

Nelson Mandela: Freedom for All

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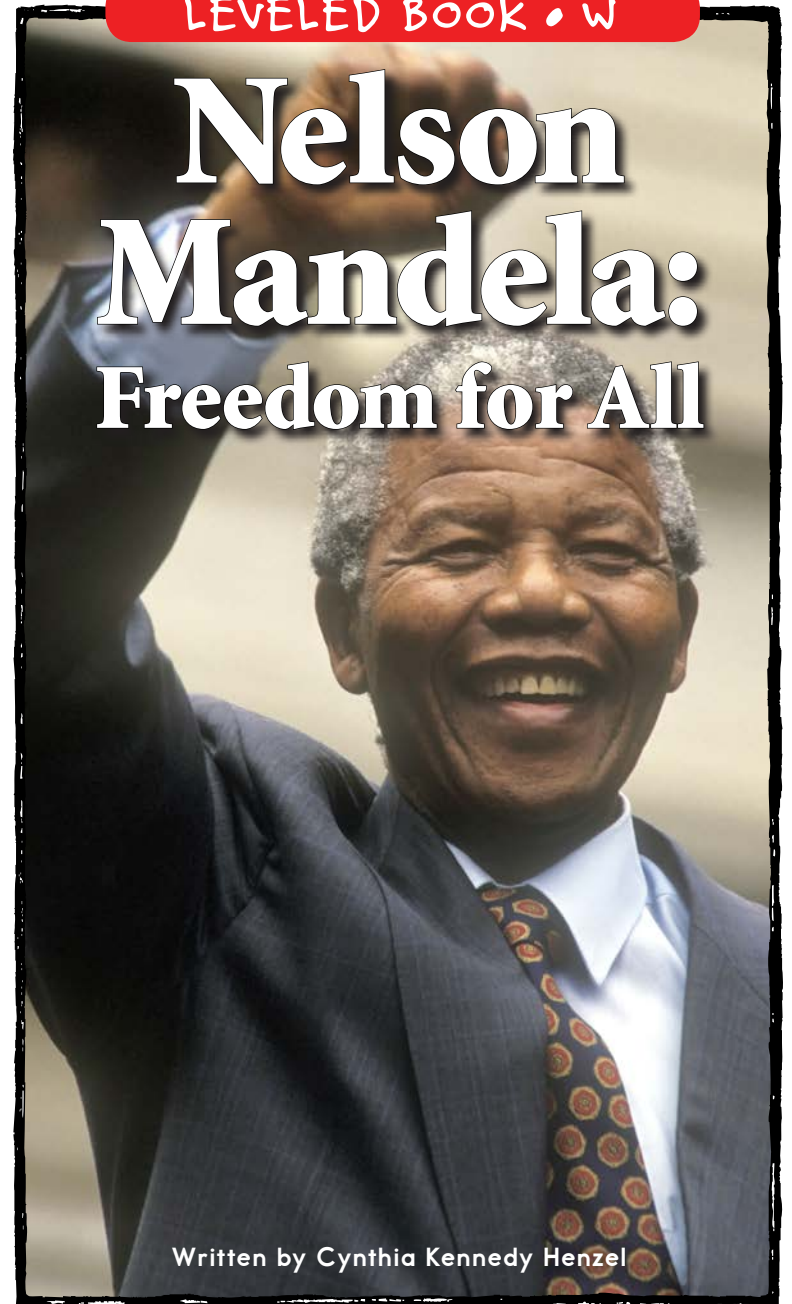


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Nelson Mandela: Freedom for All



