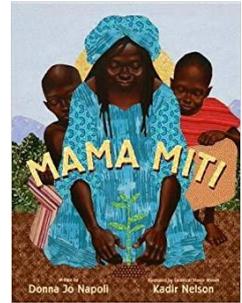
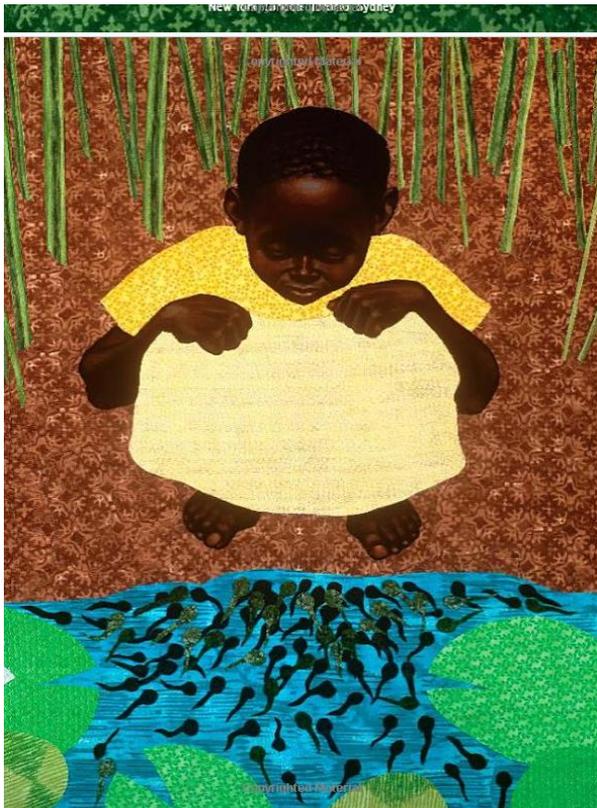


**Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning**  
**Mama Miti Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya**  
**Written by Donna Jo Napoli & Illustrated by Kadir Nelson (Simon & Schuster)**



**1. Explore it**

Read the text below and spend time looking carefully at the illustration:



On the highlands of Africa,  
near forests and plains and a huge salt lick,  
Wangari was born. The face of  
Mount Kenya smiled down on her.  
People told stories of how in the old days  
sometimes the sun shone too bright too long,  
and droughts came. Creatures suffered.  
Plants wilted. People fought.  
So the men held ceremonies under the  
mugumo—the spreading sacred fig tree—  
and the skies blessed them with shimmering  
rains to slake their thirst and water their farms.  
Village elders placed staffs from the  
thigi tree between angry men,  
and enemies became friends.



WANGARI LISTENED TO THESE STORIES.  
That's how she came to love and respect trees.  
That's how she came to be wise in the tradition  
of her family and village, of her country and  
continent.

What is happening in this extract? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences? If there are words you don't know or understand, like **highlands**, **plains**, **droughts**, **sacred** or **staffs**, you could look them up in a dictionary or online, e.g., <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>.

Think about where the story is set. Where was Wangari born? What do you already know or think you know about Kenya and the continent of Africa more widely? What do you imagine that it is like there from the description you have read above? What are the features of the landscape? Do you know what a **salt lick** is, or what happens there? If not, how could you find out?

Consider the stories Wangari was told. How did the behaviour of the people change from when there was drought to when the rain came? What does the opening of the book tell us about the importance of nature to this place and its people?

Now think more about Wangari. Why do you think listening to the stories led her to **love and respect trees**? What do you think she might have gone on to do?

## 2. Illustrate it

Think again about the environment that is described in the opening of the story. What features of the landscape are mentioned? How do you picture the **salt lick**, **forests**, **plains** and the **mountain** in your mind? What does this landscape look like to you? What do you think the sky is like? Sketch out your ideas using a pencil and paper.

Look again at the illustration that accompanies the text, the colours that have been used and how it has been composed using a mixture of painting for the child's features and collage for their clothes and the landscape. This shows a close up view; how could you use these techniques to show the wider landscape? Collect old newspapers, magazines, shopping catalogues, scraps of paper, wrapping paper or material. Find some scissors and a glue stick. Find pieces of the materials that you have collected that will allow you to have colours, shades, patterns and details that match the features of the landscape. Cut these into pieces of different shapes and sizes to build the features of your landscape. Share your work with someone else.

## 3. Talk about it

- Think about the descriptive and figurative language (adjectives, verbs, the use of personification) used by Donna Jo Napoli to describe the actions of nature: ***the face of Mount Kenya smiled down on her, the sacred fig tree, when the skies blessed them with shimmering rain*** How does the author's use of language make you feel about the nature she references? Why do you think she describes it like this?
- Look at how hyphens have been used to give extra information: ***'mugurno – the sacred spreading fig tree –'*** What does this tell us about the tree? How does it make you feel about the tree? How do you think the people felt about it?
- Thinking more about Wangari, what do you think it means to ***'be wise in the tradition of her family and village, of her country and continent'***? What does this tell us about her as a person?

## 4. Imagine it

Read the opening of the book again. Think about the importance of water. Why is water necessary for all forms of life? What do you use water for in your everyday activities? How does water contribute to the food you eat? Now stop to think about what the impact not having water. What might the potential impacts of increased droughts be? Who would be affected and how? What long-term damage would this do to trees, plants and the environment? How would this affect people?

## 5. Create it

Think about the different ways we can work to preserve water and limit its waste in our homes, schools and in everyday life. Think about a way to encourage the public to be more careful about how they use water and communicate why it is important that this resource is not wasted. What would you want to tell people about water? How do we waste water in our everyday lives? How could we stop this happening?

Think about how you might communicate this information to your audience. What language will you need to use to explain, inform and persuade your audience? Will you use photographs or diagrams to help you? You will also need to think about the form this writing could take. Will you design a poster? A leaflet? A webpage? You could also write a newspaper or magazine article on the subject. Perhaps you might like to use video or audio recording equipment and make an advert, or a segment for a documentary? You could write the script for one of these and record it. Complete your writing and share it with someone else at home. Does your writing inspire them to change their behaviour?