

This pack compliments the teaching of history and citizenship at Key Stage 3 (England) and Grades 7-9 (South Africa).

It can be used to support a visit to Delville Wood Memorial in France, where the We Die Like Brothers exhibition about the Mendi was opened in summer 2015, or it can be used to explore the First World War in the classroom. This pack was created to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the loss of the Mendi in 2017.

Activities within this pack could also form a stimulus for literacy, art and design.

#### Equipment:

Posters on pages 1-5.

Understanding Chronology sources from pages 7-10

Workbooks and writing materials.

Words highlighted in **green** can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource pack.

# We Die Like Brothers

## Activity 1

### Understanding Chronology

#### Understanding Chronology

Read the posters provided at the beginning of this pack and then carefully consider the sources that accompany this activity. Place them in **chronological** order to tell the story of the troopship Mendi.

#### Learning outcomes

Pupils will become familiar with the story of the Mendi and through that, the background context of the First World War.

Pupils will reinforce their understanding of chronology.

Pupils will explore a range of historical sources and information from other sources, to build a bigger picture of a significant historical event.

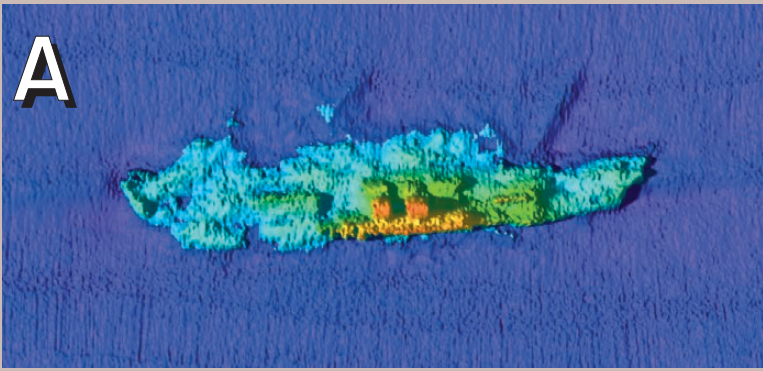
#### Homework/Extension activities

Read the sources again. Identify which are **primary sources**.

# SS MENDI



A



This is a **geophysical** survey image of what the wreck looked like in 2007 when the site was surveyed.

B

"...you can still clearly see the outline of the hull and the area where the Darro hit it, as well as the ship's engine and the huge boilers that supplied them with steam."

Extract from the 2007 geophysical survey report, produced by Wessex Archaeology.

C

0-1/3/12-500-200. S.

Nº 57662 A

NATAL.

Act 49 of 1901.  
Act 3 of 1904.

## IDENTIFICATION PASS.

1/-

Magisterial Division of RICHMONDRegistered Number 670 Date of Original Issue 30-8-1904Name and Surname (isibongo) of Native to whom this Pass is granted  
SIKANISO MTOLOName of Father NGENANGANIName of Kraal Head GAKEName of Chief MATOMLA\* Place of Residence W. P. PaganPERSONAL DESCRIPTION:  
Sex MALE Apparent Age 30 YRS. Height 5' 7"Build MEDIUM Complexion DARK BROWNMarks (if any) (see Newcastle) Pass Officer J. A. SteadDate 16-10-1916

\* Here state, in addition to the Locality, whether it is on Location, Mission Reserve, Crown, or Private Lands. In the case of Private Lands, the name of the Owner to be inserted.

Endorsement (if any) under Section 4 of Act No. 3, 1904:

Private Sikaniso Mtololo's Identification Pass. This pass was found with Private Mtololo's body which washed up on the coast of Zaandvoort, in Holland, on 29 April 1917.

Image courtesy of Noord-Hollands Archief

D

The loss of life was caused by the collision, by the Mendi taking a heavy list to **starboard** and foundering so quickly, by the lack of assistance from the Darro after the collision, and the low temperature in the water.

The loss of life at the moment of impact was due to the Darro striking the Mendi on the starboard side, in the vicinity of the fore troop deck, where a considerable number of the native labour battalion were quartered.

