

# MANDELA



**LEADER** **COMRADE** **NEGOTIATOR** **PRISONER** **STATESMAN**

**Rolihlahla** n. pulling the branch of a tree, or the one who disturbs the established order, name given to Nelson Mandela at birth

**Mandela** n. birth name of Nelson Mandela's grandfather, which became the surname of the family under colonial rule

**Nelson** n. English name given to Nelson Mandela on his first day of school

**Dalibhunga** n. founder of the parliament, name given to Nelson Mandela on the occasion of his initiation into manhood

**Madiba** n. Nelson Mandela's popularly known clan name, which means reconciles, metaphorically, the filler of ditches

APARTHEID MUSEUM



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# CREDITS

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Curators – Christopher Till and Emilia Potenza

Content advisor – Professor Philip Bonner

Script development – Luli Callinicos and Marc Suttner

Script review – Verne Harris, Noel Solani and Pumeza Mandela

Picture research – Jacqui Masiza, Ruth Muller and Rita Potenza

Graphic design – Megan Futter

Printing and production – Scan Shop





**CHARACTER**  
**COMRADE**  
**LEADER**  
**PRISONER**  
**NEGOTIATOR**  
**STATESMAN**

Nelson Mandela is an inspiration to millions of people around the world because of the quality of his character – a character that comprises such virtues as compassion, courage, integrity and hope.

What are the forces that shaped Mandela's early years? What are the origins of the character that lies behind one of the most loved and respected leaders of our time?



This photograph was taken in the district of Thembuland, in the Eastern Cape in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela was born. In the picture, we see the local magistrate on the left, holding a stick, posing with a local headman and interpreter on the right, also holding a stick. The magistrate's stick is clearly a statement of his own authority, a symbol of the colonial challenge to traditional leadership.

This world of clashing cultures – the traditional versus the colonial, the customary versus the "modern" – was the world into which Mandela was born. Mandela's character was shaped by each of these worlds.

"My father possessed a proud rebelliousness, a stubborn sense of fairness that I recognise in myself. He was asserting his traditional prerogative as a chief and was challenging the authority of the white magistrate." Nelson Mandela

## SON OF THEMBULAND

Mvezo is a tiny village on the banks of the Mbashe River in Thembuland in the Transkei. It sits on a precipice, overlooking the wooded river and thousands of streams that lie below. It was here that Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born on 18 July 1918.

Mandela was born to a people that were not free. In 1885, following long years of war and oppression, the kingdom of Thembuland was annexed by the British and became part of the Cape Colony.



Mandela's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa Mandela, was the chief of Mvezo. Represented here by this Thembu bridegroom, Nkosi (Chief) Mphakanyiswa Mandela was a tall and imposing man, who had four wives and 13 children. Mandela's father was a firm believer in traditional ways.

*"My father was an unofficial priest and officiated at local traditional rites, initiation ceremonies and funerals. He did not need to be ordained for in the religion of the Xhosas, there is little distinction between the sacred and the secular." Nelson Mandela*



Mandela's mother, Nosekeni Fanny, was his father's third wife. A reserved woman, she converted to Christianity and had her son and his two sisters baptised as Methodists. Like so many Africans of his day, Mandela would continue to be pulled in two directions for the rest of his life – between traditional values and customs, and modernity, represented largely by Christianity in his early years.



Mandela's father, though firmly traditional, was friendly with two educated brothers who were Christians. They suggested that his son should attend school. Nkosi Mphakanyiswa Mandela agreed to allow his youngest son to go to school – the first in the family ever to do so.

According to family legend, while Rolihlahla was still a small boy, his father clashed with the local magistrate, who called him to account for a ruling he made regarding an ox. As chief, he insisted that he was not accountable to the British magistrate. "Andizi, ndisaqula; I will not come, I am still girding for battle," he responded.

