PREPARING to Read

MEMOIR

from Long Walk to Freedom

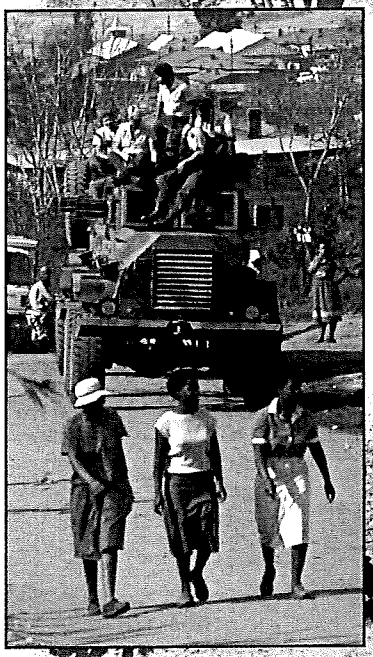
by NELSON MANDELA

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies

Connect to Your Life

What do you know about the struggle against apartheid?



Build Background

In 1948 the white-controlled government of South Africa established apartheid, or racial segregation. The purpose was to maintain white control. Black South Africans had no political rights. The struggle against apartheid intensified in the 1980s. In 1990–1991 apartheid was repealed. In 1994, Nelson Mandela was elected president. In 1999, Thabo Mbeke became the next president.

Background: South Africans wait to vote in April 1994. *Above left:* Apartheid was enforced by military and police power. *Above right:* Apartheid-era sign indicating a store where blacks were allowed to shop.

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS MEMOIR

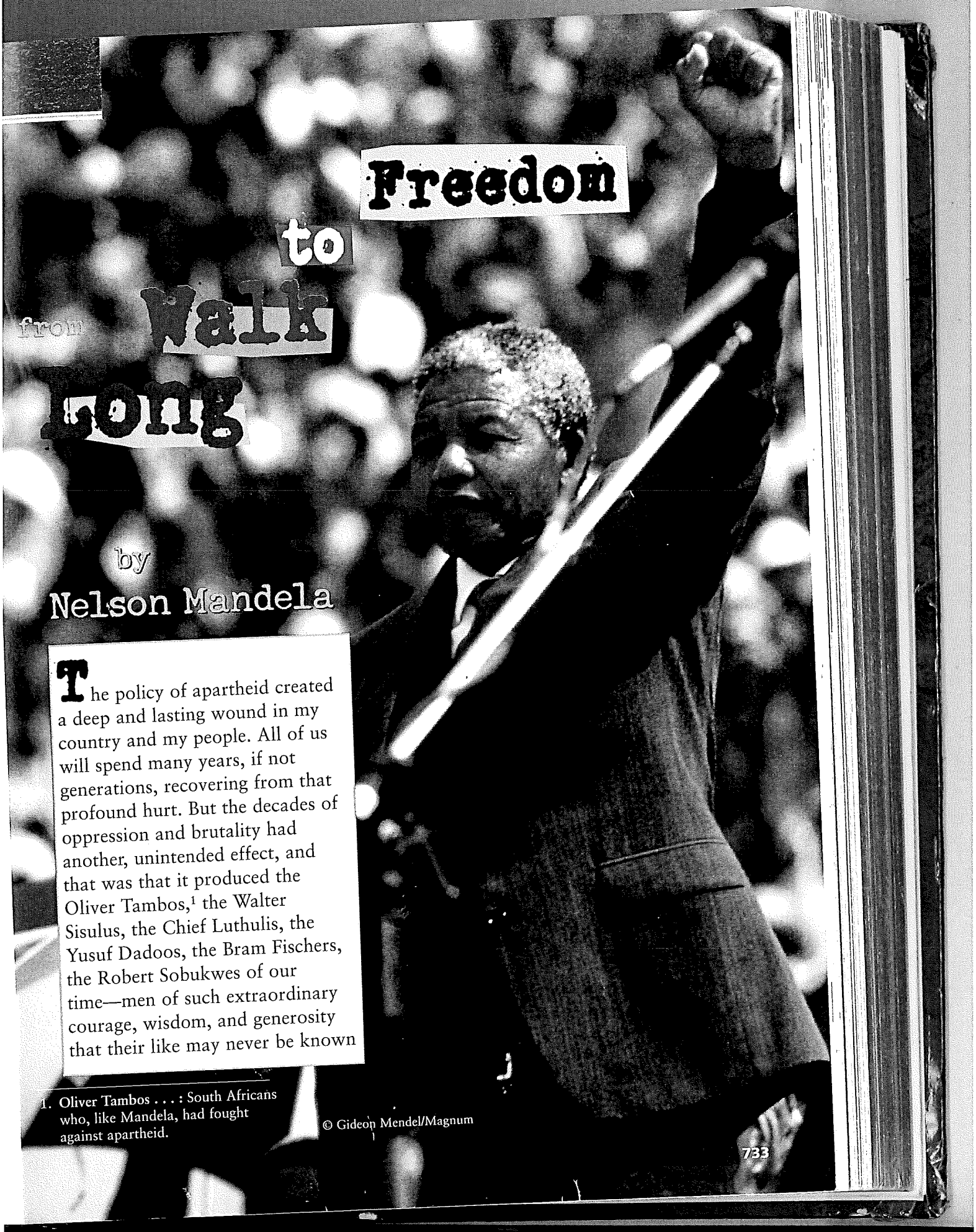
A **memoir** is a type of autobiography. In a memoir the author narrates events in his or her own life but also usually describes important events happening in the world. As you read the selection from *Long Walk to Freedom*, notice how Mandela's own story is connected to events in his country.

