



**Classroom Guide for**  
**ONLY THE MOUNTAINS DO**  
**NOT MOVE**  
by Jan Reynolds

**Reading Level**

\*Reading Level: Grades 3  
Interest Level: Grades 1-6  
Guided Reading Level: Q

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

**Themes**

World Cultures, Animals, Ecology, Sustainability, Environments and Habitats, Nature/Science, Farming, Customs and Traditions, Self Esteem/Identity, Conflict Resolution, African/African American Interest

**Synopsis**

*Nobody can say he is settled*

*anywhere forever;*

*it is only the mountains*

*which do not move from their places.*

So goes a Maasai proverb, and so goes the lives of the Maasai in Africa. For hundreds of years they have moved with their herds of cattle and goats across thousands of miles in Kenya and Tanzania.

Today the Maasai face new challenges. Their traditional way of life is threatened, lands are overgrazed, and wildlife is in danger. Maasai tribes are meeting these obstacles head-on—adapting their lives and agricultural practices while keeping their vibrant, close-knit culture alive.

**Background**

Traditionally the Maasai have always been a proud and independent tribe. For centuries they have lived in the heart of East Africa, in an area that covers about 100,000 square miles (161,000 square kilometers) and falls mainly in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. The people move often, herding their cows and goats and rotating their animals to new grazing land in a balanced rhythm with the wildlife around them. The Maasai do not cultivate the land and depend

on a cash economy as many of those around them do. Instead they live off the milk and meat their cattle provide. These cattle play a central role in the life of the Maasai. Cattle represent food and power; the more cattle a Maasai has, the richer he is and therefore the more power and influence he has within his tribe.

The Maasai today face many changes. The amount of grazing land is shrinking, and the land is becoming dry and barren, threatening their herds of cattle and their lifestyle. The Maasai are working to adapt to these challenges, while preserving their traditions and environment for generations to come.

Author/photographer Jan Reynolds explains her inspiration for the book. "I heard of the Il Ngwesi, which means 'the people of wildlife,' in passing. I heard that the people were trying to maintain the environment surrounding them while also maintaining their culture. So I thought that in their area I might see more of traditional life, less affected by the outside world, as opposed to [what I might see in the] more heavily traveled national parks. I had not visited the Il Ngwesi before this book project. . . . My experience with the Il Ngwesi was so playful and fun. The people are all so grown up, but very humorous in attitude, and adventurous by nature. . . . I think we can learn from the people of Il Ngwesi that we can all change ourselves, our routines, and our habits to become more environmentally sustainable in the way we live. We can learn to maintain the balance of nature."

**Teaching Tip**

*Only the Mountains Do Not Move* is an excellent choice to use as part of a unit on the environment and/or sustainable farming and living.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. What do you know about traditional life in African countries? How is this way of living different from the way people live in the United States?
2. What kinds of animals live in the wild in Africa? Can you tell us the names of five African wild animals?
3. Have you ever seen a live cow or goat? What can you tell us about the animal(s)? What do they need to survive?
4. What do you already know about climate change? How is climate change affecting us?

5. What is nonfiction? Have we read any nonfiction books? How can you tell if a book is nonfiction?

### Exploring the Book

Write the title of the book on the chalkboard. Ask students what they think the title means. What do they think the book is about?

Have students look at the photographs on the front and back covers. Discuss what they notice in the images.

Read the synopsis at the beginning of this guide aloud. Then flip through the book and point out the features specific to a nonfiction book: photographs, map, author's note, glossary and pronunciation guide, and source notes and acknowledgments. Also call students' attention to the Maasai proverbs that appear every few pages throughout the book.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what is important to the Maasai people and why the book is entitled *Only the Mountains Do Not Move*.

### VOCABULARY

Have students turn to the Glossary and Pronunciation Guide on the last page of the book, or write the words and names, plus their pronunciations, on the chalkboard or a chart. Ask students to practice pronouncing each entry and then discuss what it means. For entries other than names, encourage students to use them in their own sentences. The entries from the Glossary are listed below. Also encourage students to use the Glossary to remind themselves of meanings they may forget as they read through the book.

acacia	antiseptic	bao	barren	bush
drought	enkaji	enkang	extinct	habitat
herd	Il Ngwesi	irrigate	Laikipia	lash
livestock	Maa	Maasai	manure	moran
Noonkuta	oral history	overgrazing	predator	preserve
Ramati	sansevieria	Washon		

### AFTER READING

#### Discussion Questions

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

<b>Literal Comprehension</b>
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1. What is an enkaji? What is an enkang? How are each important to the Maasai?
2. Describe a Maasai bed. Why do the Maasai need nets around their beds? Why do you think they sleep on animal skins?

3. What animals are important to the Maasai? Why?
4. How do the Maasai know which animals belong to each group?
5. The author talks about the important relationship the Maasai have with their animals. What are some things the Maasai do that demonstrate how special this relationship is?
6. What are some dangers the Maasai face when they leave the enkang? How do the Maasai deal with these dangers?
7. Describe the moran. Who are they? What do they do? Why is this an important part of the Maasai culture?
8. What are five different ways acacia trees are used by people or animals?

