizwe sets out to replace Trevor’s unruly afro with cornrows—first, the woman at the salon has to chemically relax his hair, which feels like “liquid fire” and leaves burns all over his scalp. But it works and, six hours later, he

has cornrows and is delighted to look in the mirror. At home, his mom exclaims, “they turned my baby boy into a pretty little girl!” She teases him and asks if he is gay, but the whole family approves.

- Even though he is awkward, Trevor’s makeover suggests that he might be able to make the transition from outsider to popular kid. He also begins to empathize more seriously with women, especially when he burns his scalp with the chemical relaxer. Meanwhile, his mother’s jokes serve to remind Trevor that they have always prioritized experiences and knowledge over external appearances and material wealth.
- On “the big night,” Trevor tries to get the BMW keys from Abel, who is completely drunk. Abel makes Trevor buy him beer; then, he refuses to give him the BMW and leaves him with “the shitty Mazda.” Trevor gets to Babiki’s house an hour late, and they get lost and spend more than an hour driving around in circles. Finally, they arrive, but Babiki refuses to follow Trevor inside. Trevor finds Sizwe, who brings a crowd of 20 other boys out to gawk at Babiki “like she was an animal at the zoo.” Trevor is mortified and starts drinking.
 - Abel’s drunkenness and recklessness once again erodes any remaining trust between him and Trevor and throws a proverbial wrench into Trevor’s plans; just like on Valentine’s Day, everything imaginable goes wrong despite his meticulous preparation. Not only is he excluded from normal prom festivities, his failure becomes a spectacle for the whole school, now solidifying his status as an outsider. He does still have more to learn and develop, as he has not yet tried to sympathize with Babiki
- Sizwe tells Trevor that Babiki definitely can’t speak English and Trevor realizes that he has never talked directly to her and doesn’t even know what it means to have a girlfriend. Their **communication “was always through Tim,”** who speaks the local dialect. Babiki’s sisters speak English, but she does not, and Trevor is used to missing parts of any conversation in South Africa—he remembers everything in English, no matter what language it happens in first. He realizes that Babiki “probably owed Toma favor,” and is “probably terrified” after being stuck in an hour in the dark with a man she does not know and taken to a place full of strangers who cannot speak her language.
 - We see Trevor sympathize with Babiki and also see his language abilities fail for the first time. Trevor has never encountered Babiki’s language because multiple generations of South Africans were splintered and never interacted with people outside their language group. Trevor imagines this night from Babiki’s perspective and realizes that his mistake probably brought up some very real fears since just living in South Africa often means confronting the constant possibility of violent assault
- Trevor tries every language he knows to communicate with Babiki, but none work. After driving her back home in silence, “she lean[s] over and [gives] [him] a kiss. Like, a real kiss, a proper kiss.” Trevor is baffled and waves her goodbye.
 - Just when Trevor convinces himself that Babiki probably resents and fears him, she gives him a kiss, which shows him how little he understands about romance.

Ideas:

- Education about thinking independently was far more valuable than any schooling he got in traditional schooling
 - No mention of the stories of the Holocaust in US or South African textbooks
- Rising out of poverty to material success
 - Trevor experiences freedom as he starts to get more involved with American culture and his pride in his new freedom is shared with his pride in living parts of American culture

Chapter 15:

- Noah explains how the Holocaust is a central part of the German high school history education like the British Empire in British high school education but South African h.s. education, just like United States education doesn't teach a lot about the past. **Any education about the past is about facts and never the stories to explain the emotional or moral aspects**
 - His mother's education is very different from the South African or US education systems - she valued thinking independently, which became far more valuable lesson than anything he learned at school
- 3 chinese kids move to Trevor's school (when Trevor's in 9th grade): Bolo(nickname), Bruce Lee(actual name) and John. Bolo starts a business selling pirated Playstation games + CDs with a white kid named Daniel. The black kids take their games and CDs, promising to pay later but never do. Bolo and Daniel are too scared to ask, so they get Trevor's help. In exchange, Daniel helps Trevor fix his computer and gifts him his expensive CD writer when he graduates.
 - Trevor becomes a middleman b/w school's black majority and Daniel + Bolo through his ability to connect to cultures and ethnicities. While Tim (his friend from the last chapter) mainly tried to exploit Trevor, Daniel helps Trevor, through gifting him knowledge about computers and the CD writer in exchange for Trevor's help
- After they graduate, T can control the bootleg business but has no music knowledge. He starts listening to CDs (many black American albums) while he burns them. Sizwe (friend) gives Trevor's ideas like making a compilation album or having tracks fade together
 - American music is so popular and different in Trevor's world that South Africans connect to an American black identity after apartheid, an analogous struggle to slavery + segregation in America
- **"Life was good, and none of it would have happened without Daniel. Without him, I would never have mastered the world of music piracy and lived a life of endless McDonald's. What he did, on a small scale, showed me how important it is to empower the dispossessed and the disenfranchised in the wake of oppression. Daniel was white. His family had access to education, resources, computers. For generations, while his people were preparing to go to university, my people were crowded into thatched huts singing, "Two times two is four. Three times two is six. La la la ta la." My family had been denied the things his family had taken for**

