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Pamela Taivassalo

Speakers' Corner Nelson Mandela

Kristina Leon:

In the programme today: Nelson Mandela and his [inaugural speech](#) as president of South Africa. Our specialist and political rhetoric Doctor Nick Turnbull from Manchester University, meet George Fenton and Laurence Wall, Amina Jamil and Daniel Edmundson from the Debating Society at Parrs Wood High School.

This is Speaker's Corner.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

I'm Nick Turnbull and today we are going to talk about Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech. After 21 years in prison on Robben Island during the apartheid regime, he became leader of the African National Congress and in 1994 he was elected president of South Africa. He spoke to the nation in Pretoria, South Africa on May the 10th 1994.

Nelson Mandela:

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 new born liberty.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

Nelson Mandela as we know is one of the great political thinkers of the 20th Century, not just in South Africa but across the entire world. And this was a momentous occasion, after years of Apartheid regime, the denial of civil and political rights to non-white South Africans that policy had been abandoned, there had been an election and Nelson Mandela had



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been elected leader of South Africa in the first democratic elections.

Nelson Mandela:

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...

Dr Nick Turnbull:

The way he speaks, he's clearly a very articulate man. He has legal qualifications, is the leader of a political movement, even with being imprisoned for a long time. He presents key themes which are unity and colour. So in this speech, it's the resolution of a previously fragmented country. So he talks about the unity of South Africa now, by linking it to the land, the nature. So he talks about the jacaranda trees, the soil of the South African nation, the seasons, the green grass and the blooming flowers. All of these things belong to everyone.

Nelson Mandela:

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.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

So this unity of nature is linked to the unity of the people. Now black and white are together in one nation, what he calls a Rainbow Nation. So he contrasts with the division of apartheid, so the body of the nation has been healed, the healing of words. The divisions in the land have been healed, the bridge that chasms between people and black and white healed and the unity of colour; Rainbow Nation. So this is a way of speaking symbolically rather than just him advocating the success of the National African congress. The success of the black movement against white oppression. He then speaks for everyone, now black and white and all in between and it's known there especially as a figurative unification.



He was reviled by authorities for many years as a divisive figure, as an enemy of the state. Here he presents himself, he shows that he's not an enemy of the state, he was an enemy of the apartheid regime but for the unity of South Africa. And the greatest figures in political history and the greatest speakers are the ones who can unify what is divided. We don't like I think, historically the figures of division, those who would separate an us and a them, people who can bring all together are the truly great speakers. And in this speech the idea of linking two desperate parts of the population through this metaphor of the land and through this theme of colour, is really very nice and very effective.

Kristina Leon:

In Parris Wood High School in Manchester the Debating Society gathers every Tuesday. Our reporter Pamela Taivassalo paid them a visit.

Pamela Taivassalo:

I'm standing here in Manchester at Parris Wood High School with Daniel, Laurence, George and Amina and we're talking about Nelson Mandela.

Amina Jamil:

Obviously the fact that he was imprisoned showed that perhaps the people against him could not handle the truth that what they were doing was wrong, but it did make an impact on the world because of the intensity of his speech and because of the amount of change that he was fighting for.

Laurence Wall:

Very powerful and persuasive.

George Fenton:

I like the vocabulary and the description in it.

Pamela Taivassalo:

Is it difficult to come up with a metaphor?

Laurence Wall:

Yes...

Well, it depends on what you're doing really. Sometimes it's really easy,



sometimes it's very hard.

Yes.

Well I mean when you're describing something I guess, like the sea scrapes the shores, that would be a metaphor.

Pamela Taivassalo:

Do you try to come up with metaphors of your own?

Laurence Wall:

Well I do both really 'cause then it's interesting.

George Fenton:

Yes and if there's one like in a famous speech or if someone said that's well recognized, what you're saying, you could just like quote it and say whatever they said.

Amina Jamil:

With all these people in here if you watch them speak, you kind of do get a sense of overwhelming what you're witnessing, because they have such oral skills. With the Nelson Mandela I'm sure people obviously felt like goose bumps on their skin like this is going to change the world really. Obviously they may have not felt at the time but in retrospective it did change a lot.

Daniel Edmundson:

Today in English language we looked at a speech by Nelson Mandela and one of the things he said was I believe in peace, democracy and justice. And you know that builds up on the list of related topics and gets that point across really easily. And also because they're kind of abstract feelings peace and democracy and justice it allows people to put their own meaning to it and it allows people to emote with the speech rather than just concrete facts which sometimes feel a bit cold. If you can appeal to people's hearts then it's a very good thing.



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Pamela Taivassalo:

And always the most important should be last one.

Daniel Edmundson:

Yes. Yes, I think you want your most important thing at the very end because then you've got the things before it leading up to it and then you can finish on real high note. And that always makes you look very good to your audience because you know you're delivering something very fluently and very expressively.

Kristina Leon:

And now: Doctor Nick Turnbull with a few tips on how to give a great speech.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

Every speech deals with a question and you must address whatever question that is. Now in this case they're not debating a motion in Parliament, they're not debating a policy, they're not debating details. What the question is here is simply to represent unification and you can do this through these various themes. Any speech can have any details, you may be arguing a position in a debate for example on one side of the question or not, say a policy about schools or something. But whatever side you argue, the idea is to present a theme which the audience can understand and relate to, above the details of the speech. This applies for any speech I think. If you can develop a theme and weave your arguments through that theme it has an effect of presenting a unified opinion and of appealing to an audience that may have be of different types, may have different views but presenting to them something which they can all relate to.

Kristina Leon:

In Speaker's Corner today you've heard Doctor Nick Turnbull, Daniel Edmundson, Amina Jamil, George Fenton, Laurence Wall and Nelson Mandela. This programme was produced by Pamela Taivassalo, Ingela Håkansson was our sound engineer and my name is Kristina Leon.