

Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction
By Elleke Boehmer

As well as being a remarkable statesman, Nelson Mandela has become a universal symbol of justice, a secular saint. Elleke Boehmer examines not only the great anti-apartheid leader's life, but also the ways in which images and representations have been used to create the Mandela we know today - an internationally recognized icon of freedom.

Questions for thought and discussion

- Is it correct to say that Mandela is the national icon who outgrew his country?
- Do you agree that Nelson Rohihlahla Mandela is one of the definitive political figures of the twentieth century?
- Was Mandela a lesser leader than Gandhi because, unlike the Indian non-cooperation leader, he called for armed resistance to racial oppression?
- How might we explain Mandela's reputation as a warrior for democracy, given that his style of leadership has often been described as autocratic, or, in his words, 'leading from the front'?
- What was Winnie Mandela's contribution to building her husband's reputation?
- In what ways did Mandela's 27.5 years of incarceration help to mould him as a political leader?
- What is the 'secret' of Mandela's charm? How is it he compels everyone he meets?
- In defiance of all that has been written about him, is it true to say that Mandela's charisma remains to an extent indefinable? He embodies 'the gift of grace' (Max Weber's definition of charisma)
- Mandela consistently speaks of himself as merely the vessel of the struggle for freedom in South Africa, not as its leader. Is he right? And if not, why not?
- Did Mandela the President in fact fail to deliver on many of the political undertakings of Mandela the leader in the struggle against apartheid—something with which he is often charged. What were the mistakes he made in office?
- How did Mandela win over the Afrikaner, and who did he alienate as a result?
- Where do you stand on the efforts that have been made, in Nelson Mandela's lifetime, to safeguard his reputation and legacy? Given his fame, are such efforts necessary?
- How will the myth of Mandela develop after his death?
- If you were to meet Mandela, and you had five minutes with him, what would you say to him?

Other books by Elleke Boehmer

Empire, the National and the Postcolonial: Resistance in Interaction, 1890-1920
(Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002)

Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005)

With Stephen Morton (eds), *Terror and the Postcolonial* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009)

Further Reading

Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 2000)

Ato Quayson (ed.), *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (London: Penguin, 2002)

Tom Lodge, *Mandela: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006)