



Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai

Claire A. Nivola

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Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Green Belt Movement, grew up in the highlands of Kenya, where fig trees cloaked the hills, fish filled the streams, and the people tended their bountiful gardens. But over many years, as more and more land was cleared, Kenya was transformed. When Wangari returned home from college in America, she found the village gardens dry, the people malnourished, and the trees gone. How could she alone bring back the trees and restore the gardens and the people?

Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, says: "Wangari Maathai's epic story has never been told better- everyone who reads this book will want to plant a tree!"

With glowing watercolor illustrations and lyrical prose, Claire Nivola tells the remarkable story of one woman's effort to change the fate of her land by teaching many to care for it. An author's note provides further information about Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement. In keeping with the theme of the story, the book is printed on recycled paper.

Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai Details

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Author : Claire A. Nivola

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Susan says

The story of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya which focuses on environmental issues. This book describes the dramatic change undergone by Kenya in the first decade of independence from British rule and the pending environmental disaster created as farmers abandoned traditional methods of farming, cut down all the trees, and enlarged their holdings in order to grow more cash crops. When Wangari Maathai returned to Kenya from college in the United States and saw the looming disaster, she founded a movement to have farmers plant trees and return to traditional methods of farming for sustenance crops for their families. As the movement grew, it embraced an educational mission aimed at keeping the citizenry informed and holding the government accountable. This picture book biography focuses on Wangari Maathai's recognition of change, her belief she could do something to help and her work to educate women to plant trees and tend traditional gardens to feed their families.

CH_Kenya Walker says

Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Green Belt Movement, grew up in the highlands of Kenya, where fig trees cloaked the hills, fish filled the streams, and the people tended their bountiful gardens. But over many years, as more and more land was cleared, Kenya was transformed. When Wangari returned home from college in America, she found the village gardens dry, the people malnourished, and the trees gone. She set about bringing the trees back and restoring the gardens and the people. This book would be a wonderful edition to any library to share the beauty and wealth of this country. The glowing watercolor illustrations add to the the beauty of this story and the lyrical prose of Claire Nivola help tells the remarkable story of one woman's effort to change the fate of her land by teaching many to care for it.

Peacegal says

This would be a fine addition to a unit on environmentalism, gardening, Africa, or strong women leaders. We read the true story of Wangari Maathai, who helped her Kenyan village replant trees and practice resource conservation after bad planning resulted in arid, unusable lands.

Sara Ullery says

- This book is beautifully illustrated and tells the story about one woman's desire to educate those around her to care for their land. The land was once lush, but the land was being cleared, and people did not know how to take care of it. Once this woman teaches them how to tend to the land, it may begin to be beautiful once again.
- Teachers may use this for English, Geography, History, Biology

- Grades K-3
 - Individual students may read this book then write a summary on the events in the story.
 - Small groups may read this book together and identify the problems and solutions told in the story.
 - A whole class may use this book as a prompt to discuss the importance of taking care of our land. The last effects it has if we do not, and the simple ways we can all help,
 - This book is nonfiction
 - It is available on Ebook, libraries
-

Tracy says

Claire Nivola's *Planting the Trees of Kenya* tells the story of Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai and her quest to bring back the trees of Kenya. This beautifully illustrated picture book follows Maathai's story from her childhood in Kenya, to her education in the United States, and the founding of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya in 1977. In 2004, Maathai was the first woman from Africa to win a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in teaching Kenyan women to plant trees and reclaim their land. In doing so, Maathai empowered Kenyan's to take charge of their environment and of their futures. *Planting the Trees of Kenya* won the Jane Addams Book Award for Younger Children in 2009. At the end of the book Nivola includes an author's note giving more background information on Wangari Maathai. This book is suitable for grades 1-6 and would work well in a unit on biographies, biology or science (since it stresses the importance of trees and plants to keep the soil healthy and talks about how to plant trees) or a study of Africa.

Lisa Vegan says

This is a gem of a book. The illustrations made me so happy and this non-fiction book is truly inspirational.

I love this book's illustrations. I have a special fondness for intricate drawings of tiny (on the page) plant life. The trees and crops shown here are so beautiful, as are the people, the dog, the whole classroom that's shown, and I was enchanted on almost every page. I could be happy viewing over and over those miniature plants and trees. Just lovely!

