

Discover Community Gardens: *Seedfolks*

Overview: Engage your class in thinking about the power of community gardens by reading *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman.* Community gardens provide residents with many benefits such as food, a way to beautify their neighborhoods and the opportunity to get to know each other.

*Parents and Teachers: this book contains realistic, mature themes. Please read first and decide if it is appropriate for your child or class.

Grade Level/Range: 6th- 12th Grade

Objective:

Students will:

Read *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman.

Discuss the ways a community garden changes a neighborhood.

Discuss the impact of the garden on the book's characters.

Time: 1 week

Materials:

Seedfolks book

Paper

Pencils

Chalkboard and chalk or dry erase board and markers

Laying the Groundwork

Ask students to define a community. What does it mean? Can you be part of more than one community? Share some examples. Ask students to create a Venn diagram depicting the different communities they are part of.

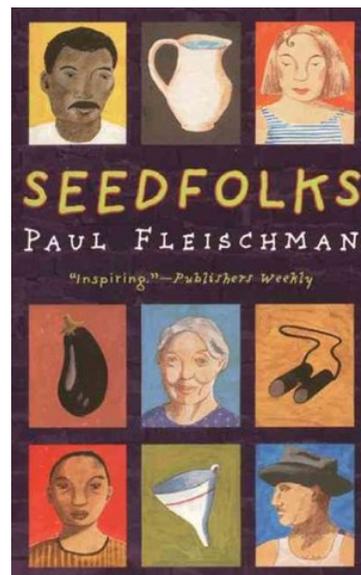
Exploration

1. Instruct students to read the book *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman. As they read, ask them to think about and write down the answers to the following questions:
 - What are some of the reasons the characters become involved with the garden?
 - What benefits did the characters receive from the garden?
 - Did the characters need to be physically involved in gardening to receive benefits?
 - What challenges did the characters face?
 - What does the title of the book mean?
 - What ethnic groups are represented in the book?
2. Lead a classroom discussion sharing the students' answers to the questions above. Write the responses on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Responses may include (although are not limited to):

What are some of the reasons the characters become involved with the garden?

- To deal with sorrow from death of a family member (Kim)
- To take advantage of the opportunity to change/improve life (Wendell)
- To participate in an activity enjoyed in past (Tío Juan)
- To honor a dead relative (Leona)
- To support activities to bring neighbors together (Sam)
- To make money (Virgil and his father)

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- To be around people (Sae Young)
- To win the love of a girl (Curtis)
- To use the garden as therapy (Nora and Mr. Myles)
- To complete a school requirement (Maricela)
- To connect with neighbors (Amir)

What benefits did the characters receive from the garden?

- Beautification of the neighborhood (All)
- Removal of unsightly and unhealthy piles of garbage (All)
- A connection with a deceased relative (Kim)
- Hope for a better life and the feeling of making a difference (Wendell)
- A chance to relate to an older family member (Gonzalo)
- A chance to share expertise and a reminder of native country and former life (Tío Juan)
- Opportunities to bring people from all cultures together for a common purpose (Sam)
- Healed feelings of fear and loneliness; felt like part of a family again (Sae Young)
- Renewed interest in life (Mr. Myles)
- Discovered the wonder of nature and find personal place in the bigger picture of life (Maricella)
- An opportunity to meet and really get to know neighbors (Amir)
- Improvement in environment and scenery (Florence)

Did the characters need to be physically involved in gardening to receive benefits?

No. Ana and Florence were both observers, but watching the gardeners and the gardens, improved their outlook on the community and on life.

What challenges did the characters face?

- Trash
- Finding the right governmental office to clean up the lot
- Locating a water source
- Ethnic groups separating themselves in the lot and initial hesitation in getting to know each other
- Litter and vandalism
- Lack of gardening information
- Stealing of harvest
- Animals eating plants
- Criminal activity

What does the title of the book mean?

‘Seedfolks’ is a term used by the character Florence to describe the first people to take residence in an area. In an [interview](#) with NPR, the author Paul Fleischman shared that it was an old term for ancestors.

What ethnic groups are represented in the book?

Vietnamese, Rumanian, Guatemalan, Haitian, Korean, British, Mexican and Indian and American

3. As a last question, ask the students who started the garden? The answer is the character Kim, a nine year old child. Ask your students to discuss their thoughts on the impact a child’s actions can have on a community. Ask them to brainstorm ways they might be able to help improve their community.

Making Connections

Find a way for your students to contribute to their community either as a group or individually. During your discussion, make sure to consider actions that can mitigate human impact on the environment. Ideas may include organizing a trash pick-up, weeding or renovating a

help

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current garden area, creating a new garden area or planting container gardens, leading a litter awareness campaign, or planting street trees. Let the students brainstorm ideas and involve them in all planning stages of the activity.

Branching Out

As a class, read or listen to the [NPR Backseat Book Club featuring *Seedfolks*](#) which includes an interview with author Paul Fleischman.

History/Social Science

The characters from *Seedfolks* arrived in Cleveland from many different countries and the plants in our gardens are the same way. Assign each student a common garden plant to investigate. Ask them to find out the plant's origin, history, uses and how it moved throughout the world. Have each student prepare a written and oral report on their plant. To compile the collected information, place a picture of each plant (or of its fruits or flowers) on the country of origin on a large world map poster. Pictures can be found in old seed catalogs or drawn by the students.

English

Invite a representative from a local community garden to your school and conduct a class interview to help the students learn more about the garden and how it benefits the community in addition to learning how to conduct an interview. As a follow up, ask students to practice their skills by finding a gardener in their own neighborhood to interview and creating a newspaper article with the information they collect.

Nutrition

Introduce students to the fact that different cultures eat different types of foods including different fruits and vegetables. Research information about common fruits and vegetables in the cultures mentioned in *Seedfolks* or the different ethnic groups represented in your area. Research methods can include Internet searches, cultural reference books or personal interviews. If possible, host an International Festival in your classroom or school, giving students the opportunity to taste the foods from different cultures.

Link to Standards:

MS-ESS3 Earth and Human Activity

MS-ESS3-3. Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing a human impact on the environment.

HS-LS2 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

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