

## This Thing Called the Future

written by J.L Powers

### About the Book

**Genre:** Young Adult

**Format:** Paperback, 208 pages

**ISBN:** 9781643795058

**Reading Level:** Grade 8–12

**Interest Level:** Grades 6–12

**Guided Reading Level:** Z+

**Accelerated Reader® Level:** 9

**Lexile™ Measure:** 710L

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** African / African American / Black, Families, Fiction, Grandparents, Realistic Fiction, Teen Interest, YA interest

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/this-thing-called-the-future/](http://leeandlow.com/books/this-thing-called-the-future/)

### SYNOPSIS

Khosi lives with her beloved grandmother, her little sister, and her weekend mother in a matchbox house on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. In this shantytown, it seems like somebody is dying all the time. Billboards everywhere warn of the disease of the day. When Khosi's mother turns sick, she refuses any care. No traditional Zulu medicine. When Khosi tries to take her mother to a western doctor, her mother tells her not to bother and to stay in school. Only education will save Khosi and her sister from the poverty and ignorance of the old Zulu ways.

School, though, is not bad. There is a boy her own age there, Little Man Ncobo, and she loves his blue-black lips and the color of his skin, so much darker than her own. But he mocks her when a witch's curse and a neighbor's accusations send her scrambling off to the sangoma's hut in search of a healing potion. She doesn't know what it is that makes the blood come up from her choking lungs. Witchcraft? A curse? AIDS? What must she do to save her mother from wasting before their eyes?

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Apartheid

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation and discrimination that took place in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s. The word "apartheid" comes from Afrikaans, meaning "apartness." This system was designed to maintain white minority rule over the country, which was home to various ethnic groups, including the Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaners, and many others.

Before apartheid, South Africa had a complex history of colonialism and settler colonialism. In the 17th century, Dutch settlers arrived, followed by the British in the 19th century. Tensions between colonizers and the indigenous peoples, such as the Zulu and Xhosa, often led to conflicts and wars. By the 20th century, the white population had established significant political and economic power.

In 1948, the National Party, a political party representing white South Africans, won the elections and officially introduced apartheid. The government created laws to separate people based on their race. The main goal was to ensure that white people maintained control over the country's resources and political power.

### Key Features of Apartheid

1. **Racial Classification:** Under apartheid, everyone was classified into racial groups: white, black, coloured (mixed race), and Indian. This classification determined where people could live, work, and go to school.
2. **Pass Laws:** Indigenous Black South Africans were required to carry passbooks at all times, which limited their movement and employment opportunities. If someone was found without a pass, they could be arrested.
3. **Land Acts:** The government passed laws that restricted Black people from owning land in most areas. They were forced to live in specific regions called "homelands" or "Bantustans," which were often poor and overcrowded.
4. **Education:** The Bantu Education Act of 1953 created a separate and unequal education system for Black South Africans. Schools for Black children were underfunded and focused on training them for low-skilled jobs.
5. **Political Rights:** Black South Africans were denied the right to vote and participate in government. Only white citizens could vote, meaning that Black voices were excluded from decision-making.

Different ethnic groups in South Africa experienced the violence of apartheid in overlapping, but unique ways. The Zulu, one of the largest ethnic groups, faced severe oppression. Many Zulu people were forced to live in homelands like KwaZulu, which lacked resources and economic opportunities. Despite this, the Zulu culture remained strong, with rich traditions in music, dance, and community life. The Xhosa, another major group, also faced similar challenges. They were known for their strong resistance to colonialism and apartheid. Leaders like Nelson Mandela emerged from the Xhosa community, advocating for freedom and equality.

