

PRESS RELEASE FROM FAIRHEADS

Preserving the /Xam heritage in Clanwilliam

Some 700 learners in the Western Cape town of Clanwilliam have been busy over the past week interpreting and re-enacting a story told by the /Xam (Cape San) people who occupied the area they live in today countless years ago.

The story holds a modern-day lesson for the children, and is chosen each year from an archive of San narratives recorded by colonial linguists Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek in the 1870s.

This archive has formed the basis for the **Fairheads/UCT Clanwilliam Arts Project** which is an ongoing collaboration between the University of Cape Town and Magnet Theatre and funded by the Fairheads financial services group.

Richard Krepelka, CEO of Fairheads, says Fairheads has supported the project for 11 years. In 2010 the company won a Business & Arts SA (BASA) award in the category of youth development.

“Fairheads’ business is about transforming the lives of children through beneficiary funds. These are funds set up to manage the death benefits of deceased retirement fund members on behalf of their minor dependants, principally allowing them to get educated.

“So too in the Clanwilliam project, children’s lives are transformed through the creative power of the performing arts. Children are exposed to a world beyond poverty and substance abuse,” said Mr Krepelka.

Mark Fleishman, Associate Professor and Head of UCT Drama, says the narrative chosen for this year’s project is “The Lions, the crows and the little tortoise.” [See transcript below]. “To us today, the story sounds weird – there are elements of cannibalism, reincarnation and a tortoise lodges itself in a lion’s head to warn people of the lions approaching. Yet to the /Xam there once existed an Early Time, a First Order in which animals were people, and the story would have had cultural significance.”

The Clanwilliam learners have explored the theme in a week-long workshop involving dance, storytelling, shadow puppetry, and arts and crafts, such as the construction of larger-than-life illuminated figures based on traditional San themes.

The workshop facilitators are from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, the UCT Drama department and Magnet Theatre.

The workshops end in a performance at which the results are enacted for the community. The performance is based on /Xam storytelling elements, including fire dancing, music and mythical objects made by the learners. It is preceded by a lantern-lit procession through the streets of the community in which the children live.

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PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PERFORMANCE AND PROCESSION ARE AVAILABLE. PLEASE CONTACT LUCY REYBURN ON 082 922 7483 OR lucyrey@iafrica.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Fairheads/UCT Clanwilliam Arts Project is a catalyst for various aspects of youth development. It has become an important training ground for facilitators, with up to 40 drama and fine art students gaining valuable experience, and other community organisations in the Cape West Coast asking for mentorship. The project has spawned a permanent drama group, COMNET, run by children who have migrated through the project. COMNET has won awards i.a at the Suidoosterfees.
2. The body of San narratives (from which a theme is chosen each year for the project) is housed at the Lucy Lloyd Archive Resource and Exhibition Centre (LLAREC), a research centre at the Michaelis School of Fine Art of the University of Cape Town. The centre was established by Professor Pippa Skotnes and colleagues.
3. This collection, compiled in notebooks in the 1870s and 1880s by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, is almost the only record we have of the /Xam language and of the ideas and world view of the people who spoke it.
4. The /Xam who taught Bleek and Lloyd their language came from the Kenhardt district, but there is historical as well as archeological evidence that the /Xam once inhabited most of the Western Cape where they painted in the rock shelters of the Cedarberg and the Northern Cape where they engraved on the boulders of the plains.

5. The archaeological heritage of the Clanwilliam area is a rich archive of potential information on long-term social and environmental history, and this is being used to enrich the school curriculum and create opportunities for small business, such as rock-art guides. The project is run out of the Living Landscape premises in Clanwilliam, an archeological field station established by Professor John Parkington of UCT's archeology department.
6. Mark Fleishman and Pippa Skotnes won a research award in 2008 for their work on the project.

Transcript from the Lloyd Bleek archive for the 2011 Clanwilliam project

THE LIONS, THE CROWS AND THE LITTLE TORTOISE

Two birds, the Blue Crane and the Crow, are out to fetch some water, when they are surprised by two lions, who are also men that eat people and can see at night. The Lions eat the Blue Crane but the Crow escapes back to the house of Crows. He is pulled up by the other crows.

The Lions follow the bird's footprints and scent to the Black Crow's house. The Lion pretends to be the bird's husband and begs her to pull him up. The bird drops a rope made of mouse entrails and the Lion climbs up with his hands. The rope breaks and the Lion falls down, roasts in the fire beneath and dies. The birds then leave the thorn-tree to another house. The other lion, attracted by the smell of roast flesh, arrives, and cuts off a piece from his companion's thigh. The dead lion suddenly comes to life again, jumps up, and asks for a piece of his own flesh, which they eat.

The Lions become hungry again and go out to look for food. They see a Tortoise. The greedy Lion swallows the tortoise whole while it is still alive. The Tortoise goes and stands in front of his forehead. The Tortoise talks from the front of the Lion's head. The Lions go hunting and see people, and as they get nearer to catch them, the tortoise warns the people. The Lions are chased away with fire.

The Lions are getting hungrier and continue until they see a herd of gemsbok. As the Lions draw closer, the Tortoise on the Lion's forehead warns the herd. The gemsbokke run away. The other Lion is angry and they go closer to the gemsbokke. Again the Tortoise warns the herd.

They set out again to find food. They are desperately hungry. They come upon a house with an old woman inside. As the Lions approach the old woman, the Tortoise warns the old woman of the danger.

The old woman tells her companion the Hare to take the thorn bag and escape. The Lions chase the Hare who goes to hide on a rock. When he sees the Lions coming closer, he throws out thorns which pierce their feet. The Lions stop to pull the thorns out and decide to go back to eat the old woman instead. But the old woman has left the house. The Lion asks his friend to open his head and remove the Tortoise. The Lion beats the front of the Lion's head with a knobkerrie, knocking a hole in it. The Tortoise moves safely around to the back of the Lion's head while the Lion falls down, unconscious. The

Lion continues to hit his friend on the head until he falls down dead. The other Lion runs away, and the Tortoise crawls out of the hole in the Lion's head. The old woman and the Hare, and the herd of gemsbokke celebrate, and praised the Tortoise for warning them and saving their lives.