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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

OCTOBER 2026
SEMESTER 2

ANTHROPOLOGY NEWSLETTER:

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

EVERY VOICE HOLDS KNOWLEDGE.



Stories are more than memories of the past; they are powerful expressions of who we are, where we come from, and how we understand the world around us. Across cultures and generations, storytelling has served as a means of preserving knowledge, sharing experiences, shaping identities, and connecting communities.

In anthropology, storytelling lies at the heart of understanding human experiences. Through listening, observing, and engaging with people's lived realities, we uncover the diverse ways in which individuals and communities make meaning of their worlds.

This edition of the Anthropology Newsletter celebrates The Power of Storytelling, bringing together student experiences, fieldwork reflections, cultural narratives, and voices from our academic community. Each story offers a unique perspective, reminding us that knowledge is not only found in textbooks but also in everyday conversations, traditions, memories, and human connections.

As you turn these pages, we invite you to explore, reflect, and discover the stories that shape our shared humanity.

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OCTOBER 2026
SEMESTER 2

The Stories of Credo Muntwa: ***Prophecies or coincidences?***



What if someone could predict the future? Would you believe them, or call it a coincidence?

Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa (1921-2020) was a prominent South African storyteller, traditional healer and custodian of indigenous knowledge. Known for preserving African oral traditions, he was also regarded by some as a prophet.

Did He See the Future?

Mutwa reportedly predicted the assassination of anti-apartheid leader Chris Hani in 1993, although the timing and exact words of this prediction remain unverified. In 1999, he also reportedly questioned whether President Thabo Mbeki would complete his presidency. In 2008, Mbeki resigned after being recalled by the ANC.

A Warning Through Art?

In 1979, Mutwa created sculptures depicting a mythical king suffering from a sexually transmitted disease. Some later interpreted these artworks as predicting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, although this claim remains unproven.

Through an Anthropological Lens

Whether prophecy or coincidence, Mutwa's stories highlight how storytelling shapes cultural beliefs, preserves indigenous knowledge and influences collective memory.

Perhaps the real question is not whether Mutwa could see the future, but why his stories continue to capture our imagination.

AFRICA: KEEPERS OF STORIES

Oral Tradition

Stories passed down through spoken words, preserving cultural knowledge, beliefs and history from one generation to another.

Epics and Legends

Powerful tales of heroes, ancestors and extraordinary events that communicate cultural values and collective memories.

Proverbs

Short, meaningful sayings that carry wisdom, teach life lessons and reflect African values.

Songs and Rhythms

Music, drumming and dance used to tell stories, express emotions, celebrate traditions and preserve history.

Marks That Spoke Without Words

Symbols, patterns and artistic designs used to communicate identity, beliefs and cultural meanings.

History in Stones

Rock paintings and engravings that offer glimpses into the lives, beliefs and experiences of earlier communities.

Stories That Travelled

Narratives carried across communities and generations through migration, trade and cultural exchange, evolving along the way.

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

OCTOBER 2026
SEMESTER 2

STUDENT STORIES

The Art of Storytelling Through Dance: Sonam Singh



Sonam Singh is a Master's student in Chemistry Education at UKZN with a deep passion for Indian classical dance, particularly Odissi. Originating from the temples of Odisha, India, Odissi preserves cultural and spiritual stories through graceful movements, hand gestures, facial expressions and rhythm. She was delighted to share her dance storytelling with the News Team!

For Sonam, Odissi is more than a dance; it is a form of prayer and a way of connecting with the Divine. Through dance, she brings ancient Hindu stories to life, expressing timeless emotions such as love, courage, compassion and hope.

Balancing chemistry and classical dance has taught her that knowledge can be expressed in different ways. While chemistry helps her understand the physical world through science, Odissi allows her to explore identity, spirituality and human emotions through the power of storytelling.

When Objects Tell Stories: Museums in Preserving Cultural Heritage

Slindokuhle Fortunate Tshisevhe | Master's Student in Anthropology, UKZN



Slindokuhle is a Master's student in Anthropology who works in the museum and heritage sector. With experience in research, collections management and cultural preservation, she is passionate about protecting African history and indigenous knowledge.

"Museums are more than just buildings filled with historical objects; they are buildings filled with stories. Every artifact, photograph, textile, and piece of beadwork carries memories of people, cultures, and generations that came before us. Through these collections, museums give a voice to the past, preserve our identities, and ensure that our stories continue to be told for generations to come."

Beaded artifacts tell us many stories about the people who made and wore them!



When an Illness Tells a Story: Exploring Zulu Spiritual Healing Through an Anthropological Lens.

"My Master's research revealed that an illness is not merely a biological experience, but is also deeply rooted in culture, spirituality, and ancestral relationships. Through the stories of traditional healers and the afflicted, I discovered how storytelling preserves indigenous knowledge and shapes understandings of health and healing. Above all, anthropology taught me that to understand people's experiences, we must first listen to their stories."

