Invictus

Exploring Issues of Belonging and Identity

Education Resource
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INVICTUS

Exploring issues of identity and belonging

Synopsis
Following the end of the destructive and racist system of apartheid in South Africa, Nelson Mandela is elected as the nation’s president. Although he has been elected with a huge majority, he is deeply aware that he does not have the confidence of many white South Africans. To realise his dream of South Africa as a rainbow nation, Mandela decides to transform the contentious national rugby team, the Springboks, into a symbol of national unity.

Getting Started
Defining the context theme

Questions about who we are and where we belong are at the heart of what it means to be human. While many of us may not articulate this process of exploration and self-examination, it underpins our interactions with each other and our sense of belonging.

To begin this theme, jot down your own, individual definitions of “identity” and “belonging”.

Join together as a group and share these definitions and try to come up with a class definition. Consider why and how these concepts are linked within the context theme. As you explore this rich theme, you will find that there are many different perspectives that can be adopted and explored.

Group Discussion
Identity

Focus on the following questions in groups. Explain your answers and give examples.

Who defines your identity? Yourself or others? Or does this change according to the situation?

How much of our identity is formed through meeting or responding to the expectations of others?

When do we feel most ourselves? What does it mean to be true to oneself?
How and why does our identity change over time?

What does it mean to act out of character?

Consider what factors create an identity including age, gender, ethnic background, nationality, interests and hobbies, physical appearance, education, and the nature of one’s employment. How do our cultural heritage, languages, beliefs, and family connections influence our self-perceptions and our perceptions of other people?

In what ways is our identity constructed by government and the State?

**Belonging**

We all have places where we feel more comfortable and people we feel more relaxed spending time with.

Where do you feel most at home and why? What does it feel like to belong? What are some of the ways people try to belong to a group? How do we know when we belong? What feelings does a sense of belonging conjure up?

Alternatively, how do we feel when we don’t belong? What kinds of situations are most likely to make us feel we don’t belong?

What does it mean to belong and not belong in Australia?

What kind of responsibilities does a society have to its members? What are the responsibilities of each member to the good of the whole?

How can the society we live in change our sense of who we are?

Why do some groups exclude others?

Should we have to change who we are in order to fit in? Explain your answer.

**Personal Reflection**

Write a paragraph prompted by the following questions:

Do you ever feel frustrated that the way you see yourself doesn’t match the way that other people see you?

Have you had the experience of being stereotyped because of one aspect of your identity: the way you look, your gender, ethnicity, clothes, job, school etc?
How many different people are you and how difficult is it to balance your conflicting identities?

**Group Identity**

What are some of the groups you belong to?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a group? Explain your answer.

What kinds of responsibility does group membership involve?

Describe some of the compromises you have had to make as a result of being part of a group.

Do you become someone different when you are in a group situation? Explain.

**National Identity**

How important is a national identity to a feeling of belonging?

When people talk about an Australian national identity. What do they mean by this?

Do you agree that there is an Australian national identity or do you think there are many different Australian national identities or, alternatively, many different versions of the Australian national identity?

What is the role of the media in creating national identity?

What is nationalism?

What are some of the ways that nationalism connects people? Give examples.

How can nationalism lead to exclusion and prejudice?

What is the role of the media, the government and other institutions in making people feel they do or don’t belong?

Are there some groups of people who are made to feel less welcome in Australian society? Explain and give examples.

**National Identity and Sport**

How important are sporting achievements in creating a sense of national unity?
Describe an Australian sporting event or achievement that made an impression on you.

What are some of the feelings evoked by a national sporting triumph?

Do you think sport is a particularly important part of Australian culture and the sense of national unity?

Describe a shared national sporting experience/achievement that you have witnessed. What was your response to this event? Did it make you feel more connected to other Australians? Did it make you feel more Australian? Or did you feel disconnected and uninvolved?

In the booklet *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, given to Australian residents applying for citizenship, sport features as a significant aspect of Australian identity. Read this section and describe your response to this information. Do you think this description of the significance of sport in Australian society is accurate? How effectively does it represent you relationship to sport? Do you think sport is an important part of being Australian?

**Sport and recreation**

Many Australians love sport and many have achieved impressive results at an international level. We are proud of our reputation as a nation of ‘good sports’. Australian sportsmen and women are admired as ambassadors for the values of hard work, fair play and teamwork. Throughout our history, sport has both characterised the Australian people and united us. From early settlement, sport provided an escape from the realities of a harsh existence. Even during wartime, members of the Australian Defence Force organised sporting competitions to help relieve the stress of the battlefield.

