

English and Literacy: Nelson Mandela

Lesson plan 1: Biography and autobiography information exercise

Age group: 10-11

Resources:

You will need:

- a selection of biographical and autobiographical books written by and about significant people;
- if available, copies of the following books:
 - Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*;
 - *Nelson Mandela* by Benjamin Pogrund;
 - *A Desire to Serve the People* by Mary Benson;
 - *Nelson Mandela: A Biography* by Martin Meredith;
- enlarged texts of extracts from Nelson Mandela biographies: ***A Desire to Serve the People*** (below); ***Nelson Mandela: A Biography*** (below) and ***Nelson Mandela*** (below);
- photocopies of the biographical texts on Nelson Mandela cut randomly into paragraphs;
- photocopies of the **Nelson Mandela information worksheet** (below);
- one enlarged copy of the **Nelson Mandela information worksheet** (below);

Introduction and whole-class activity:

Show the selection of biographies and autobiographies to the class. Ask the pupils questions such as:

1. What kind of books are these?
2. Which books are written in the first person, which are written in the third person?
3. What do they tell us?
4. Why would a person choose to write about another person?
5. Would it be an easy task? Why?
6. Pick out the books written about Nelson Mandela. Who was Nelson Mandela? Why would a person choose to write about him?

Read the first text by **Mary Benson, *A Desire to Serve the People*** (below), telling of Nelson's life as a young boy. Show the pupils an enlarged copy of the **Nelson Mandela Information worksheet** (below).

Go through the text again slowly with the pupils and ask them to decide which information should go into which box on the worksheet. Make notes in the appropriate box as suggested by the pupils. Model the way in which notes can be made from the text without writing whole sentences.

Group activity:

Give out the **Nelson Mandela Information worksheets** (below) to the pupils. Give out the **photocopied texts** (below) on Nelson Mandela cut randomly into paragraphs. Ask the pupils, in pairs, to find out as much information as they can to write up on their worksheets. Some of the information may have already been shared. Can the pupils find out anything new?

Plenary:

Bring the class back together again with their worksheets. Can the pupils add any additional information to what has already been recorded? Was there any contradictory information? Have the pupils remembered the difference between biography and autobiography? Which is written in the first and which in the third person?

Worksheet: From A Desire to Serve the People, by Mary Benson

When a son was born to Chief Henry Gadla Mandela and his wife, Nonqaphi, on 18th July 1918, they gave him the Xhosa name of Rolihlahla and, because it was the fashion to have a European name, preferably a heroic one, they also called him Nelson.

The boy and his three sisters lived in the family kraal of whitewashed huts not far from Umtata in the Transkei. Although the Mandelas were members of the royal family of the Thembu people, Nelson, like most African pupils, herded sheep and cattle and helped with the ploughing.

As a young boy he was tall for his age, and was a fast runner. He hunted buck and, when hungry, stole mealie cobs from the maize fields. He loved the countryside with its grassy rolling hills and the stream which flowed eastward to the Indian Ocean.

At night, under Africa's brilliant stars, everyone used to gather around a big open fire to listen to the elders of the tribe. The boy was fascinated by the tales told by these bearded old men. Tales about the 'good old days before the coming of the white man', and tales about the brave acts performed by their ancestors, in defending their country against the European invaders.

Those tales, said Mandela many years later when he was on trial for his life, stirred in him a desire to serve his people in their struggle to be free. A desire which eventually led to his becoming the most famous political prisoner of our time – a prisoner with songs written about him and streets named after him. How appropriate that Nelson Mandela's Xhosa name, Rolihlahla, means 'stirring up trouble'.

When Nelson first went to school – a school for African pupils – it was a shock to find the history books described

only white heroes, and referred to his people as savages and cattle thieves. All the same he was eager for Western education, and proud that his great-grandfather had given land on which to build a mission school. Even when fellow-pupils teased him about his clothes, cast-offs from his father, he pretended not to mind.

Worksheet: From Nelson Mandela: A Biography by Martin Meredith

Mandela was born in the simple surroundings of a peasant village on the banks of the Mbashe River in Thembuland. But for his royal connections, his childhood would have been no different from those of many others there. His great-grandfather Ngubengcuka, however, was a Thembu king. And although Mandela was descended from only a minor branch of the dynasty, his link with the Thembu royal family was to have a marked influence on both his character and his fortunes.

His father Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, was the village head at Mverzo. A tall, respected figure, he presided over local ceremonies and officiated at traditional rites for such occasions as births, marriages, funerals, harvests and initiation ceremonies. He had no formal education and could not read or write. But he had a keen sense of history and was valued as a counsellor to the royal family. He was also wealthy enough at one time to afford four wives and had thirteen children.

