

SACEE NEWS

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ENGLISH ALIVE CELEBRATES 60 YEARS

Twenty-five framed covers lined the foyer walls of the Baxter Theatre on the evening of 18 March. Each cover represented a year of *English Alive*, the annual anthology of creative writing by school learners published by the South African Council of English Education (SACEE).

The exhibition marked the publication's 60th anniversary. It was conceived and organised by Alison Gwynne-Evans, University of Cape Town (UCT) senior lecturer in Professional Communication Studies and the current chairperson of SACEE Western Cape.

English Alive has been published since 1967. The premise is simple: invite young people across the country to submit their writing, select the best, and publish it. The result, sustained over six decades, is an unbroken record of how young South Africans have made sense of their world. Among those previously published in the anthology are poet and performer Siphokazi Jonas, playwright and novelist Nadia Davids and poet and politician Jeremy Cronin.

The panel discussion that accompanied the exhibition brought together people whose connection to *English Alive* spans several generations. Kirsten Deane, the anthology's current editor, chaired the conversation. Twanji Kalula, the vice-chair of SACEE and a former editor of the publication, joined the panel alongside Masithembe Mqoto, founder of the Nothing Can Stop Me learner support programme, who has worked with SACEE to run creative writing workshops at Iziko Museums. Two former cover artists also participated: Senzwa Gum, whose artwork graced the 2005 edition while a learner at Pinelands High School; and Lukonde Mwanza, the 2024 cover artist from Clarendon Girls' High School.



At the Baxter Theatre



From my Chair ...

SACEE.MILSTONES AND REVIVALS



In the past two years we have celebrated three SACEE milestones. 2025 was our 70th year of service to English, and we also celebrated the 50th English Olympiad examination.

This year *English Alive* produced its 60th edition.

All of this is thanks to many people over the years who have ensured the sustainability and growth of SACEE.

Also pleasing to see is the revival of the Pretoria Branch. Amanda Swanepoel got it going again with a bang. It is pleasing, too, to see how Yvette Morgan has expanded the activities of the Eastern Cape Branch beyond the Olympiad.

May we long continue to fulfil our mission statement:

‘To support the teaching, learning and appreciation of English’

MALCOLM VENTER



POSTSCRIPT

As I was completing this edition of the SACEE Newsletter, Alison Gwynne-Evans, who has chaired the Western Cape Branch for many years, informed me that she would be standing down from this position.

Alison has worked tirelessly to make the Western Cape Branch alive, diversified and innovative.

She has also navigated *English Alive* through troubled waters to ensure its sustainability.

We salute you, Alison, and wish you everything of the best.

Malcolm Venter

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2025 REPORT

Kirsten Deane



Kirsten Deane

2025 was a busy year for the oldest publication for young writers in South Africa, *English Alive* continued to hold a space for teenagers to express themselves completely and honestly, without judgment. In 2025, this was achieved not only through the successful publication of another *English Alive* anthology but by creating opportunities for our published writers to share their work and for *English Alive* to emphasise the importance of having a publication just for teenage writers.

At the beginning of 2025, *English Alive* was invited to the Cape Flats Book Festival to host and take part in a panel discussion. The Cape Flats Book Festival invites local poets, novelists, and creative performers to share their work. The *English Alive* panel discussion included writers published in the 2024 anthology and Kirsten Deane as the new editor. Being invited to the Festival was not only a great opportunity for *English Alive* but also an essential contribution to the journey of the writers. They were exposed to many well-known published South African writers and got the opportunity to see what South African publishers there are and how the publishing process works.

We launched the 2025 anthology at the Open Book Festival, an annual literary festival that invites writers from around the world to participate in panel discussions, read their work, and have insightful conversations that shape the landscape of literature. At the launch, a handful of the students who were published read their work with confidence and vulnerability, with the help of Jasantha Singh, an essential part of the *English Alive* team and a public speaking coach.

English Alive held creative writing workshops at various schools in 2025. The workshops are comprised of seven sessions over seven weeks. Each workshop teaches the students different techniques for creating a story. Each attendee gets the opportunity to share their work and get comments from others that can be implemented for improvement. These sessions also help the students grow their confidence in sharing their work. The students were then encouraged to submit their work to *English Alive*, which many of them did, and were published.



In October 2025, *English Alive* was invited to participate in Poetry Africa, an annual international poetry festival curated and presented by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. Poetry Africa started in 1996, and since then it has been established as the biggest poetry festival in South Africa. *English Alive* was invited to have a second launch of the 2025 publication. This launch included a panel discussion where editor, Kirsten Deane, spoke about the importance of *English Alive* and read poems from the anthology. This created publicity for the publication and SACEE.

