

*GlobalTribe* Educational Curriculum

South Africa Lesson  
Robben Island: Prisoner Nelson Mandela

January, 2003  
[www.pbs.org/globaltribe](http://www.pbs.org/globaltribe)

*GlobalTribe* is a PBS series that combines the spirit of travel with a meaningful exploration of the global issues that affect us all. On our journeys to remote corners of the world, we seek to understand in human terms the universal struggles of our planet: from healing racial wounds to saving the environment to improving the lives of the poorest among us. Our quest is also to find solutions and to meet the unsung heroes in every country who offer us hope and a path to a better tomorrow.

For more information, contact:

Creative Visions  
1223 Sunset Plaza Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90069  
[www.creativevisions.org](http://www.creativevisions.org)

Developed by:

Creative Visions &  
Jennifer New

## **Introduction / Pre-viewing**

---

1. Before viewing GlobalTribe:
  - Ask students to describe apartheid. What was it? When and where did it occur?
  - Who is Nelson Mandela? Why is he important?
  - Other than apartheid and Nelson Mandela, what other associations do students have with South Africa?

## **Robben Island: Prisoner Nelson Mandela**

---

**Objective: Students will familiarize themselves with part of Nelson Mandela’s biography pertaining to his experience on Robben Island. They will better understand some of the emotional aspects of Mandela and others who are imprisoned for political reasons by devising human statues of some aspect of their reading.**

**Time: 2 to 4 hours of in-class time.**

**Grade Level: 9-12**

1. Tape off an 8-by-8-foot space in the classroom, the size of a cell in the Robben Island prison.

Over the next 10-15 minutes, ask students to write in their journals about what they think it might be like to live in this space every day for 26 years. Encourage students to sit in the space for part of the time. Afterward, ask for volunteers to share what they wrote.

2. Divide students into four or five small groups and assign each group to read one of the excerpts about Robben Island from Nelson Mandela’s autobiography that can be found at this site: <http://archives.obs-us.com/obs/english/books/Mandela/Mandela.html>

This may be assigned the day before.

3. After students have read their excerpts, have them meet with their group members to discuss the passage. Provide them with the following questions to focus their discussions:
  - What is happening in this excerpt? Most of the excerpts have one or two main vignettes; summarize the ones that appear in your reading.
  - What emotions does Mandela convey in this excerpt? List the various emotional reactions he has to his imprisonment.
  - What greater truth about being a political prisoner does the passage illustrate? Although Mandela’s experience is specific to late 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa, much of what he describes, such as missing one’s family, must be true for most political prisoners, despite geography or historical time.
4. Ask each group to form a “statue” based on their excerpt. This is a silent activity in which group members form a motionless statue that encapsulates an emotion or experience, such as “shame.” Groups work together to consider various poses that best sum up their message (talking is necessary at this time), and then perform them for others. The pose should be something that not only illustrates an important part of Mandela’s experience on Robben Island, but also the deeper

experience of political prisoners everywhere. You may want to take pictures of each statue to post in the classroom.

### **Assessment**

As each group performs its statue, the rest of the class should attempt to interpret its meaning. Then the performing group should reveal what they were attempting to communicate and why they formed the statue the way they did. Ask them to cite passages from Nelson Mandela's autobiography that influenced their statue. Afterward, have students reflect on the cumulative message of the statues.

### **Extending**

1. Re-enact scenes from Mandela's biography.
2. Read and discuss Mandela's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech:  
[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African\\_Studies/Articles\\_Gen/Nobel\\_Award\\_15212.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Articles_Gen/Nobel_Award_15212.html)
3. Have students write an essay based on Ahmed Kathrada's comment to Amy Eldon: "A prisoner never gives up hope."

### **Resources**

*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, by Nelson Mandela  
*Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada's Prison Correspondence, 1964-1989*, by Ahmed Kathrada

Robben Island Museum  
<http://www.robben-island.org.za/>

The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/>

### **Standards**

Understands the historical perspective  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=3&StandardID=2>)

Uses acting skills  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=12&StandardID=2>)

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=6>)

Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=22&StandardID=3>)

Applies decision-making techniques  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=21&StandardID=6>)

