In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The South African situation has unique elements that make it particularly
relevant and potentially enthralling in literature for young people of any culture. Black children, under fourteen years old, are fighting, suffering, and dying throughout South Africa. The nation is engaged in a desperate battle for human rights in which these children are not only active participants, but are even, in some instances, leading the political struggle. If they are not protesting in the urban townships of Soweto or Port Elizabeth, young people are struggling in the rural areas of Qwaqwa or Zululand. The acute political awareness of all South African children, black and non-black, was noted by Robert Coles, who had, in interviewing them, "never heard . . . such a shrewd and knowing appraisal of a nation by 'mere children'" (*The Political Life of Children* 13).

The subject of South Africa is currently being presented in greater, though still comparatively small, numbers of books for children than ever before. Yet, the "we need something on this subject" mentality may prevail once again in a hurried production of a body of fiction about South Africa that is lacking in quality. This is not to deny the responsibility of publishers and authors to keep abreast of current events and provide children timely information on it. However, as we witness the beginning of the treatment of South Africa as a "hot" issue in children's books, we should give renewed consideration to the importance of retaining the main elements of notable fiction in the presentation.

Literary merit and veracity, not only of factual events but also of culture and character, are the basic components which can raise the literature regarding South Africa out of the mire of expediency into the realm of living fiction. Much of what is excellent and poor in the treatment of South Africa in children's literature is evident in two recent novels, *Journey to Jo'burg* by Beverley Naidoo (1986) and *Waiting for the Rain* by Sheila Gordon (1987). To analyze these books is to invite further dialogue regarding the need to present the situation in books that also tell good stories.

*Journey to Jo'Burg*, written for a middle grade level audience, relates the experiences of a sister, Naledi and her younger brother, Tiro, who travel alone to Johannesburg from a rural South African village. The major
portion of the book is an account of a three day trip to alert their mother of a younger sister's illness. This basic plot has one of the most appealing aspects in fiction for a juvenile audience—the long trek, unescorted and unendorsed, that most surely promises to bring with it unexpected and harrowing incidents along the way. However, *Journey* is riddled with artificial plot devices and weak characters that do not sustain suspense or excitement much less the reader's barest interest.

Naidoo introduces numerous incidents, designed to show the forces of apartheid, without regard to their likelihood in real life. These incidents appear to have little impact on the main characters, and consequently the readers as well. The basic premise of the book, the creation of the need to walk to Johannesburg, is not culturally, or even realistically, plausible. From the outset the decision to walk to Jo'Burg, a distance of over 300 miles, rather than risk the grandmother's wrath for borrowing money to send a telegram stretches one's credulity. In fact, borrowing money for such desperate conditions of serious illness is common in South Africa, and so is sending a telegram. The artificial need does, however, create a vehicle to justify the children's subsequent trip and plot developments. How long will it take to travel to Jo'Burg? Will the sister die before Naledi and Tiro return with their mother?

The author, despite the plot's inherent weakness, could have turned the story into a mythlike trek of action and adventure. Yet "adventure" is what is solely missing. During the journey the children experience few incidents capable of creating dramatic tension. For instance, a hitched ride in the back of a truck produces only...
The Good and the Bad: Two Novels of South Africa

by Carla Madsen and Helen Kay Russell

The South African writer has unique elements that make it perfect for a writer and potentially insightful in literature for the young people of our time. Black children under fourteen years old are fighting, suffering, and dying throughout South Africa. The nation is engaged in a desperate battle for human rights in which these children are not only active participants, but are also the victims of this war. It is in this context that the author presents a picture of the children of South Africa, and the United States. In her novel, "The Good and the Bad," author Carla Madsen explores the lives of two children, and the impact of apartheid on their lives.

One of the children, Naledi, is a young girl who lives in a poor area of Johannesburg. She is clever, cunning, and resourceful, and she uses her intelligence to survive in a world where opportunities are limited. Naledi's mother is a political activist, and she is often absent from home, leaving Naledi to look after her younger sister and herself. Naledi is determined to help others and to make a better life for herself and her family. She is a strong and resilient character, and her determination to succeed is inspiring.

The other child, Sipho, is a young boy who lives in a rural village in the Eastern Cape. He is poor, illiterate, and has very few resources. Sipho dreams of going to school and learning, but his family cannot afford it. Sipho is a kind and compassionate character, and he is always willing to help others. He is a symbol of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

The novel is a powerful exploration of the effects of apartheid on the lives of children. It is a story of courage, determination, and hope, and it is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. The Good and the Bad is a moving story that will inspire readers of all ages.
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