

***Our School Garden!* Teacher's Guide**



Classroom Guide based on Common Core Standards for *Our School Garden!*

Written by Rick Swann and illustrated by Christy Hale

2013 Growing Good Kids Book Award Winner

Jr. Master Gardener Program and American Horticultural Society

Readers to Eaters Books

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Grades 2 to 5

Themes

School gardens, Gardening, Plant life, Life cycles, Cooking, Food, Soil, Compost, Homonyms, Cooperation, Folktales, Poetry, Collage

Synopsis

Our School Garden! is a fictional story about how young Michael, new to the city and the school, experiences the garden through the changing seasons of the school year. He discovers not just how vegetables grow but how a community can grow from a garden. Written in verse, the book features informational sidebars on key topics, including soil, life cycles, parts of plants, poetry forms, and community projects, like growing food for food banks.

The book is lushly illustrated in mixed media, combining collage and painting, that depict multicultural characters doing a variety of garden and school activities.

Background

I first started researching school gardens when my elementary school was in the process of reviving an old, underused garden. In 1906, when my school first opened, there were about 75,000 school gardens in the United States. By 1914, there was even a national office, the Office of School and Home Gardening, that helped schools create and maintain school gardens. Its mission: "A garden for every child, every child in a garden."

Why were there so many school gardens? The main reason was that people were worried that children were losing touch with nature because more and more children were moving from the countryside to the cities. In addition, educators at the time, like John Dewey and Maria Montessori, believed that children learned best with real-life experiences and activities and that lessons learned in the garden were more powerful than those read out of books or off of a blackboard.

The current revival in school gardens echoes many of the themes from a hundred years ago. School gardens follow the guideline: "Nature is our teacher." Garden educators want students to be able to

study soil cycles and life cycles firsthand. They believe that the garden is a classroom where many subjects can be taught in a real-life manner that involves observation, experimentation, and thought.

School gardens also address the concern that children are not eating enough healthy foods and staying active. School gardens are a place where children can experience growing and eating healthy food and be physically active producing it. In addition, working in the garden encourages student cooperation, and the garden can be a gathering place for the community as well as supplying food to the community, including to the local food banks.

If you want to start a school garden, there is a list of web-based resources listed at the end of this guide that can guide you through the process. But keep in mind that a garden can be as small as a container that holds soil to keep near your classroom or home window. You just need at least six hours a day of sunlight and access to water.

I would encourage you to read other books about gardening, too. Some great stories are *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown, *Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie* by Robbin Gourley, *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin, *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman, and the biography *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin.

There are also lots of information books about gardening, including *Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots* and *Sunflower Houses* by Sharon Lovejoy, and *How to Grow a School Garden* by Arden Bucklin-Sporer and Rachel Pringle. One of my favorite quotes is from that book: "School gardens are, in fact, libraries full of life, mystery, and surprise." Being in a garden is like reading a good book—you're never sure what is on the next page, but you can't wait to get there and find out.

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 you think so?
2. Without reading the text, show students the pages in the book, pointing out the endpapers, title page, pages in the body of the book, author's note, and resources. Show and read the acknowledgements and author and illustrator biographies in the back of the book. Have any of the students changed their minds about whether this is an information or fiction book? Why?
3. 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 pages of the book? What details support their answers?
4. Ask students if they have ever gone somewhere and not known anyone. How did they feel? What do they think it would feel like to be a new student at a school where they don't know anyone the first day? What would make it easier to feel welcome and to make new friends? Ask them to see how Michael, the boy in the story, responds to being new to his school.

Vocabulary

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

Review the words below and have students note how these words are used in the book. Can they infer the meaning from the context? If not, have them look up the words they do not know in a dictionary and record the meanings. Have students use words that are new to them in a sentence. If any of the words have synonyms, note that as well.

CONTENT SPECIFIC

companion planting	nitrogen	arugula	kale
nutrients	vines	stock	compost
seedling	pod	collards	stalk

ACADEMIC

vibrant	wriggle	slogan	promote
tangy	gobble	armored	zesty
lurk	festive	crumbly	burrowing
crater	kimchi	stock	dedication

A **Suffix** is a letter or group of letters that are added to the end of a word to change its meaning or to make a different word. What is the root word of each of the following words from the book, and how does the suffix change its meaning?

feathery	tenderly	crumbly	seedling
dedication	government	wonderful	actually

Homonyms are words that are spelled the same and sound the same but have different meanings. The poem “Homonym” profiles one of those words: bank. What are the different meanings of the other words in the book that are homonyms?

rock	bowl	leaves	can
head	bear	long	beans
host	gobble	down	ground

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently. There are homophones in the book, too: there/their and stock/stalk are two of the pairs. What words in the book sound like these words? What do they each mean?

no	sum	weigh	made
cede	passed	read	meet
sewing	fourth	bare	rays
berry	weak	whether	would

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. *Our School Garden!* combines poetry, fiction, and informational text. Identify each and give details that support your answer. Why do you think the author chose the format he did? Was it successful? Were parts of the book more successful than others?
2. Did Michael become part of the school community by the end of the book? How do you know? What evidence in the text demonstrates that he has made friends?

