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Urban Gardening Grows Relationships: The importance of urban gardening to the self and the earth

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Urban Gardening Grows Relationships:

The importance of urban gardening to the self and the earth

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Abstract

Urban Gardening Grows Relationships:

The importance of urban gardening to the self and the earth

Ashley King

There are many texts for young readers that focus on gardening and the pleasant experiences it can bring. However, there is a distinct lack of texts that address urban gardening specifically as well as the reasons why gardening, in and outside of cities, is so important. This independent study had a purpose of providing a book for young readers that will engage them in a celebration of gardening and the environment around them. The text of the book follows a young girl who gardens not only to build relationships with her peers, but also to take care of and appreciate her environment. The purpose of this text and research is to provide readers with an understanding of how gardening can have positive effects on personal, local, and global levels.

Table of Contents

Rationale	.....	4
Child Development	.....	8
Literature Review	.....	11
Original Material	.....	29
Applications	.....	46
Reflections	.....	47
Bibliography	.....	51

Rationale

The origin of this story is rooted in my childhood, when I spent most of my summer days visiting my grandparents' greenhouses in upstate New York. All year round my grandparents would work in the greenhouses, tending to the plants until they were ready to be sold and delivered to customers, and it was my job to assist them. I can recall my small hands working next to my grandfather's larger ones, patting the soil down around delicate seedlings and listening to his voice as he gave me instructions and whistled his favorite songs. I remember feeling accomplished and proud when our plants were ready to be delivered, knowing that we had grown them from small seeds. These are among the most precious memories I have with my grandfather; the gardening brought us closer each time I came for a visit and even after he passed away I was eager to share the experience he had given me with other loved ones. For years afterwards, my sister and I planted a vegetable garden in our suburban backyard which we tended together and eventually used to cook a harvest feast shared with our family. Each time I entered our garden I would think of my grandfather and how he taught me that gardening can not only help our environment, but can also bring people together.

My passion for outdoor work extended past gardening when I began a high school internship at a nature sanctuary in Westchester, New York where I learned about conservation and environmental education. When the internship was over and I graduated, I eagerly signed up for an environmental studies course at my college to learn more about environmentalism as a global issue. In this course we spoke at great length about urban agriculture, a topic which I was unfamiliar with. We watched videos and

read articles about the pioneers of urban agriculture who planted personal and community gardens on rooftops and in empty city lots. By employing urban agriculture practices in cities, these citizens were taking care of their environment, providing fresh organic food to people, and building a community through gardening (Green Bronx Machine, n.d.).

This was exactly the experience I had with my grandfather, only on a larger scale. When I first moved to New York City myself, I expected it to be a concrete jungle with little to no room for plants to grow, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that my assumption was wrong. There was green everywhere! I saw it on fire escapes and rooftops, in empty lots, on stoops and growing through cracks in the sidewalk, and even creeping up the sides of buildings, not to mention the abundance of greenery in the beautifully manicured parks scattered throughout the city. In an effort to make New York City more of a home, I planted a small garden on my fire escape. These experiences coalesced together and inspired me to write this story about a little girl named Marigold who moves to New York City and builds relationships and a home by gardening with her classmates at school.

Working in the garden always held a certain emotional significance for me because it was tied to the comfort and happiness I felt during the visits I had with my grandfather. I shared this feeling with my sister when we gardened together, I saw it in action at the nature sanctuary, and I discovered that it can happen anywhere in my college course. The major objective of this book is to inspire readers to not only share in the feelings of comfort and joy that can be experienced through gardening with family and

friends and, but also to be able to recognize the benefit of gardening to our planet and to go out and plant a garden of their own, no matter where they live.

Beyond the personal relevance this topic holds for me, my studies both at Skidmore College and here at Bank Street have led me to realize that a book of this type is important to create for younger students so that their generation is not only aware of environmental issues, but also have the tools to address them. One of the biggest things I took away from my environmental studies class at Skidmore was that there is a growing push for urban agriculture today, but the majority of people are not informed about it (Green Bronx Machine, n.d.). Though many people have come up with creative solutions for urban agriculture such as rooftop gardens and vertical farms, it has been difficult to establish them on a larger scale due to public ignorance. Just as I thought before I took my environmental studies class, many people do not even realize that urban farming exists and works. This book will educate those who are uninformed about rooftop gardening as a form of urban agriculture and will show them how rewarding and important to the environment growing plants is, especially in a city.

In addition to my environmental studies class, I had a friend at Skidmore whose father is Stephen Ritz, a man well-known in the South Bronx for bringing gardening into his classroom and transforming his community into a green and sustainable one (Green Bronx Machine, n.d.). Stephen teaches his students dedication and the value of hard work through gardening, resulting in happier, healthier students who are more likely to achieve and succeed in their future. Further, the students build community in the classroom and in the Bronx by sharing the food they grow with others (Colangelo, 2015). The great

success of Stephen Ritz's gardening project with his students was the inspiration for the rooftop garden in my story to be set at a school. In my story, Marigold, a new student in a New York City school, is initially very unhappy in her new environment and misses her large garden at home in suburban Virginia. However, when she becomes involved in the community garden at her school, she begins to make new friends and slowly realizes that gardening is feasible in urban areas, and that she became part of the New York City community by participating in the school gardening project. Similar to the experience of the students in the South Bronx who built their relationships and community through gardening, the development of my main character, Marigold, over the course of the book is a result of the classroom community built in her school garden.

During research I conducted on this topic, I came upon some books about the consequences of not taking care of the planet, such as *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss and *Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg. However, as researchers have stated, books that portray this alarming future can result in 'ecophobia', characterized by overwhelmed students who feel helpless and hopeless in the face of these serious issues (Gray, Elser, Klein, & Rule, 2016). Instead of these frightening images of our possible future, researchers suggest reading picture books that celebrate the environment and immerse children in aesthetic reading that enhance their understanding of, and relationship to the world around them (Korteweg, Gonzalez, & Guillet, 2010). However, I was unable to find many books that fit this description, or that addressed possible strategies for environmental action. My book seeks to add to this category of children's literature that

celebrate environmentalism and engage students in aesthetic reading about the world they live in.

Adding to the literature that celebrates the environment and the relationship humans have to it is highly important for younger students given that young students are future adult citizens who must be taught to engage in ongoing ecologically responsible behaviors (Tsekos, Tsekos, & Christoforidou, 2012). Having students think about the impact humans have on the environment and practice environmental conservation at a young age will result in adults who do the same. Moreover, the best way to engage students in these processes is to use children's literature because when we read, we are "in the hands of a gifted writer, turning from being passive followers into passionate advocates calling new followers. The writer's skill with words gives us a pleasure we want to share, and an understanding we have an urge to spread," (Lukens, 2007). This urge to share and spread our reading experiences can be used to inform and inspire young students into advocating for important global issues. Thus, reading and responding to picturebooks on environmental issues can "inspire change by instilling a sense of hope that doing something small can truly make a big difference," (Napoli, 2011, p. 77). This is the type of hope that I want students to come away with when they read my picture book. I want each reader to be filled with a sense of wonder about the environment, and the empowerment to protect it.

Child Development

The target audience of my book is eight and nine year old children based on the state of their personal, social, and emotional development at this time. Children at this

age are beginning to learn more about themselves as individuals and as part of a larger group. As individuals, children are starting to learn about themselves; what they are interested in, what they are and are not good at, and what they like and dislike. This self-discovery is a necessary precursor to the establishment of peer groups, which also emerge during this stage of development (Berk, 2006). These peer groups are only made up of a few children who have formed a deeper friendship based on shared interests (Wood, 2007). During this process of forming peer groups, children at this age are highly concerned with peer approval and fear the possibility that others might reject them. According to Erik Erikson, this fear being realized leads to feelings of incompetence given children at this age are in the middle of the industry versus inferiority stage of development (Berk, 2006). They feel the need to belong in a group, finding “comfort in knowing they are not the only person in the world to have felt awkward, overly ambitious, foolish, or shy,” (Oppenheim, 1986). Because of these concerns children at this age have, it was important for my book to have a main character struggling with this very issue. When kids read about how my main character, Marigold, deals with the move to a new city and trying to find her place in a new school with new friends, they may be able to relate and understand her struggle.

Although there are many uncertainties that come with navigating their social environment, children at this age are beginning to engage in a wide array of prosocial behaviors, and enjoy working cooperatively. They can effectively communicate with peers, take on multiple perspectives, and identify viewpoints that are different from their own (Berk, 2006). In terms of friendship dynamics, eight and nine year olds experience a

shift from the simple and superficial relationships of early childhood to more complex and psychological bonds. These strong relationships are formed around essential and mutual trust between friends where each party likes the other's personal qualities, responds to the other's needs and desires, and assists the other in times of need (Berk, 2006). Since eight and nine year olds are strengthening and deepening their relationships with peers, reading about kids their age who are doing the same is not only relatable, but might even help them to navigate their social world better. Further, because one of the largest themes of my book is building community through gardening, readers will be able to understand that they can create friendships through shared interests and working together.

In terms of emotional development, typical children of ages eight and nine are beginning to make rapid gains in emotional self-regulation. They are able to recognize that they can experience more than one emotion at a time, and they understand that other people can too. Further, these children are beginning to experience and understand sympathy and empathy (Berk, 2006). This theme is taken up in my book through the character of Marigold, who is experiencing many different feelings as she adjusts to her new home. It is important that readers be able to sympathize, empathize, and understand emotions in order to understand Marigold's character in the book, which is why eight and nine year olds are at the perfect age to be exposed to this book.