Sport also provides a common ground that allows both players and spectators to feel included and a part of something that is important to Australian society. Many Australians participate in team sports. Cricket, basketball, netball, hockey and the football codes are among the most popular. Swimming, tennis, athletics, golf and cycling are popular recreational activities. They are also sports that Australians excel at in international competitions. Other popular physical activities include bushwalking, surfing and skiing. Australians also play and love to watch football (also known as soccer), rugby league, rugby union and Australian Rules football. ‘Aussie Rules’ is a uniquely Australian game.

Australia is especially proud of its international successes in the game of cricket. Australian and English cricket teams have had an intense rivalry since the late 19th century. The Melbourne Cup, ‘the race that stops the nation’, is one of the richest
and most challenging horse races in the world. The first Melbourne Cup was held in 1861. The first Tuesday in November, Melbourne Cup Day, has been a public holiday in Victoria since 1877.¹

In groups, discuss this quote “Throughout our history, sport has both characterised the Australian people and united us.” (Or you might like to make it the focus of a debate.)

Invictus: Introduction

*Invictus* explores the idea of national identity and considers how groups divided by a long and cruel history of oppression can come together as one people. Political scientist Benedict Anderson has described the “nation” as an imagined political community, whose members perceive—or imagine—themselves as connected and part of a shared enterprise.

…regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.²

In the case of South Africa, the Afrikaner South Africans’ sense of national identity depended on the marginalisation and exclusion of their fellow countrymen. It also involved the development of the belief that their privileged position in South Africa was their god-given destiny. The society perpetuated under the system of apartheid—separateness—was designed to exclude the majority of the South African population from the privileges experienced by the White population, and rugby was one of the symbols of this division. By reimagining the Springbok rugby team as a symbol of unity, Mandela gave all South Africans the opportunity to redefine their relationship to each other and to their country.

When exploring this text in relation to the context theme of Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging, you will be challenged to consider:

1. the interconnection between individual and social identity
2. the connection between sport and national identity
3. how power informs our sense of belonging
4. the connection between the past and the present
5. the role of history in forming identity
6. the role of forgiveness and revenge in forming group identity
7. the significance given to qualities of dignity, magnanimity and generosity in modern society
8. the importance of symbolism in the construction of a national identity
9. the capacity for individuals and societies to change
10. the importance of leadership in building community

The Context

Apartheid was a system of destructive and deeply unjust racism and segregation legislated and organized so as to shore up the power and privilege of the white minority. Segregation and a belief in white supremacy go back to the very beginning of South African colonisation with slavery and the exploitation of non-white workers being integral to the South African economy. After the Second World War, many former colonies in Africa and Asia moved towards independence, but during this period South Africa introduced apartheid in order to strengthen the existing inequality.

The idea of apartheid was that one relatively small section of the community – the European population became by far the most privileged. Introduced in 1948 with the election of the National Party, the system of apartheid was defined by laws and practices designed to perpetuate and extend existing divisions and segregation practices.

As a result of this legislation and the bureaucratic procedures that accompanied it, South Africans experienced a different and fundamentally unequal set of opportunities, depending on the racial category they were deemed to fall into -- White, Coloured, Indian and Black. Under the laws of apartheid anyone who wasn’t white was restricted in where they could live, the quality of their education, where they could travel and, of course, they had no right to vote in national elections.

A key aspect of apartheid was the creation of ‘homelands’, effectively designed to remove black South Africans from urban areas. Black South Africans were required
to carry a pass when they left their designated homeland and could be arrested if they were not carrying their pass. The Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 was a result of police firing on Black South Africans who were protesting about the restrictions on their freedom to move around the country. This incident led Nelson Mandela to abandon his peaceful approach to fighting apartheid and to help found the armed wing of the African National Congress in 1961.

Mandela was jailed in 1962 and taken to Robben Island in 1963 where he experienced conditions of great deprivation. Mandela was in Robben Island Prison until 1982, when he was transferred, first, to Polismoor Prison and, later, to Victor Verster Prison. He was released in 1990, after President F. W. de Klerk resolved that all political prisoners were to be freed.

