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Auszug aus:

*Book Suggestion 17: Coconut by Kopano Matlwa*

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Coconut

Book Suggestion 17

1

Book Suggestion 17: Coconut by Kopano Matlwa

Stephanie Schacht, Augsburg

V

Title: Coconut

Author: Kopano Matlwa

Setting: post-apartheid Johannesburg

Year of Publication: 2007

Awards: European Union Literary Award 2006/7;  
Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa 2008

Publisher: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd

Pages: 190

Price: 10,95 €

ISBN 13: 978-1-77009-036-2

Target Group: Grades 10-12

Availability: [www.amsaco.de](http://www.amsaco.de)

1. Topics

- Identity
- Race, class, gender
- Colonialism
- Language
- Beauty

2. Summary

The novel recounts a single day of two black teenage girls, Olive (O) and Fanie (F), who live in post-apartheid Johannesburg. Their lives cross at a coffee shop on the suburbs where Fanie works as a waitress and Olive is a regular customer with her family.

The two protagonists with different social backgrounds both grow up in black girls in a white world and struggle with questions of identity. They are caught in the tension between "Migrant" and "Natives" values. Olive and her family benefited from the post-apartheid Black Economic Empowerment policies. They are part of a black middle class and moved to a predominantly white neighbourhood in the exclusive suburb of Sandton. Olive attends a private school which was formerly reserved for whites only. One, however, becomes increasingly aware of being marginalised by her classmates, friends and her teacher. Her self-image and self-perception diverges from what she wants to recover her "Migrant" roots. Fanie lives in poverty in a township. She had a traumatic childhood, grew up as an orphan after her mother had committed suicide. She lives with her uncle who sexually abused her as a child. Fanie dropped out of high school and now works as a waitress in a cafe that is frequented by many white people. She strives to escape her loneliness by embracing whiteness, which she shows for example by treating black customers with disdain.

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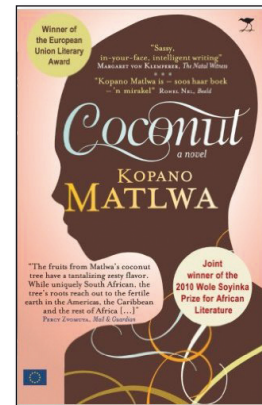
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### 1. Topics

- Identity
- Race, class, gender
- Colonialism
- Language
- Beauty

### 2. Summary

The novel records a single day of two black teenage girls, Ofilwe (Fifi) and Fikile (Fiks), who live in post-apartheid Johannesburg. Their lives cross at a coffee shop in the suburbs where Fikile works as a waitress and Ofilwe is a regular customer with her family.

The two protagonists with different social backgrounds both grow up as black girls in a white world and struggle with questions of identity. They are caught in the tension between “African” and “Western” values. Ofilwe and her family benefited from the post-apartheid Black Economic Empowerment policies. They are part of a black middle class and moved to a predominantly white neighbourhood in the exclusive suburb of Sandton. Ofilwe attends a private school which was formerly reserved for whites only. She, however, becomes increasingly aware of being marginalised by her classmates, friends and teachers because of her skin colour and develops growing discomfort with this. She wants to recover her “African” roots. Fikile lives in poverty in a township. She had a traumatic childhood, grew up as an orphan after her mother had committed suicide. She lives with her uncle who sexually abused her as a child. Fikile dropped out of high school and now works as a waitress in a café that is frequented by mainly white people. She strives to escape her blackness by embracing whiteness, which she shows for example by treating black customers with disdain.

The novel is divided into two parts. The first part is told from Ofilwe's and the second from Fikile's perspective. The narrative, however, is not chronological. It sways back and forth between the present and the past, which is indicated by a constant change between paragraphs in standard scripts (present) and italics (past). The two narrators from different backgrounds so give diversified insights into life in post-apartheid Johannesburg.