Nkosi Mphakanyiswa Mandela apparently refused to appear before the magistrate in court. This allegedly cost him his post, his stipend and the land that went with it. Now penniless, his wives went to stay at their respective parents' homes. Mandela's mother went to settle near friends and family in Qunu, a large village near Mthatha. Her children saw their father for one week every month.

"In those days, black children were given white names at school because it was more 'civilised'. My teacher called me Nelson. Maybe she named me after the great British admiral, Lord Nelson. But that is only a guess." *Nelson Mandela*

## VILLAGE LIFE

Despite Mandela's royal lineage and his fond memories of his childhood, his family's life in Qunu was as simple, indeed as poor, as that of all the other villagers in Qunu.



In the 1920s, Qunu's population, like so many other rural communities in South Africa, was disfigured by the system of migrant labour. Mandela remembered Qunu as a village mainly of women and children.

*"My mother's house was always filled with the babies and children of my relations. I rarely recall an occasion when I was alone."*

*Nelson Mandela*



In the absence of so many men, women shared their domestic burdens – fetching water from the river, hoeing, weeding and harvesting, gathering wood, cooking and raising the children collectively. This interdependence encouraged a spirit of humanism, or ubuntu – a concern for the well-being of others.

*"What is ubuntu? It is a person is a person through other people."*

*Nelson Mandela*



The school house in Qunu was a single room with a tin roof. It stood on the other side of the hill from the village. Mandela remembered his first "school uniform".

*"On my first day of school, my father took a pair of his trousers and cut them at the knee. He told me to put them on and tied a piece of string around the waist. It was the first pair of trousers I ever owned – up till then, I wore a blanket like all the other small boys."*

*Nelson Mandela*



Then one day, when Mandela was nine years old, his life suddenly changed forever. Although his father arrived for his normal visit, his health was failing.

*"I could tell he was not his usual self. He lay in the bed, looking pale and thin. His coughing got worse. He called for his pipe, and with his pipe still in, he left this world."*

*Nelson Mandela*

“Good moral character is not something that we can achieve on our own. We need a culture that supports the conditions under which self-love and friendship flourish.” Aristotle, ancient Greek philosopher



## THE GREAT PLACE

It was the dying wish of Mandela's father that his son should go and live with his kinsman, Jongintaba, the Regent of Thembuland, at the Great Place in the village of Mqhekezweni. Mandela and his mother walked for a full day before reaching Mqhekezweni.

"Uqinisufokotho, kwedinil Brace yourself, my boy," were his mother's parting words. Jongintaba David Mtirara and his wife, Noinglend Mtirara, raised Rolihlahla as their own.

"They worried about me, guided me and punished me, all in a spirit of loving fairness. Jongintaba was stern, but I never doubted his love for me." Nelson Mandela

The young Mandela was not to know that this pain of separation from his loved ones was to be repeated again and again throughout his life. Mandela remembered the excitement he felt about finding himself in such a grand place – a place that was at the same time both traditional and modern.

Mandela was deeply impressed by the way that the Regent presided over meetings with the amaphakhat, the elders at his court. He observed how Jongintaba would listen carefully to contending arguments before finally reaching a consensus decision. From this early age, he began to comprehend the value of an inclusive approach.

The Regent was able to manage with grace the tensions between traditional and modern society, a trait that Mandela was to master in years to come.

In flickering fire-light after the day's long proceedings, Mandela would listen to the elders tell the epic tales of colonial dispossession and valiant resistance. The young Mandela began to gain a wider understanding of his roots and identity.

"My imagination was fired by the glory of these African warriors. In pantomime, Chief Joyi would fling his spear and zees along the veld as he narrated epic stories of victories and defeats." Nelson Mandela



## "I AM A MAN!"



When Rolihlahla arrived at Mqhekezweni he moved in with Justice, the Regent's son and heir, who was four years older than him.

