

“*Power of One*” is a film by John Avildsen released in 1992. Avildsen also directed *Rocky* and *Karate Kid* (something about a fascination with boxing). The plot is loosely based on a novel of the same name published by Bryce Courtenay in 1989; see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Power_of_One. Among others, the film stars Morgan Freeman, John Gielgud and Stephen Dorff.: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105159/>

The *Power of One* is a story of a young English speaking South African boy named “PeeKay” and his passion for changing the world. It takes place in South Africa during the late 1930’s and 1940’s. Growing up PeeKay suffered as the only English boy in an Afrikaner school. Here you will see the on-going tension between Afrikaners and English in South Africa – part of the legacy of the Anglo-Boer wars that ended in 1902. You will also see evidence here of the sympathies of many Afrikaners toward the Nazis during WWII. Think back to some of the foreshadowing of this in *Breaker Morant*. Indeed these sympathies lead to the split of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party from the Unity government in 1941, which by 1948 lead to the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party and the enactment of strict Apartheid laws.

Orphaned at a young age, PK was placed in the care of a German national named Professor von Vollenstein (a.k.a. "Doc"), a friend of his grandfather. Doc develops PeeKay 's piano talent and PeeKay becomes "assistant gardener" in Doc's succulent garden. It is not long after WWII begins that Doc is placed in prison for failure to register with the English government as a foreigner. PeeKay makes frequent visits and meets Geel Piet (Freeman), an inmate, who teaches him to box. Geel Piet spreads the myth of the “Rainmaker”, the one who brings peace to all of the tribes. This is related to the indigenous philosophy Ubuntu, one of the founding principles of the New South African Republic: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy)). And PeeKay is cast in the light of the “Rainmaker” myth.

At this point you will get a good taste of the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa and the spiraling racial tensions. After the war PeeKay attends an English private school where he continues to box. He meets a young girl, Maria, with whom he falls in love. Her father, Professor Daniel Marais, is a leader of the Nationalist (Afrikaner) Party of South Africa. This character seems to be loosely based on the life of D.F. Malan http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_François_Malan who became white supremacist Prime Minister of South Africa and Nationalist Party leader in 1948 and set the country down long path of repression and Apartheid. Malan replaced Jan Smuts as PM a very interesting and complex renaissance man who incidentally was also a botanist: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Smuts

PeeKay and Maria fight to teach the Blacks English as PeeKay's popularity grows. After an intense tragedy, PeeKay loses focus until he sees the success of his language school among the Blacks. He and Guideon Duma continue the work in hopes of building a better future for Africa.

The movie received very good reviews (although there are a few hokey or overly dramatized parts), but many who read the book (also receiving rave reviews) are disappointed that the story line in the film is rather different from that in the book. There is a sequel to the book *Power of One* published by Bryce Courtenay in 1994 called *Tandia*, which also received good reviews. This book picks up on the life of PeeKay in the 1950s.