

T

Thoughtful Books

GRADES
3+

10²

B



A Teacher's Guide to
The Gardener
by Sarah Stewart

Series Editor
Author

Mary Abbott
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Literacy

Social
Responsibility

Note to parents and teachers

The Thoughtful Books Series makes use of exemplary children's literature to help young readers learn to read critically and to thoughtfully consider ethical matters. Critical thinkers rely on inquisitive attitudes, utilize thinking strategies, access background knowledge, understand thinking vocabulary, and apply relevant criteria when making thoughtful decisions. We refer to these attributes as intellectual tools. Each resource in this series features specific intellectual tools supporting literacy development and ethical deliberation. Teachers and parents can introduce the tools using the suggested activities in this resource, and then support learners in applying the tools in various situations overtime, until children use them independently, selectively, and naturally.

Reading as thinking

Reading is more than decoding words. It is the active process of constructing meaning. Good readers understand this process as engagement in critical thinking. They employ specific literacy competencies as they engage with text, create meaning from text, and extend their thinking beyond text. The activities in this booklet help develop the following literacy competencies:

- *Finding important ideas:* Good readers discriminate between details and key or important ideas. In this case, students read like detectives to find information in the letters and listen to identify and defend the qualities of Uncle Jim and Lydia Grace.
- *Questioning:* Good readers interrogate the text as they read. They question the text, the author, and the characters. They understand what makes a good question and demonstrate open-mindedness and curiosity. In this case, students generate questions about the information that is missing from the initial letters.
- *Reading with a purpose:* Good readers are clear why they are reading a text, either by bring a specific objective to their reading or by anticipating the author's objectives. In this case, they listen for the acts of kindness that are present in the story.
- *Synthesizing ideas:* Good readers thoughtfully apply key ideas and issues raised in text to their own lives and in broader global and community contexts. In this case, students create a plan for implementing an act of kindness.

Ethical considerations

A second focus of the activities in this booklet helps learners develop the intellectual tools necessary to think critically about ethical considerations. It is important to teach the tools, often through modelling and illustrating with examples, and continue to apply the tools in a variety of situations over time, until learners internalize them. The following ethical consideration is addressed in this resource:

- *Kindness:* Critical thinkers are able to think beyond themselves and consider the needs of others. The concept of kindness helps develop empathy as a habit of mind. In this case, students consider what constitutes an act of kindness and make a plan to implement an act of kindness.

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR: *The Gardener*

by Sarah Stewart

Grades 3+
4–5 sessions

Critical tasks

- A. Use the four letters to find information about Lydia Grace and her family.
- B. Choose and perform an act of kindness for someone with no expectation of receiving anything in return.

Story

The Gardener by Sarah Stewart, illustrated by David Small, Sunburst (2000).

Summary

In a series of letters, this story recounts the experiences of a young girl, Lydia Grace, who moves from her home in the country to the city, where she lives with her Uncle Jim. Students are asked to solve the mystery of the letters by examining four letters, using them to find out as much information as possible and generating questions that remain unanswered. The missing information is revealed as the story is read. Students then compare the two characters, Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim, and discuss the influence Lydia Grace's kindness may have had on various people. Finally, the concept of acts of kindness is applied to a real-life situation as readers address the second critical task of planning and performing an act of kindness.

Main focus

Literacy competencies

- finding important ideas
- questioning
- reading with a purpose
- synthesizing ideas

Ethical considerations

- kindness

Levels of involvement

Consider students' interest and their level of maturity to determine whether or not all three levels of after-reading activities are appropriate.

- *Exposure*: Solve the mystery of the letters and draw a web showing the information that is discovered.
- *Investigation*: Examine the similarities and differences between Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim, supporting judgments with evidence from the story.
- *Application*: Choose and perform an act of kindness for someone with no expectation of receiving anything in return.

Solve the mystery of the letters and find information about Lydia Grace

Session One

Before reading: exposure level

- Read aloud the letter from a neighbour.

Dear students,

I just moved into a lovely old house not far from where you live. When I was cleaning out the attic I found these letters. I think they were forgotten a long time ago. They are a mystery to me. I am curious about Lydia Grace and I wonder about her story.

Please read the letters and try to find out who Lydia Grace was and why she wrote these letters.

I hope you enjoy the letters and can help me solve this mystery.

