

## Family Sunday School Lesson 4 - Wangari Maathai



**Introduction:** Wangari Maathai is another example of an unconventional, modern saint, not recognized (yet) by the church. Take inspiration from her understanding of the interconnectedness of people and nature.

### **Start the Fun!**

#### Getting Creative!

Gather two sheets of paper, a black marker, a pencil with an eraser and some crayons or pastels.

Follow this video step by step to draw a beautiful tree.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gExU54kVM0o>



## **Read together**

### **A Story About Wangari Maathai**

Wangari's story begins with her birth in 1940 in Ithite, a small village in Kenya in eastern Africa. Her parents belonged to the Kikuyu tribe, and although they had converted to Catholicism, they wove their Christian beliefs with their traditional Kikuyu beliefs. For example, they believed that God lived on Mount Kenya, the second largest mountain in Africa. Like their Kikuyu neighbors, they built their house to face Mount Kenya to remind them daily where all good things come from.

They also believed the Mugumo tree, a type of fig, was sacred to God. When Wangari was a child, one of her chores was to collect wood for her family. She was allowed to take wood from any tree except the Mugumo. As her mother explained, "This is a tree of God. We don't collect wood from this tree." The Mugumo trees were allowed to live long and natural lives.

When Wangari grew up and studied biology at college in the United States, she realized the Mugumo trees were very important to the health of Kenya's environment. Because they were sacred and allowed to live long lives, the trees' roots grew deep into the ground. They cut through underground rock and allowed water to come up near the surface. They also helped hold the soil together, protecting the region from landslides.

But while Wangari was away at school, the land at home was changing. Trees--even the sacred trees--were cut down to make room for large farms and other businesses. The farms polluted the water so that women and girls had to walk long distances to get clean water, and these walks were dangerous. At the first-ever U.N. meeting about women's rights, Wangari said, "I think we should plant trees." Not everyone understood how this small step could help the women, but Wangari taught them. She started a movement called the Green Belt Movement which organized poor, rural Kenyan women to plant trees. Unfortunately, politicians and developers tried to stop the women at every turn. The politicians were not interested in the environment or the poor people. They only valued money-making businesses. Wangari was called names, put in prison and even beaten.

But Wangari kept planting trees. The first year, she only planted seven trees and five of them died. But the two trees that survived are still alive today. And the women who joined her have planted over 51 million trees in Kenya and other countries. Now the women of Kenya make money by selling trees, enjoy clean water close to their homes, eat fruit from the fruit trees they have planted and honor the sacred Mugumo trees as they used to do. Wangari Maathai won a Nobel Peace prize for her understanding of how caring for the environment means caring for people.

## **Discuss:**

*Ask:* What character traits (or we might call them “gifts”) did Wangari Maathai receive from God? How did she use these gifts to help people?

*Discuss:* Your children might come up with various responses. These are just examples: she was smart, caring and brave. She built on her intelligence by going to college, then used what she had learned to convince people to plant trees in Africa. She cared about the women and girls who had to walk a long way for water. She was brave enough to stand up to big business so that regular people could have better lives.

*Related verse:* Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

*Ask:* A king rules over his people. What makes a good king? Does he take care of his people or just take from them? If we are given the job of ruling over every living creature on the earth, what kind of rulers should we be?

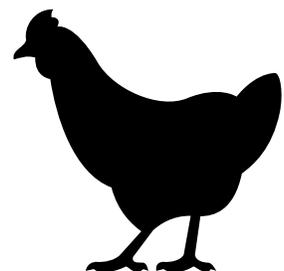
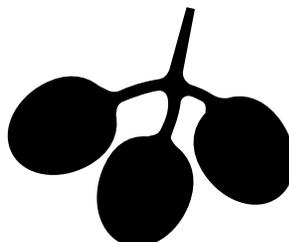
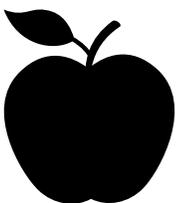
## **Pray**

Thank God for all the plants and animals on earth. They give us food, shelter, clothing, oxygen, medicine, companionship, beauty and more. Ask God to show you ways that you can help the environment.

## **Participate**

### *Mindful Eating and Prayer Exercise*

To prepare: Choose a food that came directly from nature (a vegetable, a cooked egg, a slice of whole-grain bread, some nuts or a piece of fruit--maybe even a fig!) Arrange it attractively on a plate. Remove all distractions for a moment. Sit comfortably.



1. Acknowledge the food before you and the journey it has made to your plate. Thank God for all the people who made it possible for you to have this food, from your family members who worked so you could buy it, the people who grew it, the animals who provided milk or eggs to make it, the truck drivers who drove it to your store, the store workers who sold it. Ask God for a blessing on all of them.
2. Before you eat a bite, smell the food. Look at it carefully, enjoying its beauty. Then take a bite, a small bite. Savor the taste. Pick out the flavors, the texture, and the mixture of ingredients. Chew slowly. Just as in prayer, if your mind should wander to other thoughts, gently bring it back to the food you are eating, as if every morsel was put into your mouth by the hand of an angel. Thank God for your amazing body that can taste, smell, feel and see. Thank God for the nutrition in the food that lets your body move and think. Ask God to help you appreciate every little thing you have in your life and not be dissatisfied.
3. Imagine all of the tastes of the earth. Thank God for fruits and sweets and sauces and meats, drinks and snacks, flavors of many cultures and far-off lands, foods that remind you of special places you have been and your favorite comfort foods. Imagine all are the creation of an extravagant God eager to give you joy and healing through food. Imagine each taste is an expression of love to you from a God who is the master chef.

For this time, be present with this gift from God. Taste the goodness of the Lord.

### **Wrap Up**

God loves you and has blessed you with an amazing planet to live on. Go outside and enjoy it!

### **Take a Moment to Breathe**

#### **Whistle Breath**

Find a comfortable seated position. Relax your shoulders and rest your hands in your lap. Close your mouth and take a slow deep inhale through your nose. Purse your lips as if you were going to whistle and then slowly exhale through your mouth. See how long you can extend your exhale. Repeat 3 to 5 times.