

# Introducing Nelson Mandela

This presentation provides a useful introduction and very general overview of Nelson Mandela (also called Madiba) and his life, and the themes students are likely to encounter during their visit to *Nelson Mandela: The Official Exhibition*.

Talking points are suggested for each slide – you may like to further embellish these with information from the [Timeline](#) and other resources from this online set.

It is recommended that teachers read the [Teaching and learning with sensitive histories](#) resource.

Students could research and produce a presentation of their own to go with the titles and images.

## 1. Introducing Nelson Mandela

### 2. Who was Nelson Mandela?

An opportunity for students to share what they already know about Nelson Mandela.

Possible prompts:

- South Africa
- Apartheid
- The ANC and the Freedom Struggle
- Prisoner
- Leader
- President

Summing up:

- Lawyer. Revolutionary. Activist. Political prisoner. Symbol of the struggle against oppression. World leader. Humanitarian. Nelson Mandela was all of these things.
- He became the global face of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.
- He was South Africa's first Black president – and its first democratically elected leader
- He continues to remain an icon of human rights today – 100 years after his birth.

### He was known by different names throughout his life:

- Rolihlahla – pronounced: *Ho-li-shla-shla*, which means 'tree shaker' or 'troublemaker' in the Xhosa language.
- Madiba – clan name and the name he preferred in later life.
- Prisoner 46664 – as a prisoner on Robben Island (the 466th prisoner to arrive on the island in 1964).

### 3. South Africa (i)

One of 54 countries in the continent of Africa

Where is it, within the continent and in relation to the UK and Europe?

- 1,219,090 square km
- About 9 times the size of England
- About 5 times the size of the UK

#### 4. South Africa (ii)

Became known as (The Union of) South Africa in 1910.

##### It has a European colonial history:

- Late 1400s–1500s: the Khoisan peoples were the established, dominant power in regions that are now in South Africa. Europeans began to trade with them.
- 1600s: Europeans settled in the Cape region for the first time. Zulu, Xhosa and other indigenous peoples became established in areas that would become part of present-day South Africa.
- Late 1700s–early 1800s: the British captured the Cape Colony from the Dutch; British settlers started arriving in the region from the early 1800s.
- 1830s–40s: The Great Trek. Dutch-speaking settlers migrated inland to seek independence from British rule. They seized land and, in many areas, displaced Black African people.
- Late 1800s: gold and diamonds were discovered, transforming South Africa's economy. Following a series of wars/ conflicts, Britain forcibly took control of two independent, Dutch-speaking republics; together with the two English-speaking British colonies, these formed the Union of South Africa.

#### 5. Meet Rolihlahla

Nelson Mandela was born Rolihlahla, on 18 July 1918, in the village of Mvezo, in the rural Transkei (now the Eastern Cape).

He was born into the Madiba clan of the Thembu people.

He spent his early life there and in the nearby village of Qunu.

#### 6. Meet Nelson

He was named 'Nelson' by his teacher at primary school – assigning English Christian names to African people was common practice at the time and a feature of colonialism.

His father died when Nelson was 12.

Nelson moved to the 'Great Place' of Mqhekezweni where he was brought up by Regent King of the Thembu people, Jongintaba Dalindyebo.

His father and the Regent were two major influences on his life.

In 1941 Nelson ran away to Johannesburg – a large city and direct contrast to his rural beginnings – with the Regent's son, Justice, to escape arranged marriages.

Class photo, 1938 (Nelson Mandela Foundation) – Nelson is eighth from right in the back row.

A young Nelson Mandela and his friend Bikitsha c. 1941 (Nelson Mandela Foundation).

#### 7. Segregation and apartheid

This is a useful place to briefly explain some of the sensitive language and terms such as 'Black', 'White' and 'Coloured' South Africans (see the [Teaching and learning with sensitive histories](#) resource).

From the late 1800s onwards, Black Africans and other non-European peoples were oppressed by the White descendants of the European settlers, who wanted domination. This was driven by a conviction that White people were inherently superior and brought civilisation to 'the natives' – largely discounting tribal social structures and religious beliefs that had been established for centuries.

South African people lived in an increasingly segregated society.

'White', 'Black', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' South Africans were segregated e.g. different buses, different park benches, different shops, different exits and entrances to public buildings.

In 1948, apartheid was introduced in South Africa by Prime Minister D.F. Malan's National Party. As a result of 148 apartheid laws, Black South Africans were:

- Made to carry passbooks to confirm their identity
- Subject to curfews in the towns and cities – i.e. they were not permitted to be out after a certain time in the evening
- Harassed and brutalised by police
- Denied rights at work and employment in certain jobs
- Not allowed to vote
- Forced to live in rural 'reserves' called Bantustans
- Denied a proper education

And much, much more.

This segregation and oppression was called apartheid (an Afrikaans word literally meaning 'apart' or 'separate').

It was an unjust, brutal, LEGALISED system that denied Black African people many basic human rights.

## 8. The Freedom Struggle

Unsurprisingly, groups formed to oppose segregation and apartheid.

This resistance movement became known as 'the Freedom Struggle'.

A key political group was the African National Congress (ANC). Mandela became one of its leading members.

These groups organized protests that were peaceful at first. E.g:

- The Defiance Campaign – large groups of Black South Africans mobilised and purposefully broke apartheid laws, such as walking through 'Whites only' entrances and refusing to carry passes, hoping to flood the prisons, bring chaos to the system and force changes to the law.
- Sharpeville (1960) – a large group of 5,000 gathered at government offices in Sharpeville to hand in their passbooks as a protest. Police opened fire on the unarmed and unsuspecting crowd, killing 69 people and wounding 148 more. Many were shot in the back as they tried to run away. This became known as the Sharpeville Massacre – a significant turning point in the Struggle.

