

Thursday 11th March

LO: Comprehension – The Soweto Uprising

What Caused the Uprising in 1976?

In 1975, the government passed a new law that forced schools teaching non-white children to teach mathematics, arithmetic, and social studies in Afrikaans from grade 7. General Science and practical subjects (homecraft, needlework, woodwork, metalwork, art, agricultural science) had to be taught in English and indigenous languages, such as Zulu and Xhosa, would only be used for religious instruction, music, and physical culture.

What Was Education Like During Apartheid?

During the years of Apartheid, children in South Africa received different education based on their race groups. Black South African children received a free, but sub-standard education.



Black children only went to school for three hours each day. One group of children went to school in the morning and the other group went in the afternoon. This meant that the teachers would have to teach the same lessons twice a day to different children.

16th June 1976

On the morning of the 16th June 1976, between 10 000 and 20 000 black children (and some other supporters) walked from their schools to the Orlando stadium.



As the students began the march, they discovered that the police had barricaded the road along the route they wanted to take. The leader of the action committee asked the crowd not to provoke the police and the march continued along another route. The crowd eventually ended up near Orlando High School.

The students sang and waved posters with slogans such as, "Down with Afrikaans," and, "If we must do Afrikaans, Vorster must do Zulu."

16th June 1976



The police who were on duty had no special training in crowd control. They had no loudhailer and the tear gas they released was proving ineffective. The police released their dogs to try to drive the crowds back. The students killed the dogs and in the panic, the police opened fire on the crowd. 15-year-old Hastings Ndlovu and 12-year-old Hector Pieterse were amongst the first to be killed by police bullets. The crowd were furious and violence erupted.

Amongst the 23 people killed on the 16th June was Dr. Melville Edelstein, who had spent his life fighting for the rights of the black community. He was stoned to death by the mob of students and left with a sign around his neck which said 'Beware Afrikaners'. The mob of angry protesters barricaded roads and burned cars. They attacked bottle stores, beer halls and shops, looting them and burning them down.

At the end of the first day, Soweto was marked with fires that burned into the night. The paramilitary police arrived in heavy armoured vehicles to patrol Soweto. On the 17th June 1976, more people across Soweto joined in on the violent protest, looting and burning schools, municipal halls and offices. Protests spread to Thembisa, which staged a peaceful protest, and Kagiso, where the police shot another 5 people trying to stop the protest action.

Violence continued through to the 18th June 1976, as the police tried to regain law and order in the townships across Johannesburg with helicopters and armed vehicles. The order was given to shoot to kill and try to regain control.

How many people were killed?

It is hard to know exactly how many people were killed across Johannesburg during the Soweto Uprising as the government never released accurate figures. They feared that if they released the true number of people killed and injured, the people would be so angry that it would result in further violence.

The official number released by the government was that only 23 people died in the Uprising but it is estimated that up to 200 people actually died and thousands were injured.

Why is Hector Pieterse considered a symbol of the uprising?

Hector Pieterse was one of the first children shot during the protest. A photograph of him being carried away by Mbuyisa Makhubo was taken by Sam Nzima. This photo was widely published. It was used as a major rallying point around the world of the struggle against Apartheid.



Retrieval

1. What date did the Soweto uprising begin?
2. Why were the students protesting?
3. Why did the government state that only 23 people had died in the uprising?

Words in Context

4. Find another word that is similar in meaning to 'blocked'.
5. Find a word which means that something 'is not working or getting the desired outcome'.

Inference

6. How do you think the police felt during the uprising?

Retrieval

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