

The Writer and His Experiences

Nelson Mandela

(1918–)

I never imagined the struggle would be either short or easy.

Nelson Mandela's life is proof of the power of one person to bring rights and freedom to many people.

Mandela was born in a small South African village, the son of a Tembu tribal chief. He later left village life to study law and then worked with the African National Congress (ANC), a political party. His work with the ANC brought new strength to South Africa's nonwhite majority. It also brought him into conflict with the ruling white elite, a minority who enjoyed rights that they denied most other South Africans. In 1962, Mandela was imprisoned. Two years later he was given a life sentence.

Mandela continued his work for human rights from his prison cell



Mandela was 44 years old when he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

on Robben Island. It was there, in 1974, that he secretly began writing the book *Long Walk to Freedom*.

When Mandela was finally released from prison in 1990, the world celebrated. In 1993, he and South Africa's white president, F.W. de Klerk, won the Nobel Peace Prize for their combined effort to end the country's policy of racial discrimination. A year later, Mandela, the former political prisoner, became president of South Africa.

myNGconnect.com

- 🔊 Listen to a reading from *Long Walk to Freedom*.
- 📖 Read birthday messages people sent to Nelson Mandela when he turned 85.

People lined up for hours to vote in South Africa's first nonracial election in 1994. ▶



Long Walk To FREEDOM



by Nelson Mandela



May 10, 1994, dawned bright and clear. For the past few days, I had been pleasantly besieged by arriving dignitaries and world leaders who were coming to pay their respects before the inauguration.



Comprehension Coach

Set a Purpose

Read to discover why May 10, 1994, is an important day in world history.



THE INAUGURATION WOULD BE the largest gathering ever of international leaders on South African soil. The ceremonies took place in the lovely sandstone amphitheater formed by the Union Buildings in Pretoria. For decades, this had been the seat of **white supremacy**, and now it was the site of a rainbow gathering of different colors and nations for the installation of South Africa's first democratic, nonracial government. **1**

On that lovely autumn day I was accompanied by my daughter Zenani. On the podium, Mr. de Klerk was first sworn in as second deputy president.



Nelson Mandela takes the oath of office at his inauguration. Second Deputy President F.W. de Klerk stands next to him.

Then Thabo Mbeki was sworn in as first deputy president. When it was my turn, I pledged to obey and uphold the constitution and to devote myself to the well-being of the republic and its people. To the assembled guests and the watching world, I said:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here . . . confer glory and hope to newborn liberty. Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.

*. . . We, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil. We thank all of our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for **human dignity**.* **2**

1 Word Choice

How does Mandela try to convince you of the importance of the inauguration?

2 Form Generalizations

What generalization does Mandela make in his speech?



A spectator climbs a tree for a better look at the inauguration ceremonies.

In Other Words

white supremacy belief that white people are better than people of other races
human dignity respect

Geographic Background

The Republic of South Africa is located at the southern tip of the African continent. It is often referred to as "The Rainbow Nation" because of its ethnically diverse population.





We have, at last, achieved our political **emancipation**. We pledge ourselves to **liberate** all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender, and other discrimination.

Never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the **oppression** of one by another. . . . The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement. Let freedom reign. God bless Africa! ³

A few moments later we all lifted our eyes in awe as a spectacular array of South African jets, helicopters, and troop carriers roared in perfect formation over the Union Buildings. It was not only a display of pinpoint precision and military force, but a demonstration of the military's loyalty to democracy, to a new government that had been freely and fairly elected. Only moments before, the highest generals of the South African Defense Force and police, their chests bedecked with ribbons and medals from days gone by, saluted me and pledged their loyalty. I was not unmindful of the fact that not so many years before they would not have saluted but arrested me. Finally a chevron of Impala jets left a smoke trail of the black, red, green, blue, white, and gold of the new South African flag.

The day was symbolized for me by the playing of our two national anthems, and the vision of whites singing “*Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*” and blacks singing “*Die Stem*,” the old **anthem** of the republic. Although that day, neither group knew the lyrics of the anthem they once despised, they would soon know the words by heart.



A choir wearing robes designed after the South African flag sings at the inauguration ceremonies.

3 Word Choice

Which words in these paragraphs seem emotional? What effect do you think they had on listeners, and why?

Key Vocabulary

emancipation *n.*, act of freeing people from strict control
liberate *v.*, to set free
oppression *n.*, act of preventing people from having equal rights

In Other Words

“*Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*” God Bless Africa (in the Xhosa language)
 “*Die Stem [van Suid-Afrika]*” The Call [of South Africa] (in the Afrikaans language)
anthem national song



Monitor Comprehension

Summarize

What important changes in South Africa's government did Mandela's election bring about?