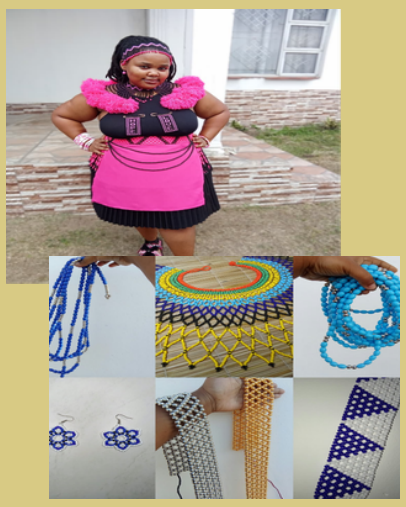
-Silindile Nobuhle Mthethwa, PhD student, UKZN

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

STUDENT STORIES

OCTOBER 2026
SEMESTER 2



The Stories We Carry: Identity, Education, and Beadwork

"My story begins with my name, Nomfundo, which carries my mother's journey of perseverance, sacrifice, and hope through education. As an anthropologist and contemporary beadwork artist, I create beadwork that tells stories of identity, spirituality, and cultural heritage. In Zulu beadwork, colors carry different meanings. For example, red can represent spiritual transformation and is often worn by traditional healers or those undergoing a spiritual calling, while white symbolizes purity, healing, and spiritual connection. Colors also have dual meanings: red may express love and passion, but also anger or heartache, depending on the context. To me, beadwork is more than decoration; every color, bead, and pattern can communicate a story. Through my art, I celebrate the power of storytelling and preserve cultural knowledge for future generations."

— Sinenhlanhla Nomfundo Bhengu

Imbongi: The Power of Poetry in Storytelling

-Smiso Mdletshe, 3rd year BSS, History & Criminology, Pietermaritzburg

For Ungomane, poetry is more than entertainment; it is a powerful form of storytelling that communicates emotions, addresses social challenges and preserves cultural heritage. Inspired by personal experiences and the lives of those around him, Ungomane began writing poetry naturally, without formal training.
Through poetry, Ungomane promotes values such as ubuntu, respect, unity, justice and pride in one's cultural identity. Ungomane believes poetry can inspire young people, raise awareness about issues such as substance abuse and encourage those facing personal struggles.

For Ungomane, poetry is a tool for education, reflection and social change, demonstrating how storytelling can challenge perspectives, preserve cultural values and give a voice to experiences that might otherwise remain unheard.



Inganekwane: The African Folkore.

UNanana & The Elephant!

As shared by Luthando Mthembu | First-Year Anthropology Student, UKZN

"Once upon a time, there lived a brave woman named Unanana. One day, a giant elephant swallowed her children. Determined to save them, Unanana followed the elephant and bravely found her way into its stomach.

To her surprise, she discovered not only her children but an entire village of people and cattle trapped inside! Through her courage and determination, Unanana rescued everyone, and they returned home safely."

The Meaning Behind the Story

Unanana and the Elephant reflects the spirit of ubuntu- *"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu."* By rescuing everyone, Unanana demonstrates courage, compassion, unity, and the importance of caring for others.

Lessons We Carry

The story teaches bravery, perseverance, and community responsibility. It reminds us that izinganekwane preserves cultural values and passes wisdom across generations.

The stories of our grandparents remind us where we come from and the values we carry forward.

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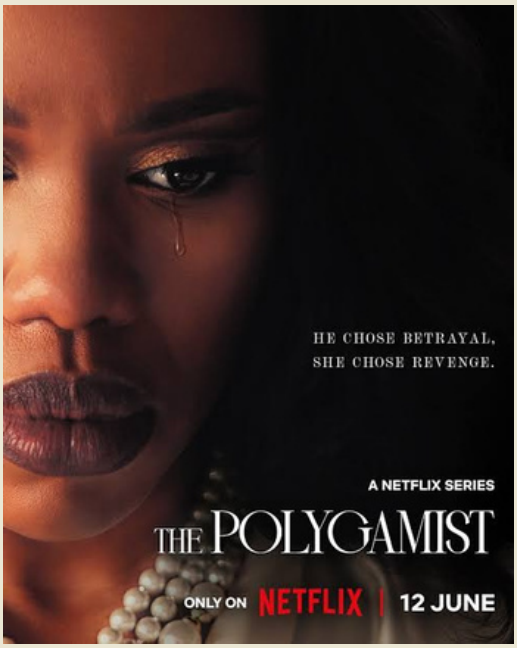
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REVIEWERS CORNER

THE POLYGAMIST: A STORY THAT CAPTIVATED MILLIONS OF VIEWERS

When fiction gives a voice to uncomfortable realities



For Zimbabwean author Sue Nyathi, the inspiration behind The Polygamist came from observing men who publicly presented themselves as monogamous while secretly maintaining multiple families. Unlike the traditional polygamous household she knew growing up, these relationships were built around secrecy and deception.

Nyathi chose to centre the women's perspectives, exploring experiences of betrayal, difficult choices and unequal power within relationships.

