

# Educator Guide

## Ages 8-12



Shiko Nguru

### Synopsis

12-year-old Mwikali is moving to a new school in Nairobi and just wants life to be normal. But when she meets Soni, Odwar and Xirsi who reveal that she is descended from an ancient bloodline of legendary Kenyan warriors, all hope of a normal life fades. Now, with an array of malign forces massing, Mwikali must delve deep into the past to discover her ancestry, learn to harness her extraordinary powers, and enter a race against time to defeat a village elder who has turned to dark magic in an effort to gain ultimate power... A fantasy adventure that will keep you on the edge of your seat right to the moment of its breath-taking conclusion!

### About the Author

Shiko Nguru is a Kenyan author and content creator, sharing her motherhood journey in the most genuine and beautiful way she can. *Mwikali and the Forbidden Mask* is her debut novel, inspired by her love of East African mythology.

### Before Reading

#### Building Background Knowledge

This story takes place in Nairobi, the bustling capital city of Kenya. Before reading, take time to build your students' background knowledge of the setting. Start by asking your students what they already know about the city Nairobi or country of Kenya. Then, with your students, build a list of questions they can research before starting the book. Provide access to a map and the compilation of all the information they gather about Nairobi, Kenya in your classroom, so that they can refer back to it as they read. If you have time, consider taking a virtual field trip to Kenya using Google Earth or take a virtual tour of the Nairobi National Museum using this online resource: (<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/explore-kenya-39-s-communities-at-nairobi-national-museum-national-museums-of-kenya/8wUBPCHm72TXsg?hl=en>).

After completing the exercise, ask your students to reflect on what they learned. What was the most interesting new fact they learned? What surprised them the most?

What We Know	What We Want to Know	What We Learned

### History and Social Studies - Jamhuri Day

Jamhuri Day, the day the Kenyan people took back the country from colonizers, is significant in the context of this story. In order for students to understand the significance when you read, it will be important to spend some time talking about Kenya’s history. If you have already covered some of the history in the “Building Background Knowledge” activity above, you may want to refer to it again or build on the research. Some questions to explore with your students could be:

- When did the first people settle in Kenya?
- Who are some of the communities indigenous to Kenya? What are they known for?
- How many languages are spoken in Kenya?
- What were some major achievements of Kenyan people?
- Who are some well-known leaders and important figures in Kenyan history?
- What does the word “colonize” mean?
- When did colonizers arrive in Kenya? Who were they? What was their impact?
- How did the Kenyan people resist colonization?
- Why is Jamhuri Day significant to Kenyan people today? How is it celebrated?

After reading the book, refer back to this discussion and notes with your students when you are discussing why Jamhuri Day might be so important to Mr. Lemayian and other characters in this story.

### Art and Culture - The Music of Sauti Sol

One of Mwikali’s mother’s favorite musical groups is Sauti Sol, a Kenyan afro-pop band from Nairobi. In 2016 they became the first Kenyan artists to run a successful nationwide tour and went on to experience global success. Have students listen to some of their music on YouTube. What are some of the instruments they can hear? Does the music remind them of other music they have listened to before? Why or why not?

## During Reading

### Vocabulary - Learning New Words in Swahili

Throughout the book, there are many beautiful words from the Swahili language included in the text - mandazi, babu, matatu, sawa, ndizi, bao, just to name a few. As you read the text with your students, encourage them to identify the new words they notice. Write them on a special word wall or chart during discussions and add the definitions so students can refer back to them as you read.

### Social Emotional Learning - The Importance of Names

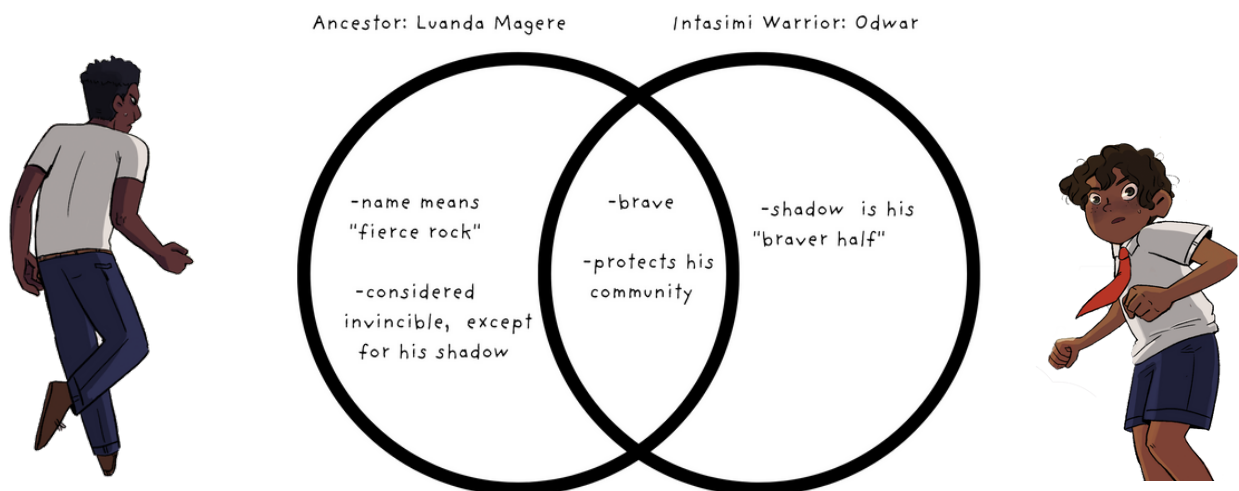
At the beginning of the story, Mwikali introduces herself as “Kali” because that’s the name teachers at Western schools insisted on calling her because it was easier to pronounce. “Never water yourself down to make other people more comfortable. Stay whole, stay true, and let them adjust to you,” Babu reminds her. Because names are such an important part of students’ identities, this text lends itself to discussion and reflection on the importance of pronouncing names correctly and affirming and celebrating the cultures and heritage of the students in your classroom. Here are some questions to help guide a discussion or written activity for you and your students:

- Why is your name special to you, your family, or your culture?
- Has someone ever mispronounced your name or the name of someone you know? How did it make you feel?
- Why do you think pronouncing our and others names correctly is so important?
- What could you do to learn to say the name of someone correctly? What could you do to help someone else learn how to say your name?

