



The  
**Wellington**  
Academy



# **Nothing's Changed**

## **Tatamkhulu Afrika**

edexcel 

**Time and Place poetry**

**Revision booklets**

## **How does this poem fit into the Time and Place collection?**

The poem depicts an autobiographical experience post-Apartheid: the poet's return to an area where he used to live, called District Six, in Cape Town, which was once a multi-cultural neighbourhood but declared a 'whites only' zone during the 1960s.

## **Context / Background to the poem**

Tatamkhulu Afrika was born in 1920 and lived in Cape Town's District Six, which was then a flourishing mixed-race community. People of many different racial backgrounds lived there harmoniously and Afrika claimed that he felt at home there. In 1948 the South African government brought in the apartheid system, based on segregating the races rigidly and denying black South Africans and what the white government called 'coloureds' (people of mixed race and Asian backgrounds) citizenship and the vote. Inevitably non-whites had the least education, the worst jobs and the worst pay. It was a thoroughly iniquitous system, and caused international protests and sanctions, and riots and protests on the streets of South Africa.

During the 1960s, the government designated District Six a 'whites-only' area and evacuated the population. It bulldozed the entire area, much of which remains unbuilt on.

Tatamkhulu was brought up as white South African, but discovered in his teens that he was the child of an Arabian father and a Turkish mother. He turned down the chance to be classified as white, converted to Islam and was classified by the government as 'coloured'.

The African National Congress (the ANC) was a political and terrorist organisation fighting the injustice of apartheid. In 1984, Afrika joined the ANC but was arrested in 1987 on terrorism charges and was banned from writing or speaking in public for five years. He changed his name to Tatmkhulu – which had been his ANC code name. He was able to carry on writing despite the ban.

Afrika has said: 'I am completely African. I am a citizen of Africa – that is my culture. I know I write poem that sounds European, because I was brought up in school to do that, but, if you look at my poems carefully, you will find that all of them, I think, have an African flavour.

In 1990 Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned leader of the ANC, was released from prison and the apartheid laws were repealed, but most count 1994 as the real end of apartheid when all South Africans – regardless of skin colour or ethnic background – were allowed to vote in national elections.

Afrika wrote this poem when it was clear that political change was coming to South Africa, and it expresses pessimism for the continuing economic and financial gulf between blacks and whites – something that may take decades to change.

**Edexcel Poetry Anthology Time and Place – The Student Guide**

# Nothing's Changed

**Stanza One:** the poet walks on the land what was District Six and notes the land is derelict and uncared for.

**Stanza Two:** makes it clear that although there is no sign saying 'District Six', the persona lived there for so long he recognises it.

**Stanza Three:** the source of the poet's anger becomes clear in that a new restaurant has opened. The poet presses his nose to the window and describes what can be seen.

**Stanza Four:** this triggers feelings of separation and the poet reinforces that no sign is needed in order for him to know where he belongs.

**Stanza Five:** a contrasting restaurant is presented for black Africans who have been excluded from the new restaurant.

**Stanza Six:** the poet backs away from the glass. What he has seen moves him to violent, passionate anger.

Linguistic		Structural and form
<p><b>Onomatopoeia:</b> <i>'click', 'thrust', 'crunch'</i> – harsh sounds to reflect poet's anger and disappointment at the lack of change or for the uncared and unnurtured environment.</p> <p><b>Verb:</b> 'labouring' – is it as though the poet's memories are resurfacing and his anger is building. The workings of his lungs and every breath feels the emotions attached to the inequality in District Six.</p> <p><b>Abstract noun:</b> <i>'anger'</i> – the first explicit reference to the poet's feelings at the injustice both past and present.</p> <p><b>Simile:</b> <i>'name flaring like a flag'</i> – the restaurant's name is obvious for all to see. This is a white's only restaurant so the use of the verb 'flaring' connotes the image of a flare going off marking its appearance. You can sense the poet's frustration that he knows he cannot go there.</p>	<p>Small round hard stones click under my heels, seeding grasses thrust bearded seeds into trouser cuffs, cans, trodden on, crunch in tall, purple-flowering amiable weeds.</p> <p>District Six. No board says it is: but my feet know, and my hands, and the skin about my bones, and the soft labouring of my lungs, and the hot, white, inwards turning anger of my eyes.</p> <p>Brash with glass name flaring like a flag, it squats in the grass and weeds incipient Port Jackson trees new, up-market, haute cuisines, guard at the gatepost whites only inn.</p> <p>No sign says it: but we know where we belong.</p>	<p><b>Free verse:</b> when a poem does not rhyme or have any musical pattern. To use rhyme would be to submit to prevailing white culture so to use free verse make a statement that signals independence from the culture and a rebellion against it.</p> <p><b>Alliteration:</b> <i>'cuffs, cans, trodden on, crunch'</i> – harsh alliterative sound to reinforce the derelict and uncared for nature of the area.</p> <p><b>Asyndeton:</b> lack of conjunctions reflect the lack of cohesion in thought. Reflects poet's feelings upon returning to District Six.</p> <p><b>Colon:</b> <i>'no board says it is: but...'</i> - the colon reveals the poet knows he is back in District Six and with it feelings in response to inequality and</p>

**Adjective:** *'incipient'* – new – new trees have been planted suggesting investment but investment into a white's only restaurant. The trees are also Port Jackson suggesting they have been shipped in from Australia at great expense.