Opposition to apartheid grew over the years. Many people organized protests, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience. One of the most significant events was the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, where

police opened fire on a peaceful protest, killing 69 people. This event drew international attention and condemnation. The African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela, became a central figure in the struggle against apartheid. Mandela was arrested in 1962 and spent 27 years in prison. His imprisonment became a symbol of the fight for justice. By the late 1980s, internal and external pressure against apartheid was mounting. Economic sanctions were imposed on South Africa by many countries, and protests became widespread. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and negotiations to end apartheid began. In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections, where people of all races could vote. Nelson Mandela became the country's first black president, marking a historic turning point in South Africa's history.

Apartheid was a painful chapter for Black South Africans, characterized by severe racial discrimination and oppression. The struggle against this system brought together people from various backgrounds, including the Zulu, Xhosa, and many others. The legacy of impact of apartheid lives on as Black South Africans work to redistribute resources and heal the wounds of settler colonial violence.

### Discussing HIV/AIDS with Students

Be cognizant of the students in your classroom and aware of students' living circumstances prior to reading *This Thing Called the Future*. Would this text be triggering for any students who live with or know someone with HIV/AIDS?

The purpose of discussing HIV/AIDS with students is to foster empathy, encourage understanding, and promote awareness. Explain that HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the immune system, and if untreated, it can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), a condition that makes it difficult for the body to fight infections. People living with HIV/AIDS may face significant challenges, including stigma and discrimination, which can make their lives even harder.

Help students understand that having HIV/AIDS does not define a person's character or worth. It is not a result of poor choices, but rather a health condition that can affect anyone, regardless of their background. Many people living with HIV/AIDS are managing their health effectively with treatment and can lead fulfilling lives.

It's important to highlight that with proper medical care, people living with HIV can have long, healthy lives. This condition is not a personal failure, and many individuals simply need support, understanding, and access to healthcare to thrive. You might consider using educational resources or personal stories to open up a discussion about community support and awareness, which can lead to positive action and service.

### References

**Apartheid:** <https://www.britannica.com/topic/apartheid/Opposition-to-apartheid> and <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/apartheid>

**HIV/AIDS:** <https://www.until.org/blogs/hiv-awareness-how-to-help-and-support-someone-who-is-hiv-positive> and <https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/talking-your-children-about-hiv-hiv-awareness-children>

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What are your thoughts on the concept of the future? How do you envision your own future?
- What do you think are some challenges young people face when thinking about their future? How can these challenges affect their decisions? How do you envision your own future?
- What does it mean to be brave? What are some circumstances that make it difficult to be brave? Think about a time when you had to be brave. What did you do? How did you feel?
- What do you know about South Africa's Apartheid? What caused it? When and how did it end? What is the legacy of apartheid?
- How do you think illness can change the way we view life and relationships? Can you think of any examples?
- How would you characterize the relationship between science and spirituality? Have you ever had a personal experience that challenged your understanding of science or spirituality? Do you think science and spirituality can coexist? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to be brave? Think about a time when you had to be brave. What did you do? How did you feel?
- As a hook for readers, consider showing students this book trailer posted on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0me8Fpd2oU>

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

**Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

**Glossary of Zulu Words:** Point out that this book contains Zulu words and phrases. Ask students why a book might be written this way. Why does it matter what language an author uses? How does a language change how a story is told or who hears it? What should you do when coming across an unfamiliar word? Show students the glossary in the back of the book and have them peruse it. Suggest that they can turn to this whenever they come across an unfamiliar word. Also note that not all words will be found in the glossary. Students can keep a running log in their reading journals of new words found and their meanings.

**Read the Author Bio:** Point out that J.L. Powers is not South African. Ask students what impact the identity of an author has on their experience of reading. Does that change depending on the identity of the characters? Or what the story is about? Or on the identity of the reader?