It is also at this age that children start to think about and become concerned with unwanted change. These are the kids who are worried about the health of their relatives, about the possibility of moving away, changing schools, and losing best friends. Books

with protagonists who are similar in age and dealing with these issues are relatable for children who are eight or nine years old and are therefore of interest. The protagonist in my book, a young girl who has moved from her rural home to the largest city in the world and is experiencing some trouble over this transition, is the type of character that a typical eight or nine year old would be able to relate to.

Additionally, eight and nine year olds are at the point in their development where they have a “growing sense of moral responsibility beyond themselves,” (Wood, 2007, p. 89). These children are becoming concerned with troubling world events and global issues, and due to their increased ability for perspective taking, are able to engage in thoughtful conversation around these topics. Because of this increased ability to think critically about important global topics at this age, my book could act as a doorway to a discussion about environmental issues and what we can do to fix them. In reading my book, students can begin to think about the benefits of urban agriculture, how individuals as well as schools and businesses can garden in the city to help purify air and provide healthier food for urban citizens. The book can even lead students to more resources about the topic or even inspire them to explore other environmental topics through the inclusion of back matter.

Literature for Children Review

Themes and Patterns

In exploring areas of children’s literature that center around topics of gardening and urban agriculture, I noticed that several themes spanned across many books. The three main categories of themes I found in these books that demonstrate how important

the topics of gardening and urban agriculture is to address with students are 1) gardening to build relationships and community, 2) the importance of environmentalism, and 3) everyone can make a difference through perseverance. Within these three larger categories, there were smaller themes and patterns present in many of the books as well. For example, within gardening to build relationships and community, there was a subtheme of the importance of collaboration to achieve the best output. In other words, many books made a common point that, without the collaboration of the characters, the work would not have been as successful. Additionally, within the category of the importance of environmentalism, there is a subtheme of growth in unexpected places. Many of the books that were explored for this project acknowledge that plants do not only show up in vast rural or suburban gardens, but in many surprising places as well. All of these themes had an impact on my thinking about the story I wanted to write in my book. While the book will touch upon many of the themes listed above, the theme that I hope surfaces foremost is gardening as a way to build relationships and community.

Gardening builds relationships and community. One of the most pervasive themes across the books I analyzed in this literature review was that collaboration in the garden results in the establishing and strengthening of bonds among friends and family. In *The Gardner* (Stewart, 1997), the protagonist, Lydia, moves in with her grumpy uncle Jim in the city because of the Great Depression. When Lydia first arrives, the city's glumness surrounds her, as represented in the illustrations in the book. However, when Lydia starts to garden and fill her uncle's bakery with colorful flowers, this begins to change. The customers smile and interact with her, she makes new friends, and she even

gets a smile from her uncle Jim at the end of the book. Lydia's gardening brought color and happiness to the people in the city and helped her to make friends and build her relationship with her uncle. Another book that illustrates this theme is *Our School Garden* (Swann, 2012). Michael has just moved to the city in this book, and he begins to feel more comfortable and at home in his new school by participating in the school garden with his classmates and attending community events. He becomes part of the community of gardeners in his new city, and is able to share that with his new friends.

In addition to these, there are also two books that focus specifically on home gardens where families reinforce their bond by working together in the garden. These two books are *Eddie's Garden and How Things Grow* (Garland, 2004), and *Grandpa's Garden* (Fry, 2012). Both of these books focus on a young boy who gardens with his family. In *Eddie's Garden*, Eddie works on his garden with his mother and sister where he learns a great deal about gardening, but also helps his sister to plant her own pumpkin seed. In *Grandpa's Garden*, Billy bonds with his grandfather by learning about and helping in the garden. In the end of both of these stories, Billy and Eddie both share in a bountiful meal of their home-grown food with their families, reiterating the relationships that were being nurtured the whole time.

Slightly different than the previous books is *A Child's Garden* (Foreman, 2009). While the other books were about planting gardens with friends and families, this book is set in the ruins of a young boy's home where he is surrounded by darkness and rubble, a fence separating him from the rest of the world. Thus, when he finds a small vine growing out of this debris, he nurtures it until it covers the fence. The vine brightens up

the pages of the book as the other children behind the fence are brought together to play near the plant. Even after the vine is torn down, a girl on the other side of the fence tends to the remains and the vine becomes magnificent again, bringing the children together in joy for a second time. The existence of the vine brings these children closer and inspires hope in all of them.

Within this theme, there were also two books that I came across in this review that not only had the theme of building relationships and community through gardening, but also had a subtheme of the importance of collaborating and teaching others about gardening. These two books are *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* (Briggs Martin, 2013) and *City Green* (Di-Salvo Ryan, 2004). In *Farmer Will Allen*, Will starts a small garden in the city with his family, who he has always gardened and eaten with. However, his project becomes bigger and bigger and soon not only is his family involved, but his community and eventually even people outside of his community. Will Allen built many relationships through his work in gardens, and his willingness to collaborate with and teach anyone who was willing to learn all about how to garden in cities created a country-wide movement. Will Allen was the one to spearhead this project, involving and teaching as many people as he could. Without his dedication to starting this collaboration, it would not have happened. In *City Green*, Marcy and her neighbor Rosa strengthen the bonds of their community by creating a garden in an empty lot where all of the neighbors come to garden, even the grumpiest curmudgeon on the street. The garden serves as a place for the community to gather, and without the collaboration of Marcy, Rosa, and the

rest of the neighbors, the garden would not have come together as nicely as it did. Thus, collaboration is also an important theme in this story.

All of these books place an importance on gardening as a way to build relationships and community, and this is an integral theme of my book as well. My protagonist, Marigold, is new to New York City and only begins to feel like it is a home when she builds friendships through her work in the community garden at school. In the end of the story, Marigold and her new friends share a feast of all of the fruits and vegetables that they have grown together to celebrate their success through collaboration and the community they have created.

The importance of environmentalism. A second salient theme in these books was the importance of environmentalism and caring for the world around us. The two books that showcased this theme the most were *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1999) and *Just a Dream* (Van Allsburg, 1990). In *The Lorax*, a young boy walks through a dark, sludgy, unpleasant place barren of any life. He comes upon the Onceler, who tells him that this place was not always so glum, but was once colorful and full of life. It was only when the Onceler himself came along and cut down all of the truffula trees despite the warnings of the Lorax, who spoke for the trees and animals. Once the last tree was gone, the Lorax and all of the life in the area disappeared. In the end, the Onceler tells the boy, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not,” (Seuss, 1999), and gives him a seed to plant in order to restore the land’s former glory. This story shows just how important it is to take care of the environment to prevent things like this from happening, and also that we all have to care enough about our environment to do

something about its destruction and possibly reverse the negative effects we've had on it in the past. Similarly, *Just a Dream* starts with a boy named Walter, who litters one day and then goes to sleep and dreams of a horrible future where the world is dark, dirty, and dead. When he wakes up, he realizes he must be better, and he takes care of the environment in order to avoid this grim future. Just like *The Lorax*, this book shows us the reality of what will happen if we don't step up and do something for our environment. Because this idea is so important, it is also featured in my book. The teacher in my story talks to Marigold and her friends about how important it is for each of us to do our part in helping the earth by planting new life.

Related to the idea of environmentalism and each individual doing something to help the environment is that the growth of plants can happen in the most unexpected of places. So even if you live in the middle of a city, you can help the earth by growing something. This theme of growth in unexpected places was particularly relevant in *The Curious Garden* (Brown, 2009) and *A Child's Garden* (Foreman, 2009). Liam, the main character in *The Curious Garden*, lives in a city that looks dirty and depressing based on the illustrations. One day, Liam is surprised to stumble upon plants growing on an abandoned railroad track, and tends to them. As Liam's garden grows, he is surprised to find that the plants like to grow in strange places, like abandoned cars and in cracks and crevices, and even up and down walls. As Liam gardens, the city gets less smoggy and eventually gets overtaken by the plants and becomes beautiful. Similarly, *A Child's Garden* focuses on a small vine that managed to grow amongst the wreckage of a destroyed community, an extremely unlikely place. However, the boy in the story cared

for this unexpected plant and helped it grow into a magnificent vine. These stories both end with beautiful and amazing plants surrounding the characters in places that they would never have been expected to grow. This relates to my story because Marigold does not expect there to be any place to garden in the concrete jungle that is New York City. However, she comes to realize that there are actually plants everywhere and she can garden in the city when she takes a closer look at the possibilities.

Anyone can make a difference through perseverance. The third theme I found in these books is closely tied to the other two, and that is that anyone can make a difference if they put in an effort and persevere. In *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* (Briggs Martin, 2013), Will Allen tries many different things before he experiences success in his gardens. Through perseverance and hard work gardening, teaching, and collaborating, Will Allen succeeds in not only creating a garden for himself and his community, but also creating gardens across the country. Without Will Allen's perseverance, he would not have made the difference that he made in the world of urban agriculture.

Similarly, in terms of environmentalism, *Just a Dream* (Van Allsburg, 1990) and *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1999) illustrate the importance of perseverance in order to maintain the beauty and purity of our world. Walter in *Just a Dream* chooses to plant a tree, recycle, and throw his trash in the garbage can, and the the boy in *The Lorax* takes a seed from the Onceler to plant in order to restore the environment. Because these boys care and decide to put in the effort to take care of the planet, they both make a difference.

Finally, in *The Curious Garden* (Brown, 2009) and *A Child's Garden* (Foreman,

2009), the main characters both take it upon themselves to help the plants they discover grow and become magnificent and beautiful. Without the boys' perseverance and work to help these plants grow, they most likely would have died.

This theme of perseverance and putting in the hard work to make a difference will also be present in my book, as Marigold and her friends each have important jobs in their school garden. Each person in the group will contribute a little bit to achieve a larger goal together.

