

# THE CURIOUS GARDEN

## Thematic connections

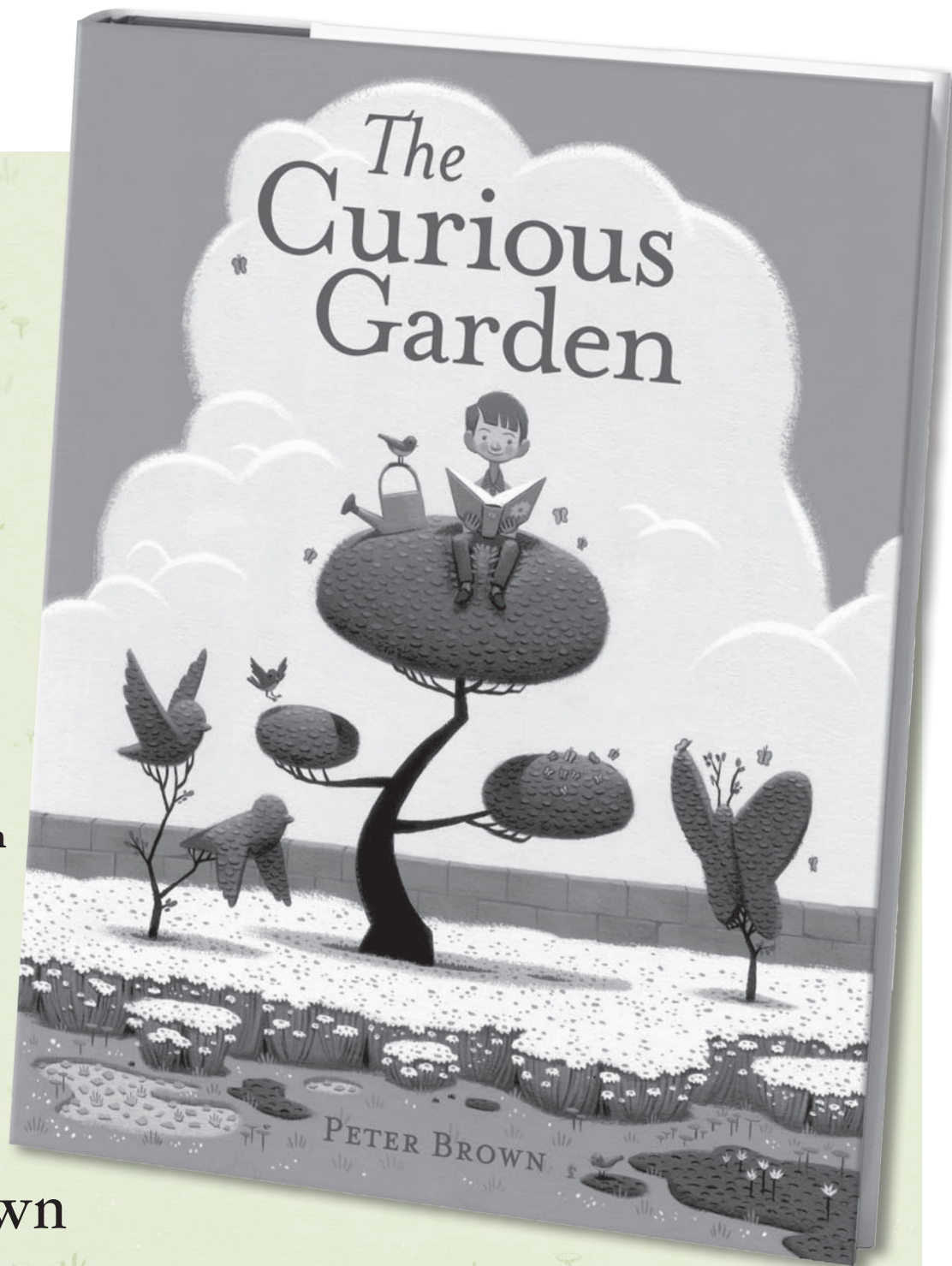
- ❖ Environmentalism
- ❖ Urban Life
- ❖ Making a Difference

Ages 3 – 6

A “hopeful little paean to the persistence of growing things in the dreariest places.”

