NELSON MANDELA: An International Symbol

MINDS ON

Rолихла Nelson Mandela is considered one of the world's greatest political leaders. He overcame overwhelming oppression as a black man in a racist, segregated nation where only white people had power and privilege. He committed his life to helping South Africa move from institutional racism to a multi-racial democracy.

A. Why should you care about Nelson Mandela?

B. What do you think you gain personally by learning about a great political leader?

C. What do you know about the life of Nelson Mandela?

Important vocabulary
Be sure to understand the meaning of the following words before reading the summary of Nelson Mandela's life:

- apartheid
- communism
- Ghandism
- socialism
- Africanism
- Afrikaner
- segregation

SETTING THE STAGE:
MANDELA'S STORY

On December 5, 2013 the world lost a great hero, a skilled political leader, and a wise and compassionate man. Nelson Mandela's funeral was a world event celebrating the determination and courage of a black leader who fought his government's racist apartheid laws, who spent 27 years in prison, and who emerged to eventually win the country's first democratic election to become president.

Rолихла Mandela was born in 1918 in Mvezo, South Africa. He grew up with the royalty who governed the Transkei homestead. He was the great-grandson of a Thembu king. He was a strong-willed, independent young man who paid great attention to details, including how he spoke and how he dressed. He was disciplined in regards to his health, rising at 4:30 every morning for one hour of exercise and he usually ate only one meal a day. The name “Nelson” was probably given to him by an elementary school teacher who noted his serious and confident nature (Nelson was a famous general in British history).

As a young man he wanted to be South Africa's first black lawyer. He was one of only a handful
of non-white people accepted to the University of Witwatersrand. His schooling was funded by a loan from the Bantu Welfare Trust, an organization that supported the educational dreams of black South Africans. While at university he meet other students who shared his beliefs in freedom and equality for all people in South Africa. He met black, white and Indian activists who wanted to explore Africanism, socialism, communism and Ghandism. These are the ideas that shaped Mandela's political beliefs.

Mandela suffered a setback in that he failed the final exam to become a specialist lawyer and instead became an attorney. But Mandela never let failure define who he was and what he wanted to achieve for South Africa.

The beginning of apartheid

South Africa was a nation shaped by continuous wars and interracial violence. In 1948, a minority government was formed by the Afrikaner party, who began to introduce segregation laws that favoured white people. In 1950, three Apartheid Acts were passed by the government of South Africa. These acts included the “Suppression of Communism Act,” the “Population and Registration Act” and the “Group Areas Act.” These laws allowed for the persecution of non-white political activities and legally enforced the supremacy of white people by categorizing people who were considered “non-European” in origin into four racial groups: “white,” “Bantu/black,” “Asian,” and “coloured/biracial.”

People classified as coloured or black were not allowed political participation. Members of the African National Congress were arrested (Mandela was a member of the ANC). Black citizenship was revoked and all aspects of life — such as what school you attended, where you were permitted to live and where you could access medical care — were based on strict segregation laws. Public transportation and beaches were also segregated.

Fighting back by peaceful means

In response to these racist laws, some anti-apartheid groups launched violent strikes. Mandela initially opposed violence. In 1952 the Defiance Campaign was formed, a non-violent program of mass resistance with Mandela as the leader. In the same year Mandela opened the first black-owned legal firm with Oliver Reginald Tambo. Both men devoted their legal knowledge to helping South African blacks.

In 1958 he married Winnie Madikizela, Johannesburg's first black social worker. This was his second marriage. He had four children with his first wife and he had two more children with Winnie.

On March 21, 1960 in the township of Sharpeville, thousands of blacks were peacefully protesting apartheid laws when the South African police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 protestors. Most of the people had been shot through the back as they attempted to run from police gunfire. Some children were killed. This event convinced Mandela that peaceful methods to try to change government laws wouldn't work.

Mandela abandons non-violence

In 1961 Mandela was appointed the commander-in-chief of the ANC’s newly formed armed wing Umkonto we Sizwe, translated “Spear of the nation.” He secretly travelled across Africa meeting with heads of state to get funding for his cause and for combat training. In 15 months he became a worldwide legend, masterminding bombing campaigns against government buildings. In August 1962 he was captured and put on trial.

Three weeks later at his trial the government called 60 witnesses and Mandela called none. Instead, he prepared an hour-long speech in
which he explained why his actions were just when compared to the unjust actions of the South African government. He received a five-year sentence. Further evidence of treason was uncovered and he was eventually given life imprisonment. He could have been sentenced to hang but international pressure was intense on South Africa to spare his life.

For 27 years, while in prison on Robben Island, he slept on a thin mat on a stone floor in a 7 x 9 foot cell. He worked for 13 years on the island's limestone quarries until his lungs and eyesight were too damaged to continue that work. He was allowed one letter and one visitor every 6 months. He spent time teaching politics to the island's political activists. There was an embargo that forbade South Africans to mention his name, words or images. But Mandela continued to remain in his supporters' hearts and prayers.

