

# TEACHING CHARACTER

THROUGH THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

A CROSS-CURRICULA APPROACH  
TO TEACHING CHARACTER

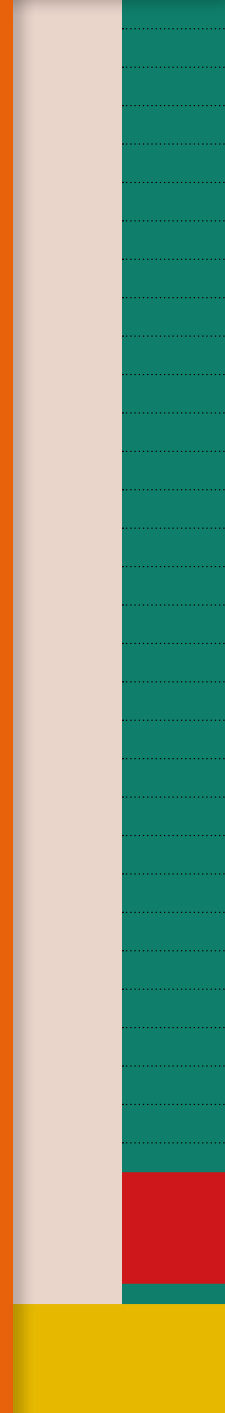
## DRIVEN TO MAKE A CHANGE

MAIN NARRATIVE

VIRTUE: DRIVE - SUBJECT: GEOGRAPHY



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES



## WANGARI MAATHAI

On 1st April 1940, in the small village of Ithite, Nyeri, in the central highlands of Kenya, Wangari Maathai was born. Her family had lived there for many **generations**, but there was no work, so in 1943 her family moved to live on a local farm. Her family was a typical Kenyan family where her father was seen as head of the house; her mother had very little power and performed traditional “women’s tasks” such as fetching water and gathering firewood. In particular, education for women and girls was not valued, or even encouraged. While living on the farm, Wangari spent a lot of time in nature and gained a great respect for the environment.

Several years later, Wangari, her mother and two brothers moved back to Ithite as there was no school. Her father remained on the farm. Her two brothers were sent to school to get an education. Wangari was desperate to learn. Wangari pleaded with her family to allow her to go to school. Finally, at the age of eight, she joined her brothers at Ithite Primary School. This young girl had been given an opportunity to show what she could do and Wangari was not going to waste it.

Wangari showed an immediate ability to learn new things and was always eager to do extra work, even at such a young age. At age eleven, Wangari moved to St. Cecilia’s Primary School, a boarding school in Nyeri. Wangari studied at St. Cecilia’s for four years. She showed a positive attitude in all of her schoolwork, and quickly became **fluent** in English. Other pupils began to look up to her, and she was proud to be seen as a role model to other young girls in the area, although she missed her family, especially her mother. When she left St. Cecilia’s, she was at the top of her class, and was granted admission to the only Catholic high school for girls in Kenya, Loreto High School.

Wangari’s love of education and her curiosity to learn increased as she got older. She began to look closely at the world. She questioned her upbringing in **rural** Africa and realised she had the ability to make a change. Kenya was going through lots of changes, but women were still not given the same opportunities as men. It was extremely unlikely that a girl from a small village such as Ithite would be able to attend university in Kenya. It was highly unusual. Wangari continued to **excel** at school and, in 1960, Wangari became one of only 300 Kenyans (men and women) to earn a scholarship to study at a university in the United States of America. Wangari did not want to leave the natural beauty of Kenya behind, but she knew that to further her education it was her only choice.

Though excited by what the future held, Wangari was also worried. She had always wanted to attend university, but attending university half way across the world would be very different and very scary. How would the American students respond to a small village girl from Kenya? Wangari attended College in Kansas, where she became known to her classmates as Mary Jo. After earning a degree in biology, she went on to receive a master’s degree in biological sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. It was here that Wangari’s love for nature and the environment began to take hold. She could see the damage the human race was **inflicting** on the planet, and despite the obstacles in her path, she knew she must help make a



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT:  
ALTERNATTIVA DEMOKRATIKA  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>

“OUR WORK WAS ABOUT INSPIRING PEOPLE TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT, THE SYSTEM THAT GOVERNED THEM, THEIR LIVES, AND THEIR FUTURE.”

- WANGARI MAATHAI

## DRIVEN TO MAKE A CHANGE NARRATIVE

change.

She always knew she had the ability to make a difference, and whilst living and studying in America, she saw how many Americans expressed themselves with honesty and freedom. This made her realise that, in a democratic community, people had the right to speak out for what they believed in. It was not wrong to have views that clashed with others, if they were expressed **rationally**. She hoped to spread this message across Kenya.

Wangari knew it was time to return to Kenya. She continued her studies at the University of Nairobi and through much hard work she earned her PhD, becoming the first woman in East or Central Africa to do so. People in Kenya had begun to notice Wangari. She had created the platform needed to make a change in the world.

Wangari's passion for the environment had not **diminished**. Having grown up in **rural** Kenya, and then travelling the world, Wangari had a unique insight into the lives of ordinary Kenyan people, with comparison to others internationally. She had a **revolutionary** idea that it was possible to improve people's quality of life if economic and social progress went together with environmental protection. Politicians initially ignored her. Male politicians looked down on her and often told her she had no right to share her ideas. Her strong character often made her enemies, and her husband, who was a politician, divorced her claiming that she was too educated and too difficult to 'control'.

Wangari felt devastated by the destruction of the Kenyan forests. She **campaign**ed for change. There were many years of unsuccessful protesting but she would not be defeated. She decided to form her own environmental group, the Green Belt Movement. The Green Belt Movement enabled communities to come together to plant trees. Wangari's plan was to reduce **poverty** in Kenya by planting trees. The movement had huge success across Kenya and Africa, where over 45 million trees have now been planted. Wangari used her influence and created opportunities to make a difference. The Green Belt Movement continues to help communities across Africa and continues to plant trees.

Wangari went on to be elected to the Kenyan parliament with an overwhelming 98% of the vote. She helped form and run many similar environmental movements around the world and in the process won many awards for her great service. In 2004, the girl who had needed to plead to be allowed to go to school, and who had faced many obstacles during her career, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "**sustainable** development, democracy and peace." Wangari Maathai's impact will long be felt in Kenya and on the sustainability of Earth.

### GLOSSARY

**CAMPAIGNED**  
to work towards a goal

**DIMINISHED**  
made smaller or less

**EXCEL**  
to be extremely good at something

**FLUENT**  
to be able to talk smoothly and effortlessly

**GENERATIONS**  
a group of people that form a family.

**INFLECTING**  
causing something unpleasant to happen

**POVERTY**  
being really poor by having no money, goods or support

**RATIONALLY**  
in a reasonable way

**REVOLUTIONARY**  
a new idea to make change

**RURAL**  
the countryside

**SUSTAINABLE**  
to be able to keep an environmental balance



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT:

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>