Anglican priest Desmond Mpilo Tutu became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches in 1979. He spoke strongly against the apartheid and in 1984 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. In 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest position in the Anglican Church in Southern Africa. In 1989 he led a march to a whites-only beach, where he and supporters were chased off with whips.

In 1994, after the end of Apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela, Tutu was appointed as Chairman of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to investigate apartheid-era crimes. This policy of forgiveness and reconciliation has become an international example of conflict resolution, and a trusted method of post-conflict reconstruction. He continues to pursue an active international ministry for peace.

Below are extracts from an interview Desmond Tutu gave to the Academy of Achievement in 2007 and has given the Global Campaign for Education permission to use in the Big Read.

**Anglican priest Desmond Mpilo Tutu became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches in 1979. He spoke strongly against the apartheid and in 1984 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. In 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest position in the Anglican Church in Southern Africa. In 1989 he led a march to a whites-only beach, where he and supporters were chased off with whips.**

In 1994, after the end of Apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela, Tutu was appointed as Chairman of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to investigate apartheid-era crimes. This policy of forgiveness and reconciliation has become an international example of conflict resolution, and a trusted method of post-conflict reconstruction. He continues to pursue an active international ministry for peace.

Below are extracts from an interview Desmond Tutu gave to the Academy of Achievement in 2007 and has given the Global Campaign for Education permission to use in the Big Read.

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

When you were a boy in Klerksdorp (small town in South Africa), what was your childhood like, and what experiences had a large influence on you?

My childhood in Klerksdorp? Well, like any other black child, we lived in a ghetto, and yet, it wasn’t as if you went around feeling sorry for yourself. We knew that we were deprived. That life wasn’t the same as for white kids, but it was as full a life as you could make it. We made cars for ourselves with wire!

My father was a school master and principal of the primary /elementary school in which I started. My mother was not very educated. I had, and still have two sisters. My brothers died in infancy so I was the only boy in the family and to some extent perhaps a little bit spoiled.

Was there any book that you read growing up that had the most effect on you?

One of the things that my father did was to let me read comics. People used to say that’s bad because it spoils your English but, in fact, letting me read - I devoured all kinds of comics - fed my love for English and my love for reading but I suppose if he had been firm I might not have developed this deep love for reading and for English, which stood me in good stead when I later went into hospital for 20 months. I had something to do.

We didn’t have too many books but my father was keen that one read things like Aesop’s Fables and Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare. I didn’t read the originals...
but I read these stories that describe what Shakespeare was saying in the plays. And then he had the encyclopedia and it was fun just paging through. I recall one occasion in class - our teacher asking whether any one of us knew what they called those things in Holland for stopping the water. And it just happened that I had been looking through these books that my father had and it looked like I was really smart because I put up my hand and I said, "Dykes." And the teacher didn't know what to do. He really wanted to put me on a pedestal for having been able to know this particular thing.

**Was there one teacher in particular you remember?**

Ultimately, it's a man who was teaching us English Literature in what we call matriculation, the last 2 years of high school. He really was quite extraordinary. When he spoke of a Shakespearean play, you almost thought that he grew up with Shakespeare! He was very good, yes. A black guy, who was fantastic and gave us a deep love for literature.

**Do you remember his name?**

Yes. Geoff Mamabolo. He died. He was fantastic, fantastic. But I had other teachers. If you gave me five opportunities, I would give you five good teachers who were incredible. These were good teachers who were dedicated despite the fact that we lived a segregated life and when you went to town where the whites lived you saw their schools much, much better equipped and with better grounds. My father bought me a bicycle and I was about the only kid in the ghetto who had a bicycle and he would send me into town. And what was extraordinary was that frequently I would see black kids scavenging in the dust bins of the white schools where they picked out perfectly okay apples and fruit. White kids were being provided with government school feeding, but most of the time they didn't eat it. They preferred what their mommies gave them and so they would dump the whole fruit into the dust bin and these kids coming from a township who needed free meals didn't get them. And so it started registering without me being aware that they were registering that these were extraordinary inconsistencies in our lives.