ENGLISH OLYMPIAD—Robert Sharman

The theme of the 2026 English Olympiad was ‘Victim or Victor’, and the title of the anthology of set texts is *We Have a Choice*. The anthology was a collection of works selected by the 2026 Chief Examiner, Hillary Lewis-Soma. Hillary also compiled the study guide and provided suggested answers to the questions in the study guide, which were posted on the Olympiad website. The anthology comprised a selection of poetry and extracts. Both the anthology and study guide were published by the Eastern Cape Branch of SACEE.

In an effort to reduce printing costs for the 2026 Olympiad, a digital copy of the study guide was posted on the Olympiad website for schools to view or download instead of printing copies for all schools by default. All schools received printed copies of the anthology, however.



FAL 3rd place winner, Lisebo Motilane from Machabeng College, with Tasneem Dolley, FAL examiner

Printed copies of the study guide were still given as an option but only to schools that had requested this option on their entry forms. Most schools (171 out of 242) opted for printed copies of the study guide to be sent to them.

Since the significant decrease in our entry numbers due to the Covid-19 pandemic our entry numbers have been increasing steadily. However, the number of entries in 2026 decreased significantly. In 2026 our entry numbers went from 5511 entries received in 2025 to 5030 entries, which is 481 or 8.73% less entries. The number of schools entering also decreased from 264 in 2025 to 242 in 2026 – a difference of 22 schools.

The Eastern Cape Branch of SACEE has decided to increase the value of the bursary support offered to indigent entrants, thereby reducing the candidate’s portion of the entry fee to only R50. It is hoped that this will enable more Quintile 1-4 schools to enter the Olympiad.

For the usual reasons (candidates changing schools, dropping out of school entirely, sporting commitments, illness, discouragement, etc), only 78% of the candidates eventually wrote the examinations.

The 2026 Olympiad prize giving took place during the midyear National Schools’ Festival, at the 1820 Settlers’ National Monument in Grahamstown/Makhanda.

Following the success of last year’s addition to the programme of addresses by some of the prize winners, this item is was retained in this year’s programme.

The occasion was also used for the launch of the new digital model of delivery of the Olympiad.

All in all the 2026 Olympiad was once again a great success.



HL winner Arabella Molefi from Future Nation Schools Fleurhof with Yvette Morgan, HL Examiner

JOHANNESBURG BRANCH—Warwick Brown

It is with pleasure that this report is presented on behalf of the members of the SACEE JHB branch at the conclusion of another successful year of projects. A productive AGM was held with a number of members volunteering for all manner of tasks including an ongoing commitment to address publicity through various social media platforms. This involved creating accounts on Instagram and TikTok with active promotion of these accounts at all SACEE events, particularly debating.

Shakespeare Festival

The annual collaboration between National Children's Theatre and the South African Council for English Education continued again. The preliminary rounds of the Shakespeare Festival and Monologue Competition took place in the indoor Imagination Theatre at NCT for three days, followed by a finals and then a Winner's showcase.

There were entries from King Edward VII School, St Teresa's School, the University of Pretoria, Sutherland High, Centennial School, Willowmoore High, Ridgewood College and NCT's Shakespeare Club, as well as several private entries. Eventually forty-four monologues, eleven duologues and eleven scenes were entered in the junior, senior and adult sections over the week of the festival, taken from more than twenty plays and the sonnets. Selections ranged from well-known plays like *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* to less popular plays like *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Pericles*.



This year the competition expanded to include other playwrights of the period. In addition to Shakespeare's speeches, monologues were presented from Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Kyd, John Marston, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher.

The finals were adjudicated by Renos Spanoudes, who praised the performers for creating their magic on the stage and provided valuable feedback.

Heartfelt thanks are again extended to the National Children's Theatre for their unwavering support of this project, as well as Dr R Quince's commitment to the Bard and his fellows. His parallel project of running a Shakespeare club at the NCT every week to introduce school learners to Shakespeare and the world of drama is reaping rewards.

Debating League

The 2025 season of the SACEE Debating League marked one of the most competitive and expansive years since the pandemic. The league continued to grow both in scale and in reach. It celebrated SACEE's 70th anniversary by reinforcing its position as the premier high school debating competition in the country.

The 2025 season saw over 80 teams competing from more than 60 schools across Gauteng. The competitive depth of the pool was particularly notable this year. Due to the strength and size of the field, the knock-out rounds were expanded to include octo-finals, allowing more teams the opportunity to compete in elimination rounds. The Pretoria region, already well-established within the broader SACEE structure, continued to set a strong benchmark for regional development.