J. G. Hay Halkett, Judge, Board of Trade Inquiry. The formal investigation into the sinking took place between 24 July and 8 August 1917.

**We Die Like Brothers**  
Understanding Chronology





E

"Instantly I could see from the fittings that it was a good quality merchant ship. I then found a little saucer with a crest, B&ASNC, British and African Steam Navigation Company."

Quote from Martin Woodward, diver, who identified the wreck in 1974.

F

"...to pause and pay tribute to all members in uniform who have taken it upon themselves to serve the people of South Africa and defend the Constitution of the country with their lives".

President Jacob Zuma's words when announcing that February 21 would be South Africa's Armed Forces Day. This was first commemorated in South Africa in 1994.

G

The Mendi was built by Alexander Stephen & Sons Ltd, Glasgow, for British & African Steam Navigation Co Ltd. and registered in 1905 in Liverpool.



H

"There was great panic and confusion, and on the deck we were told to get onto lifeboats and leave the ship, as it was sinking. Below there was a sea of darkness, but the men plunged into the rough, cold water, singing, praying and crying'.

Private Mathumetse, 16 years old

**We Die Like Brothers**  
Understanding Chronology



J

"The Mendi is now a 'protected place' under the Protection of Military Remains Act. Although divers can still visit it, it is now an offence to damage it or remove artefacts from it."

Mark Dunkley,  
Historic England, 2015.

I

"I am sure it was when the ship sank, that many men lost their lives, because as it sank it made a great hollow and many men were not far from it. So by the time the water covered that empty space many had gone down into it"

Private Jacob KoosMatli,  
C Company

K

Copy.		Date...	21st February 1917.	H.M.S. "BRISK"		Message.
Receiving Ship	Transmitting Ship.	Time of Despatch or Receipt.	T u n e.	Remarks.		
All ships s.s. Mendi	s.s. Darro Brisk	5.0 am 5.4 am	Q Q	En clair(F.method) no answer	S.O.S. s.s. Darro in collision ten miles South of St. Catherine's. Is there any assistance required, can you proceed and at what speed?	
s.s. Darro	"	5.33 am	Q	En clair	What is extent of damage?	
Brisk	s.s. Darro	5.38 am	Q	En clair	Will find out.	
All ships	s.s. Darro	5.40 am	Q	En clair	S.O.S. s.s. Darro sinking twelve South of St. Catherine's.	
C-in-C's	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0530. Convoy Mendi in collision, damage unknown.	
Plymouth	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	SS/6.58 (local interference).		
Portsmouth	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0600. Mendi sunk picking up survivors. Darro reports sinking.	
C-in-C's	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	6.19 am		
Plymouth	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	En clair	Do you want any assistance? How are you getting on?	
Portsmouth	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	En clair	All O.K. so far.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	Commercial - made several times - no reply	Have you anything to communicate?	
Brisk	Darro	5.44 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0645 Steamer Darro reports: all O.K. so far.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	5.44 am	Q	Vocabulary	0655 Indicate Mendi's position at time of sinking. Have you anything to communicate?	
C-in-C's	Brisk	6.53 am	Q	Commercial - several calls - no reply	0730 Reply 0655. 10 miles South of St. Catherine's. Captain of MENDI onboard.	
Plymouth	Brisk	6.53 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	O.K. here up to present.	
Portsmouth	Brisk	6.53 am	Q	En clair	What is the extent of damage?	
Brisk	Capt. D. II	7.9 am	Q	En clair	Still awaiting instructions from bridge.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	7.23 am	Q	En clair	I have sent to bridge for instructions.	
Capt. D. II	Brisk	7.33 am	Q	En clair	DARRO collided with MENDI 8 miles South of St. Catherine's Point. Trying to make Southampton fog preventing progress.	
Brisk	ss. Darro	7.45 am	Q	General Service	If you do not require me to stand by I will shortly proceed to port.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	7.49 am	Q	General Service	0920 To what port should BRISK proceed?	
Brisk	s.s. Darro	7.51 am	Q	Vocabulary	What is your magnetic course and speed? When did you leave scene of collision?	
Brisk	s.s. Darro	8.2 am	Q	Vocabulary	0920 Have picked up DARRO escorting her to St. Helens at slow speed.	
Brisk	s.s. Darro	8.34 am	Q	Vocabulary	North East dead slow just leaving scene.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	8.55 am	Q	General Service.	0940 Your 0910. To the most convenient defended port. After, returning to base.	
Capt. D. II	Brisk	9.13 am	Q	Vocabulary	1030 Am proceeding to St. Helens Roads with survivors of MENDI: Captain, 4 officers, 11 white ratings, 1 military officer, 3 sergeants, many coloured men saved.	
s.s. Darro	Brisk	9.18 am	Q	Vocabulary	1100 Weather permitting expect arrive 12.45 pm. 70 natives saved, 10 dead on board.	
S.O. Portsmouth	Brisk	9.22 am	Q	Vocabulary	1108 Report what base you are proceeding to utilise local patrol boats for landing survivors if possible.	
Defences.	ss. Darro	10.12 am	Q	Vocabulary	1200 Proceeding to St. Helens arrive at 1 p.m.	
Brisk	Capt. D. II	10.42 am	Q	Vocabulary		
C-in-C	Brisk	10.56 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Portsmouth	Brisk	10.56 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Capt. D. II	Brisk	10.56 am	Q	Vocabulary		
C-in-C	Brisk	11.15 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Portsmouth	Brisk	11.15 am	Q	Vocabulary		
S.O. Portsmouth	Brisk	11.15 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Defences	Brisk	11.15 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Brisk	Capt. D. II	11.40 am	Q	Vocabulary		
Capt. D. II	Brisk	12.5 pm	Q	Vocabulary		

