



# Books

## Inventors, Bright Minds and other Science Heroes of South Africa

Written by Engela Duvenage and illustrated by Tumi K. Steyn.  
Published by Penguin Random House South Africa (2020)

Review by blogger-mom, Se7en ([www.se7en.org.za](http://www.se7en.org.za))



I cannot praise this book enough, it is fantastic ... and definitely gets book of the year status on our blog.

This book has everything ... everything!!! History, science, innovation, technology, exploration, biology, medicine ... there is so much in this book. It is a fantastic read, on the market as a children's book, but to be quite honest I am enjoying reading it just as much as my kids are. This is an armchair scientist's dream, a fact checker's resource and an all round fascination for curious kids of every age. We are winding our way through it, reading about a different scientist every day. The book is divided into logical sections: medical scientists, animal scientists, environmental scientists ... computer scientists. It is astonishing just how inventive South African scientists are, to be honest who knew?

Apart from that, I love the feel of this book, it is a large format paperback, extremely comfortable for reading. It feels like you are reading an in-depth encyclopaedia, only it is full of extremely readable and fascinating stories - definitely nothing overwhelming for your middle grade

reader and upwards. Each scientist has their own illustration and a little clue in the illustration to the type of scientist that they are.

Each of the one hundred and twelve scientists is given a three page spread: a biography, an interesting introduction to the science that they do and then boxes of quick facts about where and when they were born and pertinent definitions and explanations to help the reader to remember the story. The stories are written in a way that is easily understood, and great care has been taken to make sure that more complicated science is explained carefully and understandably. I love that the stories include several facts, often quirky facts, about the scientists. It makes them much more relatable.

There are several well-known scientists in this book, for example Christiaan Barnard, the medical doctor who pioneered the heart transplant, and other lesser known scientists like Dr Heather Zar, who invented a spacer from recycling, to help children with asthma to use their inhalers. There are animal experts on massive beasts and tiny insects, not to mention ancient fish and botanists with intriguing plant stories to tell. There are computer innovators and star gazers, this book is a treasure trove for all science lovers.

I love that the book has loads of men and women scientists, it isn't a case of one or the other. It also features scientists from several different cultural backgrounds. There are young and old scientists, even a grandmother who invented a contraption to fix wind pumps. There are scientists who grew up with every possible opportunity and others who were raised in rural regions with very few scientific resources.

This is an empowering book, full of South African heroes. There is a whole section on Nobel Prize winners. Representation is key, kids need to see and hear about people from their own cultures who do great things and certainly a science reference book like this is something that school libraries all over South Africa have been missing, even if they didn't realise it.

I loved reading more about the scientists we hear about in the news, as well as reading about familiar faces from my own student days... In fact one of my favourite lecturers of all time features in the book - Prof. Daya Reddy, from the University of Cape Town, who is now a leader of world scientists and the president of the International Science Council.

Honestly, this book is a treasure and should be accessible to South African children everywhere ... as a reference book in public libraries and definitely in all school libraries. This is a homeschooler's dream. Perfectly readable, incredibly inspiring, not a book to read in one sitting, but story by story. Definitely our science book of the year.

Read the original, full review here: <https://www.se7en.org.za/2022/03/06/se7en-reviews-the-south-african-science-book-of-the-year>

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