Mandela's mother, Nosekeni Nkedama, was the third of Gadla's wives. She bore four children, the eldest of whom, Mandela, was her only son but the youngest of Gadla's four sons. Like Gadla, she could neither read nor write. While Gadla adhered to the traditional Qaba faith, involving the worship of ancestral spirits, Nosekeni became a devout Christian, taking the name Fanny.

The Xhosa name given to Mandela at his birth on the 18th July 1918 was Rolihlahla, which meant literally 'pulling the branch of a tree', but more colloquially 'troublemaker'. But the name by which he became popularly known was an English one, Nelson, given to him by an African teacher on the first day he attended school.

The landscape around Qunu – undulating hills, clear streams and lush pastures grazed by cattle, sheep and goats – made an indelible impression on Mandela. Qunu

was the place where he felt his real roots lay. It was a settlement of beehive-shaped huts in a narrow valley where life continued much as it had done for generations past. There the people dyed their blankets with red ochre, a colour said to be beloved by ancestral spirits and the colour of their faith. There were few Christians in Qunu and those that were there stood out because of their Western-style clothes.

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The Mandelas' homestead, like most others in Qunu, was simple. Their beehive huts – a cluster of three – were built without windows or chimneys. The floor was made of crusted earth taken from anthills and kept smooth with layers of fresh cow dung. There was no furniture, in the Western sense. Everyone slept on mats, without pillows, resting their heads on their arms. Smoke from the fire filtered through the grass roof. There was no opening other than a low doorway. Their diet was also simple, mainly maize, sorghum, beans and pumpkins grown in fields outside the village, and amasi, fermented milk stored in calabashes. Only a few wealthy families could afford luxuries like tea, coffee and sugar, bought from the local store.

Having four wives, each living in her own kraal several miles apart, Gadla visited them in turn, spending perhaps one week a month with each one.

Mandela's household in Qunu was often full of relatives. Uncles and aunts were as responsible for the children as the children's own parents and were referred to as 'little fathers' and 'little mothers'. Even though Mandela remembered his father for his stern countenance, Mandela tried to emulate him by rubbing white ash into his hair in imitation of the tuft of white hair above Gadla's forehead.

From the age of five, Mandela was set to work as a herdboyc, looking after sheep and calves and learning the central role cattle play in Thembu society. Cattle were not only a source of meat and milk but the main medium of exchange and the measure of a tribesman's wealth. As the price of a bride was paid in cattle, without cattle there

could be no marriage. Significant events like funerals were marked by their slaughter.

Much of Mandela's time was spent in the open veld in the company of members of his own age group, stick-throwing and fighting, gathering wild honey and fruits, trapping birds and small animals that could be roasted, and swimming in the cold streams.

Worksheet: From Nelson Mandela, by Benjamin Pogrund

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born on July 18th 1918. In accordance with custom, he was given a 'European' name as well as his Xhosa name which means 'one who brings trouble on himself'.

His father Henry Mphakanyiswa Gadla, was a chief – wealthy enough to own a horse and have enough cattle for four wives. He had twelve children. Nelson was the son of his third wife, Nosekeni; she also had three daughters.

Mandela was born in the Transkei region of South Africa, in the small village of Qunu – a collection of beehive-shaped huts with thatch roofs, known as rondavels. His mother had three huts and Mandela lived with her and his three immediate sisters. One hut was used for sleeping, another for cooking and the third for storing grain and other food. Everyone slept on mats on the ground, without pillows. His mother, as a married woman, had her own field to tend and her own cattle kraal – an enclosure for cattle made from thorn bushes.

It was a quiet, tranquil existence. Qunu was a long way from anywhere, especially in those days when local roads, if they existed at all, were unsurfaced.

Almost as soon as Nelson was old enough to walk properly, he had the job of helping to look after the family's precious cattle and goats. Relatives remember that he loved animals and, while herding, he would speak to each cow by its name, as if it was a friend.

His mother could not read or write, but Nelson had to be educated, and he started as a pupil at the local school. He was noted as quiet, industrious boy who did not live up to his Xhosa name. The school had classes for only the early years and in any event, when Nelson was ten, his father

died and there was no money for any further education. So his father's nephew, Chief Jongintaba, took over.

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In Xhosa society that was the natural thing to do. Jongintaba was the head of the Madiba clan. In terms of custom, all members of the clan were treated like people in the same family because they were all descended from the same ancestor. Mandela, or anyone else, could go to the home of any fellow Madiba member, whether in the same village or in a village miles away, and know that he would get food and shelter.

So in 1928, Nelson moved to the Great Place and shared a rondavel with his cousin, Justice. The school was a rough building, and two classes were held in one room at the same time. Nelson learnt English, Xhosa, Geography and History. He did not have writing books so wrote on slates.

Each day after school he and Justice went to the fields to look after the cattle, and to drive them back to the kraal in the evening for milking.

Worksheet: Nelson Mandela information

Nelson's family	Description of Nelson
Food	Description of the environment
Entertainment	School life