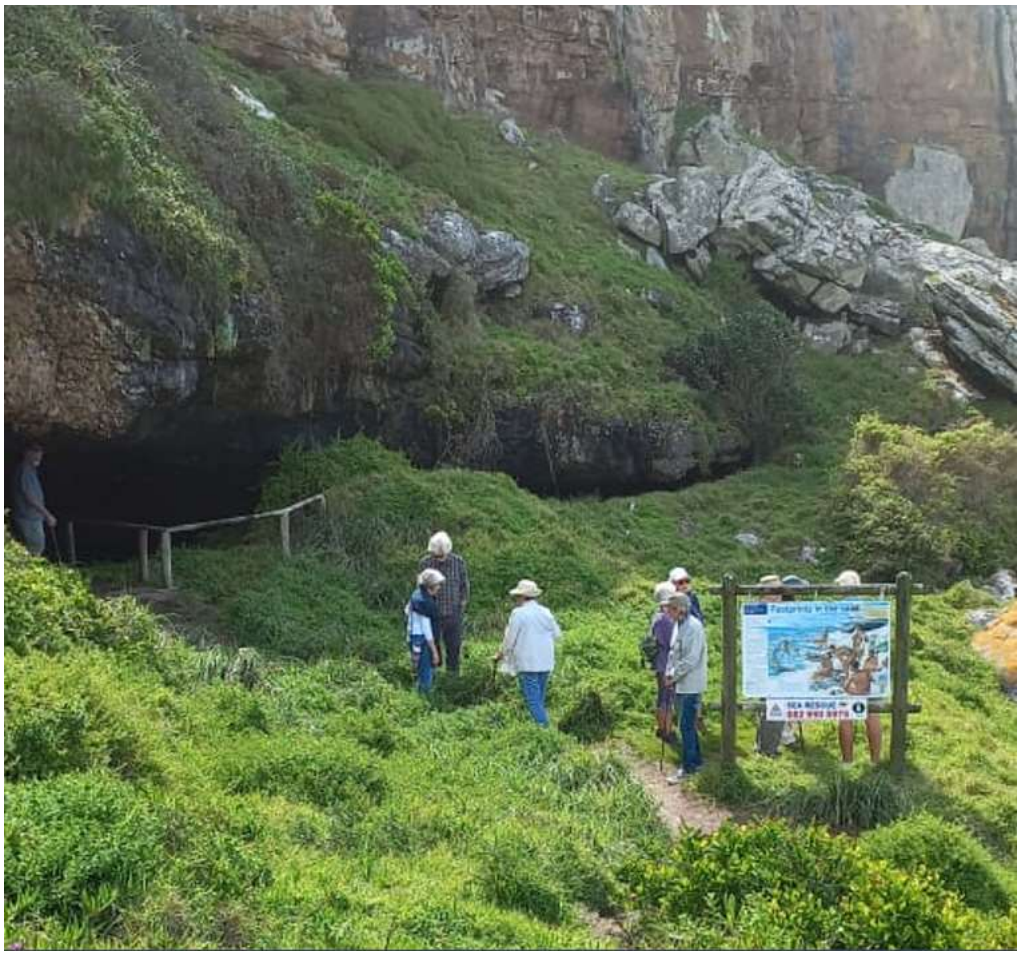
u3a Plettenberg Bay

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Contact us
https://plettu3a.org.za

October 2023

It's hard to believe that the end of the year is nigh and that we're entering our last month of activities, as we close from the end of November to the beginning of February. Be sure not to miss our two November speakers!

This month the outing to Nelson Bay Cave with Hugo Leggatt was a great success and Penny Vinjevold's talk on South Africa's reading crisis provided much food for thought. While we often may feel powerless to do something to improve things in SA, there are various initiatives to improve reading by civil society organisations and the government. We've included some suggestions of our own below for your consideration.

Best wishes,
Plett u3a committee

Welcome

A very warm welcome to our new members: Catherine van der Merwe, Wendy Utermark and Sally Milton.

