

Learning English - Moving Words

Nelson Mandela

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart"

Nelson Mandela led the struggle to replace the apartheid regime of South Africa with a multi-racial democracy, and was the country's first black president.

Nelson Mandela was born in 1918 into the Madiba tribal clan - part of the Thembu people - in a small village in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. He qualified as a lawyer and made it his vocation to campaign against apartheid, the system devised by the all-white National Party which oppressed the black majority.

As resistance to apartheid became violent, and in a climate of police brutality and clashes with protestors, Mandela, now Vice President of the African National Congress, launched a campaign of sabotage against the country's economy. He was eventually arrested and charged with sabotage and attempting to violently overthrow the government. Despite many years in jail, he emerged to become He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. Resistance to apartheid grew, mainly against the new Pass laws, which dictated where blacks were allowed to live and work.

This quote is particularly significant from a man whose words have had a huge impact across world politics. Mandela is famous for his personal struggle against oppression, imprisoned for the sake of social change. He said "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities... It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

OUR EXPERT SAYS...



I've selected this item because it illustrates an interesting point about quotations - that they often have an individual, personal relevance. My trade is linguistics, and I am desperately concerned about the plight of the world's endangered languages. Half the languages of the world are so seriously endangered that they are likely to die out in the course of the present century. Mandela's remark captures dramatically one of the core functions of language, to express identity. This is not a quotation which relies

for its power on who said it: the observation would be apposite regardless of its author - though admittedly, the fact that it comes from Nelson Mandela makes us listen in a way we would not if it had come from John Doe. It is the power of the insight that counts.



LINKS

[Nelson Mandela Foundation](#)

[Nobel Peace Prize Biography](#)

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