



Classroom Guide for
SEEDS OF CHANGE: Planting
a Path to Peace

by **Jen Cullerton Johnson**
Illustrated by **Sonia Lynn Sadler**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 1-6

Guided Reading Level: R

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Environmental Protection and Activism, Women's Rights, Farming, Education, Science Pioneers, Nobel Peace Prize, Africa

Synopsis

Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace is a biography of Wangari Maathai, who in 2004 became the first African woman and the first environmentalist to win a Nobel Peace Prize. Growing up in Kenya, Wangari was taught by her mother to respect nature. Although most Kenyan girls at the time were not educated, Wangari, curious and hardworking, was allowed to go to school. She excelled at science and went on to study in the United States. After returning home, Wangari blazed a trail across Kenya, using her knowledge and compassion to promote the rights of her countrywomen and to help save the land, one tree at a time.

Background

Wangari Maathai's story is not without its share of conflict. Her tree planting drew the attention of big businesses that wanted to keep control of the Kenyan land. After being arrested due to the schemes of a few corrupt businessmen, Wangari met other women in jail and learned of their struggles. After her release, Wangari began working to save the environment and to protect the rights of women as well. A more extensive biography of Wangari Maathai can be found on the [Nobel Prize website](#).

Every year since 1901 the Nobel Prize has been awarded for achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace. The Nobel Prize is an international award administered by the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm, Sweden. Each prize consists of a medal, diploma, and cash award. The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded for work in a wide range of fields, each time to “the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

Teaching Tip

Seeds of Change is a timely read aloud to feature during Women's History Month (March), or during April, when Earth Day and Arbor Day are celebrated. This book may also be used to introduce a unit on earth sciences, conservation, and preserving the environment.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Why are trees important to the environment? Have you ever planted a tree? Tell us about it.
2. Have you ever helped another person or group of people? Why/how did you help?
3. Where is Africa? Where is Kenya? (Provide a map or globe to illustrate.)
4. Tell me what you know about the Nobel Peace Prize. Do you know of anyone who has won the prize? (You may wish to introduce and talk about a few other recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize.)
5. Have you heard the term “women's rights”? What do you think it means? What are some ways we make sure there is equality between men and women?

Exploring the Book

Examine the book cover illustration with students. Read the title aloud and ask students to talk about what they think the title means. Write students' responses on the chalkboard. Then elicit students' ideas as to what the story is about.

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: cover, title page, illustrations, afterword, dedications, author's sources and quotation sources.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to:

- find out what seeds of change are.
- uncover qualities or attributes that Wangari Maathai possessed which qualified her to be a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

VOCABULARY

On the chalkboard, provide students with a list of words from the story which may be new or unfamiliar. Have each student choose two or three words to look up and find out the meaning. Then give students cut outs of construction paper leaves on which to write their words on one side and the definitions on the other side. Hang the leaves on the bulletin board, word side showing, and let volunteers take turns choosing a leaf, reading the word and definition, and then using the word in a sentence.

AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. What was Wangari like as a child? How was she the same as other children of her village? How was she different?
2. How was Wangari influenced by her parents and their belief in education?
3. Why did Wangari go to the United States for college? What did she study?
4. What did Wangari learn and discover in the United States? How did these things affect what she did after she completed her studies?
5. What did Wangari encounter when she returned to Kenya?
6. How did Wangari help the women of Kenya at first?
7. Why was planting trees so important to Wangari? What long-term effects did the work of the women have on the people in the villages and towns of Kenya?
8. What kind of opposition did Wangari encounter? What are some examples that show women were treated differently? How did Wangari respond?
9. What did Wangari do while she was in jail?
10. Why did Wangari start to travel after she was released from jail? What did she hope to accomplish? Was she successful?
11. Why was Wangari Maathai qualified to win a Nobel Peace Prize?
12. What did Wangari say and do at the Nobel Peace ceremony? What do you think she hoped to accomplish with her words and actions?

13. How would you describe Wangari to your friends and family if you had to introduce her to them?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for examples from the book that illustrate Wangari's character traits.
- The **Illustrator** might use information in the story and additional research to create a Green Belt Movement poster or chart showing the steps for planting tree seedlings.
- The **Connector** might find out about other environmentalists working in Africa.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find more information about Wangari Maathai.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, in oral discussion, or in written form.