Bulletin board

Future events

Our website calendar provides all the information concerning our future events and members are sent emails and reminders regarding these. This is just to remind you that we have two interesting speakers in November and that you need to note the different venue (Plett Evangelical Fellowship Church, behind the Brackenridge Estate):

- **15 November:** Gus Mills will be talking about the 18 years he and his wife spent in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park conducting extensive research on the brown hyaena and the spotted hyaena. He will also, describe many aspects of the Kalahari ecosystem, and relate some of their adventures in the area.

- **29 November:** Dr Charles Helm of the African Centre for Coastal Palaeoscience at Nelson Mandela University studies the fossilised tracks, trails, burrows and excavations made by animals along the Cape south coast, left tens of thousands of years ago by giant Cape zebras, elephants, seals, crocodiles, birds – and even gerbils and spiders. He will present the latest research findings from the 2023 field season, of which the fifteen tracksites at Robberg will form a special focus.

Please remember to use our website programme calendar to find out about our forthcoming events.

Plett u3a's 20th anniversary

Adele Adamson kindly shared a news clipping sent by her son regarding the 30th anniversary of Pine Rivers U3A in Queensland, Australia.

This seems to be a good time to start creating awareness of Plett u3a's 20th anniversary, which falls on the 24th February 2024. We are busy planning a celebration and will soon be letting you know the details.

For now we ask you to keep your diaries open for the last half of February!

Past activities

Documentaries

Around the World in 80 Gardens. British gardener and broadcaster Monty Don visits 80 of the world's most celebrated gardens. The series, filmed over 18 months, was first broadcast in 2008.

Monday 2 October: E1 - Mexico and Cuba

The series starts in Mexico, where Monty visits The Floating Gardens in Xochimilco, a borough of Mexico City. The chinampas of Lake Xochimilco are artificial islands that date back before Aztec times (CE 1100). Small rectangular areas of fertile arable land, separated by channels wide enough for a canoe to pass, are used to grow crops on the shallow lake bed. The chinampas had very high crop yields with up to 7 harvests a year and once provided the entire city with sufficient food. They still supply Mexico City with fresh produce.



One of the remaining chinampas in Xochimilco

Next are the gardens of one of Mexico's greatest architects, Luis Barragán (1902-1988), who revolutionised modern architecture in the country with his use of bright colours reminiscent of the traditional architecture of Mexico. Barragán's gardens use high walls to create secret spaces, which also provide different scales and proportions, light, shadow, form, texture, and spaces of bold colour which merge with the landscaping.



The Ethno-Botanical Garden in Oaxaca is the result of a proposal in 1993 by Francisco Toledo, a renowned artist, to prevent the former Convent of Santo Domingo de Guzmán being turned into a large parking lot. Toledo collaborated with anthropologist Alejandro de Ávila Blomberg to design the garden, which was built by the town's community. It showcases the rich diversity of plant species (especially cacti) used by indigenous communities in the region for food, medicine and cultural practices.



Las Poses ('the Pools') in Xilitla is a surrealistic group of structures created by Englishman Edward James in a subtropical rainforest in the Sierra Gorda mountains of Mexico. It includes more than 80 acres of natural waterfalls and pools interlaced with towering surrealist sculptures in concrete.



Next stop is Cuba. Monty views Alberto Huerto's urban vegetable garden in Havana, planted in the space left by a broken down building. The collapse of the Soviet

empire in 1991, together with the US trade embargo of Cuba, meant that the country found it virtually impossible to import the chemicals and machinery necessary to practise modern, intensive agriculture. As a result, Cuba started farming much of its land organically – including vacant urban plots - to grow vegetables to feed its people.

The Vivero Organopónico Alamar in Havana is another example of how Cuba, by necessity, moved away from large scale agriculture on state farms to organic food production on smaller plots. This highly productive farm of 11 ha also grows medicinal plants.



Organopónico Vivero Alamar

Cuba's gardens are mostly functional and practical rather than aesthetic. An exception is Maria's Garden in Havana. This is a small urban flower garden, where plants are found in every possible space in the yard.





