

Kenya

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,493

LEVELED BOOK • Y

Kenya

Discussion Questions

Compare and Contrast:

How are flamingos and ostriches alike? How are they different? Give examples from the text.

Evaluate:

Why are Kenya's animal parks and reserves important to both animals and people?

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Written by Jada Cisse

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Front and back cover: A Kenyan looks out over the Great Rift Valley.

Title page: Kenya's David Rudisha broke the world record for the fastest 800-meter run in the 2012 Olympics.

Page 3: Lions roam the savannas of Kenya, preying mainly on wildebeests, zebras, and antelopes.

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Countries Around the World
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Correlation

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Where Is It?

Kenya is a country on the continent of Africa that is surrounded by five other countries. Ethiopia lies to the north of Kenya, and Tanzania (tan-zuh-NEE-uh) lies to the south. West of Kenya is Uganda, while South Sudan borders Kenya to the northwest. To the east is Somalia. The southeastern coast of Kenya is on the Indian Ocean.

The **equator** runs through Kenya, which means that Kenya does not have seasons marked by changes in temperature. Instead, the amount and duration of rainfall marks the changing seasons. Temperatures do vary, however, with the mountains being cooler than lower places.

The capital city of Kenya is Nairobi (neye-ROH-bee), which originated as a railway station during the construction of Kenya's rail system. Today, more than three million people live there. The city is the industrial center of the country, with factories that make clothing and furniture along with bread, cornmeal, and other processed foods. Because of Nairobi's location near East African farmlands, crops used as raw materials do not have to travel far to food processing factories.

Nairobi is one of a few capital cities in the world with a wildlife park in its backyard. Nairobi National Park, a large game **reserve**, lies just 8 kilometers (5 mi.) from the city. Visitors can see lions, giraffes, and various reptiles and birds.

One hotel near Nairobi provides a unique experience. At Giraffe Manor, guests can eat breakfast and dinner with Rothschild's giraffes. The hotel sits on a large **sanctuary** for this rare species of giraffe. The animals actually stick their heads through the windows!



Giraffes at Giraffe Manor often visit in the mornings and evenings.

People

More than forty-five million people live in Kenya. It ranks thirty-first in population among the world's nations and includes more than thirty ethnic groups, or tribes. Almost all Kenyans have African ancestors and speak the language of their tribe in addition to at least one of the national languages, English and Swahili (swah-HEE-lee). English is the language of government, higher education, and large business corporations, while Swahili is the language of primary schools and many smaller businesses. A small number of Kenyans have ancestors from Europe, Asia, or the Middle East.



The Maasai (muh-SY) people, who traditionally have been herders, are one Kenyan tribe.

Many Kenyans enjoy watching and playing football, which is also called soccer. Kenyan runners are renowned for competing in international races and winning gold medals in the Olympic Games. Bao, a popular game played with a wooden board that has small cups for holding seeds or stones, is played by young and old alike.

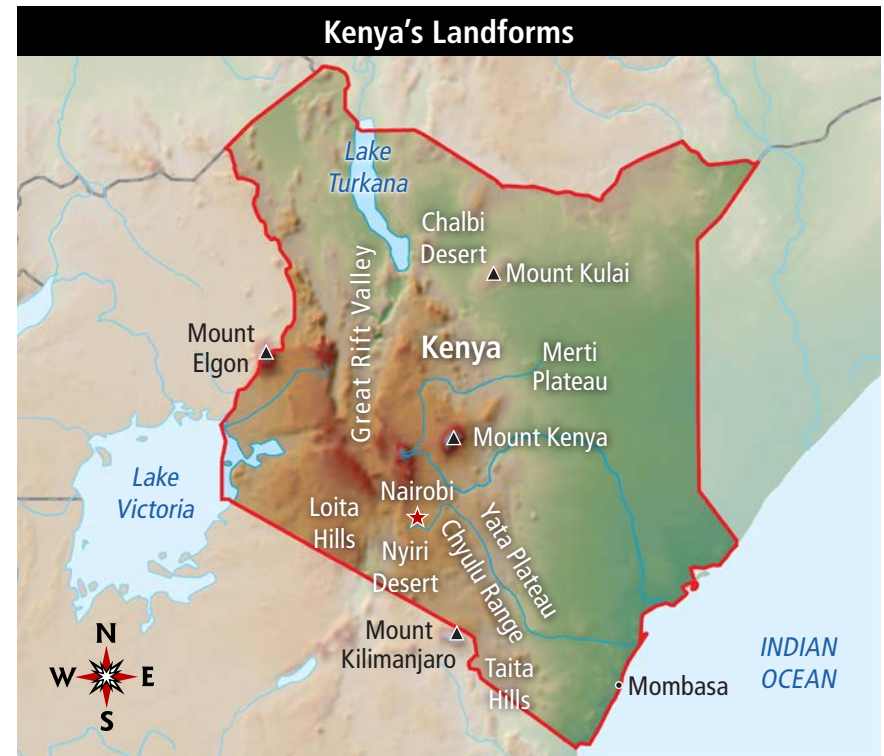


Sisal plants (main) are crushed and dried to make fibers (inset), which are then woven together.

