

NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O

Weep Not, Child

HEINEMANN GUIDED READERS
LEVEL 1

NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O
Weep Not, Child

Retold by
MARGARET TARNER
and approved by the author
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

*Illustrated by
Emmanuel Labega*



HEINEMANN

Heinemann International Publishing
a division of Heinemann Educational Books Ltd
Halley Court, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX2 8EJ

OXFORD LONDON EDINBURGH
MELBOURNE SYDNEY AUCKLAND
SINGAPORE MADRID
IBADAN NAIROBI GABORONE
HARARE KINGSTON PORTSMOUTH (NH)

ISBN 0 435 27116 4

© Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1964

First published 1964

First published by Heinemann Educational Books Ltd in
African Writers Series 1964

This retold version for Heinemann Guided Readers

© Margaret Turner 1988

This version first published 1988

Cover photograph by Nicola Sutton

Phototypesetting in 11/12pt Plantin by
Wilmaset, Birkenhead, Wirral

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk

Glossary

The glossary at the back of this book on page 64 is divided into five sections. A number beside a word in the text, like this³, refers to a section of the glossary. The words within each section are listed in alphabetical order. The page number beside a word in the glossary refers to its first occurrence in the text.

Section 1 – terms to do with light and darkness

Section 2 – terms to do with political systems and government

Section 3 – unusual negative forms

Section 4 – terms to do with emotions

Section 5 – general

A note on the historical background to this story

This story is set in Kenya in the 1950's. At that time, Kenya was a British colony.

The colonial settlers took away Kenyan people's land. They forced Africans to work on the stolen land. They made many laws that were against African people.

The K.A.U. – the Kenyan African Union – was formed by black Kenyan leaders in 1944. But the British colonial rulers refused to recognise the leaders of the K.A.U. and did not allow them to have positions of responsibility.

The K.A.U. wanted to change the colonial government and the laws by peaceful means. They wanted to have the colour bar removed so that the black people would have equal rights with the whites; they wanted the land returned to the black farmers and they wanted black people to govern their own country.

Jomo Kenyatta became President of the K.A.U. in 1947. Kenyans believed he could save Kenya from the evils of colonialism. But the colonial government refused

to listen to the K.A.U. The K.A.U. was banned and many of its members were imprisoned.

The K.A.U. had members from all over Kenya, but the highest number of members were from those parts of Kenya where the Kikuyu lived. Jomo Kenyatta was himself a Kikuyu. In 1951 a separate organisation was formed from members of the K.A.U. Many of the members of this organisation were men who had fought for the British in the Second World War. They believed that violence was the only way to bring about changes and to remove the colonial rule. In 1952 this separate organisation, called 'Kenya Land and Freedom Army', or 'Mau Mau', began to attack colonial settlers. Mau Mau also attacked and killed Kenyan chiefs. These were chiefs who supported the colonial government. Warūhiū – a well-known colonial chief – was killed in 1952.

In 1952 some leaders of the K.A.U. were killed and on 20 October of that year the government declared a State of Emergency. Jomo Kenyatta was arrested and imprisoned, even though it was never proved that he was a member of the Mau Mau.

Many young people left their villages and joined the Mau Mau. Mau Mau was a secret nationalist organisation and people from all over Kenya joined it. Most of the members were from the Kikuyu. A man joined the Mau Mau by taking a secret oath. He swore to fight for land and freedom. Members of the Mau Mau knew that if a man broke his oath or told anyone what he had sworn he would be killed by the Mau Mau.

The leader of the Mau Mau from 1953 to 1956 was Dedan Kimathi. Dedan Kimathi was caught and hanged by the British in 1956. By the end of that year approximately 2,000 European and Asian civilians, soldiers and African government troops were dead, and over 11,000 Mau Mau had been killed. However, very many thousands of Kikuyu, including women and

children, died of starvation and disease in the fortified villages. These were villages surrounded by troops sent in by the colonial government.

The British government was forced to give independence to Kenya in 1963. Jomo Kenyatta became the first President of the Republic of Kenya in 1964.

A note on the main characters in this story

Ngotho

is the head of the family in this story. Ngotho works as a labourer on the land which his father once owned, but which the British gave to a white settler. Ngotho fought with the British Army in the First World War which is referred to in the story as the First Big War. Ngotho has two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi. He has three sons by Njeri and two sons by Nyokabi.

