Tsotsi

Student Guide
INTRODUCTION
It is important to remember that the novel and film version of Tsotsi are totally different from each other. The timelines differ as the film version is set in the post-apartheid era and the novel is set during the apartheid era. There are also major plot differences between the novel and film version.

SETTING
Tsotsi is set in an unnamed township just outside Johannesburg (possibly Sophiatown), in the 1950’s. There are references to the bus boycott and the first man-made object to land on the moon. The novel clearly describes the difficulties of living in the townships and a number of passages are critical of the actions taken by the apartheid government and of the society it created.

Sophiatown
Sophiatown, also known as So'ftown or Kofifi, is a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa. Sophiatown was a legendary black cultural hub that was destroyed under apartheid, rebuilt under the name of Triomf, and in 2006 officially returned to its original name. Sophiatown was one of the oldest black areas in Johannesburg and its destruction represents some of the excesses of South Africa under apartheid. Despite the violence and poverty, it was the epicentre of politics, jazz and blues during the 1940s and 1950s. It produced some of South Africa's most famous writers, musicians, politicians and artists.

Sophiatown was originally part of the Waterfall farm. Over time it included the neighbouring areas of Martindale and Newclare. It was purchased by a speculator, Hermann Tobiansky, in 1897. The township was named after Tobiansky's wife, Sophia, and some of the streets were named after his children Toby, Gerty, Bertha and Victoria. Before the enactment of the Natives Land Act, 1913, black South Africans had freehold rights, and they bought properties in the suburb. The distance from the city centre was seen as disadvantageous and after the City of Johannesburg built a sewage plant nearby, the area seemed even less attractive. Because of these and other reasons most of the whites had moved out by 1920, leaving behind a vibrant multi-racial community. By the late 1940s Sophiatown had a population of nearly 54 000 Black Africans, 3 000 Coloureds, 1 500 Indians and 686 Chinese.

Forced removals
As neighbouring white working-class areas, such as Westdene and Newlands, developed adjacent to Sophiatown, the perception arose that the suburb was too close to white suburbia. From 1944 onwards, the Johannesburg City Council planned to move the black population out of the Western Areas, including Sophiatown. After the election victory of the National Party in 1948, relocation plans were debated at the level of national politics. Under the Immorality Amendment Act, No 21 of 1950, people of mixed races could not reside together, which made it possible for the government to segregate the different races.

When the removals scheme was promulgated, Sophiatown residents united to protest against the forced removals, creating the slogan "Ons dak nie, ons phola hier" (we won't move). Father Trevor Huddleston, Nelson Mandela, Helen Joseph and Ruth First played an important role by becoming involved in the resistance. On 9 February 1955, 2 000 policemen, armed with handguns, rifles and clubs known as knobkierries, forcefully moved the black families of
Sophiatown to Meadowlands, Soweto. Other ethnic groups were also moved: Coloured people moved to Eldorado Park in the south of Johannesburg; the Indian community moved to Lenasia; and the Chinese people moved to central Johannesburg. Over the next eight years Sophiatown was flattened and removed from the maps of Johannesburg.

Restoration of the name Sophiatown

The Johannesburg City Council took the decision in 1997 to re-instate the old name Sophiatown for the suburb. On Saturday, 11 February 2006, the process finally came to fruition when Mayor Amos Mosondo reverted the name of Triomf back to Sophiatown.

Early life in Sophiatown

Sophiatown, unlike other townships in South Africa, was a freehold township, which meant that it was one of the rare places in South African urban areas where blacks were allowed to own land. This was land that never belonged to the Johannesburg municipality, and so it never developed the form of municipal "matchbox" houses, built
row upon row, with the same uniformity and lack of character. The houses were built according to people’s ability to pay, tastes, and cultural background. Some houses were built of brick and had four or more rooms; some were much smaller. Others were built like homes in the rural areas; others still were single room shacks put together with corrugated iron and scrap sheet metal. The majority of the families living in Sophiatown were tenants and sub-tenants. Eight or nine people lived in a single room and the houses hid backyards full of shanties built of cardboard and flattened kerosene cans, since many Black property owners in Sophiatown were poor. In order to pay back the mortgages on their properties, they had to take in paying tenants. Sophiatown residents had a determination to construct a respectable lifestyle in the shadow of a state that was actively hostile to such ambitions. A respectable lifestyle rested on the three pillars of religious devotion, reverence for formal education and a desire for law and order.

People struggled to survive together, and a rich culture based on shebeens (informal and mostly illegal pubs), mbaqanga music and beer-brewing developed. The shebeens were one of the main forms of entertainment. People came to the shebeens not only for skokiaan or baberton (illegally self-made alcoholic beverages), but to talk about their daily worries, their political ideas and their fears and hopes. In these shebeens the politicians tried to influence others and get them to conform to their form of thinking. If one disagreed he immediately became suspect and was classified as a police informer.

These two conflicting images of Sophiatown stand side by side - the romantic vision of a unique community juxtaposed with a seedy and violent township with dangers lurking at every corner.
Crime and gangsterism

Crime and violence were a reality of urban life and culture in Sophiatown. The poverty, misery, violence and lawlessness of the city led to the growth of many gangs. Sections of society frowned on gangsterism as anti-social behaviour and gangsters like Kortboy and Don Mattera were despised by many as "anti social". After the Second World War, there was a large increase in the number of gangs in Sophiatown. Part of the reason for this was that there were about 20 000 African teenagers in the city who were not at school and did not have jobs. Township youths were unable to find jobs easily. Employers were reluctant to employ teenagers as they did not have any work experience, and many of them were not able to read or write. They also considered them to be undisciplined and weak.

In Johannesburg in the 1950s, crime was a day-to-day reality, and Sophiatown was the nucleus of all reef crimes. Gangsters were city-bred and spoke a mixture of Afrikaans and English, known as tsotsitaal. Some of the more well-known gangs in Sophiatown were the Russians, the Americans, the Gestapo, the Berliners and the Vultures. The names the Gestapo and the Berliners reflect their admiration for Hitler, whom they saw as some kind of hero, for taking on the whites of Europe. The best known gang from this period, and also best studied, was the Russians. They were a group of Basotho migrant workers who banded together in the absence of any effective law enforcement by either mine owners or the state. The primary goal of this gang was to protect members from the tsotsis and from other gangs of migrant workers, and to acquire and defend resources they found desirable - most notably women, jobs and the urban space necessary for the parties and staged fights that formed the bulk of their weekend entertainment.

ORIGINS OF THE WORD ‘TSOTSI’
The name ‘Tsotsi’ means ‘thug’ and in a strange irony it has its roots in cinema representations. In his autobiography The Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela remembers and defines the tsotsi’s as fedora-wearing gangsters, who imitated the fear inducing gangster noirs of the 1930’s, 40’s and 50’s. It is even thought that the word is a derivation of the word ‘zootsuit’ a type of wide-shouldered, double breastfed suit worn by American gangsters.

It may also be related to the words ‘ho tosha’ which means ‘to make sharp’, not too distant from our own slang – to look sharp.
In the novel ‘Tsotsi’ is not only the name for the main character but it also defines the individual and symbolises a generation.

STRUCTURE
The story is told as a linear narrative. It is a simple story with a beginning and an end. There are flashbacks to Tsotsi’s past, but they are simple so as not to cause confusion to the narrative structure.

PLOT
Tsotsi traces the last days in the life of a ruthless, young gang leader whose life of crime brings him to a crossroads that involves his own self-discovery as a caring human being.
CHAPTER ANALYSIS

Chapter 1
There are four members of the gang: Tsotsi, Die Aap, Butcher and Boston. Boston, the clever one, Die Aap, the strong one, and Butcher, the accurate killer. The boys are having a general talk and drinking in Tsotsi’s room. Tsotsi clasps his hands as if in prayer and decides that they should take a train. They walked down the street looking for a victim. When they get to the trains they see their victim, Gumboot Dhlamini, he is a hardworking, larger man. Almost year has passed since Gumboot left his pregnant wife for work, and he is excited to return home to write her a letter which will inform her that he will be returning home in a week.

The train station
Gumboot makes three mistakes:

1. He smiles at Tsotsi
2. He is wearing a bright red tie which makes him easy to follow and
3. he exposes his pay packet to everyone.

By describing these things in detail the author creates suspense. Also by including the personal details of Gumboot's life, a random act of violence committed by the gang, makes Gumboot's death intensely personal. The irony of Gumboot's smile is that he has nothing to smile about – he will never see his wife again or his child – the gangsters are planning to murder him for his money. The fact that Tsotsi whispers an ‘obscene reference to his mother’ in Gumboot’s ear as he dies highlights how mean-spirited and soulless Tsotsi is. He comes across as a character for whom there is no hope of redemption.

On the train Die Aap grabs Gumboot's arms and Butcher works a bicycle spoke up into his heart before Gumboot even realises that he cannot move his arms. Boston grabs
Gumboot’s pay packet and they exit the train before anyone has noticed what has happened.

In this chapter there are references to the passing of time as ‘shadows’ that are either ‘not yet long enough’ or the sun that ‘must be low’. The effect of these references imply that the men are about to take part in actions that are ‘dark’. It foreshadows the horror to come.

Also the constant reference to ‘(ten minutes late)’... if the train had been on time Gumboot may have lived. His path would not have crossed Tsotsi’s. Also the term ‘late’ is often used as a euphemistic term for death. Tsotsi has definite perceptions of each of the gang members:

1. He feels that he can trust Die Aap.

2. He feels that he should ‘never turn his back’ on Butcher, because he cannot trust him.
3. He knows that Boston is scared of him – ‘Your smile hides fear’

Boston’s reactions differ to that of the other members of the gang, because he does not follow Tsotsi blindly and questions his decision that they find their next victim at the train.

The fact that Butcher fetches the bicycle spoke before they leave foreshadows the imminent murder of Gumboot Dhlamini. It also serves to remind us that Butcher never misses his target. This creates tension.

The gang have a bad reputation in the community and this is noticed when men look the other way as the gang passes, the women call in their children and lights are turned off in the houses.
Chapter 2

The gang are at Soekie’s house drinking, laughing, and having a great time. Soekie’s place seems to be well established. There are chairs and tables. It is not in a good area, though, and is in a bad condition. There is no lampshade on the bulb, and the light casts ‘sinister’ shadows, implying that it is a place of ill repute.

Butcher was drinking the fastest and getting drunk the fastest, because he kept asking Soekie; for more. It is clear that Boston was ill after the killing of Gumboot and that he is ‘losing control’ – he spits and talks loudly in the bar.