Review of Children's Literature

Ancona, G. (2015). *It's Our Garden*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

This is the only non-fiction text included in this review, and it is about a school in New Mexico where students actively learn by gardening together. The story follows an entire year in the garden, from prepping the garden and planting the seeds, to harvesting and readying the garden for a long winter. It is complete with photographs of the children and adults as they work in the garden together. This book would be a wonderful resource to have in a classroom that is working on their own garden, and students of many ages would find it interesting. An eight year old could read it on his or her own.

This book was included in the literature review so that I could get a better idea of how school gardens work throughout the year. The book follows the students in the garden for an entire year, which helps me think about what sort of things Marigold and her new friends will do in their garden in the fall. This is a resource for the technical gardening piece of my book.

Briggs Martin, J. (2013). *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table*. Bellevue, WA:

Readers to Eaters Books.

This book tells the story of Will Allen, former basketball star, who envisioned a city where citizens could access fresh produce every day grown in the city itself. Making this vision a reality, Allen planted urban gardens and involved his family and community in growing fresh food. Eventually this turned into an urban gardening movement, spanning across multiple cities. This book would be appropriate for children anywhere between the age of six and nine.

This book was included in the literature review because of the story it told. The story of how Will Allen inspired so many people and expanded his gardening system in urban areas influenced the development of the plot in my own book. Like Will Allen, my protagonist Marigold will discover that gardening brings people together and creates a community. Additionally, at the back of the book there is a paragraph about Will Allen and where to find more material about his work. The inclusion of this back matter is something that I have included in my book so that curious readers know where to go to learn more.

Brown, P. (2009). *The Curious Garden*. New York, NY: Hachette Book Group.

This picture book tells the story of a boy named Liam, who discovers plants growing on an abandoned railway in the city he lives in. Liam decides that the plants will die if they don't receive care, so he becomes the gardener to these plants. As he tends to them they grow and expand not only along the train tracks, but into the city itself. Students between the ages of eight and nine could read this book independently.

The Curious Garden is one of the books that has informed my children's book the most. During the first reading, it struck me that Liam's perseverance in his gardening created a more beautiful and colorful city for him to live in. The words and the art come together to show how nature can make things beautiful, as long as someone is there to care.

I wanted to show this point in my book by deliberately illustrating everything but Marigold in black and white in the beginning when Marigold only sees the concrete of the city around her, and then illustrating with full color when Marigold realizes that plants are actually all around her in the city and she just had to look for it.

DiSalvo-Ryan, D. (1994). *City Green*. New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

City Green is the perfect book for students who are seven or eight years old. The story is told by Marcy, a young girl who is saddened by the empty spot left by a building that was knocked down in her neighborhood. Marcy and her neighbor, Miss Rosa, decide to do something about this and plant a garden in the empty lot. Eventually the entire neighborhood is involved in the project, even grouchy Mr. Hammer next door. By the end of the book, there is a magnificent garden blooming in the once empty lot, and Marcy bonds with Mr. Hammer over the sunflowers he planted when he thought nobody was looking.

In this story, Marcy's involvement in creating a garden in the neighborhood's empty lot builds a close knit community, which is the main reason it was selected for this literature review. In my book, Marigold and her class build their friendships and their

community through their work in the garden, the characters and events in *City Green* informing my writing in this area.

Foreman, M. (2009). *A Child's Garden*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

This book could be used for a wide span of different aged children for different reasons. A child age eight or nine could read this book independently, but it could be effectively used as a read aloud for six or seven year olds. The complex themes of hope in a time of destruction and living in a restricted environment in the book makes it useful for students as old as ten or eleven. The story is of a young boy whose home is in ruin. A wire fence and soldiers separate him from the rest of the world. One day, the boy finds a tiny green plant growing amongst the rubble and decides to tend to it. Eventually it grows up the fence and the children play amongst it until the soldiers tear it down. The boy is devastated until a little girl on the other side of the fence finds what was left of his plant and nurtures it to its former glory.

Like many other books included in this literature review, I chose to include this book because it illustrates how tending to plants and nature can bring people together and create hope for the future. A very important theme in my book is gardening to create community and build friendships, and this book draws on this theme as well. Further, the art in this book is inspirational to me as well. The ruins around the boy are all done in grayscale while the plants are done in beautifully vibrant colors. In my own story, when Marigold is feeling unhappy with the world around her, her surroundings are in black and white, and when she is feeling happy about the plant life around her, the surroundings are in full color.

Fry, S. (2012). *Grandpa's Garden*. Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books.

This story would be appropriate for readers who are seven or eight years old. It follows a young boy named Billy who regularly helps his grandfather in his garden. Together, Billy and his grandfather work hard to set the garden up, and Billy learns a lot about how to plant different vegetables, how to care for them, and how to keep pests from destroying them. At the end of the story, Billy and his grandfather harvest their fruit and vegetables together.

This book is informing my work in a few different areas. First, the work that Billy and his grandfather are doing in the garden keeps with the theme of gardening as a means of building relationships. Further, this book informed my writing about the actual work the students in my story will do in their garden. I want to make sure that the types of things my characters are doing in their garden are accurate, and using this book helps with that, as it details the processes of planting, caring for, and harvesting vegetables in the garden.

Garland, S. (2004). *Eddie's Garden and How to Make Things Grow*. London, UK:

Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

Eddie's Garden and How to Make Things Grow would also be an appropriate book for a seven or eight year old child. It is the story of Eddie, a young boy who is growing a garden with his mother and sister. Eddie learns how to plant his seeds and care for the plants as they grow and also helps his sister grow her own pumpkin. In the end, Eddie and his family harvest their vegetables and have a picnic together.

During the first reading of this book, the most enjoyable part was the ending where Eddie and his family harvest their fruits and vegetables from the garden and have a picnic together. This informed my choice to close my book with a large classroom harvest festival where the students share the food they grew in their garden together. Additionally, this book has back matter that informs the reader how to grow the plants that Eddie grows in the story and helpful tips for new gardeners. This type of back matter can inform readers who want more information, and I want to include this in my book so that curious readers can look deeper into the topic.

Nargi, L. (2011). *The Honeybee Man*. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade.

This book would be an appropriate read aloud for students from age four to eight. The story takes place in Brooklyn where a man named Fred tends to his bees on his rooftop. The text is informational as it follows Fred's bees flying throughout the neighborhood and then making honey for Fred to collect and sell to his neighbors, who are anxious to taste it.

One of the first things that struck me about this book was the illustrations. The mixture of paint and collage was interesting to me, as I have not seen much of this combination before. Seeing this beautiful art, I tried this strategy for my illustrations. Aside from the art, the language that the author uses in this book is a good balance of story and information, which is a balance that I want to achieve in my book. Finally, at the end of this book, there is a section that gives the reader information about honeybees and beekeepers if they want to know more about the topic. The inclusion of this information completes the book by giving specific facts about honeybees and how they

work to make honey that add to the fictional story the book tells. This back matter that provides extra information is something I want to put into my book so that readers can learn more about gardening and urban agriculture.

Polacco, P. (1996). *The Trees of the Dancing Goats*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

The Trees of the Dancing Goats is a story for readers between the ages of 8 and 11 as it uses more advanced language and more text on each page. The story is about Trisha, whose family is preparing for Hanukkah by decorating, cooking, and carving toys. Trisha is enjoying the holiday season until she visits a friend's house and discovers that they and the rest of the neighbors are all too sick to decorate for Christmas as they usually do. Trisha's family decides that in the spirit of true friendship, they would cut down and decorate trees for each of their sick neighbors. Their selflessness results in a happy holiday for everyone.

Patricia Polacco's books were the first consideration in this literature review because she is my favorite children's book author. Her use of description and figurative language is beautiful and I want to channel this in my writing. Further, her illustrations of ink and watercolor are delicate and detailed, giving them an air of wonder. In my book, the illustrations hope to achieve this sense of wonder about nature and the environment around us, so Polacco's illustrations inspired my work.

Polacco, P. (1998). *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.

This book can be read aloud for children from age seven to ten, and a nine year old child would be able to read it independently. This autobiographical story follows Trisha, who is excited to learn to read in school until she arrives and realizes that the letters and numbers don't make sense to her. Her classmates make fun of her as she struggles to read, but in fifth grade everything changes when Trisha enters Mr. Falker's classroom. Mr. Falker applauds Trisha's artistic abilities and takes the time to help her become a reader.

In this book, the portrayal of Trisha's feelings of isolation, fear, and sadness are moving to read and to see in the illustrations. These are the types of feelings Marigold has at the beginning of my book when she first moves to the city and feels alone, so Polacco's words about Trisha were inspiration for this section of my book. Further, Mr. Falker is, in part, the inspiration for the teacher in my book. She is understanding, kind, and knowledgeable, but most importantly believes in all of her students.

Seuss (1999). *The Lorax*. New York: Random House Children's Books.

The Lorax is a Dr. Seuss book that makes a fun and engaging read aloud for students who are between the ages of five and seven. The story starts with a boy wandering through a wasteland and encountering the Onceler, who tells him the story of the Lorax. Before the wasteland became what it was, it was bright and colorful and full of truffula trees and animals. However, when the Onceler came to town and started to mass produce thneeds out of the truffula trees, all of the trees and animals disappeared, leaving it a wasteland. The Onceler gives the boy a seed and tells him that unless someone like him can plant the seed and grow more trees, the wasteland will never get better.

The Lorax was included in this review for its theme of protecting the planet and appreciating nature to prevent the world from becoming a polluted place where you wouldn't want to live. One theme my book aims to address is the importance of taking care of our environment and doing what we can to help it. Unless we care about our environment, nothing positive will happen and there is a greater chance that it will only get worse. Further, the illustrations start bright, colorful, and happy when the trees and the animals are still around. As the environment deteriorates, the colors become dark and muddy, showing the negative change. In my book, the illustrations start out in black and white aside from Marigold, showing how Marigold views the city as a dirty, polluted place. However, as Marigold realizes that the city is actually full of plant life, the illustrations become more vibrant and colorful to show this change.