The true story is just wonderful, and important. It's about Wangari Maathai (winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize) and the Green Belt movement she started in 1977 in Kenya. When she observed that Kenya's land and its people's health was deteriorating, she organized and got people to plant trees and helped them once again live off the land. There have been extraordinary results over the last thirty plus years, and trees continue to be planted, and additional programs to help the people and land have been implemented. Wangari Maathai is a pioneer. She's also courageous; she's now a member of the Kenyan government, but in earlier years, she was in danger during some of her protests. I want to learn more about this woman.

I read this for the March Picture-Books Club at the Children's Books group. There were six books with the theme "outstanding women" and this might be my favorite of the six. Interestingly, this book would also fit perfectly with April's probable theme "environmental/nature" but I'm happy to have read it with the other "outstanding women" books.

Now, I need to go back and peruse the illustrations again. This is a book that I'd love to own.

I'm going to look for more books by this author illustrator.

Q_Barb says

Beautifully illustrated, with simple text in picture book format that tells how Wangari, the first woman from Africa to receive the Nobel Peace Prize came to found the Green Belt Movement in 1977 in her native Kenya. When she left for college in America, her country was lush with trees, clear streams and small family gardens and livestock. When she returned in 1966, three years after Kenya gained its independence from Britain, the landscape was considerably different. Trees had been cleared for commercial farms, and firewood, streams and rivers had become dirty with the runoff of dry land and people no longer ate off the food from their gardens but bought commercial food instead. Alarmed, she began urging the women to plant trees using the seedlings from existing trees. It was a difficult task, just because of the water alone, which had to be carried from far away to water the seedlings. As a result not only were more than thousands of trees planted, the work empowered the people to hold their government accountable and the movement now has close to 100,000 members. The book deals simply with the plantings and how it changed things for Kenya. The author's note offers more information about her. This book could be used as a companion to several other picture books about Wangari, including "Seeds of Change" by Jen Cullerton Johnson, Wangari's Tree of Peace, by Jeannette Winter. A classroom could be divided into groups with each group reading one of the books and then reporting, comparing and contrasting information in the books, their writing styles and illustrations. Or it could be combined with other picture books about changes made by individuals in foreign countries, such as One Hen". Or using "Paths of Peace" a classroom could study the different people in that book, including Maathai. Or this could be part of a unit on Africa, that could include the environment, politics, music, art, economy, etc.

Miriam says

Planting the Trees of Kenya is an account for young readers of the life and work of Wangari Maathai, Founder of the Green Belt Movement. Nivola explains the environmental issues in a simple, non-politicized manner, focusing on the relationship between people and local ecology and the virtues that enabled Maathai and other Kenyan women to restore the forests: hard work, independence, patience, determination. The story also encourages readers to think about ways they can make a difference on a local level rather than waiting for the government or international aid organizations to come save them.

I also liked Nivola's peaceful and detailed illustrations.

Jo Ann says

I read this short children's book 3 years ago when it came out, but it has not been added to my list until today. Wangari Maathai was a personal hero of mine...she died yesterday in Kenya after a long battle with ovarian cancer. I was a freshman when Wangari was a senior at the small Catholic college we attended in Atchison, Kansas. When she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, I was excited and proud! She was beautiful, inside and out, and this little book is a true gem...it is only a very simple and brief story about Wangari's efforts to replenish the trees of Kenya that had been stripped during her time in the 60's in the U.S. when she was attending college. The illustrations are absolutely lovely - just gorgeous! If I could, I'd frame some of

them! Today, in sadness, I re-read this little book in memory of a woman who truly changed her world!

Susan says

This book made me cry but in a good way.

What a beautiful story, made more so because it is one based on the true life of Wangari Maathai. There are so many layers to this book, text and illustrations, I think you could read it repeatedly and get something new from it every time.

The world needs more people like this. The world needs more books like this. What a joy to read this story. What a joy to learn that people are planting trees and caring for the world this way, even when the odds were against them, and even when things do not always work out as planned.

Andee says

A more detailed book for upper elementary about the life of Wangari Maathai.

Crystal says

The story is a wonderful story that I think needs to be shared. I had no idea who Wangari Maathai was before reading this book. The book tells Wangari's story of growing up in Kenya as a wonderful experience where her community honored their land and tree diversity. It then flashes forward to Wangari attending college in America at Benedictine College only to return to Kenya and find her country had vastly changed. Wangari began a tree planting campaign and won a Nobel Peace Prize for her work.

The story is beautiful, but the book is not so much. The illustrations are gorgeous, but add no additional information or teach anything to young readers. They simply represent the text.

