

# Nelson Mandela

*Civil Rights Activist, World Leader*



Nelson Mandela was a South African civil rights activist and leader. He was instrumental in helping those of all races achieve equal and fair treatment. His journey to help all people have equal rights was full of trials and troubles.

Nelson Mandela was born in a small village in South Africa in 1918. His given name was Rolihlahla (hōl-lē-shō-shō). As a young boy, Nelson was a cattle boy and tended to the animals. His father had great status in the tribe and was destined to become chief. But then he had a falling out with the tribe and lost his status. This forced his mother to move the family to a smaller village named Qunu (KOO-noo).

Although they were very poor, Nelson enjoyed his childhood and played games and made friendships. He was the first one in his family to attend school. The teacher at the Christian school gave him the Christian name of Nelson.

When Nelson was only nine-years-old, his father died of lung disease. As a favor to Nelson's father, Nelson was adopted by a chief and friend of his father. He was moved to a larger town and his quiet and easy life was over.

Nelson went to a good school next to the palace where he lived. He studied many subjects and was especially interested in African history. He learned how the African people had lived in relative peace until the coming of the white people. The black man shared his land, air and water with the new arrived white man, but the white man took all of these things for himself.

Nelson was raised to be a leader and counselor to the chief. He attended college and also participated in athletics like track and boxing. He took difficult courses to prepare himself for a good job. However, when his guardian arranged for him to be married, he didn't like it and ran away from home and settled in the city of Johannesburg. There he went to college to study law. He also joined a group called the African National Congress Youth League which fought for equal rights and against a system called **apartheid** (which means the state of being apart). That unjust system forced the blacks to be treated differently and worse than the white people.

For many years, Nelson was involved in groups that tried to change the way black people were being treated. He believed in protesting peacefully and non-violently even though the white people reacted back with yelling, beatings and sometimes killing black people who protested.



Since the peaceful demonstrations and protests were not working, Nelson eventually changed his approach. He decided that stronger action needed to be taken to force the end of apartheid. In 1961, Nelson organized a workers strike and was arrested for it. He was sent to prison. While he was there, the government found out that Nelson organized other events against the government. They changed his sentence to life in prison.

While in prison, Nelson never gave up. He was a symbol of strength and loyalty to his people. He continued to study and he eventually earned a law degree. When the President of South Africa was replaced in 1990 by Willem de Klerk, a deal was worked out for Nelson Mandela's release. President de Klerk was much more willing to work for peace and the civil rights of all people.

As soon as Nelson was out of prison, he began working tirelessly again to help the black people. He made speeches and encouraged other countries to put pressure on South African leaders to give black people equal rights – such as the right to vote. Because of their efforts, both Nelson Mandela and Willem de Klerk were jointly awarded Nobel Peace Prizes in 1993. In 1994, voting agreements were made between the black and white people and South Africa held their first democratic elections.

It is no surprise that the people elected Nelson Mandela as the first black president at the age of 77. Nelson Mandela also released his autobiography called *Long Walk to Freedom* which he secretly wrote in prison.

It was a struggle to bring the white and black people together on good terms. President Mandela used the love of sports to try to promote togetherness and healing. In 1995, South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup. President Mandela also worked hard to improve jobs, housing and basic health care for all South Africans.

Nelson Mandela retired from politics in 1999, but he kept very busy. He wrote several books and he raised money to build schools and clinics. In 2004, he moved back to his native village of Qunu. He formed a group of leaders that worked to find solutions to problems around the world.

Nelson Mandela was a source of inspiration and hope for civil rights activists in many countries. In 2009, they declared July 18 (which is Mandela's birthday) Mandela Day – a day to promote global peace and to celebrate the South African leader's legacy. On December 5, 2013 at the age of 95, Nelson Mandela died at his home surrounded by his family. Although he is no longer with us, the memory of his great influence lives on.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

QR Answers



## Nelson Mandela Questions

1. Read this sentence from the first paragraph of the story.

***His journey to help all people have equal rights was full of trials and troubles.***

Which of the following events does **NOT** support the sentence above?

- (A) Mandela being beaten and yelled at for protesting
- (B) Nelson Mandela's father dying when he was nine years old.
- (C) Mandela having to tend cattle as a young boy.
- (D) Mandela being thrown in prison.

2. What significant event led to South Africa's black community suffering from unjust laws.

3. What price did Mandela pay for his efforts to help the black people of South Africa?

- (A) he was kicked out of the country
- (B) he lost his life
- (C) he had to pay all of his money
- (D) he lost his freedom

4. What common interest did Mandela use to try to unite the black and white communities?

- (A) music
- (B) education
- (C) athletics
- (D) religion

5. Based on the text, what conclusion can you make about President Willem de Klerk?