When the novel became a Netflix series in 2026, it sparked conversations about patriarchy, cultural traditions, infidelity, women's agency and the pressures of maintaining the appearance of a perfect family.

Through an Anthropological Lens

The Polygamist invites us to look beyond individual relationships and examine the social structures, cultural expectations and power dynamics that shape people's experiences. Through the lens of kinship, patriarchy and gender relations, the series raises important questions about who holds power within families, whose interests are protected and whose voices remain unheard.

It also challenges us to distinguish between polygyny as a culturally recognised marriage practice and the use of cultural traditions to justify secrecy or unequal treatment. From an anthropological perspective, culture is neither fixed nor beyond questioning; it is continuously interpreted, negotiated and sometimes contested by those who experience it.

Most importantly, the series demonstrates how storytelling can make private experiences part of public conversations, allowing audiences to question social norms, recognise inequalities and reflect on the realities concealed behind the image of a perfect family.

Perhaps the greatest power of The Polygamist was not simply the story it told, but how it encouraged society to question whose stories are heard, whose are silenced, and who gets to tell them.

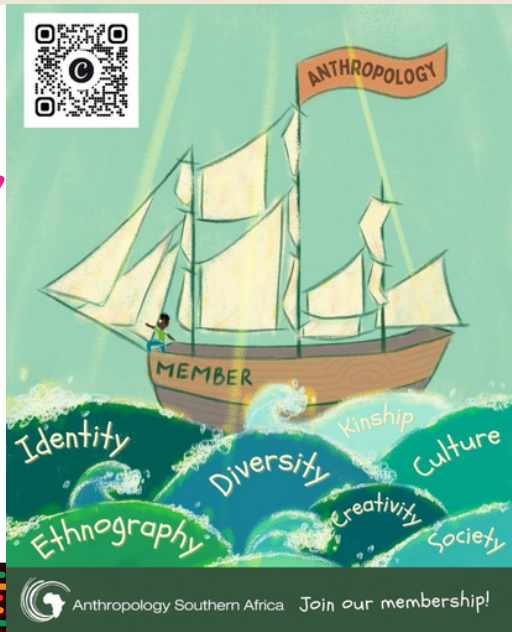
ANNOUNCEMENT!

JOIN THE ANTHROPOLOGY COMMUNITY!

Your journey in Anthropology doesn't end in the classroom!

Become a member of Anthropology Southern Africa (ASnA) and connect with a wider community of anthropologists, researchers, students and professionals who share a passion for understanding people, culture and society. Membership offers opportunities for academic engagement, networking, knowledge-sharing and participation in anthropological conversations across Southern Africa.

Be part of a community where diverse voices, perspectives and stories matter! Scan the QR code to learn more about membership and how to join.



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SEMESTER 2

Student Experience!

IF THESE ROCKS COULD TALK: UNCOVERING THE STORIES OF EBUSINGATA





Photo credit: KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg

What if the walls of a cave could tell stories of people who lived centuries before us?

"During a fieldwork visit to the Ebusingata rock art site, I joined a team of anthropologists, archaeologists, and museum artists from the KwaZulu-Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg on a mission to document and understand the ancient rock paintings.

The purpose went beyond taking photographs. We were gathering information to help recreate the rock shelter inside the museum, allowing visitors to experience and appreciate this cultural heritage without physically visiting the site.

Rock art reminds us that storytelling existed long before books and modern technology. Through paintings and symbols, earlier communities left behind traces of their experiences, beliefs, and ways of understanding the world.
Yet our fieldwork raised an interesting question: Can we recreate a cultural site inside a museum while preserving its original meaning and connection to the landscape?

This experience highlighted how anthropology, archaeology, and museums work together to document, interpret, and preserve cultural heritage, ensuring that stories of the past continue to reach future generations."

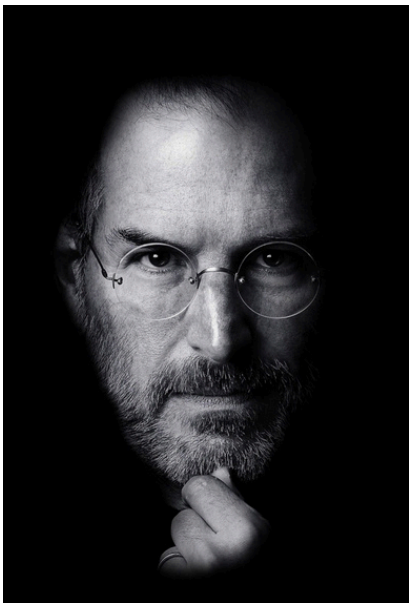
-Miss Silindile Nobuhle Mthethwa, Anthropology student

DID YOU KNOW!

Steve Jobs, a famous American entrepreneur, inventor, and industrial designer who co-founded Apple Inc., famously stated:

"The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values, and agenda of the entire generation that is to come."

He understood that audiences might forget specific product metrics, but they would always remember how the story made them feel.



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