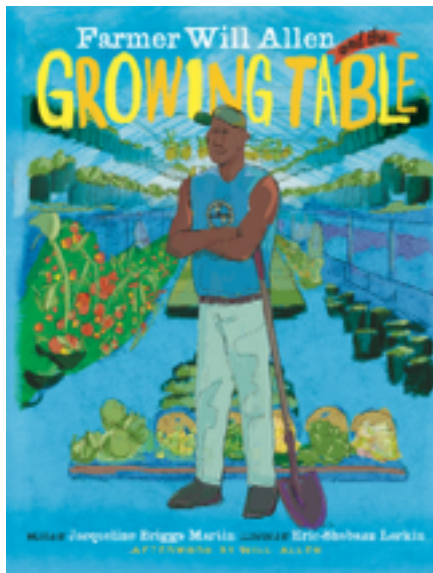


Curriculum Guide for *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table*



Classroom Guide based on the Common Core Standards for *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table*

Written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin Illustrated by Eric-Shabazz Larkin

READERS to EATERS Books

Hardcover, \$17.95

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Grades 2 to 5

Themes

Biography, People who make a difference, Food, Nutrition, Urban farming, Composting, Worms, Vegetables, African-Americans, Community service, Problem solving

Synopsis

Will Allen is no ordinary farmer. A former basketball star, he's as tall as his truck, and he can hold a cabbage, or a basketball, in one hand. But what is most special about Farmer Will is that he can see what others can't see. When he looked at an abandoned city lot, he saw a huge table, big enough to feed the whole world. No space, no problem. Poor soil, there's a solution. Need help, found it. Farmer Will is a genius at solving problems. In 2008, the MacArthur Foundation named him one.

Jacqueline Briggs Martin, author of the Caldecott winner *Snowflake Bentley*, tells the inspiring story of an innovator, educator, and community builder. Combined with artist Eric-Shabazz Larkin's striking artwork, readers will share Will Allen's optimism and determination to bring good food to every table.

Background

Author Jacqueline Briggs Martin's second passion in life after books and reading is sustainable agriculture and organic farming. There are a few good books for children on this topic, but she likes to write biographies about people who are passionate about what they do. In this book, she tells the story of pro basketball player Will Allen, who built a community garden in Milwaukee, reclaiming urban land with poor soil and little life in it, involving the neighborhood in growing fruits and vegetables, and sharing his own love of working together to bring healthy food to the table.

Martin grew up on a dairy farm, where food was both sustenance and recreation. Her family never took vacations, but it seemed like a holiday when they had peas and new potatoes or wild raspberry pie, made from raspberries her mother had picked that morning. They were very aware of the flavor of the

food they were eating. So food has always been important to her. It pains her that about one-fifth of the children in this country experience hunger at some time during their childhoods, and she wants to do something about it.

Will Allen is a former professional basketball player who has become a world authority on urban agriculture and food policy. He is the “farmer-in-chief” of Growing Power, a Milwaukee-based farm and community food center that has created community food projects across the country and around the world. Allen believes that all people should have access to healthy, high-quality, safe, and affordable food. His ideas and methods for delivering food to underserved people around the world earned him a “genius grant” from the MacArthur Foundation as well as recognition as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people of 2010.

Allen is known for the composting methods he has developed, including using worms to compost and heating hoophouses with compost piles, and aquaponics, where he grows fish and food plants in a single integrated system. But he hasn’t only created sound methods of intensive food production; he has educated people all over the world in his methods. Allen is passionate about his goal of bringing good food to everyone in the world while keeping his farming practices ecologically sound.

There are many great children’s books about urban and community gardening, including *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman, *Alice Waters and the Trip to Delicious* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, *Our School Garden!* by Rick Swann, *City Green* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan, and *Yucky Worms* by Vivian French.

There are lots of information books about gardening, too, including *First Garden: The White House Garden and How It Grew* by Robbin Gourley, *Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots* and *Sunflower Houses* by Sharon Lovejoy, and *Wiggling Worms at Work* by Wendy Pfeffer.

Before Reading

Reading Standards: Craft and Structure 5; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7; Key Ideas and Details 1

In introducing the book to students, you may wish to use some of the following suggestions.

1. Look at the cover and share the title with students. Is this an information book or fiction? Why do they think so? Ask students what they think a “growing table” might be.
2. Page through the book, showing the illustrations without reading the text. Are there clues to any of the who, what, where, when, why, and how questions for the book that students think they can answer just from seeing the pictures in the book? What details support their answers?
3. Ask students if they can think of stories where one person makes big positive changes in the lives of many other people. If they can, have them name what qualities that person had that allowed them to succeed.
4. Will Allen grew up on a farm and left it, sure he didn’t want to be a farmer like his father. Years later, he found out he missed farming and went back to it. Ask students if they can think of something that they don’t like doing now that they can imagine changing their minds about later in life.
5. Ask students what they would do to change the world.

