



# JAMES KOFI ANNAN

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## WHY HAS JAMES BEEN NOMINATED?

James Kofi Annan has been nominated for the 2013 World's Children's Prize for his work to stop child slavery.

JAMES himself was a fishing slave as a child, for seven years. He managed to escape, get an education and become a bank manager. Six years ago he left the bank to work solely to stop child slavery. At that time he had already started an organisation called Challenging Heights, in 2003, which had liberated over 500 children from slavery. James believes that poverty causes slavery, and education combats poverty. Liberated slave children come first to Challenging Heights' safe home for 65 children. The children have had difficult experiences, and are given rehabilitation and security. When they are strong enough, they can return home to their parents and attend an ordinary school. It can take a year before they are ready.

Challenging Heights also runs a school for 700 pupils of different ages. They offer training and loans to poor mothers so that they can support their families and not have to sell their children into slavery. Through 21 Child Rights Clubs, Challenging Heights teaches 630 vulnerable children about the rights of the child and campaigns against slavery. Through his work and Challenging Heights, James has supported over 10,000 children who have been slaves or at risk of slavery.



**As dawn breaks, James is leaving his home along with four other boys from his village. They have been collected by some finely dressed men. James is six years old and he doesn't know where he's going or how long he'll be gone. If he knew that now, he would probably try to escape straight away.**

A few months earlier, three men had arrived in the village. They had a couple of boys with them, and everyone in the village had stopped and stared at them. They were dressed like kings, even the boys. With clothes made from shiny fabrics with matching colours, and elegant new shoes on their feet. The men smiled and were friendly to everyone they met. They had walked round the village talking to the adults.

Rumours began to spread among the children. If they were lucky enough to be allowed to go with the men

next time they came, they too would get beautiful clothes. And they'd be able to go to school and eat their fill. They might even be able to learn English. That's what James wanted. Imagine being able to speak English! His mother admired people who could do that. But his family was poor, and it was hard to feed twelve children. It was impossible for them to go to school. There wasn't enough money for notebooks, schoolbags or uniforms.

### The boys disappear

After the finely-dressed men's visit, boys started to

disappear from the village. One by one.

"It might be your turn next," said James's friends to him. They had seen the men sitting talking to James's father.

And now he's on his way. Nobody has told him what's going to happen, not even his mother, so he's a bit nervous.

After a few hours of walking, they reach a small bus that takes them to a crossroads where a larger bus, rusty and dented, is waiting for them.

The bus is full of children, mostly boys. There are two or three squeezed onto every





seat, and even the aisle is full of children. There are a few older men sitting here and there. But there's something strange about it all.

Why is it so quiet? A boy near the front of the bus mumbles something to the boy beside him. Then one of the men jumps up and slaps him hard in the face.

"No talking!" he shouts.

James is hit by a wave of terror. Tears well up, but he swallows them.

Day turns to evening, and the rickety old bus bumps along red sand roads and paths. It stops now and again.

Every time, James thinks they've arrived, but the engine always starts again and the bus jolts on. It's a long night. In the darkness, James tries to fight back his fear. Are they going to kill us? Morning comes, then afternoon and then another night. When they need to pee, a guard always goes with them.

### **Tens of thousands of slave children**

On the third day they arrive at a large market. Now they are in the village of Yeti, at the north end of Lake Volta. Tens of

## Trees in the lake

**LAKE VOLTA IN GHANA** is the world's largest man-made lake. It was created when a dam was built to create electricity, more than forty years ago. The dam caused forests to flood, so now the bed of the lake is full of huge dead forests. Some trees stick up above the surface, but many are not visible. It's common for boats to sail into them and be pulled under. But the trees also mean that the fishing is very good in Lake Volta. The fish enjoy playing among the branches, which also protect their young.

And the trees provide lots of nutrients.

## Many children drown

**ALL THE BRANCHES** in the water mean that fishing nets often get caught, and children have to dive down to disentangle them. Many child slaves die every year. Usually because they get tangled up in the nets and can't get out.

"One in five children dies out there," says James Kofi Annan, who came close to drowning himself. Now there is a company that has started felling the trees, for valuable timber. Many fishermen are worried that the trees that could save them in a storm are disappearing.

## 'The boys who went to Yeti'

**THERE IS NO WORD** for trafficking or child slavery in Ghana. The fishing slaves get called 'the boys who went to Yeti'. That's the village where most child slaves in the fishing industry are taken. From there they are sent out to different slave owners around the lake. Child slavery is very common in Ghana. Children are sold by their parents or relatives. Often by single mothers with many children, who can't afford food for everyone. It's also common for poor people to borrow money from slave traders for a funeral when someone dies. When they find themselves unable to pay it back, the slave

trader takes their children instead. Children cost US\$15-35 and are supposed to work for at least two years. Often they have to work for much longer.

It is thought that there are almost 250,000 child slaves in Ghana, and 1.3 million child labourers. Children from Ghana are also sent as slaves to neighbouring countries. Child slavery was outlawed in Ghana seven years ago, but still goes on nonetheless. Since it is now against the law, Challenging Heights can get help from the police to set children free.