### 3. About the author

Kopano Matlwa is a young South African writer who focuses on issues of young black femininity in post-apartheid South Africa. She was born in 1986 and studied medicine at the University of Cape Town. While studying for her degree, she simultaneously wrote her debut novel *Coconut*, which was first published in 2007. In the same year, she was awarded the *European Union Literary Award* and in 2008 the *Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa* for this novel. Matlwa published another novel, *Spilt Milk*, in 2010.

### 4. Pre-reading activities

#### a. Predicting from the book title: "Coconut"

First, start with a brainstorming activity. Show students the picture of a coconut and ask them to describe it. What do they associate with this fruit? Collect their ideas in form of a mind map. Then, show them the book cover and let them predict what the book might be about. Additionally, ask students to read the definitions of the word "coconut" in the dictionary and reflect upon the different meanings.



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#### coconut or cocoanut ('kəʊkəˌnʌt)

##### Definitions

##### noun

- **1.** the fruit of the coconut palm, consisting of a thick fibrous oval husk inside which is a thin hard shell enclosing edible white meat. The hollow centre is filled with a milky fluid (coconut milk)
- **2. a.** the meat of the coconut, often shredded and used in cakes, curries, etc
- **b.** (*as modifier*) ⇒ *coconut cake*
- (*offensive, slang*) a black or Asian person who conforms to white culture at the expense of his or her ancestral culture, the idea being that, like a coconut, he or she is dark on the outside and white on the inside

Collins English Dictionary. Copyright © HarperCollins Publishers  
(found at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/coconut>)

Task:

Read through Ofilwe's alphabet. Each word stands for something that matters in her life, something she is familiar with. Fikile, who grew up in a different world, would probably list different words. Can you come up with Fikile's alphabet? And what would your personal alphabet look like?

Ofilwe's alphabet: "After-Sun. Bikini. Ballet. Barbie and Ken. Cruise. Disneyland. Disco. Diamonds and Pearls. Easter Egg. Fettuccine. Frappé. Fork and Knife. Gymnastics. Horse Riding. Horticulture. House in the Hills. Indoor Cricket. Jungle Gym. Jacuzzi. Jumping Jacks and Flip Flacks. Khaki. Lock. Loiter. Looks like Trouble. Maid. Native. Nameless. No, not me, Madam. Napoleon. Ocean. Overthrow. Occupy and Rule. Palace. Quantity. Quantify. Queen of England. Red. Sunscreen. Suntan. Sex on the Beach. Tinkerbell. Unicorn. Oopsy daisy. Unwrap them all at once! Video Games. World Wide Web. Wireless Connection. Xmas. Yoga. Yo-yo Diet. You, You and You. Zero guilt." (pp. 40/41)

**6. Post-reading activities***a. Character portrait*Task:

Write a character portrait for either Ofilwe or Fikile. Make use of your adjective lists for orientation.

*b. Talk show*Task:

Imagine both Ofilwe and Fikile were invited to a talk show in which they were asked for their opinions concerning different topics such as racism, language, beauty, equality. What could the host ask? What would Ofilwe and Fikile reply? Act out this talk show.

*c. Cover design*Tasks:

1. Have another look at the book cover of *Coconut*. Now that you have read the novel, say what you liked about it and what you would change.
2. Create your own book cover. Work alone or with a partner. Think about the style, the colours you want to use and where you want to put the text. If you like, you can also think of another title. Remember to add a blurb and a hook line.
3. Conduct a gallery walk and look at the different designs.
4. Optional: Take a vote on the best cover design.

*d. About the author*

In an interview, Matlwa was once asked what she loves most about writing. This was her answer: "You can be whoever you want to be. You can create characters that have all your worst characteristics, who are rude and obnoxious and say and think the things you shouldn't, and get away with it!" (<http://www.literarytourism.co.za/>)

Discuss this statement in class. You could ask these questions: To what extent are the two protagonists rude and obnoxious? What do they say and think that might be considered socially undesirable?

