

# Biography of Wangari Maathai



Wangari Maathai was an environmental activist. She was passionate about the earth and became an important leader because of her conservation work and support of women's rights. She was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Wangari Maathai was born in 1940 in Kenya. She grew up in a small village where her father was a farmer. She helped her family by collecting firewood and helping out at home. When she was 8 years old, she started school where she was a very good student. After high school, she won a scholarship to study in the United States where she earned a bachelor's degree and master's degree. She studied in Germany for a short time before returning to Kenya. In 1971, she studied at the University of Nairobi where she became the first woman in East Africa to earn a doctorate degree. In 1976, she worked at the university as chair of a department.

After returning to Kenya, she was upset to learn about the number of trees cut down to make room for buildings. She also wanted to help women in Kenya earn their own money and create more resources in the community. In 1977, she started the Green Belt Movement. This organization supported women by paying them to plant trees all across Kenya. It supported the planting of over 30 million trees in Kenya and helped over 30,000 women gain both opportunities and skills.

Wangari was an outspoken activist for the earth and protested against the government constructing new buildings. She was arrested many times because of her beliefs and actions. After many years protesting the government, a new political party came into power in Kenya. In 2002, she was appointed as the assistant minister of environment, natural resources, and wildlife.

Wangari kept supporting women and the environment and became known internationally for her work in the Green Belt Movement. In 2004, she became the first African woman to earn the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2006, she wrote a memoir titled *Unbowed* to share her life story. She continued to be an inspiration as she traveled the world sharing her story. Wangari died in 2011 when she was 71 years old.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Directions:** Answer the questions about the text.

Why is Wangari Maathai famous?

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Finish the sentence: Wangari Maathai became the first \_\_\_\_\_

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What were some of the challenges Wangari faced?

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Where did Wangari study?

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Why was Wangari known internationally?

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What else would you like to know about Wangari Maathai? Share your questions with a friend.

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