➤ thousands of children are brought here every year to work as slaves for fishermen all round the huge lake. The children are sold for US\$15-35, and have to work hard for at least two years. The parents who get the money have often been tricked into thinking the children will go to school and learn a trade.

There are canoes waiting on the beach, and the children are divided up between them. After a six-hour boat trip, James arrives at the fishing village where he is going to live until he is a teenager. The slave owner, who is a fisherman, puts him to work straight away. He has to bail out the canoe and prepare the nets. It's actually not that difficult. He feels calm for the first time in a few days. Things are going to be ok.

But the fear comes back. The very next morning.

That night he sleeps on the floor at the back of a hut, in a row with all the other children that the fisherman has bought.

### Wants young slaves

Around three in the morning, while it's still dark, James is woken by a load of water

being thrown in his face. The slave owner wants the children to get up and start work quickly. And a bucket of water certainly gets you on your feet fast.

They head out in the canoes. James takes care of the nets that he prepared yesterday. But today it's not as easy, and the net gets tangled up. When the fisherman catches sight of it, he lifts the heavy wooden paddle and

smacks James on the head, and everything turns black.

From now on, he has to be ready for a beating at any time, and for any reason. Sometimes hard blows with the paddle, sometimes smacks and kicks. The fisherman throws him in the water, withholds his food, and insults him constantly. Says that he's no good at anything, or that he doesn't deserve any food. It might be because the

net is tangled, because he hasn't caught enough fish, or just because he's said the wrong thing.

Like the time when he tells another boy about when his mother once bought him a football at a market. He gets a slap in the face for that. The slave owner doesn't want the boys to talk about their parents. That makes them even more homesick and makes them want to escape. If the



James almost died when he got caught in the net.



It is almost impossible for slave children to flee, but James decided to succeed.



children forget about their parents, it's much easier for the slave owner to get them to do what he wants. That's why he prefers really young children as slaves. The little ones forget so easily.

### Diving danger

But James doesn't forget. Especially not his mother. He thinks about her every day. And he doesn't stop longing for her, although the days

become weeks, months and years.

James becomes quieter and quieter. If you say that you're hungry or tired you get a beating. He realises that it's best not to say anything, and he stops talking.

The working days are long, and they always begin in the middle of the night. He only gets a few hours' sleep at night.

Of all the tasks he has to do, disentangling the nets is the worst. When one gets caught on plants on the bed of the lake, James has to dive through the muddy waters and try to work it loose without being able to see. He has to be careful not to pull the net so hard that it breaks.

Diving terrifies James every time. It's often deep, and you have to hold your breath and try to feel with your hands to find where the net is stuck, and work it loose when all you can see is yellowy-brown sludge. It's easy to panic, and sometimes boys drown. One day James himself has a near-death experience.

He has dived down to disentangle a net that is caught on something deep. Suddenly, he can't move in the water. His legs are caught in the net. He can't breathe

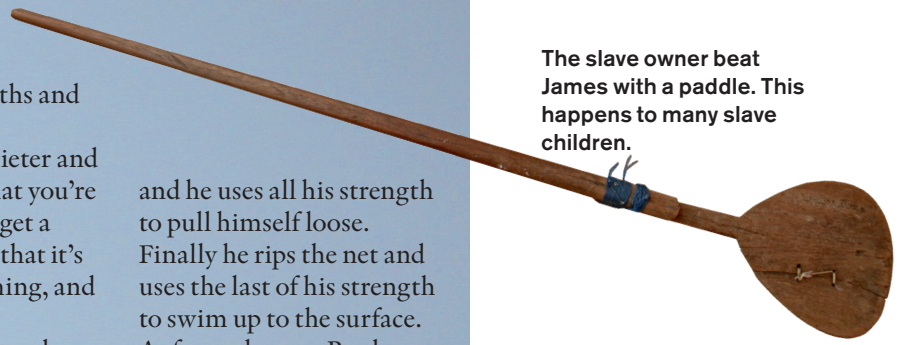
and he uses all his strength to pull himself loose.

Finally he rips the net and uses the last of his strength to swim up to the surface. As fast as he can. But he comes up under the boat and hits his head on the hull. The next thing he remembers is waking up on the beach, covered in blood, and seeing faces gathered around him.

### Growing in pride

He just has to get away! He needs to get home again, at any cost! But there are no roads. Only dense jungle full of dangerous snakes, and on the other side, the huge Lake Volta. He attempts to sneak out at night a few times, to try his luck against the dark jungle, but he has to climb over the sleeping children and they always wake up. The slave owner has taught the youngest children to shout for him if anyone tries to leave the hut. So the youngest children always lie closest to the door. After each failed attempt, James gets a real beating. But as the years go by, James's

The slave owner beat James with a paddle. This happens to many slave children.



strength grows. Eventually he can even get away with saying things like, "I'm so tired today, I'm not going out fishing". Of course, that earns him a beating. But he takes it. He grits his teeth and takes it, because protesting does him good.

