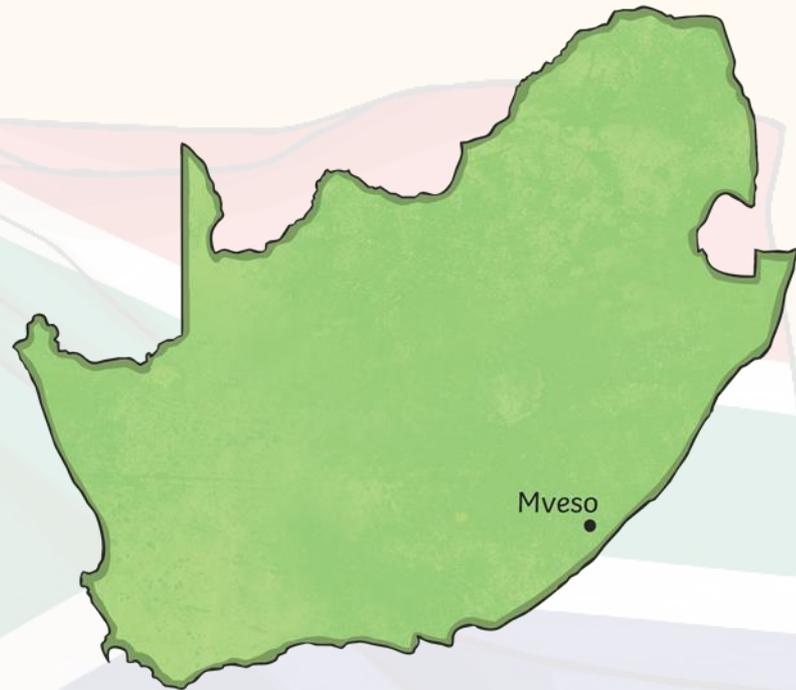# Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela's Life Story

twinkl

Mandela's Early Years

Mandela was born on the 18th July 1918 in a small rural village in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, named Maveso.

His birth name was Rolihlahla, which means 'troublemaker' in Xhosa.

His father was a chief of the Xhosa speaking Thembu people, so it was expected that he would also grow up to be chief.

Mveso

Mandela's Early Years

Unfortunately, his father died when he was nine years old and his uncle became the new chief. Nelson spent a lot of time with his uncle, the new chief, and learnt many great lessons from him about being a good leader. The most important lesson he learnt was to listen to everyone's ideas, to allow everyone to have their own opinion and to listen to those opinions before making a decision.

Rolihlahla went to school at a mission school. It was here that one of his teachers gave him the name Nelson. He worked hard at school and also enjoyed sport.

Mandela's Early Years

When he was 22, he left home and went to live in Johannesburg. Living in South Africa, under the Apartheid government's rule, was very difficult for Nelson and he experienced many hardships during this time. He decided that instead of just complaining about the terrible injustices, the best thing he could do was to study to become a lawyer and to join a political party who was fighting against Apartheid. In 1944, he joined the African National Congress (ANC).

Mandela's Early Years

Nelson was an active member of the ANC (African National Congress) fighting against the government. Soon he become a leader in the ANC. The ANC organized mass public campaigns and other protests. They also refused to obey any of the unjust Apartheid laws.

Mandela's Early Years

During Apartheid, black people were required to carry a pass book with them at all times, wherever they went. Nelson refused to carry it and he burnt his pass book in protest of this rule.
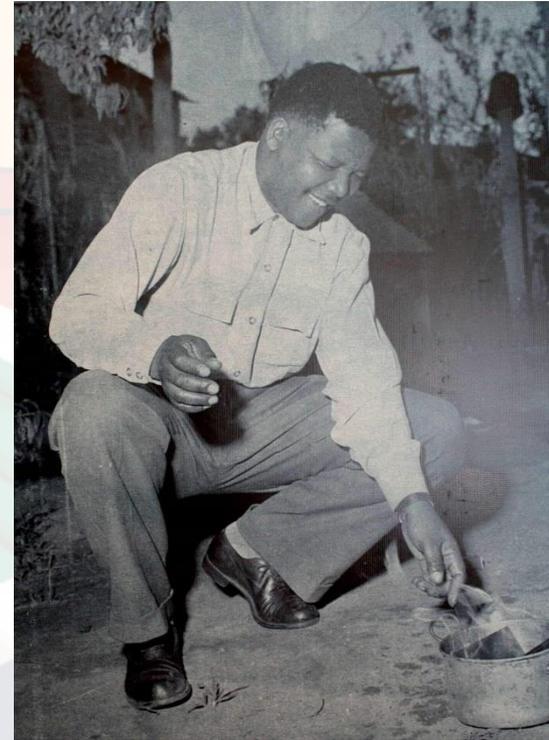

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Mandela's Years in Prison

In 1962, the government banned the ANC. This meant that no one was allowed to belong to the ANC and that the ANC was no longer allowed to exist. The members of the ANC decided that they needed to step up their efforts to get the government to listen to them. They began armed attacks and bombing crowded areas.