3. What are facts related to school gardens that you learned reading this book? What do you think you would like best if you had a school garden?
4. Look at the poem “Compost.” What does “work like dogs” mean? Why does the author change it to “work like worms?” What is “black gold” in the poem and what does “rich” refer to in the last line? How is the writing style in the text on the right-hand page different from the writing of “Compost?” Whose point of view does that writing reflect? From whose point of view is the poem? How do you know?
5. Choose an illustration that helps you determine the point of view used in the poem on that page. How does it help you? How many characters can you name on each page in the book?
6. What are the two different meanings of “companion planting” named on the “Three Sisters” pages, and how do they relate to each other?

Follow-up Activities

1. After reading the poem “The Enormous Carrot,” read a version of *The Enormous Turnip*, the Russian folktale. Discuss with students. How is it similar to the poem? How is it different? What is the theme of each? *Reading Standards: Key Ideas and Details 1,2; Craft and Structure 5*
2. Have students rewrite the recipe for School Garden Stone Soup for 14 people. *Math Content: Operations and Algebraic Thinking 2*
3. Have students research a harvest festival like one of the ones mentioned in the book: Pongal, the Chinese Moon Festival, Thanksgiving, or Sukkoth. Have students find the answers to these questions: When and where does this festival take place? What are this festival’s origins? What special foods and other rituals are connected to this festival? Have students write a short report on what they learned. *Language Arts: Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9; Text Types and Purposes 2*
4. After reading “Garden Riddles,” have students write their own riddle poems based on an animal commonly found in the garden or a plant (or the part of a plant we eat) found there. Have students carefully study their topic and find several descriptive words or phrases about it. Have them take the point of view of the topic: I am . . . and add the descriptive terms. They can end the poems with: Who am I? Have students share their riddles and see if classmates can guess the answers. *Language Arts: Text Types and Purposes 3; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas 4*
5. After reading “Spring Plant Sale,” have students make their own concrete poems. Concrete poetry is poetry written in the shape of the topic or theme of the poem. The children’s book *A Poke in the I*, edited by Paul B. Janeczko, has many wonderful examples of this type of poetry. *Language Arts: Text Types and Purposes 3*
6. Read “Found Poem.” Look at examples of Victory Garden posters by doing an online image search of “Victory Garden posters.” Discuss current topics that students might be concerned about that involve changing people’s behavior in order to improve the situation: Keep our school hallways clear of trash; Don’t abandon your pets; Recycle your used papers and cans, etc. Have students make a poster that encourages the behaviors that the students hope for. On the poster, besides an illustration that calls attention to the topic and a catchy slogan, have students write an explanatory paragraph as to why people should do this. *Language Arts: Text Types and Purposes 1; Production and Distribution of Writing 4*

Web Resources

If you are interested in starting a school garden or learning more about them, these websites are

invaluable:

The School Garden Wizard (<http://www.schoolgardenwizard.org/>) was created for America's K-12 school community through a partnership between the United States Botanic Garden and the Chicago Botanic Garden. It covers every step involved in making the case for, creating, using, maintaining, and evaluating a school garden.

The National Gardening Association maintains a website rich with ideas for gardening with children: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>. This site also maintains a national registry of school gardens as well as sells kits, tools, and books that support a gardening curriculum.

California has emphasized school garden programs for a number of years. The California School Garden Network's comprehensive website can be found at: <http://www.csgn.org/>.

Life Lab (<http://www.lifelab.org/>) is a California-based organization that offers a number of environmental, hands-on science- and garden-based programs. *The Growing Classroom — Garden and Nutrition Activity Guide* is one of the best garden-based curriculum guides available. Their website is full of useful ideas on all aspects of school gardening.

Author & Illustrator Information

Rick Swann is a former school librarian in Seattle, Washington, where he lives. He has been a gardener since he was a child, picking asparagus and blueberries near his childhood home in New England. This is his first book. Learn more about Rick at www.rickswann.com.

Christy Hale has illustrated many award-winning picture books, including *Elizabeth's Doll* and its two sequels, *Mama Elizabeth* and *Elizabeth's School*. She is the author/illustrator of *The East-West House: Noguchi's Childhood in Japan*, named a Best Book of the Year by Kirkus Reviews. She lives in Palo Alto, California. Learn more about Christy at www.christyhale.com.

Publisher Information

Our School Garden! 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 readerstoeters.com.