

CONFERENCE REPORTS

THE 39TH SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR HISTORY TEACHING (SASHT) CONFERENCE 10-11 OCTOBER 2025

Venue: Wynberg Girls' High School

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a11>

The 39th South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) conference welcomed delegates from across South Africa, as well as international institutions, on 10–11 October 2025. History teachers and teacher educators continue to grapple with what it means to teach in contexts that seem uncertain, but have the possibility of new opportunities alongside the challenges. The unique partnership between the African Association for History Education (AHE)-Afrika and SASHT enables a discussion about the challenges of teaching meaningful history during times of change in South Africa and across the continent. The SASHT conference, therefore, plays a crucial role in fostering partnerships and dialogue among all stakeholders in history education in both our national and regional contexts.

This year's conference had the theme "History Teaching in a Time of Change" History practitioners (scholars, teachers, students and museum practitioners) presented papers focusing on the following sub-themes:

- History teaching in the present-day context, using primary sources in the Grade 10 history classroom, pedagogies of personal history in teacher-training.
- Indigenous knowledge, museums as sites of teaching and learning, and issues of language.
- Issues in history pre-service teacher pedagogy, curriculum narratives and women's history.
- AI and history education, missing voices and spaces in the curriculum, pedagogy of local history.

- Using foodways as a pedagogy, factors impacting interest in history.
- Open papers on many other aspects of history education.

The conference was attended by 50 participants, ranging from preservice teachers to curriculum designers, postgraduate students, university lecturers, and historians from across South Africa and the world. A total of 35 presentations took place over the two-day conference.

The keynote address by Jeremy Vearey opened the conference with an exploration of the often-missing history of the *Bondelswarts* (historical name for a Nama ethnic group in Southern Namibia). His keynote, titled “*Novelising History: The Story of the Bondelswarts and their Armed Struggle Against Colonialism*”, covered the fascinating history of this community of fighters as well as the issues on turning that history into historical fiction. Vearey’s novel, “*Crimson Sands*”, is set in Namaland—from German-South-West Africa to the Cape Colony. The story covers the history of the community from 1904–1922, when thousands of *Bondelswarts* were shot down by Jan Smuts’s fighter planes. Jeremy Vearey conjured an intriguing story full of rich characters. The keynote sparked interesting discussions about the curriculum links to eugenics and pseudo-scientific racism as it is taught in the classroom.

During the parallel sessions that took place over the two days, papers were delivered focusing on one of the themes mentioned above, allowing presenters twenty minutes each to present and ten minutes for questions and answers. The presentations allowed for discussions across papers of a similar theme. This allowed for a mutually learning environment for both the audience and the presenters themselves, as insights were shared from different perspectives and contexts.

On Friday evening, a book launch was held for Xolisa Guzula and Athambile Masola’s new book, “*Together Apart: The Story of Living in Apartheid*”. The book is a thematic exploration of the impact of segregation in South Africa’s history, told in an engaging visual manner; key questions are framed through a conversation between a *makhulu* and a group of children. It is aimed at a young readership and serves as a valuable resource for use in the history classroom, particularly in primary school or the GET phase. Gill Sutton interviewed Athambile Masola on the process of writing the book and discussed some of the ways it could be used to help young people engage with this complex history.

It was wonderful to have students from Stellenbosch University and the University of the Witwatersrand presenting their experiences alongside their lecturers. Several sessions

were also workshop-based, fostering discussions about the practical application of history teaching in the classroom. The final session was a helpful panel discussion about the practice of history education pedagogy at universities for pre-service teachers.

Below is some of the feedback from attendees:

“Good collaboration with guests and presenters.”

“Sessions are becoming very informative and scholarly every year. Experiences shared are very valuable.”

“I appreciate the opportunity to learn from others’ research and writing.”

“Meeting everyone and presentations on AI.”

“The practical application of the sessions.”

There are always areas for improvement, and involvement from all stakeholders is welcome in the history education sector, both nationally and regionally, to help shape the future of SASHT. As there is a new Executive for SASHT, feedback from the conference will be taken on board to shape future events organised by SASHT.

In addition to the formal elements of the conference, there were opportunities for socialising and networking in a more informal setting. Delegates attended a pre-conference dinner, which ran late into the evening and on the Friday, delegates had the opportunity to go on a walking tour of the nearby historic Chelsea Village. Some delegates also visited Groot Constantia on Saturday afternoon. These opportunities allowed for relaxed engagement and enabled the formation of new relationships and connections.

We thank everyone who attended for making this year’s conference a success, and we look forward to having even more engagement at the 2026 conference.