Rosie is a friend of Soekie, and is sitting in the corner passed out. She was seducing the boys, mostly Butcher, and then Butcher and Die Aap were playing around with her. Tsotsi found it fine but Boston found it to be sickening, because he has decency. Then later Butcher and Die Aap went outside and raped Rosie. Rosie is a symbol of the moral decline and desperation of the township. Her drinking is clearly out of control, and she is physically and mentally abused by Die Aap and Butcher – another sign of the society in decline.

Soekie’s Place

The focus is now on Tsotsi and the mysterious past that he hides even from himself. He does not allow anyone to question him about his past, because he does not know the answers. He refuses to acknowledge any feelings or any sort of identity formulated by his own roots. He forces himself to live in his fixed crime-ridden present. He does not even have a real name – ‘tsotsi’ is an informal name for a violent, young criminal or gangster.

Boston is plagued by feelings of guilt and self-disgust after the senseless, cold-blooded murder of Gumboot Dhlamini. He wants to know if Tsotsi shares these feelings. Boston asks Tsotsi many questions and this has a profound effect on Tsotsi, who does not remember much of his past. Tsotsi is sent over the edge by Boston saying that everyone has a soul and he fears the day that Tsotsi discovers his own soul. Tsotsi reacts violently and savagely beats Boston.

Boston’s words ‘Everything you are not’ indicates that he does not think much of Die Aap and Butcher. One could say that Boston offers ‘educated perspective’ as he is a trained teacher. He seems more emotionally sensitive, because he is more ‘cultured than the rest of the gang.
Chapter 3
This chapter starts off with a contrasting mood in comparison to the previous chapter – ‘gentle attitudes of waiting for the rain’. People are described laughing and talking about everyday things where in the previous chapter, there is clearly alcohol and drug abuse, as well as violence towards women.

Tsotsi reflects on beating up Boston, and his hatred for him. Tsotsi keeps running to forget Boston’s words (which are repeated throughout the chapter). He physically tries to block the words out by covering his ears with his hands. He is upset by the questions, because he doesn’t know the answers to them He reveals he picked Boston because, like everyone else, he had a virtue; he was clever. Boston is needed in the gang, because he could identify details that could be dangerous to their operations.

Tsotsi reveals he has devised three rules to stay in control:
1. the rule of the waking moment – he had to have his knife;
2. never to disturb the inward darkness – does not attempt to remember; and he is afraid that the childhood memories might distract him.
3. And not to ask questions – about himself or others (the rule Boston broke).

They are all geared towards maintaining his inner darkness and fending off painful memories of his past.
The first thing he focuses on when he wakes everyday is the knife – the symbol of his savage heartless way of life. The knife stands for the obsession with violence that rules his existence.

The second rule has to do with fending off and ignoring associations from his past (like the incident with Petah) so that he does not become distracted.
He also tolerates no questions as he has no answers and therefore is in constant danger of facing the nothingness that lies behind the façade (front) of the life that he believes in and is living. Therefore, paradoxically, the only way he is able to affirm his life in the face of this belief is through pain, fear and death.

As Tsotsi moves along we start forming a picture of the apartheid period of South Africa. The author refers to the white suburbs that are separated from the township by a ‘no-man’s land’. There are also references to much better policing in the white suburbs.

The warning roll of thunder is ominous and foreshadows what is to happen. Tsotsi was planning on attacking and rape a woman but instead receives a baby in a box. Little does he know that this baby will transform his whole meaningless, savage, heartless way of life.
Chapter 4
Tsotsi keeps the baby and realises it needs milk to survive. He goes to Cassim’s shop to get milk for the baby, but cannot find a way to ask him for it. We learn that Tsotsi cannot read and is not as self-confident as he seemed previously. He enters and leaves the store repeatedly before mustering the courage to interact with Cassim. Tsotsi returns to his room to clean and feed the baby before hiding it in the ruins. Tsotsi remembers the “yellow bitch” and starts to ask questions about his past.

The narration in this chapter, changes. It is still in the third person narration, but told from the perspective of Cassim, the owner of Ramadoola, General Dealer.

In the opening lines, the author refers to a man who ‘darkened the doorway’. The shadow of a man appears right throughout the chapter until we realise that it is Tsotsi, asking for ‘baby milk’. The image is ominous. Cassim uses the words ‘bad eggs’ and we clearly understand how the community perceives the gang. The author breaks the tension by incorporating some humour. Cassim’s reaction to the situation is humorous; he is described as saying ‘yes’ for a five seconds and then farting. Cassim is so surprised by Tsotsi’s request for milk that he thinks he has misunderstood.

The streets, in this chapter, are described as days of the week. This gives us an insight to the different people of the township. ‘Saturday street’ is filled with people with money to spend, and a ‘Sunday street’ is lazy and relaxed. The people open up and make a path for Tsotsi, because they have their week’s salaries with them and they know that the gangsters will kill them for their money.

Tsotsi covers his window, because it protects him from the elements and he wants privacy. The baby boy evokes a strange feeling in the young thug. He feels awe at the realisation that a man can begin his existence in such a state of helpless dependence. He finds that he must unwrap and clean the befouled, crying baby. He cleans and feeds it fearful of the gang arriving and finding him with the baby.

In this chapter the forced removals of the Group Areas Act is mentioned. People of colour were forcefully relocated, because the areas they were living in were zoned as ‘white areas’. One of the Johannesburg townships was known as Sophiatown and when the people were relocated it became Triomf. Black people were relocated to SOWETO – which is an acronym for South Western Townships.

At the end of the chapter Tsotsi has a memory about a dog – the ‘yellow bitch’. This sudden memory ‘stabbed his darkness’. He suddenly has a need to know everything about his life. Tsotsi has also discovered that the baby is his ‘talisman’, his lucky charm and that he would keep it to work its magic again. He hides the baby in the ruins and decides to return to feed and clean it the next day. He cannot fully understand his own motives in saving the life of the baby. He resents the ‘weak hold it had found on his life...he was chancing his hand at a game he had never dared play and the baby was the dice...’.
Chapter 5
The novel slows down in this chapter as we see the burial of Gumboot Dhlamini and how the pastor is losing his faith because he is burying another nameless man.

The author makes a socio-political statement with the descriptions of the cemetery and burial. The apartheid regime relocated people without thinking of essential human needs – including where people needed to bury their dead. The Reverend Henry Ransome also does not care about the people of his parish.

Boston awakes from his unconscious state and manages his first movements in a long time. This description reminds us of how violent Tsotsi can be and one starts fearing for the safety of the baby.

Butcher and Die Aap discuss Boston’s beating and what it means for the future of the gang. Tsotsi arrives, but he is vague and less enthusiastic.

Butcher comments on the smell in the room. This is a reminder of both the presence of the baby in Tsotsi’s life and Tsotsi’s inability to take care of it properly. Both these elements create tension. They begin the ritual again but without Boston’s stories and the conversation quickly runs dry.

The words ‘something had tampered with the mechanism that had governed his life’ brings the realisation that Tsotsi will no longer be able to function as the hard gangster any more. Tsotsi finds the presence of the gang members an encumbrance and he struggles to formulate a plan for the next ‘job’. He usually makes decisions governed by ‘dark impulses’, but this is not working. Tsotsi is forced to make a decision on where the next job will be. They determine that they will go to the city for a job. Tsotsi does not specify what they will be doing.
Chapter 6
Tsotsi and his gang arrive on the outskirts of the city. They go to the Terminal Place which is a shopping centre. This is where the gangsters go to do their 'work' that night. It is the meeting place of the 'glittering' world of the white man and the dusty world of those living in the townships. The long description adds tension and suspense. Tsotsi loses his gang in a crowd of people in Terminal Place.

Tsotsi chooses his next victim when he steps on a cripple by the name of Morris Tshabalala. Morris utters the words 'Whelp of a yellow bitch' and this starts to trigger memories in Tsotsi's head.

This chapter mainly focuses on Morris Tshabalala. Morris pays attention to Tsotsi, because his hands are often stepped on by people in the street and people apologise, but Tsotsi does not apologise – he just stares at Morris with a cold, remote look in his eyes.

We learn about Morris’s past. He lost his legs in a mining accident. He feels like a “half-man” The author uses Morris’s character to criticize the unfairness of the world created by apartheid, because he had worked on the mines for a meagre salary. Even though he was injured at work, he is not given the skills or means to fend for himself. He is not able to find work, and is forced to live as a beggar on the streets. He states that ‘You are walking on stolen legs’, meaning that the city was built on the riches of mines that destroyed his life.

He realizes he is being followed, because he sees Tsotsi looking at him from across the road and hiding in doorways. He continues on his way hoping to lose him before he gets to the dark section of his journey home. He stops in the Bantu House. He stays there until the eating house closes, hoping that it will deter Tsotsi.

When he leaves he realises Tsotsi is still there. He tries to crawl away. Tsotsi starts taunting Morris by throwing stones at him. Morris turns and starts hurling insults at Tsotsi as he approaches. Tsotsi seems more intent on murder than robbery. The chapter ends with Morris looking back to see Tsotsi vanish into the shadows.
Chapter 7
This chapter traces an important turning point for Morris.

Stepping on Morris’s crippled hand has brought back memories of Tsotsi’s childhood – remembering a ‘yellow bitch’ (dog) crawling towards him just as Morris crawls now. The similarities are striking calling back the memory with great pain. This intrigues Tsotsi as he continues to follow Morris through the crowded area observing without being observed. Morris at first symbolises ‘the grotesque anatomy of life’ to Tsotsi. Morris points to all that is twisted and ugly in the world. He stands for the truth of the ‘basic horror of existence’.

Tsotsi follows the man out of the Terminal Place and into the twilight. He is both frightened and intrigued by what lies before him, wishing again to have his memory jolted but knowing that it is against everything he has stood for. Tsotsi chooses Morris, because for him the world is an ugly place and Morris is the epitome of this ugliness.

Tsotsi realises that he is not after Morris’s money. He is driven to destroy him, because he is ugly, and he has residual anger towards Boston that he wants to take out on Morris. He has a profound thought about the truth of life: life is ugly and staying alive is horrific.

As Tsotsi follows the beggar he notices many details; the speed with which the cripple tries to get away, his grunts of effort as he pushes onwards with his arms, even the fear in the way he moves. This all means nothing to the old Tsotsi but something in him has changed. He feels for the man. Tsotsi feels sympathy.

