

The best Dezemba ever

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“Class! Settle down, please!” Ms Mkhize claps her hands loudly. “I know that you are excited for the holidays but you’re stuck with me for two more hours. I want to know all about your holiday plans, so it’s show-and-tell time!”

The learners reach into their bags. Ms Mkhize has asked them to give a speech about a festive-season object that is special to them.

“Next up: Molemo,” Ms Mkhize announces. He stands up, winks at his best friend Thando and heads to the front.

“It’s simple,” Molemo says. “You haven’t eaten a *real* Christmas lunch until you’ve had oxtail stew cooked by my gogo in a driepoot pot!”

“A few pieces of ledombolo on the side with creamed spinach and

beetroot? The best Christmas meal ever! Mmm, and the cakes. Our family is going to eat all day!” Molemo rubs his tummy happily. Everyone claps.

“Last up: Thando,” Ms Mkhize calls.

Thando fist-bumps Molemo on the way to the front. He clears his throat and booms, “I present to you: Ukhamba! My family spends every Dezemba in the village on my Mkhulu’s farm. Ukhamba is used for drinking umqombothi and –”.

The collective gasp from his classmates cuts him short. “No, you guys!” Thando bursts out laughing. “That’s obviously for the grown-ups! Us kids have our own ukhamba full of ginger beer.”

Thando finishes his speech to roaring applause. It’s extra loud because everyone wants to leave. Then they wait in silent anticipation to hear the magic words.

“So quiet!” Ms Mkhize whispers. “Seriously, teaching you has been a joy. Thank you for being kind and hard-working. Have a fun and *safe* holiday. You may leave.”



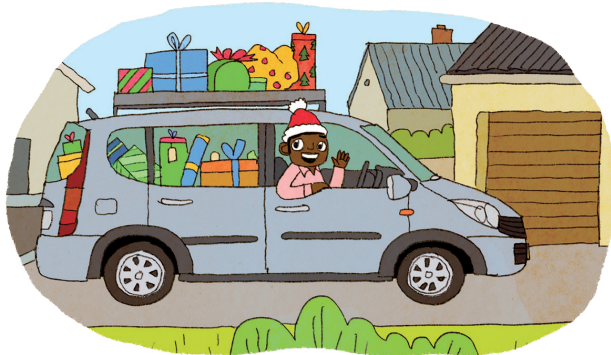
The summer days have been sizzling hot, and Christmas Eve is here. Molemo and his sister are hard at work. Every time Mama calls them. “Molemo! Lesedi! Finish those dishes before the guests arrive!”

“Molemo! The braai stand! Where’s my phone? Lesedi! The oxtail in the freezer! Did you remind Papa about the chairs?” Mama always panics when family visits.

Finally, Uncle Mpho’s car drives in. Molemo and Lesedi drop their chores and run. Gogo steps out with her arms open. “Look how big my babies are!” She showers them with hugs and kisses.

Soon, the yard is full. There is a sea of big cousins, little cousins, uncles, aunties, grannies and grandpas everywhere.

The aunties will get the food ready for tomorrow. The uncles will clear the yard for the big fires. The grandparents will rest. The big cousins will be cool, and the little cousins will play.



It's Christmas Day! The family goes to church in the morning. Everyone sings and listens to the sermon about the importance of sharing. The little cousins feel extra proud in their new Christmas clothes.

As soon as they are back home, the kitchen is busy again. The grown-ups are in charge of the food: aunties cook and uncles braai. Gogo moves between her driepoot and her many cakes and cookies in the oven.

"Besicela i-Christmas! Besicela i-Christmas!" Children's voices float in from the gate. Only Molemo and Lesedi hear them.

"Remember what Pastor Tim said?" he asks his sister. "It's always good to share!" He fetches a tray of cupcakes and hands them out happily.

