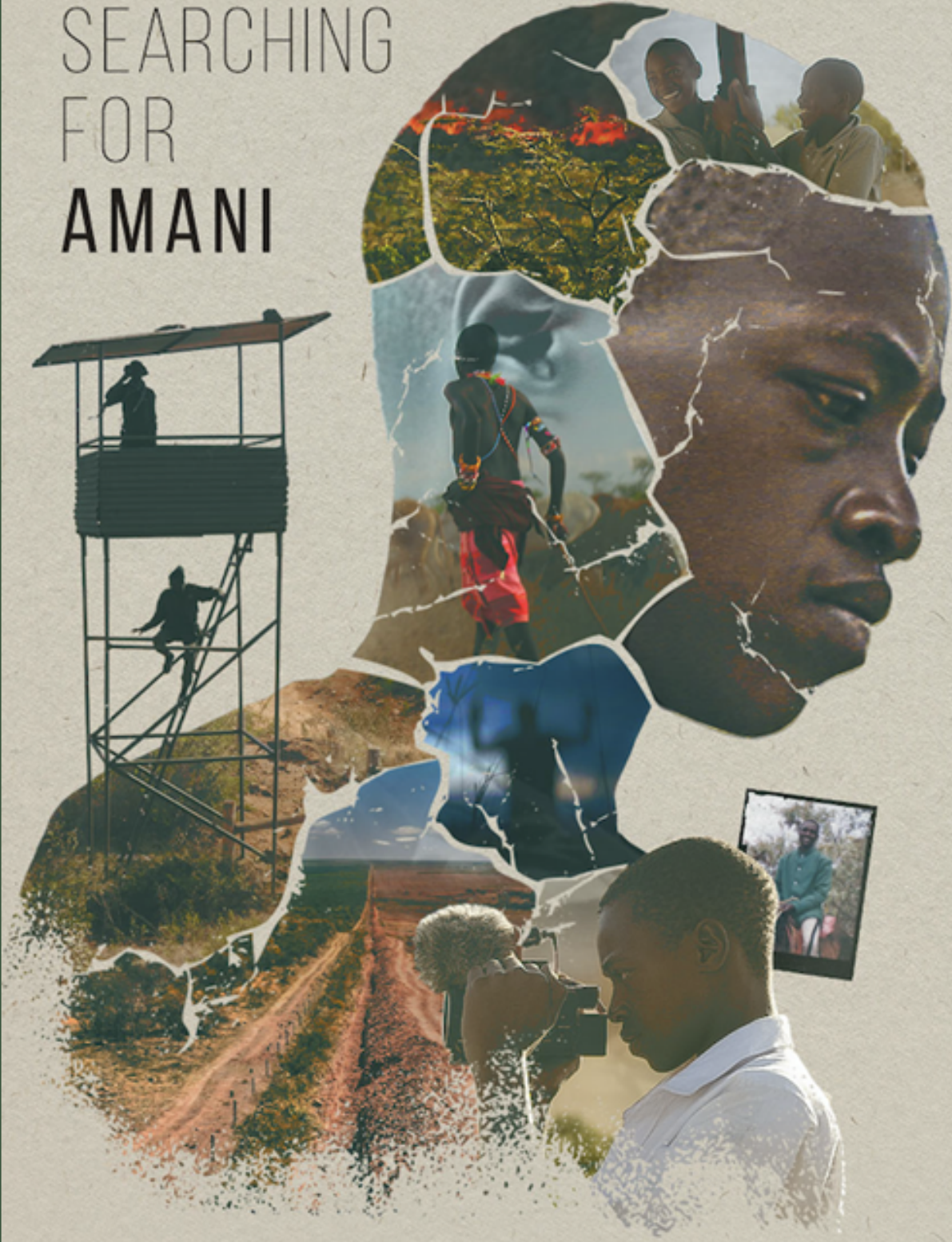


# Discussion Guide

## SEARCHING FOR AMANI



**JOURNEYS IN FILM™**  
educating for global understanding

# *SEARCHING FOR AMANI*

## Discussion Guide

For community screenings, panels, and workshops, and for college courses and seminars



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# Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

## About the Film



**A 13-year-old aspiring journalist teams up with his best friend to investigate his father’s mysterious murder within the boundaries of one of Kenya’s largest wildlife conservancies. As a ravaging drought encroaches, his quest to find the killer shifts, and a young activist is born as the collateral damage of a warming world is revealed.**

In *Searching for Amani*, Simon Ali is a 13-year-old boy searching for justice and closure around the murder of his father. The context of Simon’s story, however, is extraordinarily complex and gives viewers a lens into many topics, including climate change, colonization, resource competition, and more.

