

Lesein Mutunkei

Lesein's Two Loves

Lesein Mutunkei grew up loving the outdoors. His family spent weekends and holidays visiting parks around their hometown of Nairobi, Kenya. They went camping and hiking. They participated in charity walks and sometimes planted trees. They knew that **deforestation** was a threat to the environment, and they wanted to help make a difference.

Lesein also loves sports. He plays tennis, runs, and swims. He has a lot of energy! His favorite sport is one that is played in 200 countries across the world. It is the most popular sport. Where Lesein lives, it is called *football*; and in the United States, it is called *soccer*. He joined a club team and became one of their best scoring players. When he got to high school, he joined the school team as well.



One Little Thing

Lesein takes inspiration from Wangari Maathai, the first African woman and the first **environmentalist** to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Maathai, a science professor from Kenya, started a **grassroots** movement to fight deforestation. She saw that **native** forests were being cut down to grow crops like coffee, tea, and sugarcane.

"Cutting down the **indigenous** forests and replacing them with **exotic** species of trees caused everything else to die." ¹

Dr. Maathai encouraged people to do "one little thing" to make a difference in the world. She believed in the power of many people combining their individual efforts to make big changes. She started the Greenbelt Movement and encouraged women to plant trees in their local environment. Her efforts led to the planting of over 30 million trees across Africa. She was **affectionately** known by people in Kenya as "Mama Trees."

"It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees."
—Wangari Maathai ²

▮ **deforestation**—the purposeful clearing of forest land by humans for other uses

1. "Lesein Mutunkei." It's Time, a Festival of Climate Action. Accessed April 25, 2021.

2. Stallard, Jackie. "Words to Live By—A Tribute to Wangari Maathai." Project Learning Tree, August 21, 2019.

Lesein Mutunkei (cont.)

So Many Trees!

When he was about 12 years old, Lesein learned more about environmental threats such as deforestation, climate change, and plastic pollution. He did some research online. He learned that about 5 million trees are cut down in Kenya every day. He wanted to visualize what that many trees looked like. Using math, he figured out that every hour Kenya loses enough trees to fill about six professional soccer fields. Lesein decided he needed to do something to help.

"I didn't want to lose what I had, like going for nature walks or mountain climbing or camping."³

Trees for Goals

Lesein wanted to use his love of soccer to help plant trees. He decided to plant a tree for every goal he scored. He called his project Trees4Goals. In one year, he planted 109 trees! It made him feel good and **motivated** him to play even better.

The next year, Lesein expanded his project. Kenya's Ministry of Environment heard about Trees4Goals. They agreed to provide him with trees. Lesein planted 11 trees for every goal scored by his team, because there are 11 players on a soccer team. So far, he has planted over 1,400 trees around Nairobi.

Kids at Lesein's school became interested in his project. He showed them how to plant trees. He got other sports teams at his school to join his project. The basketball team started Hoops4Trees. He got teachers to help kids plant trees on their school field trip to a national park in Southern Kenya.

Lesein has big goals for himself and his project. He wants to create a Trees4Goals forest in every county in Kenya, and then every country in Africa. He hopes to get the international soccer organization FIFA to start planting trees. Through social media, he spreads his message to encourage other young people to help make a difference.



"I always say: you are never too small or too young to make an impact in the world. Remember that everything you do, however small, counts."⁴

3. "Kenyan Football Teen Plants Trees for Goals." BBC News. BBC. Accessed April 25, 2021.

4. "Lesein Mutunkei." It's Time, a Festival of Climate Action. Accessed April 25, 2021.

Unit 6

Name: _____

Date: _____

Key Ideas and Details

Directions: Answer the questions below about Lesein Mutunkei. Use complete sentences.

1. In what country and city does Lesein Mutunkei live? On which continent does he live?

2. What problem did Lesein want to help solve?

3. How did Lesein use math to better understand *deforestation*?

4. Who was Wangari Maathai? How did she influence Lesein?



Name: _____

Date: _____

Craft and Structure

Directions: Answer the questions below. Use complete sentences.

1. What does it mean to be an *environmentalist*?

2. Why do you think the author included the sidebar about Dr. Maathai?

3. What is the idea that ties the parts of this text together?



Unit 6

Name: _____

Date: _____

Integration of Knowledge and Meaning

Directions: Answer the questions below. Use complete sentences.

1. How did Lesein choose to help solve the problem of deforestation?

Why do you think he chose this course of action? How do you know?

2. Do you think Lesein's project was successful? Why, or why not?

3. What else would you like to know about Lesein Mutunkei and Trees4Goals?



Name: _____

Date: _____

Group Discussion



Brainstorming: Lesein uses Dr. Maathai's idea of doing "one little thing" to help make a difference in the world. What are some ideas for your one little thing? What difference could it make if many people did the same little thing?

Taking Action

Lesein planted trees to help his community. That is his "one little thing."

Directions: Think of a problem in your community and one little thing you could do to help. Complete this graphic organizer to help you come up with a plan.

What is your "one little thing" you can do?

How could you get others to join you?

What effect could the efforts of many people working together have on the problem?
