# Who was Nelson Mandela?

KS2 KS3 Ages 7-14 ⏰ 2 min read

Nelson Mandela was one of the most remarkable leaders in modern history. Born in 1918 in South Africa, he lived through a time when his country had laws that separated people based on the colour of their skin. This system was called **1**, and it meant that Black South Africans couldn't vote, go to the same schools as white people, or even live in the same neighbourhoods.

## Fighting Against Unfair Laws

As a young lawyer, Mandela couldn't stand watching his people being treated so unfairly. He joined a group called the African National Congress (ANC) that opposed apartheid through protests and demonstrations. When peaceful protests didn't work, Mandela helped plan attacks on government buildings — though he was careful never to hurt people.

In 1964, the white-only government arrested Mandela and sentenced him to life in prison. They locked him up on Robben Island, a harsh prison surrounded by cold ocean waters. For 27 long years, he lived in a tiny cell, sleeping on a mat on the floor.

Imagine being punished for standing up against bullies at school — except the punishment lasted nearly three decades, and the bullies controlled the entire country.

## From Prison to President

While Mandela was in prison, people around the world heard about his story. They protested outside South African embassies and refused to buy South African products. The pressure grew so strong that in 1990, the government finally released Mandela.

Instead of seeking revenge against the people who had imprisoned him, Mandela chose a different path. He worked with the white president, F.W. de Klerk, to end apartheid peacefully. In 1994, South Africa held its first election where people of all races could vote. Mandela won and became the country's first Black president.

## A Legacy of Forgiveness

As president, Mandela could have punished the white people who had oppressed his people for so long. Instead, he created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where people could confess their crimes and ask for forgiveness. He believed that South Africa needed healing, not more hatred.

Mandela served one term as president, then stepped down in 1999. He spent his remaining years working for peace and fighting diseases like AIDS. When he died in 2013 at age 95, the whole world mourned a man who had shown that forgiveness could be stronger than revenge.


Free for educational use