



# Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya

*Donna Jo Napoli , Kadir Nelson (Illustrator)*

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“Nelson’s pictures, a jaw-dropping union of African textiles collaged with oil paintings, brilliantly capture the villagers’ clothing and the greening landscape... **This is, in a word, stunning.**” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Nelson’s (*We Are the Ship*) breathtaking portraits of Maathai often have a beatific quality; bright African textiles represent fields, mountains, and Maathai’s beloved trees... Napoli (*The Earth Shook*) creates a vivid portrait of the community from which Maathai’s tree-planting mission grows.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“A beautiful introduction for children just learning about the Greenbelt Movement.” —*School Library Journal*

Anne Izard Storytellers’ Choice Award  
CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book  
CCBC Choices (Cooperative Children’s Book Council)  
California Collections  
NAACP Image Award Nominee

Through artful prose and beautiful illustrations, Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson tell the true story of Wangari Muta Maathai, known as “Mama Miti,” who in 1977 founded the Green Belt Movement, an African grassroots organization that has empowered many people to mobilize and combat deforestation, soil erosion, and environmental degradation. Today more than 30 million trees have been planted throughout Mama Miti’s native Kenya, and in 2004 she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Wangari Muta Maathai has changed Kenya tree by tree—and with each page turned, children will realize their own ability to positively impact the future.

## Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya Details

Date : Published January 5th 2010 by Simon Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books  
ISBN : 9781416935056  
Author : Donna Jo Napoli , Kadir Nelson (Illustrator)  
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# From Reader Review **Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya** for online ebook

## **Lisa Vegan says**

Well, this is the fourth or fifth picture book I've read about Wangari Maathai. I still haven't read her autobiography or her book about the Green Belt Movement. Each picture book has its strengths and weaknesses.

This was not my favorite of the books. Its main weakness (for me) was that in the main part of the story, women come to Maathai with problems and each time she tells them to plant trees and explains how the trees will solve their problems. Each time she ends with saying "Thayu numba \_ Peace, my people" but that's it. The refrain makes for a good story time read aloud book, but it's not until the notes at the end of the book (Afterword, Kikuyu Glossary, A Note from the Author, A Note from the Illustrator) that the reader learns anything significant about this important woman. If I hadn't read any of the other books about her, I might have enjoyed this book more than I did. At least the last page of the story did reveal how she changed the country tree by tree and the green belt movement is sort of mentioned. The notes at the end do give information about her education and what she accomplished.

While I also didn't like the illustrations as much as in a couple of the other books, I appreciated that the illustrator used printed fabrics as one of the materials to create them. I love the brightly colored prints of so many African fabrics and they were captured well within this book.

For all that, I did enjoy the book quite a bit. Ideally, all picture books about Maathai would be available to be viewed and read at about the same time because they all offer something a bit different, and readers will get a more complete picture of this woman, the Green Belt Movement, and history if all are read.

3 ½ stars

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## **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

I didn't like Kadir Nelson's illustrations in this book as much as I've liked his illustrations for other books. However, the text was beautiful.

Napoli worked in all the functions that trees have for humans as solutions to problems that women brought to her. Well done! The picture of Wangari as a child with the tadpoles is taken right out of her autobiography, *Unbowed*. Napoli also linked planting the trees with peace, although the message toward the end that Kenya was at peace wasn't true for a LONG time, despite Wangari's best efforts. Great book for kids, and adults should read her autobiography. Recommended!

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## **Eboni says**

Awesome text, and Kadir Nelson has branched a little by incorporating prints into his illustrations. Beautifully done.

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## **Traci says**

This picture book is powerful. Mama Miti-the mother of trees knows the true ways of the world and is changing our world tree by tree if we heed her warning and follow her path to plant more trees.

A wonderful story told with the richness and power of a gentle woman who started the 'green belt of peace' in Kenya to be shared with the world.

The illustrations are rich and inviting as well as the text.

Written by Donna Jo Napoli, illustrated by Kadir Nelson and published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers as a Paula Wiseman Book.

#trees #biography #PB #MamaMiti #environment

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## **Viviane Elbee says**

Interesting non-fiction book about an environmental leader in Kenya, Mama Miti, who started a Green Belt tree planting movement to counter the ill effects of deforestation in Kenya.

Kids liked the story and the message about how one person & tree planting can change the world for the better.

(I didn't know anything about Mama Miti when I picked up this book. If you're interested in knowing more, the author lists books and internet websites where you can look for more information at the back of the book.)

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## **Lisa Lathrop says**

1) This inspiring non-fiction picture book is about Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan political activist who founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977. She empowered rural women who had started reporting their streams were drying up, their food supply was diminishing and the animals were dying. Maathai's movement revived the country and brought it back to life. Wangari was an educated woman whose efforts pulled together Kenya for the common good and her efforts for peace and change won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. This poses a perfect Text to World situation as Mama Miti has done for Africa what Earth Day has done for American and our world. A possible Text to Text selection for Mama Miti could be "Fancy Nancy: Every Day Is Earth Day (I Can Read Book 1) by Nancy O'Connor. When Nancy learns that her teachers's motto is "Every day is Earth Day," Nancy tries to convert her parents to do everything the "green way." Little Nancy's theory is that when we all do our part to reduce, reuse and recycle, we can all help protect our planet for many years to come. The first Earth Day was founded in 1970 just seven years prior to Wangari Maathai winning the Nobel Peace Prize for teaching the people of Africa the ancient wisdom of peace with nature.

