

## THE POWER OF WORDS

### The power of words

*“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”*

**Nelson Mandela, Rivonia Trial, 1964**

Nelson Mandela is known as one of the all-time great orators. He recognised the power of the written and spoken word and used both to extraordinary effect over the course of his life – not least at the Rivonia Trial. His ‘prepared to die’ speech to the courtroom is widely thought to have saved his life and the lives of those on trial with him. It also reversed the roles of judge and accused – putting apartheid in the dock.

#### Gathering words

Students can use the grid to collect, under each heading, words and phrases used by Nelson Mandela and others seeking change alongside him. Students could also add some headings of their own in the blank spaces.

Back at school they could use these to inspire and inform their own:

- speech writing
- persuasive writing
- poetry and other creative writing
- campaigns
- role play

#### Writing letters

They could write a series of letters to Nelson Mandela during different times in his life and using his different names:

- Dear Rolihlahla...  
Write a letter to Mandela as a young boy growing up in rural South Africa. What might they want to ask him about his life, or tell him about his future?
- Dear Nelson Mandela...  
Write a letter to Mandela while he was imprisoned on Robben Island. What might they want to ask him about his life in prison, or tell him about his impact on London and the UK? (The [London landmarks](#) resource can help with this.) Which parts of your letter do you think would be censored?
- Dear Madiba...  
Write a letter to Mandela during his time as president. What might they want to ask about his feelings and achievements, or tell him about his impact on the world?

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### Speaking Xhosa

Nelson Mandela was from the Thembu tribe, who speak the Xhosa language. His people also had to learn the languages of colonial powers - English and Dutch Afrikaans. To help empathise with the young Nelson Mandela adopting these foreign languages, students can learn more about his birth language. Students could try pronouncing Xhosa words, using the distinctive 'Xhosa clicks', such as:

- 'Rolihlahla': Nelson Mandela's birth name
- 'Qunu': the place where he grew up
- 'Xhosa': his birth language

If there are students or teachers with South African families in the school they may be able to help with this. Or try this BBC clip:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-25356745>

### Censorship

Students could use their words and experiences of the exhibition to explore censorship.

Working in threes, they could write a letter to each other describing their thoughts, views and opinions on Nelson Mandela, South Africa and the anti-apartheid Struggle. The [Thinking and discussing](#) resource can help with this. They then pass their letter to each other and cut or block out words they think might have been censored had they been written to Mandela during his time in prison. They then each pass the censored letter to the next person in their group of three. Can they decipher the letter?

Similarly, students could each write a letter to a 'buddy', imagining they've missed them and, perhaps appreciating their good points and values. Every letter is first given to someone who is not their buddy. They cut or block out key words - randomly, or even cruelly. Then the buddy can receive the letter. What do they think is missing? How do they feel?

**THE POWER OF WORDS**

About Power

About Resistance

About Persuasion

About Oppression

About Unity