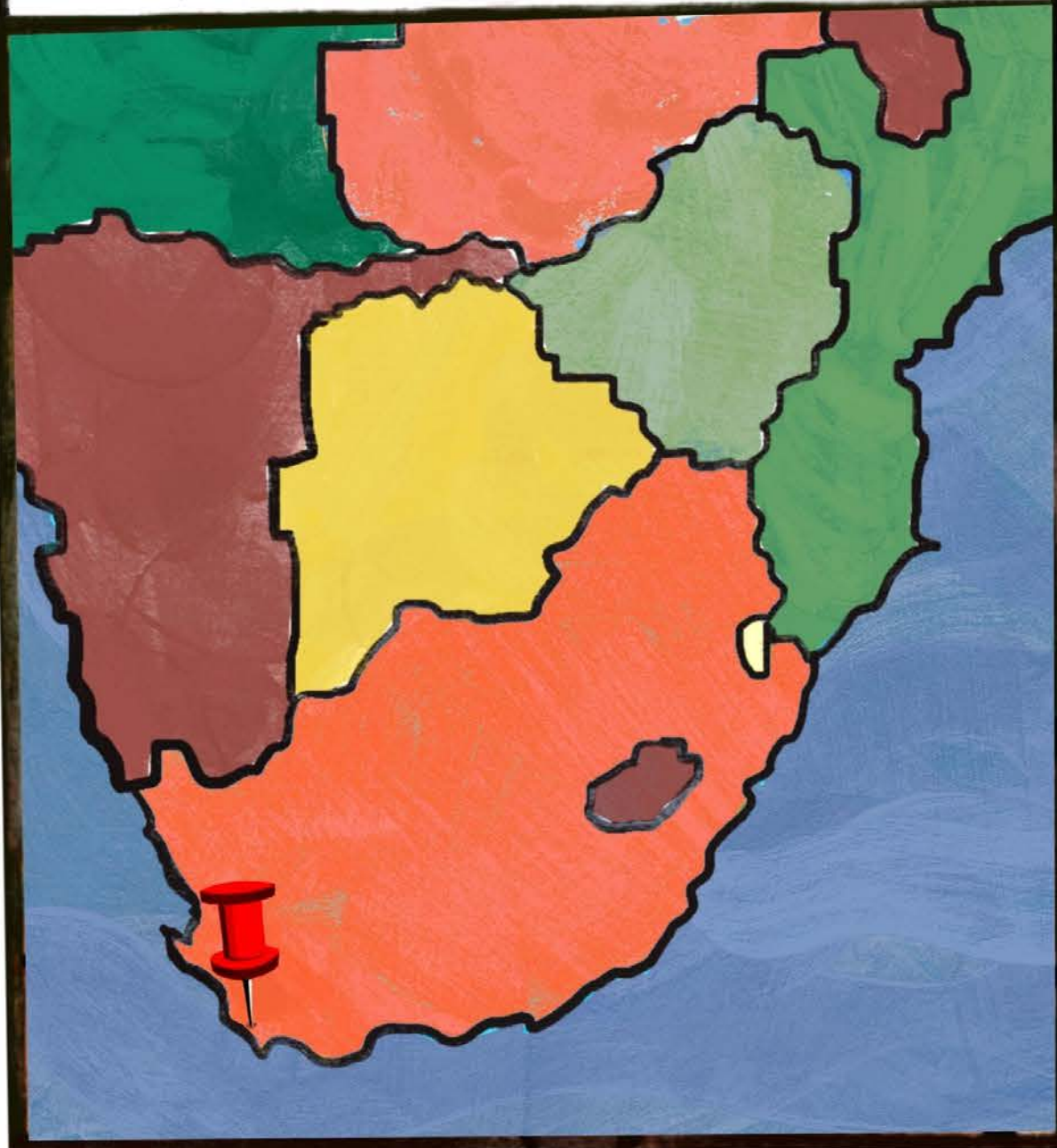
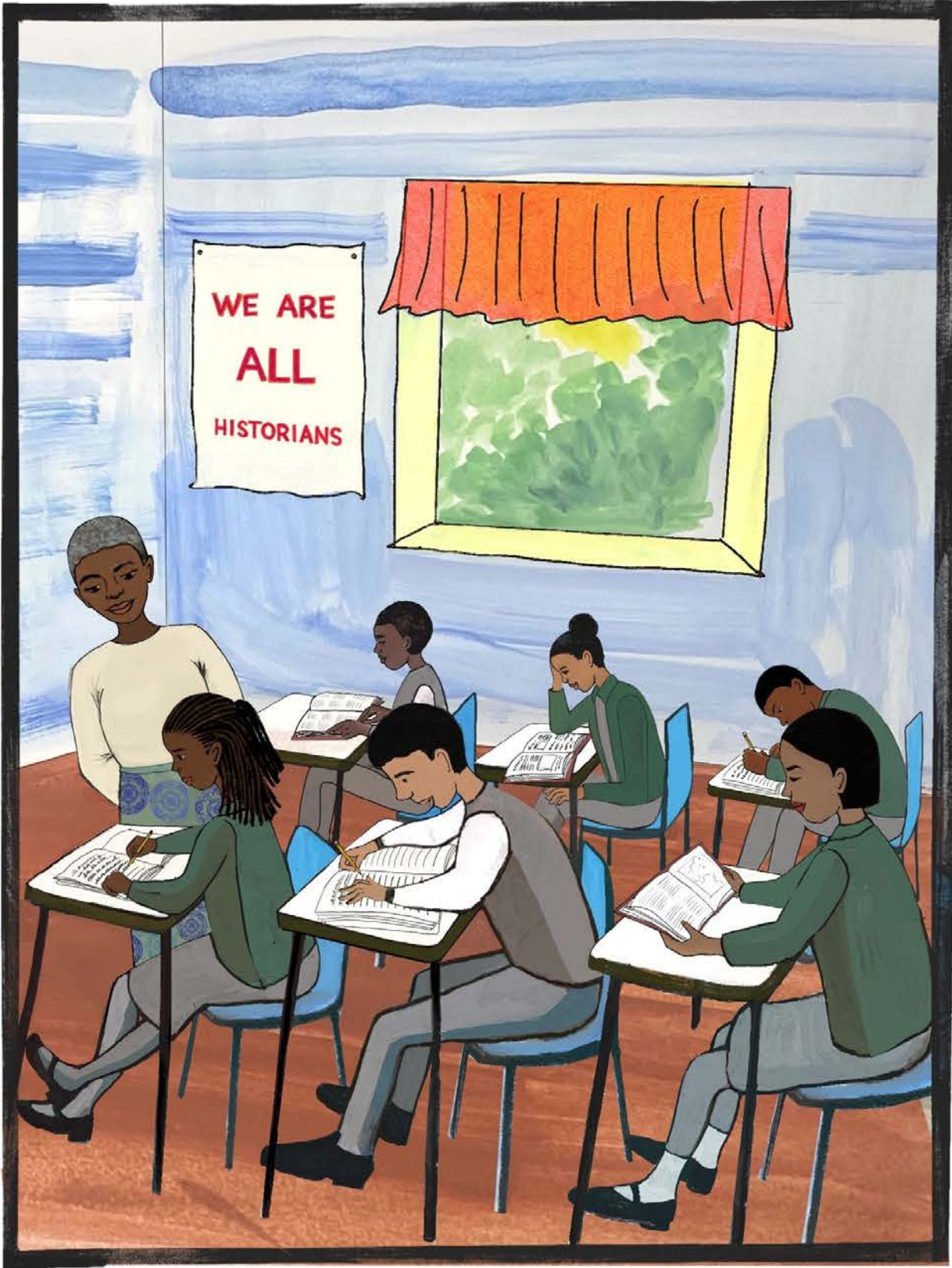


