

DOWN AT
JIKKA JIKKA
TAVERN

THE POACHER'S MOON CRIME SERIES

TEACHER'S GUIDE
ASHLING MCCARTHY & CLAIRE GEBER

Teacher's Guide for **Down at Jika Jika Tavern**

A Novel by Ashling McCarthy

Workbook Content Creation
by Claire Geber

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ISBN: 978-1-0370-7182-9

First Published in 2025

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Printed by InsideData

THE AUTHORS

Ashling McCarthy is the author of Down at Jika Jika Tavern and an anthropologist working in social development and social change. Ashling has a master's degree in social anthropology. Her work has enabled a better understanding of, and interaction with, the complexities and inequalities prevalent in South African society.

In 2010, Ashling founded an education non-profit based in a rural community in Zululand. It closed in 2025, and Ashling is now focused on collaborating with organisations that facilitate conservation education for children living in communities near game reserves.

Claire Geber is the author of this study guide and an experienced English teacher with nearly two decades of engagement with diverse student communities, spanning three continents. She is passionate about designing language resources that connect meaningfully to students' lived experiences, helping them find relevance and purpose in English studies. She believes in empowering students to express themselves with clarity and confidence.

In Down at Jika Jika Tavern, she found a text rich with contemporary resonance and the potential to inspire thoughtful analysis, authentic self-expression, and personal insight.

Additional resources can be found here to enhance your experience:

 **Youtube**



@AshlingMcCarthyAuthor

 **Pinterest**



@AshlingMcCarthyAuthor

Website



www.ashlingmccarthy.co.za

NOTE TO TEACHER

Please note that the exemplar responses included in this Teacher's Guide are not intended to reflect the kind of answers we would expect from students. Rather, they serve as comprehensive guides to help unpack each question or prompt — giving you a deeper understanding of the text's nuances and equipping you to convey key ideas with clarity and confidence in your classroom.

This resource offers more content than you'll realistically cover. It's designed to be flexible, not prescriptive. You are encouraged to select questions and activities that suit the particular skills and concepts you want to reinforce with your class. Your students receive a similar note in their workbook to explain this. There's no pressure to use everything — but there's plenty here to support you.

We hope this resource gives you both structure and freedom as you guide your students through Down at Jika Jika Tavern.



Ashling McCarthy



Claire Geber

PRE-READING

Please refer to the introductory note to the novel entitled, 'How to pronounce the name Nonhle', in which the author helps readers to pronounce the name, Nonhle.

Names are important in both real life and in novels. Your name is important because it symbolises you. You are important! Consider your name:

What is your name? _____

What language does it come from? _____

What does it mean? _____

Do you know why you were given your name? If you know, jot it down here: _____

Some names can be tricky to pronounce. The name Nonhle is difficult for some. The author of *Down at Jika Jika Tavern* opens the novel with an introductory note to help readers to pronounce the name Nonhle correctly. She explains how to say the *-hle* sound from the name Nonhle using the real-life sound of hot coals of a fire being extinguished with water. She writes:

'Imagine it's late, and the bush fire you've been standing around needs to be put out before you can go to bed. You throw a jug of water over the hot coals, which hiss with relief as they cool. That's what 'hle' sounds like! Non-hle.'

Do you find that some people struggle to pronounce your name? What tips, if any, have you come up with to help people pronounce your name correctly?

Student's own response.

Before having a class discussion on the topic below, read the QR-code-linked article on names and their significance by the author of *Down at Jika Jika Tavern*, Ashling McCarthy.



This is what's important to know about my name.

Student's own response.



PREDICTION:

Considering the meaning of the name, Mthunzi, what can we predict about his character?

Student's own response.



Scan to go to url

Scan here to listen to how to pronounce character names.



SECTION A

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Here are the characters you'll meet in the novel. Use lines to show their connections — thicker for strong ties, lighter or dotted for weaker ones. Add notes on the type of relationship they have (daughter, boss, friend).