Stewart, S. (1997). *The Gardener*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

This book is appropriate for students between the ages of six and nine. The story is told through letters that Lydia writes home from where she is staying in the big dark city with her uncle Jim during the depression. At the beginning of the book, Lydia misses home and is surrounded by the grey of the new city, but as she begins to garden and fill her uncle's bakery with flowers, the atmosphere becomes happier and brighter. Eventually Lydia begins a secret rooftop garden to surprise her uncle with and by the end of the book, she's brightened up the lives of everyone she has met in the city before she goes home.

This book serves as inspiration for the plot of my book and my illustrations. Lydia loves to garden at home, and is sad when she has to move to the city. Her sadness is

reflected in the illustration where she is standing in the corner of the train station with her bags, surrounded by darkness. However, as she begins to garden, she becomes happier and makes those around her happier as well. The relationships and happiness she builds with the city community is reflected in the illustrations, which become brighter and more colorful at the end of the book. The theme of building of relationships through gardening influences my story as well, and the simultaneous changing of the character's feelings and the color in the illustrations as the plot develops both influence my story also.

Swann, R. (2012). *Our School Garden*. Bellevue, WA: Readers to Eaters Books.

This book would be most appropriate for students between the ages of eight and eleven. Michael, the main character of the book, has just moved to a new city and gets comfortable with his new school in the school garden. Each season there is something new and exciting going on in the school garden, and the class participates in community projects related to the garden as well. It is clear at the end of the book that the garden is a great place for learning and exploring in school.

The plot of this story is the main reason why it was included in my research. Just as Michael settles into his new school by gardening with his classmates, so does Marigold, the main character in my story. The wonders of the garden bring Marigold and the other students together, resulting in new friendships and feeling at home in New York City.

Van Allsburg, C. (1990). *Just a Dream*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Just a Dream is appropriate for students between the ages of eight and eleven, and a nine year old could read it independently. The book begins with a young boy named Walter who refuses to recycle, litters, and thinks the girl next door is crazy for requesting a tree for her birthday. However, Walter dreams that night about a terrible future full of pollution and waste which terrifies him. The dream changes his view on taking care of the earth, and he even asks for a tree to plant for his own birthday.

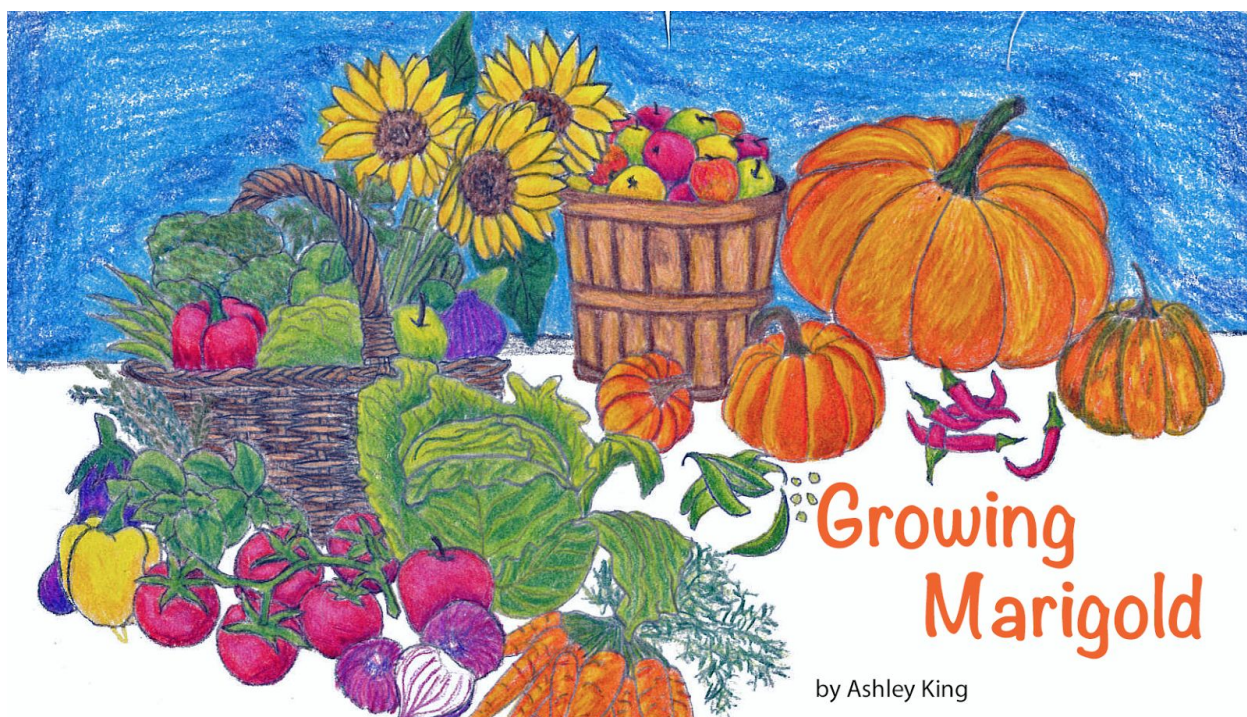
Like *The Lorax*, *Just a Dream* is included in this review because it is meant to inspire readers to do something to take care of their environment, lest it deteriorate into a polluted mess. My book aims to send the message to readers that it is important to do things like garden because this is a way we can help our environment not only survive, but thrive.

Concluding Thoughts on Children's Literature

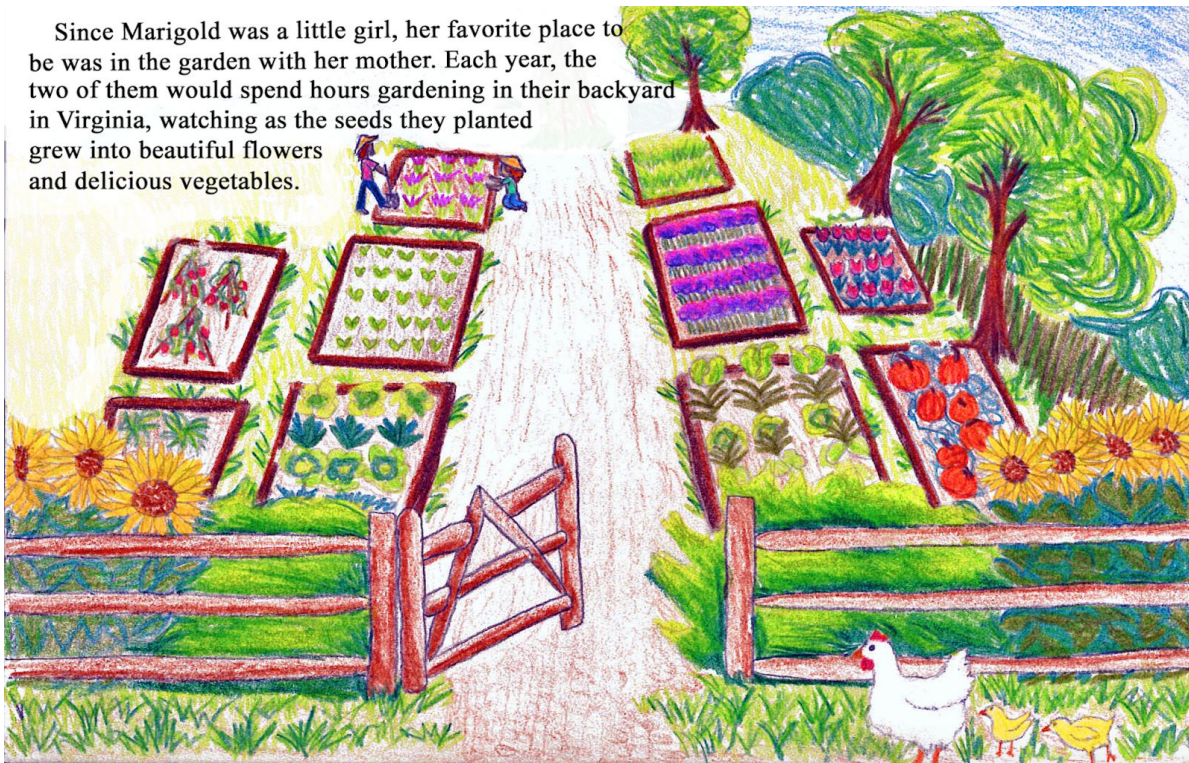
During the process of assembling this wealth children's literature that deal with the important topics of gardening and urban agriculture, I found that the majority of the books included were fiction. The choice to include almost exclusively fiction books was purposeful, as my own book is a work of fiction that was inspired by the stories compiled in this review. These works of fiction all highlight the beauty and wonder of the world around us by telling stories of people who work outdoors, feel connected to the earth, and appreciate not only the food it provides us, but also the joy in taking care of it. The fiction books included in this review as well as my own book are likely to inspire children to build relationships and take care of the environment by getting outside and gardening like the characters they are reading about, and that is why they were included in this review.

Beyond the large portion of these books being fiction, most of them also have the theme of gardening to build relationships and community embedded in their stories. This theme is highly important to remember as environmental issues grow more prominent in our world. The best way to address and hopefully reverse these issues is to come together as a world- wide community, and participate in activities like gardening that will help improve the conditions of the environment for our future. Not only would we be helping the world, but we would be building relationships with family and friends while doing it. Because of the relevance of this theme to today's global issues, it was identified as the most important theme in these books and it became the biggest focus of my book.

