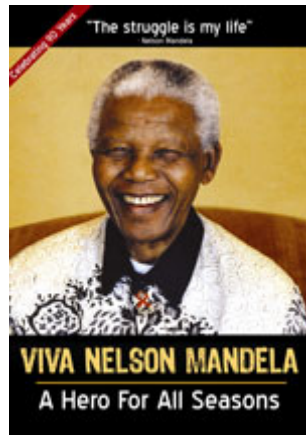




Viva Nelson Mandela

Guidebook



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Biography

Source: African National Congress Website

<http://www.anc.org.za/people/mandela.html>

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in a village near Umtata in the Transkei on the 18 July 1918. His father was the principal counselor to the Acting Paramount Chief of Thembuland. After his father's death, the young Rolihlahla became the Paramount Chief's ward to be groomed to assume high office. However, influenced by the cases that came before the Chief's court, he determined to become a lawyer. Hearing the elders' stories of his ancestors' valour during the wars of resistance in defense of their fatherland, he dreamed also of making his own contribution to the freedom struggle of his people.

After receiving a primary education at a local mission school, Nelson Mandela was sent to Healdtown, a Wesleyan secondary school of some repute where he matriculated. He then enrolled at the University College of Fort Hare for the Bachelor of Arts Degree where he was elected onto the Student's Representative Council. He was suspended from college for joining in a protest boycott. He went to Johannesburg where he completed his BA by correspondence, took articles of clerkship and commenced study for his LLB. He entered politics in earnest while studying in Johannesburg by joining the African National Congress in 1942.

At the height of the Second World War a small group of young Africans, members of the African National Congress, banded together under the leadership of Anton Lembede. Among them were William Nkomo, Walter Sisulu, Oliver R. Tambo, Ashby P. Mda and Nelson Mandela. Starting out with 60 members, all of whom were residing around the Witwatersrand, these young people set themselves the formidable task of transforming the ANC into a mass movement, deriving its strength and motivation from the unlettered millions of working people in the towns and countryside, the peasants in the rural areas and the professionals.

Their chief contention was that the political tactics of the old guard' leadership of the ANC, reared in the tradition of constitutionalism and polite petitioning of the government of the day, were proving inadequate to the tasks of national emancipation. In opposition to the old guard', Lembede and his colleagues espoused a radical African Nationalism grounded in the principle of national self-determination. In September 1944 they came together to found the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL).

Mandela soon impressed his peers by his disciplined work and consistent effort and was elected to the Secretaryship of the Youth League in 1947. By painstaking work, campaigning at the grassroots and through its mouthpiece 'Inyaniso' (Truth) the ANCYL was able to canvass support for its policies amongst the ANC membership. At the 1945 annual conference of the ANC, two of the League's leaders, Anton Lembede and Ashby Mda, were elected onto the National Executive Committee (NEC). Two years later another Youth League leader, Oliver R. Tambo became a member of the NEC.

Spurred on by the victory of the National Party which won the 1948 all-White elections on the platform of Apartheid, at the 1949 annual conference, the Programme of Action, inspired by the Youth League, which advocated the weapons of boycott, strike, civil disobedience and non-cooperation was accepted as official ANC policy.

The Programme of Action had been drawn up by a sub-committee of the ANCYL composed of David Bopape, Ashby Mda, Nelson Mandela, James Njongwe, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo.

To ensure its implementation the membership replaced older leaders with a number of younger men. Walter Sisulu, a founding member of the Youth League was elected Secretary-General. The conservative Dr A.B. Xuma lost the presidency to Dr J.S. Moroka, a man with a reputation for greater militancy. The following year, 1950, Mandela himself was elected to the NEC at national conference.

The ANCYL program aimed at the attainment of full citizenship, direct parliamentary representation for all South Africans. In policy documents of which Mandela was an important co-author, the ANCYL paid special attention to the redistribution of the land, trade union rights, education and culture. The ANCYL aspired to free and compulsory education for all children, as well as mass education for adults.

When the ANC launched its Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws in 1952, Mandela was elected National Volunteer-in-Chief. The Defiance Campaign was conceived as a mass civil disobedience campaign that would snowball from a core of selected volunteers to involved more and more ordinary people, culminating in mass defiance. Fulfilling his responsibility as Volunteer-in-Chief, Mandela travelled the country organizing resistance to discriminatory legislation. Charged and brought to trial for his role in the campaign, the court found that Mandela and his co-accused had consistently advised their followers to adopt a peaceful course of action and to avoid all violence.

For his part in the Defiance Campaign, Mandela was convicted of contravening the Suppression of Communism Act and given a suspended prison sentence. Shortly after the campaign ended, he was also prohibited from attending gatherings and confined to Johannesburg for six months.

During this period of restrictions, Mandela wrote the attorneys admission examination and was admitted to the profession. He opened a practice in Johannesburg, in partnership with Oliver Tambo. In recognition of his outstanding contribution during the Defiance Campaign Mandela had been elected to the presidency of both the Youth League and the Transvaal region of the ANC at the end of 1952, he thus became a deputy president of the ANC itself.