He continues to follow Morris as he makes his way from street to street stopping only when tired or briefly to eat at the Bantu Eating House. Finally the two are alone and Tsotsi realises it is time to do the only thing he knows well – kill. He must kill the beggar. He approaches and caught in the light cast from the street lamp overhead the beggar faces his follower. The significance of Tsotsi commenting on the ‘same light’ that fell on the baby and even Gumboot Dhlamini is that previously Tsotsi was associated with the shadows and was drawn by a dark purpose. The presence of ‘light’, and Tsotsi’s observance of it, suggests an inner change is beginning to blossom.
Instead of attacking and killing Morris, Tsotsi asks Morris how he feels. He asks Morris about his life and how he had lost his legs and why he wishes to live. Morris gives Tsotsi all the reasons why he wants to live – the sun, the rain. For the first time Tsotsi realises that killing is a choice. He lets the beggar live.

Tsotsi becomes more determined to find out about his past, after Morris asks him how old he is. Morris also tells Tsotsi that Mothers love their children but Tsotsi is adamant that they do not and walks away. Tsotsi heads back to the township, his mind reeling with thoughts. When he sits down to rest he is overwhelmed with thoughts of Boston, the beggar and the baby. He becomes aware of what ‘plot twists’ a simple day can bring. ‘One day had shaken the whole basis of his life’. Tsotsi has feelings of confusion, anger and excitement as he literally passes out and sleeps in the ‘veld’

Chapter 8
Church bells toll and the reverend contemplates his faith in God. He is painfully aware of the inadequacy of the mission. The Gumboot Dhlamini’s are not here. He cannot help them. They remain the anonymous victims of this unjust crime-ridden place. Boston also hears the church bells. He is still recovering from Tsotsi’s vicious attack.

Tsotsi himself has embarked on a spiritual journey. He is in a state of near panic and despair. The church and Reverend Ransome are following the outward rituals of spirituality, but lack the depth and earnestness of Tsotsi’s quest.

Tsotsi returns to the ruins and finds that the condensed milk has attracted ants which have attacked the baby. He realises the baby is close to death because he is barely breathing and his eyes have lost focus. Instead of running away because of the emergency, he stays and rescues the baby. He also realises that he can no longer feed the baby condensed milk and needs to find proper nourishment for the child. He then wraps the baby in his coat and takes it back to his room.

Fugard switches perspective and talks about ‘Waterworks Square’, the townships only water tap (where everyone meets) and Miriam Ngidi, and how her husband left her and now she is left to raise 6 month old Simon by herself. There is a sharp contrast between Miriam’s social skills and Tsotsi’s – probably because of his lack of upbringing – and he forces Miriam to feed and clean the baby as he does not know any other way to ask. We also see that his transformation is far from complete.

She stands up to him and challenges him with the words ‘a bitch in her backyard would look after its puppies better’ and this has a profound effect on Tsotsi. Tsotsi is starting to remember more of his past.
Tsotsi has a flashback to his past. He remembers his mom and grandma chatting and the news that his father will finally be returning home, and then the pain – he recalls the night his mother was taken from him – the last night before his father returned. We also hear Tsotsi’s birth name for the first time – David. Tsotsi’s mother is a loving mother who cares deeply for her son. It is the portrait of a loving mother and the protected childhood that Tsotsi enjoyed until the age of 10. His mother talks about his father often and his imminent return. The boy has a fantasy vision about his father. His grandma seemed to be a bitter, vindictive old woman, who is more than sceptical about the missing father.

The reference to ‘Pas’ in Afrikaans refers to the ‘dompas’ that every non-white South African had to carry during apartheid. Without it a person would be arrested and detained indefinitely. The police used to raid townships in the middle of the night to find people who did not have passes. Many families were broken up in this way, and many children were left to fend for themselves as the children were left homeless. Tsotsi is the result of the cycle of abuse. It is a time of terror and confusion which leaves the boy abandoned after his mother’s arrest. David’s grandma sets off to go and find Tondi (Tsotsi’s mother). The suddenness with which everything happened is the most painful to David. David is left to fend for himself.

His father arrives and goes into a rage when he realizes that David’s mother has been taken. He kicks the dog, breaking its back. David runs away after his father leaves and he witnesses the dog giving birth to a stillborn litter. All these happenings in a very short time, has an incredible effect on David. He is taken in by the river gang of 7 boys who are in a similar situation to him and learns many harsh lessons that turn him into a thug. As he starts his new life, he chooses a new name, Tsotsi. He started developing a set of rules that take him down his future path. He also realises that the only way to survive is never to feel the pain he inflicts on others and to purposely forget his past.
Chapter 10
In this chapter Tsotsi comes to terms with the huge turning point in his life that he appears to have arrived at. Finally the riddle of the yellow bitch has been solved. He finally has a clear vision of his past – the night he lost his loving mother and his secure home and entered a pain – filled existence dominated by merciless cruelty and crime and the need to survive at all costs.

Tsotsi wakes up, to an insistent knocking on his door. At first he is confused and then his first comprehensive thoughts are of Miriam and then of the baby. The fact that he only thinks of his knife, after that, shows that he no longer thinks of killing as his first priority. The insistent knocking is Die Aap and Tsotsi does not want him there. Tsotsi ‘gently hid the baby under the bed’. This shows Tsotsi’s growing compassion.

Tsotsi cannot think of a clear reason to give Die Aap about why he does not want him there except to utter the words ‘My mother’. Die Aap doesn’t understand, but Tsotsi comes to the realisation that everyone has a mother.

Die Aap informs Tsotsi that Butcher is gone and will not return. He was angry at Tsotsi for doing a job alone. This brings another realisation – Boston is gone, Butcher is gone therefore the gang is finished. He has a fleeting thought about starting a new gang, but then remembers the life before gangs. Die Aap seems to have some sort of blind loyalty (‘Two years Tsotsi’) towards Tsotsi and he would probably be lost without the gang as it provides him with security and an identity. Tsotsi, however, says that that the gang is finished. Die Aap leaves. He has decided that the old life is finished and he rejects the gang.

Tsotsi has named the baby David. He waits for Miriam to go to the water point again and then finds her to feed the baby. Miriam comes prepared and Tsotsi realises that she wants to be there. Miriam asks to have the baby, to take care of him. Tsotsi says ‘no’, because he realizes the baby is letting him remember his past – such as the ‘yellow bitch’ and the pipes. He leaves, taking the baby with him, to hide in the ruins – probably because he knows that if the baby wakes up and cries, its cries would draw unwanted attention and the baby might be taken from him. He is intent on keeping the baby. He goes in search of Boston.

Chapter 11
This chapter charts the life – changing journey Tsotsi is undergoing. Tsotsi locates Boston at Marty’s shebeen, passed out on the floor. When Tsotsi walks in the customers avoid making eye contact with him and Marty is clearly apprehensive and aggressive towards him. The comparison of Tsotsi carrying Boston ‘like a baby’ highlights the change in Tsotsi and emphasises the link between Tsotsi’s quest, the baby and Boston.

He brings him home to get him to talk. Tsotsi thinks that Boston can give him answers, because Boston has had an education and clearly knows things.

When Tsotsi sees Boston lying naked on the bed he is shocked at how thin Boston has become and is driven to go out and get food, which he later offers to Boston. ‘Taking care of’ has become a part of Tsotsi’s psyche. He tastes and feels Boston’s tears – he is beginning to sense
both physically and emotionally the extent of the pain that he has inflicted. Tsotsi is deeply affected. He is trembling and dizzy – this is the dawning of a change in character.

Boston’s life is revealed. He was born Walter Nguza, a gifted child who won a number of scholarships that eventually led to his studying to be a teacher. Clearly nervous and highly strung, he was often warned that he was going to have a breakdown if he did not slow down. He was accused of raping a student just before his final exams, and was expelled. Too afraid to break his mother’s heart he lied to her and did not return home. Boston lived on the fringe of society, making money stamping passes and work permits illegally. This is how he met Butcher and eventually became part of Tsotsi’s gang. He is 24 years old.

Boston notices a change in Tsotsi’s eyes. They no longer reveal the ‘darker’ purpose’ that drove him: ‘Where there had been darkness there was something like light’. In the beginning of the novel Tsotsi had been associated with images of darkness and shadows, but now he is revealed as having an inner light.

Tsotsi tells his story to Boston and Boston seems surprised at the mercy that Tsotsi had shown the beggar and then realises that all human beings can be shown mercy and can show mercy. We can assume that Boston recognises his own need for mercy. Boston tells him we are all sick of life and to seek for God. Tsotsi gives him sour-milk and bread, but Boston refuses and goes in search of his mother.

He has come a long way from being a vile gangster. He has a new – found capacity to feel pity and compassion for the victim, Boston. This brings some light into the inner darkness of his being.

Chapter 12
The resolution of the novel...
In this, the final chapter we firstly encounter Isaiah planting plants in the church garden. Isobel Marriot allows the reader to take a break from Tsotsi’s soul searching. Her
character also highlights the arrogant way in which whites treated blacks during the apartheid era. This scene creates tension, as we know that it is in this environment that Tsotsi is going to come and find ‘God’

Father Ransome’s purpose with the people is questionable. He has made no effort to teach Isaiah about God and equates the ringing of the church bell to becoming closer to God. No effort is made to get to know Isaiah.

Tsotsi goes to the church in an effort to find God. At first Isaiah resists talking to Tsotsi, because he still has the gangster image which is associated with drinking, killing and theft. Isaiah comments on how tired Tsotsi looks. It is clear that Tsotsi’s search for answers has tired him both emotionally and physically. One feels true empathy for Tsotsi. His conversations with Isaiah appear to give him some answers.

Miss Marriot’s comments that they ‘don’t allow strangers in the grounds’ and then later, that ‘he’s welcome to pray’ are contradictory and ironic. The church is there to welcome the unconverted so that they can become believers. If no strangers are allowed on the church grounds, there can be no conversions and the church will not be able to do its work.

Isaiah’s interpretation that all God wants is for people to do good and stop ‘stealing, and killing and robbing’ is similar to Tsotsi’s realisation in Chapter 10. Tsotsi comments that there is no need for revenge or hate. The presence of light in his life makes his reaction instinctive.

He returns home and feels ‘lighter’. Miriam sees him coming and goes to feed the baby. Tsotsi is no longer aggressive towards Miriam, and he trusts her. Miriam also appears to trust Tsotsi and generously pays for the medicine that the baby needs. Miriam explains that her husband, Simon, is dead but she has made peace with the idea and thinks of her son, Simon and of David. She remains positive and resolves to carry on the struggle of raising Simon on her own. She possesses the true generosity of ubuntu: she offers to take care of the baby permanently and she sees Tsotsi is weak and tired and gives him food and drink.

Miriam hangs the white washing on the line. The white washing is symbolic. The very white light shining off the washing confirms that Tsotsi is moving into the light. Tsotsi leaves, taking the baby with him. Although he trusts Miriam, he does not trust her enough yet to leave the child with her. She greets him and asks him to come back. She calls him Tsotsi and he corrects her and ‘introduces’ himself as David Madondo. Tsotsi is no more...David Madondo has returned to his soul.