Written by Cynthia Kennedy Henzel

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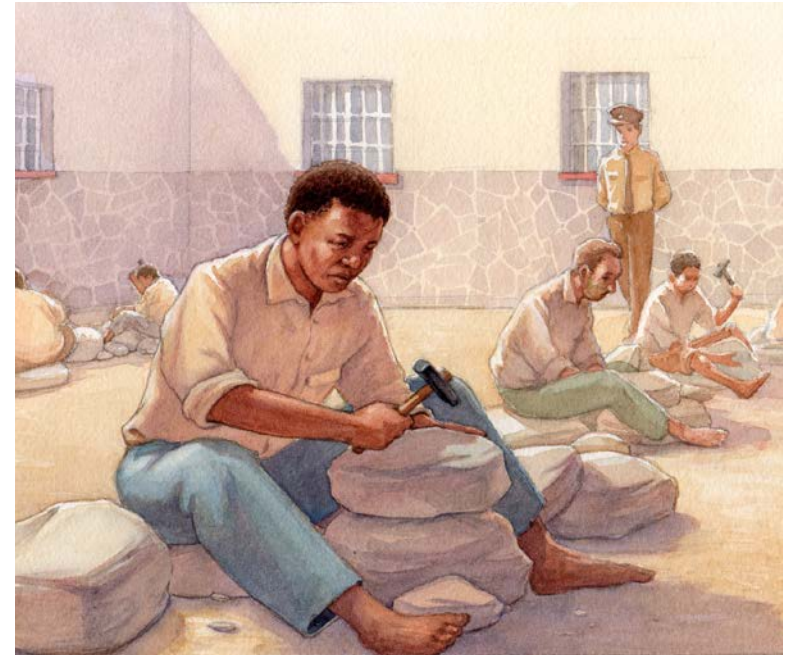
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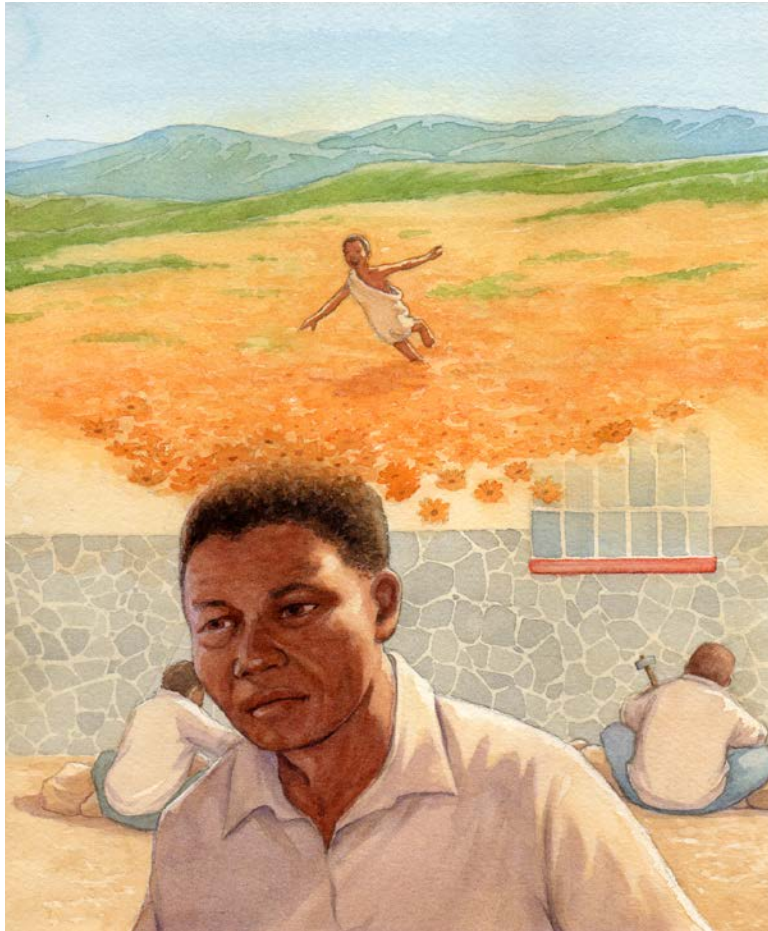
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Robben Island

Nelson Mandela sat on the hard ground of Robben Island before a pile of rocks. A guard gave him a hammer and ordered him to break the rocks into gravel. Other prisoners sat in rows near him, but they were not allowed to speak to each other.

