

Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa

By Jeanette Winter
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Summary

This book tells the story of Wangari Maathai, who was born and raised “in the shadow of Mount Kenya.” She excels at school and wins a scholarship to study in the United States. When she returned to Kenya, she was shocked by the changes in her homeland—the forest had been cut down to make way for development, leading the lives of the local people—especially the women—even more difficult. Wangari began a reforestation project; other women became involved and, despite the government’s imprisoning Wangari, 30 million trees were planted across Kenya. In 2004, Wangari won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her achievements.

Prereading Activity

Read the title and subtitle of the book to students and show them the front of the dust jacket. Ask: What is the person in the picture doing? (*She is planting something, probably a tree.*) Where do you think she is planting the tree? (*In front of a mountain, probably in Africa.*) Read the quote from Wangari Maathai on the back of the dust jacket: “People are fighting over water, over food...we plant the seeds of peace.” What do you think this means? (*When people don’t have the basics they need, like food and water, they get into fights. Planting trees will help them get food and water. Then they won’t fight.*) With students, develop a definition of the word *peace*; one definition might be freedom from fighting and disagreements.

Discussion Questions

- ⇒ Where did Wangari live?
- ⇒ Why was the forest important to Wangari and her family?
- ⇒ What happened when Wangari came back to Kenya after studying in the United States? How do you think she felt about what she saw?
- ⇒ What did Wangari decide to do about the problems she saw? Why do you think she called the trees the “seeds of hope”? Is hope important?
- ⇒ Do you think Wangari was brave? Why or why not?
- ⇒ How did Wangari’s project help the people of Kenya?

Follow-up Activity

Explain to students that Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. The committee that gives the award said, “Peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment.” Talk with students about how actions like saving the environment or giving people hope can promote peace. Ask students to draw a picture or present a skit showing an action they can take to promote peace in their school or community.