granted. I had a natural talent for selling to people, but without knowledge and resources, where was that going to get me? People always lecture the poor: “Take responsibility for yourself! Make something of yourself!” But with what raw materials are the poor to make something of themselves?”

- Trevor makes 500 rand a week, which is empowering for him - he finally has financial **choice in his life**. He develops an obsession with McDonald's; “McDonald's is America” and doesn't eat much else. He also bought a cordless phone when telecommunications was in its infancy. Each of his ideas factors into a taste of freedom and how deeply America is connected to this sense. Trevor's pride in his income is like his pride in tasting “America”—both symbolize rising from poverty to material success.
- Trevor thanks Daniel for his new niceties; Daniel's generosity shows “how important it is to empower the dispossessed and the disenfranchised in the wake of oppression.” **Daniel has access to all the resources that Trevor and his family have always lacked, and by getting those resources (the CD writer), Trevor has managed to succeed where “talent alone would have gotten [him] nowhere.”**
 - Trevor understands how success and talent cannot be thought of as purely individual: the context of resources, knowledge, and social connections that make success possible and talent visible must be considered.
 - Daniel's relationship with Trevor shows the challenges that South Africa faces after ending apartheid and repairing its damage, making it legal for black ppl to succeed and actually giving them the resources necessary to do it.
- Sizwe soon recommends that Trevor start DJing. Sizwe lives in the dense, dangerous, and hard-partying shantytown of Alexandra; in Alex, unless “someone gets shot or a bottle gets broken on someone's face [...] it wasn't a party.” Most DJs are stuck with vinyl, so can only play for a few hours, but with his computer, Trevor can play all night. He and Sizwe throw Alexandra's biggest party on New Year's Eve and immediately build a reputation. While the white kids take a gap year to travel, Trevor takes one to sell CDs by day and DJ parties by night.
 - Alexandra is the worst place for black ppl to live in during apartheid. With technology, Daniel's training, Sizwe's social connections and his own entrepreneurial mindset, Trevor becomes a local celebrity and is able to bridge wildly different communities, truly becoming an outsider and an insider
- Trevor and Sizwe decide to form a dance crew to teach people new moves mentioned in their music, and the best dancer among their friends is a guy named Hitler. Hitler is incredible, like “a jellyfish if it could walk on land,” and is “incredibly handsome.” He “almost always” wins the neighborhood dance competitions and becomes the dance crew's centerpiece; the whole neighborhood chants, “Go Hit-ler! Go Hit-ler! Go Hit-ler! Go Hit-ler!”
 - Trevor and Sizwe continue to expand their operation and, with Hitler's dancing adding a visual spectacle to their crew, they become an important rallying point

bringing the entire neighborhood together. Nobody in Alexandria appears to see anything strange about a teenager named Hitler.

