

Wanda's Roses and the Power of Community Gardens

Overview: Engage your class in thinking about the power of community and community gardens by reading *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson. Explore how the characters in the story helped Wanda's dream become a reality and what they accomplished by working together.

Grade Level/Range: 1st – 5th Grade

Objective:

Students will:

- Learn how to define a community
- Discover the benefits of a community garden

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson (or another book on community gardening)
- Dry-erase board and markers

Background Information:

What is a community garden? A community garden is a garden that is planned, planted, maintained, and sustained by individuals from a community. The community may be defined by a physical location, such as a neighborhood or a city, or by individuals linked by a common organization or cause, such as a church or food bank.

Community gardens come in all shapes and sizes. They can be as small as a raised bed in front of a town hall or library or as large as a couple of acres at the edge of town. They may be located on empty lots, nonprofit or government-owned land, or on land owned collectively by the gardeners. In some community gardens, each gardener has an individual plot to maintain. In others, gardeners work cooperatively on group plots and then share in the harvest. Some gardens contain both individual and shared plots.

Community gardens bring individuals together to work towards a common goal and create a focus on an activity with positive outcomes. Some of the benefits of community gardens include:

- They add beauty to the surroundings, which not only makes the community a more pleasant and relaxing place to live, but the gardens can also add value to surrounding homes.
- Community gardens can result in decreased vandalism, littering, and crime. (*Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2019**, 16 (24), 5119; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16245119>).

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- Community gardens can increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, which is especially important in areas with limited access to grocery stores and farmers' markets.
- Gardens add to community green space, which may benefit the local environment by helping to control erosion or catch storm runoff, and they can provide a home for wildlife.
- Community gardens can provide sources of income, such as by selling seedlings, plants, and/or produce.
- Gardening is a source of exercise and can contribute to an individual's mental and physical health. Community gardens offer opportunities for people who may not have access to their own garden space to enjoy all the benefits of gardening.

Laying the Groundwork:

Ask students to brainstorm a definition for a community. For example, a community can be defined as a group of people who live in the same place or who share common interests or identities.

Explain that people can be members of more than one community. For example, one person can be a member of all these communities:

- A school community consisting of all the other students, teachers, volunteers, and their families.
- A neighborhood community, which includes everyone who lives close to them.
- A religious community.
- A community of people who share an interest in a hobby or sport.

Communities come in all sizes. They can be small groups with a few members or a large community that encompasses all the residents of a city or county.

Have students consider what communities they belong to. Make a list of these communities on a dry-erase board or chalkboard. For example, the list might include school clubs, sports teams, and after-school groups. Have them think about their larger community; for example, all the kids in their school district.

Exploration:

Together read the book *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson, then discuss the following questions:

Why did Wanda begin cleaning up an empty lot in her neighborhood? *She wanted to make room for a "rosebush."*

How did all of the neighbors react to her cleaning the lot? *They all pitched in and helped even though they did not think her plant was actually a rosebush:*

- *Mrs. Turner and Mr. Claudel helped her move trash to the street for pick up.*
- *Mrs. Giamoni gave her trash bags to pick up smaller litter.*

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- *Ms. Jones helped her research information about roses.*
- *Mr. Sancheze helped provide water.*

What did Wanda do when her bush did not bloom? *She made flowers from paper and invited the neighbors who had helped her to a tea to celebrate.*

What happened at the tea party? *Everyone brought rose bushes (and muffins) because they wanted to help, and soon the lot was a beautiful rose garden.*

What were the benefits of the new garden? *In addition to getting rid of a trash-filled vacant lot and beautifying the neighborhood, all the characters got a chance to work together and get to know each other better.*

Use the background information to start a discussion about some of the additional benefits of a community garden. If possible, visit a local community garden space or invite a community gardener to visit your classroom to talk about their garden and share pictures. If you do not have a local community garden, try finding a video online, such as this CBS Morning video about [Community Gardens Decorating New York City](#).

*If you would like to adapt this lesson for younger kids, you may want to consider the following alternative books:

- *Errol's Garden* by Gillian Hibbs
- *Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed a Neighborhood* by Tony Hillery

Making Connections:

In Wanda's Roses, the neighbors worked together to make a beautiful space. Ask students to share examples from their own lives where they have worked with others to get big projects done.

Branching Out:

Brainstorm ideas for a community garden for your school or neighborhood. What kind of needs does your community have? Would it be beneficial to grow an edible garden? Does your community need more green space to relax? Can they think of any potential locations for a community garden? You can use the Community Garden Needs Assessment worksheet to help guide them.

Ask kids to think about online communities. How do these differ from in-person communities? What benefits are similar? How are they different?

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Community Garden Needs Assessment Worksheet

Goals:

1. Why does your community need and/or want a garden?

_____ To grow fruits and vegetables for the gardeners

_____ To grow fruits and vegetables to donate

_____ To beautify our community

_____ To provide an outdoor activity

_____ To provide social opportunities

_____ To provide teaching opportunities

_____ Other: _____

2. How do you want a garden to benefit your community?

Gardeners:

3. Who do you want to involve in your garden?

4. Are there any special groups in the community that you think would like to help?

5. List any potential garden partners that could work with you on the garden:

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Garden Space:

6. Can you think of a good location for the garden?

7. What kind of activities do you want to do in the garden space:

- ☐ Small groups
- ☐ Large groups
- ☐ Special events
- ☐ Recreation
- ☐ Attract wildlife
- ☐ Other

8. How many people will be at the garden at the same time?

9. Which season will the garden be active?

- ☐ Spring
- ☐ Summer
- ☐ Fall
- ☐ Winter

10. What do you want to grow in the garden?

Additional Notes and Ideas:

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