During the period of his incarceration, Mandela became an increasingly prominent symbol of the injustices perpetrated in South Africa, as the international community joined together to condemn the apartheid regime. Along with imposing economic sanctions, the international community also excluded South Africa from sporting competition, most notably the Olympics. New Zealand continued to play rugby against South Africa until 1981, when the Springbok tour of New Zealand was bitterly opposed by many New Zealanders and resulted in extreme social discord.
Finally in 1994, after continuing unrest, South Africa held its first democratic national election, with Mandela and the African National Congress winning 63 percent of the vote. In his acceptance speech, Mandela declared: “Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another.”

Among many gestures of reconciliation, Mandela gave the former president, F. W. de Klerk, the position of “second deputy president”. The support of the Springbok rugby team was a similar demonstration of good will towards the Afrikaner minority, along with the decision to retain white police officers as part of his security team.

Mandela’s most significant intervention in the aftermath of so many years of violent oppression and resistance was to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Focusing on the principles of restorative justice, the Commission gave victims a space in which to reveal the wrongs that were perpetrated against them. More controversially, there was a mechanism for perpetrators to make a confession and, as a result, apply for amnesty. Amnesty was by no means automatic but it was a divisive issue, especially as it tended to favour the supporters of the former apartheid regime.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was based on a determination that South Africa’s brutal past could only be dealt with and left behind if the truth was shared and acknowledged. This sharing and acknowledgement were primarily connected to the idea of forgiveness and eschewed any impulse for revenge. Not only did Mandela recognize that revenge would destabilize his government, but also that it would tie South Africans to the past that they were so desperate to leave behind.
Nelson Mandela
During his trial in 1964, the trial that led to 27 years of imprisonment, Mandela stated:

“...I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination.

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.”

Mandela repeated this pledge on his release from prison in 1990. It is extraordinary and inspiring that Mandela was able to maintain this commitment to universal freedom after his treatment in prison as well as in the face of the suffering of so many black South Africans during the apartheid period. His determination to forgive and to look to the future, rather than seek to avenge past wrongs has been integral to the rebuilding of South Africa.

*Invictus* is a tribute to Mandela’s determination to be a leader for all South Africans by fostering a sense of shared national pride and belonging. In exploring *Invictus* in relation to the context theme, a key consideration is the place of individuals and

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heroes in bringing people together and offering them a united vision for the future. Mandela demonstrated the charisma of the true leader, a quality identified by political theorist, Max Weber, to describe the unique authority that sets some public figures apart. Mandela had an extraordinary presence as well as brilliant rhetorical skills, but his authority also came from the firmness and consistency of his commitment to the cause of equality and freedom.

Critics of *Invictus* have complained that it ignores the many, many courageous people – from all sections of South African society including white South Africans -- who fought against the injustices of apartheid. However, while the depiction of Mandela in the film may fit the Hollywood model of storytelling and its focus on individual heroes, in the case of Mandela in the context of South Africa, there is a sense that both the South African population and the international community needed a hero, and Mandela committed himself wholeheartedly to this role – not out of a desire for power but out of a sense of duty.

After becoming president, Mandela’s charismatic brilliance contributed to his capacity to reflect back to diverse and disconnected groups a vision of themselves that they could recognise but that, at the same time, connected them to the New South Africa. After years of violence, fear and hatred, Mandela used rugby, one of the most hated symbols of apartheid, to exorcise some of the dark associations with the past. Tokyo Sexwale, an important campaigner against apartheid, made an interesting observation in relation to this event, highlighting the idea that the white population of South Africa had been imprisoned by fear, and the inclusiveness demonstrated in the World Cup final was a kind of liberation. This fear is demonstrated in *Invictus* with the comments of the coach of the schoolboys’ rugby team and Francois’ father’s pessimistic commentary on the evening news:

"Nelson! Nelson!" We stood there, and we didn’t know what to say. The liberation struggle of our people was not about liberating blacks from bondage, but moreso it was about liberating white people from fear. And there it was, fear melting away. "Nelson! Nelson!"4

To make people fearful is a form of power but Mandela, and others committed to justice and equality, recognised that forgiveness and generosity can be a much more powerful assertion of authority.

While *Invictus* celebrates and commemorates the impact and influence of Mandela’s leadership, Mandela’s interactions with those around him emphasise that he is drawing on a collective commitment to peace. It is his role to instil confidence in the process and to give South Africans a goal they can aspire to as a nation. This shared

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objective is a democratic South Africa, but the Springbok win in the World Cup offers a vision of the future that makes the larger aspiration seem much more achievable. It is hard to imagine that black South Africans could develop this kind of empathy for people who did so much to limit their lives and exploit their labour. However, Mandela recognised the sense of loss that white South Africans were experiencing in the post-apartheid period and offered them a sense of continuity. At the same time, he gave them an opportunity to contribute something positive to their nation and to participate in the process of rebuilding the country.