Mandela, forty-four years old, had been **sentenced** to life in prison on Robben Island, a small island off the coast of South Africa. Prisoners worked all day breaking rocks. They ate bad food, slept in tiny cells, and were treated poorly by the guards. With no newspapers or radios, the prisoners were cut off from the rest of the world.

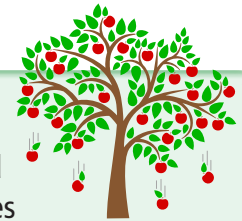


Mandela missed his children and his wife. Every six months, he was allowed one short letter, which was opened and **censored** by the prison. Every six months, he was allowed one visitor, who had to speak to him through a glass window. Sitting in the dirty prison yard, Mandela longed for the open fields and freedom of his childhood. How had he ended up here?

A Free-Roaming Life

Nelson Mandela was born in 1918 in a country that was very different from the South Africa of today. The Dutch and British had **colonized** the land centuries before. Millions of black South Africans were forced under their control. The country was rich with diamond and gold mines, but the riches were not for everyone. A small **minority** of white people had all the good jobs and owned ninety percent of the land.

Nelson's father, Chief Henry, was from a royal family of the Thembu (TEM-boo) tribe and had helped advise the Thembu rulers. However, a local British official became angry at him and took his title and money when Nelson was a baby. Nelson and his mother lived in a village near his mother's family. His father was often away at the homes of his three other wives.



Rolihlahla

At birth, Nelson Mandela was named *Rolihlahla*, which means "one who shakes the tree" in the language of the Thembu. *Tree shaker* is a term that means "someone who causes trouble or sudden change," like when someone shakes an apple tree, causing all the fruit to tumble down at once. When Rolihlahla began school at age seven, his teacher gave him a British name. He became Nelson Mandela.

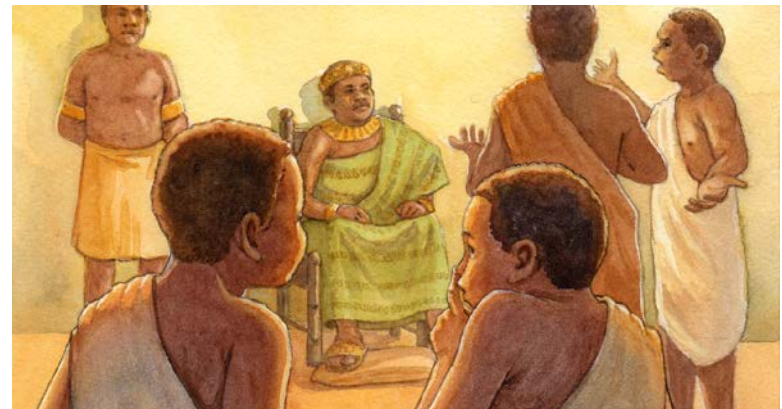
Nelson was happy playing with other boys, herding sheep and cattle, and going to school. Then, when he was nine, his father died, and Nelson's free-roaming life ended. One morning, his mother woke him early and told him to pack everything he owned in a bag. As they began a long walk along dusty roads, Nelson looked back at the family's round mud hut. He feared he would never see his home again.



Learning to Listen

Late in the evening, they came to the home of Chief Jongintaba, leader of the Thembu people. Nelson had never seen anything like the large herds of cattle and grand houses of the "Great Place." Chief Henry had been a good friend to Chief Jongintaba, and the important man wanted to raise Nelson. So Nelson's mother left her son in his care.

Nelson was lucky to live in the Great Place. He became friends and went to school with the chief's son, Justice. They went to meetings and listened as Chief Jongintaba settled arguments among his people. Nelson saw how the chief listened to both sides before making a decision. Nelson heard stories about those who came before him and learned about the ways of his people. He came to believe that he could be a leader.





The Big City

Nelson did well in school, so Chief Jongintaba sent him to college in Fort Hare. Here, Nelson got into his first bit of trouble. He quit the student council in order to show support for students who were **protesting** the poor food at the college. The head of the college gave him a choice: Nelson could rejoin the student council to show support for the college or be kicked out. Nelson refused to give in and was sent home.