Vocabulary

Language Standards: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4,5,6

Have students review the words below in pairs or small groups, and have students look up the meanings of any words they don’t know the meanings of. They might need to do an Internet search to look up farming terms if their dictionary doesn’t have those definitions.

CONTENT SPECIFIC

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| chemicals | pollution | composting |
| red wiggler worms | vats | hoophouses |
| sprouts | plots (of land) | vertical farm |

ACADEMIC

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| abandoned | drooped | graduated |
| professional | realized | scarce |
| pavement | squirmy | high-rises |
| continents | crisscrossed | warehouses |

Compound words are made up of two words that are combined to make a new word, like street + light = streetlight. There are three types of compound words: single words (streetlight), hyphenated words (merry-go-round), and open compounds where the words are written as separate words but function as a unit (school bus). There are many compound words in *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table*. Have students make a list of all the compound words that they can find and separate them into the three different types of compound words. What are the meanings of each of smaller words that make up the compound word unit? For some, like warehouse, students might be aware of the definition of the compound word but not one of the words that create it, like the word “ware.”

Some words have many different meanings. “Right” is one of those words. How many meanings of the word “right” can students think of? Have students discuss the meaning of “right” in its use in the book: “the right to good food.”

After Reading

Reading Standards: Key Ideas and Details 1,2,3; Craft and Structure 4,5,6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7,9

Discussion Questions

1. Is this book fiction or an information book? Why do you think that? What role do the illustrations have in your thinking about your answer?
2. What is Will Allen passionate about? Was he always passionate about this?
3. Do you think Will Allen is changing the world? How?
4. What would Will Allen want you, as an individual person, to do to help him make the changes in the world that he thinks are necessary to make it a better place?
5. What are facts about growing vegetables that you learned reading this book? What other facts about urban farming did you learn?
6. What is “the growing table” that the title refers to?

Follow-up Activities

1. Also read *City Green* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan or *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman to students and discuss it with them. How is it similar to *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table*? How is it different? What is the theme of each? *Reading Standards: Key Ideas and Details 1,2; Craft and Structure*

2. There is only one line of dialogue in this book (“We need fifty million more people growing food on porches, in pots, in side yards,” he says.). Why isn’t there more dialogue than this? Have students examine other biographies for dialogue and report back what they found. A biography is a true book about a real person. If dialogue appears in it, it has to be attributable to the person. Do you have any biographies at your school that aren’t really biographies but a combination of fiction and biography? *Reading: Craft and Structure 6*
3. Have students draw a timeline of Will Allen’s life. *Language Arts: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7*
4. The author is known for often using simile to get across her meaning. “Fresh vegetables were as scarce in the city as trout in the desert” is an example of this. What does this line mean? Have students create some of their own simile to describe how scarce something is or how abundant something is. *Language Arts: Text Types and Purposes 3*
5. Is there something your class would like to see happen in the world that would make it a better place? Have students research a topic like recycling or community gardening or doing something about cafeteria waste! After they research the facts, have them write a persuasive piece that provides facts and well-thought-out reasons to support their opinions. *Language Arts: Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9; Text Types and Purposes 1*

Web Resources

Find more about Will Allen and his work at www.growingpower.org.

Learn about Heifer International, <http://www.heifer.org>, the nonprofit organization that partnered with Will Allen to grow red wriggler worms and aquaponic fish. Explore different ways Heifer supports local food communities.

Author & Illustrator Information

Jacqueline Briggs Martin is the author of *Snowflake Bentley*, winner of the Caldecott Medal. Her last book, *The Chiru of High Tibet*, was named “Best Book of 2010” by Smithsonian magazine and Kirkus Reviews. Other notable mentions include ALA Notables, a Golden Kite Honor Award, Lupine Awards from the Maine Library Association, and four inclusions on the Blue Ribbon list of the Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books. She has taught creative writing at Hamline College and the University of Iowa Summer Writing Festival. She grew up on a farm in Maine and now lives in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. Learn more about Jackie at jacquelinebriggsmartin.com.

Eric-Shabazz Larkin is a filmmaker, fine artist, and a creative director in advertising. He is also a founder of the Creative School of Thought, a group of artists who produce content for public art and social change. A native of Virginia, he lives in New York City. This is his first book for children. Learn more about Eric at creativeschoolofthought.com

Publisher Information

Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table is published by READERS to EATERS, whose mission is to promote food literacy. READERS to EATERS produces books that celebrate the pleasure of food, the joy of eating together, and the wonder of seeing our nourishment grow from the ground. They can be found on the web at readerstoeaters.com.