– *Kirkus Reviews*

by Peter Brown



## Differentiation: One Book Fits All

Every student comes to the classroom with varied strengths and aptitudes. In order to meet each student's needs it is necessary to differentiate instruction. This may be an extension activity for students who have mastered the material, providing different level books during small group reading lessons, or scaffolding lessons to make literature accessible to students who are learning English. Using picture books for instruction offers a number of opportunities for differentiation. If the book is not at a student's independent or instructional reading level, a picture book may be read aloud. If the book is at a student's independent level, it is an excellent opportunity to help develop fluency through repeated rereading. The activities in this guide are designed to foster comprehension skills and content knowledge across the curriculum for students at many different levels. Feel free to adjust or adapt these ideas in order to meet the needs of your particular students.

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

#### A Defining Moment

To help students develop their vocabulary, and provide a purpose for reading, explore the word "curious" before reading *The Curious Garden*. Create a flower-shaped word web by putting the word "curious" in the middle of a circle and drawing petals around it. What does the word curious mean? Brainstorm definitions with students and write these in the petals. Use a dictionary to look up definitions and add these to the remaining petals. Talk about the two meanings of curious: "eager to learn about something" and "odd or unusual." Ask students to write two sentences to show they understand the different meanings. Show the front cover of the book and have students predict which definition will most likely apply in this story. Then, read the story. After reading, discuss with students if their prediction was correct. Why do both meanings apply? Create a chart of examples from the story that show how the garden and Liam were curious. In what ways were they odd or unusual? In what ways were they inquisitive or eager to learn?

#### Before and After

Show students the picture of the city on the first page. Create a T-chart labeled "Before" on one side and "After" on the

other. Ask students to look at the first page and write down everything they notice about the city. They might write words such as "polluted," "no trees," "depressing," "tall buildings," etc. Then, have them think of one word that comes to mind when they see the picture, and write their descriptive word next to "Before." After reading, have students look at the picture of the city on the last two pages of the book. Students can complete the "After" section by first brainstorming a descriptive word for the city as it appears at the end of the book, and then listing everything on the chart they notice in the picture. A Venn Diagram may also be used. Compare and contrast the two pictures. Discuss the change that took place. How did their descriptive words change? What happened that caused the change?

### COMPREHENSION CONNECTION

Liam is inspired to become a gardener and the idea travels throughout the city. Have students identify all the different ways the garden spread—part of it was nature, part of it was Liam's direct actions, and much of it was the process of others becoming inspired by the garden and Liam. Ask students to think about other situations where one great idea inspired another. Have students write about something or someone that inspires them. How can leading by example, as Liam does in the story, make a difference?

## SUMMARIZING

A great way to share the author's message with other classes, parents, or students that haven't read *The Curious Garden* is to present a book talk. Students can practice listening and speaking while reinforcing their understanding of the story. Book talks can be as simple as a few lines: the name of the book and author, a brief statement about the main idea, and a closing sentence telling the audience why they should read the book. For a more detailed book talk, students may want to include the connections they made while reading and their interpretation of the author's message. Integrate technology by making the talks into video or audio podcasts. Remind students that the best book talks generate excitement about the book without giving away the ending.

## VISUALIZATION

In the middle of the story Liam is preparing for spring; the illustration shows Liam reading a book. Have students visualize what else Liam must have been doing to prepare for spring. They can look at the pictures to give them ideas. Ask students to write three or four short diary entries from Liam's perspective that describe what he does while waiting for winter to pass. Some examples might include shopping for tools, ordering seeds, or reading about gardening techniques. For a 21st century twist, instead of a diary, the entries could be written as a blog. Challenge students to research gardening techniques and include their discoveries in Liam's reflections. To differentiate for younger students or those that might find writing a diary entry too difficult, students may write a "To Do" list. The list should contain the things Liam hopes to do over the winter to prepare for spring. For English Language Learners or students that might need more support, this could be completed as an interactive writing activity. Use chart paper and share the pen to create the list or diary entries together.

## SYNTHESIZING

As the garden begins to explore the city, the author writes that sometimes plants "mysteriously popped up all at once." Encourage students to make inferences by discussing what caused the garden to "mysteriously" appear. Talk about how people might have felt when they saw the garden, and have students pretend they are one of the people that woke up one morning to discover the greenery outside their door. Working with a partner, have students create a short script that shows a conversation between or among neighbors. They should include the neighbors' reactions and a few ideas about what the neighbors will do next. Will they decide to surprise someone else with a plant? Will they pitch in on a neighborhood clean-up project? When students finish their scripts, they can perform their short skits for the class.