### Exploring East African Mythology

Each of the Intasimi warriors in the story is a descendent of a legendary hero or warrior in East African mythology. Using the resources from The National Museums of Kenya below, have students choose one of the important figures and listen to their story. Have them take notes using a graphic organizer. What did the warrior or hero do? What were they like? Why were they such important figures in their communities? Which character in the story inherits their superpowers from each hero? How are they similar or different?

- Gasara Winn ([https://artsandculture.google.com/story/gasara-winn-the-story-of-the-boni-forest-protector/-QKCdmlE\\_7BjKg](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/gasara-winn-the-story-of-the-boni-forest-protector/-QKCdmlE_7BjKg))
- Cierume (<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/cierume-the-story-of-the-dancing-mbeere-warrior/NQKylSuqss9jKQ>)
- Luanda Magere (<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/luanda-magere-the-story-of-the-great-luo-warrior/IAJyPc0dTAt5IQ>)
- Syokimau ([https://artsandculture.google.com/story/syokimau-the-story-of-a-great-kamba-prophetess-and-medicine-woman/KAIyFUtzqz\\_M\\_Iw](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/syokimau-the-story-of-a-great-kamba-prophetess-and-medicine-woman/KAIyFUtzqz_M_Iw))



Comprehension & Discussion Questions:

- Why does Mwikali feel like she never has belonged anywhere?
- What is the secret that Mwikali is holding onto from her past?
- What is Mwikali able to do or see that one else can see?
- What traits do the characters Mwikali, Soni, Odwar, and Xirsi possess? What details from the text make you think that?
- What happens when Mwikali shares her secret with Soni, Odwar, and Xirsi? What does she expect their response will be? How do they actually respond?
- Who are the Intasimi? Why are they important?
- How do Mwikali's feelings about herself begin to change as she begins to learn about her ancestors?
- What is Mr. Lemayian like? How do you know?
- Why are the tutoring sessions with Mr. Lemayian so important?
- What does Mwikali learn about her ancestor, Syokimau, from Mr. Lemayian?
- Why does it become so important for Mwikali to learn about her dad?
- Whom does Mwikali meet when she travels to the past? What advice does she receive?
- How does Mr. Lemayian feel about the Forbidden Mask? What does he do or say that makes you think that?
- Who is the Red Oloibon? What makes him different from other Oloibons?
- Who is the only one who can destroy the Forbidden Mask?
- Who does Mwikali think is the Red Oloibon at first? Why does she think this?
- There are several characters in the book who are not exactly as they appear. Who are they and how does your opinion of them change in the book?
- What problems or challenges does Mwikali face at Tanu's Restaurant? How are these problems resolved?
- What is a libation? What happens when Mwikali gives a libation near the stream where water runs in the opposite direction? Who does she meet there?
- What important reminders does Sokiyau give to Mwikali?
- Why is Jamhuri Day so important to Mr. Lemayian and the Kenyan people? Why is it significant in this story?
- How does Mwikali figure out where the Forbidden Mask is hidden?
- Who is really the Red Oloibon? Were you surprised when you learned this? Why or why not?
- Why does the Red Oloibon need Mwikali for the Forbidden Mask ritual?
- What does the Red Oloibon say to try and convince Mwikali to participate in the ritual?
- Do you have any sympathy for the Red Oloibon's point of view?
- How is the Forbidden mask finally destroyed?
- What do we learn about Mwikali's father? Why did he disappear from her life for so long?
- What do you think is the lesson of this story? What is the author trying to teach us?
- How does the character Mwikali change throughout the story? What evidence from the text makes you think that?
- Who is your favorite character in the story? Why?

## After Reading

### History and Social Studies - Honoring Our Ancestors

In the beginning of the story, Mwikali feels like an outsider and even “cursed” by her ability to see the future. As she learns more about her connection to her ancestors and the gifts she’s received from them, she begins to develop confidence and pride in who she is. Have your students reflect on their ancestors or members of their families. Encourage them to come up with a list of questions to ask their family members in order to learn more. Who were their ancestors? Where did they come from? What special talents, skills, traits, or “superpowers,” might they have inherited from their ancestors that make them who they are today?

### Social-Emotional Learning - Building Empathy

“But Mwikali had never really felt like she belonged anywhere. For as long as she could remember, she had always been different. She had always been the new kid. The outsider.” Ask your students why they think Mwikali has always felt like she was different. What examples from the text can they point to as evidence? Ask your students if they have ever felt like Mwikali did at the beginning of the book. How did it feel? What or who helped them feel more included? As a class, brainstorm ways your students might be able to help others feel included at their school or in their communities.

### Narrative Writing - Writing Your Own Adventure

At the end of the story, a mischievous smile creeps across Odwar’s face. “How would you guys like to go on an adventure?” he asks. Ask your students to brainstorm where they think the Intasimi warriors will go next. Have them write their own adventure for the Intasimi warriors. Where will they go? What challenges will they face? What adventures will they have?