*"Justice became my first hero after my father. Tall, handsome and muscular, he was a fine sportsman, excelling in track and field events, cricket, rugby and soccer."* Nelson Mandela

When he was 16, Mandela attended the initiation school with Justice. The circumcision ceremony took place at the historic and ancient site of Tylarha on the banks of the Mbashe River.

*"The old ingcibi raised his assegai, and with a single blow changed each of us, in turn, from boys to men. As the pain shot through our loins we cried, 'Ndiyindoda, I am a man!'"* Nelson Mandela



Until 2008, this bookshelf was still inside the hut that Justice and Mandela had shared in the 1930s. The books on the bookshelf date to this period. The Nelson Mandela Museum now makes this artefact available for display in museums.

After the initiation ceremony, Chief Meligqili spoke to the young men. Mandela never forgot the words of the old chief: "There sit our sons, young, handsome and healthy, the flower of our Xhosa youth, the pride of our nation. We are here to promise them manhood; but it is an empty promise, because we Xhosas, and all black South Africans, are a conquered people."

"I quickly realised that I had to make my way on the basis of my ability, not my heritage." Nelson Mandela



## A WESTERN EDUCATION

Missionary teachers contributed to the building of Mandela's character. They set high standards of morality. An important aspect of Christianity was forgiveness – to harbour grievances would be to lessen one's own character.

After his initiation ceremony, Mandela was sent to Clarkebury, a famous mission school (pictured here). Mandela was not sufficiently well co-ordinated to excel in sports like soccer or cricket. Instead, he devoted himself to long-distance running. He also took up boxing, which became a lifelong passion.



Mandela's high school years were spent at Healdtown, an elite Methodist mission school beyond Thembuland, near the old colonial military station of Fort Beaufort.

Healdtown was suffused with British character, and Mandela was to retain an enduring respect for many aspects of British culture. Years later, in 1962, as an accused in court, he would describe the British Houses of Parliament as "the most democratic institution in the world".



This is the earliest known photograph of Mandela. It shows Nelson Mandela in the top row, fifth from the right, in his Healdtown class in 1938. The white woman in the second row from the front is Miss Myrtle Workman, who was in charge of the girls' hostel. To her left is Dr Arthur Wellington, Headmaster of the school. To his left is Rev S S Mokitimi, head of the boys' hostel, who later became the first African president of the Methodist Church of South Africa.



"I simply could not compromise. Something inside me would not let me." Nelson Mandela

## FORT HARE

Mandela passed his matric exams at Healdtown and was accepted for a BA degree at Fort Hare in the town of Alice in the Eastern Cape.



Mandela's plan was to become an interpreter in the courts of Thembuland. But his kinsman and nephew, Kaiser Matanzima (above right), who went on to become the leader of Transkei homeland, persuaded him that law was a more powerful and influential profession. Mandela readily agreed.



At Fort Hare, Mandela was exposed to a wider world, and his political horizon broadened. He was excited by the number of students who came from all over the country, and even beyond South Africa's borders, such as Seretse Khama (above left), who was to become the first president of independent Botswana.




During his second year, Mandela was nominated for election as a prefect. He accepted – only to find that the majority of students were boycotting the elections. A few students voted and Mandela was elected as a prefect. He decided that he could not accept the position, even though the principal threatened to expel him if he refused.



Mandela wears the Fort Hare University blazer at the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 2006.

**Mandela stubbornly refused to return to Fort Hare. The Regent was angry at Mandela's disobedience and decided it was time to teach him and his son Justice a lesson about real responsibility. He arranged marriages for both young men.**



To escape an arranged marriage, for the first time ever Mandela disobeyed the Regent. Mandela and Justice ran away to Johannesburg. At a stroke, his entire future and golden prospects of becoming a royal adviser and civil servant were destroyed.

Mandela had by now developed distinct character traits instilled in him by his family, community and education – courage, an eagerness to learn, the sensitivity of a boy who had experienced loss and separation, and an air of dignity as befitted his royal status. He had also learnt from an early age to find a synthesis between traditional African ways and “modern” western ways.