Encourage students to stop and jot in their notebooks when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- How HIV/AIDS stigma impacts families and communities
- The impact of gender-based violence
- The difficulties of dealing with the loss of a parent and troubling community dynamics
- The rich vibrant culture of the Zulu people of South Africa
- the journey of being brave and trusting their inner power

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Note on Vocabulary by J.L.Powers

The Zulu language is structurally very different from English. It is organized around the noun. There are seventeen classes of nouns. Because the initial part of the noun is dropped when constructing a sentence, it can be difficult for English speakers to look up nouns in a Zulu dictionary. This initial part of a noun may also be dropped when a person is addressed directly. For example, amantombazana means "little girls," but if you were addressing a group of little girls directly, you would address them as Ntombazana.

Please note that though I have often pluralized words the Zulu way, I have made some exceptions. The plural for sangoma should be izangoma but I have pluralized it the English way by referring to a group of healers as sangomas. I have also done this with the word tsotsi.

### Content Specific

Dirge, mealie, sangoma, muthi, missionaries, plait, parish, congregation, lobolo, incense, ochre, gourd, convent, ebbs, liberation, guerilla soldiers, riveted, menacing, remedy, HIV, AIDS, apartheid, ancestors, ricochets, esophagus, vigil, veranda, fiddle, murmurs, tromping, phlegm, douse, chameleon, cataracts, staccato, frets, keening, rondavel, carcass, sinewy, toddle, haggard, penitent, hymns,

malaria, parasite, taunt, purgatory

### Academic

Foreboding, smug, gnarled, arthritis, vigilant, indulgently, scolding, chide, omission, sanctuary, queue, apprentice, pungent, conspiracy, confide, concession, coax, liberation, riveted, menacing, remedy, vigorously, accusations, obedient, superstition, accosted, rebukes, apartheid, feeble, groin, lewd, disperse, eerie, pagan, indignant, testimony, wail, famine, reconciling, kneading, propelled, hostile, subsides, malicious, cacophony, crevice, reluctant, smolders, strife, concocts, heaving, jowls, sober, insistent, distraught, virtue, recedes, solemn, reassurance, mischievous, jubilant, dictates

\*For Zulu specific words and their definitions, refer to the Glossary in the back of the book.

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

#### **Part 1**

1. What do you learn about Khosi and her family from the first chapter?
2. What beliefs do Gogo and Mama hold that differ from one another?
3. Describe Khosi's first encounter with the witch. Why does Khosi need protection from her?
4. Which family member does Khosi share a birthday with? Why does Gogo believe this is important?
5. Who is Khosi's sister? Describe their relationship.
6. What is Khosi's living arrangement with her parents and grandmother?
7. What is Imbali? Where is it?
8. What kind of attention does Khosi attract because she is coming of age? How does the drunk man at the tuck shop treat her?
9. Who is Little Man Ncobo? How does Khosi feel about him?
10. What kinds of dreams/nightmares does Khosi experience?
11. Who is the sangoma? What is her significance?
12. Who is Thandi? What do you learn about her in Part 1?
13. What does Khosi learn from her meeting with the sangoma?



14. Does Little Man believe in witches and ancestors?
15. What is Mama's reaction when she finds out the drunk man attacked Khosi?
16. Which other family members of Khosi do we meet in Part 1?
17. Who is MaDudu? Why is she angry with Khosi's family?

**Part 2**

18. How does Zi react to Mama being away for a long time?
19. How does Khosi react once she starts menstruating?
20. What do you learn about Khosi's father in Part 2?
21. What does Khosi mean when she says her parents participated in the liberation struggle?
22. What is lobolo? What impact does it have on marriage?
23. Why is Khosi worried about Thandi?
24. Who is Makhosi?
25. What encounters does Khosi have with the drunk man?
26. How do the tensions between MaDudu and Khosi's family intensify?
27. Describe Mama's health in part 2? How does she explain these changes?
28. How do some members of Khosi's church react to Zolani Ngcuka? Why do they react this way?
29. What lie does Khosi tell her family?
30. What happens during Little Man's party?
31. What happens on Khosi's walk home from Little Man's Party? What role does Khosi's grandfather play in these events?
32. What is virginity testing in the story? How does Khosi's mom and aunt feel about this ritual?
33. What secret is Khosi keeping about her mother at the end of part 2?

