



Classroom Guide for FIRST COME THE ZEBRA

written and illustrated by
Lynne Barasch

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 3
Interest Level: Grades 1-5
Guided Reading Level: P

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Traditional Culture, Tribal Rivalry, Animals, Working Toward a Common Goal, Conflict Resolution, Friendship, African/African American Interest

Synopsis

One day when Abaani, a Maasai boy, takes his family's cattle out to graze, he is surprised to see a Kikuyu boy, Haki, tending a new fruit and vegetable stall alongside the road. The boys are aware of the traditional conflicts between the Maasai and the Kikuyu. They take an immediate dislike to each other.

A short while later, as customers surround Haki's stall, a dangerous situation suddenly arises. A little boy wanders into the grass where three warthogs are grazing. Abaani realizes they must act quickly to get the little boy out of the way before the warthogs are angered. He calls to Haki, and together they rescue the child. This selfless act of cooperation makes the boys look at each other differently, and eventually become friends. They play games of *mancala* together, and trade fruit and vegetables for cows' milk. As their friendship grows, Abaani and Haki hope that the Maasai and Kikuyu can one day be friends too.

The story is framed by the annual great migration of animals from Tanzania to Kenya, making the connection of sharing resources. The animals share the grassland, each taking only what it needs. The boys hope that their tribes will also find their own way to coexist peacefully and share the land.

Background

First Come the Zebra was inspired by a trip that author Lynne Barasch took to Kenya. She says, "I had always wanted to go to Africa. The realization of this wish was greater than I anticipated. The vast plains stretching out as far as the eye can see, the sweeping skies, the variety and numbers of animals were all things I had hoped for. But standing in the tall grass, feeling the soft air, hearing the sounds of the animals—I knew this was an experience I would have to try to capture in a picture book."

In modern-day Kenya, twenty-first century life clashes with a way of life that hasn't changed very much in hundreds of years. The steel and glass towers of Nairobi, the capital, are a long way from the stick and dung huts of rural villages. Throughout the country, many such sharp contrasts in economic and social conditions are evident. Of the peoples living in Kenya, the Kikuyu, who are traditionally farmers, are the majority. The Maasai, a smaller, seminomadic group, are cattle herders. The conflicts between the Maasai and the Kikuyu are deep-seated and ongoing. Over the years the Maasai have lost much of their grazing grassland, which has been taken over for farms worked by the Kikuyu. This and the problem of grazing cattle straying between the grassland and farmland continue to cause clashes and protests. Recently, however, attitudes have begun to change. The youth of the country have become the hope for the future. Especially among the young, attitudes and opinions about strong group loyalty are undergoing a slow but steady transformation. People are coming together and learning to coexist peacefully.

The boys in this story play an ancient game referred to as *mancala*. Mancala is a type of board game that has several names and local variations, depending on where in the world it is being played. To play, small pieces, usually pebbles or stones, are put into shallow pits carved in a board or dug out of the ground. Two players compete by moving pieces from one pit to another. The object is to capture as many pieces as possible before one of the players clears his or her side of all pieces. The player with the most pieces at the end of the game wins.

Teaching Tip

First Come the Zebra is a great read aloud for the beginning of the school year when teaching respect for others and conflict resolution strategies.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this 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 Kenya? On which continent is it located? What is the weather like? Where do people live? How do people make a living?
2. Have you ever heard the words *Maasai* and *Kikuyu*? What do you think the words mean? What do you know about the people who are Maasai or Kikuyu?
3. What does the word *migration* mean? What types of animals migrate? Why do animals migrate?
4. Think about your best friend. Do you remember when you first met her or him? Did you like the person right away, or did it take a while to become friends? What do you like to do with your best friend?

Exploring the Book

Display the book. Read and talk about the title. Ask students what they think the title means. What do they think the story is about?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, half title page, dedication, title page, and illustrations. Have students note the expressions on the faces of the two boys they see throughout the book. Explain that these expressions help tell the story.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out why the author chose to title the book *First Come the Zebra*, and what happens to the two boys shown on the front cover.

VOCABULARY

The story contains several descriptive words and phrases, some of which may be unfamiliar to some students. Talk about the meanings of the words and phrases listed below. Then ask students to give synonyms and/or use each in a sentence that reflects its meaning.

lush	vast	wildebeest	gazelle
stall	rooting	toddling	migration
savanna	herd	attend to business	furious
warthog	territory	hoofbeats	kiondo
grunt	snort	horizon	mancala
an idea begins to take shape			

There are also names of places and peoples in the book that are probably unfamiliar to students. Review the terms and invite students to look up some information about each to share with the class.

Tanzania	Kenya	Maasai	Kikuyu	Kamba
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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.

1. Why did the author choose to start the story by describing the great migration of animals? How does the migration relate to the ending of the story?
2. How do the animals work together during the great migration?
3. What is important to the Maasai people?
4. What is important to the Kikuyu people?
5. Why do Anaani and Haki start yelling insults at each other when they first meet? Where did they learn these insults?
6. Why do you think the baby wanders away in the tall grass?
7. What happens to start changing Abaani's and Haki's opinions of each other?
8. How do the boys work together to save the Kamba woman's baby? What does each boy do?
9. How do Anaani and Haki feel about each other right after the Kamba family leaves Haki's stall?
10. How does the friendship between Abaani and Haki develop? What do they do? How do their feelings about each other change?
11. What happens when the boys play mancala?
12. What is the idea that Abaani and Haki come up with toward the end of the story? How do they think their families will react?
13. Do you think children like Abaani and Haki can make a difference in the way the Maasai and Kikuyu live together in Kenya? Why do you think so?

