

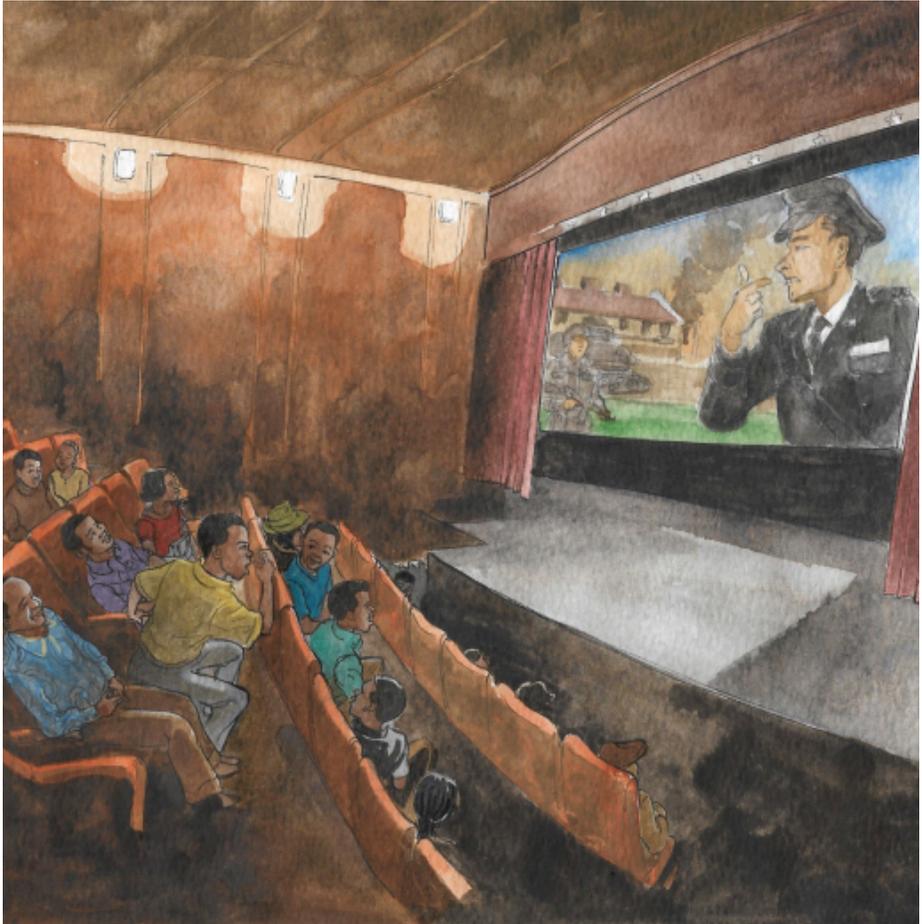


# John Kani from Snake Pit to King

Ndivhuho Mutsila

Vusi Malindi

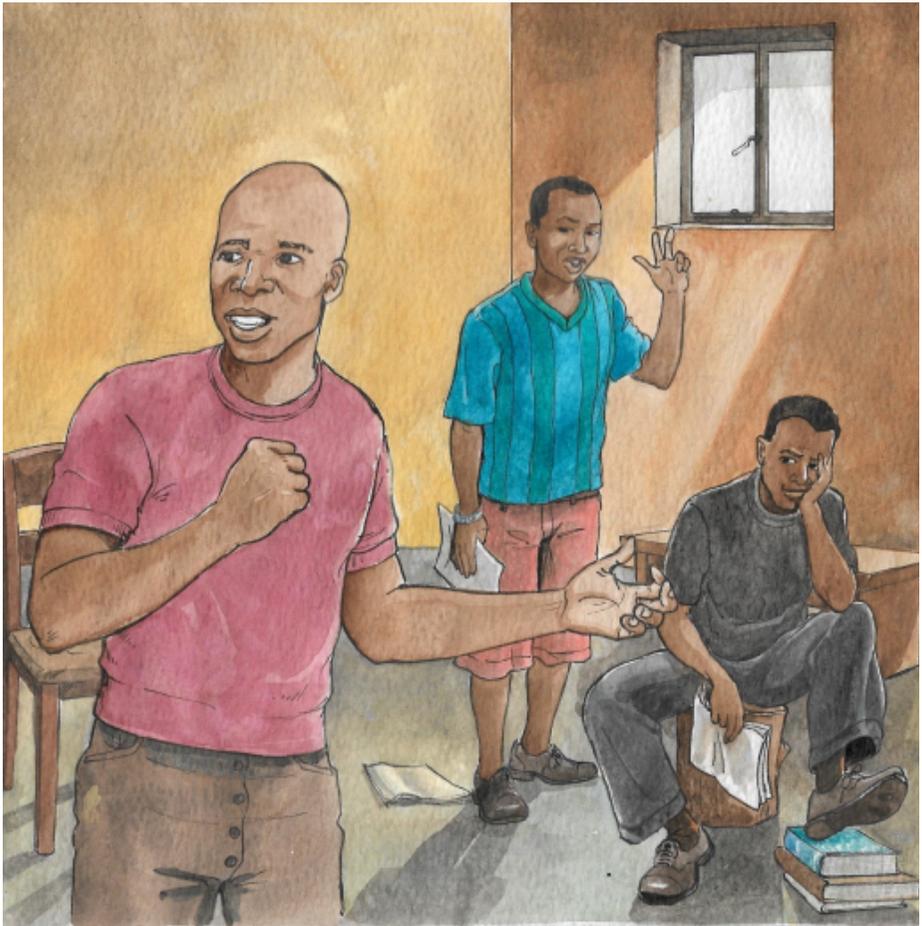




Actors can change their voices and pretend to be