Walkways beside reflecting pool



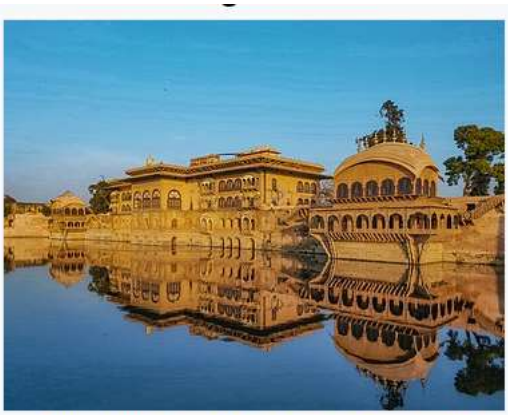
Mehtab Bagh ('Moonlight Garden')

Monday 9 October: E3 – India

Monty visits the majestic tomb gardens of the Mughal emperors, starting with the Taj Mahal in Agra, which was commissioned in 1631 by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, to house the tomb of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal; it also houses the tomb of Shah Jahan himself. Various types of symbolism were employed in the Taj to reflect natural beauty and divinity. The basic elements are Indo-Islamic in origin. The structure of the Taj and the gardens is symbolic of Mumtaz's mansion in the garden of Paradise. The charbagh garden (42-acres), inspired by Persian gardens, symbolises the four flowing rivers of Jannah (Paradise) and reflects the Paradise garden derived from the Persian *paridaeza*, meaning 'walled garden.' In mystic Islamic texts of the Mughal period, Paradise is described as an ideal garden of abundance with four rivers flowing from a central spring or mountain, separating the garden into north, west, south and east. The Mehtab Bagh ('Moonlight Garden') is perfectly aligned with the Taj Mahal on the opposite bank. Early accounts describe the garden's profusion of vegetation, including abundant roses and fruit trees. Over time the Taj Mahal and its gardens declined. In the 19th century, the British restored the Taj Mahal and changed the landscaping to reflect the formal lawns of England.



Akbar's tomb, built in 1605–1613, is the tomb of the Mughal emperor Akbar. It is situated on 119 acres of grounds in Sikandra, a suburb of Agra in Uttar Pradesh. The park-like walled garden contains a herd of deer and tame langur monkeys and has several tanks to supply water to the many fountains, water features and canals.



Deeg Palace in Deeg, Rajasthan, India

The Deeg Palace, outside Bharatpur in Rajasthan, was built in 1772 as a luxurious summer resort for the rulers of Bharatpur State. The palace was in active use till the early 1970s. Keshav Bhawan, the monsoon pavilion, contains an arcade that runs around the interior of the pavilion over a canal with hundreds of fountains. The walls of the canal are pierced with hundreds of minute water jets. Bullocks were employed with large leather 'buckets' to draw water to the tank through a complex pulley system. In religious festivals colours are added to the water, so that the fountains spouted coloured water. The fountain spray and the jets create a monsoon-like ambience. Hundreds of metal balls placed strategically in a channel on the roof are set rolling with the water pressure which results in a thunder-like sound.



Jal Mahal Palace after renovation

Jal Mahal ('Water Palace') is in the middle of the Mansagar Lake in Jaipur, Rajasthan, and its gardens are based on the charbagh concept, with four walkways leading to a central platform with waterways of fountains. The four stories of the building were built on the bottom of the lake when empty. The eastern side remains underwater when the lake is full. While Monty was there in 2007/8 the palace and gardens were being restored using traditional methods and techniques by craftsmen who were probably descendants of the ordinal palace builders.



Abraham's organic spice garden in Thekkady, Kerala, is a 12-hectare family farm, where Monty was encouraged to smell and taste the huge variety of spices grown for cooking and ayurvedic medicines.



The garden is most famous for its sculptures made from recycled ceramic

The Rock Garden of Chandigarh is a sculpture garden in Chandigarh, which was built by Nek Chand, a government official who started building the garden in the jungle secretly in his spare time in 1957. It was discovered in the 1970s and has now spread over an area of 40 acres. The garden is completely built from discarded industrial and home waste materials, as well as rocks and stones collected from the mountains – all of which Nek transported to the site on his bicycle.