**Part 3**

34. What is the significance of the chapter title "Slap"?
35. Why doesn't Khosi's mother want to see a doctor? What is she afraid of?
36. What is the relationship between Mama and Little Man's father?
37. What is necklacing?
38. What happened to the witches' son?
39. How does the family celebrate Zi's birthday?
40. Who gave Khosi's mother HIV? How does this get revealed?
41. What changes does Khosi notice in her mother overtime?

42. What does the dry mud Khosi finds on the side of the house represent?
43. Why are Khosi's ancestors fighting with one another?
44. What is the process of purification? Why is it done?
45. How does Mama's sickness worsen overtime?
46. What does Mama give to Khosi and ask her to keep safe?
47. What is a deathbed promise? What promise does Khosi make to her mother?
48. What happens between Thandi and Honest? What does Khosi learn about her mother when she goes to the bank?
49. Describe Khosi's dream in the chapter entitled "Battle". What does she learn in this dream and what does the dream represent?
50. Who finds Khosi after the drunk man beats her up?
51. How does Khosi feel during her mother's funeral?
52. How does Khosi resolve the issue with MaDudu?
53. What does Khosi decide about being a healer?
54. How does the book end? What does Khosi learn about herself?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Revisit the title of the book. What does *This Thing Called the Future* mean to you after reading? What does the book teach you about time and the future?
2. How does Khosi's relationship with her family shape her identity and her outlook on life? What challenges does Khosi face within her family dynamics?
3. What role does Khosi's mother play in her development as a character? How does their relationship evolve throughout the book?
4. How does Khosi's perspective on family change as the story progresses? What events or experiences lead to this change?
5. How does Khosi's journey mirror or challenge traditional coming-of-age narratives?
6. How does the legacy of South Africa's apartheid shape the story? What do you learn about apartheid through Khosi's mother?
7. What are the responsibilities of ancestors? Why are ancestors important?
8. Dreams play a crucial role in the story identities. How do Khosi's dreams influence her choices and sense of self? Why are dreams important?
9. What do science and spirituality represent in the story? How are they connected to the knowledge that Khosi has and is interested in?



10. On page 48, Khosi asserts, "But because Gogo and Mama are so stubborn, it makes it really difficult to navigate a path between them, to be my own person, to assert myself. I don't want to offend either one of them. No, I want them both to be pleased with the person I become. That's the difficulty of my life." Does Khosi achieve the desire to please both her Gogo and her mother by the end of the book? Why or why not?
11. What role does fear play in the story? How do different characters confront or avoid their fears?
12. Baba tells Khosi that each generation has its own challenges. What challenges does your generation face?
13. How does Khosi learn to protect herself? What are some way you protect yourself?
14. Interpret the quote "evil is blind but anger is a path in the forest, guiding evil through the dark" (73). What is the relationship between anger and evil? Can anger be useful?
15. What is the difference between HIV and AIDS? Why are they often used interchangeably?
16. What is the significance of the drunk man and the witch in the story? How do their relationship and interactions shape Khosi's journey? What do they symbolize for Khosi and his understanding of the world around him?
17. What is Mama's view on survival? How does this differ from Khosi's? What does survival mean to you?
18. On page 181 Khosi asserts, "even with power you can still be afraid." Why is this an important lesson?
19. How would you characterize the relationship between Khosi and Little Man? How does HIV impact the decisions Khosi makes about sexual intimacy?
20. What do you learn about healing and forgiveness through Khosi's story?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What do you think the message to the reader is? Think about possible motivations behind the authors' intentions to write the book. What do you think they wanted to tell her young readers?
2. Reflect on what this story shares about people who experience HIV/AIDS. Make a list of questions you have about the problem of HIV/AIDS in our world. Then make a list of ideas that others' can do to help combat these issues.
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *This Thing Called the Future*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make

from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *This Thing Called the Future* make you think of that?

