

Create Your Own Garden-Inspired Performance

Overview: Lights, camera, action! A garden is a dynamic space full of stories to be harvested and shared. Let the garden become your stage by encouraging your students to create their own garden-inspired theatrical performances.

Grade Level/Range: K to 8th Grade

Objective:

Students will:

- Use observation and research skills and/or a garden-themed book to identify a garden- or nature-based scenario or phenomenon to turn into a play
- Identify a storyline, create characters, and write a script
- Create and/or find props and costumes
- Perform their play

Time: 1+ hours

Materials:

- Garden or natural space for observations (optional)
- Garden-based books (optional)
- Paper, pencils, and clipboards
- Assortment of materials to be used for costumes and props

Background Information:

A garden is a busy place. Both above and below ground, plants, animals, and microorganisms are growing and interacting while the environment they live in is also in constant flux. Creating a play that shares the story of events occurring in your garden and its inhabitants can be a terrific way to strengthen students' understanding of natural processes and phenomena. By recreating the interactions they observe, students can relate to the garden through a new lens and express concepts they learn in the classroom (like pollination, life cycles, and seasons) in an engaging way. Crafting a script and then performing it allows them to both think and do, which can be especially beneficial for kinesthetic learners.

Here are a few ideas for creating a garden-inspired performance.

Bring a garden book to life. Draw on the creativity of an experienced author to recreate characters and situations featured in their story. This is a good option for students who may need more support or if pressed for time. Look for books with multiple characters placed in relatable situations. Some book ideas include:

- *Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin
- *A Place to Grow* by Stephanie Bloom
- *Seed School* by Joan Holub
- *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson
- *The Runaway Garden* by Jeffery Schatzer
- *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry
- *The Donkey Egg* by Janet Stevens
- *Tops and Bottoms* by Janet Stevens
- *June 29, 1999* by David Wiesner
- *Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter



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Imagine a day in the life of a garden inhabitant. Have students observe and then create their play around the everyday happenings of an animal or a plant in their garden. Follow a butterfly or bee as it visits different flowers. Create commentary or dialogue for a patch of sunflowers turning their heads as the sun moves through the sky. Imitate a group of ants as they search for food.

Recreate a garden-based phenomenon. Nature is full of significant events that keep our world turning. Bring a scientific phenomenon to life through characters and an entertaining story. Act out the life cycle of a plant from seed to seed or the adventures of a pollinator looking for its next meal. Share the story of a drop of water as it moves through the environment.

Laying the Groundwork:

Ask students if they have ever seen a play before. What are some of the components of a play? (*i.e., storyline with a beginning, middle, and ending; characters, costumes, and props*) Why do we watch plays? (*They are entertaining and/or educational.*)

Ask students to act out the life cycle of a plant to get their creative juices flowing. Characters can include seeds, a narrator, the Sun, raindrops, and bees. Below you will find a possible script:

Once upon a time, there was a family of tiny seeds snuggled into the soil, trying to stay warm during a cold, cold winter.

One day, they noticed that the weather began to warm, and they were not quite so cold anymore.

The following week, rain fell from the sky, and they decided to soak in some water. With the warmer temperatures and wet weather, they decided they wanted to take off their coats and start to grow.

First, they sent out a few roots to see what was around them in the soil. They were hoping to find more water, maybe some nutrients.

Then they decided they were tired of being in the dark, and they wanted to see what was above ground too, so they slowly unfurled their stems and baby leaves.

The sunlight was so warm and welcoming they wanted to get closer, so they kept growing and growing, adding more leaves. They were so happy that they wanted to share their joy with everyone. So, they decided to grow flowers.

The flowers attracted new friends to visit – some little bees. The bees would take and leave gifts of pollen when they stopped by to say hello. Before long, their flowers turned into fruits with new seeds growing inside. Eventually, the fruits got so heavy they dropped off the plant leaving a new batch of tiny seeds in the soil.

Exploration:

1. After your life cycle performance, tell students they will be creating their own play inspired by the garden. Begin with a visit to your garden or a natural area and ask students to brainstorm a possible event or situation as a focus for their play. These types of questions might kick off your brainstorming: *What are some events in a garden that might be entertaining to share with others? What are some lessons we could teach others about the garden? Who or what kind of character could we find in a garden? Are there any common challenges or obstacles in a garden that its inhabitants face?*

If you are pressed for time, you can suggest turning a favorite garden book into a play. See the Background Information for ideas.

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2. Once you have chosen a focus, create a scene outline for the action you plan to include. *Can we break the event/concept into steps? What are the steps, and what order should they go in? Should there be multiple scenes in our play?*
3. Once your students figure out the event/concept they want to focus on, have them make a list of the characters they want to include. Ask: *What characters can play a part in our story? What will each of the characters do in our play? What do you think they would say about the event or situation?*

You will want enough characters so that every student can be involved in the action in some way. For students who are not comfortable with speaking parts, you may want to make a list of behind-the-scenes jobs that will be needed, like set, costume, and prop designers.

4. Using your scene outline and character list, create a script. This can be done as a group activity, or you can break into smaller groups, especially if there will be multiple scenes in your play. You may want to assign parts prior to this step to make sure students have a chance to provide input on the lines they will be reading. Read the script aloud multiple times and brainstorm ways to make it more entertaining.
5. Design the set, costume, and props. Gather all of your supplies and then rehearse as needed. If time allows, or if you are looking for more ways for students to contribute, create a playbill or program to go with your play.
6. Share the play with friends and family. You could arrange for live performances or record for digital viewing.

Making Connections:

After your performance, take time to reflect on your play. Ask students to share what they learned during the process. Brainstorm ways you would like to improve or expand on your work.

Branching Out:

If looking for a shorter activity, try creating a *tableaux vivant*. *Tableaux* or *tableaux vivant* is French for “living picture.” Individuals or groups use their bodies to create a human statue that represents a single moment of action from a story or event.

Create a stage area in your garden and gather a box of natural materials (pine cones, sticks, stones, shells, large leaves, etc.) that could be used for props. Encourage kids to create informal plays during garden free time.

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