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 parts of the story that suggest how each character is feeling.

- The **Illustrator** might create a diagram or chart that illustrates the important stages in the cycle of rice farming in Bali.
- The **Connector** might find other books (fiction and nonfiction) that take place in Kenya or that are about the Maasai and/or the Kikuyu.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each character in the story as well as a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might look for more information about life in modern-day Kenya.

*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 or similar ones 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.

1. What did you like about this story? Why? What didn't you like? Why?
2. Do you think *First Come the Zebra* is a good title for the story? Why or why not? What other titles can you think of that might work for the story?
3. What role does the game *mancala* play in the story? Have you ever made a new friend while playing a game? What game was it? What happened?
4. Do Abaani and Haki shape the events in the story, or do the events shape Abaani and Haki? What makes you think so?
5. How might the story have ended if Abaani and Haki had not cooperated to save the baby? What might have happened to the baby? To Abaani? To Haki?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Ask students to write a letter to either Abaani or Haki. Each student should tell some things about his or her life in the United States, and then ask Abaani or Haki some questions about aspects of their lives in Kenya that are not described in the story. Topics such as school, siblings, climate, favorite sports and/or games may be suggested to get students started.

2. Have students write a book recommendation for this story explaining why they would or would not recommend it to other students.
3. Let students choose a character from the story (Abaani, Haki, a Kamba woman, even a zebra) and rewrite a favorite part of the story from that character's point of view.
4. Have students work with a partner or in small groups to write a set of classroom rules for treating one another with respect.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Assign each English language learner to a partner who is a strong English speaker and reader. Have the partners read the story together.
2. After the first reading, go back through the illustrations and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
3. Teach ELL students simple phrases such as "I don't know that word." "I have a question." "Speak more slowly." "Please repeat that sentence." Encourage ELL students to use these phrases to communicate their needs while reading.
4. Have each ELL student write three questions about the story. Then have students pair up and discuss answers to the questions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

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

Social Studies

1. Locate Kenya and Tanzania on a world map or a globe. Then have students find out more about the two countries. Good place to start are the [Kenya page](#) and [Tanzania page](#) of the 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.
2. Interested students might do research online and in the library to learn more about the Maasai and the Kikuyu, and the reasons for the traditional conflict between the two peoples in Kenya.

3. The children in *First Come the Zebra* provide an example of how conflicts can be resolved peacefully and show a way in which people with differing beliefs can coexist peacefully. You may wish to explore with students the topic of peaceful coexistence and how kids can make a difference toward this goal. As a starting point, discuss the story presented in *Sharing Our Homeland*, which addresses the issues in the context of a summer camp in Israel.

Science

Have students research the great migration. Students may look for answers to questions such as the following. Where exactly does the migration take place? What territory is covered? What animals are involved? How many animals migrate? When during the year does the migration take place? What hazards do the animals encounter? Have students create a map showing the path of the migration, with notions of some of the most important facts they have discovered.

Music

Introduce students to some African music from the Maasai and the Kikuyu. You can download a free CD of traditional Maasai music at [African Art Online](#). And several recordings of Kikuyu gospel songs can be found on [Videosurf](#). You will want to preview any recordings before playing it to make sure the content and visuals are appropriate for your students. Additional information about Maasai and Kikuyu music and dance can be found online at [Blue Gecko](#).

Discuss the sounds students hear and have them speculate about the types of instruments used to produce the sounds. Does the music from these two groups of people remind students of other music with which they are familiar? Students may enjoy making comparisons among the different types of music.

Art

Abaani and Haki play a game called mancala. Have students create their own mancala boards out of egg cartons. They can use paper clips, fried beans, pennies, or other small objects for the pieces. Instructions for making a simple mancala board and directions for playing the game can be found [here](#).

Math/Cooking

If you have cooking facilities available, students may enjoy cooking and tasting the traditional Kenyan dish called *kunde*, black-eyes peas and tomatoes. A recipe can be found [here](#). You can also try making crunchy bananas. A recipe can be found about halfway down [this web page](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Lynne Barasch has written and illustrated several award-winning books for children, including *Knockin' on Wood*, *Hiromi's Hands*, and *First Come the Zebra*, all published by Lee & Low Books. Barasch found inspiration for this story during a trip to Kenya in 2007. The warthogs, in particular, impressed her. Says Barasch, "One day I opted not to go out in the Land Rover with the guide. Instead I took

my little field set of watercolors and went to a wild area beyond the tents where we were staying. Three warthogs were grazing there. Quietly I approached, unseen by the warthogs. I found a small wooden bench and set up there, keeping my feet well up on the bench in case the warthogs noticed me and decided I was a threat to their territory. Luckily, they didn't, and I spent a few very happy hours closely observing and painting them. These warthogs became part of my story. I had my sketches for reference, which were especially meaningful as I remembered that beautiful morning."

Barasch and her husband live in New York City. To find out more about Lynne Barasch, visit LynneBarasch.com.

Book Information

\$18.95, HARDCOVER

ISBN 978-1-60060-365-5

40 pages, 10 x 9-1/2

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *First Come the Zebra* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/370/hc/first_come_the_zebra

BookTalk with Lynne Barasch:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/zebra.mhtml>

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/370/hc/first_come_the_zebra (secure on-line ordering)

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