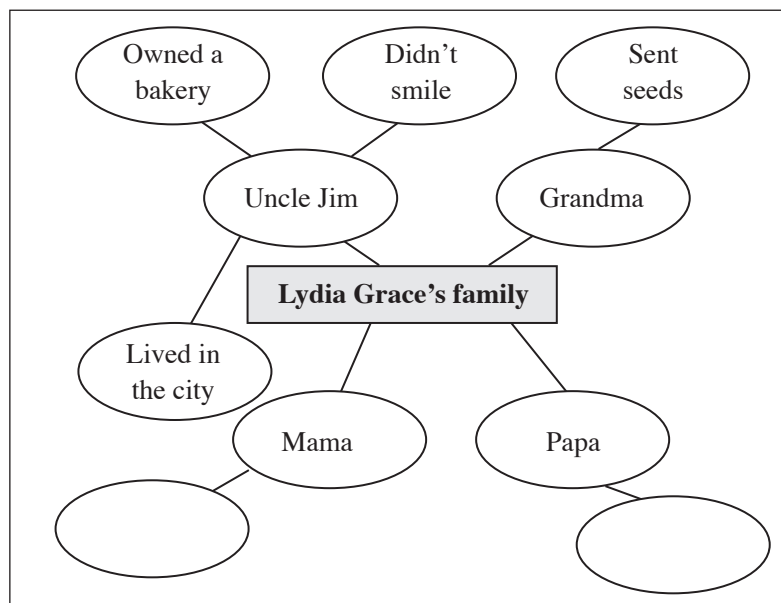
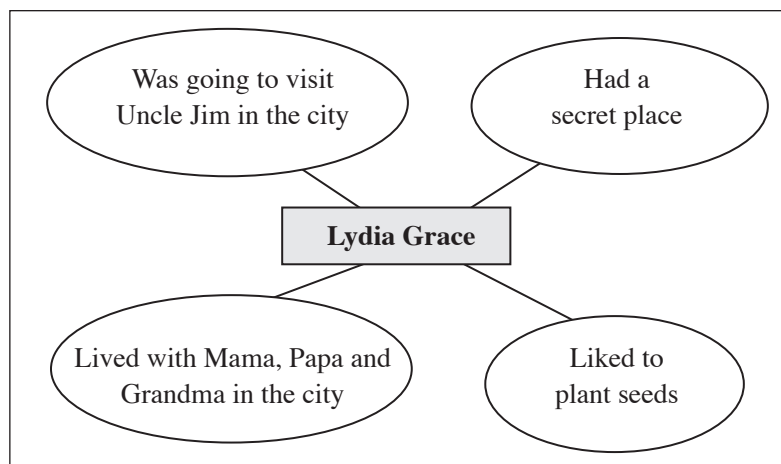
Sincerely,

A neighbour

- Discuss solving a mystery with students and brainstorm some skills that are required to think like a detective (for example, asking questions, looking for clues).
- Show students the *Letters from Lydia Grace* (Blackline Master #1), and introduce the task of finding out about Lydia Grace and her family. Brainstorm possible questions students might have about the letters (for example: Who wrote them? Why were they written? When were they written?). Introduce the 5Ws (who, what, where, when, why) as a good tool to help us find information. Point out that when we find information we also have more questions.
- Have students work with a partner, and distribute a copy of Blackline Master #1, with the letters cut apart, to each pair. Tell students they are going to practise looking for clues that will help them find information. Ask the question: “When were the letters written?” Point out that the detail of the letter date is an important clue.
- Once students determine the date, talk about 1935–36. Briefly explain that during this time there was a depression and a lot of people found it very hard to make a living.
- Ask students what the next step might be in solving the mystery of the letters. Discuss with students whether or not the order the letters were written in is important.
- Invite students to look for clues in the letters that indicate the order the letters were written. Based on the dates of the letters, ask students to put the letters in the correct sequence. A calendar may be needed to illustrate the progression of a year.

**Finding
important ideas**

- Give each pair of students a copy of *Detective notes* (Blackline Master #2) and tell students they are going to read the letters as if they are detectives, looking for clues that will provide information about Lydia Grace and her family and also considering any questions that they wonder about. Remind students of the importance of the 5Ws in finding information and asking questions. Ask students to complete the first critical task: Using the four letters, find information about Lydia Grace and her family.
- Model finding information using the first paragraph of the first letter. Read each sentence and ask students who the sentence is about and what information is provided. Record the information found on an overhead copy of Detective notes.
- Instruct students to continue reading the letters and recording information with their partners.
- When students have completed solving the mystery in pairs, invite them to share the information they have found. As a class, create two webs, similar to the ones following, illustrating what is known about Lydia Grace and her family.