NJERI ————— = NGOTHO = ————— NYOKABI
(First wife) (Second wife)

┌──────────┐
│ │
└──────────┘
BORO KORI KAMAU

┌──────────┐
│ │
└──────────┘
MWANGI NJOROGI

Boro

Ngotho's eldest son by his first wife. Boro fought for the British in the Second World War. He came back from the war a bitter and angry man. He has left home and has gone to Nairobi to look for work. Boro does not respect his father because Ngotho works as a labourer on the land which his father once owned.

Kori

Boro's brother. He also has left home and gone to find work in Nairobi.

Kamau

Njeri's youngest son. He has stayed at home and is learning to become a carpenter. His wages help to support the family.

Mwangi

Ngotho's son by his second wife, Nyokabi. Mwangi was killed while fighting for the British in the Second World War.

Njoroge

the main character in the story. He is Ngotho's youngest son by his wife, Nyokabi.

Other main characters

Jacobo

Jacobo has done well out of colonial rule. He is wealthy and is ready to help the British so that he can keep his land and his wealth. Mr Howlands uses Jacobo in his fight against the black people.

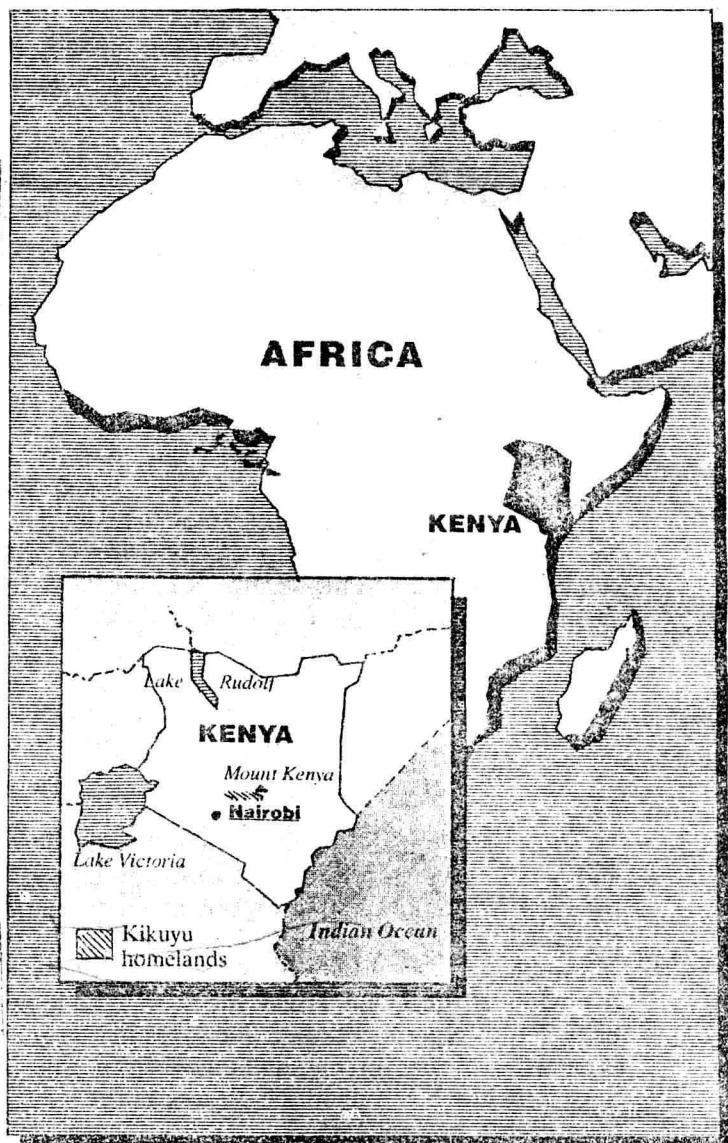


Mwihaki

Jacobo's daughter. She makes friends with Njoroge and falls in love with him. The unhappy love affair between Mwihaki and Njoroge is a central part of the story.

Mr Howlands

the white settler who farms the land which once belonged to Ngotho's father. He loves his farm and is determined that no one shall take it from him. His hatred for the black people increases as the struggle for freedom becomes fiercer.