In *Invictus*, we see how Mandela constructed himself as an icon of national unity through his bodily presence. During many of the years that he was imprisoned, Mandela had no visitors and even after visits were allowed, the authorities place a ban on photography. So, the growth of the myth and reputation of Mandela grew partly based on his absence and, once released, his bodily presence became a powerful symbol of hope for the future. Mandela used his presence at the rugby games to encourage South Africans to reimagine this symbol of disconnection as a symbol of hope and renewal. The effectiveness of this strategy is evident in the transformation of the crowd at the rugby from a booing mass waving the flag of apartheid South Africa to the cheering fans waving the flag of unity. Moreover, by wearing the rugby jersey, Mandela transformed a symbol of division and injustice into one of unity and hope. The image of Mandela and Pienaar each wearing the Springbok colours and celebrating the team’s win has become one of the iconic images of the new South Africa.

**Discussion Points**

What aspects of Mandela’s public identity contributed to his leadership?

Find out more about the quality of charisma.

What is the role of leadership in creating a national identity?

**I am the Master of My Fate**

As represented in *Invictus*, the events relating to the 1995 World Cup rugby final are a tribute to the purity and determination of Mandela’s vision of a united South Africa. The poem *Invictus* which sustained him during his time in prison highlights his single-minded refusal to contemplate defeat. Mandela did not allow room for self-doubt or hesitation. As the events play out in the film, it is made clear that this resolve is what South Africa needs at this time.

During his years in prison Mandela demonstrated his inexorable focus on the ultimate goal of his struggle through his decision to learn Afrikaans and to learn about Afrikaner culture in prison so as to understand the people whose ideas he was struggling against. This knowledge informed Mandela’s understanding of the significance of rugby in leading white South Africans towards a shared future. His
fellow inmate Mac Maharaj has commented that Mandela showed “right at the outset this focus of thinking of the other side, understanding them, anticipating them and so at the end of the day understanding how to accommodate them.”

In *Invictus*, Mandela’s mission to lead his country into the future is presented as a kind of paternal duty to ensure the new democratic nation fulfils its potential. This is demonstrated in the tough love he shows his security team when he makes them work alongside the white security staff who had formerly supported the apartheid system. As the father of the new South Africa, Mandela refuses to allow his domain to be tarnished with the discriminatory policies that he and so many others have struggled against for so many years. We see a similar assertion of his fatherly authority in the scene where he lectures the African Sports Commission as he tries to convince them not to extinguish the Springboks: “You elected me your leader. Let me lead you now.”

**Read *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley**

How does the poem add to the story told in the film?

How does the poem connect with the context theme?

Why does Mandela give the poem to Francois? What is he trying to tell him?

**The power of language**

In today’s media-saturated society, informed by public relations and spin, we can underestimate the potential power and significance of language in building connections between citizens and in giving communities something to believe in. In Australia, politicians and public figures have become masters of the soundbite in which they communicate as little as possible. However, the response to communications such as Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech and the speech against discrimination of all kinds made by Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison attest to a collective wish for leaders to be authentic and to speak with sincerity. As South Africans tried to carve out a future that did not involve civil war and social breakdown, Mandela made speech after speech that gave people the confidence that a shared and peaceful future was possible.

As you explore the concept of representative and visionary leadership as it is represented in *Invictus*, you might like to draw on some of Mandela’s key statements and speeches. Consider how words can be used to capture people’s imaginations and build a sense of belonging and national identity, In particular, the speech he

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delivered at his inauguration as president stands out as a statement of national identity on behalf of all South Africans.

Statement of Nelson Mandela at his Inauguration as President, 10 May 1994, Pretoria

Your Majesties, Your Highnesses, Distinguished Guests, Comrades and Friends:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here, and by our celebrations in other parts of our country and the world, confer glory and hope to newborn liberty.

Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.

Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity’s belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.

All this we owe both to ourselves and to the peoples of the world who are so well represented here today.

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.

Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change.

We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom.

That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression.

We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil.

We thank all our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity.

We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, non-sexism, non-racialism and democracy.

We deeply appreciate the role that the masses of our people and their political mass democratic, religious, women, youth, business, traditional and other leaders have played to bring about this conclusion. Not least among them is my Second Deputy President, the Honourable F.W. de Klerk.