Log of radio messages sent and received by HMS Brisk which was in the vicinity of the Mendi when it sank.

We Die Like Brothers  
Understanding Chronology



L

Just a line while still waiting to  
leave to again wish you goodbye.  
When I got the chance  
yesterday after all the  
excitement I looked in your  
direction.

Had rather a restless night so  
far. This is a fine boat and  
nicely fitted up, two in each  
cabin. Suppose shall get used to  
my new surroundings in a day or  
two.

Ta ta fondest love,  
Bob

Letter dated 16th January  
1917 from Sergeant MacTavish  
to his wife written on the  
day the ship departed from  
Table Bay, Cape Town.



M

**H**E whom this scroll commemorates  
was numbered among those who,  
at the call of King and Country, left all  
that was dear to them, endured hardness,  
faced danger, and finally passed out of  
the sight of men by the path of duty  
and self-sacrifice, giving up their own  
lives that others might live in freedom.  
Let those who come after see to it  
that his name be not forgotten.

*Colour/Serjt. Robert Alexander MacTavish  
S. African N. Lab. Cont.*

Scroll commemorating  
Sergeant MacTavish

**We Die Like Brothers**  
Understanding Chronology



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Activities within this pack could also form a stimulus for literacy, art and design.

#### Equipment:

Posters from pages 1-5.

Reverend Dyobha's speech from The Death Dance on page 22.

Understanding Significance worksheet on page 12.

Workbooks and writing materials.

Words highlighted in **green** can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource pack.

# We Die Like Brothers

## Activity 2

### Understanding Significance

#### Understanding Significance

Read the posters at the start of this pack again, and the speech made by Reverend Dyobha which can be found in The Death Dance.

They contain a lot of information about the ship and its story. The worksheet on page 12 has some statements about the story of the Mendi.

Determine which have:

**Local significance**

**National significance**

**International significance**

#### Learning outcomes

Pupils will gain an understanding of how events in one country can have significance and influence in others.

Pupils will gain historical perspective by understanding the terms local, national and international in relation to historical significance.

#### Homework/Extension activities

Research what is meant by the following terms – cultural history, economic history, military history, political history, religious history and social history.

Can any of these terms be used to describe the story of the Mendi?

Could more than one term be used?

# SS MENDI



1. The role of the SANLC has  significance because the men were South African, serving the British Army and were to be based in France.

2. The wreck of the ship has  significance because it lies in British waters, but tells the story of South African men, on their way to France.