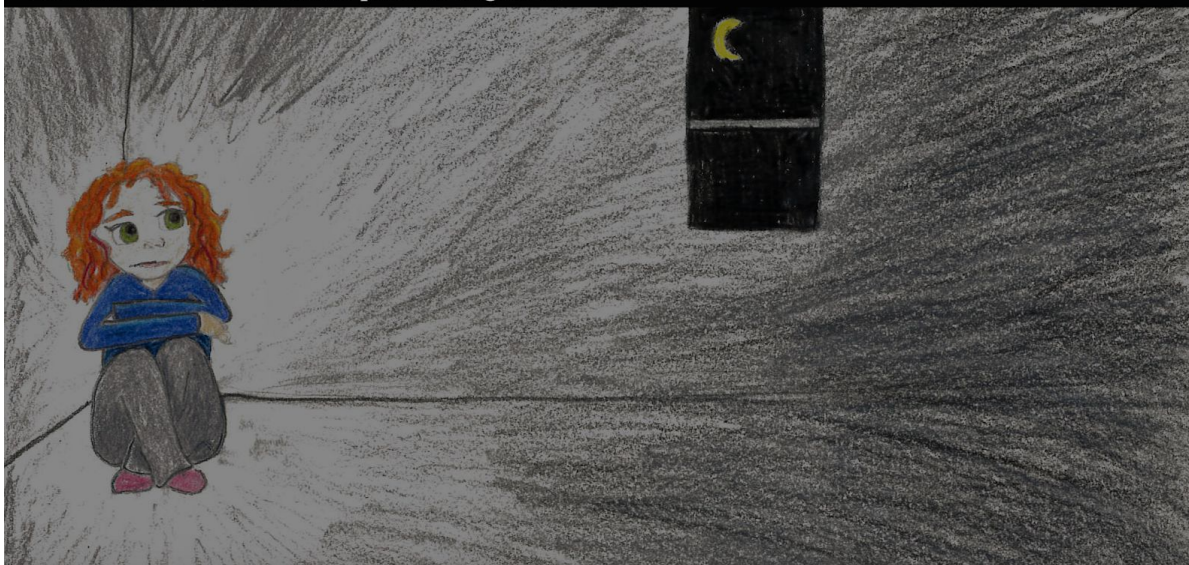
Original Work: *Growing Marigold*



Since Marigold was a little girl, her favorite place to be was in the garden with her mother. Each year, the two of them would spend hours gardening in their backyard in Virginia, watching as the seeds they planted grew into beautiful flowers and delicious vegetables.

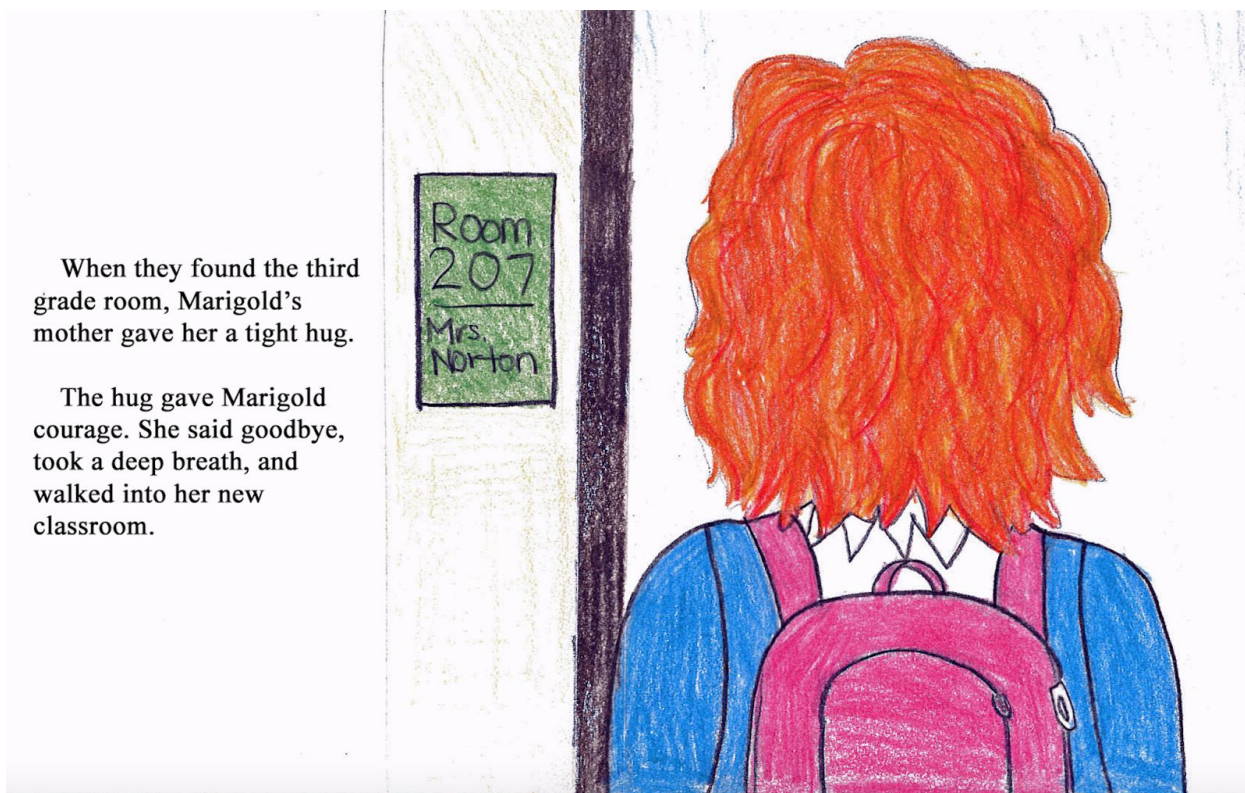


But everything was different now. Marigold's mother got a new job, so they had to move to a small apartment in New York City. Marigold hated the apartment. It looked dark and dirty, plus it was cramped and had a funny smell. But worst of all, there was no place for a garden.





Soon it was September, time for Marigold to go to her new school. As she and her mother walked to the school past towering buildings, Marigold asked, "What if I don't like it there?" "Don't worry," Her mother answered, "Just give it a chance. You will make friends just like you did in Virginia, and you'll start to feel right at home." Marigold was not sure if she would ever feel at home in New York City.



When they found the third grade room, Marigold's mother gave her a tight hug.

The hug gave Marigold courage. She said goodbye, took a deep breath, and walked into her new classroom.

Marigold was greeted by the noise of chattering students when she entered the room. Her stomach flip flopped with anxiety and her heart beat like a drum in her chest.

“Welcome to the third grade!” A cheery voice said. A tall woman with a big warm smile walked over to Marigold.

“You must be Marigold! I’m Mrs. Norton.” Something about Mrs. Norton calmed Marigold’s nerves and made her worries disappear. She smiled back at her teacher.

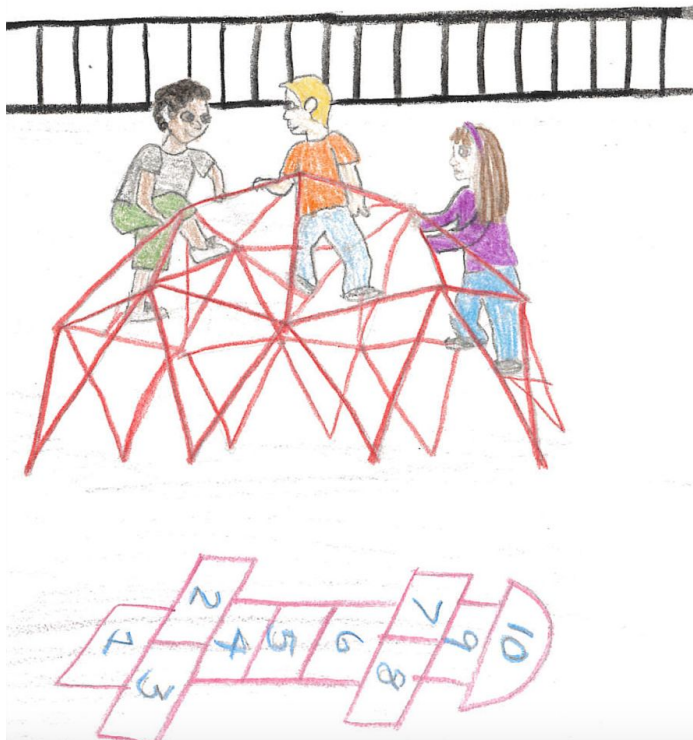


By the afternoon, Marigold was feeling more comfortable in her new school, but was still feeling too shy to speak to any of her classmates.

At recess while the rest of the third graders played, Marigold sat on a park bench reading a book about plants.

She was only a page in when Willa Moran, a girl from Marigold’s class, sat down beside her.