Nelson Mandela was banned and arrested a number of times.

At one trial he wore traditional Thembu dress as a statement of his African identity.

## 9. Rivonia Trial, 1964 quote

Nelson Mandela and the ANC went 'underground'.

He was eventually arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

During the Rivonia Trial he made an extraordinary three-hour speech from the dock which ended with these words.

This speech is widely believed to have saved his life and the lives of his comrades also on trial. Many had believed they were certain to receive the death sentence. Mandela's speech effectively turned the tables and put the government on trial.

Mandela's powerful use of words – as both a writer and speaker – is a recurring theme throughout his adult life.

## 10. Prison

Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years – 18 of them on Robben Island where he was kept in a tiny cell. For many years he was made to work every day in the prison quarry, breaking rocks.

Under the most appalling and brutal conditions, Nelson Mandela continued to display extraordinary qualities such as determination, resilience, kindness, respect to his fellow prisoners – and even to his jailers.

Apartheid also determined prison rules. Black prisoners were given fewer ‘privileges’ and the worst food. They were made to wear shorts and called ‘boy’ in one of countless daily attempts to humiliate them.

At first, Mandela was not allowed to send or receive any letters for six months.

Letters were then heavily censored, often with whole paragraphs cut out. Some letters and cards were confiscated and not delivered.

When he was eventually allowed visits they were heavily guarded and all conversation was censored.

He was not allowed to attend the funerals of his mother and his eldest son.

He was not allowed a visit from his daughters until 1975 – by which time he had been in prison for a decade.

Mandela continued to resist apartheid in prison and became a spokesman for other prisoners, e.g. he repeatedly requested long trousers and better food for inmates. Progress was slow but eventually concessions were granted. In many small and clever ways, Mandela began to form relationships and gain the respect of his jailers.

## 11. The Freedom Struggle continues (i)

In South Africa: the Freedom Struggle became increasingly violent. E.g. The 1976 Soweto uprising: children and students were murdered by police when they protested against being taught in Afrikaans in schools

Around the world: Mandela became the global face of the Struggle – even while still inside prison. BUT, as he repeatedly said,

*“The Struggle is not one man, it is all of us, it is a group of men and women”.*

## 12. The Freedom Struggle continues (ii)

The UK was at the centre of the global response. The ANC and other political exiles set up headquarters in London and a growing number of anti-apartheid campaigners began to join forces. South Africa was boycotted by countries around the world. It was not

allowed to compete in the Olympics and other international sporting events. Many internationally famous musicians refused to perform at the South African entertainment venue Sun City.

A 70th birthday tribute concert for Nelson Mandela was staged at Wembley Stadium in 1988. It was televised and watched by approximately 600 million people in 60 countries worldwide.

## 13. Freedom and healing (i)

After 27 years in prison, Mandela was eventually released by President F.W. de Klerk in 1990.

South Africa was on the brink of civil war and apartheid was failing. The government had little choice but to unban the ANC and other political opponents, and begin negotiations.

Mandela and de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nelson Mandela and thousands of other Black Africans voted for the first time in their lives in the 1994 election. It was South Africa’s first ever democratic election: ‘One person. One vote.’

Nelson Mandela was elected - South Africa’s first Black President.

#### 14. Freedom and healing (ii): inauguration speech quote

President Mandela continued to display and encourage the values for which he had become known and respected: kindness, inclusivity, humility, forgiveness.

He devoted the rest of his life to uniting South Africa and to humanitarian work at home and abroad. He set up the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund which promotes and supports a humanitarian response to the plight and needs of children in South Africa, the Mandela Rhodes Foundation to enable African students to undertake postgraduate studies and develop leadership capacities and the Nelson Mandela Foundation to promote peace, human rights and dialogue. He was also a co-founder of The Elders Foundation - a group of respected global thought leaders who tackle human rights issues.

He supported a number of other initiatives, such as 46664, that seeks to spread awareness of HIV and combat AIDS, and was sought after internationally as a mediator. He remained convinced the route to a better world lay in eradicating poverty and improving education. .

#### 15. Freedom and healing (iii)

In 1995, Francois Pienaar captained the South African rugby team – the Springboks – to their first Rugby World Cup victory. The tournament was held in South Africa for the first time. President Mandela, wearing a Springboks shirt, handed the cup to Pienaar in what became an iconic moment of South African unity.

One of the remarkable features of Mandela's presidency was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It was established to deal with historical human rights violations. Amnesty was offered to some perpetrators of past violence.

Although seen as a necessary step towards a new South Africa, it proved harrowing and controversial as victims and relatives of the dead came face to face with those responsible. Mandela believed it 'helped us move away from the past to concentrate on the present and the future'. Although its recommendations were not taken up by Mandela's successors, the TRC has since been adopted as a reconciliation model in more than 30 countries worldwide.

Nelson Mandela – Madiba - died in 2013, age 95, surrounded by family. He was buried in his home village of Qunu.

#### 16. Legacy

As Madiba's grandson, and Chief of the Mvezo Traditional Council, Chief Mandela says:

*"Mandela freed the oppressed and the oppressor... It is very difficult to follow in his footsteps in terms of his achievements and standards. They are just too big shoes to fill. What we can do is to live our life and make the best contributions we can... We must all pick up the baton and run with it."*

How will you continue Nelson Mandela's legacy? It's in your hands.