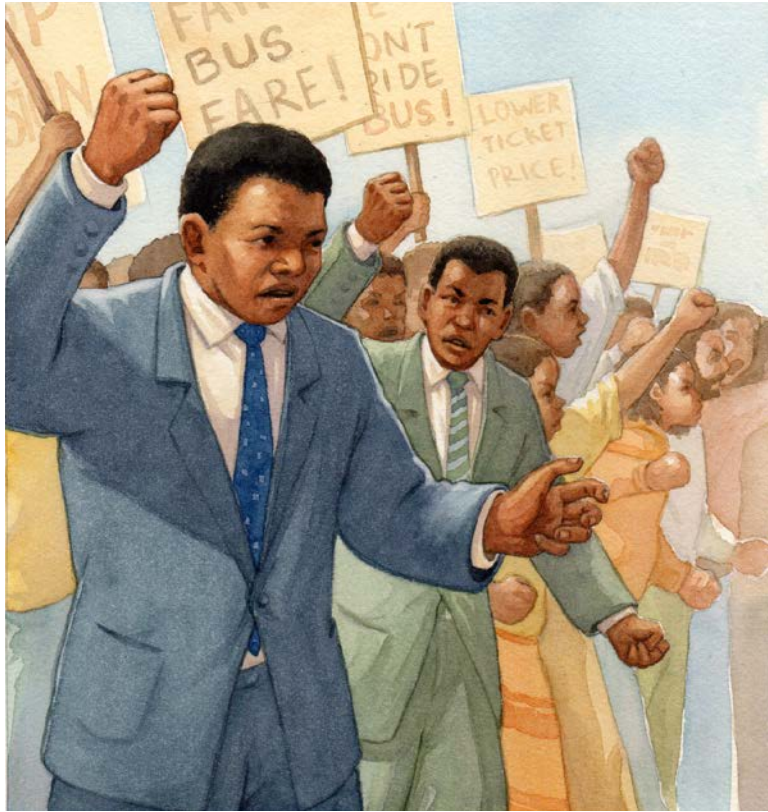


In the course of a few years, Nelson moved from village life to Johannesburg, the biggest city in South Africa.

Chief Jongintaba was angry and decided that it was time for both Justice and Nelson to get married. The young men were shocked! They did not want to marry the girls whom the chief had chosen for them. Instead, they sold one of the chief's prize oxen to get money and ran away to Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa.

Justice got a job as a mine clerk, and Nelson became a security guard. Chief Jongintaba soon found them and demanded that they return home. Justice returned, but Nelson decided to stay alone in the big city.

Nelson made friends, moved into a tiny room, and finished his college degree by mail. One of his new friends got him a job at a law office where he could work as a clerk while he studied for a law degree. The friend also brought Nelson into the African National Congress (ANC), a group that fought for equal rights for blacks.

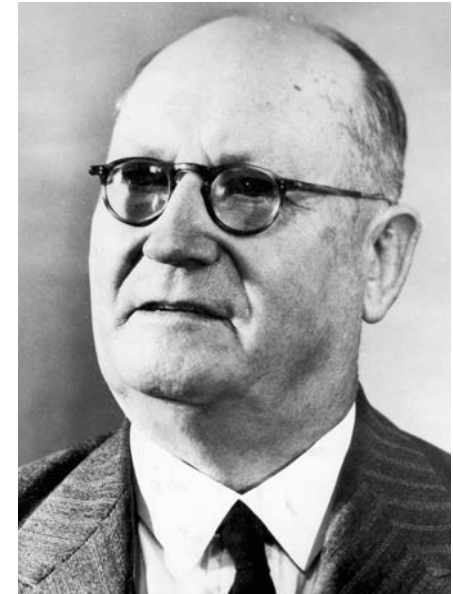


Soon Nelson marched in his first protest, to stop bus fare increases for poor workers. People **boycotted** the buses, refusing to ride them. After only nine days, the fares were reduced.

Nelson was excited by their success, and in 1944 he helped found the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) as part of the ANC. The ANCYL wanted to plan bigger protests and boycotts. Within a few years, the group would have more cause to protest than ever before.

