

Nelson Mandela's Nobel Prize Speech and Vocabulary

Section Objectives:

- Summarize a story
- Analyze primary and secondary sources and make inferences
- Analyze a literary work using philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social influences of a historical period
- Compete word analogies
- Create semantic maps
- Understand jargon or technical language and synonyms



Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela spent his life fighting against apartheid, which is the system of legalized racism that ruled South Africa from 1948 until 1990. Under this rule, the black majority of inhabitants were not recognized as citizens of their country. They were denied the right to vote and forced to live in small and economically disadvantaged “black homelands.” Education, medical care, and other public services were also segregated and inferior to that of the ruling white minority.

Mandela chose this life of struggle. He was born in 1918 to the Chief of the Tembu Tribe in Transkei, South Africa. He decided to renounce his right to take over as Chief of his tribe to pursue a law degree in college; however, he was expelled from University College at Fort Hare for leading a student strike. This was the beginning of a lifetime of political activism.

Apartheid comes from Afrikaans, one of the official languages of the Republic of South Africa and is derived from seventeenth-century Dutch. The word can be broken down into *apart*, and *heid*, meaning “hood” or “ness”; the word can be translated as “separateness.”

At the age of 24, he joined the African National Congress, which aimed to gain social and political rights for blacks in South Africa. While in the ANC, Mandela promoted civil disobedience or non-violent strikes against the system that was oppressing people of his race. The government resisted his work by arresting him for treason in 1956. Mandela defended himself during this five-year trial and was eventually acquitted in 1961; however, the ANC was declared illegal, so Mandela was forced to fight apartheid underground. To do so, he formed a new group, Spear of the Nation, which accepted the use of violent tactics for the good of their cause.



Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela

He was arrested again in 1962 for organizing illegal demonstrations and sentenced to five years in prison. During that time, he and other members of Spear of the Nation faced a trial for attempting to overthrow the government through violence. After defending himself and his cause in court again, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964. He remained in prison for twenty-five years, including six years in solitary confinement. Mandela was offered a release from jail under certain conditions in 1984 and 1985. One condition was to return to his “homeland” of Transkei and the other was to renounce violence against the regime; however, he refused to sacrifice his principals in fighting for equal rights for blacks in South Africa for his own personal freedom.

Then under worldwide economic and political pressure, new president F.W. de Klerk released Mandela from prison in February 1990. Mandela is considered by many the most important political prisoner of the twentieth century.

After his release, he resumed leadership in the African National Council. In this position, he waged a worldwide campaign against apartheid. For these efforts, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. Then he was elected president of the Republic of South Africa in its first free and fair elections.

Reading Nelson Mandela's Nobel Peace Prize Address

Notice all of the people listed in the greeting of this speech. Mandela names the attending leaders of Norway, as it is customary for them to attend. In addition, he names a fellow laureate, **F. W. de Klerk**, the President of South Africa who released him from jail. Mandela also honors him by acknowledging de Klerk's courage to admit the injustice of apartheid and the foresight to understand that all people of South Africa must be participants in determining the future of the nation. It is almost important to take notice of other people mentioned in this address, including **Chief Albert Luthuli** and **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**. They are other South Africans whose fight against apartheid earned them the honor of a Nobel Peace Prize.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is mentioned twice in the speech because of his work as an American black civil rights leader and because he was also a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Mandela says that he "grappled with and died in the effort to make a contribution to the just solution of the same great issues of the day which we have had to face as South Africans." Mandela also quotes King twice; he says, "Let the strivings of us all, prove Martin Luther King Jr. to have been correct, when he said that humanity can no longer be tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war." Then he refers to King's inspirational "I Have a Dream" speech in his closing when he says, "Let the efforts of us all, prove that he was not a mere dreamer when he spoke of the beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace being more precious than diamonds or silver or gold."

Finally, he names **Aung San Suu Kyi**, also a Nobel Peace Prize winner who was imprisoned in Burma when her native people were oppressed by the government.

In mentioning these names, he is drawing parallels between himself and other Nobel Peace Prize winners in not just this accomplishment, but their shared ideals of equality and human rights.

Though Mandela is receiving one of the most prestigious awards one can be honored with, he remains humble. He deflects all of the credit for his work and instead asserts it was the work of many by calling himself "a representative" of the millions of South Africans who dared to rise up against apartheid and of the millions of people across the globe in the anti-apartheid movement.

To focus your reading of this address, look for the answers to the following questions.

1. Research or use information from the text to identify the people he mentions in this address. Then infer what his purpose is in mentioning them:

F. W. de Klerk

Chief Albert Luthuli

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Aung San Suu Kyi

2. What language does he use to deflect all of the credit for his work and instead asserts it was the work of many?
3. What specific references does he make about oppressive conditions that black South Africans endured?

Vocabulary

4. seminal
5. presumptuous
6. dichotomies
7. tyranny
8. guise
9. scourge
10. grave

Identifying Vocabulary in Context

Carefully examine the context each word is used in and from that try to discern the meaning of the word. Then compare your best guess to the actual definition.

It will not be presumptuous of us if we also add, among our predecessors, the name of another outstanding Nobel Peace Prize winner, the late Rev Martin Luther King Jr.

We speak here of the challenge of the dichotomies of war and peace, violence and non-violence, racism and human dignity, oppression and repression and liberty and human rights, poverty and freedom from want.

These countless human beings, both inside and outside our country, had the nobility of spirit to stand in the path of tyranny and injustice, without seeming selfish.

Thus, it will mark a great step forward in history and also serve as a common pledge of the peoples of the world to fight racism, wherever it occurs and whatever guise it assumes.

The children must, at last, play in the open veld, no longer tortured by the pangs of hunger or ravaged by disease or threatened with the scourge of ignorance, molestation, and abuse, and no longer required to engage in deeds whose gravity exceeds the demands of their tender years.

These great masses will have turned their backs on the grave insult to human dignity, which described some as masters and others as servants, and transformed each into a predator whose survival depended on the destruction of the other.