Questioning

- Discuss with the students what they now know about Lydia Grace's story and ask what things remain a mystery in her story. Invite students to share their questions and brainstorm questions that remain unanswered, such as: What was the bakery like? Where was her secret place? What did Uncle Jim do when he saw the secret place?

Begin new session

During reading

- Show students the cover of *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart. Tell students the story contains the rest of the letters and pictures to help us understand Lydia Grace's story.
- Show students the picture on page 2. Confirm with students the information they have already discovered and discuss any new information the picture provides.
- Read each letter in the story and instruct students to look at the pictures carefully to understand the full meaning of the story. Focus on what the story is telling us about Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim.

After reading: investigation level

- After reading all the letters in the story, ask the students to think about Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim. Ask students how they would describe each character and record their suggestions on the board.
- Invite students to consider how Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim were the same and different in the story. For example, they were different because Lydia Grace was always happy and Uncle Jim never smiled. They were the same because they cared about each other. For each similarity and difference suggested, ask the students: "How do you know?"
- Review the events of the story using the pictures, and encourage students to find examples from the story (letters and pictures) that show the similarities and differences. Introduce the term "evidence" as information that helps us decide what to believe. For example, we can say Lydia Grace there is evidence that she was helpful because she worked in the bakery.
- Instruct students to work with a partner and record their ideas in a Venn diagram, (Blackline Master #3), or invite students to discuss their ideas in partners and then create a Venn diagram as a class.
- Discuss with students whether or not Uncle Jim was different at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. Encourage students to support their answer with evidence from the story.

Read the story for further information

Compare Lydia Grace and Uncle Jim

Finding important ideas

Begin new session

After reading: application level

- Re-read the story and ask students to listen for acts of kindness. After each letter is read, ask students to identify any act(s) of kindness and record them on the board. A chart similar to the one below may be useful in recording.

Acts of kindness

Who was kind?	What did they do?	Who did they do it for?

- Review the acts of kindness and add a fourth column entitled “What happened?” to the chart. Discuss with students what happened as a result of the acts of kindness. For example, Grandma sent seeds to Lydia Grace and perhaps Lydia Grace was less homesick and she was able to grow flowers for others to enjoy. Perhaps more people came to the bakery because the flowers made it beautiful.

Acts of kindness

Who was kind?	What did they do?	Who received the kindness?	What happened?

- Ask students whether or not the result of an act of kindness is always evident. For example, Uncle Jim did not smile when he received the poem but he put it in his pocket and patted it.
- Discuss with students the benefit acts of kindness provide for the giver as well as the receiver. Ask students what motivates acts of kindness and whether or not a person should expect something in return for being kind. Point out that it is often simply nice to be nice.
- Provide examples of appropriate and inappropriate acts of kindness. For example, offering candy to someone who does not like sweets or giving someone a pet would not be suitable acts of kindness.
- Organize students in partners, and show them a copy of Blackline Master #4. Explain that their task is to read each card and decide whether or not the action is an act of kindness. On the board, illustrate separating the cards into two lists as illustrated below.

Are these acts of kindness?

Yes

No

- Give each pair of students a (cut up) set of action cards from Blackline Master #4, and do one example as a class, if necessary.

Plan and implement an act of kindness

- When students have completed sorting the cards, invite them to share their decisions with the class. Based on the distinctions between the “yes” and “no” columns, as a class, decide which criteria indicate that an act is kind (for example, the act makes someone happy, feels good to do, is simple or do-able, you don’t expect anything in return).
- Ask students to complete the following critical task: Choose and perform an act of kindness for someone with no expectation of receiving anything in return.
- Invite students to brainstorm who they might do an act of kindness for. Encourage students to think of people in their home, school, and community. Provide students with a copy of Blackline Master #5, *My action plan* to record their ideas.
- Once students have identified several possible acts of kindness, invite them to consider whether their ideas meet the criteria for an act of kindness and, based on these criteria, select the most appropriate act of kindness.
- Invite students to complete the “when” column of the plan and implement their plan.
- In a week’s time invite students to report back to the class on the implementation of their act of kindness. Students might also write a journal entry about their act of kindness.