- The name "Hitler" is because black ppl in early South Africa were given white names and they don't understand who "Hitler" is - they simply believe that he almost beat the Allies, making him tough. Parents want their kids to be tough, so the name "Hitler" continues.
 - South Africans see Hitler as the enemy of their enemy, without realizing that he was also responsible for the Holocaust and the inspiration for apartheid.
 - Trevor sees the name "Hitler" as evidence of colonialism's lens: it doesn't care enough about South Africans to learn their real names nor does it teach him the real history based on which they are expected to choose names.
- At Trevor's comparatively sophisticated school, they about World War II, but not about Hitler's racist policies (on which apartheid was largely modeled). People think in terms of their own history and **"Hitler is not the worst thing a black South African can imagine"** compared to the **Europeans who colonized their people**. Westerners "insist that the Holocaust was the worst atrocity in human history" but **forget about colonialism**, which is different only because it lacks detailed records, which the Nazis kept religiously. **For Africans, Hitler is "just another strongman from the history books."**
 - "There is also this to consider: The name Hitler does not offend a black South African because Hitler is not the worst thing a black South African can imagine. Every country thinks their history is the most important, and that's especially true in the West. But if black South Africans could go back in time and kill one Person, Cecil Rhodes would come up before Hitler. If people in the Congo could go back in time and kill one person, Belgium's King Leopold would come way before Hitler. If Native Americans could go back in time and kill one person, it would probably be Christopher Columbus or Andrew Jackson."
 - **Trevor exposes the Western perspective through which readers might be seeing his story. Ranking atrocities, especially Western atrocities, does a disservice to the struggles other communities have gone through and focuses the attention on Western communities. Focusing attention on communities that have been harmed isn't wrong - it's required - but the same attention should be paid to other atrocities.**
- As the dance crew grows, they play for wealthier black families and white people, and eventually at a private Jewish school. They start and ten minutes in, Trevor announces, "Give it up and make some noise for [Hitler]!!!"
 - The group becomes a token of the town's culture, for wealthier ppl who want to know what is happening in areas like Alexandria but don't want to go themselves. Trevor still currently lives a more comfortable life in a white suburb.
- The teacher at the Jewish school calls him a "horrible, disgusting, vile creature." Trevor **misunderstands**, citing Hitler's moves as "part of our [African] culture." She continues, saying that "you people are disgusting." Trevor concludes that she's racist and thinks she's talking about white people vs. black people racism bc "Jews in South Africa are just white people." He announces that "now we have Nelson Mandela on our side!" The group dances out of the school, changing *Go Hit-Ler!*

- Both Trevor and the teacher believe that they're standing up for the oppressed, but the division in education about history from apartheid prevents both of them from appreciating the other's viewpoint because they simply don't know the other's viewpoint. Trevor thinks she's proclaiming white supremacy and insulting their blackness and the teacher thinks that Trevor is idolizing the Holocaust.

Chapter 16:

- Alexandra was originally a white man's farm, sold to blacks before apartheid. Blacks were banned from owning property in apartheid and the area was filled with squatters. White suburbs "[pin it] in on all sides" and it's extremely dense
 - Apartheid intentionally designed Soweto to be a slum but also made Alexandra a slum through applying contradictory laws on the preexisting geographical divisions. Because it is "pinned in," it lacks Soweto's sense of aspiration: there is no space for people to expand and no hope of living a better life in the neighborhood.
- Trevor seldom goes to Alexandra until after high school, when suddenly being from "the hood" is "a badge of honor," with American hip-hop taking off.
 - South Africans connected to a black identity separate from ethnic/tribal identities with American culture as "authentic" black identity is located in the experience of inner-city poverty, which Alexandra best represents in South Africa.
- Alexandra is a hum of activity, the product of ordinary ppl going about their lives in their own social structure; a microcosm of post-apartheid black South African life; Trevor feels like he belongs in Alexandra, even though he's coloured and most there are black.
- Abel causes trouble at home, which pushes Trevor away from family and into an independent life. The pride of being "in the hood" creates a self-limiting paradox to avoid being "the cheese" (having enough money to afford cheese)
- Black youth are hit the hardest; they've seen economic opportunity but don't have the resources to pursue it - Trevor's education in knowing how to be independent was far more important than any schooling to advance his life.
- **"It's easy to be judgmental about crime when you live in a world wealthy enough to be removed from it. But the hood taught me that everyone has different notions of right and wrong, different definitions of what constitutes crime, and what level of crime they're willing to participate in."**
 - "There is a very fine line between civilian and criminal" in Alexandra because everyone is a gangster and "crime cares". This crime is usually meaningless and pushes people to live their lives based on principles instead of some social demand/expectation. With no work, **it's unreasonable to refuse informal work on moral grounds.**
 - Everyone takes advantage of the no-questions-asked system for trading goods simply because of principles - feeding your family is more important than some white family's radio because "white people have insurance"
- Trevor and Sizwe are constantly looking for opportunities to grow their business, hopping on minibuses with their minibus clients to get loans from "upstanding, well-spoken East Bank boys" rather than crackheads and violent loan sharks.