About seventy-five percent of Kenyans live in the countryside, where most farm to earn a living. They grow food to feed their families, along with crops to sell such as tea, coffee, corn, sweet potatoes, and wheat. They also grow flowers, many of which are used to make a natural insecticide. Another important Kenyan crop is **sisal**, a type of plant with strong fibers used to make ropes and mats. Tourism is another big source of income for the country, with over a million people visiting Kenya every year.

Kangas

Cotton is an important crop in Kenya that is used to make clothing such as kangas. Women wear these large, colorful pieces of cloth as shawls, head scarves, and skirts. A woman might also use a kanga to carry her child. Many kangas have a proverb or saying on them, such as this one: "He who digs a well gets himself inside."



Land

The western part of Kenya contains highlands that are divided by the Great Rift Valley, a 6,437 kilometer (4,000 mi.) crack in Earth's crust about 50 to 130 kilometers (30–80 mi.) wide. The floor of the valley contains lakes, volcanoes, and deserts. The walls are cliffs called **escarpments**, which rise up to 2,700 meters (9,000 ft.) above the floor.

The highlands are one of two areas that receive enough rain for farming, so most of Kenya's people live there. Mount Kenya, in the highlands, is the highest mountain in the country.

Kenya's coastal lowlands also receive enough rain for farming. Coconut and cashew crops thrive in this area of the country. White sand beaches and **mangrove** forests line the coast.

Kenya's deserts, found mostly in the north, are not as large as the Sahara and other African deserts. A few **nomadic** tribes, who mainly herd sheep and goats, live in these arid areas. At the western edge of these deserts is Lake Turkana, where fossils of the earliest humans have been discovered. Lake Turkana, which used to be named Lake Rudolf, is the largest desert lake in the world.

Kenya is famous for its **savanna**, where large herds of wildebeests, zebras, gazelles, and other animals graze. Grasses on the savanna grow as tall as 1.5 meters (5 ft.), and thorny, flat-topped **acacia** (uh-KAY-shuh) trees dot the landscape. Kenya's grasslands are found in the areas west and east of the highlands.



Ivory comes from elephants and hippos. Many countries today ban the sale of ivory.

History

Kenya has evidence of some of the earliest humans. They had little interaction with the world at large until the first century AD, when people from the Middle East and Asia established trade in East Africa. For hundreds of years, people on Kenya's coast traded slaves as well as **ivory** and other things. People from Europe arrived in Kenya in the late 1400s, and Kenya officially became a colony of the British Empire in 1920.

The British angered Kenyans when they gave much of the native land to white people from Great Britain and South Africa. Many Kenyans began fighting for independence in 1952. By 1963, the country gained its freedom from British rule.

For a few decades, the president of Kenya had a great deal of power, and the government had only one political party. Many Kenyans wanted to see an end to this inequality. In 2010, a new constitution was passed that gave the president less power and the people more power.



On a safari, tourists usually travel in guided vans to search for animals to see and photograph.

Animals

Kenya is famous for its wildlife, some of which is very rare. To protect its animals, Kenya has set aside more than fifty parks and animal reserves. Every year, millions of tourists go on **safari** to see animals such as rhinoceroses, lions, leopards, hippos, and elephants.

Kenya has two kinds of elephants. The forest elephant lives in the highland rainforests, while the savanna elephant lives in many environments, including deserts. Kenya also has two kinds of rhinoceroses—the white rhino and the black rhino—even though both are actually gray. Rhinos do not see well, but they have keen senses of smell and hearing. Even though they weigh about 3,600 kilograms (8,000 lbs.) on average, they can run as fast as 45 kilometers (28 mi.) per hour.

Zebras, gazelles, and other grazing animals fill the Kenyan savanna. One of the most amazing sights in all of Africa is the annual **migration** of wildebeests and zebras. Every year, about 1.5 million wildebeests and 300,000 zebras migrate over 1,600 kilometers (1,000 mi.) from the Serengeti (ser-en-GEH-tee) Plain to Kenya's savanna to find food and water. It's a difficult trip, and every year about 250,000 wildebeests die in the process. Along the way, predators such as lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, and wild dogs follow the herds. One of the most spectacular events is the migratory crossing of the Mara River.