The film takes place one year after Simon’s father, Stephen Ali, is killed. At that point, no official investigation has taken place. As such, Simon and the Ali family decide to seek out the truth of what happened for themselves. They are driven by a need for justice, which gives way to a desire for peace (*amani*) for themselves and their community. As an aspiring journalist, Simon interviews multiple people familiar with his father’s case in an attempt to learn more. He investigates within the boundaries of Laikipia Nature Conservancy, one of Kenya’s largest private wildlife conservancies, where his father worked as a tour guide and was known for many years as a peacemaker. Simon’s father moved his family to a small farm in the south of Laikipia to escape the encroaching drought that was quickly turning the north of Laikipia and the rest of northern Kenya into desert. He hoped that doing this would ensure that his children had a better childhood than he did. As the drought continues to rage across Laikipia, less and less pasture is available to the Indigenous pastoralist communities in that region.

As a result of this scarcity, many of the pastoralists are forced to invade farms and fenced-off private land like the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, which is among the last green areas in northern Laikipia. However, due to various reasons (which will be highlighted in this guide), local pastoralist families are denied access to the land for grazing, leading to violent clashes between them and the nature conservancy due to resource competition.

Through the film, viewers are able to learn alongside Simon about the life and death of his father, sparking reflections and conversation about the changing environment, conservation, and community equity in a time of a humanitarian crisis.

# Letter from the Filmmaking Team



Hello, and welcome to the heart of *Searching for Amani*!

Whether you're in a classroom, community setting, homeschooling, or exploring independently, this discussion guide offers a friendly hand in navigating the heartwarming, sometimes devastating, and thought-provoking aspects of Simon's journey and our film.

## EXPLORING TOGETHER

The film brings to light the experiences of young people living on the front lines of climate change, with a special focus on Simon, an extraordinary young soul we met when he was 13 years old. As we dive into Simon's story, we invite you to stay curious, and bring your own perspectives to the conversation.

## SCREENING OBJECTIVES

- Dive into the personal and urgent impacts of climate change on front-line communities, sharing the unique narratives and the profound impact of environmental changes currently affecting individuals like Simon and his family.
- Reveal the intersectional nature of climate change so that discussed solutions are nuanced. In our film, you see that tensions remnant from colonization, climate change, conservation practices, and the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples are all interconnected, and thus solutions can't tackle just one of these issues to be effective.
- Advocate for Indigenous voices and embrace a third way: Connect with Simon's exploration of more harmonious coexistence, weaving together identities and advocating for Indigenous voices for a more inclusive and just future.

## HOW TO USE THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The film touches on many issues, so to help you, this discussion guide offers detailed guidance on facilitating discussions on the following five topics. Depending on the time available and how you would like to focus the discussion, please use the sections that are most relevant and helpful to you:

- **Impacts of Climate Change in Kenya** — Discuss the personal and urgent impacts of climate change while considering the equity of who is most impacted.
- **Pastoral, Agricultural, and Urban Life** — Explore the shifts in pastoral, agricultural, and urban life, appreciating the resilience of these diverse ways of living.
- **Conflict and Wildlife Conservation** — Delve into the delicate dance between conflict and conservation, recognizing the efforts to preserve both nature and community.
- **Role of Investigative Journalism** — Celebrate Simon’s dream of becoming a journalist, showcasing the role of investigative journalism in seeking justice and awareness.
- **Reflections and Additional Resources** — Additional resources are provided for those eager to dive deeper, adding more layers to your discussions.

Throughout the topic sections, you will find the following relevant content:

- **Overview and background info** with helpful insights and context about the topic.
- **Discussion questions:** Guided prompts to help get the conversation started.
- **Engagement activities:** Ideas to promote active participation in the film topics and discussion questions that support in-depth conversations and personal reflection.

This guide was thoughtfully put together by a small, dedicated team of individuals who are passionate about making learning enjoyable for students worldwide. We encourage you to approach it with an open and curious mind, ready to discover new things. Thank you for joining us on this heartfelt exploration of Simon’s world.