In response to these attacks, the government arrested ten leaders of the ANC and tried them for acts of treason and sabotage at the Rivonia Trials.

The trial ended on 12 June 1964, with eight of the accused, including Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Motsoaledi, Mlangeni, and Goldberg, being sentenced to life imprisonment.

Mandela's Years in Prison

All the prisoners, except for Goldberg (because he was white) were sent to Robben Island Prison for hard labour. His prison number was 46664.

While in prison, the prisoners selected Mandela as their leader as they respected his honesty and his ability to be a fair leader. Whenever there was a disagreement amongst the prisoners, Mandela would step in to help resolve the problem. He used the valuable lessons he had learnt back in his village to help him, and always listened to both sides of the argument.

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Mandela's Years in Prison

Photo courtesy of (@commons.wikimedia.org) – Witstinkhout, 18 August 2013

Life on Robben Island was not easy for the prisoners. The cells were so small that when Nelson lay down on his sleeping mat, his feet and hands could touch the opposite walls. He only had a metal bucket as a toilet. Prisoners were not allowed radios or newspapers, and they were only allowed one visitor and one letter every six months.

Mandela's Years in Prison

Mandela was in prison for 27 years and during that time, always remained true to his beliefs that everyone deserved to be respected and treated fairly. He understood that the prison guards were just doing their jobs and he treated them with respect. He also used his time in prison to learn to speak Afrikaans and to get to know more about Afrikaner culture and history. He also spoke to the prison guards about why he had chosen to fight for democracy and his dream for South Africa.

Free at Last!

On the 2nd of February 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. He and President F.W. de Klerk started making changes so that all South Africans could live free lives, under a democratic government.

On the 27th April 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa and everyone over eighteen was allowed to vote. For many people, this was the first time that they were allowed to vote as only whites were allowed to vote while the Apartheid Government was in power.
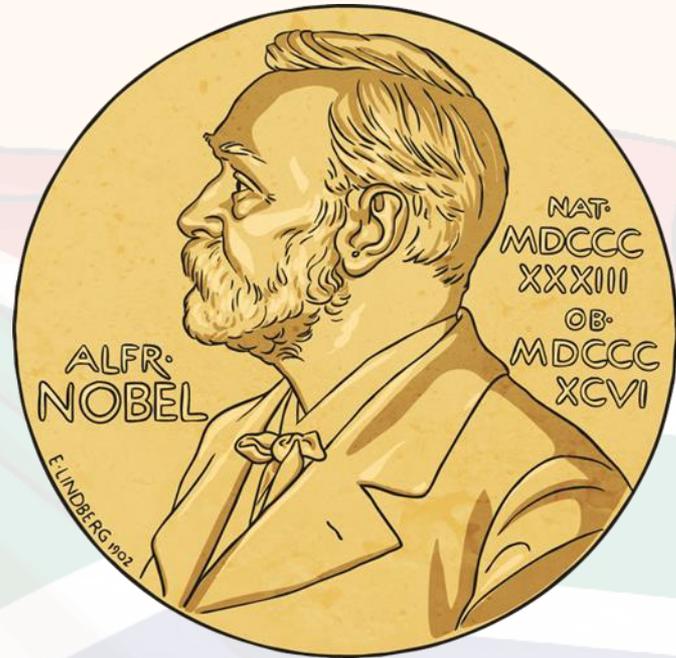
Free at Last!

The ANC won the elections and on the 10th May 1994, Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South Africa's new president. He was the first black president that South Africa had ever had! He chose F.W. de Klerk and Thabo Mbeki to be his deputy presidents.

Living as a Free Man in South Africa

Mandela was a great South African leader. South Africa prospered under his leadership. People called him 'Tata', which means 'father'.

He was admired by many other world leaders as well and went on many state visits. In 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace prize. This award was shared with F.W. de Klerk.

Living as a Free Man in South Africa

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Mandela wrote an autobiography about his life called 'Long Walk to Freedom', in 1994. It is a book that teaches us a lot about patience, kindness, perseverance and understanding.

Nelson Mandela finally retired as President in 1999, and from 2004, he gave up politics completely, to enjoy a quiet life with loving wife, Graça, and his family.

He died peacefully at home with his family on the 5th December 2013. He was 95.