3. The Reverend Dyobha's words spoken onboard the deck of the sinking ship have (1) , (2)  and (3)  significance. They have (1)  significance because he speaks of tribal groups, (2)  significance because those groups form the nation of South Africa and (3)  significance because they encourage unity and equality amongst all people.

4. Across South Africa memorial services were held with huge numbers attending. The services were accompanied by an outpouring of grief and dignified sorrow, highlighting the  significance of the sinking of the Mendi.

5. The Mendi was built in Glasgow in 1905. Glasgow had a thriving shipbuilding industry that had  significance to the people of that city. At the time, Glasgow was the greatest shipbuilding centre in the world and therefore also had  significance.

6. Before the war, the Mendi carried cargo and passengers between Liverpool and West Africa.

This trading of goods and movement of people had  significance.



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#### **Equipment:**

Would You Join the SANLC? sources on pages 14-16.

Workbooks and writing materials.

## **We Die Like Brothers**

### **Activity 3**

### **Would You Join the SANLC?**

#### **Would you join the SANLC?**

In small groups read all of the sources and decide whether you would have joined the South African Native Labour Corps or not. To help you decide divide the sources into two piles – reasons for joining vs reasons for not joining. Once groups have made a decision they can then share their views and explain how they divided the sources with another group/the whole class. This should lead on to discussions about the SANLC in general but more importantly about attitudes at the time and also how the same piece of evidence can be interpreted in different ways by different people.

#### **Learning outcomes**

Pupils will use historical sources to learn about the South African Native Labour Corps.

Pupils will draw their own conclusions based on evidence.

#### **Homework/Extension activities**

Imagine that you have agreed to join the Labour Corps. Write a letter home telling your family why you have come to this decision.

# SS MENDI





National Library of Scotland  
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## Source A

The South African Native Labour Corps was formed in 1916 during the First World War. The British Government needed more manpower and it was decided that men from British colonies could join the war effort but only as labourers. This meant that they would not fight but would do all of the heavy jobs to support the army. This included driving, tree felling and railway construction and maintenance.

*Members of the Military Police of the South African Native Labour Corps camp at Dannes March 1917*

## Source B

Colonel S. M. Pritchard, who directed the native labour corps, described the work the men were to do as...

'...that class of employment that was exclusively or ordinarily suited to natives - such as driving, (wagon) leaders and general labourers.'

## Source C

*Troops of South African Native Labour Corps digging sand in a camp at Dannes March 1917*



National Library of Scotland License: CC BY 4.0

## Source D

In 1913 the Natives Land Act was introduced in South Africa. This act gave the majority of farming land, some 80%, to white people, thus taking land away from the black families who had farmed it for decades. In 1913 only 20% of people living in Africa were white. This act was deeply unpopular with black South Africans.

Act No. 27  
of 1913.

[Date of commencement—  
19th June, 1913.\*

### ACT

To make further provision as to the purchase and leasing of land by Natives and other Persons in the several parts of the Union and for other purposes in connection with the ownership and occupation of Land by Natives and other Persons.

(Assented to 16th June, 1913).  
(Signed by the Governor-General in English).

BE IT ENACTED by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, the Senate and the House of Assembly of the Union of South Africa, as follows :—

**We Die Like Brothers  
Would You Join the SANLC?**





## Source E

*Men of the SANLC are inspected by King George V*



## Source F

Joining the SANLC meant travelling abroad. The Mendi sailed from Cape Town, to Lagos in Nigeria, to Sierra Leone and to Plymouth in Devon. This journey took less than a month and many men on board travelled further in that time than they had ever done in their lives. The Mendi's final destination, which she did not reach, was Le Havre in France where the men were to serve.

**We Die Like Brothers  
Would You Join the SANLC?**



## Source G

Many well educated and influential men signed up to join the SANLC. These included clergymen, teachers, translators, clerks and businessmen. Men of black royal houses also joined up. These included Henry Bokleni and Dokoda Richard Ndamase from the Pondo royal houses; Chief Bota and the grandson of King Moshoeshe from Basutoland; Chief Mamabola from the Transvaal; the nephew of King Cetshwayo and a grandson of King Dinuzulu from Zululand.