- Trevor and Sizwe even match guys who are willing to give them beer to resell with the daughters of the women they met in their travels, their minds always focused on making a profit.
- They have “10k rand in capital”
 - With Trevor and Sizwe’s business becoming well-established (and Trevor’s computer skills, which he learned from Daniel, and bookkeeping skills, which he learned from his secretary mother, coming in handy) it seems that they have found a place for themselves in the neighborhood and become a rare success story amidst Alexandra’s general desolation.
- Despite his hustle, Trevor isn’t closer to covering tuition because of the hood’s insular and provincial nature - the hood’s community never made “[him] feel like [he] [needed] to do more”; The hood limits his ambition and he realizes that he has to leave + he loses his business to a trigger-happy cop who shoots his laptop at a DJing event (**police still have power to oppress South Africa’s native peoples**)
- “In society, we do horrible things to one another because we don’t see the person it affects. We don’t see their face. We don’t see them as people. Which was the whole reason the hood was built in the first place, to keep the victims of apartheid out of sight and out of mind. Because if white people ever saw black people as human, they would see that slavery is unconscionable. We live in a world where we don’t see the ramifications of what we do to others, because we don’t live with them. It would be a whole lot harder for an investment banker to rip off people with subprime mortgages if he actually had to live with the people he was ripping off. If we could see one another’s pain and empathize with one another, it would never be worth it to us to commit the crimes in the first place.”
 - **Trevor’s empathy** with the camera with pictures of the family’s vacation shows him that there are constructive and destructive ways to make money and has the choice to make money constructively.
- Police pull the dance group over, call them “trash”, “dogs from Alex... bunch of fucking hoodlums”. Police want a bribe to let them go.
 - As in most of the world, the police are above the law, so function effectively as an organized crime syndicate with the backing of the state. Here, they take advantage of (and perpetuate) the stereotype of poor black men as criminals in order to prey on Trevor and his friends—whom, oddly, they insult for being from a poor neighborhood and assume will have enough money to pay a bribe.
- Cop is blinded by his perceptions of Trevor based on race and where he lives—and not at all on his behavior, character, or decisions. Cop immediately assumes that Trevor is not like his friends and can be turned against them. **This difference goes no deeper than the fact that Trevor can choose not to spend time in Alex (but says nothing about his socioeconomic status, likelihood to be a criminal, or relationship to the other boys).**

- Trevor shoplifted batteries once as a ten-year old and his mom made him confess to a security guard, who thought that he was just “some wayward orphan, because what mother would send her ten-year-old child to jail?” - **Patricia was scarier than apartheid**
- Patricia tries “to discipline [him] before the system does.” She insists that if Trevor gets arrested, she will not help him. It is “the ultimate tough love,” even if “it doesn’t always work.”
 - Patricia fundamentally believes that Trevor will become what others expect of him: by expecting so much of him as a child, she did her best to make sure he fears authority because South Africa’s authorities do whatever they wish with black men; she also clearly sees **how Alexandra is giving Trevor permission to fail because nobody expects anything of anyone else there.**
- Trevor sees a cell phone ad (business opp.) and steals one of Abel’s junk cars to pursue it. Cop pulls him over and arrests him and Trevor is afraid of his mother’s tough love and Abel’s fury to contact them.
 - The police act first and ask questions later; Trevor is not only stopped merely because the cop assumes he is guilty of something, but also assumed guilty of the worst possible crime that could lead his license plate not to match.
 - Trevor doesn’t yet understand the motivations behind his mother’s consistent and principled “tough love”, which is designed precisely to save him from the arbitrary and sadistic violence that the legal system can use against him
- Trevor also has distinctive advantages in jail—he can afford a lawyer and pretend to be tough—which only exaggerate the hardships for someone who is at the very bottom of the economic, racial, and ethnic classes.
- His strange realization that jail offers material comforts with no work obligations reveals this deeply problematic reality where jails and prisons are the only government services that provide anything to South African minorities:
 - South African minorities are in such poverty that jail is better than their current living situation and may actually not be much of a deterrent.
- Trevor uses language to avoid conflict and connect to different South African communities;
- The systemic prejudice that provides Trevor opportunities because he speaks English and can afford an attorney are not present for the Tsonga man. Crime, for the man, was an act of desperation rather than a sign of moral evil, and without an understanding of this contributing context the legal system is bound to perpetuate rather than fight crime.
 - “The difference between criminals and people who’ve committed crimes” is their appearance:
 - the first man, regularly treated as an offender and neglected by the law is the stereotypical image of a hardened criminal;
 - the second, imprisoned for the first time, shows how he’s scarred from the prisons.
 - The cell’s racial division is just like Trevor’s first day of sixth grade, when he has to choose a side and ends up joining the black kids—here, it is unclear whether he’s chosen to join the white ppl bc he has sold out due to fear or is navigating

diverse cultural contexts in order to save himself from turning out like the man who cries to him about being beaten and raped in jail.

- His opportunities also allow him to get a trial date and go home on bail. Patricia reminds him of her love, saying “when I beat you, I’m trying to save you. When they beat you, they’re trying to kill you.”
 - “I know you see me as some crazy old bitch nagging at you,” she said, “but you forget the reason I ride you so hard and give you so much shit is because I love you. Everything I have ever done I’ve done from a place of love. If I don’t punish you, the world will punish you even worse. The world doesn’t love you. If the police get you, the police don’t love you. When I beat you, I’m trying to save you. When they beat you, they’re trying to kill you.”