MR MCKENZIE



THOMAS MCKENZIE



KAREL DU RANDT



JOSEPH GUMEDDE



SENZO MDLETSCHE



DUTCH MÜLLER



BENTO



NONHLE NGUBANE



SAMSON NGUBANE



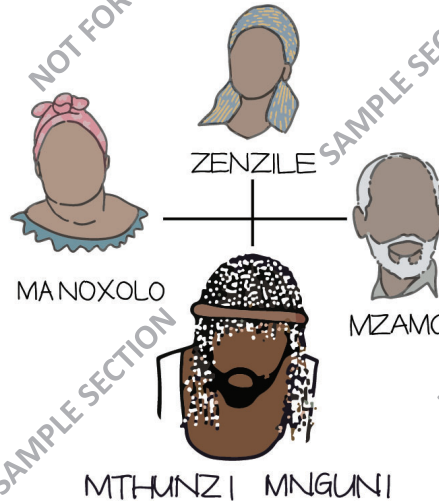
LUCKY MHLONGO



THULI NGUBANE



ZODWA SHEZI



BHEKI



NKOSI



MANDLA MTSHALI

CHARACTER SKETCH

You have been provided with a Character Sketch page for each of the six main characters. The icons below help categorise relevant information from the novel to your character sketches.



Baggage

What from their past has shaped them (backstory)?



Heart

What motivates them?



Mouth

What quotes from the novel, either by the character or about the character, reveal who they are?



Eyes

How do they see the world?



Brain

What thoughts occupy their minds?

