

# Nelson Mandela

From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was run using a system of apartheid. During apartheid (meaning 'apartness'), there were laws to keep Black people and White people separated. Nelson Mandela, a politician and activist, was a key figure in ending apartheid and bringing more equality to South Africa.



## Childhood

Nelson Mandela was born on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1918 in Mvezo, into the Thembu people. The Thembu people had their own kingdom within South Africa and Nelson's great-grandfather had been king. He lived in a small village in a grassy valley and he helped on the land, herding cattle and sheep. He later wrote, "nature was our playground" and recounted that he and his friends would enjoy sliding down rocks near his home. Although his parents were illiterate, Nelson attended the village school and learnt to read and write. At the age of seven, his schoolteacher gave him the name Nelson – he had been born Rolihlahla Mandela but it was customary for a new name to be given at school.

## Politics and Prison

During his years at university and beyond, Nelson Mandela became increasingly involved in politics. He began by protesting about the poor quality of university food (for which he was expelled from his first university). He later took part in a march to protest about bus fares and then went on to join the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC was a political party which campaigned for South Africa to become independent from the British Empire and, later, for apartheid to end.

There were more Black people than White people in South Africa but only White people were in the government and only White people were allowed to vote. In 1948, apartheid laws began to be introduced to further separate Black people and White people: they were not allowed to marry each other; they were not allowed to eat together; many Black people were eventually evicted from their homes and sent to live in separate parts of the country.

Nelson became increasingly passionate in his belief that everyone should be treated equally. As part of the ANC, he campaigned and demonstrated by making speeches, holding meetings, organising rallies and making plans for a better government. The ANC used peaceful protests; when these didn't work, government property was sometimes destroyed, always with the intention that nobody would be hurt. The government banned the ANC and arrested Nelson twice, finally imprisoning him with a life sentence in 1962.

### Freedom

Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. During this time, the South African government continued to take tough action against activism. Activism is when people campaign strongly for change. Strikes and protests were banned and many activists were arrested. Meanwhile, people around the world united in campaigning for Nelson's release. In the UK, the number one single 'Free Nelson Mandela' became a worldwide anthem for anti-apartheid.

Slowly, the government's approach began to change. In 1990, a new president, FW de Klerk, bowed to national and international pressure and finally set Nelson free from prison. The two men began to negotiate and work together. They were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. This is a prestigious award given only once a year for contributions to world peace.

In 1994, for the first time, Black people were allowed to vote in the national elections and Nelson Mandela was voted in: the first Black president of South Africa. As president until 1999, Nelson worked hard to address widespread poverty and inequality. He wanted to give everyone access to basic healthcare and other social services.



Nelson Mandela used sport to unite the nation: he encouraged all South Africans to come together to support their national rugby team, who were called the Springboks. In 1995, South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup. Nelson famously wore the Springboks' jersey and South Africa won the tournament.

### Legacy

Nelson Mandela lived to the age of 95. Many people remember him as a civil rights hero whose actions helped to make life fairer for thousands of people. He helped to bring equality to South Africa as well as a better system of government. Each year on his birthday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, Mandela Day is celebrated around the world. People remember how he devoted his life to fighting for freedom and often use this day to take action to make the world a better place.

# Questions

1. Draw **four** lines and match each event to the correct dates.

Apartheid laws enforced in South Africa.	1962-1990.
Nelson's lifespan.	1918-2013.
Nelson's imprisonment.	1994-1999.
Nelson's presidency.	1948-1994.

2. **The ANC was a political party which campaigned for South Africa to become independent from the British Empire and, later, for apartheid to end.**

What does 'campaigned' mean? Tick one.

- refused to do something
- broke the law
- worked hard to change something
- disagreed with

3. Find and copy the meaning of the word 'apartheid'.

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4. Find **two** methods that Nelson Mandela used in his protests against apartheid.

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- \_\_\_\_\_

5. Summarise Nelson Mandela's achievements in 25 words or fewer.

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6. Discuss two aspects of Nelson's character, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

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7. Why are Nelson Mandela's words "nature was our playground", a good way to describe his childhood?

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8. Compare Nelson's childhood to his later years. How were they different?

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9. Why was Nelson released from prison in 1990?

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10. Comment on how the author's presentation of the text aids the reader's understanding.

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