Monday 16 October: E6 - China and Japan

Suzhou, a beautiful ancient Chinese city with more than 2,500 years of history, is often referred to as 'the Venice of China'. The Humble Administrator's Garden is one of the most famous of the gardens of Suzhou. In 1513, Wang Xiancheng, an Imperial Envoy and poet of the Ming Dynasty, started building the garden, which took 16 years to complete. The garden contains numerous pavilions and bridges set among a maze of connected pools and islands. The plants here represent various seasons, peonies for spring, lotus for summer, osmanthus in the winter time and plum blooms in winter.



The Humble Administrator's Garden

The Lion Grove garden in Suzhou is famous for the large and labyrinthine 1154 m^2 grotto of *taihu* (limestone rocks featuring holes and pores) rocks at its centre. The grotto contains a maze of 9 paths winding through 21 caves across 3 levels. The pond divides the grotto into the east and west sections The name of the garden is derived from the shape of the rocks, which are said to resemble lions. It was built in 1342 during the Yuan Dynasty by a Zen Buddhist monk.



Inside the Lion Grove Garden

The Imperial Summer Palace in Beijing, a complex of palaces and gardens that cover 3.5 km^2, was built in 1750. The natural landscape of hills and open water is combined with artificial features such as pavilions, halls, palaces, temples and bridges to form a harmonious ensemble. The Yongzheng Emperor introduced the waterworks, creating lakes, streams and ponds to complement the rolling hills and grounds. Using Kunming Lake and Longevity Hill as the basic framework, the Summer Palace combined political and administrative, residential, spiritual, and recreational functions within a landscape of lakes and mountains, in accordance with the Chinese philosophy of balancing the works of man with nature.



Behai Park in the Imperial Gardens, Beijing

To understand ‘Gongshi’ (‘Suiseki’ in Japanese – the art of stone appreciation) as well as Chinese garden design and Chinese art, especially their unfamiliar mountain landscapes, Monty travels to the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan) in eastern China. Here he discovers the frequent subjects of traditional Chinese paintings, including the 800-year old ‘Guest Greeting Pine’. The tree got its name because of two large branches roughly halfway up its trunk that make it appear to be greeting someone with open arms.



Welcoming Pine in Huangshan (Yellow Mountains)

The garden of the Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto is an example of *kare sansui* (‘dry landscape’), a refined type of Japanese Zen temple garden design that generally features distinctive larger rock formations arranged amidst a sweep of smooth pebbles or gravel raked into linear patterns, or ‘waves’, that facilitate meditation.



Ryōan-ji (late 16th century) in Kyoto, Japan, a famous example of a Zen garden

The Issidan Zen Garden of the Ryogen-in Temple in Kyoto is a large Japanese rock garden. It has three main groups of rocks, each with their own significance. In the forefront is the Kame-jima (turtle island) group, and on the right is the Tsuru-jima (crane island) group. Both are symbols of longevity, because in the Japanese tradition the crane is said to live 1,000 years, while the turtle is considered to have a lifespan of ten thousand years. Finally, the third group in the upper right represents Horai-san, the ‘Treasure Mountain’ or ‘Treasure Island’, a mythical place inhabited by immortals.



Issidan Zen Garden of the Ryogen-in Temple

Tōtekiko, one of the five gardens at Ryogen-in Temple, is claimed to be the smallest Japanese rock garden.



Tōtekiko, Ryogen-in Temple

Monty visits the Urasenke Tea Garden for a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. In Medieval times, samurai, who then controlled Japan and were at the top of the social hierarchy, greatly contributed to the development of the tea ceremony. The Tea Garden contains a number of elements such as lanterns, stepping stones, bamboo fences, moss and water basins, which later became essential elements of Japanese landscaping. The tea ceremony takes place in a separate tea pavilion, which is reached by a stepping-stone path through the garden. Prior to the guests’ arrival the path is sprinkled with water



Japanese tea house

from a ladle to cool the immediate area and keep down dust. Guests stop at the Water Basin (*Tsukubai*) to rinse their hands as a symbolic act of cleansing. Samurai would leave their sword weapons on a shelf before entering the tea house. The small entryway into the teahouse requires guests to express their humility by bowing low to enter into the space.



