

## MANDELA AND THE FIGHT AGAINST APARTHEID

*Nelson Mandela is one of the most famous freedom fighters. As a result of fighting for the freedom of his people he was imprisoned for 27 years. How much do you know about Mandela? Which other freedom fighter do you know about and what do you think about him or her?*

Prison not only robs you of your freedom, it attempts to take away your identity. Everyone wears a uniform, eats the same food, and follows the same schedule. It is by definition a purely authoritarian state that tolerates no independence or individuality. As a freedom fighter and as a man, one must fight against the prison's attempt to rob one of these qualities.

From the courthouse, I was taken directly to Pretoria Local, the gloomy red-brick monstrosity that I knew so well. But I was now a convicted prisoner, not an awaiting-trial prisoner, and was treated without even the little deference that is afforded to the latter. I was stripped of my clothes and Colonel Jacobs was finally able to confiscate my *kaross*. I was issued the standard prison uniform for Africans: a pair of short trousers, a rough khaki shirt, a canvas jacket, socks, sandals and a cloth cap. Only Africans are given short trousers, for only African men are deemed 'boys' by the authorities.

I informed the authorities that I would under no circumstances wear shorts and told them I was prepared to go to court to protest. Later, when I was brought dinner, stiff cold porridge with half a teaspoonful of sugar, I refused to eat it. Colonel Jacobs pondered this and came up with a solution: I could wear long trousers and have my own food, if I agreed to be put in isolation. 'We were going to put you with the other political,' he said, 'but now you will be alone, man. I hope you enjoy it.' I assured him that solitary confinement would be fine as long as I could wear and eat what I chose. For the next few weeks, I was completely and utterly isolated. I did not see the face or hear the voice of another prisoner.

I was locked up for twenty-three hours a day, with thirty minutes of exercise in the morning and again in the afternoon. I had never been in isolation before, and every hour seemed like a year. There was no natural light in my cell; a single bulb burned overhead twenty-four hours a day. I did not have a wristwatch and I often thought it was the middle of the night when it was only late afternoon. I had nothing to read, nothing to write on or with, no one to talk to. The mind begins to turn in on itself, and one desperately wants something outside oneself on which to fix one's attention. I have known men who took half-a-dozen lashes in preference to being locked up alone. After a time in solitary, I relished the company even of the insects in my cell, and found myself on the verge of initiating conversations with a cockroach.

I had one middle-aged African warder whom I occasionally was able to see, and one day I tried to bribe him with an apple to get him to talk to me. 'Baba,' I said, which means Father, and is a term of respect, can I give you an apple?' he turned away, and met all my subsequent overtures with silence. Finally he said, 'Man, you wanted long trousers and better food, and now you have them and you are still not happy.' He was right. Nothing is more dehumanizing than the absence of human companionship. After a few weeks I was ready to swallow my pride and tell Colonel Jacobs that I would trade my long trousers for some company.

During those weeks I had plenty of time to ponder my fate. The place of freedom fighter is beside his people, not behind bars. The knowledge and contacts I had recently made in Africa

were going to be locked away rather than used in the struggle. I cursed the fact that my expertise would not be put in creating a freedom army.

I soon began to protest vigorously against my circumstances. I demanded to be put with other political prisoners at Pretoria Local. Among them was Robert Sobukwe. My request was ultimately granted, accompanied by a stern warning from Colonel Jacobs that serious consequences would result if I returned to my impudent ways. I don't think I ever looked forward to eating cold mealie pap so much in my life.

*'Long Walk to Freedom' by Nelson Mandela*

**Questions:**

1. What two things do you lose once you are put in jail?
2. Why is a prisoner who is awaiting trial treated with greater respect than one who has been convicted?
3. What position do you think Colonel Jacobs holds at the prison?
4. Give the main reasons why Mandela was put in solitary confinement.
5. Was Mandela right or not in refusing to eat the porridge? Why?
6. Mandela tried to bribe a warder with an apple because
  - (a) He wanted to be given better food
  - (b) The warder was a fellow Black
  - (c) He was feeling lonely
  - (d) He wanted the warder to free him from jail
7. What was Mandela's main aim in wanting to be free again?
  - (a) To have the opportunity to talk again
  - (b) To be able to see his former schoolmates
  - (c) To be able to set up a freedom army
  - (d) To get an important, well-paying job
8. What urgent request did Mandela make?
9. Which other word can you use to mean 'mealie pap'?
10. Which other title can you give this passage?