Contents

<i>Glossary Note</i>	vi
<i>A note on the historical background to this story</i>	vi
<i>A note on the main characters in this story and their family trees</i>	viii
 PART ONE: THE WANING LIGHT	
Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	5
Chapter Three	8
Chapter Four	12
Chapter Five	16
Chapter Six	19
Chapter Seven	23
INTERLUDE	
PART TWO: DARKNESS FALLS	
Chapter Eight	31
Chapter Nine	35
Chapter Ten	39
Chapter Eleven	42
Chapter Twelve	46
Chapter Thirteen	51
Chapter Fourteen	55
<i>Points for Understanding</i>	59
<i>Glossary</i>	64

PART ONE
THE WANING LIGHT
Chapter One

'Njoroge, Njoroge!' the woman called. The little boy, dressed in nothing but a piece of calico³, ran up to his mother.

The woman smiled. Her small eyes were full of life and the smile lit up her dark face. She looked at the child with pride.

'Would you like to go to school?' she said.

Njoroge gasped, but said nothing.

'We are poor, you know that,' his mother went on.

'Yes, mother.' The boy's voice shook a little.

'You won't get food at midday like the other children.'

'I understand.'

'And you must never bring shame⁵ on us by refusing to go to school.'

The thought of going to school was like a bright light in Njoroge's mind¹.

'I want to go to school,' he said quietly. 'I will never refuse to go to school.'

'All right. You'll begin on Monday. When your father gets his pay, we'll go to the shops. I'll buy you a shirt and a pair of shorts.'

'I thank you, mother, very much.'

Njoroge wanted to say more, but he could not. His mother looked at his eyes and understood. She was happy, because her son was happy. In the evening, Njoroge told his brother Kamau the news.

'Kamau, I shall go to school. I'm glad. Oh, so glad. But I wish you were coming too.'

'Don't worry about me,' Kamau said to the little boy.

'I'm being trained as a carpenter. It's a useful trade⁵. You get your education and I'll get a trade. Then, one day, we'll have a better home for the whole family.'

‘Yes,’ Njoroge replied. ‘That’s what I want. I think people get rich because they are educated.’

Ngotho, Njoroge’s father, was proud that his youngest son was going to school. Njoroge was the second son of Ngotho’s second wife. Njoroge was the first of Ngotho’s sons to go to school. A man was always proud if one of his sons went to school. It was important for the boy and his family.

Ngotho had two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi. They had given him five sons. But Mwangi, Njoroge’s only brother, was dead. He had been killed in the Second Big War.

All the other brothers were friends and they often sat together in one hut. They loved to hear stories from Ngotho or the women. That night, all the young people sat together in Ngotho’s big hut. Ngotho told them a story. It was the story of the first man and woman and of the land that God had given to them.

‘God showed the man and woman the land and said: “This land I hand over to you, O Man and Woman. It’s yours to keep and to look after for ever.”’

There was a strange light in Ngotho’s eyes as he spoke. When he told this story, he forgot his wives and sons and all the young people in the hut.

Njoroge listened to the old story of the beginning of the world. He wished he had stood next to God and seen all the land. At the end of the story, he cried out, ‘But where did our land go?’

Everyone looked at the little boy. Ngotho answered his son slowly.

‘I am an old man now. But I have asked that question many times, waking and sleeping. I’ve said: What happened, O God, to the land that you gave us?’

‘I’ll tell you what happened,’ Ngotho went on. ‘First the sun burnt all the land. There was no water and the cattle died. Then the white man came and took the land. But not all of it at first’.

'Then came the First Big War. It was the white man's war, but we had to fight for them. We had to clear the forest and make roads for them. We helped the British to win the war and we came back tired. We said to each other: 'We have helped them. What will they give us in return for our help?'

'They gave us nothing in return for our help. Instead, they took our land.

'My father's land was taken from him. He died lonely, waiting for the white man to go. But the white man stayed. My father died on the land, working for another man. Now I too work for another man, on the land that used to belong to us.'

'You mean the land that Howlands farms⁵?'

The question came from Boro, Ngotho's eldest son.

'Yes, the same land,' Ngotho replied. 'My father showed it to me when I was young. But one day the land will return to us. I work here, waiting for that day.'

'And do you think that day will ever come?' another son, Kori, asked.

'I don't know. Perhaps not in my life-time³, but, oh God, I wish it was possible.'

Boro, sitting alone in a corner, thought about the land which they had lost.

Boro, too, had fought for the white man. He had fought in the Second Big War. That war had killed his brother, Mwangi, who had been his dearest friend. Boro had gone to the war a boy and returned a man. Now he was a man with no land and no job.