The 2025 season produced exceptional performances across both senior and junior divisions.

Senior Division Winners: Roedean School

Best Senior Speaker: Ameer Loonat (King Edward VII School)

Junior Division Winners: Steyn City School

Best Junior Speaker: Edzai Mpukuzela (Randfontein High School)

It is notable that a bulk of competitors at SACEE are selected to compete at the National and Worlds Schools Championships on a consistent basis.

A significant milestone for the 2025 season was the league's expanded social media presence. The finals were recorded and posted on YouTube, increasing accessibility and visibility for participants, schools and the broader community.

WESTERN CAPE BRANCH—Alison Gwynne-Evans

2025 was quite a roller-coaster year for SACEE. At a national level we importantly celebrated 70 years of existence as an organization. To celebrate that, SACEE Western Cape linked the launch of the 59th edition of *English Alive* to the Open Book Festival in the Cape Town Library. Coincidentally, the Library also celebrated 70 years of service in 2025. The 2025 edition of *English Alive* was the first edition published under the newly appointed English Alive editor, Kirsten Deane.

Kirsten Deane innovates

Kirsten was recommended by Kobus Moolman of UWC and has quickly asserted her own style and energy to the role of editor—driving several new initiatives linking to the Cape Flats Book Festival and Poetry Africa, as well as her own connection to St Michael's Child and Youth Care Centre. Kirsten is a talented author in her own right and recently celebrated the publication of her first book of poetry, titled *Disabled, but...* We are excited to have Kirsten at the helm of *English Alive* as we enter a new season growing our footprint in schools across the country.

Spellcheck

The Spellcheck and Public Speaking Competitions ran successfully in 2025 – but the Forum Discussion Competition was held over to 2026. Nine schools in the Western Cape wrote the 2025 South African Council for English Educators Spellcheck Competition on Wednesday, 12 March 2025. A total of 1310 Grade 8 learners tackled the test, of whom 28 learners earned full marks and 54 earned highly commended certificates.

The learners found the spelling test a bit easier this year as can be confirmed by the results. The large– school average error rate of 8,9 is lower than 2024 (9,7). Those schools with over 90 learners which came in with a below-average error rating must be very pleased with and proud of their results, which are a tribute to the hard work of both the educators and learners.

Claremont High School took the honours in the large schools with an average error rate of 5,4 followed by Rhenish Girls' High School with an average error rate of 8,06. Congratulations to Claremont on their first entry being so successful. CBC St John's once again headed up the schools smaller than ninety with an average error rate of with the average for the schools coming in at 7,2. CBC St Johns has topped the small schools for 8 years in a row!



Membership issues

At a membership level, SACEE is struggling to keep consistent membership from new and established schools. We need to build our administrative processes so that changes in teaching staff are more easily updated. Support from provincial departments of education is important.

Isiko collaboration



2026 started with a successful negotiation of an MOU with Iziko Museums. This makes partnering with Iziko easier in terms of year-on-year agreements and co-operation for events.

I am lucky to have an active and supportive team, and I value your support and would like to affirm each of your different contributions

BORDER BRANCH—Lisa Musto

2025 truly proved to be a celebration of the English language for the SACEE Border Branch. We went into the year with a clear vision in mind: to once again improve upon participation in events and to continue to innovate and offer exciting projects for the learners to partake in.

Primary School Activities

There was a total of 12 activities held for the primary schools in 2025. These activities were well supported and enjoyed by all those who participated.

High School Activities

A total of 5 activities were held for the high schools in 2025. High School section featured its debut Oratory Day, which is now a permanent fixture on the SACEE calendar.

National competitions

2025 proved to be another successful year for the **National Short Story Competition**. We received a total of 412 entries: 107 from high school learners and 305 from primary schools. Of these, 67 received Gold awards, 93 Silver and 110 Bronze.

There were 36 schools that entered the SACEE 2025 **Puzzle Parade** (Grades 1 – 3) which resulted in a total of 7402 learners participating.

11 758 learners from 43 schools in Grade 4-7 and 9821 learners from schools in Grades 8 – 11 participated in the SACEE **National Language Challenge** in 2025. In the East London area, 8 learners were placed in the top 3 positions from grades 4-11.

Prize-giving

The 2025 Annual Prize-giving was held at Hudson Primary School on the 11th November 2025. More than 300 Certificates were awarded to the prize-winners in the various categories.

