

# THE WORLD'S OLDEST FIRST GRADER

3

On January 12, 2004, Kimani Maruge knocked on the door of the **primary** school in his village in Kenya. It was the first day of school, and he was ready to start learning. The teacher let him in and gave him a desk. The new student sat down with the rest of the first graders: six- and seven-year-old children. However, Kimani Maruge was not an **ordinary** first grader. He was 84 years old—the world's oldest first grader.

## FIGHTING TO STAY IN SCHOOL

Kimani Maruge was born in Kenya in 1920. At that time, primary education in Kenya was not free, and Maruge's family didn't have enough money to pay for school. When Maruge grew up, he worked hard as a farmer. In the 1950s, he fought with other Kenyans against the British colonists.<sup>1</sup> After years of fighting, Kenya became **independent** in 1963.

In 2003, the Kenyan **government** began offering free primary **education** to everyone, and Maruge wanted an education, too. However, it wasn't always easy for him to **attend** school. Many of the first graders' parents didn't want an old man in their children's class. School officials<sup>2</sup> said that a primary education was only for children. But the school principal,<sup>3</sup> Jane Obinchu, **believed** Maruge was right. With her help, he was able to stay in school.

<sup>1</sup>colonists: people who live in a foreign country that is controlled by their country

<sup>2</sup>official: a person who has an important position in an organization, such as a government or a school

<sup>3</sup>principal: the person in charge of a school

LIVE  
WORKSHEETS

Maruge was a **motivated** and successful student. While in primary school, he studied Swahili,<sup>4</sup> English, and math. He did well in these subjects. In fact, **D** he was one of the top five students in his first grade class. By the second grade, Maruge became the school's student **leader**. And even though life was sometimes difficult, Maruge stayed in school until the seventh grade.

In 2008, Maruge had to move to a refugee camp because of fighting in his village. However, even during those difficult times he continued to go to school. **E** Later that year, he moved to a home for the elderly. Some of the residents of the home were illiterate, and Maruge taught them to read and write. He also continued going to school.

### INSPIRED<sup>5</sup> TO LEARN

In 2005, Maruge flew in a plane for the first time in his life. He traveled to **F** New York City, where he gave a speech at the United Nations. He spoke about the importance of education and asked for help to educate the people of Kenya. Maruge also wanted to improve primary education for children in Africa.

Maruge died in 2009 at age 89, but his story continues to inspire many people. The 2010 movie *The First Grader* showed Maruge's amazing fight to get an education. After watching the movie, many older Kenyans **decided** to start **G** school. One of those people was 19-year-old Thoma Litei. Litei said, "I knew it was not too late. I wanted to read, and to know more language, so I came [to school] to learn. That is why it is important for his story to be known."

**Task 2: Complete the summary below. Use NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS  
AND/OR A NUMBER for each answer.**

The world's oldest first-grader is an 84-year-old man from (1) \_\_\_\_\_. His name is Kimani Maruge. When Maruge was young, his family couldn't afford to (2) \_\_\_\_\_ for school, so he became a farmer. In the 1950s, Maruge was a soldier to fight against (3) \_\_\_\_\_ until his country became independent in 1963. In 2003, Maruge could attend school because the primary education was (4) \_\_\_\_\_. However, many of the first-graders' parents and (5) \_\_\_\_\_ didn't want him to be in school, but the school (6) \_\_\_\_\_, Jane Obinchu helped him continue with his study.

Although having to move to a refugee camp and then to a home for the elderly in (7) \_\_\_\_\_, Maruge still kept on going to school. He gave a speech at the United Nations in 2005 about the (8) \_\_\_\_\_ of education. He died in 2009 at age 89. Maruge's life inspired a movie called (9) \_\_\_\_\_ in 2010.