## Source I

The Native Land Act meant that black farmers had less land to farm and so were able to produce less food. In the Transvaal province, in south eastern Africa, a drought further decreased the harvest. The Transvaal region provided the majority of recruits for the SANLC.

## Source K

In 1915 Bonar Law, the Secretary of Colonies, stated in a secret report that...

‘...no proposal for training natives upon a large scale was likely to be acceptable to... the British and Dutch inhabitants of the union, as the return, after peace, of a large body of trained and disciplined men would create obvious difficulties and might seriously menace the supremacy of whites.’

Because of this it was decided that native servicemen would only play background roles by providing labour, rather than being armed and trained to fight.

## Source H

Members of the SANLC received a daily wage which was somewhat higher than the wage earned by labourers in South Africa. A large part of the wage was paid straight to their families back home. In addition to this, the men received a uniform, a food ration and accommodation.

## Source J

The South African Native National Congress (SANNC) was established in 1912 to protest against racial discrimination in Africa. On the outbreak of war in 1914 they pledged loyalty to the British government for the course of the war. They also promised not to criticise the British government and offered to raise troops for the war effort. They hoped that this attitude would win them the respect of the government and help them to secure black rights in the future. This was a view encouraged by the white government of South Africa.

## Source L

‘The empire must uphold the principle that a coloured man must not raise his hand against a white man if there is to be any law and order in either India, Africa or any part of the empire where the white man rules over a large concourse of coloured people.’

Opinion expressed in the East Rand Express, a South African newspaper when it was suggested that Indian men be allowed to join the war effort.

**We Die Like Brothers  
Would You Join the SANLC?**



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Activities within this pack could also form a stimulus for literacy, art and design.

#### Equipment:

Exploring Inequality sources on pages 18-19.

Workbooks and writing materials.

Words highlighted in **green** can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource pack.

## We Die Like Brothers

### Activity 4

### Exploring Inequality

#### Exploring Inequality

On the next page are extracts from an exhibition about the Mendi that is installed at Delville Wood Memorial. Read the sources carefully. What differences do you notice between the pay and conditions for black and white men on board the ship?

Record your findings on the worksheet.

#### Learning outcomes

Pupils will begin to explore difficult concepts of inequality, racism, colonialism and empire.

#### Homework/Extension activities

These differences in treatment are borne out of colonial rule and the British Empire. Research the background to the Empire to answer the following questions:

What was the British Empire?

When did the Empire begin to expand and when did it contract?

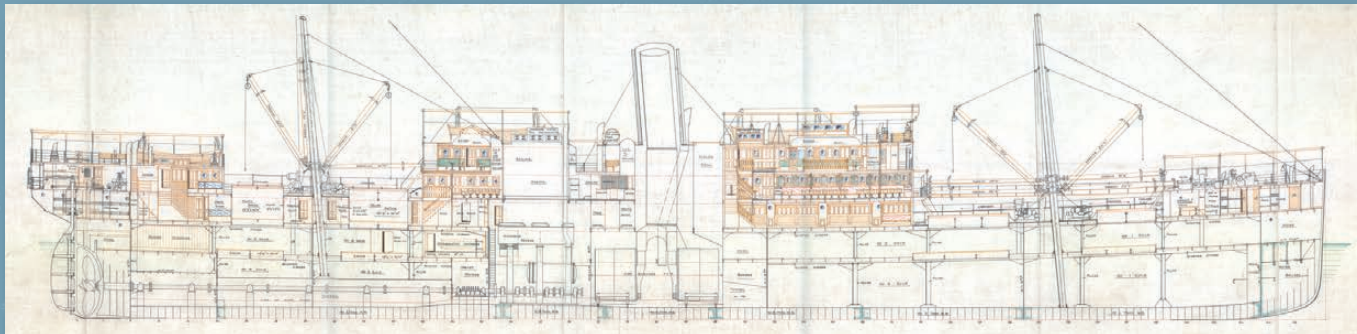
What did British Colonial rule mean in South Africa?

What changes did the British introduce?

Were these changes good for South Africans?

# SS MENDI





©National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Once underway, life on board settled into a routine. The men spent the daytime on open deck as far as possible. They cleaned the decks and laid their kit out for inspection. In the later stage of the voyage many acted as lookouts.