**When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?**

I know that for a very long time my consuming passion, which was confirmed when I contracted TB when I was about 12 or so, was that I wanted to be a physician. I wanted to be a physician so that I can find a cure for the scourge and in fact, I was admitted to medical school. If we had had the funds maybe today I would have been a physician. As it turned out, I was not able to take up my place at medical school.
and instead went to Teacher Training College because the government was giving scholarships for people who wanted to become teachers.

I became a teacher and I haven’t regretted that. It was wonderful because I thought back to my own teachers and what they had meant for me. And really trying to get kids who in so many other aspects of life were being told that they didn’t really count to become outstanding at whatever they wanted within reason was humbling. I went back to teach at my alma mater, and the conditions would shock many people. I was teaching English and we had classes with an average number of 80 students in a class. Now imagine if you will, a language class where kids must be given a great deal of exercises, marking all of those 80. And no-one ever taught just one class. I remember I taught four classes, two of which were about 80 each and the other two about 40 each. There was no-one to complain to about the size of the classes because the government’s position was that ‘the natives are a nuisance and the least you can do for them, the least you can get away with the better.’ Our educational system was the pits. It was just the sheer determination of the people.

When I started teaching, I tried to be what my teachers had been to me to these kids seeking to instill in them a pride in themselves and in what they were doing. A pride that said they may define you as so and so but you aren’t that. Make sure you prove them wrong by becoming what the potential in you says you can become. For four years I taught English and History and it was fun when you got kids beginning to see the interconnectedness of things.

But then government decided that they were going to have something called Bantu education, an education specifically designed for blacks, and they made no bones about the fact that it was designed as education for perpetual serfdom. Dr. Verwoerd said, "Why do you have to teach blacks mathematics? What are they going to do with mathematics? You must teach them enough English and Afrikaans, the other white language as it were, for them to be able to understand instructions given to them by their white employers." He said that. I mean, unabashedly that was the purpose for him of education. It was then I said, "No, I’m sorry. I can’t -- I can’t collaborate with such a travesty, but I didn’t have too many alternatives, too many options to choose from.

In May of 1976 you wrote a letter to the Prime Minister warning of a building tension among black South African youth over the government imposed Bantu education. What was its significance leading up to the June 16th, 1976 riots?

"I wrote the letter to the Prime Minister and told him that I was scared. I was scared because the mood in the townships was frightening. If they didn’t do
something to make our people believe that they cared about our concerns I feared that we were going to have an eruption.

I sent off the letter. I probably made a technical mistake by giving it to a journalist before hearing from the Prime Minister because this journalist was working for a Sunday newspaper and gave it enormous press, and I think quite rightly the Prime Minister was annoyed that I had not given him the opportunity but never mind. He, the Prime Minister, dismissed my letter contemptuously. I wrote to him in May of 1976. I said, "I have a nightmarish fear that there was going to be an explosion if they didn't do anything." Well, they didn't do anything and a month later the Soweto happened.

The South African government for some odd reason had ignored my letter where I warned. I didn't have any sort of premonition, although I felt there was something in the air, but when it happened, when June the 16th happened, 1976, it caught most of us really by surprise. We hadn't expected that our young people would have had the courage. See, Bantu education had hoped that it was going to turn them into docile creatures, kowtowing to the white person, and not being able to say "boo" to a goose kind of thing, you know, and it was an amazing event when these school kids came out and said they were refusing to be taught in the medium of Afrikaans. That was -- that was really symbolic of all of the oppression. Afrikaans was the language they felt of the oppressor, and protesting against Afrikaans was really protesting against the whole system of injustice and oppression where black people's dignity was rubbed in the dust and trodden underfoot callously, and South Africa never became the same -- we knew it was not going ever to be the same again, and these young people were amazing. They really were amazing.

What was it about these kids that makes you use the word "amazing?"

I recall that on one or two occasions, I spoke to some of them and said, "You know, are you aware that if you continue to behave in this way, they will turn their dogs on you, they will whip you, they may detain you without trial, they will torture you in their jails, and they may even kill you?," and it was almost like bravado on the part of these kids because almost all of them said, "So what. It doesn't matter if that happens to me, as long as it contributes to our struggle for freedom," and I think 1994, when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president, vindicated them. It was the vindication of those 1977 remarkable kids.