Rivers such as the Mara are also home to hippopotamuses. Hippos may look serene and innocent as they move along in the water, but they actually cause more human deaths in Africa than lions. These aggressive, territorial animals stay in the water most of the time, but at night they emerge to feed on grass and other plants. Sometimes they eat crops, which causes conflict between the hippos and people.



Hippos' huge teeth make them very dangerous.

Other places in Kenya have many animals, too. Thousands, sometimes millions, of greater and lesser flamingos gather on Lake Nakuru in the Great Rift Valley. These wading birds stick their heads into the water to feed on small plants and animals.

Flamingos spend most of their time in the water, but another African bird lives only on land. The ostrich is the largest bird in the world, and it lays the largest eggs as well. One egg can weigh 1.35 kilograms (3 lbs.). To protect itself from predators, an ostrich may hide by stretching out on the ground. It may also run away, reaching speeds of up to 70 kilometers (43 mi.) per hour. If all else fails, the ostrich can deliver powerful kicks to defend itself.

Kenya has several large, dangerous predators, and two that are most harmful to humans are actually very small. The tsetse (TSEE-tsee) fly and the mosquito infest about one-third of the country. These insects carry the diseases of malaria and sleeping sickness. Sleeping sickness gets its name from one of its symptoms: people with the disease become very sleepy. When a tsetse fly or mosquito bites a person, the insect transmits a very small organism that causes disease. Both malaria and sleeping sickness make people very ill.

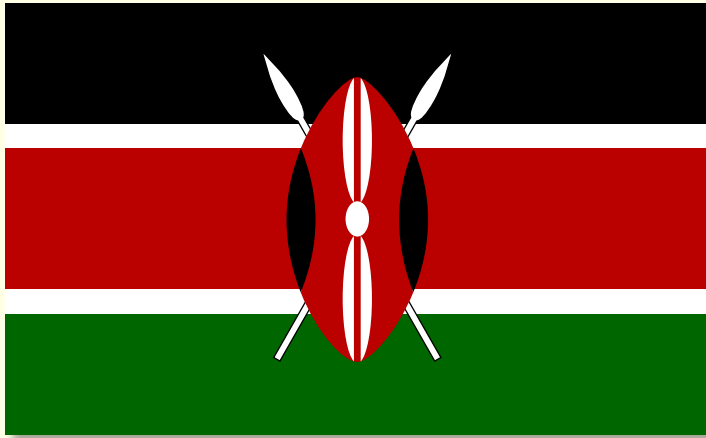


Nairobi has many government buildings and museums as well as several universities.

Conclusion

Kenya may be famous for its safaris and savanna, yet the country has much more to offer. The cliffs of the Great Rift tower over a valley filled with life, and many of its animal species cannot be found anywhere else. Kenya's capital city is the center of industry for the whole country, exporting goods to places all over the world. Kenya is one of the world's most spectacular nations, filled with an abundance of natural beauty and a multitude of fascinating cultures.

Kenya



Population: 45,010,056

Land: 569,140 sq km (219,746 sq. mi.)

Capital City: Nairobi

Primary Languages: Swahili, English

Primary Religion: Christianity

Currency: Kenyan shilling



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

Glossary

acacia (<i>n.</i>)	a tree with small yellow or white flowers that grows in warm climates (p. 9)
equator (<i>n.</i>)	an imaginary line that circles the Earth halfway between the North and South Poles (p. 4)
escarpments (<i>n.</i>)	steep slopes or cliffs that separate two areas of land (p. 8)
ivory (<i>n.</i>)	a white material that makes up the tusks of elephants or other tusked animals (p. 10)
mangrove (<i>n.</i>)	a tropical tree that grows in swamps or shallow salt water and grows roots from its branches (p. 9)
migration (<i>n.</i>)	a regular, predictable movement of living things from one location to another (p. 12)
nomadic (<i>adj.</i>)	moving from place to place without a permanent home (p. 9)
reserve (<i>n.</i>)	a place where wild plants and animals are protected (p. 5)
safari (<i>n.</i>)	a journey to search for wild animals (p. 11)
sanctuary (<i>n.</i>)	a safe place (p. 5)
savanna (<i>n.</i>)	a flat grassland with few trees (p. 9)
sisal (<i>n.</i>)	a plant grown for its leaves, which produce strong fibers used in making ropes (p. 7)