Chapter 18:

- Noah eats the whole bowl of custard and jelly meant for the wedding and creates an excuse to get out of going to church on Sundays
- Trevor gets interest from girls after his makeover wrt. Babiki. He dresses up for girls, but his mom dresses up for Jesus; God has replaced husbands in Soweto, sustaining women spiritually when men are unavailable due to work or prison
- Patricia probably “broke more than a few hearts in her day,” but Trevor only ever knew of her being with his father and Abel. Abel was “Handsome, but [not] good-looking,” strong and charming, with a good sense of humor and an eagerness to help those in need. This “made his abuse even harder to deal with.”
 - Trevor and Patricia don’t feel like they need a man in their life to complete a family dynamic. Patricia and Trevor live very independently, and Patricia dates Abel just because she likes him. Abel feels like he needs to be needed and depended on, which he doesn’t get from Patricia
- Patricia says that she’s planning to marry Abel but Trevor thinks it’s a bad idea because “there’s just something not right about him.” His name reflects a dual personality: Abel’s English name is “the good son” from the Bible, but his Tsonga name, Ngisaveni, means “be afraid.”
- Patricia and Abel get married anyway and Patricia has a son, Andrew when Trevor is 9. They learn about Abel’s Tsonga family and see the extreme sexism (men do little other than drink and work, women do all the domestic tasks and bow to men). Patricia mocks these customs by exaggerating them, which makes everyone uncomfortable
 - He soon sees that Abel’s traditional Tsonga conceptions of gender are fundamentally incompatible with Patricia’s independence, and she is not afraid to point out how ridiculous she finds it that his family effectively treats women as servants.
- Abel tries to “impose his ideas of what he thought his family should be,” when Andrew is born: forces the dogs to start living in the yard, refuses to fix Patricia’s car, so that he becomes the family’s only means of transportation, Trevor can no longer see his father
 - Abel is acting out the gender roles he’s been raised on and is trying to gain control in their relationship. Trevor, naturally, feels more or less no connection to him.

- Have to conform to social expectations from his family - his family keeps commenting on
- Abel regularly drinks and he usually explodes to violence when it happens. Abel comes home and nearly burns the house down and Patricia calls her mother, saying that “this man, he’s going to kill us one day,” but Abel hangs up her call. They get into an argument, and Abel attacks her, hitting her and knocking her down “for a good thirty seconds.” When she gets back up, Patricia keeps yelling at him, and he hits her again. She brings Trevor and Andrew to the police station.
 - Abel wants control over this relationship. He falls into alcoholism to numb himself and craves the control over his relationship that he doesn’t even have over himself. Patricia refuses to live by other people’s rules, and so she has no interest in giving him a second chance or the control that he craves.
 - She stands her ground on principle, and he attacks her because **he is incapable of resolving conflicts, asserting his masculinity, or defining his relationship with her through words or principles. Unable to justify why she owes him complete control over her life, Abel resorts to brute force, which can be seen as a sort of moral cowardice**
- The police say that “it happens”, and don’t take Patricia seriously. Patricia takes Andrew and Trevor to Soweto, and a few weeks later, Abel comes to apologize. Frances encourages Patricia to give him another chance, and she agrees. For years, everything is fine at home.
 - South African police have little interest in protecting everyone equally. Even though they have harassed Trevor, demanding bribes and arresting him without solid evidence, when there is obvious proof of Abel’s assault they do nothing, even taking his side and treating him as the victim of a wife audacious enough to report abuse.
- Abel’s a good mechanic and Patricia supports him. They buy the company Abel works for and, to support its debt, they sell their house and live in the garage. Trevor sleeps in cars. At 11, Trevor starts working there too. The business and family keep losing money, though, and eventually they are reduced to eating worms. This is the unhappiest period of Trevor’s life, although he does not resent Abel or his mother for getting him into it.
 - **It’s tragic that Patricia invests so much into Abel, tries to save his business for him, and is perfectly capable of doing so but he views her as a piece of property to be owned and controlled. Her trust in Abel even draws the family back into poverty, as they lose their Eden Park home to the “black tax.”**
 - **The company debts are similar to the tax, showing how black business owners struggle to learn the rules of the white capitalist, leading them to be unable to succeed in the white man’s world. On top of this, they start out centuries behind when they are finally allowed to participate in this economy at the end of apartheid, as Trevor discussed in his chapter on the “Cheese Boys.”**
- **Trevor realizes that Abel is buying auto parts on credit with “a crazy markup” drinks away his profits, only making his debts worse. Patricia quits her job to run**

the business, which starts going better but Abel begins resenting her for it. Eventually, Patricia gives up and gets another secretary job, which gets them the house in Highlands North, just as Abel's creditors take away his workshop.

