

Two men who made a difference to their countries and the world should be remembered equally

If you could invite anyone no longer living to an imaginary dinner party, who would you invite? Jesus, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Michael Jackson? One man's name often features in answer to that question...

Over the holidays, two renowned world leaders died. Both were acclaimed in their own homelands, both sought to find peace and identities for their countries. Yet one man had international leaders attend his funeral and respects were paid from all corners of the globe. The other man's funeral, most countries sent their deputy ministers. Why?

I am, of course, referring to the sad and untimely deaths of Nelson Mandela and Ariel Sharon.

Nelson Mandela is close to being a saint. He is seen as a gracious and forgiving man, whose determination to right the wrongs of apartheid in South Africa led him first to protest, then to jail and then, ultimately, to freedom and the presidency of South Africa. Mandela had a fierce sense of right and wrong, but a determination to put the past behind and build a new and safe South Africa.

And Ariel Sharon wanted the same. He fought for a secure Israel for all its citizens, without fear and threat from outside or inside, and Sharon made remarkable gestures in aiming for peace with surrounding countries. Israel is precariously positioned on the edge of the Middle East and Sharon knew what it would take to make the whole region safe and peaceful. But Sharon's other tactic of fighting fire with fire was completely at odds with Mandela's 'truth and reconciliation' approach.

Why is one man right and the other wrong? Each left a legacy ensuring his country's survival and strength under the most difficult of circumstances. Should not each man be remembered with equal dignity?

Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, 1918 – 2013

Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel, 1928 – 2014

This is an opinion-based article designed to provoke debate, discussion and further inquiry amongst your students:

Suggested follow-up activities for discussion and debate, research and inquiry:

- Who would you invite to your imaginary dinner party – dead or living? Give your reasons. Could you foresee any potential clash of personalities? Who would you choose not to seat next to another guest? What would you feed them without offending them?
- What makes a good world leader? What attributes and characteristics should a good leader have? Investigate using one current leader as an example (maybe look at leadership in school, in the community or nationally).
- Using a variety of news and information sources, read further into the lives of Nelson Mandela and Ariel Sharon and write an obituary for one of them – either in a positive light or in a negative one.
- Answer the two questions in the last paragraph.