Tea Garden

Tofuku-ji is a Buddhist temple in Kyoto, which has a number of gardens. The current garden was designed by landscape architect Mirei Shigemori in the 1930s. Widely criticised at the time by traditionalists, the moss garden in particular has been emblematic of the renewal of Japanese gardening principles in the 20th Century.



The moss garden



Monday 23 October: E8 - South Africa

Monty's tour of SA starts in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, which was founded in 1913 to preserve the flora native to the South Africa's territory. It was the first botanical garden in the world with this ethos. While our national flower, the king protea, may not be his favourite, Monty is enchanted to find a spotted eagle owlet in the shrubbery, with mom above.



To see how SA's indigenous plants are used in a structured garden Monty visits the artist Henk Scholtz's garden in Franschhoek. He finds it to be 'the most photogenic garden' he'd ever visited, adding 'at every turn, there's a composed view'.



Next he visits the Company's Garden in Cape Town, the oldest garden in South Africa, now a city park. The garden was originally created in the 1650s by the region's first European settlers and provided fertile ground to grow fresh produce to replenish ships rounding the Cape. It is watered from the springs off the lower slopes of Table Mountain.



Simon van der Stel originally granted the land, an estate of 57 morgen, to Jacob Vogel in 1697. The next owner of Stellenberg was the Englishman John Stanton White (1742 to 1768), known locally as Jan de Wit. It is likely the present U-shaped Cape Dutch homestead was built by him in the mid-18th century. The garden consists of 16 distinct areas, structured like rooms which either inter-lead, or are linked by walks or allées that echo the interior of the old house.



Donovan's L'il Eden is a garden in a squatter camp in Hout Bay. It contains many art pieces and is an ongoing creation. Donovan believes in teaching the younger generation to love plants and gardening, which is why there is a group of busy young boys at the bottom of the garden.

Thereafter Monty travels to the Drakensberg mountains to see some botanical treasures in their natural environment.



Photo: Jessa Joughin

Edward Tudor Boddam-Wetham bought the Free State farm in 1910 and named it ‘Kirklington’ after his ancestral home in Nottinghamshire. He and his wife Ruby Newberry created a huge garden on slopes terraced with beautifully cut retainer walls cut from the sandstone of the surrounding mountains. Edward designed complex water catchment systems to water the garden, starting with channels carved out of the rocks on the mountain, to channel water into large stone dams.



The Artists Rock Garden in the foothills of the Magaliesberg mountains was created over a period of 30 years by a married couple, Geoffrey Armstrong (sculptor) and Wendy Vincent (artist). They rescued endangered indigenous plants from threatened locations throughout South Africa and relocated them within their garden, using local rocks and dead wood collected from the surrounding environment.



The Brenthurst Gardens in Parktown, Johannesburg, is a 45-acre (180,000 m^2) estate managed by Strilli Oppenheimer, wife of Nicky Oppenheimer. Built on steep rocky slops, the estate was started in 1906 and has been owned by the Oppenheimer family since 1922. Joane Pim (1904-1974), described as 'one of the most remarkable South African landscapers', began working on the Brenthurst gardens in 1959, leaving her stamp on the garden. Strilli is a firm believer in natural gardening, and believes in letting plants evolve according to their ecology, so some beds have been allowed to re-seed themselves naturally over the years. The gardens are 70 percent indigenous and range from gracious avenues of planes and oaks, to indigenous grass enclaves, beautifully manicured lawns, and several miniature forests – all interspersed with tumbling fountains and sculptures, and several kilometres of stone pathways, with many sculptures throughout. There are several gardens, including an indigenous grass garden, organic vegetable garden and a Japanese garden built by the Japanese Emperor's head gardener.