**Adjectives:** *'new, up-market, haute'* – gives us a sense of the restaurant and the quality on offer.  
*'crushed ice white'* – luxuries connoting treatment is good.

**Noun:** *'linen'* – good quality materials

**Noun:** *'bunny chows'* – food is unlike the food presented at the restaurant (compare with crushed ice white)

**Adjectives:** *'plastic'* – quality of material is poor in comparison to linen – cheap connotations.

**Verbs:** *'wipe', 'spit'* – unlike there being a 'guard on the gatepost', the connotations of the guests at the café are that the manners of the clients are poor.

**Adverb:** *'again'* – the poet has reverted to a boy once more suggesting that nothing has changed and he feels a regression.

**Adjectives:** *'small, mean'* – literally small like a boy or metaphorically small as in feeling small as a result of inequality. 'Mean' as the anger that is felt bubbles to the surface.

**Verb:** *'burn'* – the anger in the persona is rising at the injustice felt.

**Verb:** *'shiver'* – wants to cause destruction by throwing a stone.

**Metaphor:** *'bomb'* – the stone – recognising that this level of injustice leads to violence and a destruction of a community.

I press my nose  
to the clear panes, know  
before I see them, there will be  
crushed ice white glass,  
linen falls,  
the single rose.

Down the road,  
working man's café sells  
bunny chows  
take it with you, eat  
it at a plastic table's top,  
wipe your fingers on your jeans,  
spit a little on the floor  
it's in the bone.

I back from the glass,  
boy again,  
leaving small mean O  
of small, mean mouth  
Hands burn  
for a stone, a bomb,  
to shiver down the glass.  
Nothing's Changed.

segregation start to  
surface within him.

**Repetition:** the repetition of *'and'* is used to emphasise the force with which he comes back to District Six and feels an inequality inherent in his entire being.

**Colon:** *'no sign says it: but we know where we belong'* – again, the poet doesn't need a sign, he knows where he is and what this signifies to him.

**Juxtaposition:** the two eateries are juxtaposed to highlight the difference in treatment of whites and blacks and the injustice of this as felt by the persona.

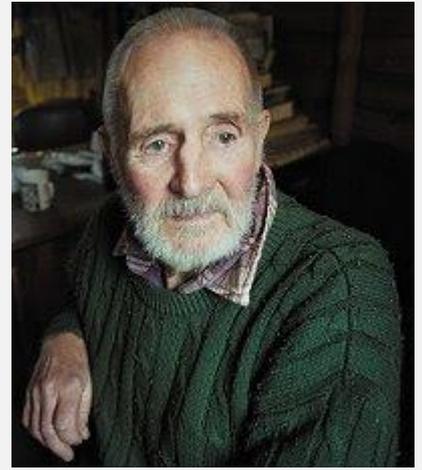
**Declarative:** *'Nothing's Changed'* – statement which angrily connotes the disappointment at a lack of change and forces the reader to consider the reality of this.

**Stanzas:** six stanzas, short lines giving a visual coherence.

**Present tense:** immediacy and sense of authenticity in that this is now and relevant.

Tatamkhulu wrote about the poem:

Nothings' Changed is entirely autobiographical. I can't quite remember when I wrote this, but I think it must have been about 1990. District Six was a complete waste by then, and I hadn't been passing through it for a long time. But nothing has changed. Not only District Six...I mean, we may have a new constitution, we may have on the face of it a beautiful democracy, but the racism in this country is absolutely redolent. We try to pretend to the world that it does not exist, but it most certainly does, all day long, every day, shocking and saddening and terrible. Look, I don't want to sound like a prophet of doom, because I don't feel like that at all. I am full of hope. But I won't see it in my lifetime. It's going to take a long time. I mean, in America it's taken all this time and it's still not gone...so it will change. But not quickly, not quickly at all.



### **Key questions:**

Evaluate the title of the poem 'Nothing's Changed' and how successfully you think it encapsulates the political message of the poem.

Explore how successfully you feel Afrika conveys his disappointment upon his return to District Six.

Choose the line you feel helps to convey the sense of injustice felt most and justify your choice.

Analyse the use of contrast to present the inequality felt in District Six.

Discuss whether you think the continuing inequality and prejudice is likely to end in violence. Do you think this is what Tatamkhulu is most worried about?

Assess whether you think Tatamkhulu's anger is justified.

Do you believe 'nothing' has still changed?

Compare the poet's feelings about place with the feelings about place in another poem.