Closing remarks

Much like our chosen Poetry theme for this year, 'Beginnings and Endings', we reflect on the successful and happy chapter that was 2025. None of these events would be a success or continue if it weren't for the stakeholders: namely teachers, parents and learners alike. To the principals, educators and SACEE school Reps, thank you so much for the role you played the past year, and for your consistent support. We also wish to extend a special thank you to Gonubie Primary, Stirling Primary, Merrifield, Hudson Park Primary and Clarendon High who willingly hosted and made various events possible.



MIDVAAL BRANCH—Annastella Papageorgiou

This year the Junior Original Writing Competition for Primary Schools was led by Miss Annastella Papageorgiou from Mondeor Primary School, assisted by Mrs Heather Tutton, Mrs Ella Leite, Miss Talita Bedessy Mrs Paula De Oliviera, Mr Keletso Mamabolo, and the Miss Earth SA Team. Individual pieces of writing were submitted by eleven schools. All entrants received a certificate of participation, merit, runner-up or winner. The floating trophy in memory of Mrs Beverly Liebenberg was awarded to the schools with the most winning pieces (Pridwin Preparatory School) and a trophy recording the top five schools was presented to the runner-up school (Roedean School) in honour of Dr Richard Hayward, the founder of this particular competition. The competition was sponsored by The Glen Shopping Centre, Mondeor Primary School, The Miss Earth South Africa Programme, Generation Earth and Mr M. Terezakis from Leondale Pharmacy.

TOP FIVE SCHOOLS:

Pridwin Preparatory School, Roedean School, St. Mary's School, Waverley, Auckland Park Preparatory School

PRETORIA BRANCH—Amanda Swanepoel

The 2025/2026 year has been a rewarding and informative one, with definite room for competition expansion next year. We hosted a Spelling Bee for Grade 6 & 7 Pretoria schools on 2 August 2025. This turned out to be a resounding success, with the help of our sponsors, Bidvest Waltons, who gave away free stationery on the day and sponsored prizes for our winners. Bargain Books displayed an array of reading variety and also sponsored prizes for the winners. The event was particularly well supported by the parents and is sure to be on the schools' calendars again this year.

We also gained new memberships through this initiative, which we hope to expand on in the next Spelling Bee.



EASTERN CAPE BRANCH—Yvette Morgan

The 2025 year's Olympiad marked its 50th anniversary. As the English Olympiad was founded by Dr Malcolm Venter in 1976, it was fitting that he be made the Chief Examiner. Yvette Morgan was his Co-examiner, while Tasneem Dolly prepared the FAL exam for 2025. This year, the anthology was entitled 'Love! Life! Land!' which carried the theme of 'Celebration'.

SACEE Eastern Cape and The Grahamstown Foundation have had meetings and are currently working on ideas to ensure the future growth and modernisation of the Olympiad. Keeping an evermore paperless society in mind, we are looking at options to cut unnecessary costs and facilitate efficiency of the project. We have thought of several ways in which the Olympiad could be modernised to entice more learners to take part in the future. We are also focusing on increasing our FAL entries to give a greater audience the chance to experience participating in our project. While I cannot reveal any definite details as we are very much in the planning stages, SACEE Eastern Cape is very excited about the positive possibilities the future holds.

This year we ventured into offering a Public Speaking Challenge which is open to Juniors (Grades 7 – 9) and Seniors (Grades 10 – 12). Each term we offer a challenge covering different aspects of public speaking:

Term 1: Spelling Bee

Term 2: Dramatic Monologue or Interpretive Reading

Term 3: Prepared and Unprepared Speeches

Term 4: The top 3 in each category compete for first place.

Though this project is in its infancy, it has been well received by schools in and around Gqeberha.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL
ENGLISH OLYMPIAD
— REIMAGINED FOR 2026 —

A New Chapter BEGINS!

More than a new logo...

We're launching a renewed English Olympiad experience designed to better support **teachers** and **learners** throughout the year.

- NEW WEBSITE
- FACEBOOK COMMUNITY
- INSTAGRAM UPDATES
- TUTORIAL VIDEOS
- TEACHER RESOURCES
- LEARNER SUPPORT

IMPROVED SUPPORT
Tutorials, worksheets, videos and more.

BETTER COMMUNICATION
Regular updates, important information and reminders.

STRONGER COMMUNITY
Connect, share and celebrate success together.

WATCH YOUR INBOX!
Our official launch email will provide everything you need to explore the new English Olympiad.

- Website & social media links
- Teacher & learner resources
- Guides, tutorials & videos
- Important dates & information

Supporting learners. | Empowering teachers. | Inspiring excellence.
LAUNCHING 2026!