

Storytelling: What the Class of 1976 can teach the Class of 2020

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Since ancient times, storytelling has been an effective way of sharing history down through the generations. African culture is deeply rooted in oral tradition and the world knows us for our rich storytelling. We tell stories to pass on traditions, codes of behaviour and to maintain social order. As specialist brand storytellers and champions of storytelling, we reflect on what the Class of 2020 can learn from the Class of 1976, lest we forget.

Every year, Youth Month presents an opportunity to transform South Africa's image as a global leader in the fight against poverty and inequality and as an advocate for empowering youth. But, there is the temptation to see what happened on 16 June 1976 as a memory disconnected from our reality, causing us to reminisce without changing our actions.

For brands, there is the risk that without taking the time to listen to the stories of the past or even to their customers, their marketing teams may deliver tone-deaf brand messaging and communications just to tick the social media boxes.

What is the story?

On 16 June 1976, a group of students from Morris Isaacson High School and surrounding high schools in Soweto, Johannesburg planned a peaceful protest against a system that would teach most school subjects in Afrikaans.

The late photojournalist Sam Nzima¹ was covering the march for the newspaper *The World*, when he captured the iconic image of Hector Pieterse's lifeless body being carried through the streets of Soweto with Hector's sister Antoinette by his side. Today, this photograph symbolises the power and importance of this youth uprising and the struggle against Apartheid.

But today's youth need more than images to remind them of how relevant history is still for us today.

We owe it to the Class of 2020 to share the stories, not to incite hatred, but to help our youth (and ourselves) remember that:

1. Education is still worth fighting for

The Covid-19 lockdown period in South Africa laid bare the stark differences between the resources available to children in the country and to the schools they attend. It's estimated that only 20% of scholars could continue some form of learning online since 26 March 2020, further exposing a chasmic digital divide.

Brands came to the party and certain learning sites were zero-rated during the time, meaning that students could access them data-free, while the government used public broadcasting channels to bridge the learning gap.

When schools were reopened, many worried that it was too soon, but considering that education is such a hard-fought-for constitutional right, the Department of Education was resolute about making it happen.

It is still too early to say whether schools opened too soon, but this should be all of our problem. Our children's education affects our society.

Patricia Bosman, senior graphic designer at Idea Hive, says: "Knowing what happened on 16 June, I am grateful for the educational opportunities it has afforded me. I believe the Soweto youth uprising gave birth to a cultural and technological

landscape that has allowed the youth of today to express them in ways I cannot fathom. I salute the youth of '76."

2. Equality is still worth fighting for

Towards the end of 1975, the then apartheid government issued an instruction to the Department of Education to teach half of all subjects in standard five in Afrikaans. Parents and schools immediately opposed this instruction and from the beginning of 1976, Soweto schools were in protest leading to the day of the massacre.

Sadly, inequalities still exist today. From the difference between the haves and the have-nots, to the total disregard for the value of the lives of women and children.

Corporate diversity and inclusion expert and part-time Gibs faculty member, Seth Naicker of IndiAfrique, says it is our responsibility to teach our children about their history: "In my role, as a dad, I have chosen to explore the story of 16 June with my children and share the story of struggle against social injustices, racism and prejudice of any kind. When my children see Youth Day and celebrate Youth Month, they must know our history to appreciate our here and now, and what future we together will create of justice and equitability and human dignity for all."

The Soweto uprising caused international revolt and further comprehensive punitive sanctions and that was **before** the age of globalisation. Just think of the possibilities for our youth to effect change with the platforms available to them.

3. Women still have a voice that needs to be heard

Ask most people which name comes to mind when you mention 16 June and it will most likely be that of 12-year-old Hector Pieterse or of Hastings Ndlovu, the 15-year-old boy believed to be the first to have died that day.

We often forget the role of women (or girls as they were) on the day, though. Sibongile Mkhabela, the only woman who was an executive member of the SSRC² and general secretary of the SASM³ that planned and organised the uprising, is least spoken about⁴ and less known. Her contributions to and sacrifices for the liberation project are unknown to many of today's youth and so are those of many of the women who protested that day.

In 2020, we were met with a flood of violent acts against women and girls during and before lockdown. Women need to be heard now more than ever. Yet, in the corporate world, the gender pay gap and glass ceiling are still the daily reality.

"As a young black woman in South Africa few opportunities are readily available to you. I have had to work twice as hard as my male counterparts. The greatest lesson I learnt from the class of '76 is to pursue my dreams without fear and against all odds. For that I am grateful." - Keletso Nkabit, head of brand communications strategy at Idea Hive.

Yaw Dwomoh, chief executive officer for Idea Hive, says: "Producing stories and experiences that are deeply in line with the lived experience of today's customers and followers are important. So is relaying the stories of our shared past, with integrity and authenticity. We cannot underestimate the power of the youth to build a world that is more just, equal and at peace."

1. <https://ewn.co.za/features/mbuyisa/throughthecracks/#chapter1>

2. SSRC - Soweto Students' Representative Council

3. SASM - South African Student Movement

4. <https://www.pambazuka.org/gender-minorities/herstory-soweto-uprising-and-erasure-black-women>

About Idea Hive

At Idea Hive, we create and execute pioneering brand storytelling solutions to illuminate your brand's power. We apply a strategic framework which extracts and aligns all the key components of your brand's story.

Our team of curious, creative, driven and critical thinkers mould all the elements into a cohesive brand storytelling solution that will change how the market sees and experiences your brand.

We craft and execute heartfelt and character-driven brand storytelling campaigns that position your brand/and or organisation to achieve its full market potential.

We offer an array of tailormade solutions around our services, which includes branding, design, influencer marketing, visual content and communications. All solutions are anchored in ensuring that each brand story is told exceptionally, uniquely and to the right audience.

Imagine a world where brands defeat normal and ideas inspire change.

When we change, we change the world around us.

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Yaw Dwomoh, chief executive officer for Idea Hive

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