When the slave owner's wife shouts at him, telling him he doesn't deserve food, he refuses to eat. Pride and self-esteem become more important than hunger and pain. So many of the boys here have just given up. They just sit there, silent and apathetic, and don't want anything any more. James doesn't want to end up like that. He will manage to escape. And he will get home!

### Escape

When James is thirteen, the opportunity arises. A close relative has died, and his mother visits the fishing village. It's the first time James has seen her in seven years. She tries to persuade the slave owner to let James go to the funeral. He refuses. He thinks James would try to escape. And suddenly, James realises that that was his mother's plan all along. She wants him to escape. She pleads with the fisherman, telling him it is so important for James to be there.

Finally, James's mother manages to persuade the slave owner and promises that James will come back as soon as the funeral is over. They

James's work always started in the middle of the night, and he only got a few hours' sleep.

Every time James tried to escape from the slave owner he got a thorough beating and was forced out onto the lake to work again.





➔ decide that he will take the boat, and then a bus to the village where the funeral will be held.

James never boards the bus. He finds some men in a truck, driving timber in the direction of his home village. James offers to help them in exchange for some pocket money. They agree. After unloading the timber, they plan to head back to collect another load, but James says he'll wait for them instead. He makes his way to the beach – that way it's easier to find his way home.

After seven years as a fishing slave, James has learned to navigate by the stars. They help him during the dark nights. It takes two days and two nights to get there. But for James, none of this is difficult. He finds wild mango and eats his fill of the rich, juicy fruit. The feeling of freedom carries him mile after mile, with a lightness in his step. Soon he'll be home! But finding his way is tricky – so much has changed in seven years, and there are new roads and houses everywhere. Will anyone recognise him?

Of course they recognise him! Look, here comes Annan's boy! James Kofi! My, how he's grown! People greet him happily.

James is free, and his new life is just beginning. 🌍

# James after slavery

## Children before

**A teenage boy is sitting in the schoolyard with some Primary 1 children. They have their reading books out. It looks like the teenager is helping the little ones with their reading. But it's the opposite. The seven-year-olds are teaching James Kofi Annan to read.**

**W**hen James had managed to escape and made it home again after seven years, his mother was overjoyed. But his father was not so pleased. He thought James had broken his contract with the slave owner, and he was afraid that that would cause problems for them.

“For over a year he kept telling me to go back,” says James. “But in the end he gave up.”

### Small children as teachers

James wanted to learn to read and write. He was thirteen years old, and went round different schools

trying to register. But they all said no.

“They were afraid of me. They saw a cocky teenager with hatred in his eyes, and they thought I'd cause a lot of trouble.”

Eventually there was one school that agreed to accept James. He started in Primary 6.

**When children arrive at James's safe home they are often in a bad way. But they soon make friends who they can play with and who share their terrible experiences.**



James is out on Lake Volta to set a slave boy free.





# money

“I couldn’t read or write though, and I didn’t understand anything in the lessons.”

There was only one solution. To spend breaks and lunchtimes with the little ones, asking for help. And to use their books.

“I had to swallow my pride and let the little children become my teachers.”

James quickly caught up with the students in his class. He graduated from school with top marks and went on to university. He bought an old photocopier and started

making adverts for different companies so that he could afford to study.

## Bank manager

After university, James got a job at a large bank.

“Suddenly I had a manager’s job and I was earning lots of money. It was fantastic!”

He was good at his job, and was promoted to a more senior position.

“Life was going well, but every day I thought about the children who were still slaves, suffering as I had done.”

James started to use money

from his salary every month to help a few children from the village to go to school. It started with two children. One year later, 52 children had received help to go to school, and Challenging Heights was born. The bank gave him an award for his work with children, and money towards the project. And he was given an even better management job.

“But not everyone liked my work with children,” says James. “Many slave traders were furious. After all, we were persuading families to demand that their children be returned, and we were teaching children about their rights. The slave traders started spreading rumours that I was using witchcraft. They even threatened my family.”

## James resigns

So that he would have time to work with Challenging Heights, James started working part-time at the bank.

“I had had a fantastic career, but suddenly my job at the bank seemed meaningless. I started thinking about dedicating all my time to Challenging Heights. But how would I support my family?”

On his birthday in 2007, James was sitting at his computer at work and started writing his letter of resignation. Just as he finished it, an email arrived.

“It was from the board of the bank. They were offering me the top job, heading up the bank. And there I was, sitting looking at my letter of resignation. I pressed ‘send’ and left the bank for good. 🌐



The children never got enough sleep when they were slaves, but at the safe home they sleep well.



The Challenging Heights boat has carried many slave children to freedom.

When he worked at the bank, James thought about slave children all the time. He founded the organisation Challenging Heights, and built a safe home for liberated slave children.





# 48 slave children

These 48 children, set free by James and Challenging Heights and now living at their safe home for former slave children, were slaves for between six months and twelve years. Between them, they have lived as slaves for a total of 222 years! But now they are free and dreaming of the future. The most common dreams are to be professional footballers, drivers, teachers or bank managers. James used to be a child slave and then became a bank manager!