Warmly,  
The *Searching For Amani* Film Team

# Impact of Climate Change in Kenya



We have become aware in recent years of the impact of climate change in various parts of the world: sea level rise, wildfires, more frequent and more intense hurricanes, etc. What we do not always realize is that many parts of the world that contribute least to climate change are often the ones most affected by climate change. *Searching for Amani* speaks to how climate change-induced drought has ravaged harvests throughout Laikipia and other areas in Africa. This has had a devastating effect on farmers and herders who rely on green pastures to survive.

## Questions

1. In the film, a news anchor reports that Africa contributes just 4 percent of global carbon emissions, despite being the continent that will suffer the most from climate change.

Some ways in which climate change affects Africa include:

- More frequent and intense hurricanes, wildfires, and droughts
- Food and water insecurity due to extreme drought
- Crop devastation and livestock starvation, which adversely affect those with agricultural livelihoods
- Forced migration in search of resources
- Poor health and low access to preventative measures
- Loss of cultural identity due to forced lifestyle changes
- Price inflation of resources such as food, livestock, and other survival necessities.

***How might this also lead to continued and increased economic inequality and a larger wealth gap between countries in the Global North and the Global South?***



2. Simon mentions that his father moved their family to southern Laikipia because it was known for its green landscape, including trees and grass. The film illustrates the devastation of that land for farmers and herders, which is the result of extreme drought throughout the years. At the time of filming, rain had not fallen in a year, and over two million people were at risk of starvation. Currently, the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia) has been gripped by its worst drought in 40 years with insufficient rainfall (sometimes no rain) for five consecutive seasons. Tens of thousands of people have died, crops have shriveled, livestock has starved, and chronic hunger and water insecurity are widespread and growing.

***What are some possible elements necessary for providing drought relief, aid, and prevention?***

***What are ways that we can bring more attention to this crisis?***

3. In the film, Simon's teacher mentioned other environmental impacts in addition to drought, including deforestation and carbon dioxide emissions. Deforestation is the purposeful clearing of forested land that is then converted to put something else in its place. Typical causes for this include agricultural expansion, wood extraction for fuel, and infrastructure expansion, such as road building and construction. Carbon dioxide emissions involve energy production due to burning coal, oil, or natural gas. Deforestation can also result in more carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere. Trees take in carbon dioxide from the air for photosynthesis, and carbon is locked chemically in their wood. When trees are cut or burned, this carbon returns to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. With fewer trees around to take in the carbon dioxide, it accumulates in the atmosphere and accelerates global warming.

***How might urbanization (the process of creating more urban and modern city spaces) play a strong role in continued deforestation and carbon dioxide emission?***

(Discussions on deforestation may include conversations about commercial cash crops, wood usage, building construction, etc. Discussions on carbon dioxide emissions may include vehicle usage, fuel consumption, etc.)

***What have you noticed in your own community spaces that may contribute to the effects of climate change?***

***Has climate change impacted your community? If so, how?***

# Pastoral, Agricultural, and Urban Life



*Searching for Amani* provides a glimpse into the difficult lives of subsistence farmers like the Ali family, now without the income of their father. It also shows the lives of pastoralists who live a migratory lifestyle in order to feed and water their animals. Lastly, it offers a brief glimpse at life in the modern city of Nairobi.

## Questions

1. Pastoralists move from place to place based on food availability and resources for their livestock. In the film, it is mentioned that pastoralists are hanging on to their traditional ways of living and are not moving in the direction of “modern society.” Simon’s best friend, Haron, mentions that pastoralists do not want to abandon their culture. Culture can be described as the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.

***What are some traditions or values that you and your family have preserved over time, and why are they important to you? Why do you feel it is important to the pastoralists that they preserve their culture and way of life? Five aspects of culture include values and beliefs, language, symbols, rituals, and norms. What elements of culture were illustrated in Searching for Amani? How does the film demonstrate the potential threat of culture being stripped away?***

2. Simon and others in the film speak to how the current conflict and drought have impacted agriculture and the lives of the farmers. For instance, it is mentioned that land used to be considered communal property, where everyone respected and tended to its needs in order to share its resources. Resource scarcity has led to the stronger desire for ownership over parts of the land where people have become territorial regarding resources.