different people. They play all types of characters in plays and films.

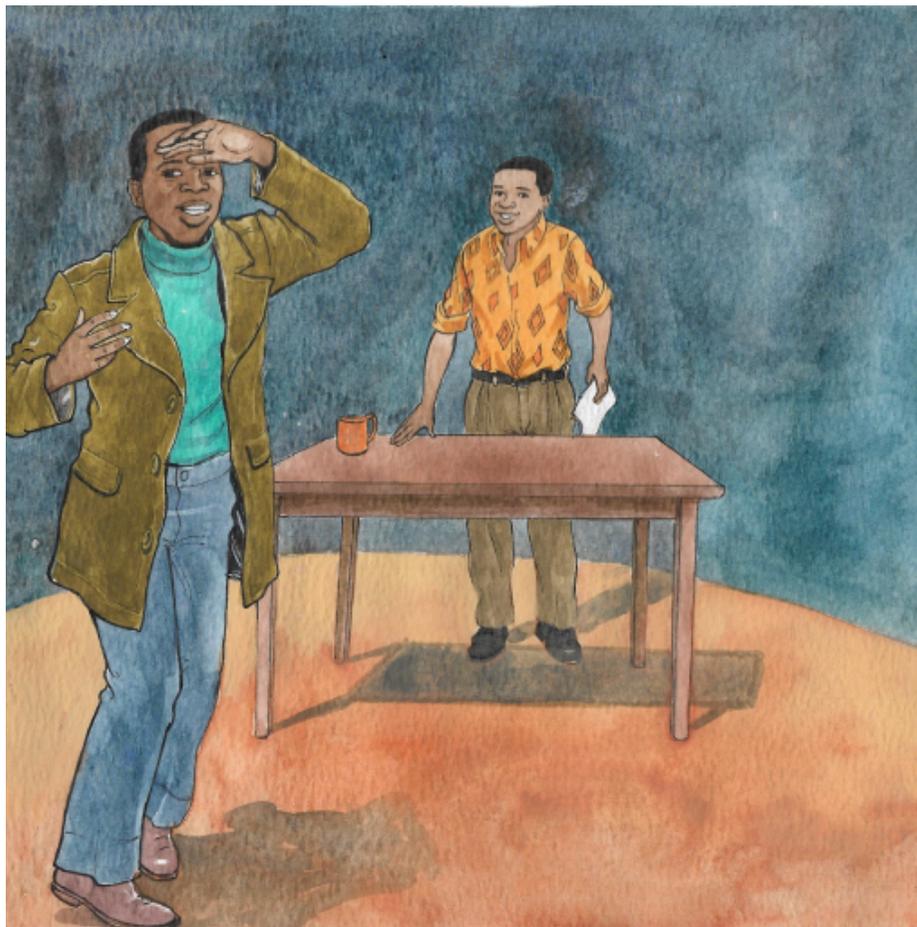
When John was young, he would watch films with his friends who didn't understand English well.