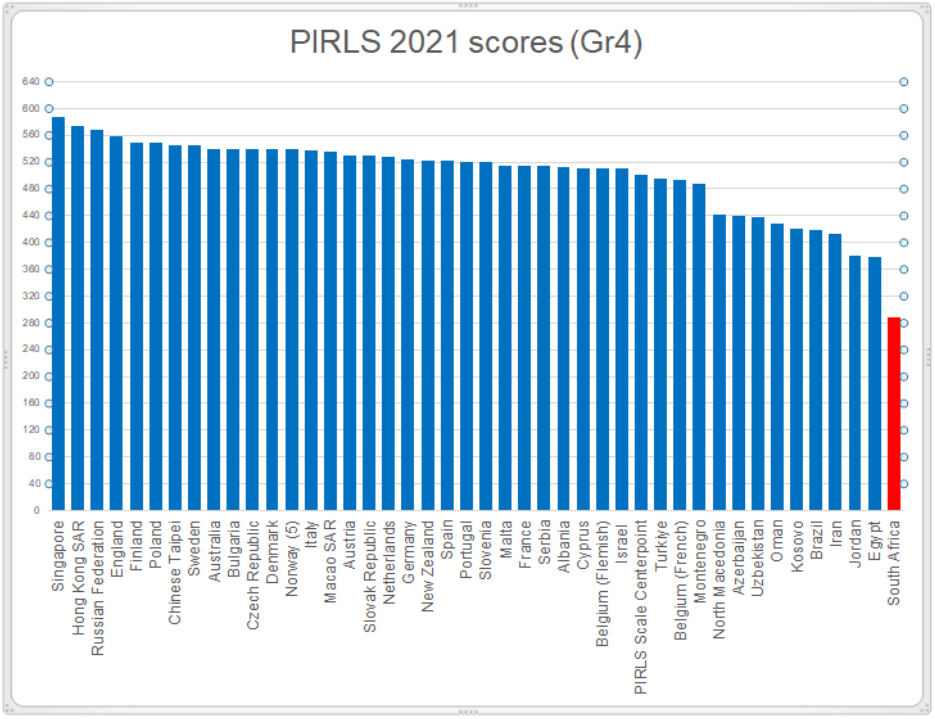


The Thuthuka School Garden in the Tembisa township near Johannesburg grows mostly herbs and organic vegetables, which are used to feed the school children and the surrounding community. Traditional medicinal plants are grown to treat ailments such as children's coughs.

Talks

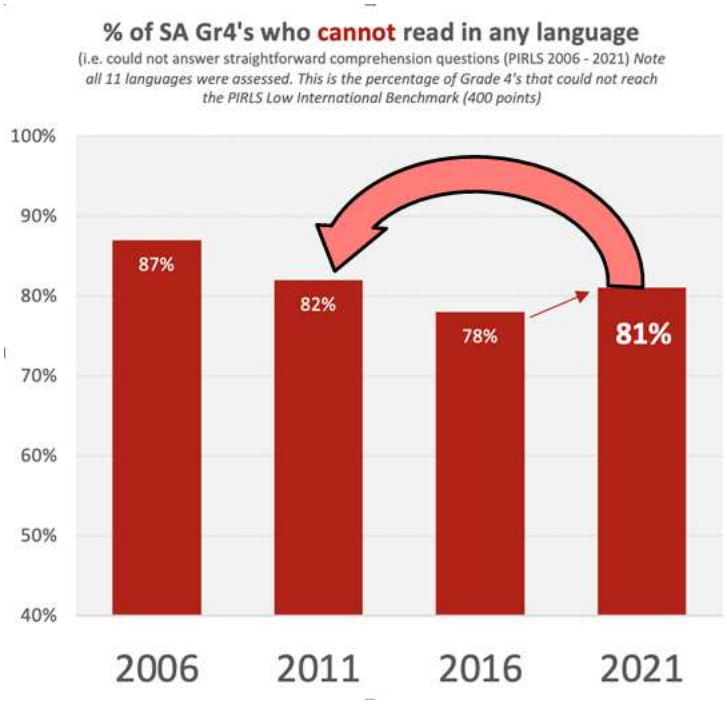
Wednesday 25 October: Penny Vinjevold – South Africa's reading dilemma

The release of the results of the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in May 2023 was met with shock and disbelief in South Africa. This study, conducted in 2021, indicated that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language. Of the 43 countries that participated in PIRLS 2021 South Africa came last with a score of 288 (international average: 500). SA is 2-5 years behind other middle-income countries like Jordan, Egypt, Iran and Brazil.