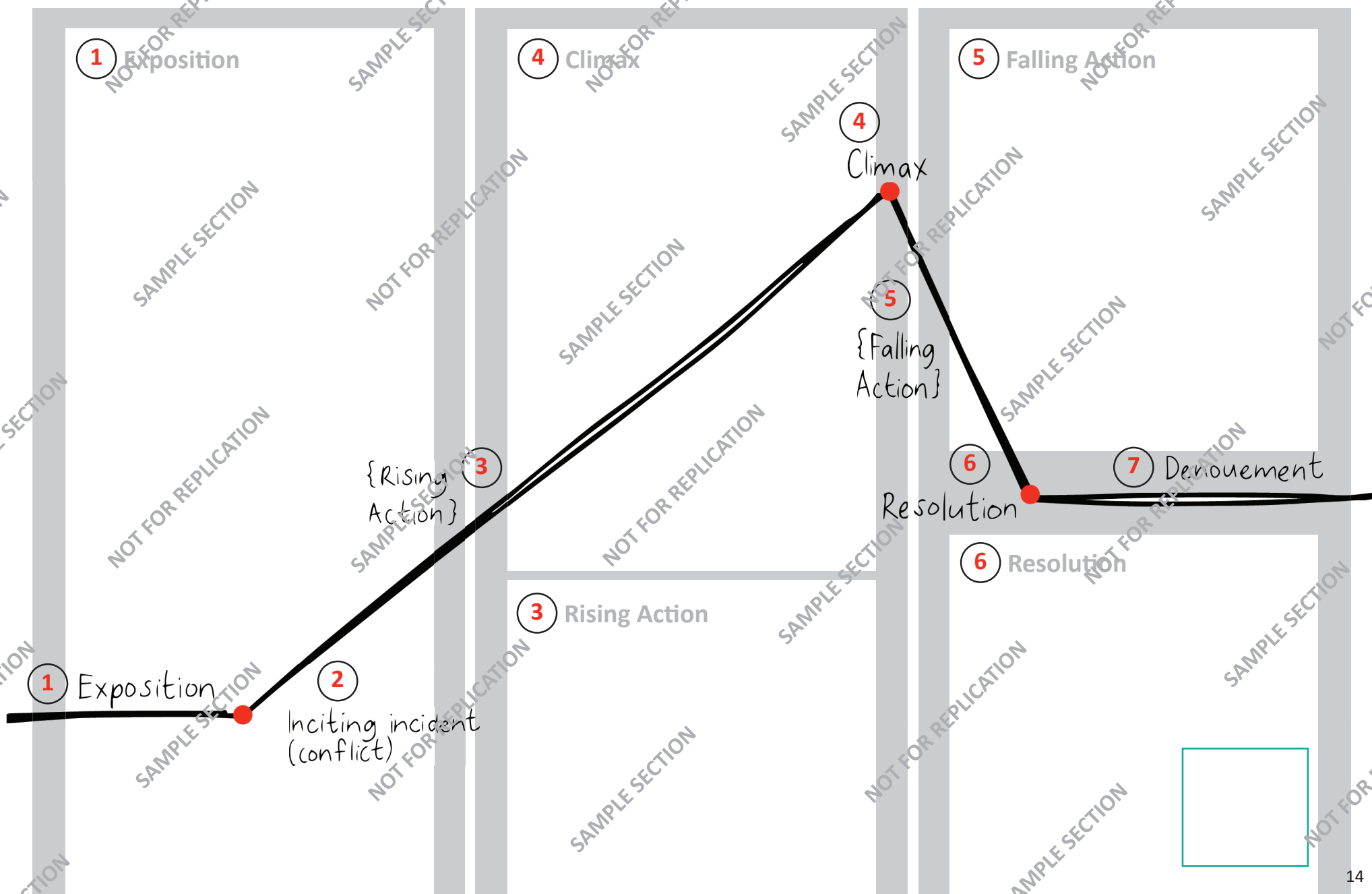


NONHLE NGUBANE



NARRATIVE ARC

You'll be prompted to add notes throughout the guide, but feel free to do so at any time as you gain new insights. **TIP:** Including page numbers in your own notes can be helpful.



Exposition = Setting + Characters
Setting = Where? + When?
See page in novel for map.

2 Inciting Incident/Conflict

7 Denouement

All of this forms the narrative arc, which creates a complete and satisfying storyline.

BEGINNING

MIDDLE

END



THEMES

There are seven main themes in *Down at Jika Jika Tavern*. This list will appear at the end of each chapter section, where you can highlight or underline the key themes. Use the space below to jot down notes on how each theme appears as you work through the guide. **TIP:** Including page numbers in your own notes can be helpful.

1. REVENGE + BETRAYAL

2. CONSERVATION + POACHING



3. GENDER

4. TRADITIONAL CULTURE
VS WESTERN CULTURE

5. IDENTITY + BELONGING

6. EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE
+ POWER

7. GREED





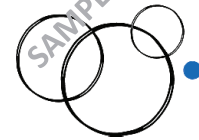
SYMBOLS & MOTIFS

As you go through the study guide, pay attention to the symbols shown here. Copy any information on them to this page to track how each symbol appears in the novel.

TIP: Including page numbers in your own notes can be helpful.



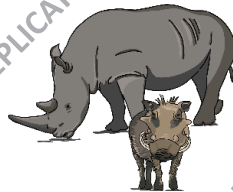
LITTLE BEE-EATER



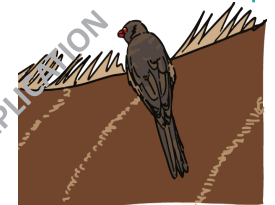
CIRCLES



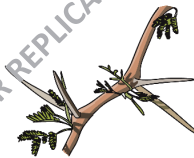
FENCES



RHINO + WARTHOG



OXPECKER



WHITE THORN

SECTION 3 A TERRIBLE MISTAKE

29th November 2012
(pp1–4)

This is the **prologue** of the novel. A prologue serves as an introduction to a work of literature, often offering background information or preparing the reader for the story to come.

Look at the date in the prologue heading of *Down at Jika Jika Tavern*. What year do the events in the prologue take place?

2012



Pages 2–3: 'When Nkosi finally indicated that it was time, the three quickly emerged from the vehicle... Run as fast as he could back to the fence, back to safety.'

'It was a necessary precaution as a small copse of trees missing branches, near a game reserve, might alert a patrolling security company to illegal activity going on.'

Based on this chapter, what kind of 'illegal activity' do you think might happen 'near a game reserve'? Explain your ideas using details from the text.

The 'terrible mistake' likely refers to illegal activity in the game reserve, such as poaching or smuggling. The characters' covert actions — covering the vehicle in branches and hacking tree limbs — imply an attempt to avoid detection by security, suggesting they are involved in criminal activities within the protected area.



As you read on and learn more about the **setting** and **characters**, jot down your notes on page 14-15



Based on the title 'A Terrible Mistake' and the images on the novel's cover, what do you think this mistake might be?

Student's own response.

DEFINITIONS

Prologue

Setting

Character



'He'd never drunk muthi before, but he didn't want to offend the ancestors and create bad luck for himself.'