John interpreted the English dialogue to his friends, playing different characters.



After completing High School, John worked at a factory. He also joined a group of actors, who worked in other jobs. They were mostly Black actors.

John said, "We were more than just a drama group. We were soldiers on stage. We used art to speak out against wrongs."



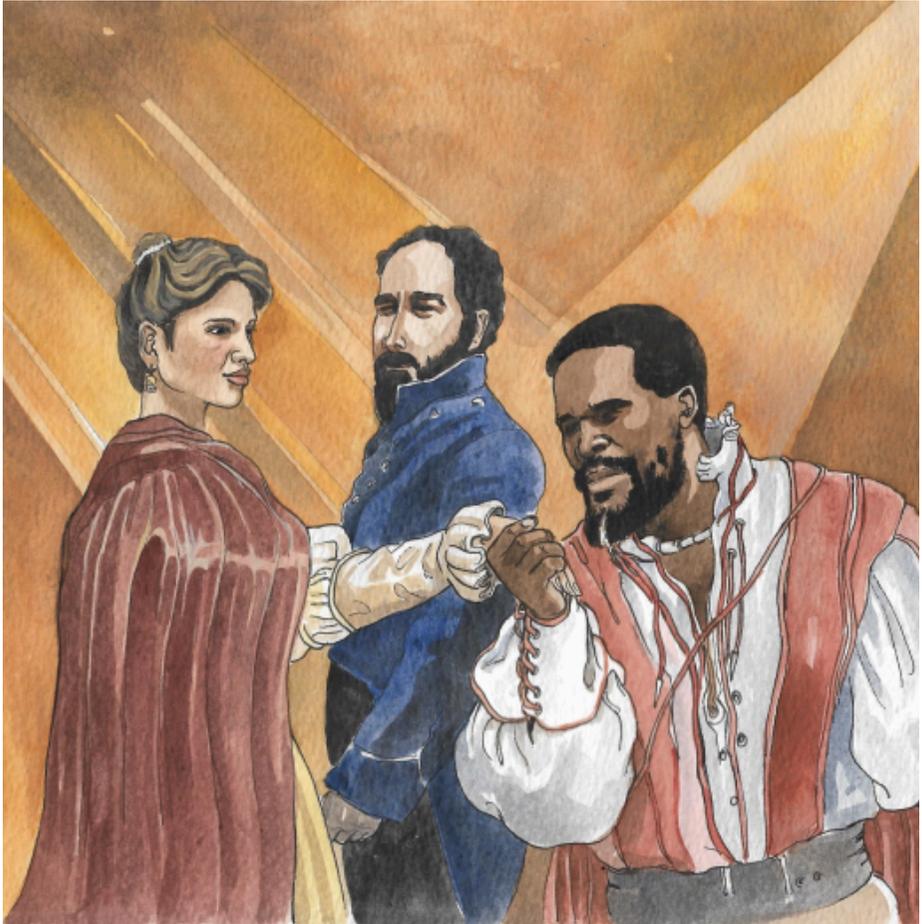
At this time, John became good friends with actor Winston Ntshona. They began creating plays together. They were in a drama group called the Serpent Players. This group's first performance was in the empty snake pit of the Gqeberha zoo. That is why they called themselves the Serpent Players.



