

English and Literacy: Nelson Mandela

Lesson plan 3: Biographies of Nelson Mandela

Age group: 10-11

Resources:

You will need:

- the **Worksheet: Extract from Nelson Mandela** (below) by Benjamin Pogrund;
- the **Worksheet: Nelson Mandela Information** (below).

Introduction and whole-class activity:

Ask the pupils questions about biographies and autobiographies, for example:

1. Who can write them?
2. Why would a person choose to write a biography or autobiography?
3. What makes the lives of certain people so interesting?
4. What can you learn about a person by reading about their life?
5. What can you learn about yourself?
6. What makes a best seller?

Read the extract from **Ben Pogrund's biography of Nelson Mandela** (below). Add any additional notes to the original **Nelson Mandela Information worksheet** (below). Referring to the biographies and autobiographies, how would the pupils choose which one to read? How does the writer make the reader stay interested, without exaggerating?

Model the opening of a biography of Nelson Mandela with the class. Consider the choice of vocabulary, the style, and ways in which to engage the reader.

Group activity:

Ask the pupils to begin their own biographies of Nelson Mandela, using the information from the previous lessons. Additional time will be needed to complete these biographies.

Plenary:

The pupils share their favourite sentences or phrases that they have used to grip the reader.

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Worksheet: *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 any local roads 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.

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.

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Worksheet: Nelson Mandela information

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