Brazil and South Africa have roughly the same GDP/capita ($7000/capita). The average Brazilian Grade 4 child is three years ahead of the average South African Grade 4 child. In Brazil 61% of Grade 4's could read at a basic level in 2021 compared to 19% in South Africa.

We have lost a decade of progress. Between 2006 and 2016 the percentage of children that could not read declined from 87% to 78%, but the increase to 81% takes us back to the results of 2011. The four provinces with the biggest declines were North West, Free State, Mpumulanga and Limpopo.



We have a 'generational catastrophe.' More than 4-million children in primary school have experienced more than half their schooling career in a disrupted state due to Covid, either due to school closures or rotational timetables). Global research on school closures due to epidemics or natural disasters show that there are long term consequences to short term crises. These include lower educational attainment, lower earnings, higher unemployment and being more likely

to be in lower skilled occupations in adulthood.

So what is being done? There are various initiatives to improve reading by civil society organisations, human rights organisations, non-government organisations, academics, business and libraries.

Government initiatives: The National Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed a revised Reading Strategy in July 2023 and visited all provinces to promote the strategy. DBE has developed readers for Grades 1 to 3 in all South African languages. These can be downloaded from the DBE website. All provinces have developed Reading Strategies or Plans. (However, these are not necessarily implemented in the schools.) The President's Youth Employment Initiative placed 300 000 young people in schools as teachers' assistants – many are Reading Champions.

From September 2023 onwards the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE) developed the ECDOE Reading Strategy and Campaign and launched the ECDOE Reading Strategy and Campaign. The Reading Strategy was revised to align with DBE National Strategy. In August 2023 the ECDOE issued a circular on the required content of School Reading Policies, with a template and videos. Subject Advisers and Circuit Managers assisted all schools to prepare their School Reading Policies. By the end of October 2023 all schools had to submit their School Reading Policies to Circuit Managers. However, as at 25 October most schools had not yet complied. In September and October 2023 1,1 million open-source graded readers were printed for Foundation Phase learners.

Teacher deployment and training for results is critical. In September 2023 additional teachers were allocated to the Foundation Phase. These will be monitored throughout 2024. From October 2023-December 2030 Foundation Phase Subject Advisers, HODs and teachers will be trained to teach reading. The emphasis will be on phonics training in Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, teaching reading in African Languages, terminology/orthographic rules in Xhosa and Sotho, phonological awareness and handwriting. Communications regarding these initiatives included the distribution videos and jingles on the Reading Strategy, meeting stakeholders such as the Education Advisory Council, addressing the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign structures, media houses, higher education institutions, etc., as well as using print media, social media and radio to advocate the Reading Strategy.

Initiatives of civil society organisations, academics, NGOs:

- The Right to Read Campaign (2021) aims to develop regulations on reading in the Foundation Phase. (South African Human Rights makes the legal argument that the right to read is a basic human right.) The Right to Read Campaign intends to make early-grade literacy a national priority through legislative reform and the development of binding regulations for the first three grades. These regulations should clarify the state's obligations in terms of teaching time, teacher training, quality learner and teacher support materials, and regular literacy testing to ensure that learners can read for meaning by age 10.

- The Reading Panel (2021). Luminaries from academia, civil society and business aim to lobby government to prioritise reading.

- Academic cohort studies of reading achievements by the University of Stellenbosch, UCT, Wits, UJ and others.

- NGOs supply open-source reading material.

To be able to teach reading skills you need books, which are expensive and almost impossible to access in remote rural areas. Penny showed us examples of picture and story books in 11 South African languages for young children of different age groups that are available from Book Dash (bookdash.org). All the books made by Book Dash are published on their website for free. This means anyone can freely read, download, print, translate and share the books. (See also below.)