I really disliked how prevalent the themes of "women not complaining" and self-agency were. I also disliked how Wangari was depicted as this hero for bringing her strong christian education in America to Kenya and improving their conditions single-handedly.

I think it is very dangerous to ridicule the expression of unhappiness of Kenyan citizens for the condition of their land after they were colonized and their government's attempt to enter into the world trade market and handle their growing population once the colonization ended. People should be allowed to be angry about injustices inflicted upon them and express that anger. This book completely disregards that the citizens were being used by the British for decades and it was not their fault. It also seems as if the author is glorifying colonization by painting Wangari's childhood as perfect even though Kenyans were basically used as laborers for the British plantations.

I think this story needs to be told, I just do not like how this book tells it. Young people should learn to value the earth and all living things. Young people should learn that they have power as individuals, that they can make an impact in their community and even the world. Young people should also learn that it is okay to

hold others accountable for their wrongs.

This book could be used in a classroom. I would just be sure to structure it so that students do not receive the wrong message.

Tricia Pham says

This book is the story of a girl who grew up in Kenya with lush land full of plants and trees, and her return to Kenya and the changes she makes. Her name is Wangari Maathai and she has returned home after living in America to attend college. She comes back to find that the land is dry, her people are malnourished and the land is cleared of most of the trees. She decides that she is going to make a change and begin the Greenbelt Movement by planting trees. She does this so that the health of her village will grow better, and the land will be healthier. She ends up succeeding, and she invites tons of people to join her in planting trees, and they do. In the end, the land ends up gaining its wealth back and the village its health.

I can see myself reading to kids about this book while teaching them the concept and reasons behind gardening. In elementary school students will start gardening and I think this would be a great book to compliment that. The pictures are also amazing, something I can see readers of all ages enjoying.

Amber says

I enjoyed this picture book biography. I liked the illustrations, and the text is informative. Wangari Maathai's story is interesting. I knew basically nothing about Kenya. There are a few minor discussion points, nothing that's dwelt on. It mentions in the extra biographical info at the end that there's a problem with "ever-expanding population dependent on ever-shrinking natural resources," just in passing. It also mentions in the main text that the fig tree was sacred, meaning that it was to the people of Kenya, but these might be things to talk about. Overall an enjoyable read, and I appreciate the messages about perseverance and how one person can make a positive difference.

Kathryn says

This is the a beautiful and inspiring story of Kenyan Wangari Maathai, the first woman from Africa to receive the Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Green Belt Movement. But, first and foremost, Wangari loves trees, nature, and the harmony that sings when humans work in rhythm with their environment--and this love, which began in her childhood, is what inspired her in everything else. I think this story is so powerful not only because it shows us a truly outstanding woman--but it shows how we can each be part of something outstanding--life is always giving us opportunities to shine. When Wangari saw that the people who had once loved the land had "forgotten to care for the land that fed them" she saw how the land could not longer take care of them and this lead to all sorts of poverty and illness. People wanted to blame others, especially the government, but Wangari said, "Think of what we ourselves are doing... when we see that we are part of the problem, we can become part of the solution." I love that the Green Belt Movement began as a grassroots movement with "everyday women" planting trees and making a difference, not waiting for Big Important Government (or Big Important Men) to take care of it for them. I think this book's message is as much about personal responsibility as it is about environmentalism. The illustrations by turns convey the beauty and the fragility of nature, the beautiful unspoilt landscape, the ugly ruination of overharvesting, and

the eventual blossoming of hope and renewal.

I would have liked a bit more information on why Wangari chose to study abroad and return to Kenya. Had she left with the intention of building her knowledge base to do something progressive in Kenya? Had she always intended to return? It just seemed that she was so happy and content in her youth, then suddenly she was off in America. A little more information here could have really rounded out her character (if not in the story itself then at least in the author's note).

I was also really shocked and fascinated to learn that Kenya began to "fall apart" AFTER it gained its independence from Britain in 1963. In my ignorance, I would have guessed that the years following their long-awaited independence would have been a time of celebration and progress; not that there wouldn't be lots of adjustments and some difficult ones at that, but I was surprised that, rather than an unrestrained blossoming of the native culture there was, "more poverty than before, more malnutrition, more hunger, and more unemployment." The author's note indicates this was due to the population crisis, and I'm sure that had much to do with it, but I am just curious about the political changes, too.

Overall, this is a wonderful book and it inspired me to learn more about Wangari.