1: IT IS SO GOOD TO SEE YOU

25th November 2012
(pp5–12)



Page 5: 'When the taxi dropped Nonhle Ngubane off on the side of the road, she was covered in a fine coating of red dust.... Nonhle, however, was completely uninterested in the magic light; she slouched in a wrinkled heap, too tired to pick up her oversized suitcase packed with clothes and gifts for her family.'

Identify and briefly describe specific details about the **setting** that are revealed in this extract.

Nonhle Ngubane is introduced as arriving in the South African bush. The term 'veld' is used which is South African vernacular. Further supporting this suggestion of setting is the reference to the 'zebra' which is an African animal.



Let's explore some examples of **descriptive adjectives**. Descriptive adjectives are the most common type of adjective. They provide information about the quality, size, shape, colour, and overall appearance of nouns, helping to add more detail and make descriptions more vivid.

Identify and contrast the descriptive adjectives used to describe (qualify) the common noun, 'weave'.

TIP: Use words like 'whereas', 'however', 'on the other hand', 'in contrast', or 'yet' to highlight the changes in the weave's appearance.

Previously, Nonhle's weave was 'glossy' and 'black'. Whereas, now it is a 'burnished copper'.

OR

Previously, Nonhle's weave was 'glossy' and 'black'. However, now it is a 'burnished copper'.

When we order descriptive adjectives before the noun they qualify, we sequence them as follows:

1. Opinion - **subjective impressions** (e.g., prized, ugly)
2. Condition (e.g., shiny, scuffed)
3. Size (e.g., big, small)
4. Age (e.g., old, new, vintage)
5. Shape (e.g., round, square, angular, organic)
6. Colour (e.g., red, lilac, cerulean)
7. Origin (e.g., French, Japanese, foreign, exotic)
8. Material (e.g., wooden, metal, synthetic)
9. Purpose (e.g., hiking, expedition, everyday, business)

DEFINITIONS

Descriptive adjectives



'Mama, I am so happy to be home.'

In this extract, Nonhle is described as *'too tired to pick up her oversized suitcase'*. The adjective *'oversized'* refers to the size of her luggage. Rewrite the sentence below, ensuring the additional descriptive adjectives for her suitcase are in the correct order.

Later, Nonhle bent to retrieve her hard-shell, travel, carmine, shiny, oversized suitcase.
Later, Nonhle bent to retrieve her **shiny, oversized, carmine, hard-shell, travel** suitcase.

Now, think of a bag that you own or have seen and create a correctly ordered list of descriptive adjectives to describe it.

I reached for the well-worn, frayed, compact, tubular, olive green, canvas utility bag that sat in the overhead compartment.

A noun can also function as an adjective when it is placed before another noun to describe (qualify) it. Identify all the examples of nouns used as adjectives in this extract.

'December' (homecoming)
'Afternoon' (sun)

A **suffix** is a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word to change its meaning or grammatical function.

Many adjectives can be turned into nouns by adding the suffix *-ness*. Can you find any adjectives in this passage that can be changed in this way? Write down both the noun form and the original adjective form.

TIP: If an adjective ends in 'y', remember to change the 'y' to 'i' before adding *-ness*.

fine → fineness
red → redness
glossy → glossiness
black → blackness
tiny → tininess
fuzzy → fuzziness
toothless → toothlessness

DEFINITIONS

Suffix



*'Because, sisi,
it is hard like
a stone.'*



Pages 5–6: *'She sighed and attempted to reorganise the scowl that the trip had induced..... Since the window had been open at this point, Nonhle had been forced to sit in a furious sulk for the rest of the journey, while the mama relaxed in glorious contentment as the cool air brought down the dangerously high temperature of her inner core.'*

The term 'war' is used in this extract. Explain why this is a metaphor and not a literal war.

In this context, 'war' is a metaphor as it refers to a heated disagreement between two taxi passengers over keeping a window open, highlighting the intensity of their conflict without implying any real violence or military action.

Find one word in the extract that is a **synonym** (a word with a similar meaning) for war and that shows that this is an **extended metaphor** – one that is extended throughout the passage.

Battle

Motivation is the reason or drive behind why someone does something or makes certain choices.