**Eriel, 14**  
10 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Kwame, 15**  
8 years as a slave  
Wants to be a driver



**Kwesi David, 15**  
7 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bank manager



**Abene, 7**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a fashion designer



**Mabel, 15**  
9 years as a slave  
Wants to be a nurse



**Kobena A, 13**  
4 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Peter, 13**  
5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**David, 10**  
4 years as a slave  
Wants to be a taxi driver



**John, 13**  
3 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bank manager



**Arhinful, 11**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a doctor



**Kwamena, 11**  
5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a driver



**Daniel, 17**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Adjoa, 13**  
5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bank manager



**Justice, 12**  
1.5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a carpenter



**Mprem, 12**  
3 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bank manager



**Joshua, 10**  
5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Kojo Joe, 6**  
1 year as a slave  
Wants to be a pilot or a carpenter



**Kofi, 16**  
9 years as a slave  
Wants to be a tailor



**Bortsie, 13**  
4 years as a slave  
Wants to be a tailor



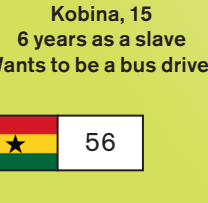
**Kobina, 15**  
6 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bus driver



**Kweku, 14**  
10 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Kobina, 14**  
8 years as a slave  
Wants to be a footballer



**Kwame, 15**  
7 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer





# 's dreams of the future



**Ekow, 10**  
6 years as a slave  
Wants to be a taxi driver



**Daniel, 10**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a tailor



**Nenyi, 13**  
7 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bus driver



**Apreku, 14**  
10 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Sammy, 10**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a doctor



**Kow, 14**  
12 years as a slave  
Wants to be a bus driver



**James, 13**  
4 years as a slave  
Wants to be a footballer



**Kojo, 16**  
1 year as a slave  
Wants to be a building contractor



**Kwame, 8**  
1 year as a slave  
Wants to be a driver



**Donkor, 8**  
6 months as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Otoo, 13**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a driver



**Portia, 15**  
6 years as a slave  
Wants to be a teacher



**Kweku, 5**  
1 year as a slave  
Wants to buy a car



**Afedzi, 15**  
1.5 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Nkonta, 12**  
9 years as a slave  
Wants to be a taxi driver



**Yaw, 14**  
10 years as a slave  
Wants to be a teacher



**Charles, 12**  
6 years as a slave  
Wants to be a teacher



**Junior, 6**  
2 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer



**Adam, 14**  
Refugee from Liberia  
Wants to be an engineer



**Muhammed, 15**  
Refugee from Liberia  
Wants to be a civil engineer



**Martha, 14**  
Several years as a slave  
Wants to be a fashion designer



**Richard, 14**  
Different background  
Wants to be a bank manager




**Esiamia, 17**  
10 years as a slave  
Wants to be a professional footballer




**Francis, 14**  
Different background  
Wants to be a truck driver







"All those who use children as slaves should be put in prison, and the whole world should be told about this!" says Kwesi.



The full moon shines brightly over the jungle. Under a bush, two little boys lie side by side. They stay as quiet as they can to avoid being found. Every sound in the night frightens them. The jungle is full of snakes. But they have finally managed to escape!

# Kwesi was left to die

The two boys are fishing slaves, far from home. One of them is Kwesi from the village of Senya. He is ten years old, and is meant to be working for the fisherman for three years.

When Kwesi's father died, his mother Yaba didn't have any money for the funeral. A man she knew offered to lend her some money, and she accepted. Soon after the funeral, the man demanded the money back. But Yaba is poor, and has eight children. She tries to support the family by looking for firewood and sticks to sell. She doesn't have any money. So the man threatens to call the police and make sure she ends up in jail. What would happen to

her eight children then? Kwesi hears everything. He knows that other families in the village have received money for sending their boys to Yeti to fish. He offers to go with the man and work off his mother's debt.

"To pay off that amount, you will have to work for three years," says the man.

### Almost drowned

The first morning, Kwesi has to carry six paddles down to the shore. He can hardly lift them. He tells the fisherman, who yells:

"Do you think you're here for a holiday?"

That evening, Kwesi doesn't get any food.

The slave owner has bought

lots of children to work for him. Their work begins around eleven o'clock at night. They cast the nets until six in the morning, when they gather in the nets again. Then

the fish have to be gutted, and that takes until the afternoon. There are not many hours left for Kwesi to sleep.

The slave owner gets angry with the children for the

The slave owner scared the children into believing that the people who come to take them away are dangerous, evil people. But Kwesi believes Steven and goes with him.

This picture was taken from Challenging Heights' boat when it was on its way to Kwesi's canoe.





**Challenging Heights found Kwesi when he was busy pulling up nets. They realised straight away that he was not well at all.**

slightest little mistake. He often uses the heavy paddle to beat them.

Kwesi often has to dive down deep in the water to disentangle nets that get caught on branches. It's dangerous work, because it's easy to get tangled up in the net. And it's impossible to see anything down there.

One day, Kwesi swallows a lot of water just as he is diving down, and he needs to get back up quickly. But one of his legs is stuck in the net. He feels dizzy, but he manages to pull his leg free.