<b>Extension/Higher Level Thinking</b>
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9. What does the title of the book mean? How does this apply to the Maasai?
10. Why do you think most of the Maasai in the book wear red (and/or pink) clothing?
11. Just by looking at the photographs, what can you figure out about the climate where this group of Maasai live?
12. How do the Maasai feel about wild animals? How do you know?
13. What are some Maasai traditions and practices that are environmentally friendly? How do these practices keep the Maasai in balance with their environment?
14. How are the Maasai in this book addressing the challenges they are facing? Is that the way you would have handled the situation? Why or why not?
15. There are several Maasai proverbs used throughout the book. What do you think each proverb means, especially in relation to the information in the section of the book that follows it?
16. Notice the way *Only the Mountains* begins and ends. How does the author get your attention? How does she tie up all the information at the end of the book?
17. Do you think the author is trying to send a message through this book? If so, what is it? Why do you think that message is important to her?

### 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 passages in Dada-ji's story that are similar to what Aneel and Dada-ji do together after eating roti.
- The **Illustrator** might create an illustrated chart showing the ingredients and steps for making roti.
- The **Connector** might find other books that feature Asian Indians in the United States or that are set in India.
- 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 Indian foods or the tradition of storytelling in India.

\*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 and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. Based on information in the book, how is your life similar to that of a Maasai child? How is your life different?
2. In the Author's Note, the author says she took her son with her to visit the Maasai. Would you like to have made the trip with them? Why or why not?
3. Choose one word that you think best describes Maasai culture. Why did you choose this word? Provide evidence from the book to support your choice of the word.
4. Imagine that you are giving a talk to the class about climate change in Africa. Using information from the book, write two ideas you would present in your speech.
5. Prepare a list of questions that you would ask Noonkuta if you had the opportunity to interview her.

6. *Only the Mountain Do Not Move* is a photo-essay, a story illustrated with photographs instead of art. Using a favorite photograph that illustrates an activity in which your family, school, or community has participated, write a short photo-essay of your own. You may also wish to create a proverb to go along with your text.

### ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the story aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the photographs in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the story.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

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

#### Social Studies

1. If students have experience reading physical maps, have them locate the Maasai territory (as indicated on page 3 of the book) on a physical map of Africa. Ask students to note the information they find on the map. Then discuss how the landforms in the Maasai region might affect their lifestyle.
2. Locate Kenya and Tanzania on a world map or a globe. Then have students find out more about the two countries. Good places to start are the [Kenya page](#) and [Tanzania page](#) of National Geographic Kids online. From the basics given there, students may further explore topics that interest them. Then have students make a chart comparing the two countries in the following areas: geography, nature, history, people, culture and traditions, and government.

#### Social Studies/Language Arts

Have students make a list of several facts they learned about Maasai life and traditions. Then ask students to research the Kikuyu, another prominent native group

in Kenya. Have students compare and contrast the life and traditions of the two groups. Students may also discover the ongoing conflict that exists between the Maasai and the Kikuyu. This could prompt a discussion or debate about the issues facing the two groups and how these issues might be resolved.

### Science

1. Traditionally the Maasai use a twig from a type of acacia tree as a toothbrush. Have students research the history of the toothbrush. They may be surprised to learn that early forms of the toothbrush have been in existence since ancient times.
2. Have small groups of students select and research one of the wild animals native to Kenya and report on the factors that may be affecting its survival, such as loss of habitat and climate change.

### Art

1. Have students create their own *bao* boards out of egg cartons. They can use paper clips, dried beans, pennies, or other small objects for the pieces. Bao is also called *mancala* in many countries where the game is played. Instructions for making a simple mancala board and directions for playing the game can be found [here](#).
2. Maasai men and women wear beaded necklaces and bracelets. If you have supplies for making beaded jewelry available, students may enjoy creating their own items to wear.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR/PHOTOGRAPHER

Jan Reynolds is an award-winning author and photographer whose work has appeared in numerous publications, including *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, and *Outside* magazine. All seven books in her *Vanishing Cultures* series of photo-essays for children were recognized as Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People. Reynolds is also an avid skier, mountain climber, and adventurer. She holds the world record for women's high altitude skiing, was part of the first expedition to circumnavigate Mount Everest, and performed a solo crossing of the Himalayas. Reynolds lives with her husband and their two sons in Stowe, Vermont. To find out more about Jan Reynolds, visit her [website](#).

### Book Information

\$18.95, HARDCOVER

ISBN 978-1-60060-333-4

40 pages, 10 1/4 x 8 3/4

Reading Level: Grades 3

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Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5.8/.5

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**RESOURCES ON THE WEB**

Learn more about ***Only the Mountains Do Not Move*** at

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/428/hc/only\\_the\\_mountains\\_do\\_not\\_move\\_a\\_maasai\\_story\\_of\\_culture\\_and\\_conservation](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/428/hc/only_the_mountains_do_not_move_a_maasai_story_of_culture_and_conservation)

**BookTalk with author Jan Reynolds**

[http://www.leeandlow.com/p/only\\_the\\_mountains.mhtml](http://www.leeandlow.com/p/only_the_mountains.mhtml)

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