## WRITING

### Acrostic Garden

Create an acrostic garden by having students choose a flower, vegetable, or something related to gardens or nature to write about. Begin by sharing several examples of acrostic poems. Help students understand that in an acrostic poem each letter of the word they choose should begin a word or phrase that describes their subject. Acrostics in their simplest form use one word for each letter. Students may challenge themselves, however,





# THE CURIOUS GARDEN

by writing their acrostics using longer phrases or a rhyming pattern. Add illustrations and mount on colorful paper to create an eye-catching display.

## Personification

In *The Curious Garden*, the garden has a personality and feelings. Talk about the writer's craft of using personification. First, analyze how personification is used in this story. Then, have students choose something from nature and write a story from its point of view. Encourage students to think about the qualities or characteristics of the thing they choose and use that to make their personification more convincing.

## VOCABULARY

### Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt

Vivid word choice is an important aspect of *The Curious Garden*. As a whole group, go on a "vocabulary scavenger hunt." Begin with *The Curious Garden* and identify the words that truly help readers visualize and understand the mood of the story. "Dreary," "drizzling," and "popped" are all words that create pictures in our minds. Talk about the meaning of the words. Then, encourage students to look

through the books they are reading independently to find other vivid vocabulary words. After the "scavenger hunt" is complete, students can report back to the whole class and share the words they found. Challenge students to use the new words in their writing.

## SOCIAL STUDIES & SCIENCE

### Green by Design

By the end of the story, there is a garden or green space on top of almost every building. Rooftop gardens are becoming more and more popular, especially in urban areas. In some parts of Switzerland, there is even legislation that requires all new construction buildings to provide for a green space of some type equal to the size of the footprint of the structure. Give students the opportunity to design a rooftop garden for a building in their area. Integrate mathematics by calculating perimeter or area. Younger students, or those with less math background, may want to focus on simply designing the green space. Challenge students to research the advantages and obstacles to consider when converting roof space to green space. They should focus their research on economic advantages in terms of additional insulation, possible food production,

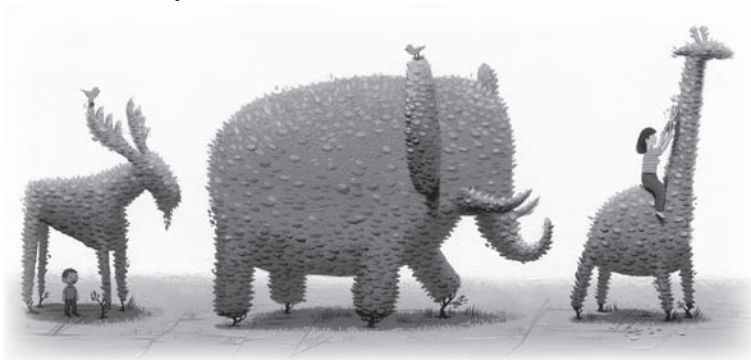


# THE CURIOUS GARDEN

as well as the large number of environmental advantages—a natural filtering system for rain water, decreasing carbon dioxide in the air and increasing oxygen, restoring the natural balance, etc. Interviewing an architect or engineer may also be part of this project. As a culminating activity, have them write a proposal that details their plans for the rooftop garden, why it should be considered, and their ideas for overcoming any obstacles that may be presented.

## Topiaries around the World

Topiaries, (plants grown into ornamental shapes through training and pruning), are featured on the cover of *The Curious Garden*. These living sculptures can trace their history back to Roman times. In addition, the shaping of shrubs and trees was also practiced in ancient China and Japan. Today, examples of topiary may be found in many places around the globe. Explore the beauty of topiary by showing photographs of topiary gardens from Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America. Have students locate the topiary gardens on a world map or on a web-based tool such as Google Earth. Challenge students to find examples of topiaries from as many different continents or countries as possible. How are they the same? How are they different?