When Kwesi comes up to the surface, the slave owner smacks him in the face with the paddle. He thinks Kwesi was too slow. His upper lip splits in two. That's why Kwesi still has a large bump on the right side of his upper lip.

#### **Whipped with a rope**

Now Kwesi is lying awake under the full moon, straining to hear every noise. He has tried to escape before, but has always been found, and beaten.

**This is what Kwesi's hands looked like when he was rescued. Being in the water all the time damages your hands and nails. This is what all fishing slaves' hands look like.**



Earlier in the day, the slave owner accused Kwesi and another boy of stealing fish. It doesn't matter that they deny it, and swear that they are innocent. The fisherman ties them up by their hands and feet to two trees, and whips them with a thick length of rope. The boys shriek and cry out in pain. Suddenly two strangers appear. One of them holds down the slave owner, and the other unties the boys.

"Run as fast as you can," says one of the men.

The boys run into the jungle while the men hold the fisherman back. They don't know which way to go, but they run for their lives. Sometimes it feels like they're just running round in circles. They come down to the water a few times, but it's too far to swim. They can't see land. When night falls they lie down under a bush and pull their knees up inside their big t-shirts. It's hard to sleep, and their backs are smarting from the whip wounds.

#### **Angry community chief**

When the sun rises, the boys head deeper into the jungle. They see lots of snakes, and they move very carefully. When they reach a small stream they can finally have a drink. Whatever direction the boys go in, they always reach the water. Eventually they realise something – they are on an island! There's nowhere to escape to.

They are hungry and tired. They spend another night in the light of the moon, hardly sleeping at all. The next day

they wander aimlessly, their stomachs crying out for food. The boys find a small pineapple plantation in a glade, and eat their fill of the fruit.

Suddenly a man pops up out of nowhere. The owner of the pineapples! But instead of shouting at them or beating



**This picture was taken when Challenging Heights came to rescue Kwesi. He was thin and exhausted then.**





The crowns of the trees in the middle of the lake saved Kwesi's life.

them, he looks at the welts on their backs and calls for the community chief. The community chief is furious, and takes both the boys back to the slave owner. He shouts at him and promises to report him to the police if he ever does anything like this again.

**Trees save Kwesi**

From that day on, the fisherman actually does become a bit kinder. He doesn't beat Kwesi again. But the fisherman's grown-up sons are not kind at all. Sometimes Kwesi

goes out fishing with them. When they need to go to the toilet, they use the lake. One day when Kwesi is out with the slave owner's sons, one of them squats over the rail and does what he has to do. Then he orders Kwesi to dive in right there. Kwesi refuses. So he pushes Kwesi in.

"We'll say that you ran away and that we couldn't find you," they say, disappearing with the boat.

Kwesi is alone in the water, in the middle of the huge lake, several miles from land.

There are large dead forests under the surface, and here and there bare treetops reach up out of the water. Kwesi swims to the closest tree. He can hang on a branch and rest until he has the strength to carry on. Then he aims for the next one and swims on.

By swimming from tree to tree and resting in between, Kwesi finally manages to reach an island, where he collapses on the hot sand. Later the community chief finds him, and takes him in a boat to the slave owner's house.

"To be forgiven for what you have done to this boy, you must sacrifice a sheep," says the community chief. And the fisherman actually does sacrifice a whole sheep.



On his way to freedom. Kwesi with his rescuers from Challenging Heights.



Finally back home with his mum Yaba.

"I didn't know where they had taken Kwesi or how terrible life was for him. He could have died! I'm so happy that he's home again now and going to school."



Kwesi likes dancing.





### **Kwesi set free**

Kwesi has now been a slave for one year and eight months. The time goes so slowly. He has one year and four months left.

One day, a motorboat draws up beside Kwesi's canoe. A woman and a man start to talk to him. They say that their names are Linda and Steven. They ask lots of questions. His name, where he comes from, his mother's name, and the name of the slave owner he works for. Kwesi doesn't understand what they want, but he answers all the questions.

Linda and Steven come from James's organisation, Challenging Heights, and have rescued children from

here before. They start their boat and Kwesi watches them going ashore and heading for the slave owner's house.

The slave owner has warned the children many times:

"Evil people may come in a boat and try to take you with them. Don't trust them. It is incredibly dangerous to go with them! Their boat will sink. They are evil people who want to harm you. Never trust them! Run and hide if you see them coming."

The woman and man return in their boat. They tell Kwesi that he is free. That he can go with them to a safe home where he will be taken care of and won't have to be a slave any more. Kwesi doesn't

know what to believe. He's uncertain. But then Steven mentions the name of a teacher that Kwesi really liked at school, before he became a slave. Then Kwesi realises that they must have met his mother, and he decides to go with them.

### **Finally home**

Linda and Steven have collected more children, and there is a bus waiting. The safe home is high up on a hill with a view out over villages and jungle, and there are lots of other children there. They are playing football and volleyball. Kwesi loves playing football.

They are given food several times a day. Like all the other

children, Kwesi is too thin and needs to put on weight. He can start back at school and catch up on the things he's missed. And he feels safe. Now Kwesi can begin to play and laugh again.

