Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom 9th – 12th Grade Curriculum

Overview of Classroom Lessons

The film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, tells the inspirational story of one of the greatest leaders of our time, Nelson Mandela. From his humble beginnings in Transkei, South Africa, to his 27-year incarceration for treason and eventual release to become the first president of a fully participatory and democratic South Africa, the film provides educators with an important opportunity to help their students understand this inspirational story.

Educational outreach is a vital component to furthering the film’s message. The classroom lessons that accompany the film not only examine this explosive period in South African history, but also afford an opportunity to explore current issues for Africa, America, and much of the world. Some of the key themes explored include:

- The influence of cultural heritage
- The impact of apartheid and its relationship to racial segregation in America
- The paradox of the “liberator” versus the “traitor”
- The difficulty associated with change and transition
- The role of international media coverage and sanctions in the fall of apartheid
- Leadership and the role of the individual to make change

The educational materials for *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* will use the richness of the movie with accompanying film clips and skill-building activities to provide great learning opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions that explore key themes of the film. *The following provides examples of the themes, messages, and student learning outcomes of Mandela lessons; detailed lesson plans with instructional materials, sample questions, and assessment options will be available soon.*

The Cultural Heritage of South Africa and its Influence on Nelson Mandela

Like any young person, Nelson Mandela was influenced by his cultural heritage. Early in the film, Mandela goes through a rite of passage to become a man. Students will gain an understanding of how Nelson Mandela’s humble beginnings in rural South Africa shaped his life. Students will examine scenes from the film and passages from Mandela’s autobiography that focus on the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.

Students will then reflect on aspects of their own lives and culture and explore a time when they experienced a new responsibility or life-lesson that told them they were transitioning between childhood and adulthood. They will present this experience in a written story, live dramatization, or a multi-media production.
Colonialism and Apartheid in South Africa

Colonialism and apartheid defined South Africa for many decades, just as the history of slavery and racial segregation defined the United States. Opening up with a self-reflection activity, students will gain insight into the nature of segregation and its impact on the individual. Students will compare and contrast examples of life under South African apartheid and American segregation.

Students will examine various historical scenarios in which South African individuals exercise their rights while simultaneously violating apartheid laws. Students will analyze the impact of decades of institutional segregation in South Africa and the United States and how both countries’ racial policies shaped relationships between blacks and whites in their respective countries. Students will then summarize their findings in a report and make recommendations for change.

Liberator or Traitor?

Depending on one’s perspective, one person’s freedom fighter is another person’s terrorist. History is full of examples of individuals and events that do not squarely fall into just one category or the other. In this lesson, students will begin by exploring historical examples of people fighting for their rights and reflect on this conundrum.

Students will then examine the African National Congress’s strategic transition from non-violence to more direct confrontation in their quest for freedom. Students will conduct mini-deliberation sessions on the cost/benefits of different resistance strategies and then assess the effectiveness of these strategies in helping to end apartheid. Students will then apply this analysis to current interracial and cultural disputes seen on international, national, state, or local levels. They will create an action plan with specific steps to address the conflict, reflecting on the effectiveness of different resistance strategies they explored in this lesson or identifying others that may be more appropriate.

The Long Walk to Democracy

Democracy is a difficult form of government to conduct. It requires vigilant citizen participation, virtuous leadership, and a commitment to transparency. Yet, it has evolved to become the most desired form of government in large part because of the way it honors the rights of individuals. Like the American colonists, many South Africans longed for democracy. Like many American patriots, Nelson Mandela dedicated his life to establishing full democracy in South Africa. In the lesson’s opening activity, students experience a small example of life without democracy where a few students have the right to select snacks for the class and the majority of students have to accept what the minority chooses.

In the main activity, students will work in small groups to explore key events in South African struggle for democracy. Students will analyze similarities and differences between these events and the critical events in America’s expansion of democracy from
the 19th century to the present. Focus will be on Jim Crow laws and their relationship to apartheid laws. Students will examine primary source material and develop in-depth news reports explaining the events and commenting on how the laws of both countries restricted democracy and liberty.

**The Impact of International Sanctions and Media in Ending Apartheid**

In the second half of the 20th century, international news coverage brought world events to everyone’s attention in real-time. Governments could no longer hide their actions behind miles of distance and delayed communication. Countries and individuals found themselves accountable for their actions as the international news media investigated their deeds and broadcasted their stories around the world. Allied and adversarial nations quickly reacted with support or condemnation.

In this lesson, students will examine how international media coverage of South African apartheid led to international responses. They will begin by exploring and analyzing U.S. policies towards South Africa from the time apartheid was instituted. Students will then engage in a policy-making simulation, recommending ways the U.S. could respond to several South African apartheid government actions at key points in its history. Students will role-play different constituencies who have interests in South Africa and will weigh in on what they think is the best policy. The class will then vote on a policy to recommend.

**Nelson Mandela’s Lessons in Leadership**

What makes a good leader? Is it possessing the confidence to lead from the front or the willingness to lead from behind? Does it require innate abilities or learned behaviors? What lessons can students learn from a life such as Nelson Mandela’s? This lesson opens up with a brainstorming activity that asks students to identify qualities of a good leader. Students will test these qualities against several “crisis” scenarios in which good leadership is required.

Students will then examine examples of Nelson Mandela’s leadership as depicted in the film. For each example, students will identify the leadership quality Mandela exercised and will evaluate its effectiveness. Students will have an opportunity to decide whether they would have addressed the situation in the same way or differently. They will then formulate a presentation on their findings.

**Tools and Assessment**

These main lessons outlined above will be designed to be conducted in one to three class periods with possible additional time for small homework assignments. The lessons will contain clips from the film — as well as other exclusive primary sources, such as original audio clips, photographs, and documents — with easy access for teachers and students. In addition, the lesson package will also contain several smaller lessons that reflect the themes of the main
lessons but are designed to be covered in a single class period. There will also be a film viewer’s
guide of discussion questions for groups only viewing the film.

All lessons will be presented in a familiar curriculum design with learning objectives, step-by-
step teacher instructions, student handouts, and culminating projects or assignments
accompanied by teacher assessment tools. The lessons will contain student-centered activities,
clips from the film, and cooperative learning activities that promote academic skills, critical
thinking and problem solving. Each lesson will also contain extended activities and lists of
specific and general resources teachers can tap into for further study.

All lessons will align to current standard assessment models, including the following National
Council for the Social Studies standards: Culture as dynamic and changeable over time; Time,
Continuity, and Change as students study the past to enable them to understand the human story
across time; People, Places, and Environments as students examine social, cultural, economic,
and civic issues to address pressing questions; Individual Development and Identity as students
explore how personality is shaped by culture and institutional influences; Power, Authority, and
Governance as students explore the dynamic relationship between individual rights and
responsibilities and the needs of groups and society and become more effective problem-solvers
and decision-makers; and Global Connections as students analyze the costs and benefits of
increased global connections and evaluate the tensions between national interests and global
priorities.

These lessons will address 21st Century Skills by giving students opportunities to practice skills
of critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, and media literacy.

For those school districts that have adopted Common Core State Standards, teachers will find
the lessons incorporate many CCSS skill areas, such as reading information text, writing with
purpose, speaking and listening.