***In what other ways have the resource conflict and drought changed/affected the farmers’ way of life? How might these changes to agriculture impact the lifestyle of others throughout Kenya, including the pastoralists and those living in Nairobi?***



3. Simon mentioned that the boarding school students are a mix of boys and girls from different ethnic communities who live in an area surrounding the conservancy. While pastoralists and farmers have different lifestyles, at school, this does not seem to lead to separation or to affect the way in which the students socialize together. While interviewing his friend Haron regarding his family's life as pastoralists and life on the conservancy, he begins to challenge Haron about their decision to remain pastoralists and the situation of the conservancy being private property.

***How do you feel the resource crisis may have caused barriers of understanding between farmers and pastoralists?***

4. Simon's grandfather mentioned that Simon's father, Stephen, may have been killed by people who were envious that he was shown favor by white people and given opportunities for advancement and authority through his job on the conservancy.

***How might this speak to ways in which colonization can fuel perceptions of advancement based on proximity to whiteness and cause social divides and mistrust between communities of color?***

5. Nairobi is Kenya's capital city and one of the largest cities in Africa. It is an important commercial and financial hub. It's a modern and bustling city, rich in culture and history, but also known for its nature and wildlife opportunities.

***Looking at how Nairobi is depicted in the film, how might the lives of the residents in Nairobi be similar to the pastoralists and farmers? How might they be different? How do you feel the resource crisis in Kenya might be impacting those living in Nairobi?***

# Conflict and Conservation



Conservancies are areas of land preserved to promote healthy ecosystems that support wildlife, livestock and human needs. They strive to improve or maintain the conditions of degraded areas with the intention to ensure adequate supply of water for wildlife, people and livestock. The nature conservancy for which Simon's father worked has a noble goal. Its green acres and sufficient water provide a habitat shared by native wildlife, including endangered species. Tourists can visit, and the fees they pay help support the program. However, the effort to save wild species means that the area is off-limits to pastoralists whose herds are dying because of extreme drought. This has led to conflict between the conservancy owners and the pastoralist groups. This conflict has led to violence in the community. The Laikipia Nature Conservancy represents a rich resource of grass and water. Before colonization, the land was occupied by pastoralists with their livestock. When the British colonized the land, they moved Indigenous people to reservations. When Kenya became independent, many of the British left and some of the land was sold to wealthy Europeans. As a result, the Gallman family, a white Italian family, became the private owners of the land.



## Questions

1. While interviewing his best friend, Simon asks Haron if it is right for the pastoralists to trespass on private property.

***Why might the current pastoralist families also feel ownership over the land?***

2. In the film, it is mentioned that over 50 percent of the land in Laikipia is owned by 30 people.<sup>2</sup> There is a romanticization of what wildlife conservation looks like. While it is a noble goal to protect wildlife, it has resulted in land being fenced off while former residents of that same land are affected by drought, dying of starvation, looking for pasture, and forced to migrate frequently for survival. As a result, it is seen by some as caring more for animal life than human life.

***How does Searching for Amani demonstrate how this reality of land ownership and limited access to land can lead to a humanitarian crisis?***

3. Simon's friend Haron and his family describe the dangers of trying to graze on the conservancy land. Pastoralists found grazing on the land are arrested or shot. As a result, each day brings danger to the pastoralists. In response, they arm themselves, and conflicts over resources grow. Villages and wildlife are sometimes attacked. Resource competition is a negative interaction between individuals who share limited resources. For instance, all living things need water. Everything — people, plants, animals, and even things too small to see — need water to survive. As a result, water is a critical resource. When scarce, there can be devastating consequences. More and more land in Kenya is becoming desert, but the population that lives as pastoralists and farmers continues to grow.

In the film, Sveva Gallman questions why the pastoralists are armed when searching for food and water.

***How does this feed into a narrative mentioned in the film of white conservationists perceiving the pastoralists as bandits and thieves? Based on the film, how do you think conservationists justify keeping others from grazing on the preserved land?***

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=539836677287067>  
<https://theconversation.com/decades-old-tensions-are-driving-the-conflict-in-kenyas-laikipia-region-75071>  
<https://www.citizen.digital/news/kenyan-company-moves-to-restore-laikipia-countys-lost-glory-n336175>

# Role of Investigative Journalism



For years, Simon has wanted to be an investigative journalist and eventually appear on television as a news anchor. After his father dies, Simon uses techniques of journalism: planning questions, making contacts, and conducting interviews. Investigative journalists are expected to find and share the truth using reliable primary sources. They are often trusted by local communities across the world to capture all angles and all sides of a story. What is sometimes forgotten is that even the best individual journalist or journalistic platform can be impacted by human bias. Human bias can be subtle and indirect, whereas our personal experiences affect how we make decisions and influence how we act and behave. Indigenous peoples have often been unable to have their voices heard, even as others are making decisions that have a profound effect on their lives.