From Bad to Worse

Only white people could vote in South Africa, and in 1948 they elected D. F. Malan of the Afrikaner National Party as president. That party believed in **apartheid** (uh-PAR-tide), a policy that forces different races to stay **segregated** from each other, with different rights.



Malan supported a policy of apartheid—“apart-ness” in Afrikaans, the language of the descendants of the first Dutch settlers.



Apartheid signs in both English and Afrikaans kept whites apart from other races in 1950s Johannesburg and for decades after. Notice that whites (Europeans) were referred to as “ladies” and “gentlemen,” but other races were not.

Ethnic Groups in South Africa, 1946

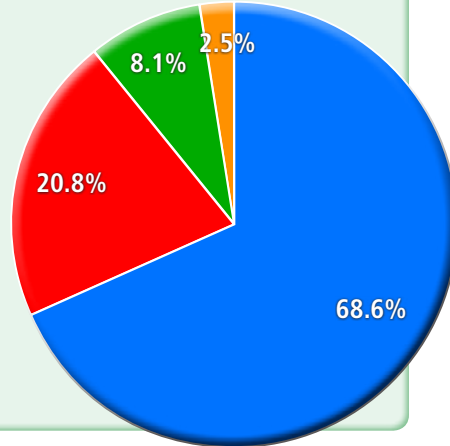
Black: 7,832,000

White: 2,373,000

Coloured: 928,000

Indian or Asian: 285,000

White people made up only one-fifth of the population at the time apartheid went into effect. Yet black people, who made up two-thirds of the population, ended up with fewer rights than any other group.



All black men had to carry a pass to travel, and blacks could not be trained for good jobs. Every person was labeled by race: black, white, Coloured (mixed race), or Indian. People of different races could not marry, and each race had to live in its own area. People were often labeled by their looks, so family members might end up in different groups if some had lighter skin than others. Families with members in different groups could not live together. They could not even meet in parks or other public places because those areas were segregated, too.

Mandela was now married with children to care for and worked long hours at the law office. Still, as conditions got worse, he fought harder for justice and became the president of the ANCYL in 1951.



Black protesters take over part of a train car marked "For Europeans Only" and shout their slogan, "Africa!" Thirty-four were later arrested.

A Rising Star

The next year, the African National Congress urged people not to follow the apartheid laws. Blacks burned their travel passes and sat down in Whites Only parts of buses. They drank from Whites Only water fountains and played in Whites Only parks. Mandela spoke before thousands of protesters and was arrested. He was forbidden by law to travel, give speeches, or hold public office.

Mandela continued to work for the ANC in secret. He also helped start the first black law office in South Africa, to help people who were suffering under apartheid.

In 1955, Mandela was arrested again and charged with treason, or trying to bring down the government. He was released from jail for a time, but the ban on speaking and travel continued. Unhappy with the risks he took and the dangers he faced, his first wife divorced him.

During the four-and-a-half-year trial, Mandela continued his work with the ANC in secret, but conditions got worse. At a protest in 1960, police fired at peaceful protesters and killed sixty-nine people. The ANC was banned.



A woman weeps after viewing her husband's body. He was one of sixty-nine protesters shot by police during an apartheid protest in 1960.

Soon after, Mandela's trial ended when he was found not guilty of treason. Yet Mandela knew that unless he gave up the fight for equal rights, he would soon be arrested again. Since he refused to give up the fight, he went into hiding.

Mandela felt that all those years of peaceful protests had failed, and the ANC needed to try something else. In 1962, he escaped South Africa to ask leaders in other countries to help. Some gave him money for the fight, and others offered military training. He learned for the first time how to shoot a gun and make a bomb.



Mandela in London during his time abroad in 1962

Mandela and Martin Luther King

Nelson Mandela is often compared to Martin Luther King, the famous leader of the U.S. civil rights movement. Both men struggled to win equal rights for their people. Yet while King saw progress in his country, Mandela saw the opposite in South Africa, as rights for nonwhites continued to vanish. Unlike King, Mandela eventually decided that violence was necessary to bring about change.

