

# MAASAI DRESS-UP GAME

## THE CHARACTERS

Meet Nanyori and Saruni, two students at Noonkodin Secondary School in Tanzania. They both love dressing up in traditional Maasai clothes, as well as the colourful clothes popular in other parts of Tanzania, which are often called 'Swahili' fashions (Swahili is the national language of Tanzania).

**Nanyori** (pronounced 'Nan-YOUR-ee') is the *endito* (girl) on the left. Many Maasai girls in Tanzania have to get married before they're 16, to husbands chosen for them by their parents, but Nanyori is lucky because she has a sponsor who pays for her to be a boarding student at Noonkodin. Her father has two wives and twelve children altogether - Nanyori is the fifth. She's wearing a traditional black under-garment called *arkaraha narok* ('narok' means black). It's a rectangle of black cloth, with white stripes sewn on to it, which is tied in a knot at one shoulder and then fastened at the waist with a thin strip of cloth that serves as a belt.

**Saruni** (pronounced 'Sah-ROO-nee') is the *olmurrani* (warrior) on the right. Boys go through a circumcision ceremony between the ages of 12 and 17, and after that they are called warriors. There are no wars any more, but sometimes the warriors do have to defend their animals and their village against fierce wild animals, like lions, leopards and cheetahs. Saruni's father is a small-scale farmer, and his mother and older brothers help to look after the cattle and goats. The family has to work very hard to pay Saruni's school fees, and he's worried that if there's a drought, they won't be able to afford it and he'll have to leave school. In the picture he's wearing his shorts, ready to start putting on his *rubega* (robes).

## THE CLOTHES

### Nanyori's Maasai Fashions

For normal everyday wear, Nanyori first puts on one of her long dresses, in blue or purple, and then a shorter piece of cloth (plain or striped) over the top.

Cloaks and jewellery, including beaded headbands and the huge round necklaces (*isosin*) made of beads and wire, are worn on special occasions. The two outfits with *isosin*, long white bead necklaces and striped cloaks are typical of what a Maasai girl might wear (with a blue dress underneath) to a big celebration, like a wedding or a coming-of-age party. The Maasai are very fashion-conscious, and every year there are new designs!

Nanyori loves to try on the brown and white *orkila* (traditional Maasai bridal dress) belonging her sister-in-law, who just joined the family! Traditionally, an *orkila* would be made of soft ox leather, sewn with white beads and small metal discs, but nowadays young people often prefer to have them made from brown cotton cloth.

### Nanyori's Swahili Fashions

Like the other Noonkodin students, Nanyori has to wear a uniform - a dark green blouse, khaki skirt and blue jumper. [FACT: The uniform was invented by the very first Noonkodin students, our 'Class of 2008', who chose it to represent the colours of their environment - blue for the Monduli mountains, green for the trees, and khaki for the dry grass. The dark green blouse also serves a very practical purpose, in that it doesn't show the dust as much as a white one would!]

In the evenings and at weekends, Nanyori enjoys wearing her 'Swahili fashions'. The green and blue outfit called a *khanga* (KAN-guh) is very casual - it's just two pieces of cloth, one tied round the waist like a sarong and the other draped over the shoulder. Every *khanga* has a traditional African proverb or a religious message in the Swahili language; Nanyori's says MUNGU AKUPE BARAKA, which means 'May God give you blessings'. The other outfits, called *kitenge* (kee-TEN-gay), are more formal. Each one is made up of a skirt and blouse, which can be worn with or without a matching headscarf. Sometimes Nanyori likes to get her hair braided on top of her head, in a style that is jokingly called 'Kilimanjaro'!

### Saruni's Maasai Fashions

Just like the girls, young Maasai warriors love to wear fashionable clothes, and keep up with new styles. Saruni normally wears three *rubega*, one tied over each shoulder and the other draped round his shoulders like a blanket.

For special occasions, Saruni wears a thick beaded leather belt over his *rubega*, and puts on white bead armbands that almost cover his lower arms. He sometimes wears a long black wig, called an *oldaika* - it reminds him of the time when he was a newly initiated warrior and could grow his hair long, with woollen hair extensions braided into it and metal clips fastened in the front. He also likes to try on his brother's *orkila*, a brown leather wedding cloak that will be his one day, when he gets married!

### Saruni's Swahili Fashions

The boys' uniform is almost the same as the girls', with khaki trousers instead of a skirt. When Saruni isn't at school, he has to help out on his father's farm, and for that he wears a T-shirt, scruffy jeans, and wellies - he doesn't want to get his Maasai clothes dirty! He also has two embroidered outfits that he wears when he goes to town, or sometimes for church.