Of their law practice, Oliver Tambo, ANC National Chairman at the time of his death in April 1993, has written:

To reach our desks each morning Nelson and I ran the gauntlet of patient queues of people overflowing from the chairs in the waiting room into the corridors... To be landless (in South Africa) can be a crime, and weekly we interviewed the delegations of peasants who came to tell us how many generations their families had worked a little piece of land from which they were now being ejected... To live in the wrong area can be a crime... Our buff office files carried thousands of these stories and if, when we started our law partnership, we had not been rebels against apartheid, our experiences in our offices would have remedied the deficiency. We had risen to professional status in our community, but every case in court, every visit to the prisons to interview clients, reminded us of the humiliation and suffering burning into our people.

Nor did their professional status earn Mandela and Tambo any personal immunity from the brutal apartheid laws. They fell foul of the land segregation legislation, and the authorities demanded that they move their practice from the city to the back of beyond, as Mandela later put it, miles away from where clients could reach us during working hours. This was tantamount to asking us to abandon our legal practice, to give up the legal service of our people... No attorney worth his salt would easily agree to do that, said Mandela and the partnership resolved to defy the law.

Nor was the government alone in trying to frustrate Mandela's legal practice. On the grounds of his conviction under the Suppression of Communism Act, the Transvaal Law Society petitioned the Supreme Court to strike him off the roll of attorneys. The petition was refused with Mr Justice

Ramsbottom finding that Mandela had been moved by a desire to serve his black fellow citizens and nothing he had done showed him to be unworthy to remain in the ranks of an honourable profession.

In 1952 Nelson Mandela was given the responsibility to prepare an organisational plan that would enable the leadership of the movement to maintain dynamic contact with its membership without recourse to public meetings. The objective was to prepare for the contingency of proscription by building up powerful local and regional branches to whom power could be devolved. This was the M-Plan, named after him.

During the early fifties Mandela played an important part in leading the resistance to the Western Areas removals and to the introduction of Bantu Education. He also played a significant role in popularising the Freedom Charter, adopted by the Congress of the People in 1955.

In the late fifties, Mandela's attention turned to the struggles against the exploitation of labour, the pass laws, the nascent Bantustan policy, and the segregation of the open universities. Mandela arrived at the conclusion very early on that the Bantustan policy was a political swindle and an economic absurdity. He predicted, with dismal prescience, that ahead there lay a grim programme of mass evictions, political persecutions, and police terror. On the segregation of the universities, Mandela observed that the friendship and inter-racial harmony that is forged through the admixture and association of various racial groups at the mixed universities constitute a direct threat to the policy of apartheid and baasskap, and that it was to remove that threat that the open universities were being closed to black students.

During the whole of the fifties, Mandela was the victim of various forms of repression. He was banned, arrested and imprisoned. For much of the latter half of the decade, he was one of the accused in the mammoth Treason Trial, at great cost to his legal practice and his political work. After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the ANC was outlawed, and Mandela, still on trial, was detained.

The Treason Trial collapsed in 1961 as South Africa was being steered towards the adoption of the republic constitution. With the ANC now illegal the leadership picked up the threads from its underground headquarters. Nelson Mandela emerged at this time as the leading figure in this new phase of struggle. Under the ANC's inspiration, 1,400 delegates came together at an All-in African Conference in Pietermaritzburg during March 1961. Mandela was the keynote speaker. In an electrifying address he challenged the apartheid regime to convene a national convention, representative of all South Africans to thrash out a new constitution based on democratic principles. Failure to comply, he warned, would compel the majority (Blacks) to observe the forthcoming inauguration of the Republic with a mass general strike. He immediately went underground to lead the campaign. Although fewer answered the call than Mandela had hoped, it attracted considerable support throughout the country. The government responded with the largest military mobilisation since the war, and the Republic was born in an atmosphere of fear and apprehension.

Forced to live apart from his family, moving from place to place to evade detection by the government's ubiquitous informers and police spies, Mandela had to adopt a number of disguises. Sometimes dressed as a common labourer, at other times as a chauffeur, his successful evasion of the police earned him the title of the Black Pimpernel. It was during this time that he, together with other leaders of the ANC constituted a new specialised section of the liberation movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe, as an armed nucleus with a view to preparing for armed struggle. At the Rivonia trial, Mandela explained: "At the beginning of June 1961, after long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I and some colleagues came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be wrong and unrealistic for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force.

It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form Umkhonto we Sizwe...the Government had left us no other choice."

In 1961 Umkhonto we Sizwe was formed, with Mandela as its commander-in-chief. In 1962 Mandela left the country unlawfully and travelled abroad for several months. In Ethiopia he addressed the Conference of the Pan African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa, and was warmly received by senior political leaders in several countries. During this trip Mandela, anticipating an intensification of the armed struggle, began to arrange guerrilla training for members of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Not long after his return to South Africa Mandela was arrested and charged with illegal exit from the country, and incitement to strike.

