All About Me!

While it is disappointing that we are not able to have our usual transition days with you this year, we'd like to give you a chance to tell us all about yourself in another way.

Here we have put together a number of tasks that will help us get to know you and can be used to help you get to know one another when you join us at Neatherd. Bring your work with you on your first day as your form tutor will be looking forward to seeing it and sharing it in form time.

Autobiography

An autobiography is a story of a person's life, or a part of their life, which they write themselves. Many autobiographies start with the writer sharing some important memories from their childhood.

Reading

Read this extract from the autobiography of Nelson Mandela. In this section, he describes his childhood and explains how he got his name.

My mother presided over three rondavels at Qunu which, as I remember, were always filled with the babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practised by Europeans. We have no half-brothers or halfsisters. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother.

Of my mother's three huts, one was used for cooking, one for sleeping and one for storage. In the hut in which we slept, there was no furniture.

We slept on mats and sat on the ground. I did not discover pillows until I went away to school. The stove on which my mother cooked was a three-legged iron pot that rested on a grate over a hole in the ground. Everything we ate we grew and made ourselves. My mother planted and harvested her own mealies. After harvesting the mealies, the woman ground the kernels between two stones. A portion of this was made into bread, while the rest was dried and stored in pots. Unlike mealies, which were sometimes in short supply, milk from our cows and goats was always plentiful.

From an early age, I spent most of my free time in the veld playing and fighting with the other boys of the village. A boy who remained at home tied to his mother's apron strings was regarded as a sissy. At night, I shared my food and blanket with these same boys. I was no more than five when I became a herd-boy, looking after sheep and calves in the fields. I discovered the almost mystical attachment that the Xhosa have for cattle, not only as a source of food and wealth, but as a blessing from God and a source of happiness. It was in the fields that I learned how to knock birds out of the sky with a slingshot, to gather wild honey and fruits and edible roots, to drink warm, sweet milk straight from the udder of a cow, to swim in the clear, cold streams, and to catch fish with twine and sharpened bits of wire. I learned to stick-fight - essential knowledge to any rural African boy - and became adept at its various techniques, parrying blows, feinting in one direction, striking in another, breaking away from an opponent with quick footwork. From these days I date my love of the veld, of open spaces, the simple beauties of nature, the clean line of the horizon.

Usually the boys played among themselves, but we sometimes allowed our sisters to join us. Boys and girls would play games like ndize (hide-and-seek) and icekwa (touch and run). But the game I most enjoyed

playing with the girls was what we called khetha, or choose-the-one-you-like. This was not so much an organised game, but a spur-of-the-moment sport that took place when we accosted a group of girls our own age and demanded that each select the boy she loved.

Our rules dictated that the girl's choice be respected and once she had chosen her favourite, she was free to continue on her journey escorted by the lucky boy she loved. But the girls were far cleverer than us and would often confer among themselves and choose one boy, usually the plainest fellow, and then tease him all the way home.

The most popular game for boys was thinti, and like most boys' games it was a youthful approximation of war. Two sticks, used as targets, would be driven firmly into the ground in an upright position about one hundred feet apart. The goal of the game was for each team to hurl sticks at the opposing target and knock it down.

We each defended our own target and attempted to prevent the other side from retrieving the sticks that had been thrown. As we grew older, we organised matches against boys from neighbouring villages, and those who distinguished themselves in these battles were greatly admired.

After games such as these, I would return to my mother's kraal where she was preparing supper. Whereas my father once told stories of historic battles and heroic Xhosa warriors, my mother would enchant us with Xhosa legends and fables that had come down from numberless generations. These tales stimulated my childish imagination, and usually contained some moral lesson. I recall one story my mother told us about a traveller who was approached by an old woman with terrible cataracts on her eyes. The woman asked the traveller for help, and the man averted his eyes. Then another man came along and was approached by the old woman. She asked him to clean her eyes, and even though he found the task unpleasant, he did as she asked.

Then, miraculously, the scales fell from the old woman's eyes and she became young and beautiful. The man married her and became wealthy. It is a simple tale, but its message is an enduring one: virtue and generosity will be rewarded in ways that one cannot know.

On the first day of school, my teacher gave each of us an English name and said that from then on that was the name we would answer to in school. This was the custom among Africans in those days and was undoubtedly due to the British bias of our education.

That day the teacher told me that my new name was Nelson. Why this particular name was bestowed on me I have no idea. Perhaps it had something to do with the great British sea captain Lord Nelson, but that would only be a guess.

What do we learn about Nelson Mandella's childhood from this part of his autobiography?

Do we get any clues about his personality from the things he tells us?

Can you spot any descriptive details he has included to help the reader imagine his life?

Writing

Now try writing part of your own autobiography. Don't worry; it doesn't have to be as long as this section from Nelson Mandela's!

You could write about an important moment in your childhood, something you remember clearly. It could be your first day at school, a family holiday or outing, the birth of a brother or sister or getting a pet.

Alternatively, you could copy Nelson Mandela's approach and describe your childhood – where you lived, who you spent time with, what food you ate, what games you played and so on.