We would also like to pay tribute to our security forces, in all their ranks, for the distinguished role they have played in securing our first democratic elections and the transition to democracy, from blood-thirsty forces which still refuse to see the light.

The time for the healing of the wounds has come.

The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come.

The time to build is upon us.

We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination.

We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace.
We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

As a token of its commitment to the renewal of our country, the new Interim Government of National Unity will, as a matter of urgency, address the issue of amnesty for various categories of our people who are currently serving terms of imprisonment.

We dedicate this day to all the heroes and heroines in this country and the rest of the world who sacrificed in many ways and surrendered their lives so that we could be free.

Their dreams have become reality. Freedom is their reward.

We are both humbled and elevated by the honour and privilege that you, the people of South Africa, have bestowed on us, as the first President of a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa, to lead our country out of the valley of darkness.

We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom.

We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success.

We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world.

Let there be justice for all.

Let there be peace for all.

Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.

Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfill themselves.

Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.

Let freedom reign.

The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement!

God bless Africa!

Thank you."

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Discuss in Groups

Read this speech and describe the key features of Mandela’s vision for the new South Africa.

How does this speech demonstrate Mandela’s ongoing commitment to a South Africa “in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities”?

What does Mandela mean by a “rainbow nation”?

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Consider the following statement: “Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves.” How did apartheid imprison the body, the mind and the soul of all South Africans? How is this demonstrated in Invictus?

How important are leaders and leadership in fostering a sense of shared belonging within
- a group
- a society
- a nation?

What does it mean to be a white South African?

As his character is represented in Invictus, Francois Pienaar is, like the South African nation, transformed by Mandela’s example. Through his association with Mandela, Francois becomes what Mandela believes he can be. The more that Francois learns about Mandela, the further he travels away from the system of apartheid that produced him towards a new understanding of his identity as a South African and of his place in the world. Francois’ own father is presented as a man who is frightened of the future, and whose fear and cynicism prevent him from reimagining himself as part of the new South Africa. His pessimism stretches to encompass his son and his future: “I feel sorry for you, Son. You got your whole life ahead of you. What’s it gonna be like now?” Francois’ father is a man without hope, so Francois looks to Mandela for leadership and something to believe in.

Supported by the system of apartheid, Afrikaner South Africans constructed a shared identity and history to the exclusion of the majority of people living in South Africa. This shared identity was carefully nurtured and policed and was passed down to the next generation through the collective determination of the church, the school and university systems and individual families.7 In the case of apartheid South Africa, national identity was intricately interconnected with the racist determination to exclude the majority from the privileges experienced by white South Africans. This process of exclusion was formulated and justified by the belief shared by many in the Afrikaner community that it was their destiny to occupy the place in South Africa they carved out for themselves through legislation and force.

Grand apartheid dictated where you could live, where you could go to school, what work you did, who you could marry and at what emergency room the ambulance would drop you off after a car accident. Petty apartheid dictated such important details as which

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benches you could park your behind upon and on which bathing beaches you can spread out your towel for a dip.\(^8\)

While it is hard to believe that a genuine sense of community and belonging could be created in these circumstances, white South African national identity was and continues to be very powerful. In the context of the new democratic South Africa, the white South Africans’ connection to their homeland needed to be harnessed to an alternative and more inclusive understanding of what it means to be South African.

The trip to Robben Island was an important event for the Springbok team in 1995 and is endowed with great significance in *Invictus*.\(^9\) It not only serves to highlight Mandela’s extraordinary strength and capacity to forgive, but also provides Francois with a new version of the history of his country. Through putting himself in Mandela’s shoes, Francois is able to escape the limitations and thwarted worldview he inherited as a white man born into the apartheid system. As Francois faces the reality of the apartheid regime and its cruelty, it becomes part of his own history and identity. When he stretches out his arms to measure Mandela’s cell, he and we become aware that he and his fellow white South Africans have also been imprisoned by the evil of the apartheid regime.

The real Francois Pienaar has described how the apartheid system was presented as a truth not to be questioned.

"I remember when I heard Nelson Mandela's name mentioned at barbecues or dinner parties, the words ‘terrorist’ or ‘bad man’ was an umbilical cord almost to his name. As a young kid I wish I'd had questions about it, but I never did. I just thought that guy's maybe not a good guy, because sadly we didn't engage with our parents.