For the whites, there were deck games and bridge when not on duty. Captain Yardley was the Commanding Officer's regular bridge companion. Lieutenant Richardson played the piano in the saloon.

For the blacks, there were boxing matches and night-classes (run by Captain Hertslet). Services were held by the Chaplain, Reverend Wauchope, on Sundays. Boat-drills and fire-drills were practised regularly.

## Source A



©Cory Library/Rhodes University/Africa Media Online

### Isaac Wauchope Dyobha

Born in Doornhoek near Uitenhage in 1852, Isaac was the eldest of 10 children. A Xhosa of the Chisana clan, he was educated in the Lovedale Mission. Originally recruited to the SANLC as a clerk interpreter; he was 65 years old when he became the Battalion's chaplain. His monthly pay was £6.

The Reverend was a prominent member of a group of East Cape African intellectuals, who encouraged their compatriots to join the Labour Corps in the hope that the black population would benefit politically from this show of loyalty.

## Source B

**We Die Like Brothers**  
Exploring Inequality





As part of their marketing and publicity, shipping companies had a wide range of tableware marked with their livery and crests. The coffee can bears the African Steam Navigation Company Elder Dempster crest, the dishes the British & African Steam Navigation Company Elder Dempster crest.

Decorated in the very popular Key Festoon pattern, it was manufactured by Mintons of Stoke-on-Trent, England. Different tableware was used on different parts of the ship. Decorated ceramics would probably have been reserved for the white officers of the Labour Corps.

## Source C

Image courtesy of Mark Sijmans



19.

Sikaniso Mtolo was from Richmond, Natal. He was 30 or 31 years old when he died. His monthly pay was £3. Private Mtolo's identity pass is a remarkable survival. It was washed up with his body on the coast at Zandvoort

(North Holland) on 29 April 1917.

The Natal Native Locations Acts (1901, 1904, 1916) required Africans within South Africa to obtain

identification passes, to carry with them at all times and produce on demand. These controls were early steps towards the system of **Apartheid**. They were designed to control the movement of black and indigenous South Africans and to secure the supply of labour for the mines and growing heavy industry.

## Source D



## Source E

The black victims were more likely to share a headstone or plot than their white compatriots. All are now honoured by headstones maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Those whose bodies were not found are named on memorials to the missing of the war.



## Source F

Many of the men on board had not seen the sea before. Private Stimela Jason Jingoos, who sailed to France with the Labour Corps on another ship, recalled the reaction of his comrades:

"It was the first time most of us had seen the sea, and we all spent hours talking about it and repeating, 'So this is the sea!' The thing that amazed me about it was how the sun came up out of it every morning".

**We Die Like Brothers**  
Exploring Inequality



Differences between the treatment of  
black and white men in the story of the Mendi

Black

---

White

---



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#### Equipment:

Reverend Dyobha's speech on page 22.

Workbooks and writing materials.

Words highlighted in **green** can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource pack.

# We Die Like Brothers

## Activity 5

### The Death Dance

#### The Death Dance

Read aloud the words spoken by Reverend Wauchope Dyobha on the deck of the damaged Mendi. **Oral tradition** records that the men took off their boots and stamped the death dance on the sinking ship.

Read the passage carefully and look at the words the Reverend uses. Then answer the questions below the passage in your workbooks.

#### Learning outcomes

Pupils will be reminded of the human story behind the history that they learn.

British pupils will gain an understanding of South African tribal culture and affiliation, something not prevalent in UK societies.

Pupils will explore unity in the face of adversity.

#### Homework/Extension activities

Here are some other speeches about unity:

"The bell of man's inhumanity to man does not toll for any one man. It tolls for you, for me, for all of us." Martin Luther King Jr

"Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer! We must not let that happen here." Eleanor Roosevelt

"When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you." Winston S. Churchill

"The perfect state is one where men weep and rejoice over the same things." Plato

"Sixty years ago, the people of South Africa proclaimed that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people." Jacob Zuma

"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realised. But, my Lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" Nelson Mandela

Consider carefully what each person is saying, and the words that they are using. Write your own short speech to promote unity. It may help to think of a challenging situation that you or your classmates face, and to consider how working together could help.