A bitter anger⁴ filled Boro's heart. In a whisper that everyone could hear, he said, 'To hell with waiting.'

And to his father he said, 'How can you work for a man who has taken our land? How can you go on being his servant?'

And Boro walked out into the darkness without waiting for an answer.



A bitter anger filled Boro's heart.

Chapter Two

On Monday, Njoroge went to school for the first time. He did not know exactly where the school was. So Mwihaki, the daughter of Jacobo, showed him the way.

Jacobo was the owner of the land on which Njoroge's family lived. Jacobo was a black man, but the white men allowed him to grow pyrethrum⁵ as a cash crop² on his land. Pyrethrum was a cash crop which Jacobo was able to sell in the market. So Jacobo was rich and his big house looked like a white man's home.

Everything was new to Njoroge on that first day. The school was a strange place and the church beside it was the biggest building Njoroge had ever seen.

When the other boys saw Njoroge, they began to tease⁵ him.

'You are a *Njuka!*' they cried. 'Come on, Njuka, carry this bag for me.'

'No, my name's Njoroge,' the little boy answered. He did not understand that Njuka meant 'new boy'.

The boys began to laugh. 'Njuka, Njuka!' they shouted.

But Mwihaki stopped them.

'Yes, he's a Njuka. But he's *my* Njuka. Don't any of you touch him!'

The boys were silent. Mwihaki's sister, Lucia, was a teacher at the school. They were afraid that if Mwihaki told her sister about them they might be beaten.

For the first few weeks, Njoroge always walked home with Mwihaki. They lived near each other and Njoroge liked the clever little girl.

One day, they did not go straight home. They sat down on a little hill and began to play. They forgot the time and, as darkness came, Nyokabi came looking for her son, Njoroge.



... as darkness came Nyokabi came looking for Njoroge.

She was angry to find her son with Mwihaki. She did not want him to be friends with a rich man's daughter.

Njoroge was sorry to see his mother so angry. He decided that in the future he would keep away from Mwihaki.

Nyokabi was very proud of her son and she loved to see him reading or writing. She wanted Njoroge to get the white man's education. Then, perhaps one day, Ngotho, her husband, could stop working for Mr Howlands.

Njoroge told his mother everything that happened at school.

'The teacher asked me to tell a story today, mother,' he said. 'A story you had told us came into my head. But when I stood up, I was afraid. I lost the story!'

'A man should not be afraid,' Nyokabi said. 'You have many stories. Or have we wasted our time telling them to you?'

'I tell you, mother, I forgot all of them!' And the little boy's eyes opened wide.

Nyokabi laughed.

'All right. I'll tell them to you again. But now you must fetch your brother, Kamau. Your elder mother, Njeri, wants him. Don't forget to take off your school clothes first.'

Dressed in his old piece of calico, Njoroge took the path to the house of Nganga, the carpenter. The path went near Jabobo's house and Njoroge saw Mwihaki coming towards him. He was ashamed of meeting her dressed in his piece of calico, so he turned away and went along another path.

Nganga was the village carpenter and Ngotho had paid him a lot of money to teach Kamau his trade. Nganga was rich because he had land. Land was much more important than money. A man was rich only if he had land.

As Njoroge got near to Nganga's house, he saw his brother coming towards him.

'Work's over for today,' Kamau said. 'Let's go home, brother. Oh, how I hate this man, Nganga!'

'Why, brother? Isn't he a good man?'

'No, he isn't. He doesn't let me do anything. How can I learn a trade just by watching? He treats me like a servant.'

'But why?' Njoroge asked. 'He is a black man, like you.'

'Blackness is not all that makes a man,' Kamau replied bitterly. 'Rich men – black or white – never want others to get rich. Sometimes a European is better than an African. A white man is a white man. But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh⁵.'

Njoroge said nothing. These ideas were difficult for him to understand. But he knew that the only good thing was education.

Chapter Three

Ngotho usually walked through the fields to work. Ngotho loved walking through the fields in the early morning when everything was green and the crops were in flower. But today he was walking along the busy tarmac road that went straight to the city. Black men had made the road for the white men in the First Big War.

Ngotho was thinking of what his son Boro had said. Ngotho thought too of all the lonely years of waiting – black men waiting for their land to be returned to them. Perhaps they had all waited too long. Perhaps it had been wrong to wait at all. Perhaps that was the coward's⁵ way.

Mr Howlands, the white settler², was already up when Ngotho reached his land.