Based on the first paragraph of this extract, suggest what might have motivated each character in this 'war'. Use specific details from the text to support your ideas.

Nonhle is motivated to keep the taxi 'window closed' so that the wind blasting in through the window doesn't disrupt 'the glamour' that she had carefully constructed before the trip, whereas the enormous mama is motivated by the heat that is causing her to feel hot and have a 'sweaty form' and so she is 'keen on keeping it open' to cool her.

Contrast is used to highlight the different feelings about the outcome of the 'war' between the 'enormous mama' and Nonhle. Find and quote a two-word description for each character from the last sentence of the extract to show this contrast in mood. Then, suggest who the winner of the 'war' might be.

Furious sulk

Glorious contentment

The 'enormous mama' has been victorious.

A **euphemism** is a mild or indirect expression used to replace one that may be considered too harsh, blunt, or offensive. Early on in Nonhle's recollection of this 'war', the 'enormous mama' is described as having a 'large posterior'. Name the anatomical feature for which this is a polite reference.

Her buttocks/bum etc.

DEFINITIONS

Synonym

Extended metaphor

Motivation

Euphemism

Her 'large posterior' is described as 'glued' to the taxi seat. This is a metaphor because it compares her body sticking to the seat to something being physically glued, without using 'like' or 'as'. With close reference to the extract, explain why this metaphor is effective at capturing the experience of the 'enormous mama' in the taxi on this hot day.

TIP: Focus on how the metaphor appeals to the sense of touch and makes the discomfort of the heat more vivid.

It is a metaphor because she has not had literal glue applied to her buttocks to adhere her to the taxi seat; however, it is effective at implying that she is feeling very sweaty on this hot day against the 'fake leather' of the taxi seat and it is causing her skin to feel as if it is sticking to the seat.

Sibilance is a literary device that involves the repetition of 's', 'sh', or 'z' sounds in a passage to create different effects, such as a soothing or eerie atmosphere, depending on the context. It is similar to alliteration. Sibilance is used in the extract below:

'After passing through the last toll plaza, the taxi driver had swerved to a stop and threatened to leave them on the side of the freeway, if they continued slamming his precious window back and forth.'

Why is the 's' sound effective?

The 's' sound is effective as it is a fluid and smooth sound and so it reinforces the swiftness and speed with which the 'taxi driver' responded to the 'war' underway between two of his passengers. It also indicates the speed with which the taxi swerved to the side of the road.



Consider what we learn about Nonhle from our introduction to her as she journeys back to her family home. Jot down your notes on page 8.



Page 6: *'Nonhle stood in the dying light, trying to rid herself of the irritation that continued to course through her body.... The sudden flow of saliva nudged her out of her contemplation, and she bent down to pick up the handle of her new purchase.'*

In this extract we learn that Nonhle has travelled from Durban (in South Africa) back to her family home. Reread the extract, focusing on the way that the author has appealed to the senses of smell and taste using descriptive adjectives.

DEFINITIONS

Sibilance

'I'm going home,' she said,



with a sigh of happiness.

DEFINITIONS

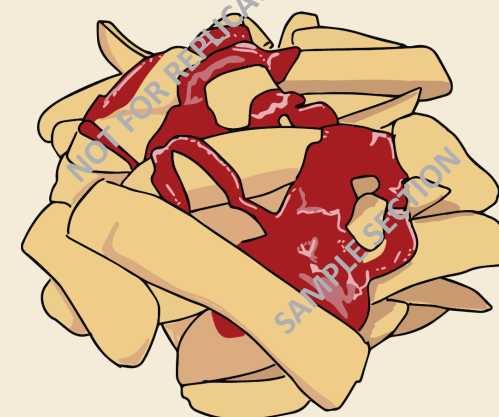


Her mouth watered as her brain conjured up the acidic tang of white vinegar doused liberally over a plate of **hot, greasy chips**, then smothered in **glossy red tomato sauce**.

Her mouth puckered at the recollection of the stodgy, rancid chips smothered in congealed and gritty sauce. Other options for descriptive adjectives: bland, watery, greasy, clumpy, overpowering, bitter, sour, stale, slimy, artificial, salty, chalky, burnt, etc.

Categorise any other descriptions that could link to our sense of smell according to each of the two locations described. (Remember that some of these might overlap with our sense of taste.)