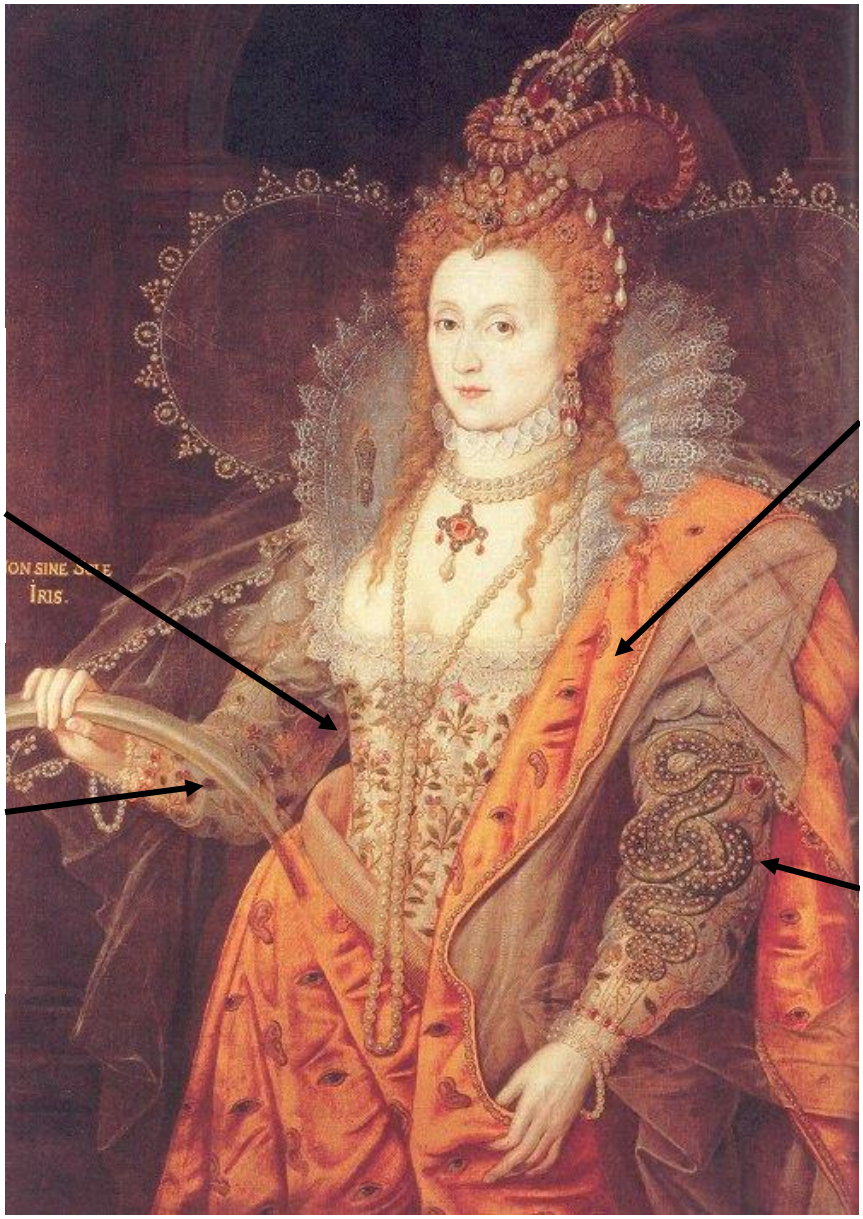
Self-portrait

A portrait is a painting or drawing of someone. A self-portrait is a painting or drawing of yourself.

In the past, portraits were an important way for kings and queens to communicate with their people. Many people couldn't read, so the king or queen would share important messages about themselves through details in their portrait.

Look closely at this portrait of Queen Elizabeth I who ruled England from 1558 to 1603.

English wild flowers on her dress remind people she is a true Englishwoman and represent her love for her country.



Eyes and ears on her dress symbolise that she sees and hears everything that happens in her kingdom.

She is holding a rainbow to represent peace, showing she will keep peace in her country.

The snake represents intelligence. It is holding a ruby heart in its mouth to show that she rules using her head and not her heart.

Self-portrait – your turn

Create your own self-portrait. Try to include some details that give information or clues about your personality. You could include these details in your clothes, things you are holding, or in the background.

Heroes

Our heroes can shape the person we become. Think about someone you admire. What is it that you look up to in this person? In what ways do you hope to be like them?

Create a fact file on someone you admire. They could be a sportsperson, a musician, an artist, actor, writer, scientist, inventor or engineer. Or, they could be someone closer to home: a member of your family or a person you know.

A fact file gathers together all the key information on a person or a topic. You could include:

- Their date of birth
- Details about their childhood
- Their achievements
- What they stand for or believe in
- A quote – something they said
- A picture of them

Plus anything else you think is important or interesting about them.

A fact file is usually laid out with clear sections for the different information. It could look like this:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Name:</td><td rowspan="3">Picture</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Date of birth:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Childhood:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Achievements:</td><td colspan="2">Beliefs and ideals:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Quote:</td></tr>
</table>

Creative writing

You have the opportunity to have your writing published in a Neatherd creative writing book!

Write a short story with the title ‘New Beginnings’. You can use the pictures on the next page to inspire your story, and you can use one of the story starters if you like.

For the chance to have your writing published, give your story to Mrs Gill in the school library by 20th September.

Story starters

You don’t have to use one of these, but you can do if you like. They link to the pictures on the next page.

- What was behind that door would change my life forever.
- Sunrise meant a new day, a new beginning.
- Impossible. It couldn’t be true.
- Breathing heavily, I ran across the ground.
- Gasping, panicking, panting, …
- I couldn’t wait for the New Year to begin
- Slowly, I opened my eyes and saw…
- Breaking, reaching through the earth…
- School gates loomed above me like …
- Change. I can’t escape it.
- Pushing the peeling door open, I heard a loud screech.

Pictures

Try using one of these to inspire your story. Remember, the story should be about new beginnings.