



*Liliesleaf*

A PLACE *of* LIBERATION

**Grade 4**

**Local History**

**Big Story, Little Story**

ENGAGE

DISCOVER

REFLECT

Heritage Site | Museum | Restaurant | Archive | Conference Centre

Why do we study history? When we learn about things that happened in the past, it helps us to understand how people long ago shaped the world as we know it today. But history is not just something that happened long ago in far away places to important people. History is something that all of us make, every day. Our lives today will be the history our children study in the future.

When we learn about history we talk a lot about heritage. Heritage is not history: it is not what happened in the past but what has survived from the past: the memories, languages, traditions, art, food and architecture that have passed through our families and communities for many years. Heritage can be tangible (you touch it or pick it up): objects, buildings, paintings etc. or intangible (you experience it rather than touch it): dance, song, poetry, religion, stories etc. Our beautiful landscapes – mountains, rivers, beaches, forests and veld – are all a part of our heritage too, as are plants and herbs that are used as traditional medicines. We use our heritage to understand our history.

Even though the study of history is usually about major events in the past that changed the world, those big events are made up of many smaller events. However, while one event might be a ‘small’ story in the bigger picture, it is a ‘big’ story for the people involved in that event.

At Liliesleaf the ‘big’ story is about how the leaders of our freedom struggle got caught by the police. This led to the Rivonia Trial and long prison sentences for these leaders, and dealt a harsh blow to the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa. But at Liliesleaf there are also many ‘smaller’ stories that all played a part in how the big story unfolded.

There are the stories of the workers at Liliesleaf, who did not even know that Nelson Mandela was hiding out there. There are the stories of the policemen who took part in the raid, who at that time probably believed that they were doing the right thing. There are the stories of the children of the men who were arrested; stories that show how their parents’ political activities impacted on their lives. Then there is also the story of how some of the people who were connected to Liliesleaf managed to escape from prison...

### ***Prison Break: A Short Story***

Arthur Goldreich sat on the floor of his tiny, dirty cell at Marshall Square police station, drawing in the dust with his finger and thought about how he had ended up here. Only the other day he was working as an artist and designer. Now he was in prison.

Arthur and his family were living at Liliesleaf at the time of the police raid, providing a cover for the underground activities that were going on there at the time. When the police raided Liliesleaf he was interrogated for hours, then taken to Marshall Square police station where he was thrown into a cell. In the cell he couldn’t stop thinking about the raid and how they could possibly have prevented it. What should they have done differently?

It did not take Arthur long to discover that his fellow comrades Harold Wolpe, Abdulhay Jassat and Mosie Moolla were also being held at Marshall Square. The four men befriended Johannes Greef, a young prison warder who allowed them to spend time together every day. They started plotting their escape. One day Greef told them that he had crashed a friend’s car and needed money to fix it. They knew what to do. They told Greef that if he would help them escape, they would organise money for him.

This was the plan they came up with:

In return for R 1 000.00, Greef would open their cell doors and allow himself to get knocked out by Arthur, so it would look like he was overpowered. The men would then use his keys to get out of the building.

Once they got outside, they would find a getaway car, organised by Harold Wolpe's wife, AnnMarie. They would drive to a safe house before they would be smuggled out of the country. The men knew the plan was completely crazy, but also knew that it was their only chance. On the night of the escape Greef was late. He came to unlock their cells at about 1 o'clock in the morning. After all four men had been released, Greef waited for Arthur to give him the knock-out blow as arranged. But Arthur just could not do it. Greef was left with four empty cells and the problem of how he was going to knock himself out.

By some miracle the four men managed to get out of the police station and the police car park without running into a single person. But when they got to their getaway car it was locked, and the driver was nowhere to be seen. They needed to make a new plan. Knowing that the streets would be full of police very soon, they split up into pairs. Abdulhay and Mosie headed west to Fordsburg, a predominantly Indian part of the City where they both had friends and family, while Harold and Arthur headed east towards Hillbrow. Amazingly, a friend of theirs, Barney Simon, who had always sympathised with the liberation movement, drove past. He took them to his flat and later to a safe house nearby.

With the help of Hilda Bernstein and Bram Fischer, Arthur and Harold were able to access a safe house in Mountain View. They could not speak or bath during the day, in case anyone working on the property found them and reported them. At night, they could turn on the light to talk and wash, but there was always a fear of being caught. It took more than a week of living in fear before they were taken to Swaziland in the boot of a car.

As it turned out, they had left the Mountain View cottage just in time. A day or two later, the police raided the cottage after receiving an anonymous tip-off.

From Swaziland they were flown to Botswana. They stayed in Francistown for a while, but always feared being deported back to South Africa. They even slept in the local jail for a while because they were told it would be safer! From there they were flown to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, via the Congo. In Tanzania they were received as heroes.

En route to Fordsburg, Abdulhay and Mosie came across their friend Peter Joseph, who was on his way home after work. Peter, a fellow activist, took them to a safe place. Three days later, Abdulhay and Mosie parted ways. Mosie went to the Magaliesberg and Abdulhay headed to his aunt's farm in Vereeniging.

A fortnight later Abdulhay disguised himself as a religious Muslim woman and managed to cross the Botswana border to safety. Seven weeks later, Mosie was smuggled out of the country as well.

The escapees became symbols of defiance for activists throughout South Africa. By escaping from prison and then to safety they showed how well connected the resistance was, how many people outside the country were sympathetic to it – and just how satisfying it was to escape from the clutches of the apartheid government's security police.

Johannes Greef paid a heavy price. His station commander was immediately suspicious of his role in the escape. On cross-examination, he confessed that he was to receive money. Johannes was given a six-year prison sentence for assisting in the escape. He served two years. In the late 1990s, the ANC finally settled the money due to him.

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## QUESTION 1

Write down the names of the places where this story mainly takes place.

## QUESTION 2

What were the names of the men who were involved in the escape?

## QUESTION 3

If possible, search the Liliesleaf website and/or the Liliesleaf exhibitions for more information on each of these men and write a short paragraph on each.

## QUESTION 4

Do you think this is a 'big' or a 'small' story in the history of South Africa? Why do you say that? Discuss this with a friend and write down your conclusion.

## QUESTION 5

Think about an interesting story in your school, community or family that people might still be talking about in many years to come.

Write a short story of approximately one page. Remember to give it an exciting title.

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*Marshall Square Police Station in downtown Johannesburg.*