5. How has reading *This Thing Called the Future* impacted your understanding of spirituality? What are some other ways people rely on spirituality?

### Multilingual Learners Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are multilingual learners (ML).

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the sections of the book in order and have students summarize what is happening in each section.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they think the message of *This Thing Called the Future* is.
5. Have students give a short talk about one of the characters in the book. Have them discuss what characteristics they admire about the person they chose.
6. Have students illustrate or discuss a loss and/or major challenge they have experienced and had to deal with.
7. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of a word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
8. Consider consulting <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/> for more ideas on how to support Multilingual Learners.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Khosi experiences a wide range of emotions throughout the story, especially as she learns about being cursed and her mother's illness. What kinds of emotions does she express over time as they gain more information? How does she turn her emotions into action?
2. This book covers an important part of world history. Part of that history includes racial violence, traumatic events, and grave injustice. What are some of the different ways that the characters in the book take care of themselves when confronted with traumatic events? How do they support each other? How do you take care of yourself when faced with traumatic situations or difficult truths?
3. Loss is a theme in this story. Have you ever dealt with a loss of someone you love? Why do some people become angry during times of sadness or trauma? What are some other grieving processes people usually go through when dealing with the loss of someone they love?
4. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with five columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Encourage students to review blurbs for *This Thing Called the Future* and write their own, longer, review of the novel.**
  - Example reviews: <https://www.jlpowers.net/this-thing-called-the-future>
  - For ideas, check out this Book Review Template (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/book-review-template-30200.html>) by ReadWriteThink.org.
- **On page 97 Khosi's Uncle states, "the past is important but so is today."** Write an

essay that explores what themes emerge from the quote regarding the importance of memory and experience. How do these themes resonate throughout the book? What lessons can readers learn about the relationship between the past and the present from Khosi's experiences?

- **Tell students to imagine they will be interviewing the J.L. Powers for a local newspaper or talk show.** Ask students to develop a list of five interview questions they want to ask. What do they want to learn about in terms of Anthony's life, his art, and the process of writing this graphic novel? Lead a class discussion, creating a combined list of questions and then narrowing that list down to ten questions.
- **Examine the different literary elements that used throughout *This Thing Called the Future*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc). Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *This Thing Called the Future*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? See PBS's Literary Elements and Techniques video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>)
- **Prepare a defensive essay that explains your views on which character changed the most throughout the course of the novel.** Defend your views by citing specific examples.
- **Select a scene in which you disagreed how a character handled a situation, person, or event.** In the voice of that character, rewrite the scene as you think it should have happened.
- **Assign students different characters from *This Thing Called the Future* and have them brainstorm about a guiding question:** What and how can this character teach us? Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share out their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study on the history of apartheid.** Refer to the Background section of this guide for additional context. Guiding questions to ask include: What caused apartheid? When was it? What were some socioeconomic restrictions? Who are some of the major figures who opposed apartheid? What role did other countries take in apartheid? How did apartheid

end? How does the legacy of apartheid impact South Africans today?

- **Research significant events in South African history related to apartheid and the Zulu people.** Create a visual timeline that includes at least 10 key events, such as the formation of the African National Congress (ANC), the Sharpeville Massacre, and significant Zulu uprisings. Include images and brief descriptions for each event to enhance understanding.
- **Give students a blank map of South Africa.** Have them research and map different townships, including Imbali. Where do different ethnic groups reside? What languages are spoken? Encourage students to engage with the historical geography of South Africa, fostering a deeper understanding of how different areas were impacted by apartheid and how they continue to be shaped today.
- **Have students identify themes in *This Thing Called the Future* and connect them to present-day issues.** Provide students with a graphic organizer that has "Themes in *This Thing Called the Future*" in the left-hand column and "Present-day Issue" in the right-hand column. Explain to students that they need to list themes from *This Thing Called the Future* and present-day issues that relate to that theme. Once the graphic organizer is complete, have students select one theme and one present-day issue and write an essay explaining the connection between the two in more detail. Why did they pick this theme to focus on, and what are the implications in our society today? Consider modeling the theme of "sexual education" in *This Thing Called the Future* and connecting it to conversation around teach abstinence in schools. Brainstorm with students how and why these two themes connect, and then have students write an essay about a different theme from their organizer.

### Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students draw their own cover image for the book *This Thing Called the Future*.** What kind of materials do they want to use for the cover? Encourage students to think about what happened in this book, and how that reflects the artwork for the cover. How can they use the current cover to inspire their work?
- **Ask students to write their own free verse or narrative free verse poem about a cause they care about.** Encourage students to have their poems reflect their personal experiences and/or their feelings and opinions toward the topics. Have students perform their work.
- **Put students in small groups.** Have them work together create poster for HIV/AIDS awareness. What information would they want to share? How can their posters avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or stigma? Provide examples of other HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns.
- **Have students research the artistic expressions (music, visual arts, literature) that emerged from anti-apartheid movements.** Students will create their own art pieces (paintings, poems, songs) inspired by themes of resistance, identity, or hope. Organize an art exhibit where students can display their works and discuss their meanings and inspirations.

### School-Home Connection

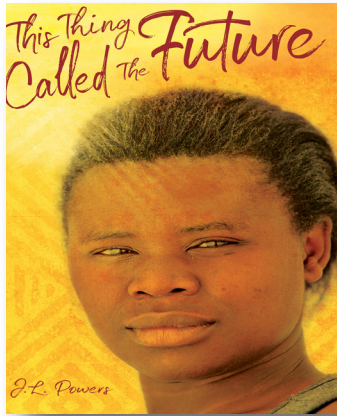
(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Encourage students to conduct interviews with family members or community members who lived during apartheid.** Have students ask what folks remember about this time and what impact it had on their lives.
- **If possible, arrange visits (in-person or virtual) with local individuals working to combat HIV/AIDS (e.g., someone from a local aid organization).** Prepare questions with students to help them build more context for understanding the experiences living with this diagnosis, and for understanding the specific concerns about HIV/AIDS in your area.
- **Have students explore the Apartheid Museum website:** <https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/>. What do they notice? Have them write down 5 things they observed and learned.





## Ordering Information

**General Order Information:**

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

**Secure Online Ordering:**

[leeandlow.com/books/this-thing-called-the-future/](https://leeandlow.com/books/this-thing-called-the-future/)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400

**By Mail:**

381 Park Ave S, Room 1401  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J.L. Powers** is a novelist and scholar. Her recent novel *This Thing Called the Future* is a coming of age story set in post-Apartheid South Africa. Her previous anthology was *Labor Pains and Birth Stories*. She holds master's degrees in African History from State University of New York-Albany and Stanford University, and won a Fulbright-Hayes to study Zulu in South Africa, and served as a visiting scholar in Stanford's African Studies Department in 2008 and 2009. She lives in San Francisco's Bay area.

## REVIEWS & AWARDS

**Best Fiction for Young Adults**, Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)

**Best Children's Book of the Year**, Bank Street College of Education

**Best Teen Books**, Kirkus Reviews

"This is a fascinating glimpse into a worldview that, while foreign to many readers, is made plausible through Khosi's practical and conflicted perspective.." – *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, **starred Review**

"Captures the local conflicts as well as the universal coming-of-age themes. Teens will sympathize with Khosi's weariness at hearing about her parents' heroic role in the past 'struggle,' and the tense story builds skillfully to an anguished revelation readers will want to discuss." – *Booklist*

"Takes a loving, clear-eyed look at the clash of old and new through the experience of one appealing teenager. . . A compassionate and moving window on a harsh world." – *Kirkus Reviews*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com).