Kwesi stays at the safe house for almost a year, until he is healthy and strong and his self-esteem is restored. He has lots of scars on his body and a large bump on his lip from when the slave owner split it with the paddle. But now he's back home with his mother, and in Primary 6 at an ordinary school. His favourite subject is maths and he wants to be a bank manager. 🌐



"When Kwesi and I play football on the same team we're unbeatable!" says Kwesi's friend Daniel. "Kwesi usually helps me with maths. He's really good at it."



If there was a fire and Kwesi could only rescue one thing, he would take the chest full of his father's clothes.



James was a slave and became a bank manager. Kwesi wants to do the same.





The village where Esiama was held as a slave for ten years.



## Mission:

# Save Esiama!

The phone rings. A grandfather is worried about his two grandchildren. They have been sold to a Lake Volta fisherman. He asks for help. "Get them out of there. This is not good."

Steven and David from Challenging Heights start planning a rescue mission straight away. And they're going to look for Esiama too – a boy who has been a slave for over ten years. They've heard he's in the area.

The bus to Yeti, one of the villages by Lake Volta, takes eleven hours. Steven and David arrive late at night and check in at a basic hotel. In the morning, the Challenging Heights boat is at the shore and ready for action.

The lake is full of canoes and boats. There are young children in most of them, paddling or pulling up nets.

Steven is the rescue mission leader, and he knows how important it is to be careful. The slave owners often get very aggressive when the team appear, and there can be

threats and arguments. Half of the rescue attempts are not successful.

### Fishing for information

They know the name of the fisherman who has bought the two brothers, but they don't know exactly where he lives.

After a couple of hours on the lake, the Challenging Heights boat slows down and approaches a canoe full of fishermen and children.

"Do you have any fish?" asks Steven. They do. He buys a few fish and says that they're on their way to visit the slave

owner, and wonders if they know where he lives.

They know roughly, but not exactly.

Steven thanks them and the boat moves on. They approach some more children and fishermen in another canoe.

"Do you have any fish?" Yes they do. Steven buys a couple more fish. Now he gets more detailed information on where the slave owner lives,



The slave owner's wife says she doesn't know the two brothers.





**Esiama on the bus, on the way to the safe home.**

talk to him first to explain why they have come to the village.

The community chief is friendly and leads the way between the huts to the fisherman's home. He has three small red clay houses, and a small patio with a roof made of rushes to provide shade.

The slave owner is out fishing, but his wife is at home.

Steven explains who they are and that they are looking for the two brothers.

"They are not here," she says. She doesn't know them.

"The children's grandfather says that you bought them."

"That's not true."

The woman gets angry and raises her voice.

"I'm going to tear strips off whoever told you that!"

**We'll be back**

Steven phones the chief of the village where the children's grandfather lives. Usually only the community chief has a telephone. It takes a few minutes.

"I know that the children are there!" says their grandfather. "She's lying!"

Steven explains calmly to the woman that if she is lying about the boys, they will come back with the police. Then the slave owner will have to pay lots of money to the boys' family to make up for their suffering.

The wife is angry, and she won't give in.

The slave owners almost always deny everything at first. Sometimes they also tell the children to run and hide when Steven and the team come. They say that the team are dangerous. That they will take the children to a dangerous place, that their boat will go under, or that the children will be sold for

and the boat heads in that direction.

After a mile or two, they stop at another canoe. Now Steven gives away all the fish. He only bought them to start a conversation, so he could ask for directions.

**Slave owner's wife denies everything**

They go ashore at an island and ask for the community chief. They always have to





➔ medical testing. Sometimes the slave owners sell the children on to someone else. “There is nothing more we can do just now,” says Steven. “We’ll have to come back again.” The boat heads back out onto the lake.

### No Esiama here

The next task is to look for Esiama – a boy of 17 who has been a slave for ten years. They know the name of the slave owner and they’re fairly sure of which village he lives in. There are lots of canoes on the beach. They ask a boy about the slave owner and about Esiama. “Of course, he’s my dad. He’s at home right now and Esiama is here too.”

Great! Now Steven knows. They have never been here before and they get a shock as they approach the huts. There are children everywhere. Several hundred of them. They can’t all be the villagers’ own children. They sit down on some benches outside the community chief’s house. After a while, three men emerge representing the village, and the play-acting begins.

Steven says the name of the slave owner they want to see. “There is nobody of that name here,” they say.

Steven explains that he knows that the man is here and that he is at home right now. There must have been some misunderstanding. The men look at each other, bewildered.

Adults and children flock around the hut, listening with interest. Steven repeats calmly that he knows that the man is here, and he takes out some papers.

The three men ask for a few moments to discuss the matter in private. They disappear round the corner.

### There’s Esiama!

A few minutes later the men return and sit down. Now one of them admits that he is the man they are looking

for. Steven explains that they have come to collect Esiama. His mother wants him home. “I don’t have an Esiama here,” says the man.

Steven looks at his papers and says that he knows Esiama is here, and that he is being collected now.

The atmosphere grows even more tense. More and more people gather around the hut.

Steven explains that either the slave owner can let Esiama go now, or Steven will come back with the police, which will be expensive for the slave owner.