Nonhle's Family Home: _____	Durban
spice and honey starchiness of the African potato wild garlic	clean scent the ocean curry and biryani acidic tang white vinegar



'Her mouth watered.

The increased repetition becomes distracting, and the meaning of the sentence becomes harder to follow because the repetitive noun references interrupt the flow, making the sentence cumbersome. This requires readers to pause and process information, which shifts attention from the characters' emotions to the structure of the sentences, reducing empathy and engagement.

Rewrite the following part of the extract as if you were Samson and replace all character names with pronouns.

'They walked up the stairs and Samson settled himself onto a kitchen chair, just as Thuli placed a mug of tea in front of him. He briefly squeezed his wife's hand, which she'd placed on his shoulder.'

Begin: We walked up the stairs and...

We walked up the stairs and I settled myself onto a kitchen chair, just as she placed a mug of tea in front of me. I briefly squeezed my wife's hand, which she'd placed on my shoulder.

Note how powerful pronouns are in giving the reader a different point of view. Consider experimenting with different points of view in your own writing.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

We are introduced to Nonhle Ngubane, a university student returning home for her summer holidays. Her childhood home is located within the workers' compound of The Last Outpost lodge. After getting dropped off by a taxi, she accepts a ride to the compound from a man later revealed to be Senzo Mdletshe. Upon arrival, we meet her parents, Samson and Thuli.



THEMES

From the list below, *highlight* the themes that emerged in this chapter:

Revenge & Betrayal | Conservation & Poaching | **Gender** | Traditional culture vs Western culture |
Identity & Belonging | Education, knowledge & power | Greed



NONHLE NGUBANE



SENZO MDLET SHE

CHARACTER SKETCH

NONHLE NGUBANE

	Possible Answers	Evidence
Brain: (Inner World) What thoughts are circling their head?	Although she believes her father is innocent, she worries that he, too, might be tempted by a better life for his family.	'A sense of discomfort began to rise within her. <i>Was it possible that he'd finally given in to the visions of a different future for himself and his family?</i> ' (Chapter 18 – Page 126)
	She wants Thomas to understand that people who live outside of the game farm do not get to experience the natural heritage on their doorstep.	"'Do you ever think about how people on the outside of the reserve feel about being on the outside? People once had access to all of this land, and now they don't.'" (Chapter 5 – Page 39) "'I've lived next to this reserve my whole life. My father works in it! And the first time I saw an elephant, out in the open, without a fence in front of it, was when I started working here.'" (Chapter 5 – Page 40)
Heart (Motivation) What causes them to do the things they do?	Nonhle believes her father is innocent and seeks to prove it.	'Nonhle smacked her hand on the desk in frustration. "My father's not like that —"' (Chapter 18 – Page 124) 'It wasn't the vision of thousands of baby tortoises being crushed that mobilised her, but the parting words of the policewoman: <i>"It's all up to you now."</i> ' (Chapter 20 – Page 141)
Baggage (Backstory) What significant events have they experienced?	Nonhle, unlike her peers, attended a private boarding school.	'It was a journey that would set Nonhle apart, a journey that she had known would be difficult because she had to catch up to the other girls; girls who had attended well-resourced schools, while she had to share her books with many other learners.' (Chapter 6 – Page 47)

AUTHORS NOTE

Thank you for choosing Down at Jika Jika Tavern and for using the Teacher's Guide to support your teaching of the text.

To Give Feedback

Your feedback is invaluable as we continue to develop user-friendly, thoughtful, and effective resources for both educators and students. We warmly invite you to share any constructive suggestions regarding the content, structure, or layout of this guide. Your insights help us refine our materials and ensure they continue to support meaningful engagement in the classroom and ease the burden of resource development placed on you.

Please send your feedback to: info@ashlingmccarthy.co.za

Continue the Journey

If you and your students enjoyed Down at Jika Jika Tavern, continue the journey beyond the classroom with the sequel, The Leopard in the Lala, where you will reunite with Nonhle, Thomas, and Senzo — joined by new characters — to confront unexpected dangers and explore the plight of leopards, as the future of this majestic cat hangs in the balance.

Look out for the third instalment, In the Shadow of Baboon Rock, coming in 2026.

