

## **African superheroes to make an appearance at this year's SA Book Fair**

*For immediate release*

**Johannesburg, South Africa [insert day and date]** – In a country in which 73% of the population is not interested in reading books, there couldn't be a more urgent task than that of producing more local literature that will appeal to the majority of the South Africans.

“Reading is critical to fulfilling individual potential and collective social development,” says Elitha van der Sandt, CEO of the South African Book Development Council (SABDC), which hosts the South African Book Fair in spring every year. “This makes it one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal to tackle poverty and inequality. For this reason - as well as for many others - it is heartening to see that there are more and more young authors emerging who are determined to redefine what it means to be South African, to exercise an influence on their surroundings and to redefine the future.”

On the back of the hype surrounding the release of *Marvel's Black Panther* earlier this year, there has been a growing interest in African storytelling and African superheroes. This comes at a time when the unique voices of more and more local authors are effectively transforming the book publishing industry, with many bringing beautiful, powerful and vibrant African superheroes to life.

Loyiso Mkize of Team Kwezi has, for example, been on the comic book scene for nearly ten years and has been involved in developing several comic book series, including the very successful soccer-based series *Supa Strikas*. He embarked on a fine art career seven years ago and has since held four solo exhibitions and participated in six group exhibitions, attracting a keen following both at home and internationally.

Loyiso and Clyde Beech make up Team Kwezi, and their *Kwezi* comic book series is one of the country's most trendy superhero series, featuring as it does a character who is boldly black and South African. The series follows the life of a teenage boy in a fictional city modelled on Johannesburg, who discovers that he has superpowers. His early journey has him basking in the attention of his many fans, until he realises that his powers come at a price and that he has quite a few life lessons to learn. This is a story that appeals to a broad audience and each new title in the series leaves youngsters clamouring for more.



This phenomenon is especially encouraging in light of the National Reading Study conducted by the SABDC in 2016, which found that only 14% of the population identify as book readers, while approximately 58% of South African households do not have a single leisure reading book in the home. Similarly, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), also conducted in 2016, found that 78% of South African grade four learners struggle to read with comprehension in any of the local languages, demonstrating just how important it is to foster a culture of reading amongst children and youngsters.

“Reading is the cornerstone of development and forms the basis of lifelong learning,” says van der Sandt, “so creating an interest in the written word is one of our key objectives at SABDC. As importantly, reading for pleasure opens up so many new worlds and gives us wonderful opportunities to explore both our own cultures and those of others. It is for this reason that we feel it is essential to support young local authors who are telling stories that their peers can relate to.”

Along with Mkize and Beech, Benoit Knox and Bontle Senne will participate in a discussion session about graphic novels and their role in youth culture on Saturday, 8 September. Senne is a writer and an advocate for children's literature who writes in several indigenous languages. Her books include an Afrocentric adventure/fantasy series of three books for tweens entitled *Shadow Chasers*.

Knox, of BK Publishing, is riding the superhero wave with his educational publication *Supernova*, a general interest magazine covering topics related to science, technology, the environment, world cultures, sports, the arts and social issues. The magazine, which is almost a comic book, is carefully designed to help children read, absorb and enjoy a wide range of content.

“Since before I could read, I've loved comics,” he says. “Though I used to read superhero stories when I was growing up, my favourite comic heroes generally didn't include people with superhuman powers. The best comics for me are those about ordinary people, like Tintin and Spirou, who get swept up in epic adventures and who push through difficult challenges, no matter how hard they may be. These characters are strong-willed and courageous, and they are constantly learning from their adventures.

“In my work, I use comics and illustrations to attract children to the world of science, ecology and history. I believe that, as publishers, we need to use all of the tools at our disposal to develop a reading culture, and that comic books provide the surest way of initiating reluctant readers into the world of reading.”



The South African Book Fair will take place from 7 to 9 September at the Newtown Precinct in Johannesburg. In addition to a dedicated schools programme, an outdoor family zone to relax in and a magic tent featuring children's theatre productions, the Book Fair will feature an exhibition showcasing the very latest titles across all genres, as well as an engaging and thought-provoking programme of discussion sessions, philosophy café events and poetry café readings. The diverse topics featured at these sessions will include mental health, politics, identity, gender, queer issues and children's issues, amongst many others.

To book for the *Graphic Novels* session on 8 September or any of the other sessions on the literary programme, please visit the South African Book Fair's website at [www.southafricanbookfair.co.za](http://www.southafricanbookfair.co.za).

The full programme of events is available on the South Africa Book Fair's web site and tickets for all sessions are available through WebTickets (<https://www.webtickets.co.za/EventCategories.aspx?itemid=1482084984>).

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Released on behalf of the South African Book Fair by OnPoint PR (Johannesburg).

**For further information about the South African Book Fair, please visit:**

Web site: [www.southafricanbookfair.co.za](http://www.southafricanbookfair.co.za)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SouthAfricanBookFair](http://www.facebook.com/SouthAfricanBookFair)

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**About the South African Book Fair**

The South African Book Fair (SABF) is held under the auspices of the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) and is the culminating event of the annual National Book Week. Comprising a dedicated schools' day, a book industry exhibition, a literary festival, storytelling

festival, philosophy and poetry cafes, it provides a unique opportunity for engagement with writers, publishers, thought leaders, as well as an excellent platform for trade and promotion.

The SABF aims to:

- Engage children of all ages in the joy of reading;
- Present a lively and engaging literary festival;
- Provide a platform for untold stories to be told;
- Facilitate robust engagement on a range of topical issues;
- Showcase books, publishers, authors, booksellers and related industries;
- Forge and promote partnerships across the book publishing and bookselling industries, both locally and throughout Africa;
- Provide a channel for SMME development; and
- Facilitate skills and enterprise development across the entire book industry value chain.

Presented by the South African Book Development Council, in proud association with the Fibre, Processing and Manufacturing SETA.

### **About the South African Book Development Council**

The South African Book Development Council (SABDC), formerly known as the Print Industries Cluster Council (PICC), is the representative body for the South African book publishing industry. Its members include all key stakeholders in the book publishing and bookselling value chain. Further information about the Council and its work is available at <http://sabookcouncil.co.za>.