John and Barney established the Market Theatre Laboratory, which is part of the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

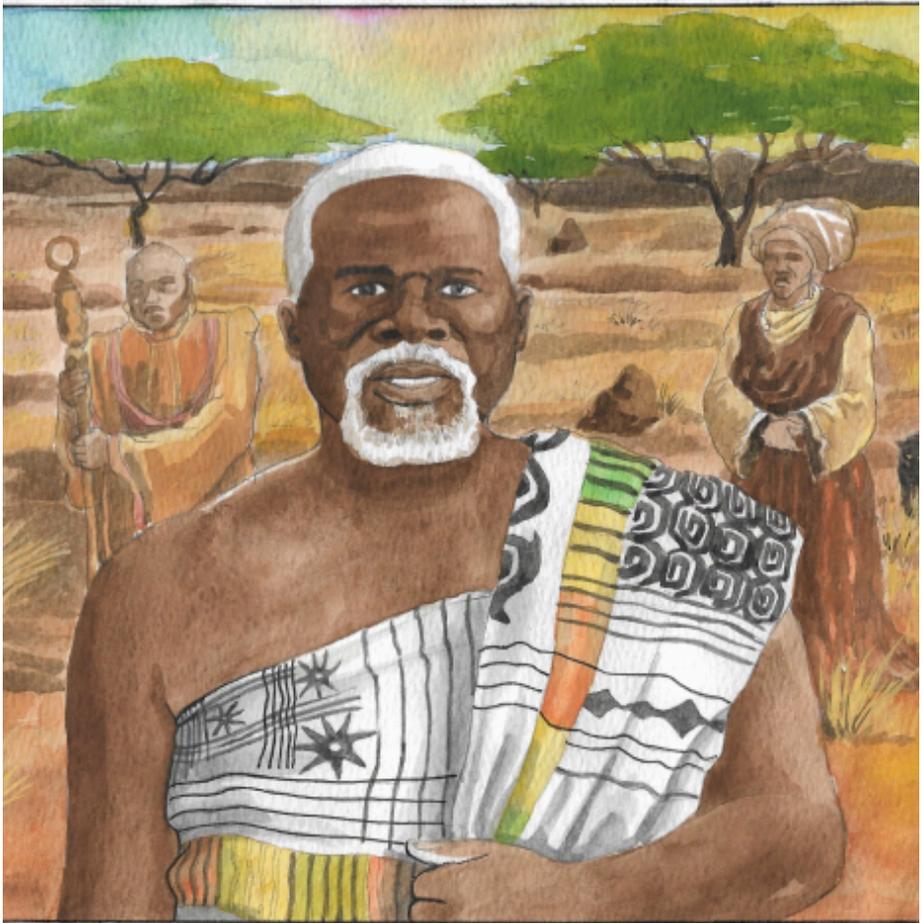
The Laboratory trains people who want to work in theatre, especially acting.

In 2014, the Market Theatre changed the name of its biggest venue to the John Kani Theatre, to honour him.



In 2002, John wrote his first play on his own. It is called "Nothing but the Truth" and is set in South Africa after apartheid.

Over the years, he has acted in many types of plays, including "Othello" by William Shakespeare, and "Miss Julie" by August Strindberg.