- Abel is sad that he has lost control of his business more than he is to have lost his profits. This also more fundamentally reflects the lack of knowledge and resources that Trevor sees as one of the main factors locking black South Africans into a cycle of poverty.
- **"I grew up in a world of violence, but I myself was never violent at all.** Yes, I played pranks and set fires and broke windows, but I never attacked people. I never hit anyone. I was never angry. I just didn't see myself that way. My mother had exposed me to a different world than the one she grew up in. She bought me the books she never got to read. She took me to the schools that she never got to go to. I immersed myself in those worlds and I came back looking at the world a different way. I saw that not all families are violent. I saw the futility of violence, the cycle that just repeats itself, the damage that's inflicted on people that they in turn inflict on others.
- I saw, more than anything, that relationships are not sustained by violence but by love. Love is a creative act. When you love someone you create a new world for them. My mother did that for me, and with the progress I made and the things I learned, I came back and created a new world and a new understanding for her. After that, she never raised her hand to her children again. Unfortunately, by the time she stopped, Abel had started."
 - **he recognizes that violence is pointless and love truly makes relationships function by letting people "create a new world" for one another.**
 - Patricia's corporal punishment teaches Trevor valuable lessons but he also teaches her that these lessons can be taught without violence. Trevor's argument about the transformative potential of love is the central strand in his portrait of his relationship with his mother; she allowed him to succeed by opening worlds that he was not supposed to access, and of course her kind of mutual world-making love stands in opposition to Abel's controlling, world-restricting, violent conception of love.
- Patricia stops beating her kids and Abel starts instead. Abel chases Trevor through 3 neighbourhoods to beat him. Abel's beatings feel more like an expression of his rage rather than discipline. From then on, Trevor avoids Abel as much as possible at home, but Abel still manages to hit him on occasion. On the other hand, Abel loves and respects Andrew, his firstborn and the only person in the house who is not afraid of his father.
 - Abel's attacks show Trevor a small aspect of the daily terror his mother must endure—but courageously confronts for years, since she is not lucky enough to simply isolate herself from him. Abel sees children as nothing more than extensions of their fathers: he treats Andrew well because Andrew is his own son and effectively does not consider Trevor part of the family because Trevor is Robert's. Patricia's parental role plays no part in this equation of male "ownership."

- The business fails and Patricia legally divorced Abel to save her credit. They live together. Abel continues fixing cars, now in the yard, and drinking away all his profits; Patricia gets a better position at her real estate company and ends up paying for everything. **Her independence makes Abel furious, and he hits her again.** The adult Trevor interjects that he “can’t recall the details” because there were so many more incidents just like this one, but he does remember that **the police again blew it off.** Every time this happens, Patricia tells Trevor to pray.
 - Abel poses a threat to their financial future on top of their economic future. She takes on the traditional male role instead of the female one, and Abel blames her even though she is merely filling in to cover for his own failures. She’s stuck at a crossroads now where she either lets her family starve (because Abel cannot pay the bills) or is beaten for keeping the family afloat.
 - Contrast to her normal find-a-solution mentality, she looks to prayer, presumably bc she feels powerless
- Abel is unrecognizable when drunk, nothing like his usual self—he once pees on Trevor’s floor, thinking he is in the bathroom, and often kicks Trevor out of bed, thinking Trevor’s bed is his own. He also beats his buddies who work at the shop (and drink after work) with him, and he kicks Fufi all the time. The beatings are infrequent, every few years, but just often enough for everyone to remember that it might happen again.
 - Abel is spiraling out of control in even more domains of his life, as evidenced particularly by his abuse of his workers. Violence is a self-perpetuating cycle, much like the historical cycles of violent ethnic and racial hierarchy in South Africa among the Dutch, British, coloreds, and various African indigenous groups
 - **Abel cannot discern love from violence, Trevor has already shown that they are opposites, since violence perpetuates the condition of power asymmetry (even if it occasionally changes who is in power) while love allows parties to insist on equality and mutual interest, so thereby “create a new world.”**
- Patricia tells Trevor that Abel bought a gun and “thinks he’s the policeman of the world.” Trevor moves out soon (he’s grown) and Patricia and Abel live in separate bedrooms. Trevor is counting the years until his little brother Andrew turns 18 and Patricia gives birth to Isaac
 - Abel’s gun—which he is definitely willing to use—suggests that he is falling deeper into his cycle of violence, trying to control the entire world like a “policeman” to cope with his accelerating loss of control over himself. Still unable to see Trevor as anything more than a symbol of the fact that Patricia has not always been “his,” Abel’s masculinity becomes so fragile that he quite literally cannot stand to have Trevor around the house.
- Trevor stops visiting, but visits one day to see police cars in front of the house. Abel hit Patricia with a bicycle and she called the police. He apologizes but blames Patricia and insists that he has to show his workers that he can “control [his] wife.” Patricia has a shack built in the backyard and moves into it, both for her protection and as a way of forcing Abel to answer to the world.