The novel ends both tragically and satirical. Fugard makes it clear that the further demolition of MaRhabatse’s home stems from the apartheid authorities’ racist policies. It was in fact these policies that brought about the traumas visited upon the young David Madondo which tore him away from his loving mother and delivered him onto the mean streets of Egoli. Tsotsi dies tragically while trying to save the baby when the ‘whites’ bulldoze the ruins. When his body is uncovered there is a beautiful smile on his face. He clearly thought that he was going to be able to save the baby. He thought as he was about to die that he had done ‘good’.
CHARACTER ANALYSIS
Tsotsi (David Madondo)

As a boy Tsotsi was innocent and content, living as a victim of apartheid. His mother was taken from him and his grandma abandons him in search of his mother. He is left alone to witness the return of his father.

We come to understand the immense impact, the night before his father returned and the day his father returned, had on him. His mother, who was a loving and caring woman, is taken away in a raid by the apartheid police. This is a great shock to the young David’s system. His grandmother leaves to find Tondi (Tsotsi’s mother).

His father’s return leaves further scars, when the man walks into the house looking for his wife and paying no attention to the young David. He walks outside and kicks David’s dog, breaking her back and David watches as the dog gives birth to stillborn puppies and then dies. David’s father has left and he is now on his own.

He leaves the house and meets a group of 7 boys (Petah’s gang) and they accept him. This gang changed his identity; he became Tsotsi after several days and participated in crime with them. He states: ‘My name is Tsotsi’. This transformation from an innocent boy to a hardened young man has resulted in him living a life of robbery, rape and murder. He no longer has a use for past memories and his conscience no longer exists. He has learnt the ‘gangster code’ and this is what sets him on the path for his future. Tsotsi has ‘street smarts’. He is not educated – he cannot read or write (illiterate) – he therefore does not question anything. He acts on impulse and instinct.

He has a code that he lives by:
1. the rule of the working moment – always able to see his knife;
2. never to disturb the inward darkness – does not attempt to remember; he is afraid that the childhood memories might distract him.
3. Not to tolerate questions – about himself or others (the rule Boston broke).

He becomes leader of a gang who commits crimes in order to survive.

Throughout the novel we see an evolution of Tsotsi’s character from a hard, uncaring individual to a man with an understanding much greater than that of an average man. In the early stages Tsotsi demonstrates his hard, uncaring shell when he seeks out his victim Gumboot Tshabalala with the stealth of a predator hunting its prey. He kills him for no other reasons than the colour of his tie, his smile and the pay packet. An innocent man dies and his death is pointless.

Underneath it all there is a man that is scared of what caring could do to him. Tsotsi carries fear in his heart. A fear of the past and the fear of what these memories could bring him. He is systematically forced to face these fears as the memories he suppressed start to surface. The three rules are starting to diminish and through his interaction with others he changes back from Tsotsi to David.

Boston’s words send Tsotsi over the edge and he starts to think. He remembers things from his past. He also takes the baby and becomes caring towards it. A light starts to grow within him. The baby acts as a catalyst for his journey of self-discovery.
As he starts his journey towards self-discovery he encounters Morris the beggar and eventually lets him live when Morris tells him he wants to live. While Tsotsi follows Morris we also notice that he observes Morris’s every move and starts to feel sympathy for the crippled beggar, because the baby has changed his value for life. Morris reminds Tsotsi of his dog who was powerless in a similar situation. The sympathy he attains is translated to when he and Morris interact and he decides to let him live, as Morris explains he must. Not only has Tsotsi’s outlook changed but Morris now values his own life as well. Their exchange also leaves Tsotsi with the belief that he must value the little things in life in order to become redeemed.

Tsotsi finds Boston and takes him to his house where he nourishes him like a mother would. Tsotsi leaves his rule about questions behind and his only desire is to seek answers to his questions. Boston explains that everyone is sick from life – living in apartheid – and in order to further pursue the answers to his questions he must find God. This leads Tsotsi to Isaiah who teaches him more about God and what he can do for you. He explains to Tsotsi what sins are and the consequences of them. He tells Tsotsi that to further understand God he must attend church. Tsotsi agrees to this and this shows that he is truly committed to do whatever it takes to pursue his goal of redemption. He returns home feeling ‘lighter’.

Miriam also plays a role in changing Tsotsi. At first he threatens her, showing that the change within him is not complete. In their subsequent interactions Tsotsi no longer has to intimidate her to receive nourishment for the baby. In their final interaction – after Tsotsi comes back from meeting Isaiah – she opens up to him, explaining how her husband is dead and she accepts that she must move on. This belief transfers to Tsotsi and resonates with him. From her belief he understands that you can’t let your past determine your future and you must continue living on despite past influences. This is the next step towards redemption, as it allows him not to dwell on the mistakes of his past. This understanding makes it possible for him to realise he can leave his past lifestyle behind. She shows him trust and he starts to trust her – although not completely enough to leave the baby with her.

These events collectively influence Tsotsi to become David again, a human with a soul. He is no longer a murderous Tsotsi but a compassionate and loving young man. These new values are what drive him to attempt to save the baby at the end of the novel. His instinct of killing has shifted to an instinct of saving lives without hesitation. When his body is discovered he has a beautiful smile on his face, showing that he has no regrets and is pleased with who he has become.

This is the ultimate sacrifice in life and the final step for Tsotsi to attain full redemption from past sins, becoming David – a new admirable man.
Boston
Boston is the ‘brains’ of the gang. He went to university but was accused of raping a fellow student before his final exams and was expelled. This alters his future path and he resorts to crime for survival. He is a very knowledgeable character and always entertains the gang with stories. He constantly asks Tsotsi questions, which go against Tsotsi’s last two rules. These questions cause Tsotsi to eventually react violently towards Boston and he almost beats him to death. Tsotsi beats Boston because of the questions and because Boston accuses Tsotsi of having no decency. This influences Tsotsi’s decisions throughout the novel. At the end of the novel Tsotsi seeks Boston out and cares for him in order to discover the answers to the questions Boston asked earlier. Boston acts as a catalyst for Tsotsi’s search for God. He tells Tsotsi that he must seek out God to get more answers and tells Tsotsi that everyone is ‘sick from life’. Not only does he help Tsotsi understand what he must do to seek further redemption but the exchange they have also makes Boston realise that he must go back home and seek redemption from his mother.

Butcher
Like all black males living in South Africa at the time, Butcher is a victim of apartheid. These men take all means to survive and we see this expressed in the way Butcher lives his day to day life in the gang. To them he is the killer – he never misses a strike and is the go-to man when the job needs to get done. Violence is the way he has learned to survive, because it is the only way he knows. To Tsotsi, Butcher isn’t much but a person in his gang who is a skillful and ruthless killer. Tsotsi doesn’t trust Butcher and knows that he should not turn his back on him. Butcher is a flat character that does not show development. He simply disappears after feeling betrayed by Tsotsi, because he thought Tsotsi had done a job on his own. He has probably moved on to the next gang.

Die Aap
Die Aap was given his name based solely on his appearance – he has very long arms and is stronger than the rest of the gang members. He is also a product of the apartheid system. The three other gang members view him as a threat. Although he is older than Tsotsi; he views Tsotsi as a role model. Die aap is extremely loyal and when Tsotsi disbands the gang he is upset, because he feels as if they were brothers. During his last interaction with Die Aap, Tsotsi does come to the realisation that everyone has a mother. Die Aap leaves, seemingly lost. He does not mean much to Tsotsi and does not play much of a role in the understanding of the novel other than being the person that Tsotsi tells that the gang is over. He is also a flat character that shows no development in the course of the novel. He, just like Butcher, will probably also just move on to the next gang.

The Baby
The baby is introduced relatively early in the novel. Tsotsi is given it in the bluegum trees by a frightened woman who he intended to rape. As the plot progresses we come to see, the baby represents innocence, kindness, and the positives of human nature just like David, before he became Tsotsi. Tsotsi recognises that and names the baby David, after his past self. The baby helps Tsotsi become David again, through simple life lessons such as caring and nurturing and responsibility for others. By nurturing the baby, Tsotsi is developing a compassionate outlook. At the end of the novel when David Madondo sacrifices his own safety for that of the baby, he is actually saving himself. By his efforts to save the baby, he is actually saving himself. By his efforts to save the baby his
instincts have changed from violence – a street thug - to compassion – like a mother, saving his humanity. The ultimate redemption of becoming David again.

**Morris**
Morris is a cripple who lost his legs in a mineshaft collapse. He has lost his dignity and is ashamed of the way he must get his money in order to survive – begging. He believes he is a half-man. When Tsotis’s gang goes to Terminal Place, Tsotsi steps on Morris’s hands and decides that Morris will be his next victim. However, while stalking him, Tsotsi starts feeling sympathy for the crippled man, because he reminds him of the ‘yellow bitch’. Morris is the catalyst for Tsotsi remembering the dog he had as a child. He is also a symbol for South Africa – a nation crippled by apartheid laws. Morris helps the reader understand and see the pivotal moment that the shift within Tsotsi occurs. Morris shows Tsotsi the value of the little things in life (the sun and the rain). He also shows Tsotsi that one can make choices about things. With his reactions he creates and helps Tsotsi develop the ability to show decency and allows Tsotsi to make choices that affect others, rather than just himself. Morris’s final words to Tsotsi are that all mothers love their children.

**Miriam**
Miriam is an eighteen year old with a young baby, more or less David’s age. Like many other young women in South Africa, Miriam has been abandoned by her husband, Simon, and left with a child to care for all on her own. Tsotsi’s mother and the lady who gave Tsotsi the baby were put in the same situation. Miriam is a symbol for these women. Gumboot also left his pregnant wife. Miriam is the woman who is forced, by Tsotsi, to feed David. She symbolises motherhood and nurturing and desperately wants to keep little David. She performs motherly acts towards Tsotsi as well and teaches him how to love again. She shows Tsotsi – through her acceptance of her own fate – that we must not live in the past and need to move on with life and never give up.