# CAPETOWN

SOUTH AFRICA





## MS. ETHEL, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

*“I really loved history, and I thought I would make a change in history by teaching learners.”*

– Ms. Ethel

By Adriana Cortez, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, and Shelby Carvalho

### ABOUT MS. ETHEL

Ms. Ethel migrated to South Africa from Zimbabwe and understands what it means to be othered in the context of recent violent, and sometimes deadly, xenophobia. She attributes her own successes as an educator to “firm discipline,” which grounds her high expectations for her students. The public school where Ms. Ethel works as a history teacher and a school counselor serves diverse students, migrants and nationals alike, most of whose families have limited economic resources and whose communities experience high rates of violence. Ms. Ethel’s identities and various roles allow her to understand her students’ experiences on both systemic and interpersonal levels as she strives to help them be successful students and active members of society.

### HOLDING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Ms. Ethel wants her students to be successful and, to make this possible, she must help them understand how to be successful. To do so, she maintains high expectations for both her students and herself. Her students also hold each other accountable to Ms. Ethel’s expectations, hushing each other when the classroom gets too loud.

The writing prompts Ms. Ethel assigns require deep thinking, asking students to study their historical sources and filter out unnecessary information. She asks them to craft and present original arguments and defend their positions in debates. She believes all students can do this work. To support this learning and success, Ms. Ethel uses several strategies consistently: she reviews previous lessons, scaffolds tasks by doing them together first, and offers guidance on what evaluators look for on high-stakes exam responses. She also pays close attention to who is participating and who has been quiet, making sure to include everyone in the conversation.

Ms. Ethel believes in hard work and models this for her students. She makes herself available for students to meet with her and discuss personal or academic matters. As she said, “The only joy we get as educators is to see these learners excelling in life.”

## RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

Ms. Ethel's personal experiences with migration, as well as her unique position as both teacher and counselor, give her insights into the identities and lives of her students.

Ms. Ethel brings this awareness into her history classroom, asking students to discuss complex topics like exploitation, child labor, and human rights and responsibilities, not only in the historical context of the Industrial Revolution, as is on the syllabus, but in the context of contemporary conditions of migrants and others in South Africa. She asks her students to connect the history they are learning to these present conditions and to the kinds of community members she expects them to be in the future. Ms. Ethel calls her students "historians," placing them in an important role not just as inheritors of this difficult history but as creators of new knowledge with the power to think in new ways about the future.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Ms. Ethel seeks any available moment to learn more about her students as individuals.

As Ms. Ethel looks through her students' workbooks, she gives them personalized feedback, and praises them when they've done a good job. She compliments them on their creativity. These words of encouragement help her build rapport and create a safe space for students to learn from their mistakes. She said, "These are learners who actually want to engage. These are learners who are actually inquisitive. These are learners who don't fear educators."

Ms. Ethel knows which of her students – both migrants and nationals – are struggling in history class because they are still learning English, she knows who is close friends with whom, she knows who reads books in their free time, she knows whose family has insecure housing, she knows who loves history and who needs to be convinced they are indeed a "historian." These relationships with her students shape her approach to teaching, including the "firm discipline" that is core to her pedagogy. Although compromise does not come easily to her, she describes how she adjusts the nature of any discipline to align with what each student needs to succeed at school, needs she knows well through her relationships with students.

**Learn More** about Ms. Ethel and schools as welcoming communities in South Africa (coming soon!).