“He’s right there!” shouts someone suddenly. “There is Esiama!”

A tall boy in a blue football shirt flashes past and disappears.

One of the men stands up and throws a shoe at a group of children in the crowd.

“Get out of here!”



### Trying to bluff

The men stand up, all shouting over one another. Steven stands up too, but remains calm. The slave owner gives Steven a threatening look.

“I have paid for Esiama to work for me, and the contract hasn’t expired yet,” he shouts. “I’ll do whatever I need to to keep him. How dare his mother send you to get him! If I have to hand him over I’ll make life difficult for her!”

Steven repeats that there are only two choices. Either



“They used to say mean things about my parents, and that I was stupid and no good at anything,” says Esiama.



### Finally free.

The team need to get Esiama on board the Challenging Heights boat as quickly as possible. The motor is running so that they can make a speedy departure. The slave owner frightened Esiama by saying that the people collecting him were not going to take him home to his parents at all, but to somewhere very dangerous.



they take Esiama right now, or Steven returns with the police tomorrow.

The group discuss the options between themselves. Someone says that it might be best to let him go. Otherwise there could be big problems for them all.

The slave owner's wife says the team can leave and promises to bring Esiama to them tomorrow.

Steven has heard this before. He knows it's a bluff.

"No," he says, "there are only two options."

"But we'll bring him to you tomorrow!" they shout.

"No. Then I'll have to bring the police instead."

They realise that Steven isn't going to give in.

### Quick exit

It only takes a few moments for Esiama to pack up his things. They fit in the bottom of a small rucksack. He looks scared, but he goes with the team.

A big crowd of people follow them down to the boat. The atmosphere is still aggressive and the slave owners are shouting. They need to make a quick getaway before something happens.

The boat driver is ready and the motor is running.

Esiama is on board.

The boat sets off onto the lake at top speed.

Tomorrow, Esiama will start Primary 1. 🌐



Esiama has never attended school before and can't read or write.

"It's good for me to start school. But it's a bit embarrassing to be in a class with such young children."



There were many new friends waiting at Challenging Heights' safe home for children who have been slaves. It took a few days for Esiama to feel safe. But soon he was in good spirits and playing football with the other boys.

The Challenging Heights boat sets off from the shore, on a mission to rescue Esiama.

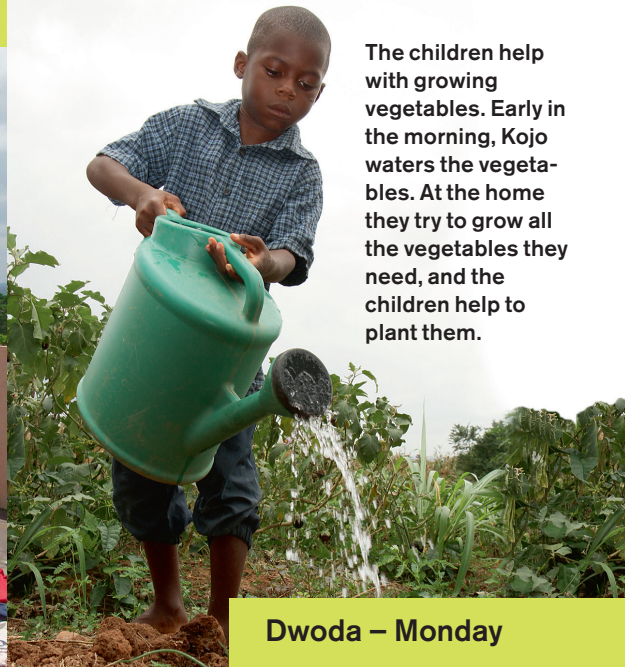




## Kwesida – Sunday

The children pray for their families and for their futures.

Sunday is the big laundry day.



The children help with growing vegetables. Early in the morning, Kojo waters the vegetables. At the home they try to grow all the vegetables they need, and the children help to plant them.

## Dwoda – Monday

All those who need it have their heads shaved.



# A week in the life of a

## Benada – Tuesday



While they were slaves, the children who now live at the safe home had to work hard and got very little sleep. Every day was the same. But at Challenging Heights, the week is filled with fun things.

Most of the children have never attended school. It's fun to go to school!

Today's food is a favourite for lots of people – kenkey and peanut sauce. Kenkey is a thick dough made with cornmeal.



## Wukuda – Wednesday



Many of the children need new shoes. They draw round their feet to make sure the new shoes are the right size.

Painting is good for the children. Kojo proudly shows off his aeroplane.







### Yawda – Thursday

When the children were slaves, boats were not a fun thing. But now they play with boats that they have made themselves.

Every day ends with bathing.



# freed slave



### Fida – Friday

Windows kept getting broken, so the school put an end to games of football in the schoolyard – games with a real ball, that is. Now the boys have made their own ball from plastic bags and string. It doesn't break any windows!



### Memenda – Saturday



Today there's a goodbye party for all the children who are going home to their parents.

Kweku is sad to say goodbye to friends who are going home.



Not everyone is happy to have to leave friends behind.