Since he considered the prosecution a trial of the aspirations of the African people, Mandela decided to conduct his own defence. He applied for the recusal of the magistrate, on the ground that in such a prosecution a judiciary controlled entirely by whites was an interested party and therefore could not be impartial, and on the ground that he owed no duty to obey the laws of a white parliament, in which he was not represented.

Mandela prefaced this challenge with the affirmation: I detest racialism, because I regard it as a barbaric thing, whether it comes from a black man or a white man.

Mandela was convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment. While serving his sentence he was charged, in the Rivonia Trial, with sabotage. Mandela's statements in court during these trials are classics in the history of the resistance to apartheid, and they have been an inspiration to all who have opposed it. His statement from the dock in the Rivonia Trial ends with these words:

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 was sentenced to life imprisonment and started his prison years in the notorious Robben Island Prison, a maximum security prison on a small island 7Km off the coast near Cape Town. In April 1984 he was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town and in December 1988 he was moved to the Victor Verster Prison near Paarl from where he was eventually released. While in prison, Mandela flatly rejected offers made by his jailers for remission of sentence in exchange for accepting the bantustan policy by recognising the independence of the Transkei and agreeing to settle there. Again in the 'eighties Mandela rejected an offer of release on condition that he renounce violence. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts. Only free men can negotiate, he said.

Released on 11 February 1990, Mandela plunged wholeheartedly into his life's work, striving to attain the goals he and others had set out almost four decades earlier. In 1991, at the first national conference of the ANC held inside South Africa after being banned for decades, Nelson Mandela was elected President of the ANC while his lifelong friend and colleague, Oliver Tambo, became the organisation's National Chairperson.

Nelson Mandela has never wavered in his devotion to democracy, equality and learning. Despite terrible provocation, he has never answered racism with racism. His life has been an inspiration, in South Africa and throughout the world, to all who are oppressed and deprived, to all who are opposed to oppression and deprivation.

In a life that symbolises the triumph of the human spirit over man's inhumanity to man, Nelson Mandela accepted the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of all South Africans who suffered and sacrificed so much to bring peace to our land.

Lesson Plan:

Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die" Speech.

Materials Needed:

- Viva Nelson Mandela DVD
- Copy of Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die" speech found at this website. - <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/rivonia.html>

Time needed to complete lesson:

Two Class Periods

Objectives:

Students will watch the DVD and read Mandela's speech to aid them in writing an essay on both.

Step One:

Watch the "Viva Nelson Mandela" DVD, specifically the chapter focused on the Rivonia trial and the statement he gave.

Step Two:

Have students read the entire "I Am Prepared to Die" speech found at the website.

Step Three:

Ask your students the following questions:

1. After watching the DVD and reading Mandela's statement, why do they think that it is so highly regarded, even today?

2. The statement by Mandela is known by many as the "I Am Prepared to Die" speech, based on the final sentence in the statement. Why is that?

3. Many compare Martin Luther King Jr's. "I Have a Dream" speech to Mandela's speech. Although both speeches were given in very different circumstances, their themes are similar. Ask students to compare and contrast the two speeches.

Step Four:

Written Report:

Have students write a one to two page report on the Rivonia speech. Students should reference specific quotes from the speech and discuss why the speech continues to impact readers today.

Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History: Era 9 — Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up.
- U.S. History: Era 9 — Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast Nelson Mandela to other well-known political or religious figures who fought for civil rights and/or political freedom. This can include, but is not limited to, Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and Martin Luther King, Jr. What personal qualities does each of these leaders share?
2. After police forces massacred unarmed civilians at Sharpeville in 1960 along with the subsequent banning of the African National Congress (ANC), Mandela and his supporters encouraged the use of sabotage and other violent means, which leading to their arrest and imprisonment. Many years later when Chris Hani, a popular ANC leader was assassinated during negotiations with the government, Mandela made a televised speech appealing for people not to seek violent retribution. Does non-violence always work in these types of political situation? Are disenfranchised groups ever justified in using violence when oppressed?
3. During his imprisonment on Robben Island, Mandela and his supporters would stage hunger strikes to protest their treatment. Other political prisoners have long used hunger strikes as a way to bring attention to their cause. Do you believe that hunger strikes are effective or not in raising awareness for a specific cause or issue?
4. Compare and contrast the civil rights movement in America in the 1960's and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Why did it take longer for South Africa to end apartheid than it did for the U.S to outlaw racial segregation?
5. As South Africa moves into a post-Mandela period, what will be his enduring legacy? Despite Mandela's many achievements, South Africa still has many issues yet to be resolved, such as land distribution from whites to blacks and the high HIV-infection rate. Do you think the new elected leaders of South Africa will be able to use the name of Mandela in helping resolve these issues?