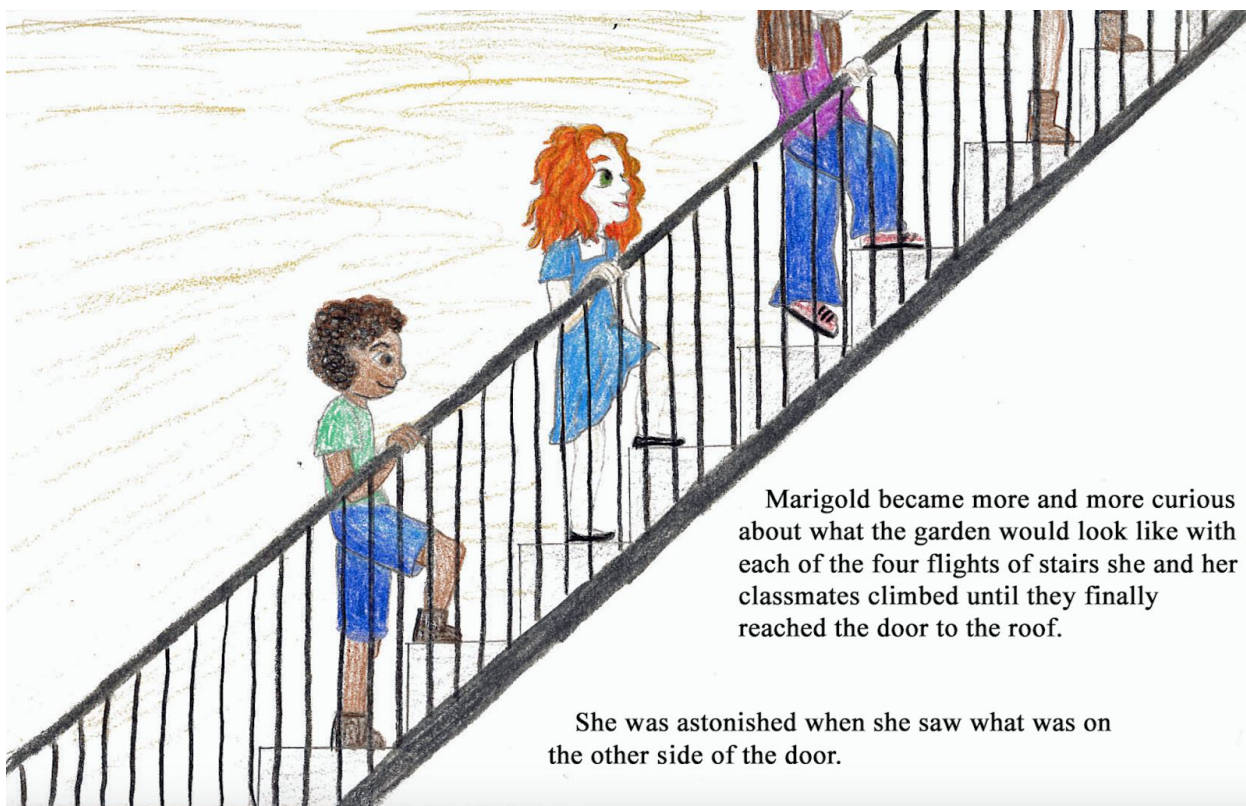
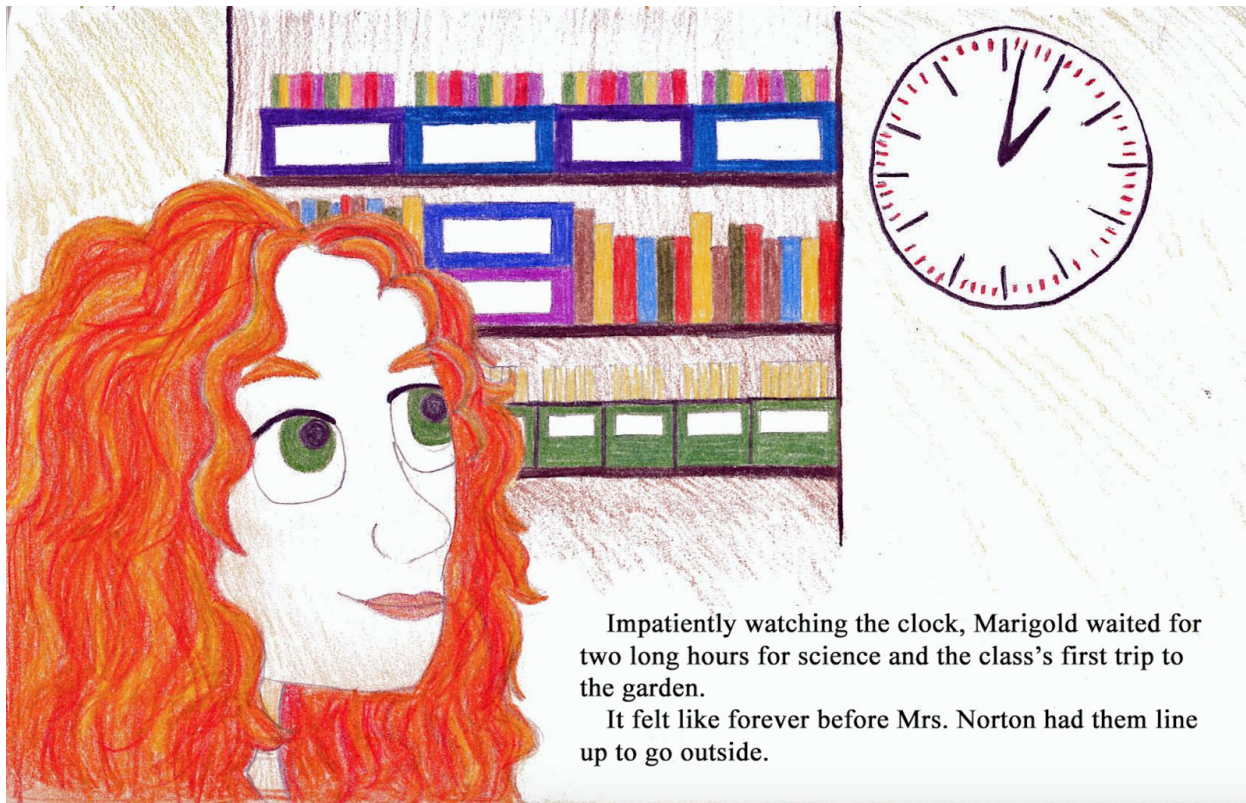
“What are you reading?” Willa asked, peering over Marigold’s shoulder at the trees and flowers on the pages of the book.

“It’s about plants, My mom and I used to garden when we lived in Virginia” Marigold answered.

Willa’s eyes lit up with excitement. “I love to garden, too! I can’t wait to start our community garden later today!”



Marigold’s heart lept at the thought of being able to garden again. She never expected to see a garden in New York City and she wondered where it could possibly be. When she walked to school that morning all she saw was concrete and brick. Nevertheless, Marigold was anxious to get into the outdoor classroom.





Mrs. Norton had the class gather around a man wearing a large wicker hat and a Hawaiian shirt waiting with seedlings on the ground in front of him.

Willa waved Marigold over to where she sat on a wooden bench near the front.



“Welcome back to the school garden everyone!” the man with the wicker hat said excitedly.

“I’m Mr. Klotz, and I’ll be helping you make the most out of your garden this year!” The class cheered with anticipation.

Marigold could barely focus as Mr. Klotz explained the rules of the garden and what they would be doing that day.

She was already dreaming of getting her hands in the soil and planting fall seedlings.



Mr. Klotz gave everyone a partner and then assigned each pair a job to do. Marigold and Willa had to plant kale and cabbage in a raised bed.

Together, the two girls gently pushed the cabbage and kale seedlings out of their containers.

“Loosening the soil on the bottom helps the roots grow better and stronger, that’s what my mom always told me.” Marigold said to Willa as they carefully separated the soil and roots.

“Really? I never knew that was why we always did that!” Willa smiled, placing a cabbage plant in the dirt and packing the soil around it. “Is there anything else we should do to help them grow better?”

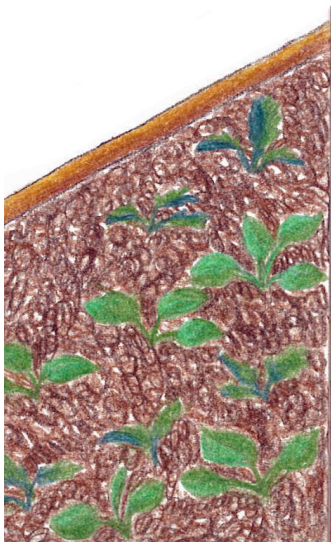


Marigold thought back to the previous year when she and her mother planted kale in their backyard.

“We should plant the kale all the way up to the first leaves. The first time my mom and I planted kale we didn’t do that and all of them grew big and flopped over on the ground because their stems weren’t strong enough.”

“Well, we certainly don’t want floppy kale!” Mrs. Norton said as she approached the girls. The two of them smiled at their teacher and giggled, then went back to work.

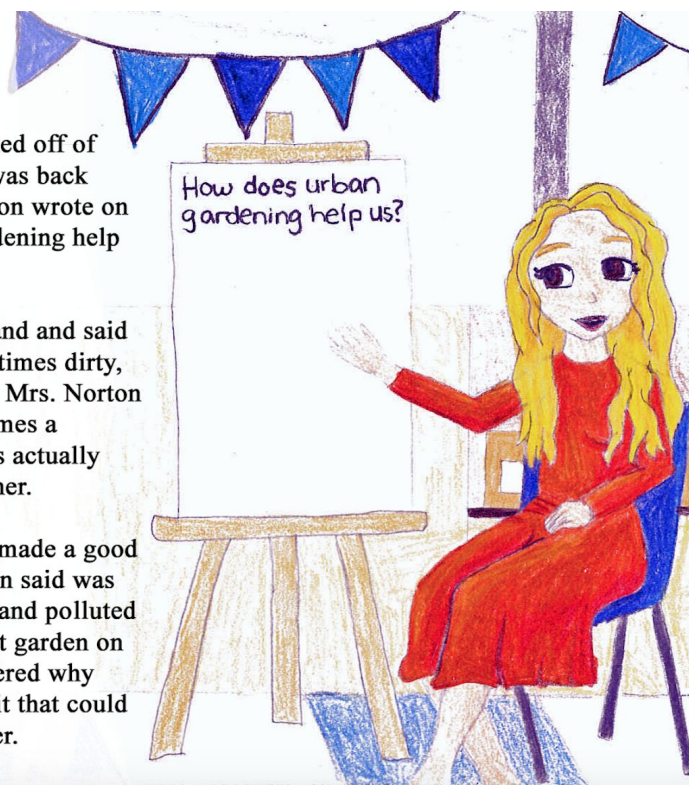
When Marigold and Willa were finished, they took turns watering their three neat rows of small plants before the class period was over.