## Urban Planning Team

Discuss the difference between urban and rural communities. Complete a Venn diagram as students brainstorm what they know about each one. Discuss the types of buildings, businesses, and services found in urban communities. Ask each student to choose one and create a model of that building. Once students create their models, put all of the buildings together to make an urban area.

Then, add rooftop gardens, parks, and walking paths to recreate the urban setting. After the transformation is complete, refer back to the original Venn diagram. Given the changes made to the model of the urban community, what changes might they make to the Venn diagram? In what ways has the urban community become more similar to a rural community? What differences remain?

## What is Photosynthesis?

*The Curious Garden* changes the city not only by making it more beautiful, but also by making it a cleaner and healthier place to live. Explore photosynthesis and discuss why it is so important. Help students understand the process by giving them the opportunity to act out the process in small groups. Create cards printed with the words *plant*, *oxygen*, *carbon dioxide*, *sugar*, *water*, and *sunlight*. Give the students in each group the cards and provide them with reference materials to help them learn about photosynthesis. After reading about photosynthesis, ask each group to act out the process. Their goal is to show (through role-play) the part each of the cards plays in photosynthesis. After all students have the opportunity to explore photosynthesis, invite them to think about *The Curious Garden*. Liam is shown singing to the plants. Why might singing or talking to plants help them grow?

## The Highline Connection

The Highline in New York City inspired Peter Brown to write *The Curious Garden*. Originally built in the 1930s, trains traveled on the Highline until the 1980s. At that point, it fell into disrepair and seemed forgotten. Nature, however, did not forget the Highline. Weeds and wildflowers began to grow and take over the elevated train tracks. Some people that lived near the abandoned tracks wanted it torn down, while others believed it should be preserved. Have students research the history of the Highline in Manhattan. Ask them to pretend they are one of the concerned citizens that wanted to preserve the tracks, or they can pretend they are one of the residents that wanted the tracks removed. Have them write a letter to the editor describing their position and what they think the City of New York should do. Then, have students

# THE CURIOUS GARDEN

investigate the Highline's current situation. A great place to start is [www.thehighline.org](http://www.thehighline.org). This site gives many details about the history of the Highline, as well as details about plans for its future. Ask students to discuss whether they agree with the current plans. What are the positive aspects? Are there any negatives? What would they do if they could design a plan for the Highline's future?

## MATH

### Seed Catalog Math

Collect seed catalogs from nurseries and provide them to students. Determine with students an appropriate budget (any amount from \$5.00 to over \$100 depending on the ability level of students) and a list of fruits, vegetables, and flowers that may be grown in your area. In teams, have students work together to order as many different seeds as possible without going over the budget. Remind students to calculate possible shipping costs as well. Compare orders among teams. Did all teams order the same seeds? Why or why not?

## MOVEMENT AND GAMES

### Seed Packet Fun

What do you do with seed packets after the seeds have been planted? Play games, of course! Recycle empty seed packets by using them to create motivating and educational games. Play Memory or Go Fish, by using pairs of seed packets. Give students practice alphabetizing by having them put the vegetable and flower seed packets in alphabetical order from "asters" to "zucchini." Seed packets may also be used as a science activity for classifying. Give pairs of students a pile of seed packets and a time-limit (2-5 minutes) to record all of the different ways they could group them. They may classify them according to size, shape, color, germination time, or any other number of ways. Challenge students to create their own games using the seed packets. Provide tag-board (to make game boards), markers, and other craft supplies and give students the

opportunity to use their imagination to develop a game for their classmates to play. Use the games as center activities or save them for a special activity day.

## ART AND MUSIC

### The Gardens of the Masters



Gardens and flowers have captured the imaginations of many artists. Flowers and gardens inspired famous painters such as Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir,

Henri Matisse, Vincent Van Gogh, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Have each student choose a famous flower or garden painting to research and analyze. Ask them to determine the artistic style and try to discover what inspired the artist. Students may also want to learn about the artist's life and write a short biography. What are the similarities and differences between the piece of art they studied and the art studied by their classmates? In what ways is it similar to the illustrations in *The Curious Garden*? In what ways is it different?

