

Reading Together: Building Connections and Communities

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Participating in the 2024 Khanya College Winter School was an unforgettable experience. One of the most important things we learned was the value of unity and solidarity in difficult times in communities. As part of our ongoing learning, we were asked to start study groups in our communities. This wasn't easy.

It was hard to get people, especially young people, to join. "At first I thought the experience would be difficult to manage, till I finally got to understand and acknowledge the importance of reading as a collective," said George Mothebe, a study group member from New Bronville, Welkom in Freeestate.

Our goal was to read together and prepare for the 16th Jozi Book Fair. We read two books: *The Vaal Uprising of 1984* by Franziska Rueedi, which helped us prepare for a discussion on the 40th Anniversary of the Vaal Uprising, and *Gold and Workers* by Luli Callinicos, which prepared us for a discussion on land dispossession and the creation of the South African working class.

Reading together as a group helped us to connect with each other and it improved our understanding of the country we lived in. It encouraged different views by allowing everyone in the study group to share their understanding, making our experience even better.

Since starting the study groups, we had our share of disagreements, but we've managed to resolve our differences and came out stronger. Through reading together, we've experienced personal growth, self-reflection, and stress relief.

Mvuselelo Mngxuma, a study group member from Freedom Park said, participating in study groups made him understand the importance of organising and mobilising people. He added that, it showed him that we are all fighting one thing – capitalism, which seeks to divide us. Through the study group and discussions, the study group member says he learned how to build a stronger and more resilient community of readers, and he learned the importance of empowering each other to take action, reading together was a reminder that every individual has an important role to play in our collective struggle, and that we all have the potential to be leaders in our own right.

Reading together is powerful. As young people we need to gather, read and grow together, by doing that we will find the power to change ourselves and our communities. As readers, we've gained a new understanding of the world around us in many ways.

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