

Sisanda's gift



Story by Gcina Mhlophe

Illustrations by Jiggs Snaddon-Wood

Every day when eight-year-old Sisanda gets home from school, she changes out of her uniform, eats her lunch and plays a game of *umlabalaba* with her grandfather. They have so much fun flying their “cows” around the board that she doesn’t want to stop. But then he reminds her that she wants to become a bank manager one day when she grows up.

“How will you do that if you don’t go to high school?” jokes her grandfather.

Sisanda just laughs. “I *will* go to high school and university too. That’s why I work so hard at school!”

Sisanda is quite tall for her age – she takes after her father. Her round face and beautiful smile are her mother’s. Both her parents get up early each morning to go to work at the game reserve close by. By the time Sisanda and her friends start school, coachloads of tourists are already arriving to spot Africa’s finest animals.



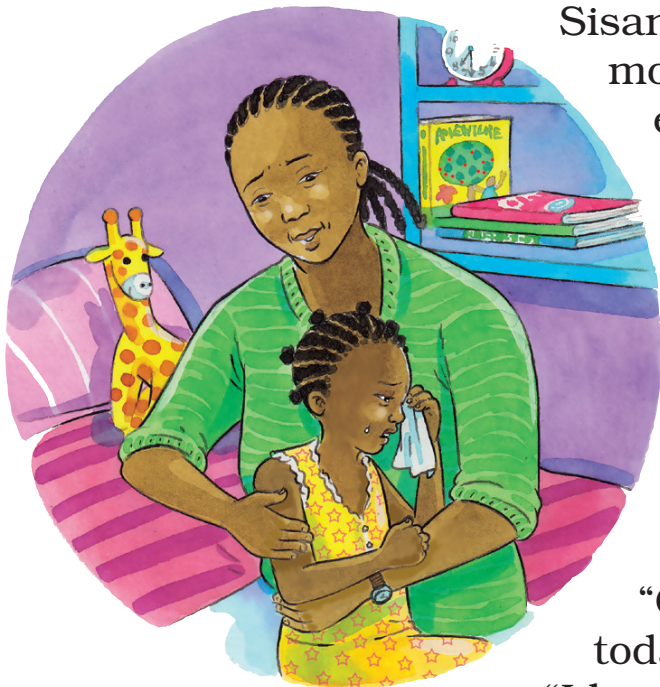
For her last birthday, Sisanda had a special treat – her parents got permission for her to have a party at the game reserve. The giraffes at the reserve were curious about this group of people. They stretched out their long necks for the best view of the party and they even seemed to want some of the birthday cake! Sisanda loved the giraffes. All animals were special to her, but it was the quiet and gentle giraffes that stole her heart. She could spend all day watching them.

One Friday, Sisanda's father came home from work early. He looked very upset.

"What's wrong, Baba?" Sisanda asked.

"Today a swarm of bees stung a mother giraffe," explained Sisanda's father. "Her head was so swollen from all the stings that her beautiful eyes were closed. We tried everything to help her, but it was no use – she died. And the saddest part of all is that she had a young calf that still needs her."

"Oh no!" said Sisanda starting to cry. "I wish there was something I could do. The baby giraffe must be crying just like me."



Sisanda cried and cried. Her mother tried to comfort her. She even read Sisanda an extra story at bedtime to help her forget how sorry she felt for that baby giraffe. Eventually, Sisanda drifted off to sleep to the sound of her mama's voice.

The next morning Sisanda woke up with an idea!

"Can I go to work with you today?" she asked her baba.

"I have a gift for the baby giraffe."

Her parents looked at each other, smiled and said, "Yes, of course you can come with us."

It was a warm but cloudy day. Everything in the reserve seemed unusually quiet.

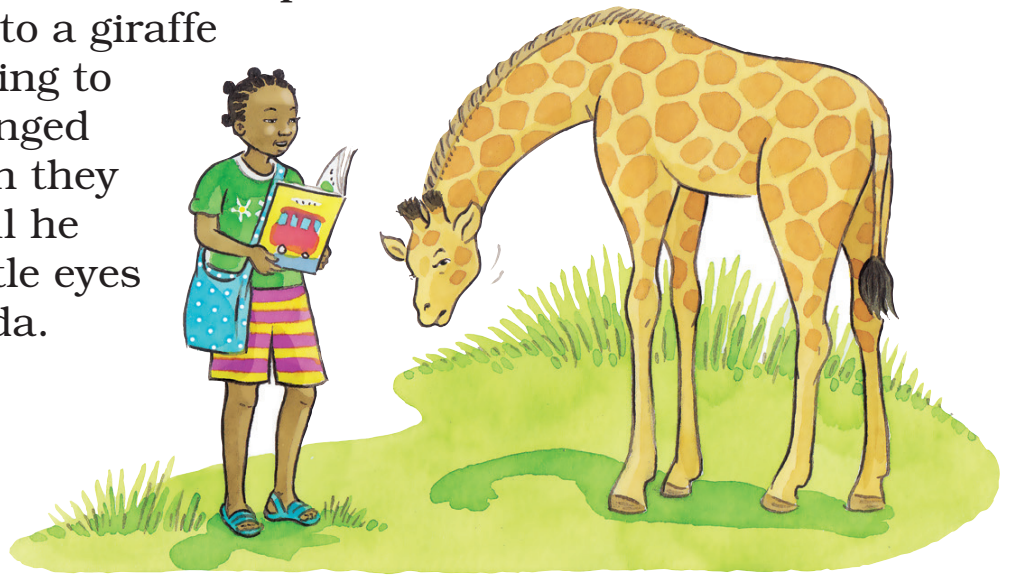
"I think the sun isn't shining today because it's sad about the baby giraffe," said Sisanda.