## Hi in Ghana

This is how friends greet each other in Ghana:

1. Shake hands

3. Grab your friend's fingers

5. Pull your hand away quickly to make a 'click' sound.

2. Grab hands again

4. Hold on tight to your friend's middle finger.

## Three freed brothers

**BROTHERS** Kweku, 5, Kojo, 6, and Kwame, 8, were taken by a slave owner when their mother couldn't afford to pay back the money she had borrowed for their father's funeral. After one year as slaves, the brothers were freed by Challenging Heights.

"When they came to collect us, the slave owner said he was going to make us into medicine. We were terrified," says Kwame.

"I was homesick the whole time and I cried every day," says Kojo.

Kojo cried with fear at the slave owner's house.

The three liberated slave brothers Kweku, Kojo and Kwame are happy at Challenging Heights' safe home.



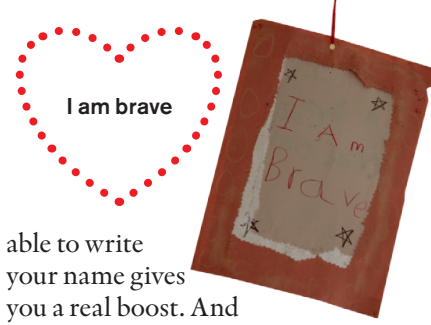
The middle brother Kojo and another slave boy are rescued with help from the police.

Here is Kojo in a life vest on Challenging Heights' boat, after being set free.





# Children have stopped talking



“WHEN THE CHILDREN are freed from slavery they come here to stay first, from four months up to one year. The children are often traumatised when they arrive,” explains Linda Osabutey. She is the director of the safe home.

Being ‘traumatised’ is when you have been through a terrible experience that has damaged you.

“The children are scared and insecure. They don’t want to make eye contact and they find it hard to sleep. Sometimes they have stopped talking altogether. We have had children here who haven’t started talking until they’ve been here several

months. Some of them don’t even know their own names, or their parents’ names.”

Linda explains that sometimes the children have been slaves for so long that their parents don’t recognise them any more, and the children don’t recognise their parents either.

At the safe house, the chil-



dren are given medical examinations and they receive help to get their inner strength back.

“They’ve had so many beatings and scoldings that they don’t have any self-esteem left,” says Linda. “The children get lots of help, including art therapy, where they can paint, draw and create. That helps them to get stronger.

“A simple thing like being

“When the children arrive they are often scared, and some of them have stopped talking altogether,” says Linda, the director. She is holding the two youngest children – Kweku, 5, and Junior, 6.

able to write your name gives you a real boost. And their parents are proud and understand that school is important. Many children have never felt loved. Here they get to be children. Maybe for the first time in their lives. We give them as much care and love as we can, until they are strong enough to go home,” says Linda.

For the whole of the first year after the children have moved back home, Challenging Heights staff visit them and their parents once a week. They want to make sure that the children are being treated well and going to school. After the first year, they visit once every two weeks.

## Slave round the clock

**MABEL IS 15 YEARS OLD.** Two years ago her mother died. Her father had left the family long before that. Mabel and her siblings went to live with relatives.

To pay their way, Mabel was forced to work hard. At night she went out fishing. In the morning she collected wood and helped to cook the ‘kenkey’ maize porridge. Then she made lunch for everyone on the boats. And after that it was time to start preparing the dinner.

“I hardly slept at all,” says Mabel. “Every evening I hoped that there would be a

storm, so I wouldn’t have to go out on the lake.”

She has ugly scars on her back, from being beaten with a paddle.

Her relatives had children of their own who were allowed to go to school, but Mabel and her siblings were not. One day, Steven and Linda from Challenging Heights came to visit. They told Mabel’s relatives that the law states that children have to go to school, and that they wanted to take Mabel and her siblings with them.

“They refused to let us go. So Steven and Linda came back with the police to get us.”

Mabel is delighted to be able to live in the safe house and go to school there.

“If I was President of Ghana I would make sure people knew that if you buy slaves you can end up in jail.”



## What would you be called in Ghana?

When James uses his middle name, Kofi, everyone knows that he was born on a Friday. In Ghana, children are named after the day of the week they are born. People used to think that the day of the week determined what kind of person you were. Apart from their day name, the children also have several other names. What would you be called if you had been born in Ghana?

DAY	GIRL	BOY
Monday	Adwoa, Adjoa	Kojo, Kwadwo
Tuesday	Abena, Araba	Kobena, Kwabina
Wednesday	Akua, Ekua,	Kweku, Kwawo
Thursday	Aba, Yaa	Yaw, Kwao
Friday	Afua, Efua	Kofi, Yoofi
Saturday	Ama, Awo	Kwame, Kwamena
Sunday	Akosua, Esi	Kwesi, Kwasi



A week in a row! From left to right, these friends are sitting in order of the day they were born. From the left: Jessica Adjoa (Monday), Arhinful Kwabina (Tuesday), Maagew Kwaku (Wednesday), Daniel Yaw (Thursday), Afedzie Kofi (Friday), Mabel Ama (Saturday) and Donkor Kwesi (Sunday).