Once all of the soil was washed off of hands and knees and the class was back inside at their tables, Mrs. Norton wrote on the board, How does urban gardening help us?

Owen Matthews raised his hand and said that since urban cities are sometimes dirty, plants can help make it cleaner. Mrs. Norton said that air pollution is sometimes a problem in cities and that plants actually filter the air so it becomes cleaner.

Marigold thought that Owen made a good point, and that what Mrs. Norton said was important. The city was a dirty and polluted place except for the magnificent garden on the school’s rooftop. She wondered why there weren’t more spaces like it that could help the air become even cleaner.





A girl named Michelle asked if growing food in the city was better than getting food from somewhere else, which got the class thinking about how far food travels from other places into the city.

Mrs. Norton told the class that food normally travels 4,200 miles to a table and that the trucks that carry it release gas that makes the air dirtier as they drive.

The class agreed that it must be much better to grow your own food in the city instead of getting it somewhere else.

Marigold was glad that her school garden was helping the environment, and she felt proud that she got to be a part of it.

At the end of the school day, Marigold ran into her mother's waiting arms and immediately began chattering about her day.

As they walked home hand in hand, Marigold eagerly told her mother all about the rooftop garden. She spoke about Mr. Klotz and his big wicker hat, planting kale and cabbage with Willa, and talking about urban gardening in class.





“It sounds like you had a wonderful first day! I’m glad you’re feeling so much better about your new school.” Marigold’s mother smiled as they approached their building. Looking at the brick building in front of her, Marigold felt her joy deflating. It was true, she did feel better about school. The problem now was that she still lived in a bleak and unsightly concrete building where gardening would be impossible.

Every morning for the next month, Marigold dragged her mother out of bed early so she could get to school before class started.

If she arrived early enough, Mr. Klotz would allow her to come up to the roof with him to give the plants their first drink of water for the day.





Marigold cherished the quiet calm of the garden each morning. All she could hear was the wind rustling the leaves of the plants, the water dribbling out of the watering can's spout and showering over the greenery, and the faint sound of Mr. Klotz humming his favorite songs.

It was on one of these peaceful mornings that Marigold realized that other kids in her school loved gardening just as much as she did.

It was a crisp morning in mid- October and Marigold arrived at school almost an hour early to work in the garden. When she got up to the roof, she was surprised to see Willa and Owen Matthews filling up watering cans with a hose together. When Willa saw Marigold, her face lit up with a big smile.

"Hi guys, you're here early to work in the garden too?" Marigold asked.

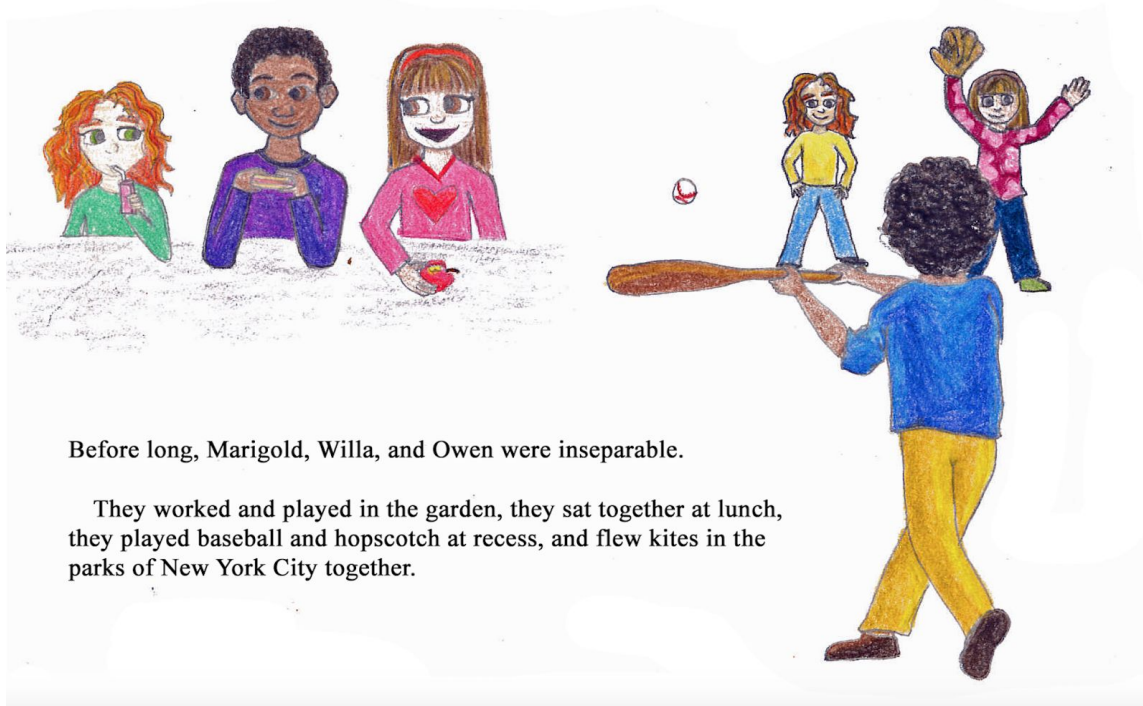
Although she had been enjoying her quiet time with Mr. Klotz in the garden, she was excited to see that other kids in her class wanted to be in the garden as much as she did.





“Remember yesterday you told me that you get here early to help in the garden? I thought I’d like to do that, and I told Owen to come too because he loves gardening just like us!” Willa replied, starting to water the bed of kale and cabbage that they had planted almost two months ago. The leaves were much bigger now, and the stalks were growing tall and sturdy.

The three of them talked and laughed as they tended to the garden and then walked down to their classroom together.



Before long, Marigold, Willa, and Owen were inseparable.

They worked and played in the garden, they sat together at lunch, they played baseball and hopscotch at recess, and flew kites in the parks of New York City together.



Soon even the apartment Marigold lived in started to feel like home after a class lesson about city citizens doing their part to help the environment by keeping plants on windowsills and fire escapes.

Marigold and her mother had never thought of gardening in such strange places, but they were both eager to try it.



Together, they planted a few bulbs to keep inside for the winter until they could be placed on the fire escape in the warm spring sun to bloom. Marigold was overjoyed to be able to help the world around her simply by doing something she loved right at home.

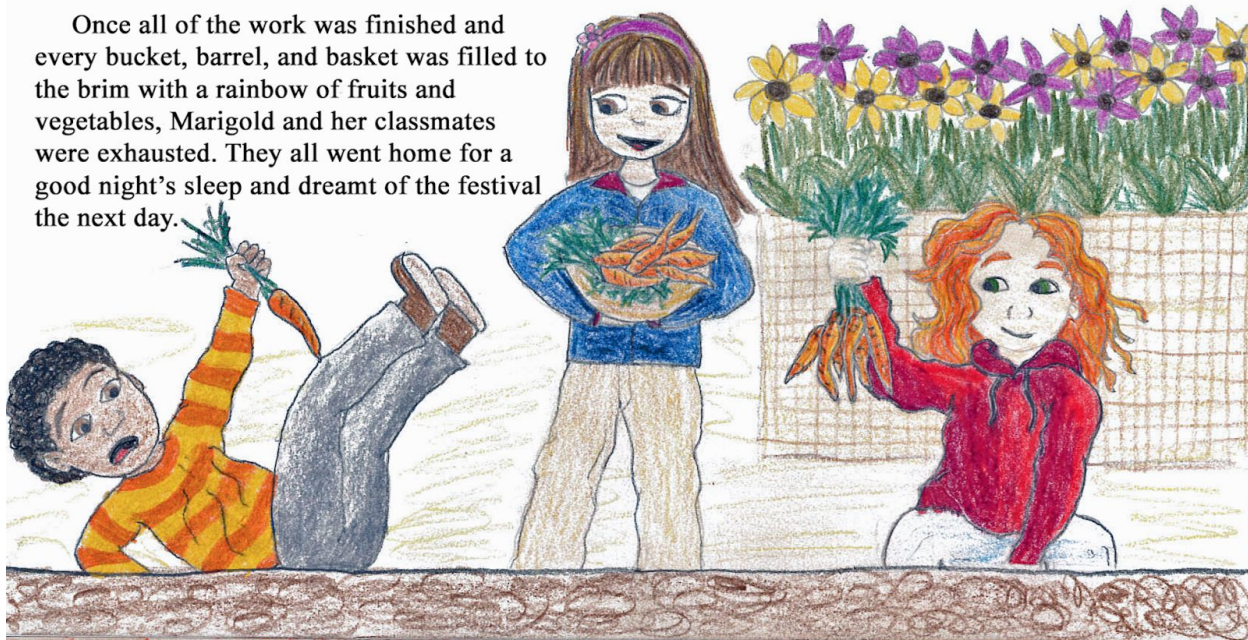


November came quickly, and with it shorter days and colder weather, which meant it was time for the annual harvest festival.

The class was abuzz with excitement when Mrs. Norton announced that they would be harvesting all of the crops they had grown together for a harvest feast with friends and family to celebrate all of their hard work and cooperation as a class in the garden.

Up on the rooftop that afternoon, Mr. Klotz assigned Marigold, Willa, and Owen to the task of pulling up carrots from the ground and washing them. Owen pulled one stubborn carrot so hard that he fell over when it finally came out of the ground, sending all three friends into a fit of laughter.

Once all of the work was finished and every bucket, barrel, and basket was filled to the brim with a rainbow of fruits and vegetables, Marigold and her classmates were exhausted. They all went home for a good night's sleep and dreamt of the festival the next day.



The morning of the festival, Marigold dressed in her favorite yellow dress and walked to school arm in arm with her mother, chattering the whole way about how many friends she needed to introduce to her.