**Isaiah**
Isaiah and Tsotsi meet at the church near the end of the novel. They engage in a short, yet life changing conversation. In the Bible Isaiah is the inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God, and in the novel he teaches Tsotsi about God. He tells Tsotsi about the consequences of sin and that God is inside the church. Although we know that this is Isaiah’s simplistic way of explaining things, Tsotsi takes these words to heart and it engages his interest for attending the church even more. Tsotsi had been looking for God and that is why he went to Boston; Isaiah is his door to God. Isaiah allows Tsotsi to understand the possibilities Christianity brings.
THEMES

Redemption
Fugard wants his readers to understand that redemption can be attained by even the most corrupted individuals if one choices to make change in their life. Tsotsi’s violence and indifference towards his victims make him a corrupted thug, but because of the changes he makes, he finds redemption and is reborn with the innocence he had as a child – as David Mondondo. His choices that lead him to forgiveness started with receiving the baby; he began to care for it which started to trigger memories from his past. Then through caring for the baby, and other events like his discussion with Morris, Tsotsi begins to value life. Later he remembers his past: the night his mother got taken away, his father killing the dog and him running away where he later lost himself and became Tsotsi. He recognises his change, so he goes in search of the defeated Boston. Boston tells him about God and Tsotsi goes to the church and finds Isaiah. Isaiah tells him about the goodness God wants and Tsotsi, in an attempt to learn more about God, agrees to go to church. Afterwards he goes to Miriam, and both of them realise they must let the past go, so they can become better people in the future. Through finding faith in God, and helping Miriam let her husband go, Tsotsi finds redemption.

There are also stories of redemption for a couple secondary characters. Boston was a high-achieving university student before he made a drastic mistake. He did not want his proud mother to find out he had been kicked out of college for being accused of attempted rape; he hid this from her and started selling passbooks, and later became a member of Tsotsi’s gang. As part of the gang he is involved in committing inhumane crimes - he becomes sick of life. He loses his pride. When Tsotsi finds him and tells him about his change, Boston decides he must make a change. The battered and beaten Boston hobbles out of the room, and runs in search of his mother. He wants her to be proud of him. He wants to be forgiven.

Miriam yearns for her husband’s return, despite the likelihood of him being dead. She realises after interacting with Tsotsi and caring for little David that she must focus on the future and be as much of a loving mother as possible. Because of her choice to love and care, she is forgiven for her sin of not completely caring.

These redemptions are catalyzed by little David. He starts Tsotsi’s change; therefore, directly leading him towards redemption, and indirectly leading Boston and Miriam towards forgiveness. In addition, saving Morris’s and many other lives Tsotsi may have taken. The baby is a protector, and a giver of redemption.

Fugard wants us to understand forgiveness is always attainable, and sometimes we must also give it. Redemption doesn’t always have to be in the eyes of God; it can be about forgiving ourselves for the immortality of our actions. We can obtain it by being decent, and making the right choices. It is not easily attained, or necessarily quick. Tsotsi took many steps towards kindness and sympathy. He had to remember his past then understand his change before he was redeemed.

You don’t have to be searching for redemption, but Fugard shows once you are redeemed, you are a different person.
**Survival**

Fugard also portrays the theme of survival. He suggests individuals will do whatever it takes – both physically and morally – to survive. At the beginning of the novel, Tsotsi and his gang members do whatever it takes to survive, despite the unethical nature of their actions. This represents the desperation of the blacks during Apartheid. They had to constantly overcome poverty in order to survive. Tsotsi’s survival shifts from physical to moral, later in the novel, once he receives the baby and begins to remember the innocent boy he was. When he witnesses Morris, he begins to feel sympathy for him, and his other victims. When he meets Isaiah and he tells him God does not want us to sin, Tsotsi realises the immortality in his actions. In the face of God, he has not been “good”, and will go to hell. However, Tsotsi chooses to become decent and live his life with morals. He becomes a different person – David Mondondo – who is selfless, compassionate, and ethical. His change is derived from the decent influences of others and not wanting to be the same corrupted person. He chooses to survive morally, not just physically. Fugard conveys the message that it is no good to live forever, if you can’t live with yourself. Tsotsi’s moral survival caused him to compromise his physical survival by sacrificing for the baby. If he focused simply on his physical survival he would be alive, but without pride. Fugard wants his audience to understand having pride in your actions and your morals is more important than surviving while having shame for yourself. ‘Everybody dies but not everybody lives’ can be applied: we will all physically die at some point, but to morally survive is a true testimony of how you lived.

**Apartheid**

Fugard also conveys the theme of the negative affects the oppression had on the black society in South Africa during Apartheid. The white minority put down the black majority. All of Fugard’s characters are a reflection of the effects of Apartheid. Tsotsi and his gang are healthy young men who should have jobs, but because of apartheid they are sitting around in the middle of the afternoon without work; this forces them into a life of crime - having to murder for money.

It is a recurring theme. It forced Tsotsi to choose violence when he was a little kid. The police came and took his mother away because she didn’t have a passbook. Again it comes up at the water point. The water point’s inconsistency represents the instability, economically and socially of the black people. Their lives could be uprooted by the white expansion any day, and they lived in fear of frequent raids.

A black man’s power is shown through Isaiah. He answers to Miss Marriot who wants him to plant in straight rows. This symbolizes her need – and the white people’s need – to control the black society. Nature doesn’t grow in straight lines, nor should the blacks be confined to tiny townships, but the white belief of ethnocentrism is their reasoning to dominate other – to their belief – inferior groups.

It shows up again at the conclusion of the novel. The whites often took over black townships to get rid of the black spots. They would demolish old houses to build new communities. It can be seen that the white’s bulldozed the ruins, causing both David and little David to die. Fugard implies that white domination has caused black society within South Africa to suffer extensively simply because the white man’s belief of superiority.
Religion
Religion is a major theme throughout the entire novel. Almost every event relates back to Christianity in some way. The baby represents the newborn baby Jesus. He brings innocence and peace to Tsotsi. Miriam represents the Virgin Mary. She loves and cares about everyone which is why she wants to keep David. Gumboot Dlamini’s funeral leads the pastor to question his faith. Boston is the first person to mention to Tsotsi that if he seeks redemption he must seek God, Isaiah plays a pivotal role in directing Tsotsi focus towards God. Morris’s simple appreciation of nature also relates back to the creation of God. With Tsotsi’s death we accept that his soul has been saved.

SYMBOLS

The Dog:
The dog represents his past. Tsotsi is the dog. It also represents the crippled apartheid system that South Africa is faced with. The dog allows Tsotsi to compare Morris to his past and help his decision to let him live.

Light and dark:
Light is the kind, compassionate, caring and thoughtful side of the story. Dark represents the bad, murderous, ruthless and violent aspect of the text

The story begins in the darkness when Tsotsi is still a thug who kills and robs with his gang but as the story progresses and he moves closer and closer to becoming David we see more light appear in his life. In the dark is where he commits acts of violence such as almost raping the girl who gave him the baby. He stalks Morris in the dark and Rose was raped by his gang in the dark too.

Light is shown when Tsotsi decides to let Morris live (they are under the lamp post), we also see it when he confronts Boston after beating him only two days before, it is at night, in the dark when the beating occurs and it is light when Tsotsi meets up with him again. Finally when Tsotsi attempts to save the baby at the end, the sun is shining. Also, when he is recovered. The transition as the novel moves from beginning to end is very clear and we can see how the two symbols are represented.

Ruins:
Represent South Africa and the situation as a whole for the blacks under apartheid. The blacks have a tougher life, with much less rights and privileges than the whites. They were poor and lived in run down townships. The whites held no care or concern for them and no desire to give them a respectable life. Just like how no one has care for the ruins in the novel, the blacks lives were in ruins. They were viewed as inferior like a rundown building.

Water:
The water supply that many people lined up for is a symbol of life. Water is essential to the survival of a human being and without it you will eventually perish. It shows us how desperate the blacks were under apartheid, for the most basic necessity. They were lined up for the ability to continue on. ’Lined up for life’. 
**Baby:**
The baby is a symbol of renewal, rebirth and redemption, focused on Tsotsi. It is the catalyst to change Tsotsi back to the person he once was, David. Tsotsi sees himself within the child and it triggers the pursuit of cleansing and redemption within his life. The baby is Tsotsi also; it is what he represents when he is David, innocence, kind-heartedness and youth. In attempting to save the baby at the end he is actually saving himself from the ‘thug life’ he was living.

**Miriam:**
Miriam represents the Mother Mary. She is caring and nurturing and shows Tsotsi how to start loving again. She is a character who can forgive him for his actions.

**The City:**
This represents the labyrinth of Tsotsi’s mind. He is confused about what he is feeling on his walk back home after encountering Morris. His feeling of being lost in the literal sense is relatable to the metaphorical idea that he is physiologically lost.

**Isaiah:**
He represents the link to God, and his way of speaking to Tsotsi about redeeming himself is pivotal.
HELPFUL INFORMATION

Setting

The novel, Tsotsi, is set in the 1950’s in a location or township called Sophiatown near Johannesburg. People struggle to make a living and their shack homes are constantly threatened by demolition teams. Many resort to crime.

Narrator

We see what happens through the eyes of an omniscient third person narrator. We are thus able to gain a good understanding of the other characters. He describes what they look like, what they say, and the effect their actions have on the other characters. We also gain an insight into Tsotsi’s criminal psyche.

We gain an insider perspective on the changes in Tsotsi as his consciousness of his own identity grows. From wishing to silence Boston, he now wants to hear what he has to say. From enjoying the cruel game of hunting down a victim, Tsotsi chooses not to kill. He gains an understanding of who he really is, and he recovers his values.

Conflict

Conflict is associated with rising action or the building of tension. Inner conflict arises from the problems that a character faces. Tsotsi has suppressed his emotions as a way of dealing with the trauma of being left without anyone to care for him. Now, his inner conflict is between whether to continue to be cruel and indifferent to the pain he inflicts on others, or to respond to the needs of others, knowing how important nurture and a secure home is.

Outer conflict relates to verbal or physical action. In Tsotsi, this is related to physical attacks such as David Madondo’s father’s attack on the dog, Gumboot’s death, or the merciless assault on Boston when he asks questions that anger Tsotsi.

Mood and atmosphere

The mood in Tsotsi is predominantly sombre or foreboding. Moments of happiness are seen as illusionary short lived. David’s happy life with his mother is threatened from the start by the police raids and the lack of money. Maxulu and Gumboot’s happiness is cut short by Gumboot’s tragic death. The jubilation of a Saturday street is also short lived in that it is limited to that day. The ending is bitter sweet. David Madondo (formal Tsotsi) dies, but he dies smiling.

Tone

The narrator’s tone usually reflects his attitude to a particular event or emotion. The tone is ironic, for instance when Tsotsi visits the general dealer.

