

Athol Fugard, John Kani, Winston Ntshona

## The Island

United Kingdom (1974)

TAGS: [African Traditions](#) [Antigone](#) [Sophocles](#)



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General information	
Title of the work	The Island
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Republic of South Africa
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1974
First Edition Details	Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, "The Island" in <i>Statements</i> [three plays], London: Oxford University Press, 1974, 109 pp.
ISBN	0192829254
Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Young adults
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## Creators



### **Athol Lannigan Fugard , b. 1932 (Author)**

Athol Harold Lannigan Fugard, a playwright, director and actor, was born in South Africa, at Middleburg, on the 11th of June, 1932. He lampoons the ills of apartheid in his creative works, especially in his plays, *The Blood Knot* (1963), *The Island* (1973), *Three Port Elizabeth Plays* (1974), *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* (1977). Up to today he still directs and writes.

Source:

[Bio](#) at formnfunction.net (accessed: November 19, 2019)

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### **John Kani , b. 1942 (Author)**

John Kani, a South African, was born on the 30th of November, 1942 as Bonsile John Kani. He is a playwright and an actor, and is known for his role in *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996), *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *Black Panther* (2018). He has won many awards, among them, the Broadway 1975 Tony Award. His is also known for his collaborative writing with popular South African writers, Athol Fugard and Winston Ntshona in their *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Island*.

John Kani in 2007,

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(accessed: January 7,  
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### **Winston Ntshona , 1941 - 2018 (Author)**

Winston Ntshona was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in October 6, 1941. He was an actor and a dramatist. He wrote many plays with Athol Fugard and John Kani. However, he is known for his *Gandhi* (1982) and *Blood Diamond* (2006). Together with John Kani, he won the Broadway 1975 Tony Award for best actors for the staging of their co-authored plays *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Island*. His writings are anti-apartheid. He died on the 2nd of August, 2018.

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## Additional information

### Summary

The play begins with two prisoners, John and Winston, prisoners in a cell on an Island. They undergo torture and mutilation every day, while in chains. However, they resolve to practice camaraderie as a source of relief. John caters for Winston, while the latter takes care of the former's wounds. As they languish in misery within the confines of the cell, they take a trip down memory lane to their blissful boyish days; the time they spent at the beach, and their early incineration days in the cell, when they rehearsed *Antigone*, Sophocles' play to perform. They relate the play to their daily experience in South Africa, while they were free and the time when the white minority oppressed blacks and coloured people. The play continues with the prisoners recounting their past and later rehearsing the play they are going to perform. In the course of the rehearsal, Winston is disappointed with the female role he has taken. He wonders how the audience will appreciate it. He is certain that the audience will mock him, and that his fellow prisoners will humiliate him. On the contrary, John is excited at the idea that he has been summoned by the governor, and his appeal for his ten-year conviction has been commuted to three years three months. This appeal elates Winston, as he dreams that John will soon be free. However, his joy is short-lived as he starts regretting why he opposed the regime in the first place. Finally, he concludes that he might have simply been accomplishing his fate.

The play ends with the performance of *Antigone*. John (who plays the role of Creon) sentences Winston (Antigone) to jail in a cave, to starve and die there. He is charged for defying the King's order and not being loyal to her brother by refusing to give him a befitting burial. Winston, now back to his prison status, praises his country but criticizes the white regime in South Africa. Immediately, sirens are heard and both inmates, still handcuffed, escape.

### Analysis

*The Island* mirrors the suffering of inmates on the Ruben Island in South Africa during the apartheid epoch. Although its realities are South African, they replicate what Sophocles presents in *Antigone*. The play, thus, uses a play within a play to create a liaison between two cultures separated by time and space, yet united by similar realities. Both plays project the ruthlessness of rulers, civil disobedience and the quest for freedom in South Africa and ancient Greece. The oppression

of South Africans by callous rulers, as portrayed in the text through the imprisonment of John and Winston on the Island, bears semblance with King Creon's oppression on Antigone and her brother Polyneices. Again, in both *The Island* and *Antigone*, freedom is curtailed, to the extent that misdemeanours lead to long term prison sentences. For example, John is imprisoned for belonging to a banned organisation and Winston for burning his passbook. A similar civil disobedience is evident in *Antigone*. Antigone disrespects Creon's decree prohibiting her from burying Polyneices. The insolence in both text lead to the imprisonment of these characters by their rulers. Also, John's and Winston's miserable conditions resonates Antigone's agonies. They are chained, and asked to act. In sum, the parallels between *The Island* and *Antigone* x-ray the ruthlessness of oppressive regimes, the civil disobedience that follows it and the different strategies used by characters to survive from classical to postmodern times.

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Classical, Mythological,  
Traditional Motifs,  
Characters, and  
Concepts

[African Traditions](#) [Antigone](#) [Sophocles](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,  
and Concepts Relevant  
for Children and Youth  
Culture

[Disobedience](#) [Freedom](#) [Judgement](#) [Justice](#) [Obedience](#) [Political changes](#)  
[Values](#) [Violence](#)

Further Reading

Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Mark Griffith, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

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