# SS MENDI



Read aloud the words spoken by Reverend Wachope Dyobha on the deck of the Mendi. **Oral tradition** records that the men took off their boots and stamped the death dance as the ship sank.

Read the passage carefully and look at the words the Reverend uses.

**“Be quiet and calm, my countrymen, for what is taking place is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die...but that is what you came to do. Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I, a Xhosa, say you are my brothers. Swazis, Pondos, Basutos, we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our bodies”.**

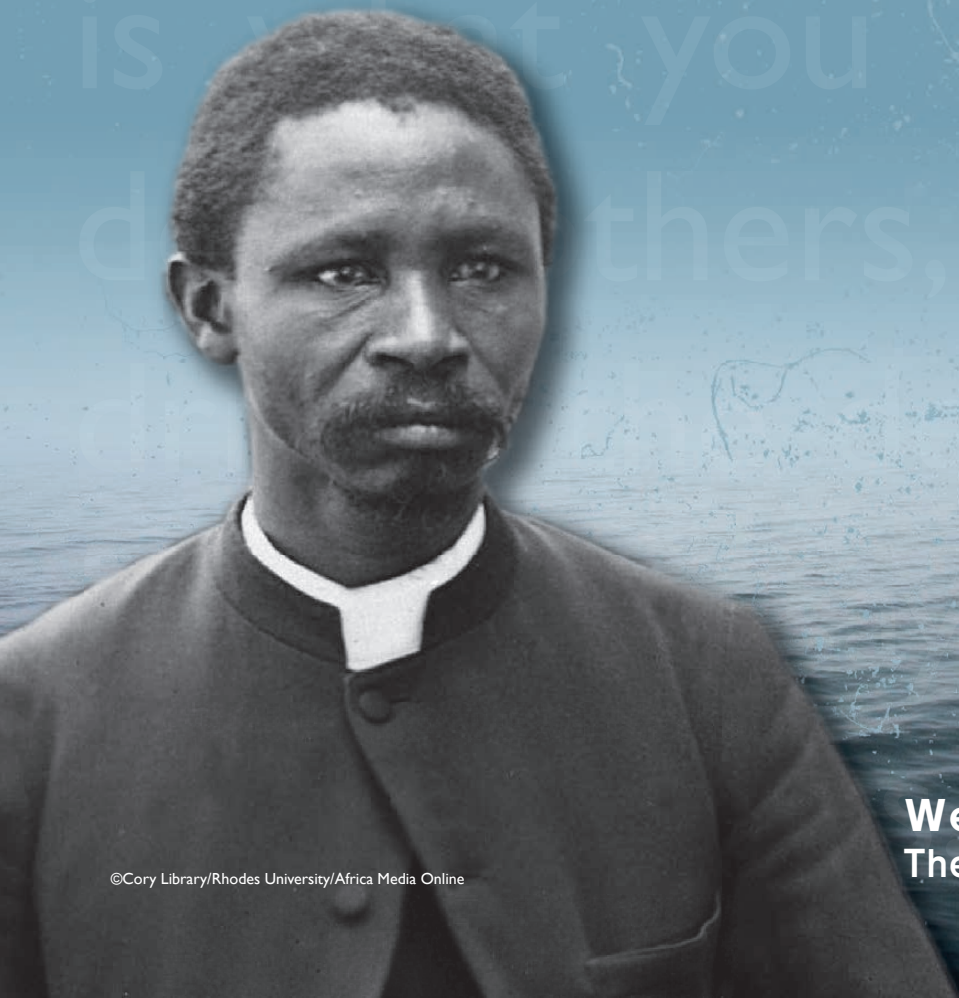
Answer the following questions:

Are there any words that you don't understand? See if you can find out what they mean – either by asking someone who might recognise them (see Activity 7 – Making Links) or by using the computer.

What words does the Reverend use to promote unity amongst the men on the ship?

How do the words he spoke make you feel?

How would they make you feel if you were on board the sinking ship in 1917?



**We Die Like Brothers  
The Death Dance**