In a dialogue, the speaker’s tone can be bitter, angry, mocking, harsh, friendly, or kind, to give a few examples. Miriam’s tone is usually courteous, as opposed to the aggressive tone that Tsotsi often uses, until he starts to change
Outline of the novel

Chapter 1: The gang meet and plan and execute the murder of Gumboot Tshabalala

Chapter 2: Tsotsi brutally attacks Boston

Chapter 3: Tsotsi is given a baby in a shoe box

Chapter 4: Tsotsi finds a place to hide the baby

Chapter 5: Gumboot Dhlamini is buried, and Butcher and Die Aap meet up with Tsotsi

Chapter 6: Tsotsi singles out Morris Tshabalala as his next victim

Chapter 7: Tsotsi and Morris meet and talk

Chapter 8: Tsotsi coerces Miriam Ngidi into feeding the baby

Chapter 9: Flashback to Tsotsi’s childhood

Chapter 10: Tsotsi takes the baby to Miriam Ngidi so she can feed it

Chapter 11: The story of Boston’s earlier life emerges

Chapter 12: Tsotsi is crushed by a bulldozer when he tries to rescue the baby
Chapter 1:

Pre-reading

1. What does the title and the picture of the cover of your edition of the novel suggest about the focus of the novel?

Open ended. The novel focuses on a young black man who lived some time ago and was involved in criminal activities in an impoverished black community.

Reading

2. Explain why Butcher does not pay much attention to the stories Boston tells.

Butcher has little interest in words. He is a man of action and particularly enjoys killing people.

3. What mood is created in the first paragraph and what does it lead you to expect?

The mood is sombre, creating an expectation that something bad is about to happen.

4. There is something of a contradiction here. Die Aap and Tsotsi are said to listen attentively, yet they do not seem really interested in the stories. Explain this contradiction.

Listening to the stories makes the time go by much faster. Die Aap and Tsotsi have no other way of passing the time.

Post-Reading

5.1 What is surprising about Tsotsi’s hands?

His hands are delicate, rather like those of an artist. One would not expect someone who is involved in violence to have hands like those.

5.2 What is ironic about Tsotsi bringing his hands together as if he is going to pray?

The irony is that, instead of being a sign of spiritual activity, his gesture signals the start of violence.

6. The four members of the gang are very different. What do their actions and words reveal about their chief characteristics?

Tsotsi says little but his actions and words spur the others to action. He seems to hate goodness or happiness and takes pleasure in killing Gumboot’s happiness, replacing his smile with a grimace of hatred and agonising pain. He delights in the fear and hate he inspires in others.

Butcher actively hates Tsotsi but remains a member of the gang because he recognises Tsotsi’s skill as a leader. He has no life outside the gang. His joy and purpose in life is to be an expert killer with a bicycle spoke. When he laughs, it is without feeling.

Die Aap is totally loyal to Tsotsi and always supports what he says. He has very long arms. He uses the immense strength in these arms to immobilise victims.
7. Comment on the effect that Tsotsi has on people when he walks down the street on his way to commit a crime.

Tsotsi is feared for his ruthlessness. When he appears on the streets on his way to committing a crime, people show their fear by securing their properties or moving out of the way. He is hated.

8. Explain why Gumboot describes his year away from Maxulu as a short one in some ways and a long one in others.

Gumboot hates being parted from Maxulu and longs to be with her. The time seems to drag by. On the other hand, he works long hours so the days go by quite quickly.

9. Outline the reasons that Tsotsi chooses Gumboot.

Tsotsi chooses Gumboot for three reasons: First, Gumboot’s happy smile is like a light in the area and, second, the bright red tie he is wearing makes him easy to follow. The third reason is that, when Gumboot pays for his ticket, he reveals that he has quite a lot of money. He has forgotten to take out a single coin beforehand.

10. What is particularly tragic about the timing of Gumboot’s death?

After a long time away, Gumboot has only one week to go before he returns home to his wife and meets his child for the first time.

Chapter 2

Pre-Reading

1. How do you feel when you are asked very personal question, especially by people who are not close friends?

Resentment/embarrassment/indignation at an intrusion into your personal affairs.

Reading

2. What phrase in the second line reveals that Butcher’s laughter is intended to belittle Boston?

“sick like a dog”

3. Boston seems to dislike violence. What possible reason does he have for slapping Rosie?

Boston is sickened by the violence of the gang’s latest killing. His nerves are on edge and he finds Rosie’s behaviour irritating. He knows that she is looking for business and that Butcher and the others are likely to treat her badly. He wants to re-establish his credibility as a tough gang member.

4. Soekie does not know her birthday. Explain how this is possible.

Soekie’s parents have not kept in touch with her at all. Her birth was never registered.
5. People usually pay for their drinks once they have been given them. Why does Soekie collect the money before she pours a round of drinks?

Soekie has to have tough rules. If she waits until her customers have finished their drinks, she may not be paid.

Post-reading

6. Compare Boston’s attitude to violence to that of the other members of the gang?

Boston is sickened by the violence and he feels the need to raise questions about the morality of what they are doing. The others see killing merely as part of the operation. Butcher actually enjoys killing as it demonstrates his special skill.

7. What does the description of Rosie reveal about the life of some women in the township?

Some women are abused both mentally and physically and are abandoned by their husbands. They end up as prostitutes desperate for a way of getting alcohol to numb their senses (or food or other necessities).

8. Briefly explain what Boston means when he says that Gumboot Dlamini has died because of his decency.

Gumboot is a good man who is concerned about living a good life and meeting his responsibilities as a husband and father. His honesty and trust make him vulnerable to criminals. Tsotsi takes special delight in destroying what is beautiful or good.

9. Comment critically on Boston’s warning to Tsotsi.

Boston does not realise that Tsotsi does have feelings – he feels deep hatred towards him. Boston’s questions have also made Tsotsi feel fearful because he cannot answer them.

10. Suggest a reason for Fugard’s choice of ‘sprawling’ to describe the effect on Boston of the first kick.

It suggests that Boston is taken by surprise. He has no time to plan his fall or to sidestep the kick. He lands with his legs and arms spread out in uncontrolled fashion.

Chapter 3

Pre-reading

1. Based on what you know about Tsotsi so far, what reaction do you expect him to have to his violent attack on Boston?

He would put the attack firmly behind him and not have even a moment’s regret.
Reading

2. Boston’s warning sounds in Tsotsi’s head again and again, but the words are not exactly the same. Explain why this is happening.

Tsotsi is confused and deeply troubled. He is trying to make sense of Boston’s words.

3. What is ironic about Boston’s chief function in the gang?

Boston is the strategist who makes sure that there are no flaws in their plans and that nothing has been forgotten, and yet he does not want the plans to succeed.

Post-Reading

4. Explain why Soekie is so anxious to have Boston taken away from her shebeen as soon as possible.

Earlier, Soekie says that she does not want any rough stuff. She is determined not to encourage rowdy or violent behaviour or to give the idea that her shebeen has a reputation for violence. She needs to sell as much alcohol as she can and she does not want anything that might discourage customers. She does not want to attract the attention of the police and give them a reason to shut down her shebeen.

5. Tsotsi sees his purpose in life as killing or striking fear in the hearts of people. Explain how his three rules help to keep him on that path.

Tsotsi makes sure that his knife is ready for use from first thing in the morning. He deliberately forgets any face or incident from the past as soon as he remembers it, and he does not allow anyone to ask him any questions about his past. This means he is able to prevent himself from feeling any sympathy for his victims, and he is always ready to launch a lethal attack without warning.

6. Some sights and smells evoke the past for Tsotsi. Identify two of these.

Give any two: Wet newspaper, a spider spinning its web on the ceiling, the baby.

7. Explain Butcher’s disappointment when Tsotsi ignores the young prisoner, who passes them one day when they are rolling dice.

Butcher enjoys violence. The policeman is alone and so would be an easy target. He is hoping that Tsotsi will give the signal to the gang to free the prisoner (and hurt or even kill the policeman).

8. While he stand taking shelter among the Bluegum trees, Tsotsi is able to think more calmly and explore the reasons for his angry explosion. What does this reveal about the change that is beginning to happen in him?

He is able to think and explore his feelings. His hatred of Boston subsides and he begins to appreciate Boston’s qualities.
9. The woman suddenly thrusts the shoe box with the baby inside it into Tsotsi’s hands. Suggest a reason for her action.

She is desperate to escape the attack on her that Tsotsi seems about to launch. She realises this could distract him for long enough for her to get away. She knows she has a better chance of escaping if she does not have to carry the baby.

10. In the light of what you have learnt about Tsotsi thus far, what do you think Tsotsi is likely to do with the baby?

Tsotsi has shown no ability to show compassion and so he is likely to abandon the baby or kill it without a second’s thought. Any credible answer that can be justified in terms of the first three chapters.

Chapter 4

Pre-reading

1. Discuss the dangers face by people working in small shops in impoverished communities.

Discussion could relate to their vulnerability to break-ins, looting and to armed robbery.

Reading

2. From whose perspective is the first part of the chapter told?

The perspective is mainly Cassim’s, but we also have something of the old man’s perspective.

3. Comment on Cassim’s sales strategy.

Cassim engages customers in a conversation about a product or other possible choices and draws them into a kind of emotional connectedness with the product.

4. Explain why Cassim is not alarmed at first, when Tsotsi comes into the shop.

There is safety in numbers. At that point there are eight people in the shop. Tsotsi is unlikely to harm him or his wife, or attempt to rob them, while there are so many people around.

5. Tsotsi does not find it easy to move through the crowd on his way back to his room. What does this reveal about the mood of a Saturday street?

The mood is carefree/jubilant. It is broad daylight and people are determined to enjoy themselves. They have the confidence of being in great numbers so they are not cowed by gangsters and do not think of giving way to them.

Post-reading

6. Discuss the inner conflict that for about two hours prevents Tsotsi from going right into the shop.

Tsotsi knows he must buy milk for the baby, but he is afraid that he will appear a fool.
7. Cassim describes Tsotsi as “a bad egg”. How appropriate is this description?

A “bad egg” is a very mild description for someone who is a hardened criminal. People find Tsotsi repulsive and prefer not to be close to him.

8. Comment on the irony of the power dynamics in the conversation between Cassim and Tsotsi.

Cassim is terrified because he fears that Tsotsi has come to the shop with criminal intent. He is very careful not to upset Tsotsi and speaks very nervously. Tsotsi is actually at a disadvantage because he has no idea what milk to buy and he is afraid of appearing a fool. Cassim gains the upper hand in the end. He is able to cheat Tsotsi into buying condensed milk because Tsotsi is unable to read so cannot check what he says.

9. Explain Tsotsi’s reason for deciding to keep the baby.

Tsotsi is now desperate to have all his questions about his previous life answered. This baby appears to be a catalyst.

10. What makes the ruin of MaRhabatse’s home such an appropriate place to hide the baby. Carefully explain.

MaRhabatse’s home has already been stripped bare so no one is likely to go there. In addition, one of the corners of the building still has a little piece of roofing in place that will offer the baby some shade. Just like the baby, the ruin has been abandoned.