"You didn't ask questions like why black kids don't go to school with you, why is it just all white? That's how you grew up, which is very wrong and very sad. I wish I'd had the courage of conviction to ask questions, but I didn't. It's about exposure."  \(^10\)

Meeting Mandela and having his world and his experience extended beyond the limits and limitations imposed by the system of apartheid, gave Pienaar the

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\(^8\)  [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/health-jan-june09-sa4_0220/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/health-jan-june09-sa4_0220/)

\(^9\)  Gallagher, Brendan, “Former South Africa captain Francois Pienaar recalls the day no one fluffed his lines”, *The Telegraph*, 29 January 2010, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/southafrica/7103855/Former-South-Africa-captain-Francois-Pienaar-recalls-the-day-no-one-fluffed-his-lines.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/southafrica/7103855/Former-South-Africa-captain-Francois-Pienaar-recalls-the-day-no-one-fluffed-his-lines.html)

opportunity to contribute to the change that was taking place instead of looking backwards to the past. In *Invictus*, this preparedness to change alongside the new South Africa is demonstrated when Francois ensures the team knows the words to the African anthem Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika (Xhosa for God Bless Africa). This gesture was a very powerful demonstration of respect and reconciliation.\(^\text{11}\) For the huge television audience, a population brought together with the slogan “One Team One Country”, it was important and significant for the Springboks to sing the anthem of people they had treated as their enemy, in a language they had condemned as belonging to an inferior race.

**Questions**

Francois Pienaar demonstrates that our identity is not fixed and is continually being modified as a result of life experience. What are some of the experiences that lead Francois to change? How does this change relate to his sense of himself as South African?

How do other characters in the film demonstrate their capacity to change? Explain.

How does the process of empathy contribute to characters’ capacity to change?

How important is a shared sense of history in connecting people?

How important is the past in creating a sense of national identity?

How important is the future?

Watch the interview with Rachel Perkins on ACMI View, and using these questions as a prompt, consider the ideas highlighted by Perkins and how they relate to the themes explored in *Invictus*.

What does Perkins mean by seeing the world from an Indigenous point of view?

What is the fuller Australian story?

How might this contribute to a more mature nation?

How does Francois’ meeting with Mandela introduce him to the fuller South African story?

How does putting himself in Mandela’s shoes change his identity as a South African and his sense of belonging?

\(^\text{11}\) In 1995, South Africa had two anthems to be played at official events: Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, which had been the anthem of the African National Congress during the years of apartheid, and Die Stem van Suid Afrika (The Call of South Africa), the Afrikaner anthem of apartheid South Africa. It was actually the team manager Morne du Plessis who insisted on this show of respect.
Building the new South Africa

While *Invictus* focuses primarily on the Springboks and the 1995 Rugby World Cup final as an iconic moment of reconciliation, the film alludes to other ways that Mandela sought to unite the disparate peoples of South Africa. Most notably, we see the white staff employed by the previous government packing up ready to leave their jobs, and Mandela giving them the opportunity to stay: “All I ask is that you do your work to the best of your abilities and with good heart.” Significantly, when he addresses them, he wishes them good morning in Afrikaans and assures them that in the new South Africa neither language, skin colour nor previous political allegiances will be used to discriminate against people.

In all cultures, language is an important marker of identity and, in most countries, particular languages and dialects are endowed with greater prestige than others. In Australia, the policy of multiculturalism led to a recognition of the importance of community languages, while recent efforts to maintain and reclaim many of Australia’s diverse Indigenous languages recognise their significance and connection to identity. South Africa has eleven official languages, and the attempt to build a rainbow nation has focused on acknowledging at least the main languages spoken. For instance, as of 1997, and in keeping with Mandela’s policy of unity and unification, a single national anthem has been constructed out of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (God Bless South Africa) and *Die Stem van Suid Afrika* (The Call of South Africa) and it includes verses in the five main languages spoken in South Africa.

The new flag of South Africa is an important symbol of the country’s new inclusive nation identity, involving a blending of the colours of the flag of the African National Congress and colours with associations with a number of other flags used over time. This explanation most effectively signals the unifying role of the flag:

The design and colours are a synopsis of principal elements of the country’s flag history. Individual colours, or colour combinations represent different meanings for different people and therefore no universal symbolism should be attached to any of the colours.