"We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence; when this form was legislated against, and then the Government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer with violence," Mandela said.

In the end, Mandela saw his dream of an equal South Africa come true—equal, united, and at peace.

A year later, Mandela slipped back into South Africa and started a new part of the ANC called the Spear of the Nation (MK). The MK wanted to force the people in power to listen to them. They planned to do this by using **sabotage**, such as bombing buildings or power stations. Unfortunately, as a result of the bombings, people died.

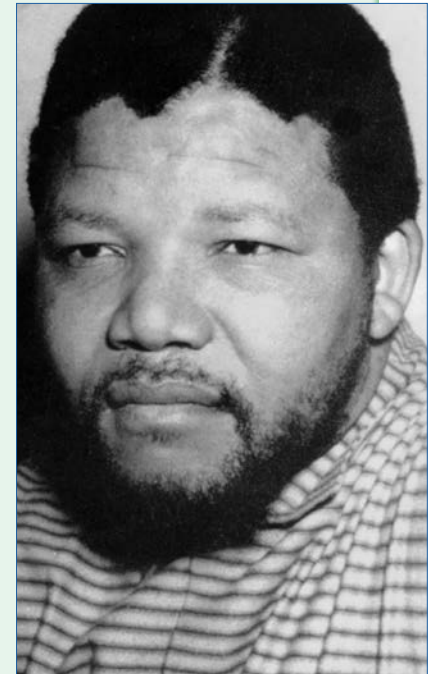
Mandela made his plans at the MK's secret hideout. He traveled in disguise and became famous as the Black Pimpernel, a Robin Hood-type character who slipped past government traps aimed at catching him.

In 1962, Mandela was caught and sent to prison. Then the police found Mandela's secret hideout and his plans. He was charged with **conspiracy** to bring down the government, a crime for which he could be put to death. This time the verdict came quickly: guilty.

Mandela knew he would rather die than give up fighting for justice, so he prepared his final words in case he was to be hanged. The judge instead sentenced him to life in prison.

The Words Mandela Thought Might Be His Last

"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."



Mandela awaits his fate—life or death—after he is found guilty in 1964.

Prison Years

Mandela's early years in prison were hard. Although the prisoners were not allowed to speak to one another, they found secret means of communicating, such as leaving notes under rocks or taped under toilet seats. Mandela demanded rights for the prisoners and that all races be treated with **dignity**. The guards came to respect him. Over time, the prisoners got better food, books so they could study, and more freedom to talk.

Mandela became a leader among the prisoners, who were men of different races. He used the listening skills he had learned as a child so that everyone felt he understood their side of the story. Many blacks thought that South Africa should be only for blacks because they were there first. Mandela had once believed this, too, but he now realized that all races should have a place in a truly free country.

Mandela's family and friends made sure the prisoners on Robben Island were not forgotten. They led protests and boycotts, and worked outside the country to make Mandela's name known everywhere.

Still, the government became more violent—protesters were murdered or simply disappeared. Even children were attacked when they protested laws that forced them to use the Afrikaans language in schools rather than their own language.

Other countries boycotted South Africa by not trading with them. By the 1980s, people around the world demanded an end to apartheid. The South African government wanted Mandela to cooperate, so they moved him to a better prison on the mainland. They promised to free him if he spoke up against violence and the MK, but he refused unless the government cast off apartheid.



People protest in front of the White House during a visit from South Africa's president in 1990.

In 1989, F. W. de Klerk was elected president. Within months, he let Mandela go and allowed the ANC to meet. Nelson Mandela, age seventy-one, walked free for the first time in twenty-seven years.

In 1993, Mandela shared the Nobel Peace Prize with de Klerk, but his work was not done. Now he worked to bring about free elections.



Mandela and de Klerk stand with their Nobel Peace Prize gold medals and diplomas. The prize is given to those who have made great strides toward peace.