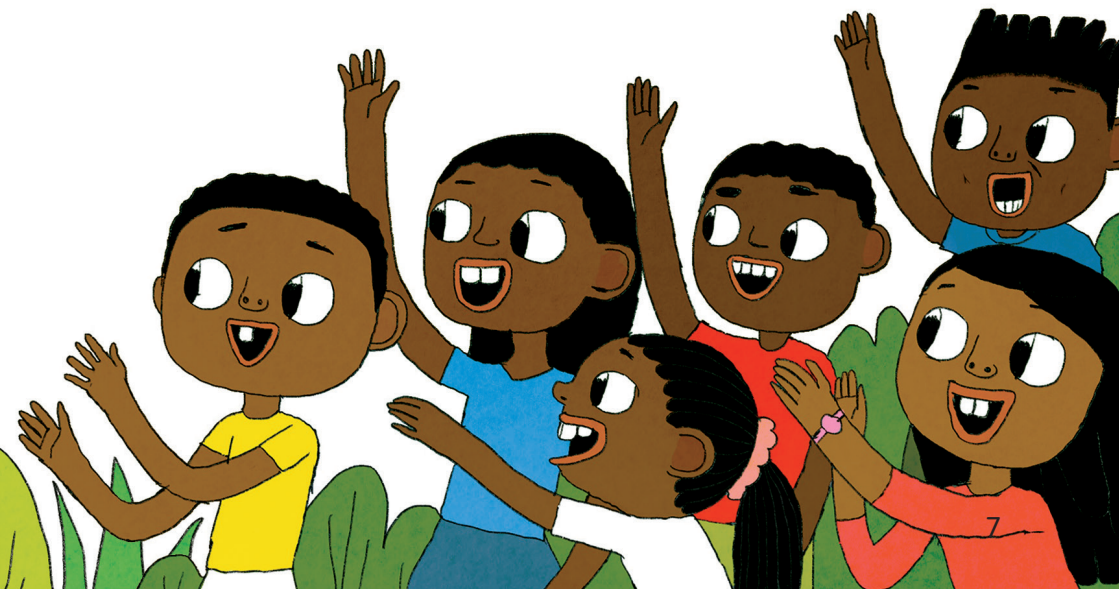
Back in the kitchen, Gogo is upset. "Aowa! How can that be? I left those cupcakes right here!"

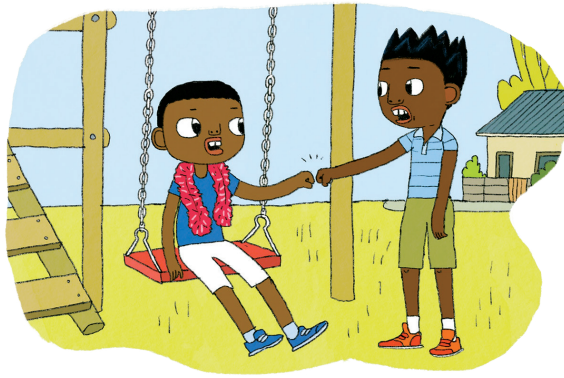


After some moments, Molemo swallows hard and confesses. "I'm really sorry, Gogo."

Gogo can't believe it. "That was my new recipe. It's always good to share and be generous but now I can't even buy more chocolate. All the shops are closed."

Molemo feels like he has ruined Christmas. He hurries out of the yard so that he isn't around when Mama finds out because then he'll *really* be in trouble.





He ends up at the park and is surprised by who he sees. “Bro! Aren’t you meant to be in the village?” The boys fist-bump but Thando looks just as sad as Molemo feels.

“This Dezemba really sucks,” Thando sighs. “First, it started with the drought...” He explains that it hasn’t rained for months in Mkhulu’s village. The crops and animals are dying. “That’s why my family is stuck here. The city is so boring and quiet.”

Molemo explains why he’s sad too but he cheers up as he thinks about how loud and fun it is back at home. He wants to share the happiness. “Bro. Come and spend Christmas Day at my house! All my cousins are there and we’re swimming.”

“Thando, stay close,” Molemo instructs his friend. “Our simple mission is to avoid Gogo and Mama.”

They sneak around as they help with the braai and the driepoot cooking, they dance with the big cousins and, eventually, swim with the other little cousins.

“Merry Christmas! It’s lunch time!” Papa summons. Everyone rushes in and settles to eat. Of course, there’s a special VIP table for the little cousins.

“Is that a new little cousin that I haven’t met yet?” Gogo is puzzled.

Molemo realises that he’s busted. “This is my friend, Thando. I invited him, Gogo,” he begins to explain the whole story. Gogo smiles proudly. “You’re right, my boy. It is always good to share!”

“Thando, do you want to invite your parents to spend Christmas with us?” Gogo asks. “There’s plenty to go around.”



Thando's parents arrive. They thank Gogo, Mama and Papa for the invitation. "We didn't want to arrive empty-handed," they say. Gogo is full of joy as she disappears into the kitchen with the chocolates.

The Christmas celebration begins. Everyone eats until they can't eat anymore. Kwaito, amapiano and shouts of "Heppi!" and "Merry, merry Christmas!" fill the air along with yummy smells.

"Bagaetsho!" Mama waits for quiet. "There are enough gifts for all the kids, so let's go. Yes, big cousins. That means you too!" Everyone laughs. Everyone is full and happy. Gogo brings out a new tray of cupcakes. Molemo and Thando agree that it's the best Dezemba ever!