- Patricia insists on continuing to call them for the same reasons she builds the shack: because they may eventually help, and because it allows her to make a point that Abel's actions are wrong. Abel still sees Patricia's independence as a sign of his own weakness.
- Trevor doesn't understand why his mom won't just leave but recognizes his inexperience with relationships, acknowledging that "sex and hatred and fear can intertwine." He can't be part of "this dysfunctional thing" and cuts off contact with the family; he blames his mother for choosing to stay, just as she has taught him that people are always and solely responsible for their choices. But he does not understand the general perception around domestic violence, either—it is normal in South Africa, and women will be criticized and shamed if they leave men - Patricia even explains that "if I leave he'll kill us." Trevor never brings it up again.
 - Trevor realizes that he was naïve about both relationships and cultural expectations at the time due to his youth and inexperience. She was entirely serious about the threat Abel posed and focused more on her safety than her independence. Domestic violence is a cultural norm that lingers after apartheid, continuing the patriarchy and giving women a very different experience of colonialism and apartheid
- "When he said that, my body just let go. I remember the exact traffic light I was at. For a moment there was a complete vacuum of sound, and then I cried tears like I had never cried before. I collapsed in heaving sobs and moans. I cried as if every other thing I'd cried for in my life had been a waste of crying. I cried so hard that if my present crying self could go back in time and see my other crying selves, it would slap them and say, "That shit's not worth crying for." My cry was not a cry of sadness. It was not catharsis. It wasn't me feeling sorry for myself. It was an expression of raw pain that came from an inability of my body to express that pain in any other way, shape, or form. She was my mom. She was my teammate. It had always been me and her together, me and her against the world. When Andrew said, "shot her in the head," I broke in two."
- Patricia does eventually leave and Trevor is deep into his career by now. A few years later, Trevor gets a phone call from his mom's number. It's Andrew, reporting that "mom's been shot." Trevor knows Abel shot her and rushes to the hospital. Andrew explains in another call: when the family got home from church, Abel was waiting with his gun; he shot Patricia in the leg, and then in the head. Trevor is in "raw pain" and he arrives at the hospital to see Andrew also covered in blood, who breaks down soon after.
 - His "raw pain" is really various kinds of loss bundled together: pent up feelings about how his mother lost her freedom from Abel, regret at temporarily distancing himself from the family, and the loss of his main "teammate," teacher, mentor and inspiration in life. He's also frustrated with her devotion to God, believing that a just God wouldn't do this to someone who had already overcome so much during and after apartheid, thanks solely to her own fearlessness.
- Inside, Patricia is covered in blood with a hole through her face. She's awake, and tells Trevor, "it's okay, baby. I'm fine." She tells Trevor to go to Andrew, and he does.
 - Despite her injuries, Patricia places Trevor's needs first and worries more about his emotional pain and sanity than her own grave condition.