The central design of the flag, beginning at the flagpost in a ‘V’ form and flowing into a single horizontal band to the outer edge of the fly, can be interpreted as the convergence of diverse elements within South African society, taking the road ahead in unity. The theme of convergence and unity ties in with the motto Unity is Strength of the previous South African Coat of Arms.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) Symbolism, National Flag, South African Consulate General, [http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/flag.html](http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/flag.html)
Invictus highlights the significance of the flag as a marker of identity, with our (and Nelson Mandela's) first encounter with the white South African rugby audience attesting to an ongoing connection to the flag of apartheid South Africa. By the time the final is played, this allegiance to the past has been replaced by a commitment to the unity represented in the flag of the new South Africa. When Francois checks out the ground on the day of the final, the first thing he sees is the flag suspended overhead. Later, when the teams enter the ground, an overhead shot gives this flag pride of place, placing it at the centre of the frame and over and above the players. In the final sequence of the film, as Mandela looks out of the window of his car at the crowds of euphoric Springbok fans and South African citizens, he is able to witness the presence of the South African flag alongside the Springbok pennant and uniform, a connection that offers great hope for the future.

**Discussion Points**

What is the role of a nation’s flag in creating a sense of shared belonging?

In Australia, what are some of the ways people use the national flag to express their identity? Try to list both positive and negative expressions of national identity and pride.

Can changing a flag or an anthem really change the way people view their country and their place in it? Explain.

**The Legacy of the Springbok Victory**

As the global community joined together to support the millions of disenfranchised South Africans fighting to be treated with justice in their own country, the white South African sporting community became isolated. Along with international sporting events such as rugby World Cup, South Africa was barred from competing in the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic and Commonwealth Games, test cricket, Davis Cup tennis and world athletics. The Rugby World Cup was the first international sporting competition held since the breakdown of apartheid, so it was an event of great significance. In his inauguration speech, Mandela looked forward to a future in which South Africa was no longer treated as the “skunk of the world”. This comment highlighted the indignity and shame of being part of a nation reviled by the international community.

As is made clear in Invictus, rugby was the sport that most came to stand for the injustice of apartheid. Whereas the black South Africans played soccer, the white South Africans viewed rugby in almost religious terms. Mandela’s decision to use rugby to construct an emotional connection between white South Africans and the new regime was both magnanimous and politically astute. In the early 1990s during the transition to democracy, around half of the white South African population said they could live with losing their flag and their national anthem but over 90 percent stated they could not bear losing the springbok rugby team.¹³ In Invictus, when

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¹³ Nauright, John, “Mandela saw sport as a way to bring South Africans together”,

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explaining his determination to maintain the name and identity of the Springbok team to his assistant Brenda, Mandela reminds her that the white minority still controls the police, the army and the economy. This pragmatism forms the basis for the farsighted and imaginative policy of inclusion and interconnection commemorated in the film. It is, as Mandela states in *Invictus*, “a human calculation”. According to Morné du Plessis, who was the manager of the South African team in 1995, Mandela’s magnanimous gesture “had a lasting effect on how people could use sport to value each other and to come to understand each other a little bit better.”

There is no doubt that this shared victory offered all South Africans a welcome and timely taste of what it is like to be united through national pride, and it contributed to the nation-building process at an opportune time. Yet, while South Africans continue to reminisce about the elation of the 1995 victory, the anticipated transformation of South African society into a harmonious rainbow nation has not eventuated, nor have the Springboks developed into the inclusive team that was hoped for: “Rugby’s reluctance to grapple with its past and take concrete steps to mirror the country’s demographic make-up reflects how black South Africans remain spectacularly side-lined in many aspects of life.”

**Read and discuss this passage**

Asked whether the springbok emblem represented some form of a national heritage, South Africa’s poet laureate, Keorapetse Kgotsiile, says there was never a stage when the game of rugby was ever transformed enough to represent “a future possibility of anything”.

If anything, Kgotsiile says, it approached abstract possibilities of hope because of what Madiba represented when he seemed to be giving it the green light as a result of collective wishes.

“Then we transferred that [hope] to it but did not change the reality. I strongly believe that in the creation of artistic symbols and images, for instance, they have to be rooted or steeped in social reality, in terms

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14 “Mandela inducted into World Rugby Hall of Fame”, SouthAfrica.info, 5 October 2015, http://www.southafrica.info/mandela/mandela-hall-of-fame-051015.htm#.VIiLv63t4ly5#ixzz3sJMKg2kj

of how people act and interact. Symbols should be a result [of something], not what people aspire to.”

Do you agree that symbols are only meaningful if they relate to something that has been achieved?