A great big elephant gazed at the family walking by.

"Maybe he's wondering why a little girl is going to work with her parents," said Sisanda's mother.

Sisanda nodded. “He’s going to get a surprise when he finds out,” she thought.

They found the baby giraffe standing alone. His willowy neck drooped and his big brown eyes looked dull. Sisanda stood as close to him as she could. She opened her small bag and took out a book. Then, to her parents’ surprise, she began to read to the baby giraffe. He turned his head towards her voice and listened as if he could understand every word. At first, Sisanda’s parents thought reading to a giraffe was a strange thing to do, but they changed their minds when they saw how peaceful he looked – his gentle eyes looking at Sisanda.



“My story made him feel better,” Sisanda told her grandfather when she got home.

Sisanda went to visit the little giraffe most afternoons and over weekends. And every time she went, she took another story to share. The two new friends looked so good together that even passing tourists took photos of them.

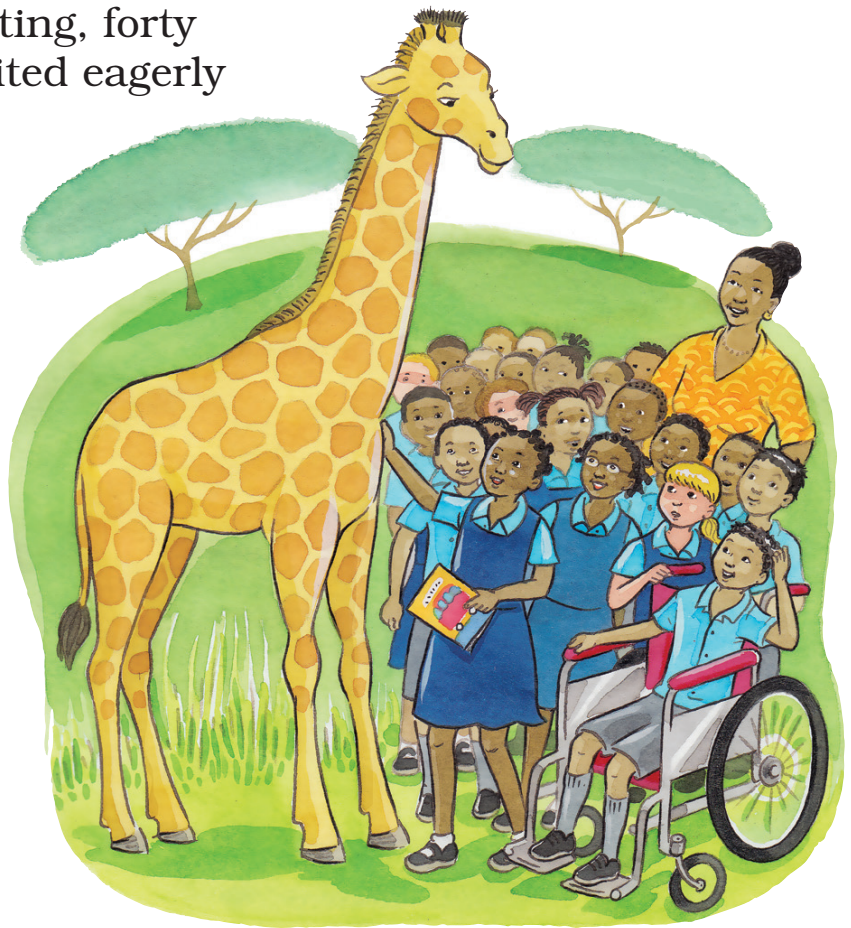
Slowly the little giraffe grew stronger. People at the game reserve were taking really good care of him and all the love from his new friend, Sisanda, worked like magic.

One day the reserve manager asked Sisanda to give her new friend a name.

“I think Thokozani is a good name,” said Sisanda.

The next day the reserve manager phoned Sisanda’s teacher. He invited all Sisanda’s classmates to come and meet Thokozani. The handsome giraffe had grown taller and stronger in the three months since Sisanda’s first visit.

On the day of the outing, forty Grade 3 children waited eagerly for the reserve gates to open. Then Sisanda proudly led everyone to Thokozani. Some of the children looked at the tall giraffe in amazement. Others giggled nervously. Their teacher, Miss Khanyile, just smiled.



“Your friend is beautiful, Sisanda. You have been so kind to him,” she said gently.

“What is his name?” asked one of the boys.


“Thokozani,” answered Sisanda.

“Thokozani means ‘rejoice’,” explained Miss Khanyile.

The children sat down and listened while Sisanda read the story she had read to Thokozani on the day they had first met. The reserve manager took photos. Some tourists passing by took photos too. Even a photographer from a local newspaper clicked away. He promised that a photo of them would be in the local newspaper very soon. Everyone cheered.

What a gift! Reading to heal a friend.

•••••

• **GET CREATIVE!** 

• Encourage your children to interpret the story by asking them to draw

• or paint a picture of their favourite part.

•••••

Sisanda's gift

Story by Gcina Mhlophe • Illustrations by Jiggs Snaddon-Wood



Visual

Draw or paint a picture of your favourite part of the story.



Reading

Choose one of your favourite stories to read to someone else, just like Sisanda did in the story. Or, choose a storybook that you enjoy and use the pictures to help you retell the story.



Writing

In the story, a photographer from the local newspaper took a photograph of Sisanda reading to the other children in her class. Write a newspaper report to go with the photograph.



Craft

Use natural materials (like stones, sand, leaves, twigs) to create a game reserve. Then use playdough or clay to create a giraffe and other animals that live there.



Performance

Tell or read aloud a story that you think would help someone who is sad to feel better.