ACTIVE READING MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS

A writer's principle message is called the main idea. The main idea may be the central idea of an entire work or of one paragraph. Details such as facts or additional thoughts clarify, or support, the main idea. As you read this selection, choose a paragraph and jot down the main idea and supporting details in your READER'S NOTEBOOK.

WORDS TO KNOW **Vocabulary Preview**

curtailed indivisible transitory
incomprehensible resiliency



Freedom to from Walk Long

by Nelson Mandela

The policy of apartheid created a deep and lasting wound in my country and my people. All of us will spend many years, if not generations, recovering from that profound hurt. But the decades of oppression and brutality had another, unintended effect, and that was that it produced the Oliver Tambos,[1] the Walter Sisulus, the Chief Luthulis, the Yusuf Dadoos, the Bram Fischers, the Robert Sobukwes of our time—men of such extraordinary courage, wisdom, and generosity that their like may never be known

1. **Oliver Tambos . . . :** South Africans who, like Mandela, had fought against apartheid.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.

again. Perhaps it requires such depth of oppression to create such heights of character. My country is rich in the minerals and gems that lie beneath its soil, but I have always known that its greatest wealth is its people, finer and truer than the purest diamonds.

It is from these comrades in the struggle that I learned the meaning of courage. Time and again, I have seen men and women risk and give their lives for an idea. I have seen men stand up to attacks and torture without breaking, showing a strength and resiliency that defies the imagination. I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. I felt fear myself more times than I can remember, but I hid it behind a mask of boldness. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

I never lost hope that this great transformation would occur. Not only because of the great heroes I have already cited, but because of the courage of the ordinary men and women of my country. I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart its opposite. Even in the grimmest times i prison, when my comrades and I were pu to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps ju for a second, but it was enough to reassu and keep me going. Man's goodness is a f that can be hidden but never extinguished

We took up the struggle with our eyes open, under no illusion that the path wou an easy one. As a young man, when I join the African National Congress,[2] I saw the my comrades paid for their beliefs, and it high. For myself, I have never regretted m commitment to the struggle, and I was al prepared to face the hardships that affect personally. But my family paid a terrible perhaps too dear a price for my commitm

In life, every man has twin obligations- obligations to his family, to his parents, t wife and children; and he has an obligati his people, his community, his country. In civil and humane society, each man is abl fulfill those obligations according to his o inclinations and abilities. But in a country

2. **African National Congress:** the political party opp apartheid that Mandela helped found.

WORDS TO KNOW **resiliency** (rĭ-zĭl′ yən-sē) *n.* the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune

South Africa, it was almost impossible for a man of my birth and color to fulfill both of those obligations. In South Africa, a man of color who attempted to live as a human being was punished and isolated. In South Africa, a man who tried to fulfill his duty to his people was inevitably ripped from his family and his home and was forced to live a life apart, a twilight existence of secrecy and rebellion. I did not in the beginning choose to place my people above my family, but in attempting to serve my people, I found that I was prevented from fulfilling my obligations as a son, a brother, a father, and a husband.

In that way, my commitment to my people, to the millions of South Africans I would never know or meet, was at the expense of the people I knew best and loved most. It was as simple and yet as incomprehensible as the moment a small child asks her father, "Why can you not be with us?" And the father must utter the terrible words: "There are other children like you, a great many of them . . ." and then one's voice trails off.

I was not born with a hunger to be free. I was born free—free in every way that I could know. Free to run in the fields near my mother's hut, free to swim in the clear stream that ran through my village, free to roast mealies[3] under the stars and ride the broad backs of slow-moving bulls. As long as I obeyed my father and abided by the customs of my tribe, I was not troubled by the laws of man or God.

It was only when I began to learn that my boyhood freedom was an illusion, when I discovered as a young man that my freedom had already been taken from me, that I began to hunger for it. At first, as a student, I wanted freedom only for myself, the transitory freedoms of being able to stay out at night, read what I pleased, and go where I chose. Later, as a young man in Johannesburg, I yearned for the basic and honorable freedoms of achieving my potential, of earning my keep, of marrying and having a family—the freedom not to be obstructed in a lawful life.

But then I slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were not free. I saw that it was not just my freedom that was curtailed, but the freedom of everyone who looked like I did. That is when I joined the African National Congress, and that is when the hunger for my own freedom became the greater hunger for the freedom of my people. It was this desire for the freedom of my people to live their lives with dignity and self-respect that animated my life, that transformed a frightened young man into a bold one, that drove a law-abiding attorney to become a criminal, that turned a family-loving husband into a man without a home, that forced a life-loving man to live like a monk. I am no more virtuous or self-sacrificing than the next man, but I found that I could not even enjoy the poor and limited freedoms I was allowed when I knew my people were not free. Freedom is indivisible; the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on all of my people were the chains on me.

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all

3. **mealies** *South African:* corn.

WORDS TO KNOW
incomprehensible (ĭn'kŏm-prĭ-hĕn'sə-bəl) *adj.* not understandable
transitory (trăn'sĭ-tôr'ē) *adj.* lasting only a short time; temporary
curtailed (kər-tāld') *adj.* cut short **curtail** *v.*
indivisible (ĭn'də-vĭz'ə-bəl) *adj.* incapable of being divided

people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended. ❖