- Abel drunkenly insisted that he would kill the whole family, which had “stolen [his] life” and “taken everything away from [him].” Andrew tried to calm him down, and his father threatened to shoot him first.
 - Trevor realizes that Andrew must have dealt with a far deeper pain, since his father shot his mother, and he has to reconcile this with his love for them both.
 - Isaac is crying and confused; Abel starts firing randomly, and Patricia jumps toward him in an effort to protect the rest of her family, who manage to run away. Abel tries to shoot her in the head, but his gun misfires. As she tries to drive away, however, he shoots her from behind the car. Andrew jumps in the car and drives to the hospital.
 - Patricia is also astonishingly selfless during Abel’s attack, throwing herself in front of her family even though she certainly knows that she is the primary target anyway
 - Abel is deluded and drunk, believing that he had a right to own his family, which Patricia has “taken ... away”. Andrew is indubitably in the hardest position, especially since he spent so many years trying to stop his father’s violence and genuinely loving him despite it.
- Trevor decides to call Abel, and he picks up. Trevor yells that he “killed my mom!” and Abel says, “if I could find you, I would kill you as well” before hanging up. Trevor is frightened and furious.
 - Abel has no remorse and remains emotionally level; he tried to kill Patricia because he was denied complete control over his family. This wasn’t a crime of passion.
 - he conceives love as a legalistic duty rather than an interpersonal feeling, and so has no sense that his abuse would make it justifiable for Patricia to leave him
- A nurse comes out and reveals that Patricia doesn’t have health insurance. Trevor insists that he will pay and the nurse tells him it could cost him hundreds of thousands, or millions, and leave him in debt for the rest of his life. Trevor pauses in shock, wondering what his mother would do, and what would happen if he pays the money and she dies anyway. He will have to take care of his family and could “get trapped by the cycle of poverty and violence” that he was supposed to break the family out of. But he insists and gives the nurse the card.
 - Good medical care is a privilege reserved for the rich in South Africa; paying his mother’s bills is a version of the “black tax” that could threaten to leave him destitute and alone.
 - He does it anyway, which shows how she has imprinted her moral values in him; he only ever considers not paying because he knows how much his freedom matters to her.
- Miraculously, all of Patricia’s vital brain regions and veins/arteries remain unscathed. Trevor’s decision to pay her fees and Patricia’s life’s worth of prayers clearly seem to have been rewarded.
- Trevor visits Patricia the next morning, who seems “frail and weak.” He wonders why he did not kill Abel himself years before and feels “angry at God” for letting this happen to Patricia despite her devotion to religion. Patricia wakes up, and Trevor starts crying. She

tells him not to, and that he should “look on the bright side.” There is no bright side, he insists. But **“of course there is,” she replies, for “now you’re officially the best-looking person in the family.”** They both break out into laughter, “the way [they] always did” as a team.

- Patricia’s response to a near-death experience shows us her seemingly infinite resilience as she takes it in stride. The final chapter, just like the first chapter, ends with Trevor and Patricia laughing about something that others would find deeply problematic
- After shooting Patricia, Abel takes his frightened four-year-old son Isaac to a family friend’s house. On the way, he explains that he is planning to kill himself. Abel spends the rest of the day visiting relatives, explaining what he has done and what he is planning to do. But one cousin tells him to “man up” and turn himself in, and he agrees.
 - Abel’s cold-blooded murder attempt is especially problematic because he seemed to be in completed control of his thoughts; he wasn’t acting in a drunken rages.
 - He was motivated by the most extreme imaginable version of possessive love and left the situation with a level head and his son. Isaac faces the largest challenge; he understands what he has just seen but is too young to fully process its implications and emotional consequences for his relationships with his parents.
- Abel manages to get bail and is free again in a month. None of Patricia’s calls resulted in charges, so he has a clean criminal record. He gets a lawyer and insists that his children need him, then pleads guilty to attempted murder and gets three years of probation—no prison time. He still has partial custody of Andrew and Isaac and is “walking around Johannesburg today, completely free,” still living in the same neighborhood near Patricia.
 - South Africa’s justice system continues to be deeply flawed after apartheid. The Tsonga man who shoplifted video games to feed his family probably received a harsher sentence than Abel, who shot his ex-wife in the head.
 - Unfortunately, this is unsurprising given how lightly the police took all of Patricia’s earlier domestic violence calls; clearly, those in the legal system are more interested in personal gain and social control than justice.
- When Abel holds the gun at Patricia, who’s on the ground, she prays. The gun misfires 4 times, a seeming act of God that saved her from Abel murdering her
- The hospital bill is 50,000 rand, but Trevor still tells his mother he “can’t believe you didn’t have health insurance.” She insists that she has God, and he admits that “for once I cannot argue with you.” But Jesus did not pay the hospital bill, Trevor jokes. Patricia replies, “but He blessed me with the son who did.”
 - The hospital bill seems like a third miracle: while the cost of Patricia’s treatment initially threatened to bankrupt the family, undo all of Trevor’s economic progress, and send them back into poverty, ultimately it is far less than the nurse warned.
- Final conversation:
 - “My child, you must look on the bright side.”
 - “What? What are you talking about, ‘the bright side’? Mom, you were shot in the face. There is no bright side.”

- “Of course there is. Now you're officially the best-looking person in the family.”
- She broke out in a huge smile and started laughing. Through my tears, I started laughing, too.
 - The book closes with an exchange between Trevor and Patricia—through religion and humor, she always manages to see the bright side and inspires Trevor to do the same.