Chapter 5

Pre-reading

1. What would you usually expect to happen at a burial service? Include the social importance of a funeral in your discussion.

A funeral is usually an opportunity to take one’s leave of someone one has loved or respected. Normally family and friends and colleagues come to a funeral to mourn the person or pay their respects in the sense of acknowledging the contribution the person has made.

2. What qualities would you expect a successful gang leader to have?

A successful gang leader has to be able to command the respect and loyalty of the gang members or to be feared by them. He has to be able to lead successful criminal activities that bring rewards to all of the gang members. He has to be ruthless and without moral qualms.

Reading

3. Comment on the ironic aspects of the funeral.

The minister does not even know the name of the person, let alone anything about his life, and no one is there to mourn him.
4. What do you think the description of Boston lying in the gutter is intended to make readers feel at this point?

The intention is to make readers feel sorry for him. (He has been abandoned there as if he is no longer of any value/some sort of garbage. We are meant to feel the effects of ongoing violence in the lives of the community. Boston is an object of idle curiosity rather than horror, suggesting that this is not an unusual occurrence. We are also intended to feel horrified/shocked that someone has been so heartless as to steal his trousers as he lies there helplessly.) The horror is that there is no place for sympathy for the victims of violence.

5. What makes this day rather different from the usual pattern of this particular gang’s life?

Tsotsi has not turned up to meet Die Aap and Butcher and, when he does get back, he is very distant. There is no Boston to help them plan their strategy and to help them to while away the time before they set out on their next operation.

Post-reading

6. Compare the way Butcher sees the woman who passes by and the way Tsotsi sees her.

Tsotsi sees the woman as a mother and possible nurturer/supplier of milk for his baby. Butcher and Die Aap see her as a sex object and make demeaning remarks.

7. Comment on Butcher’s effectiveness as a substitute storyteller for Boston.

Butcher is a poor substitute. He is unable to weave the stories together and his stories end after only ten words.

8. Discuss the effectiveness with which the writer conveys Tsotsi’s failing ability to be the gang leader.

The writer shows clearly that Tsotsi is no longer able to focus on his role as the gang leader. His mind keeps drifting to thoughts about the baby and he is irritated by Butcher and Die Aap. Without something in Boston’s stories to spark some kind of murderous desire in him, Tsotsi is unable to act on impulse and choose a target. He is only able to make a vague suggestion rather than decide on a definite target area.

9. What is the relationship between Butcher and Die Aap? Explain how it is linked to the theme of social disintegration.

Learner’s own motivated response.

10. Die Aap and Butcher interpret Tsotsi’s hitting the palm of his hand with his fist as a signal that he is about to announce the target area. How does this action underline the way in which Tsotsi and the group are drifting apart?

Before, they have always worked as a unit led by clear instructions and signals that Tsotsi gives. Tsotsi has lost confidence in his ability to make decisions and is much more concerned about the baby’s needs than with choosing a victim.
Chapter 6

Pre-Reading

1. Why would a paraplegic be easy prey for robbers?

The robber would have the advantage of speed, height, and strength over a paraplegic.

Reading

2. Egged on by his gang, Tsotsi makes the decision to go to the ‘city’, the term that is used for the shopping centre near Terminal Place. Why are the people safer there in the early morning than after sunset?

Few of them would have much money in the early morning, as opposed to after sunset, when some of them would have been paid.

3. A ‘quid’ is a colloquial term for a pound, the currency at the time. Why is “quadrangle” a clever term for this shopping centre? (clue: A quadrangle is a space where people assemble)

“Quidrangle” is a double pun which cleverly describes a place where people gather to bargain (wrangle) for better prices.

4. Some words are written to reflect the way they are pronounced in the community. One example is “Lay-ee-deeshin” (late edition). How would the following be written in formal English?

4.1 “Cit-ee-deshin”

“Cit-ee-deshin” = City Edition

4.2 “Layeet-spotreesilts”

“Layeet-spotreesilts” = Late Sports Results

Post-Reading

5. Why does Morris Tshabalala shout obscenities at the children who do not treat him respectfully?

It is a sign of Morris’s deep frustration about being so handicapped. He finds insults from children particularly hard to take because he is a man and therefore should be respected. He finds it humiliating that he is unable to function as a man in so many physical ways. He should at least have the respect of those who are not yet adults.

6. Morris routinely uses the insult “whelp of a yellow bitch” when people step on his hands. Why does it affect Tsotsi so deeply?

The insult strikes a distant chord in Tsotsi. Since being given the baby, Tsotsi has had recurring images of the yellow bitch that died as a result of his father’s vicious attack.
7. What is the reason for Tsotsi’s choosing Morris Tshabalala?

Since Friday night Tsotsi has tended to operate on his own. He feels he can manage this operation without the help of the other two. He claims that he chose Morris because he is so ugly.

8. Morris becomes a beggar because he has no other choice. Comment critically on this statement.

Morris begs because his earnest attempts to find work and not simply be pitied failed miserably. Although he finds it humiliating, begging gives him a way of having enough money for food each day.

9. In what way is Morris’s present life of criticism of the evils of apartheid?

Morris is one of the many casualties of working underground on the gold mines on contract, a job available to black people. Black people are not allowed to form unions and there is no pension for contract workers, so he has no hope of compensation or a regular monthly income. We also see that black people are viewed generically. He has no hope of being considered by white people for any job on his own merits.

10. Comment critically on the success with which Tsotsi is depicted as playing a cat-and-mouse game with Morris Tshabalala.

Tsotsi allows Morris to think that he has escaped him again and again and then he reappears again. None of Morris’s attempts to throw Tsotsi off the scent are successful, not even his long stay at the Bantu Eating House. Tsotsi gives him a false sense of confidence that he has escaped, only to reveal that he has been nearby all the time. He follows relentlessly, allowing Morris to have a false sense of confidence and then filling him with fear and dread again.

Chapter 7

Pre-Reading

1. Based on what you have read so far, do you think that Morris Tshabalala would welcome death? Explain your answer.

Morris’s existence is such a painful struggle that death must seem attractive. If he is longing for death, why does he struggle so hard to remain alive?

2. Skim the first paragraph. What sign is there that Tsotsi is no longer an expert criminal?

Tsotsi does not intercept Morris before he reaches the end of the dark, deserted street. Morris is able to move into the well-lit Main Street where there are other people.

Reading

3. What prompts Tsotsi’s flashback?

Tsotsi’s flashback is prompted by Morris's curse, “whelp of a yellow bitch”.

4. Tsotsi finds himself forgetting about Die Aap and Butcher and musing about the baby, the Bluegum tree and the bitch. What does this suggest about his priorities at this point?

This suggests that Butcher and Die Aap are of little interest to Tsotsi now. His priority is fast becoming searching to find out about his past and his true identity.

Post-Reading

5. In what ways are Morris and the yellow bitch that Tsotsi remembers similar?

Morris is only able to use his hands and arms to move, just as the bitch was only able to use her front paws and front legs. The back part of their bodies was useless. Both found moving agonising. Tsotsi notes that the skin on Morris’s neck bulges and then he looks like a dog pulled up short on a lead. Another similarity is that Morris is vicious with his mouth, just as the bitch snarled at people.

6. Discuss the credibility of Tsotsi’s decision not to kill Morris.

Tsotsi’s decision is a logical progression of the process that has begun with the baby. He has begun to care about people and to ask questions about the choices he makes. When he finds Morris is able to escape using the cover of the stalled car, he is relieved, not angry. He has begun to feel sympathetic towards Morris.

7. What is Morris’s reason for leaving all his money in a pile under the street light so Tsotsi can see it?

Morris puts all the money he has in a heap under the lamplight, where it can be clearly seen, as an offering to Tsotsi. It is a last desperate attempt to save his life.

8. Discuss your response to the meeting between Morris and Tsotsi.

You should give your own response. (Example: I found it an amazing and moving moment. Instead of a violent encounter which results in Morris’s death, they meet in silence and then speak as if they have known each other all their lives. They share their deepest experiences in a way in which only intimate friends can.)

9. What is the extraordinary realisation that Morris reaches, on this night.

Morris realises that although his life is hard and he is misshapen and has little or no respect from others, there are many things that give him joy and give him a reason for living.

10. Explain why Tsotsi cannot go back to making the choice to kill. As part of your answer, outline the events that have led him to this point.

Tsotsi reaches a turning point, when he encounters the woman under the Bluegum trees who gives him the baby. He chooses to keep the baby and to care for it. His meeting with the beggar makes him even more conscious of the change in himself. Tsotsi cannot go back to making the choice to kill, since he can no longer cut himself off from his victims and their suffering and pain. He has begun to care about people and wants to help them. For the first time, he has realised that he has the power to decide not to kill.
Chapter 8

Pre-reading

1. The church bell of the Church of Christ the Redeemer rings at the beginning of the chapter. What event in Tsotsi’s life could the bell be foreshadowing?

The bell could foreshadow Tsotsi going to seek peace at the church./Tsotsi’s death.

Reading

2. What kind of effect does the resounding bell have on the township?

The resounding bell is compared to a heavy bird hovering over the township. It seems to be judgmental because it seems to be casting a shadow./It does not seem to be offering any comfort or relating directly to their lives.

3. The ants invade the condensed milk tin. What does this reveal about Tsotsi’s ability to look after the baby?

Tsotsi is not at all equipped to look after the baby. He lacks even the basic knowledge about the scrupulous care that has to be taken to keep anything that is being used to feed a baby clean and away from insects.

4. What picture are we given of Miriam as she takes her place in the queue?

Miriam has practical intelligence as she is able to work out how long the queue is going to take and has chosen a time when she will only have to wait half an hour.

5. Simon, Miriam’s husband, has disappeared after being involved in the bus boycott. How is this incident liked to the theme of the oppression of Apartheid and its negative effects on society?

Black people are not allowed to engage in protests, even when they are peaceful. If they do, they can be summarily arrested and then sentenced to short periods of imprisonment. It is not easy to find people after they have been arrested. Families are often separated – sometimes people disappear and are never seen again.

6. When Tsotsi knocks at her door, Miriam is not suspicious at first. Explain why she tries to slam the door shut to prevent him coming in a few minutes later.

Tsotsi looks over his shoulder to check to see that there is no one around. This action suggests that he may be wanting to sexually assault her.

7. Tsotsi issues brusque instructions and very short explanations to Miriam. What does this reveal about his social skills?

Tsotsi has few social graces and a limited ability to express more complex requests./ He has no experience in explaining a situation and winning sympathy.
8. What makes the thought of breast feeding the baby so revolting to Miriam? Explain clearly.