1. Do you think Wangari is a brave person? Why? Was she scared of anything when she was younger? If so, what? How did she cope with her fear?
2. Talk about what drove Wangari to help the environment and the women of Kenya. Do you think she is a hero? Why or why not?
3. In 2004, Wangari Maathai won one of the most important prizes in the world, a Nobel Peace Prize. How do you think she felt when she won? What do you think are the effects of her having won this prize?
4. Do you know anyone who has attributes or qualities similar to those of Wangari Maathai? Tell us about this person. Where do you think these attributes and qualities come from?
5. How does this book affect your thinking about the environment and the way people can help preserve and restore places that are in danger?

6. If you could choose one thing to change about the world, what would it be? How would you go about creating the change?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Let students work in small groups to write one-act plays based on various scenes in the story. If necessary, review with students the mechanics of play writing.
2. Have students research other Nobel Peace Prize winners. Let each student choose her or his favorite winner and write a short essay describing why the person deserved the award and why the person is the student's favorite winner.
3. Pretend you are a reporter assigned to interview Wangari Maathai after she is released from jail. Write a list of questions you would ask in the interview.
4. This book has won numerous awards. (You can find a list of them [here](#) or at the end of this guide.) Make a list of reasons why you might give this book an award. Then use these reasons to write a persuasive paragraph explaining why an organization should honor the book.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Assign each English language learner to a partner who is a strong English speaker and reader. Have partners read the pages and discuss the illustrations together.
2. Teach ELL students simple phrases such as "I don't know that word." "I have a question." "Speak more slowly." "Please repeat that sentence." Encourage ELL students to use these phrases to communicate their needs while reading.
3. Read aloud a sentence from the book and have students read it aloud after you, pointing to each word as they speak.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. Have students research more about the Nobel Prizes, when and why they started, where they are awarded, and the criterion for winning. Have students write a brief report based on their findings.
2. Using maps of Kenya and the world, have students identify the places where Wangari Maathai studied, traveled, and worked. You may wish to research places not mentioned in the book to give students more to find and identify.
3. Interested students might do research in the library and online to learn more about Wangari Maathai. Encourage students to include information about the work Wangari has done since 2004, when she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Social Studies/Science

Have students find out more about the Green Belt Movement, which works for human rights and environmental protection. Create a list of the major objectives for each part of the movement, then list some specific accomplishments of the movement from projects around the world.

Science

1. Wangari Maathai studied biology and chemistry, and her work relates to botany (plant biology) as well. Have students research these different branches of science and create a chart showing the main focus of each. Then encourage students to discuss how each branch of science plays a role in Wangari's work as an environmentalist.
2. If your city, town, or school community has a tree planting program, find out if there are ways for students to get involved.

Music

Bring in recordings of both traditional and popular Kenyan music. After listening to a few selections, have a discussion about how the music makes students feel, any instruments they recognize, and so on.

Art

The illustrations for *Seeds of Change* were created using a scratchboard technique. Students may enjoy trying a variation of this technique, called crayon etching, for their own illustrations. Special scratchboard paper can be colored with crayons, then the entire sheet is painted black with India ink. When the ink is dried, it

can be etched/scratched off with a stylus or art knife, exposing the colors underneath. Note: care should be taken when using the sharp etching tool.

Drama

If students created one-act plays based on the story, give them some time to rehearse and perform their plays.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Cullerton Johnson is a writer, an educator, and an environmentalist with masters degrees in nonfiction writing and curriculum development. She has taught in countries all over the world and now teaches at an inner-city elementary school in Chicago, where she also conducts writing workshops. She is inspired by Wangari Maathai's dedication to women and the environment. *Seeds of Change* is her first picture book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sonia Lynn Sadler is an illustrator and a fine artist. Growing up she traveled to many countries and lived in five different states. Currently splitting her time between Maryland and New Jersey, Sadler focuses on depicting the cultures, lives, and stories of peoples of African descent. Her unique style employs a variety of techniques and mediums—from watercolor to scratchboard—and draws inspiration from quilts.

Awards and honors *Seeds of Change* has received include:

- Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent in Illustration
- Notable Children's Books, *Smithsonian* magazine
- Amelia Bloomer Project, Feminist Task Force, American Library Association (ALA)
- Notable Books for a Global Society, International Reading Association (IRA)

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about **Seeds of Change** at

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/381/hc/seeds_of_change_planting_a_path_to_peace

BookTalk with Jen Cullerton Johnson and Sonia Lynn Sadler:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/seeds.mhtml>

Order Information**On the Web:**

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