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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Reggie Finlayson. *Nelson Mandela.* Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1999. 112 pp. $25.26 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8225-4936-9.

Jayne Woodhouse. *Nelson Mandela.* Des Plaines, Illinois: Heinemann Interactive Library, 1999. 24 pp. $19.92 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57572-669-4.

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Looking Up To A Hero

Because of the concomitant need to have an understanding of the South African situation which firstly condemned and jailed Nelson Mandela and now glorifies and loves him, each of these publications strives in different ways, with varying successes, to breach an understanding of the set of sometimes contradictory truths that frame the historical account. Given the discrepancy of the age groups for which they cater, this serves as a joint review rather than a comparison.

The Finlayson book is written very enthusiastically, but with the assumption that its readers have a working knowledge of basic elements of African history and geography. Taking on a format evocative of a novel, this book brings the personality and the trials of Mandela to the fore and opens up avenues for reader empathy. They can gain an insight into the thoughts and ambitions of Mandela, articulated through either quotes from his speeches, his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* or the writer's interpretation of events, circumstances, and decisions taken. The text is easy to read, yet not simplistic, and would be productive for the young adult as well as the scholar.

The Woodhouse book, obviously constructed for the very young reader, is far more simple. It presents the broad narrative of Mandela's life, but perhaps too little emphasis is placed on the brutality of a social mindset which governed apartheid. Indeed, although the term appears in the text, it is absent from the glossary. Children, especially those who live outside South Africa, need clear and substantive definitions of apartheid, including the ways it differed from racial segregation systems in the U.S. Such knowledge will better enable them to understand the significance and poignancy of Mandela's rise to acknowledgment in South Africa.

Both are small format books, designed for the grasp of small hands. They are both sturdily constructed and boldly designed. Finlayson's is illustrated mainly with photographic material from historical archives, reproduced clearly and at appropriate sections of the text. Woodhouse's publication is also cohesively put together. Visually and conceptually divided into two sections, the first section is illustrated with pen and ink images in bright colours. Likenesses of famous people are dealt with competently by illustrator, Alice Englander. The second half of the book is illustrated with photographs primarily from Mandela's adult years after apartheid.

Finlayson's text is distributed across eight chapters, each divided into subsections which highlight the progression of the narrative. It's a substantial book and one that can be used to good advantage either by the student for recreational reading, or as part of curricula work. Woodhouse, by the same token, straddles issues like apartheid, press opinions, treason, and the conflation between rural and urban lifestyles in South Africa in ways necessitating an adult's input. Given the simplicity of the text, the word count and the general approach, this text is misleading in that it couldn't be read and understood properly by a young child reading alone.

Finlayson demonstrates a sensitivity to his readers without being patronising. The text has been researched thoroughly, and he doesn't pull punches in representing the ugliness of apartheid in either word or image. Overall the outlook is a palatable one, giving spirit to the poignant and powerful rise to prominence of one Xhosa boy from the Transkei, whose life path affected his people, his country and the world. Interestingly, the pronunciation guide is flawed by inadequate representation of the diacritical 'click' in some of the words, such as "Qunu" and "Xhosa".

Woodhouse, on the other hand, has tended to gloss

over some details. For instance, the name "Rohihlahla" is spelt incorrectly – an oversight which, given the fact that this is one of the names of the book's main protagonist and focus, is unforgivable.

As her series premise dictates, she highlights different sources through which one could learn more about Mandela such as his autobiography, the newspaper and the arts. In the latter, she unfortunately only considers the manifestations of Mandela's status as an international icon in sculpture made by white men. She overlooks the reality that Mandela has become an emblem of freedom and peace in indigenous painting, sculpture and beadwork by black and white men and women alike, in South Africa.

That said, the Woodhouse publication must be commended on the complexity of the task to represent complicated political figures like Mandela in context, to young children in the United States. Over and above its conceptual problems, if used appropriately by the teacher or parent, this may serve as a impetus for the young student to learn more about the subjects at hand and in this context it is recommended.

Finlayson's book can hold its own. Having made extensive use of Internet resources, Mandela's autobiographical works and other printed publications, this is a serious biography of Mandela, which while not embodying compromise, presents a man with a past, a history and a future within the context of his country in a way that children can access. Very highly recommended.

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