**Apartheid undone**

After years of protests within South Africa and international boycotts and sanctions, the South African President, P. W. Botha decided to consider Mandela's release from prison. Mandela was very ill with tuberculosis and Botha was terrified that if he died in prison, it would spark a civil war. In 1989 Mandela secretly met with the president. One month later Botha was removed from office after suffering a stroke. The new president, F.W. de Klerk, announced in 1990 that he would free Mandela, lift the ban on the ANC and negotiate a new constitution for South Africa. The announcement came as a shock. White racists marched on Pretoria demanding that Mandela hang. One of the most popular ANC leaders, Chris Hani, was assassinated which caused a new wave of violence.

In a televised address Mandela attempted to stop the violence by acknowledging the fact that a white man had killed Hani but that a white woman had risked her life so that the murderer was caught. Mandela's calm and persuasive presence controlled the day and commanded the nation. He decided to work with his enemies at a peaceful transition of power and to avoid a civil war that he once would have encouraged.

Mandela demanded a new multi-racial election in South Africa and it was granted. Mandela voted for the first time on April 27, 1994. Two weeks later, he was the country's first democratically elected president. The election also marked the official end of apartheid.

**Mandela conciliatory as president**

Mandela never once expressed bitterness or resentment about his time in prison nor towards the South African white community who had enjoyed power and privilege over black South Africans. As president Mandela oversaw the rewriting of the constitution. He asked Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which guaranteed amnesty for those who confessed all they knew about the politically motivated crimes of the apartheid era. He was the president from 1994-1999.

He achieved personal happiness on his 80th birthday when he married his third wife, Graca Machel, an international advocate for women's and children's rights.

Stephanie Findlay and Nancy Macdonald summarized Mandela's legacy in a Maclean's magazine aptly titled *Freedom Fighter*: “The world doesn't celebrate Mandela for his four years in the president's office. He will forever be remembered for his magnanimity, his integrity and his unbreakable strength as he walked the long, tumultuous road to lift South Africa from the darkness of apartheid, and into a new future, whose story isn't yet 20 years old.”
Did you know?

Only four months after Nelson Mandela was released from prison he travelled to Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. He was very grateful for Canadian support in the struggle against apartheid. He described Canadians as “steadfast friends of our struggling people.” The prime minister at the time, Brian Mulroney, had put a lot of diplomatic and economic pressure on the South African apartheid regime despite many other world leaders who chose to ignore or downplay the issue.

Activity

Create a photo essay, comic book or song based on the life of Mandela. Before you begin, decide who the audience will be for the product (elementary school children, your peers) and for what purpose you are sharing Mandela's story. Be sure to create a narrative that highlights his personal traits, his leadership skills, the political and social contexts of South Africa, and his accomplishments.
VIDEO REVIEW

Pre-viewing

1. Think about the words “terrorist” and “freedom fighter.” What are the possible similarities and differences between these two terms in your mind?

2. Is it possible for someone to be viewed as both a terrorist and a freedom fighter? How and why?

3. What do you already know about Nelson Mandela?

4. Why do you think that Nelson Mandela's death caused an outpouring of grief and remembrance around the world?

While viewing

Read the questions over before viewing the video. Write down your answers to them while watching the News in Review Mandela segment.

1. Mandela was in prison for __________ years.

2. Mandela became the first black president in South Africa’s first democratic election.
   - [ ] TRUE
   - [ ] FALSE

3. How was his health impacted while in jail?
4. How did he fight the stigma of AIDS?

5. Who was “booed” at Mandela’s funeral?

6. Who officially represented Canada at the funeral?

7. 40% of black South Africans currently live in poverty.  
   - TRUE  
   - FALSE

8. Mandela led South Africa out of apartheid.  
   - TRUE  
   - FALSE

Post-viewing

1. List three words you think describe Nelson Mandela. What facts about his life led you to choose these descriptive words?

2. Why do you think so many world leaders attended Mandela's funeral?

3. Music and dance were an important part of the South African's celebration of Mandela's life and accomplishments. What song would you pick as part of a memorial service for Mandela and why?
ACTIVITY: MANDELA IN HIS OWN WORDS

Select five of the quotes below from Nelson Mandela and answer these questions:

1. What “big” or significant idea is central to the Mandela quote?
2. Should we care about this idea? Why?
3. What is Mandela's viewpoint/perspective on the “big” or significant idea? (You may have to do further research on Mandela's life in order to answer the question.)
4. Do you agree or disagree with the quote?
5. Create one or two deep questions regarding the big ideas represented in this quote.

A. “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

B. “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

C. “I was not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances.”

D. “I was called a terrorist yesterday, but when I came out of jail, many people embraced me, including my enemies, and that is what I normally tell other people who say those who are struggling for liberation in their country are terrorists.”

E. “When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw.”

F. “Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”

G. “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

H. “During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. 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.”

I. “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

J. “Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.”

K. “I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying.”

L. “I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one’s head pointed toward the sun, one’s feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.”
Extension activities

1. Research more Mandela quotes and choose one that you feel should be added to this list and explain why.

2. Choose the quotations that you feel would be best for school announcements, bulletin board posters, website postings, school planners and work towards spreading his words to your school community.