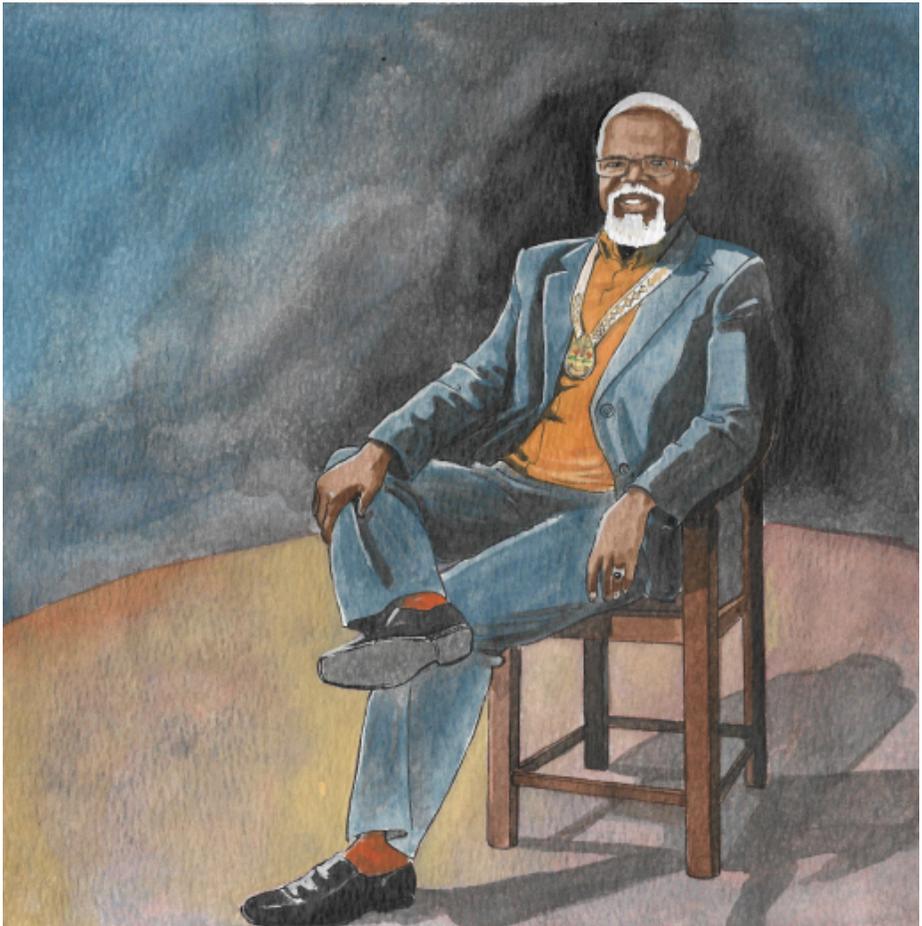


John has also acted in TV series and films.

In 2016, he played King T'Chaka of Wakanda in the film "Captain America: Civil War".

Two years later, he again played the King of Wakanda in the film "Black Panther".

John introduced isiXhosa as the language of Wakanda!



In 2005, John was awarded The Order of Ikhamanga by the South African Government.

This award is for excellent achievement in the creative fields, for example, in theatre, literature, music, or journalism.

Today, John is still writing, acting, and achieving in the world of theatre.

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This is what John Kani says about his achievements:

“Theatre, writing and performing enable me to relate to what's going on inside me, in the centre of my soul.” What do you think he means? Talk about this with others.

## —Questions

1. Who influenced John Kani to tell stories?  
Why do you say so?
2. Explain what these people do in the theatre: actor, writer, director.
3. What was the origin of “The Serpent Players” drama group’s name?
4. Find out if there’s a theatre group in your community.

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This storybook was created and written in Tshivenda, as part of the Zenex Ulwazi Lwethu reading materials project in 2021.



Ulwazi Lwethu is a Zenex Foundation funded and initiated project to develop a series of graded and leisure African language readers and teacher support materials. This project is targeted at teaching and supporting learners in the Foundation Phase to improve their home language reading and understanding. The readers have been originated in nine African languages in collaboration with Molteno Institute for Language and Literacies, Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development, Room to Read South Africa, and Saide. All resources are developed as Open Education Resources (OER).



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