Do you think aspiration and hope can build change? Can you think of any examples where this has happened?

Do you think sport can play an important role in building community?

**Forgiveness**

In the moment in Mandela’s prison cell on Robben Island when Francois fully realises the immensity of Mandela’s suffering, he also grasps the immensity of his capacity to forgive. Revenge is often associated with strength and forgiveness with weakness, but Mandela demonstrates how powerful forgiveness can be. Revenge keeps the victim tied to the perpetrator, whereas forgiveness offers freedom from the wrongs of the past and a commitment to the future. The capacity for forgiveness to offer the potential for renewal and release has been explored by political theorist, Hannah Arendt, who wrote:

> “Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it. …Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever…”

Not only was Mandela’s championing of the Springboks new and unexpected, so too was the enthusiasm with which this team, so closely associated with apartheid, was adopted by South Africans who had suffered under this oppressive system. Part of this investment in the fortunes of the once-reviled Springboks related to the power of Mandela’s vision for the future and the investment the majority of the population had in his strength and unflinching belief in the possibility of a united South Africa. To buy into the shared dream of a World Cup rugby victory, the majority of South Africans had to make an enormous commitment to forgive an evil history, when many white South Africans had not even expressed sorrow or regret. Perhaps for people who had been victims of injustice, prejudice and division for so long, what was most important was the fact that forgiveness offered hope for the future. The fact that many who benefited from apartheid had not sought forgiveness made the forgivers even stronger, as they chose to cut ties with the prejudices of the past.

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The Rugby World Cup offered South Africa a chance to celebrate as a nation. However, Mandela, his government and other important figures in the rebuilding process, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, recognised that while forgiveness was at the forefront of the new South Africa, this was not the same as forgetting or ignoring the suffering experienced and wrongs committed by both sides involved in the struggle against apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to bring the suffering and violence of the past to the surface. If the South African people were to build a future together, it was important that they acknowledged the truth of the history they shared:

History was made by the TRC – not just that a nation participated in this exercise – but also literally because one of the aims of the TRC was to re-write the history of South Africa so that future generations could never say, as some have managed to do about the holocaust: oh, no – it didn’t really happen.\textsuperscript{17}

Victims had the opportunity to share their stories and place them on the record – this was an important process both for individuals and the country as a whole to deal with the trauma of the past. The focus on truth and transparency led to the Commission being empowered to offer a pardon, in certain circumstances, for political crimes. A particularly important part of the Commission’s role was its focus on restorative justice and reconciliation – a commitment to the “granting of reparation to, and rehabilitation and restoration of the human and civil dignity of, victims of violations of human rights”\textsuperscript{18}.

Both the elation over the Rugby World Cup win and the noble principles underpinning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have dimmed over the course of time. Many have suggested that in each case the white South Africans have been held less accountable than history should dictate and forgiven too easily. Other commentators have questioned the idea of truth, highlighting that it is something negotiated and partial, and depends on your perspective. According to Michael Ignatieff: ‘The past is an argument and the function of truth commissions, like the function of honest historians, is simply to purify the argument, to narrow the range of permissible lies.’\textsuperscript{19}

As you consider \textit{Invictus} in the context of Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging, you will be able to discuss both the lasting impact and present-day meaning of the events it depicts. You might also like to consider the role of the film itself in reigniting

\textsuperscript{17} Slovo, Gillian, “Making history: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, \textit{Open Democracy}, 5 December 2002, \url{www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/article_818.jsp}


\textsuperscript{19} Ignatieff, Michael, “Articles of Faith”, \textit{Index on Censorship}, September 1996 25: 110-122
national pride, and highlighting the principles of forgiveness and reconciliation on which the new South Africa was founded.

**Discussion Points**

In *Invictus*, Mandela states: Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon. What does Mandela mean? Is it fair for him to impose his idea of forgiveness on Jason? Is it fair to expect all South Africans to understand and share in this new identity that Mandela is offering them? Explore this idea of forgiveness and consider how it might add to your own understanding of identity and belonging.

Share your responses to this poster encouraging South Africans to tell their stories to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Do you agree that sharing the truth contributes to the process of healing? What other consequences might result from telling the truth? Can you give some examples from your own experience and/or that have arisen in the context of Australian public life?

Explore

Watch and read the many tributes to Mandela on the occasion of his death. As you explore this theme, consider how people draw on Mandela’s legacy to dream of a better world and a more harmonious past.

How important are ideals and optimism in building identity and fostering a sense of belonging?