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Pre-Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

**Masai rite of passage**

The Masai are an African tribe of about half a million people. Most of them live in the country of Kenya, but they are also nomadic. Groups of Masai also live in other parts of east Africa, including north Tanzania and they move their animals (cows, sheep and goats) to different areas of the region.

There are many other African tribes but, for many people, the Masai are the most well-known. They are famous for their bright red clothing and their ceremonies that include lots of music and dancing. Probably, one of the most colourful ceremonies is the festival of ‘Eunoto’. This is a rite of passage when the teenage boys of the Masai become men.

‘Eunoto’ lasts for many days and Masai people travel across the region to get to a special place near the border between Kenya and Tanzania. The teenage boys who travel with them are called ‘warriors’. This is a traditional name from the past when young men fought with other tribes. Nowadays, these warriors spend most of their time looking after their cattle.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the teenagers paint their bodies. Meanwhile, their mothers start to build a place called the ‘Osingira’. It is a sacred room in the middle of the celebrations. Later, the older men from different tribes will sit inside this place and, at different times, the boys go inside to meet them. Later in the day, the boys run around the ‘Osingira’, going faster and faster each time. It is another important part of the ritual.

The teenagers also have to change their appearance at ‘Eunoto’. Masai boys’ hair is very long before the ritual but they have to cut it off. In Masai culture, hair is an important symbol. For example, when a baby grows into an infant, the mother cuts the child’s hair and gives the child a name. At a Masai wedding, the hair of the bride is also cut off as she becomes a woman. And so, at Eunoto, the teenage boy’s mother cuts his hair off at sunrise.

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On the ﬁnal day, the teenagers meet the senior elders one more time. They get this advice: ‘Now you are men, use your heads and knowledge.’ Then, people start to travel back to their homes and lands. The teenagers are no longer ‘warriors’. They are adult men and now they will get married, have children and buy cattle. Later in life, they will be the leaders of their communities.

tribe(n) /traɪb/ large group of families living in the same area

nomadic (adj) /naʊˈmaedɪk/ moving from one place to another and not staying in one place

warrior(n) /ˈwɒriə(r)/ soldier or someone who ﬁghts for the tribe

ritual (n) /ˈrɪtʃuəɭ / formal ceremony with different stages

sunrise (n) /ˈsʌnraɪz/ when the sun comes up and the day starts

elder (n) /ˈeldə(r)/ older and experienced person in a tribe or community