In the classroom, the tables and chairs had been pushed together to create one long table, covered with a red and orange checked cloth.

There were vases full of cheerful sunflowers bursting with color all around the room, and there were bowls and dishes of every shape and size holding a bounty of food.



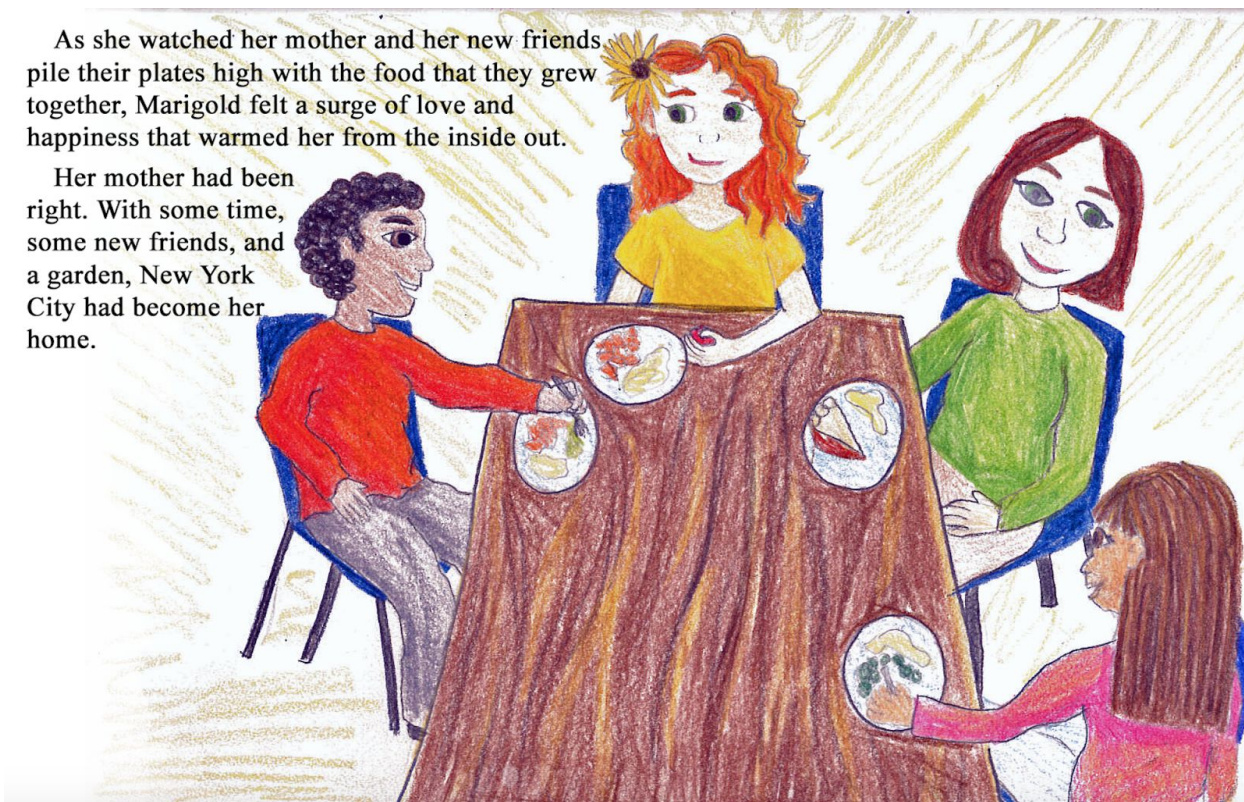


Children and parents packed the room, talking and laughing as they filled their plates and sat down to eat.

After Marigold introduced her mother to Owen, Willa, and their parents, all of them sat down at the table together. Marigold's senses were overwhelmed with the sights and smells around her. There were roasted squashes, sautéed greens, casseroles, and pies—each dish looking more delicious than the last.

As she watched her mother and her new friends pile their plates high with the food that they grew together, Marigold felt a surge of love and happiness that warmed her from the inside out.

Her mother had been right. With some time, some new friends, and a garden, New York City had become her home.



Want to know more?

Visit these websites to become involved in community projects in New York City to help your environment through gardening!

<https://greenbronxmachine.org/>

<https://www.newyorkcares.org/Gardens>

<https://www.grownyc.org>

www.greenthumbnyc.org/gardensearch.html

You can also learn how to help the environment at home by visiting <https://www3.epa.gov/epahome/home.htm>

Applications

Growing Marigold could be used in a few different ways in the classroom.

Overall, one of the most important uses of this book is to inspire thoughtfulness and appreciation of the environment in students who read it. The book could, of course, be part of a classroom library where students could pick it up at any time to read, but I believe that it could also be used purposefully. When beginning a unit or a project that involves gardening or growing plants of any kind, this book would make a great introduction as a read aloud to get students thinking about the topic of gardening and why it's important, especially in the city. It is a book which, throughout a unit of study on gardening or plants, could be revisited many times, focusing in on different sections or pages each time.

This book might also be useful in a unit about health and the food we eat. It can be used as an introduction to get students asking questions like where does our food come from, and why might it be good to grow your own? This could even be a smaller part of, or lead into, a larger study on environmental issues that our world faces today.

One consideration teachers should have before reading this book in class is making sure that their students have some kind of context about gardening and the kind of work that goes into planting and maintaining a garden. The more background knowledge students have, the more they will get out of the reading of the text (Irwin, 2007).

Reflections on a Read Aloud and the Writing Process

When deciding on the audience I would share my book with, I wanted to be sure I chose a group of children I knew and had worked with previously. Based on this thought, I chose to read to a third grade class at an independent school in lower Manhattan where I spent three months student teaching in the fall of 2016. I had pushed into this classroom a great deal in my time at this school, so I had already established a rapport with the students.

Once I had decided to go into this classroom to read, I thought about whether I wanted to read it as a whole group read aloud, or a small group. Considering that the class contains a wide range of students from different areas both in and outside of New York City, I wanted to include all of them in the read aloud. I was curious to find out how students from different backgrounds and areas would respond and relate to the book.

Before I started reading, I wanted to activate background knowledge about the topic of urban gardening (Irwin, 2007). I purposefully did not ask the students to think about the themes of moving or making new friends because I wanted this thinking and conversation to come up organically as we read the story. The students had a decent amount of prior knowledge about gardening and the importance of urban gardening because the majority of them come from families who have country houses with gardens outside of the city, and they had gone on a class fieldtrip to a farm to learn about how it helps the environment. The students all had positive stories and memories to share around this topic. After spending about five minutes engaging in this conversation and warming the students up for the story, I began to read.

Before coming in, I had created a list of ten questions that I might want to ask the students depending on how they were interacting with the text, so as I read, I made judgements about which questions were most important to ask. There were a few explicit questions, but most were implicit, requiring the students to think deeply about the story and how the characters were feeling and acting. I paused four or five times to engage the students in thinking about what was going on in the story and connecting it to their own lives (Irwin, 2007). I consistently asked them across the entire story how Marigold was feeling and how they knew, given that one of the biggest themes of the book, gardening to build relationships and community, is illustrated through Marigold's transformation. The class understood how Marigold was feeling from the start, explaining how they felt nervous on their first day of school this year, and that it's sometimes hard to make friends in a new place. A student who was new to the school this year commented that he was

able to make a new friend this past fall because they both enjoyed playing and watching baseball, just like Marigold made friends who also liked to garden. As individuals, all of these third grade students were able to relate to Marigold personally, because they are all learning about themselves, their interests, and how they fit in with their peers (Berk, 2006).

By the end of the story, the students had had a rich discussion around relationship building through Marigold's experience in the text, and the importance of urban gardening and were eager to ask me questions about my writing process. I had not expected to have to answer questions like how long it took me to write, edit, and illustrate or which publishers I was planning to send it to. They wanted to connect their knowledge of the writing process (Davis & Hill, 2003) to my work. The students were inspired by me and my work, and I feel fortunate to have had the experience sharing my work with them and knowing that they not only enjoyed it, but were motivated to write more themselves. The experience of reading my book to children prompted in me a greater sense of pride in the months of work I did to make it what it was, and it is a feeling that inspires me to consider more writing of this kind in the future.

Reflection on the Process

From the very start of my time at Bank Street, I was eager to start the process of writing a children's book for my masters project. One of my biggest dreams as a child was to write and publish a book for kids. Wanting to get started as early as possible, I began thinking about what my book might be during the summer of 2016, allowing myself time to find an idea that I was truly passionate about. The idea for *Growing*

Marigold came to me early on in this period, and it began to take shape in my mind as something that I was dedicated to create. With Marigold's mess of fiery red hair and timid personality in mind, the writing began.

During this process, there were times when the writing flowed naturally, and phrases sounded right the first time around. However, sometimes finding the words was more difficult, and I had to set my work aside and come back to it with fresh eyes. After writing the entire story, I reread it and wrote three more drafts before I was satisfied with the words of the story. My favorite part of the process of putting the book together was creating the illustrations to go along with the words. As I wrote the story, I imagined what the pictures might look like, and once the text was finalized I sketched everything out in pencil. It was fun adding in color after sketching, particularly because there is a color change from dark and drab to bright and cheery as the book goes on. I used Photoshop to add the text to my illustrations, and I was pleased with the amount of manipulations I was able to do with the words and the pictures to make them as cohesive as possible.

The process of writing, illustrating, and creating the book *Growing Marigold* was certainly challenging, but it was one of the most fun and rewarding experiences I have ever had. It is an amazing feeling to spend months of time working on a story and images of your own design and ending up with a tangible product that reflects the time and effort you poured into it. This project accurately reflects not only my time at Bank Street, but also me as a person, and I am proud to graduate having written a book for children.

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