2) Through this book, Mama Miti exposes children to the land of Kenya and the way of life during troubled times. Young Wangari was told stories of how Kenya was lush and beautiful prior to the sun shining brightly and the drought that resulted. Children who read this book, learn how one woman's idea can change a whole country. Remembering stories of the sacred fig tree and how it brought peace between the angry men, Wangari grew older, remember these beginnings, planted, and gave plants away for families do the same. Her efforts created a movement in Africa and that allowed the country to thrive and become at peace again. The message to young girls and boys everywhere is that even ONE person can affect change.

3) Bloom's Taxonomy Questions:

1 - Creating: What do you think would have happened if Wangari did not give trees away to women and their children?

2 - Analyzing: Compare how trees became a sign of peace?

3- Understanding: Explain why you think Wangari gave trees to others to plant?

4 - Evaluate: what influence does Wangari Maathai (the mother of trees) have on us?

5 - Remembering: - Why did Wangari learn to love and respect trees?

6: - Applying - Do you know of any other instances where one person's actions inspire others to do the same thing and a movement grows?

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## **Sue Cowing says**

Donna Jo Napoli has told the inspiring contemporary story of Wangari Maathai tree by tree, in the compelling, flawless rhythm of an old tale . Kadir Nelson's fabric collage illustrations deepen the glory of the text. Adult readers will be led to wonder at a true story of social and environmental renewal emerging from an area commonly thought to herald the next worst things in the future of the planet. Child readers will be strengthened in their inclination to believe that very small efforts can lead to big changes, even to peace, and will begin to think about what they can do. A beautiful book in every sense.

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## **Sarah Hannah says**

I feel like to say anything about the illustrations is almost a waste of time, because Kadir Nelson did them, so OF COURSE they are spectacular. I was a bit surprised to find they were his because I don't recall any other work of his that I've read that used mixed media. I really love that this book focused on Maathai's Kenyan life and work in Kenya, not her time in the US. I'm reading five picturebooks about Maathai, and this is the first one that actually has enough text AND enough back matter that I am legitimately excited and interested to know more about the subject.

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## **Sarah says**

This isn't my favorite Kadir Nelson illustrated book, but I really liked the story and the illustrations together. Though one of the disappointments of this book and others like it is that it diminishes the achievements of the figure being biographed in order to make a point. Wangari seems like a figure who just knows from wisdom she has to plant trees for specific purposes. But in reality she went to school and had advanced degrees that helped her to spread her knowledge and to be listened to and respected as a knowledgeable figure.

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### **John says**

I've read three books about Wangari Maathai and each took a different angle. I like this one better than Seeds of Change and Wangari's Trees of Peace.

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### **Darin Johnston says**

"Plant a tree."

That's what Wangari Maathai said to the first women who approached her about having "too little food", no job, and no skills. Maathai told her to plant a mubiru mubiru tree and to eat the berries. Another woman approached Maathai, telling her she had to walk hours to find firewood. "What can I do?"

"Plant a tree. Here are the seedling of the mukinduri. This tree makes good firewood. Plant as many as you can."

And so it was with Maathai, suggesting various trees to help clean the watch, to help the health of livestock, to help keep predators away. Before long, there was "a green belt of peace" because of Mama Miti, the mother of the trees.

5 stars, for this book not only gives us information, but gives up hope that we to can plant trees and see the good they bring our environment.

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### **Emily says**

This is a well researched book with beautifully written prose focusing on the later part of Wangari's life. The illustrations are absolutely stunning and are reason enough to include this book in a collection. The combination of printed fabrics and oil paints give each picture such incredible texture and life.

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### **Wendy Gardiner says**

biography of 2004 Nobel Peace prize winner Wangari Muta Maathai. Gorgeous illustrations by Kadir Nelson. Terrific afterward that provides even more details about her amazing life. The book doesn't reveal the full complexity of her life or work, but it is a good introduction and is visually stunning. Author's note at end describes research process & provides links to gain additional knowledge. (I went back and forth between 3 & 4 stars, and the illustrations are what was the deciding factor).

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### **J-Lynn says**

A beautiful story describing the Green Belt Movement started in Kenya by Wangari Muta Maathai who was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004) for working to revitalize a deforested Kenya.

While the movement was a grassroots movement organized by this woman politician, this picture book tells the story as if Wangari is a town elder who gives advice to women who travel from all over the country for her help. It captures the spirit of the African culture--specifically the Kenyan notion of harambee (swahili) which means pulling together for the common good--as this one woman encourages her people to reengage with the land and respect the symbiotic nature of trees. She becomes known as "Mama Miti" or "mother of the trees."

In the back of the book, there is an afterword, extensive note from the author, glossary, and a note from the illustrator which discuss the true life of Wangari and the creation of this book.

The illustrations are by Kadir Nelson but are his first exploration into mixed collage. He paints the faces and some of the background with oil paints, layering the clothing and panorama with printed fabrics all on gessoed board. He said he wanted "to use these materials because African culture is rich with textiles and color, and I felt it essential that the artwork reflect an aesthetic of both East Africa and my own work." He succeeds. The pictures capture the epic beauty of Africa and the rich colors of the Kenyan people. I hope he gets rewarded for these bold illustrations come awards season.

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### **Robyn Davis says**

I absolutely love this book. It is a beautiful story of a strong African woman. It has big, beautiful pictures that students would enjoy. It also includes many words and phrases in Swahili, as well as a glossary in the back. A great way to introduce Kenyan culture into your classroom and to link to students from Kenya to help them feel validated.

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