## Questions

1. Typical elements of what most see as good journalism involve asking a lot of questions, investigating the truth, and searching for evidence. In the film, Simon develops an interest in journalism in response to his feeling that journalism is based on “knowing what is wrong and what is right.”

*Is this still how journalism is viewed in our modern world? Why or why not?*

2. Indigenous peoples are the earliest known inhabitants of an area, along with their descendants. They are sometimes called “natives.” They often are looking to retain social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live.

*As Simon interviews different people in his community about the murder and the resource crisis, how does he begin to notice that native voices are not being heard? What are some examples that the film gives?*



3. Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills, and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For Indigenous communities, this knowledge informs their decision-making about fundamental aspects of life, including language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) program promotes local and indigenous knowledge and its inclusion in global climate science and policy processes. Learn more about [UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems \(LINKS\)](#) and discuss why it is important for indigenous knowledge to be included in modern decision-making concerning environmental science and related policy.

***Why is it important to give Indigenous voices a platform? What are some ways to do this?***

4. In the film, there is a story highlighted on the news show *60 Minutes* that speaks to how the Gallman family acquired the Laikipia Nature Conservancy land. There is no language involving colonization. Instead, it is told as a brave and noble story of how Kuki Gallman left Italy and "swapped her life of privilege for the wilds of Africa." She is praised for turning the "cattle ranch" into Kenya's largest private wildlife sanctuary.

***In what ways does this narrative speak to the erasure of the history of colonization in Kenya?***

***How does storytelling such as this contrast to the expectations that our society places on good journalism if good journalism involves asking a lot of questions, investigating the truth, and researching for evidence?***

***Does this contribute to the romanization of wildlife preservation? If so, how?***

# Reflections



The Ali family took on the investigation of Stephen Ali's murder to seek justice and closure. Initially, no investigation was done because the family did not have enough money to pay for law enforcement to investigate. After interviewing multiple people, Simon is not able to find conclusive answers to his questions. At the end of the film, Simon's mother acknowledges this and says, "The truth is we need to let go of the hurt and learn to live in peace."

## Questions

1. We learn that the meaning of *amani* is peace and that it may have been one of the last things that Stephen Ali said before he was shot.

*Do you feel it is possible for the Ali family to find the peace that they are searching for despite not learning who murdered Stephen? As they are also searching for justice, does justice equate to peace?*

2. *What is the message that the film is trying to leave with its audience?*

3. *Based on the information that Simon learns along the way while conducting his interviews, how might some of what he learned have changed his perspective on some areas (e.g., the pastoralist lifestyle, the conservancy, etc.)? What are some things that you have learned regarding the historical and current resource crises in Kenya?*

# Making a Difference



## What Can You Do?

### 1. Watch and Learn:

- Keep an eye on what's happening around you.
- Think about whether things are getting better or worse.
- Figure out how you can help make things better.

### 2. Speak Up for Justice:

- If you see something unfair, don't ignore it.
- Use your friends, family, and community as allies to stand up for what's right.
- Be brave like Simon and ask tough questions when needed.

### 3. Know Your Land's History:

- Learn about the history of where you live.
- Find out about the people who lived there before you.
- Remember and respect their names and their stories.

### 4. Be a Good Friend:

- Build strong relationships with friends and family.
- Support each other through tough times just like Simon and Haron did.
- Remember that every little thing you do matters.

# Additional Resources

Learn more about the colonization of Africa, nature conservancies, the history of land conflicts in Kenya, the impact of climate change, and other related information.

CNN.com

[Catastrophic drought that's pushed millions into crisis made 100 times more likely by climate change, analysis finds.](#)

Learn more about the current drought crisis in the Horn of Africa (from April 2023)

<https://www.usaid.gov/kenya/economic-growth-and-trade>

<https://kenyaembassydc.org/aboutkenyahistory/>

<https://en.unesco.org/links>

<https://www.usaid.gov/climate/country-profiles/kenya>

[History of Land Conflicts in Kenya](#)

[The case of pastoral communities in Northern Kenya - PLOS](#)

[Stealth Game](#)

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