*Weitere Hinweise für die Lehrkraft***a. Altersgemäßheit**

Matlwa spricht in ihrem Roman viele Themenbereiche an, die jugendliche Leserinnen und Leser interessieren. Er wird aus der Perspektive von zwei Mädchen erzählt, die ungefähr im gleichen Alter sind wie die Schülerinnen und Schüler. Die Schriftstellerin

versteht es sehr gut, Einblicke in das Leben der Jugendlichen zu geben. Das liegt vermutlich auch daran, dass sie bei der Veröffentlichung des Romans selbst gerade einmal 21 Jahre alt war und auch in Johannesburg aufgewachsen ist. Im Zentrum des Romans steht der Identitätsfindungsprozess beider Protagonistinnen. Die Mädchen machen sich Gedanken über ihr Aussehen, haben Ambitionen und verlieben sich. Das sind auch Themen, mit denen sich Jugendliche in Deutschland identifizieren können. Aber auch Ausgrenzung und Rassismus in deutschen Schulen sollten zunehmend diskutiert werden. „*Coconut*“ erlaubt einen Einblick in das Leben junger Menschen in einem Land, in dem diese Themen durch die Studentenproteste #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall und #RacismMustFall hochaktuell sind. Der Roman bietet in diesem Zusammenhang wertvolle Diskussionsanlässe.

Der Hashtag #RhodesMustFall steht für eine Studentenbewegung im März 2015, die sich für die Beseitigung der kolonialen Statue von Cecil Rhodes von dem Campus der Universität Cape Town einsetzte. Die Statue, ein Symbol der weißen Vorherrschaft, wurde nach einigen Wochen heftiger Proteste entfernt. Weitere Studentenproteste, die sich für eine Dekolonialisierung des Bildungssystems stark machten, folgten. Studierende forderten unter anderem eine Zurücknahme der angekündigten Gebührenerhöhungen (#FeesMustFall) und protestierten gegen fortwährende Benachteiligungen und Rassismus im Bildungssystem (#RacismMustFall).

#### b. Themen

Der Roman kann in den Jahrgängen 10–12 (G8) bzw. 11–13 (G9) in den Themenbereichen „Identität“, „Südafrika“ und „Rassismus“ behandelt werden. In der 10. Klasse könnte auch nur der erste Teil des Romans (bis S. 93) gelesen und besprochen werden. In den höheren Stufen bietet sich der Roman als Anlass für tiefergehende Diskussionen an.

#### c. Sprachlicher Schwierigkeitsgrad

Der sprachliche Schwierigkeitsgrad des Romans ist angemessen für die Oberstufe. Selbstverständlich enthält die Lektüre unbekannte Wörter, die sich jedoch oft aus dem Kontext erschließen lassen. Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollten auf den ständigen Wechsel zwischen der Gegenwart und der Vergangenheit (retrospektive Passagen) hingewiesen werden.

#### d. Leseprozess

Der Roman ist 190 Seiten lang. Es bietet sich an, ihn in einem *straight-through approach* zum Beispiel über die Ferien lesen und vorbereiten zu lassen. Im Unterricht können dann anschließend themenorientierte Schwerpunkte gesetzt und diskutiert werden.

#### *Hilfreiche Internetadressen*

Eine Auswahl an Rezensionen:

<http://www.africabookclub.com/?p=7688>

<https://maaretta.wordpress.com/2012/11/25/i-dislike-those-of-my-kind-kopano-matlwa-novel-coconut-deals-with-colonized-consciousness-among-other-social-themes/>

Interview mit Kopano Matlwa:

[http://www.literarytourism.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=291:interview-with-kopano-matlwa-author-of-coconut&catid=26&Itemid=100053](http://www.literarytourism.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=291:interview-with-kopano-matlwa-author-of-coconut&catid=26&Itemid=100053)

Informationen zu #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall und #RacismMustFall:

<https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/> und <http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/>

<http://mg.co.za/article/2015-10-19-four-things-you-need-to-know-about-feesmustfall#.Vih8l2qxP0o.facebook>

<https://twitter.com/search?q=%23racismmustfall>

Dokumentarfilm über Studierende an der südafrikanischen Universität Stellenbosch („Luister“), die mit anhaltenden Rassismussvorwürfen konfrontiert wird:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4>

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