Penny finished with the question 'What to do now?' This led to a lively discussion from the audience

Penny Vinjevold has worked as a teacher, teacher educator and government official. She taught at schools in Johannesburg, Mafeking and Soweto for 16 years. Thereafter she became the General Manager of Evaluations and Research at the Joint Education Trust. In 1999 she co-edited the book *Getting Learning Right* and managed the research component of the President's Education Initiative. In 2002 she joined the Western Cape Education Department as Chief Director: Planning. She was the Head of Education in the Western Cape from 2009-2016 and worked for Eastern Cape Department of Education 2017-2020. Penny retired in 2020 and has since been a volunteer for the South African Human Rights Commission and the Right to Read Campaign, which is concerned with improving reading in the early grades of schools in South Africa.

Do you want to get involved in improving literacy?

After Penny's talk several people wanted to know what they can do to help improve children's reading skills. Here are some of our current follow-ups:

- **Availability of printed books:** Penny has ordered 20 copies of 12 titles in English and Xhosa for purchase @ R15 each (excludes delivery costs)
- **Local literacy development:** please help us identify local people and organisations involved in developing reading skills
- **Book distribution:** some of us may want to buy books (perhaps as Christmas presents) but may not know where the needs are greatest – which is why we would like to connect to local people involved in developing reading skills, either here and/or in remote rural areas.

Outings

Wednesday, 4 October - Nelson Bay Cave with Hugo Leggatt



Photo: Lorna van der Merwe

Hugo Leggatt and his wife travelled from Wilderness to provide us with a guided tour of Nelson Bay Cave (also known as Wagenaar's Cave) in the Robberg Nature Reserve. The cave shows evidence of human occupation as far back as 125,000 years ago. It is a Stone Age Archaeological site and interpretation centre (within a hut inside the cave) that forms part of the Western Cape's Cradle of Human Culture route.

Robberg is a unique geological site, where some of the oldest and youngest rocks in the world can be found in close proximity to each other. Robberg consists of three distinct layers known as the Robberg formation, where the bottom layer is about 250 million years old and consists mainly of Table Mountain quartzite. The middle layer is comprised of river stone conglomerate, suggesting that Robberg was once a river bed. The top layer is approximately 45 000 years old and consists of sandstone.

The cave has yielded rich archaeological material regarding its intermittent Middle and Later Stone Age occupation, dating back more than 125,000 years. Artefacts and discoveries include stone and bone tools, decorative shells, pottery, ostrich eggshell beads, the use of ochre pigments, and hearths.

The cave was abandoned between 40,000 and 20,000 years ago during the last ice age when the sea level here dropped some 130 metres and the coastline moved about 100 kilometres seaward. Around 22 000 to 14 000 years ago extensive grasslands covered the coastal plateau in the Plettenberg Bay area. The diets of the cave occupants changed depending on how far away the ocean was located. When the sea receded their diet changed to land mammals instead of fish and sea food. The pottery shards and remains of sheep and cattle tell of Khoikhoi farmers who occupied the cave in recent times.



Hugo Leggatt Photo: Jan Hough

Programme calendar

Use our website programme calendar to view our forthcoming events by day, week or month. The calendar is printable. After clicking on a specific event you can click to either invite a friend, RSVP, or copy the event and its details to your online or phone calendar.

Committee

Chair	Jan Hough	084-674-4235
Vice Chair	Lorna van der Merwe	082-784-9903
Secretary	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Facebook	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Finance & DVD library	Ian Hogan	072 940 7298
Marketing & communications	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779
Membership	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Newsletter	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779
Outings	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Programme coordinator	Lynette Timme	079-313-9641
Website	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779

Special interest groups

Chess	Frank Hollenberg	082-566-2964.
Computer basics	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
French conversation (full)	Merle Decot	084 581 7379
French for beginners	Ingrid James	076-689-5245
German	Doris Engelhardt	082 626 0212
Music (Monday Music Memos)	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Poetry group	Chrissy Hay	083-648-0306
Science group	Henry Timme	078-877-5829

General enquiries u3aplett@gmail.com



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