

Nelson Mandela



Nelson Mandela was born in 1918 in Mvezo, South Africa. His father, Henry, was chief of a tribe in south Africa called the Tembu, and his great grandfather was the tribe's king. Sadly, his father died when he was just nine years old.

Nelson attended the University of Fort Hare, the South African Native College. He then moved to the city of Johannesburg to study law at the University of the Witwatersrand, before qualifying as a lawyer in 1942, aged 24.

South Africa is home to many different peoples and cultures – so much so that it's been nicknamed the 'rainbow nation'. But, sadly, at the time that Nelson Mandela was growing up, there was a huge racial divide in the country.

White people ran the country, and they generally led privileged lives with good jobs, nice homes and access to good schools and healthcare. Most black people, however, worked in low-paid jobs, and lived in poor communities with poor facilities. They had far fewer rights, too – they weren't even allowed to vote in elections.

Like many others, Nelson Mandela felt that everyone deserved to be treated the same, regardless of their skin colour. And so in 1944 he joined the African National Congress (ANC) – a political group that strived for equal rights for whites and blacks, which he later became the leader of.

In 1948 the South African government introduced a system called 'apartheid', which furthered racial divide in the country even more. Under new racist laws, black people and white people were forced to lead separate lives. They weren't allowed to live in the same areas, share a table in a restaurant, attend the same schools or even sit together on a train or bus.

The South African government did its best to keep Mandela from spreading his message of equality for blacks and racial unity. He was kept in jail for 27 years. During his time behind bars, Nelson Mandela didn't give up on what he believed in. He even refused freedom on two occasions, and instead chose to stand by his principals. He used his time to learn new things, including **Afrikaans** – a language of South Africa spoken mostly by white people – which earned him respect from the guards he spoke to. He became famous around the world as an icon of the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Rock stars, actors, politicians and ordinary people campaigned to free him and end apartheid. He was released from prison in 1990 and the world rejoiced. His work towards making South Africa a more peaceful place won him the **Nobel Peace Prize** in **1993**.

Come the 1994 general election, all races in South Africa were allowed to vote. And Nelson's hard work for so many years finally paid off... The ANC won, and Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first black president. As President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela improved the living standards and facilities of South Africa's black population, who had suffered for decades under apartheid. He also worked hard to make South Africa a country of equality, where people of all race and colour lived together in peace.

In 1999, Nelson Mandela retired as President, but whilst he left politics behind, he continued to be an important figure around the world as a symbol of peace and equality. The same year that he retired, he founded the Nelson Mandela Foundation, an organisation that works to this day to promote the principals of equality, freedom and peace.

He died on the 5 December 2013, at the age of 95. Nelson Mandela was one of the most loved and respected people in the world. His message and example are of great inspiration still today for many people.