The baby is foul smelling and its mouth has been attacked by ants. She also finds abhorrent the thought of being asked to feed any baby other than her own.

9. Refer to Tsotsi’s comment that “a backyard bitch would have looked after its puppies better”. It Tsotsi’s response in keeping with what we know about him?

Tsotsi tends to become angry when a raw nerve is touched. He remembers the yellow bitch which was helpless to protect her pups. It is as if she has read his mind.

10. The writer describes Sunday night in some detail. What is his purpose in doing so?

Sunday is the night when people are able to have a peaceful, good sleep after a pleasant day. Without this kind of rest, they will not be able to survive the hard week ahead. It emphasises the normality of other lives with their ability to rest, compared to Tsotsi’s sleeplessness. The impression is created that no one in the township is free – it is merely the expression of their captivity that differs.

Chapter 9

Pre-reading

1. What is the happiest memory of your childhood?

2. Skim through the first paragraph. What kind of world is evoked by the atmosphere that is created here?

The peaceful and harmonious mood evokes a safe and happy world.

Reading

3. Why is Tsotsi’s mother so particularly happy on this day?

Tondi’s husband is coming home after a long time in jail.

4. How do we know the police raids are a frequent occurrence?

There is a community warning system, using stones to tap on lamp posts.

Post-reading

5. Is Tondi’s way of bringing up her son justified? Substantiate your view.

Tondi over-protects David because she does not want him to be exposed to the harshness of the world outside their home. (Own opinion: You must make a clear and credible case for or against the way she has chosen to bring up her son. You may want to relate it to his response to being without his mother.)

6. Explain why the bitch has become so seemingly bad tempered.

The bitch is pregnant and her pups are due very soon.
7. What do you think worst aspect of the police raids is? Justify your answer.

Learner’s own motivated response.

8. What is remarkable about the way the old woman speaks to David before she goes off to find his mother?

The old woman treats David as if he is an adult and gives him full and clear explanations about what she intends to do and what he must do. She expects him to manage being on his own.

9. When David joins up with the band of homeless boys, he is unwilling to go off scavenging with them at first. He longs for them to return as they are all he can remember. How does this description help you to understand how deeply David has been affected by the events of the previous day?

It shows that the trauma David has experienced has profoundly disorientated him, making him lose all memory of the life he lived before and of the mother to whom he was so deeply attached. He has lost his identity.

10. David adopts the name “Tsotsi” when he begins a life of crime. What does this symbolise?

David has moved from being someone who is defined by his mother’s love to being a stereotype who has no individuality or humanity. He mechanically fits into a pattern of ruthless behaviour.

Chapter 10

Pre-reading

1. The chapter begins with someone knocking at Tsotsi’s door quite early in the morning. Who could it be?

It is most likely to be one of the gang knocking. Miriam is unlikely to come to his room at that point in the day.

Reading

2. What is the significance of Tsotsi’s checking to see that the baby is all right first, rather than checking to see that his knife is ready for action.

Tsotsi is changing. His first instinct is to nurture, not to ensure that he is suitably armed to kill. Getting answers to questions is his first priority now, rather than being ready to kill.

3. Why has Miriam needed to sew buttons onto her blouse?

She has needed to replace or strengthen the buttons after Tsotsi tore her blouse open to make the point about needing her to breastfeed the baby.
Post-reading

4. How many days have passed since Tsotsi was given the baby? Draw a timeline showing the main events each day since he was given the baby.

Timeline

Friday night: Given the baby

Saturday: Buys condensed milk at General Dealer Cassim
          Feeds baby and cleans him
          Hides baby at ruin (Gumboot buried and Boston comes too)
          Arrival of gang at his room to plan the next operation
          Targets Morris Tshabala at Terminal Place and hunts him.
          Does not kill him.

Sunday: Finds ants in the condensed milk tin and kills them
        Decides to find woman to feed the baby

5. Die Aap comes to Tsotsi’s room as a matter of routine every day. Discuss the credibility of what transpires between Die Aap and Tsotsi on the Sunday.

Yes/No possible. Yes, Tsotsi is tending to focus more and more on the baby and the discoveries he is making about himself, leaving his criminal life behind. It is not surprising that he seems to have little knowledge about Die Aap. Die Aap, on the other hand, has little ability to work out complex issues. He is used to accepting Tsotsi’s decisions and never questioning them. He accepts that Tsotsi no longer has any use for him.

6. Tsotsi watches Miriam as she waits in the queue for water. What evidence is there that he is changing?

Tsotsi is taking in the detail of Miriam’s features and her physical shape with warm appreciation. This is a sign of his genuine interest in others – an entirely new character trait. Before this, Tsotsi tended to view women only as possible prey.

7. Suggest a reason to makes Tsotsi name the baby David.

Tsotsi identifies with this baby that has made it possible for him to reconstruct his memories and his identity as David Madondo./He sees the baby as his and, like many fathers, chooses to name it after himself.

8. What indication is there that the relationship between Miriam and Tsotsi is deepening?

Tsotsi and Miriam are relaxed in each other’s presence and tender towards each other. For the first time, Tsotsi is able to speak to her without difficulty and shares the full story about how he has come to have this baby. She is genuinely interested.
9. When Tsotsi explains to Miriam that the baby has never seen its own father, he speaks in a harsh tone. Explain the reason for Tsotsi’s harsh tone.

Tsotsi is recalling his own father whom he never saw. When his father returned from imprisonment, he could not be reunited with his wife, which would have given him the chance to meet his child. Perhaps he connects his own father with a man who was in jail for most of this childhood. His only memory of him is of a violent man who viciously attacked his dog.

10. How do we know that Tsotsi does not fully trust Miriam yet?

Tsotsi thinks that Miriam may follow him to see where he hides the baby so he looks back to see whether she is following him.

Chapter 11

Pre-reading

1. The previous chapter ended off with Tsotsi setting off to find Boston. What kind of meeting do you think they will have.

The meeting with Morris has shown a surprising side to Tsotsi. Perhaps he will be empathetic. Give any answer that takes account of the changes in Tsotsi.

Reading

2. Why does Marty want Boston out of her shebeen as quickly as possible?

The stench and Boston’s moans and grunts are beginning to upset Marty’s customers. She is a pragmatist. The customers are her main concern.

3. What link is there between the fly paper whose victims are trapped on its sticky surface and Tsotsi’s former role as a criminal?

The flies are caught in its stickiness just as Tsotsi’s victims were helpless to escape death from him.

4. Explain why Boston has decided to stop wearing glasses.

Boston is a coward. One of his ways of coping with the life he leads is to stop himself from seeing clearly.

Post-reading

5. What does Marty mean when she says that Boston has returned to her shebeen too late?

At one stage Boston and Marty had a close relationship. Despite the way he treated her, she would have been willing to pick up the relationship. Now he is a wreck of a man so there is no possibility of a relationship between them.
6. Do you think that Boston was unjustly treated at the College? Explain your view.

An argument could be made either way. For: His impeccable record and his lack of experience with women could have been used to mitigate his sentence. Or Against: Even attempted rape is a very serious crime and should be dealt with harshly.

7. Boston has probably not been able to eat for the past few days but this is not the reason that he is so thin. What has made him so thin?

As we have seen during his time as a student, Boston loses weight when he is anxious or under strain. Since the first murder, he has faced increased strain as a member of the gang. His drinking has probably also affected the amount he eats.

8. How has Boston become a member of the gang? Is it a matter of chance, or a choice to do so?

It is a mixture of chance and choice. The beginning of his life of crime can be traced to Boston’s chance encounter with Johnboy Lethetwa, where Boston chooses to help Johnboy overcome his passbook problem.

9. Comment on the significance of the inner light that Boston sees in Tsotsi’s eyes.

Tsotsi has been defined by the darkness within him. The light in his eyes means that he is becoming conscious that he has a soul. He is searching for meaning.

10. How is Boston’s determined departure down the road linked to the theme of self-discover? Explain clearly.

Boston has realised that he can go back to his old decent life and start again. Like Tsotsi, he realises that he does have a choice. He is determined to return home.
Chapter 12

Pre-reading

1. What kinds of people help you to do your best?

Open ended. Some possible answers: People who help are those who are encouraging/who offer constructive suggestions/who recognise and praise achievement.

Reading

2. What makes Miss Marriot’s treatment of Isaac so particularly offensive?

Miss Marriot treats Isaac, who is an old man, as if he were an intellectually challenged child.

3. Explain why Tsotsi chooses to carry the baby in his coat.

Tsotsi is unwilling to let people know that he has the baby. This is also a way of protecting the baby from the light.

4. How does Miriam feel about the baby at this point?

Miriam is beginning to love the baby. She has felt fulfilled by being able to meet the baby’s needs./She is drawn to David and so wants to help him.

Post-reading

5. Why does Isaac find being close to Miss Marriot so distasteful?

Everything Isaac learns about Miss Marriot when she is in close contact has repulsed him. This includes the way she speaks and her physical attributes.

6. What does the whiteness of the sheets on Mirriam’s wash line symbolise?

The sheets highlight the movement towards a life of new beginnings (being washed clean suggesting redemption) where doing the morally right thing is affirmed./ The whiteness of the sheets suggests a world of light which makes courage possible.

7. What makes Isaac’s invitation to come to church so effective? Consider what he says and how he says it.

Isaac speaks from the heart. Although he has rather a distorted picture of the gospel message, he is able to present it in a way that makes sense and is directly relevant to Tsotsi. For instance, he makes the point that God wants people to stop killing and robbing, and that all are welcome.

8. David Madondo says, “Peace to you”, to the milkman. What does this suggest about the fundamental way in which he has changed?

In his life as Tsotsi, he was filled with hatred and his life signalled terror and violence. He is no longer Tsotsi. He is David now, and his reason for living is to be a force for good. He feels only goodwill towards others.
9. David Madondo dies smiling. Comment on what this symbolises in the novel as a whole.

David dies smiling because a happy smile reflects inner peace and self-acceptance, unlike Gumboot whose joyful smile is distorted into a grimace when he dies. It may be that he thinks he has succeeded in saving the baby and thus has made a meaningful contribution.

10. Discuss the effectiveness of the ending of the novel, which leaves quite a number of questions unanswered.

The answer to this question is speculative. One possible argument for its effectiveness is that Fugard succeeds in allowing the focus to fall on David Madondo and that David’s search for redemption/peace has been successful. Another possible argument is that the writer avoids a banal ending that suggests that all the problems can be neatly resolved in an environment that is fraught with complexity.

You could argue that the ending is not effective because of the questions that it leaves unanswered. (What happens to Boston? Does the baby die? What happens to Miriam? Where has Tondi been during this time? Does she ever find out what has happened to her son?)