Blackline Master #5

Name: _____

My action plan

Who (could I be kind to)?	What might I do? (Think of several ideas.)	What difference would it make?	When will I do this?

• makes someone happy An act of kindness: • feels good to do • is simple
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Assessment

- Use the rubric *Identifying differences and assessing acts of kindness* (Blackline Master #6) to assess students’ ability to distinguish differences and implement an act of kindness.

Letters from Lydia Grace

Taken from *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart

August 27, 1935

Dear Uncle Jim,

Grandma told us after supper that you want me to come to the city and live with you until things get better. Did she tell you that Papa has been out of work for a long time, and no one asks Mama to make dresses anymore?

We all cried, even Papa. But then Mama made us laugh with her stories about you chasing her up trees when you were both little. Did you really do that?

I'm small, but strong, and I'll help you all I can. However, Grandma said to finish my schoolwork before doing anything else.

Your niece,

Lydia Grace Finch

Sept 5, 1935

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I'm so excited!!!

There are window boxes here! They look as if they've been waiting for me, so now we'll both wait for spring.

And, Grandma, the sun shines down on the corner where I'll live and work.

Love to all

Lydia Grace

P.S. Uncle Jim doesn't smile

March 5, 1936

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I've discovered a secret place. You can't imagine how wonderful it is. No one else knows about it but Otis.

I have great plans.

Thank you for all the letters. I'll try to write more, but I'm really busy planting all your seeds in cracked teacups and bent cake pans! And, Grandma, you should smell the good dirt I'm bringing home from the vacant lot down the street.

April 27, 1936

Dearest Grandma,

All the seeds and roots are sprouting. I can hear you saying, "April showers bring May flowers."

Emma and I are sprucing up the bakery and I'm playing a great trick on Uncle Jim. He sees me reading my mail, planting seeds in the window boxes, going to school, doing my homework, sweeping the floor. But he never sees me working in my secret place.

Love to all,

Lydia Grace

P.S. I'm planning on a big smile from Uncle Jim in the near future.

Detective notes

Person	Information I learned	Questions I have
Lydia Grace		
Uncle Jim		
Mama		
Papa		
Grandma		

Remember to use the 5 Ws to guide your thinking:

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

Lydia Grace

Uncle Jim

Are these true acts of kindness?

Your mother is sick and you make her a cup of tea.	You take your neighbour's garbage out every week and he pays you \$5.
You want your brother to help you do the dishes, so you give him some candy.	You make your sister's lunch.
You share a snack with your friend at recess.	You promise to take your friend to Mexico.
You find a loonie on the street and give it to a homeless person.	You make your grandma a picture to decorate her fridge.
You take your neighbour's dog for a walk.	You pull the weeds in your mom's garden.

My action plan

Who (could I be kind to)?	What might I do? (Think of several ideas.)	What difference would would it make?	When will I do this?

An act of kindness:

- makes someone happy
- feels good to do
- is simple

Identifying differences and assessing acts of kindness

	Sophisticated understanding	Exended understanding	Basic understanding	Partial understanding	Pre-recognition
Distinguishes differences between characters	Correctly distinguishes the similarities and differences between Lydia Grace's and Uncle Jim's qualities; identifies some subtleties. Provides specific, relevant, supporting evidence.	Correctly distinguishes the similarities and differences between Lydia Grace's and Uncle Jim's qualities. Provides relevant, supporting evidence.	Correctly distinguishes the obvious similarities and differences between Lydia Grace's and Uncle Jim's qualities. Provides general, supporting evidence.	When given simple examples of similarities and differences between Lydia Grace's and Uncle Jim's qualities he/she can correctly distinguish them.	Needs support to distinguish similarities and differences between Lydia Grace's and Uncle Jim's qualities.
Plans and implements a reasonable act of kindness	Plans and willingly implements reasonable acts of kindness in more than one setting (e.g., home, school, community). The actions meet all of the criteria of an appropriate act of kindness.	Plans and implements a reasonable act of kindness that meets all of the criteria of an appropriate act of kindness.	Plans an act of kindness that meets up to two criteria for an appropriate act of kindness; may need support in implementing it.	Selects an action that does not fully meet the criteria for an appropriate act of kindness. Needs support in implementing it.	May be able to identify an act of kindness but is unable to plan for and implement it.

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