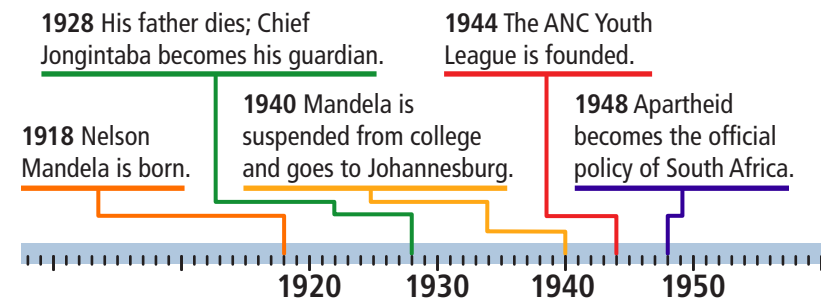
People line up for miles to vote in South Africa's first all-race elections in 1994.

Five-Hour Lines

The country's first free elections took place in 1994. Thousands of people stood in lines for up to five hours to vote for the first time. Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa.

Mandela did not want his country filled with hate and fear over things that had happened in the past, so he helped start the Truth and **Reconciliation** Commission (TRC). A person could come before the TRC and confess to things he or she had done during apartheid and not be charged with a crime.

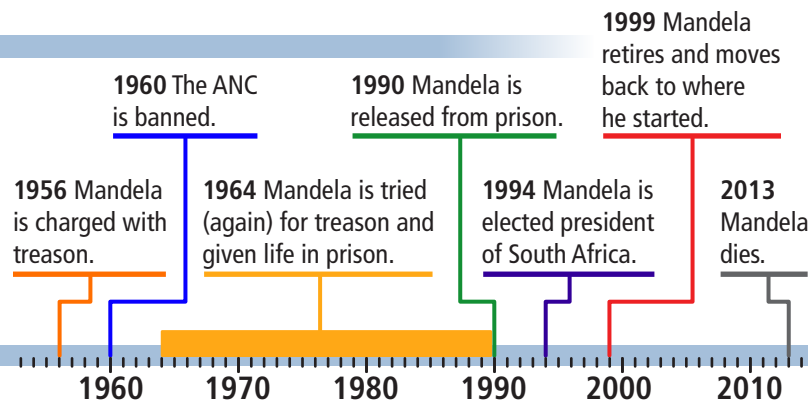
NELSON MANDELA TIMELINE



Some considered the TRC process unfair; however, it helped bring to light the truth about crimes that happened under apartheid. Those who had suffered under the old laws sometimes discovered what had happened to friends or relatives who had disappeared.

Mandela retired after his first term as president. He finally moved back to his childhood village, but he did not retire from helping his people. He met with world leaders to advance his country and peace around the world, and he started the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund to help children. After a long illness, he died in 2013.

Mandela's belief in talking with everyone, rather than just one side, helped to establish a country where all people are treated equally under the law. Today, Nelson Mandela remains a lasting symbol of freedom for all.



Glossary

apartheid (<i>n.</i>)	an official policy of racial segregation in South Africa, now ended, that discriminated against people who were not white (p. 12)
boycotted (<i>v.</i>)	refused to buy or take part in something in order to make a point or force a change (p. 11)
censored (<i>v.</i>)	removed words or other content viewed as threatening or offensive (p. 5)
colonized (<i>v.</i>)	established an area or a country that was ruled by or belonged to another country (p. 6)
conspiracy (<i>n.</i>)	the act of two or more people secretly plotting to do something illegal or harmful (p. 18)
dignity (<i>n.</i>)	worthiness of respect or esteem (p. 19)
minority (<i>n.</i>)	a small group within a larger population; less than half (p. 6)
protesting (<i>v.</i>)	expressing strong disagreement or disapproval (p. 9)
reconciliation (<i>n.</i>)	the process of two or more people or groups settling a disagreement and becoming friendly again (p. 22)
sabotage (<i>n.</i>)	the intentional destruction of or interference with something in order to make it not work (p. 17)
segregated (<i>adj.</i>)	kept apart based on group differences, such as race (p. 12)
sentenced (<i>v.</i>)	formally declared a punishment given to someone by a court of law (p. 4)