### Natural Dyes and Art

Nature often inspires art, but it can also help create art. Throughout history, people used plants to create colorful dyes. Begin by discussing how people long ago used natural dyes to create colorful clothing and art. Then, show examples of some of the plants used to create these dyes: beets, marigolds, red cabbage, and onion peels are a few examples. Ask students to predict which colors each plant or plant part will produce. Have them check their predictions by making natural dyes from the plants. To make dyes, add the plants to a few cups of water and simmer on the stove or in a crock-pot. Let the dye cool and then use it to dye fabric or give students paintbrushes to color white paper. Connect to history by asking students



# THE CURIOUS GARDEN

to research the local plants people of long ago used in their area of the world. Have students write a reflection about their experiences and discoveries.

## Curious Garden Soundtrack

Dramatic changes take place in *The Curious Garden*. Ask students to create a “soundtrack” by listening to many different types of music and identifying pieces that might be appropriate for each part of the story. Begin by looking at each section of the story and identifying the mood. The beginning is dark and rainy. What type of music would be appropriate to represent this? Later, the garden is just beginning to grow. What type of music would be appropriate to represent this? Continue the process by analyzing each page. Then, ask students to work in small groups to create a “soundtrack” for the book. They should consider using classical music, as well as other styles of music. Have groups present their selections and discuss why they chose each piece. As an extension, ask students to write a written explanation justifying their selections.

## CHARACTER EDUCATION

### Unity in Diversity

Begin by showing students pictures of flower gardens (or refer to the illustrations in *The Curious Garden*). Ask students to discuss what they notice about the gardens. Are all of the flowers the same shape, color, and size? Discuss with students how the differences among the plants in the garden make it so beautiful. Talk about how the differences among people, like the varieties of plants in a garden, make the community or world such a wonderful place. Ask students to think about something that makes them different and special, and create a flower that represents him or her. Then, create a class bulletin board to show the beauty in diversity. As a variation, give students seeds or bulbs and plant an outdoor Unity Garden. Ask students to share something that makes them unique as they plant the garden together.

### Blossoming Kindness

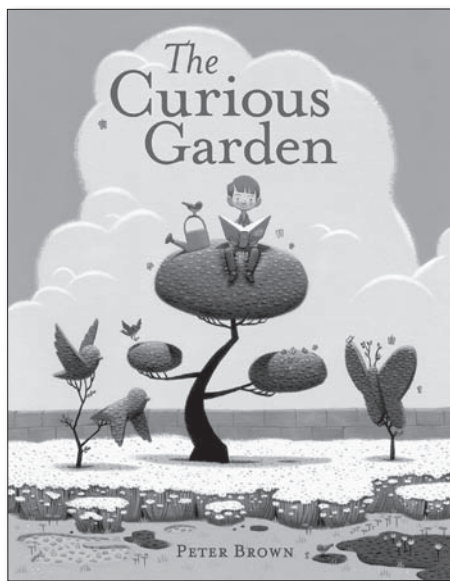
Talk about the importance of making a difference in the lives of others. Discuss how Liam made a difference. Then, ask students to think about someone they know that might be in need of something to cheer them up. Encourage kindness to blossom by teaching students to force bulbs. Gather potting soil, bulbs, and flowerpots or other containers. Make sure the containers are clean and sterile. Fill each container with soil and plant the bulbs. Put the flowerpots in a cool and dark place for 12-13 weeks. The temperature should be about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Mark the calendar to remove the bulbs after about three months. Then, bring the plants indoors and wait for them to grow shoots and leaves. Give the potted flowers to a senior friend or someone special for a bit of color in the winter. If time is more limited, try cutting branches from flowering trees or bushes such as apple trees or forsythia. Bring the cuttings inside and put them in warm water. As long as the trees were in a cold environment outside and entered a dormant stage, the branches should flower within several weeks.

### Earth Day is Everyday!

*The Curious Garden* is a wonderful book to read aloud as part of an Earth Day event, but even if it is not officially Earth Day, there is no reason why it can't be celebrated. Remind students that it is important to care for the Earth throughout the year. Brainstorm a list of simple activities that can help preserve the environment and conserve energy, thinking of as many ideas as possible. Then, create an “Earth Day Every Day of the Year” class calendar. Write the brainstormed activities on the calendar pages as a reminder of the importance of doing the little things each day to make a difference. For a more involved project, students can create individual calendars using a computer software program. Add photographs or illustrations that reflect the environmental conservation message. These could even be used as a fundraiser, with proceeds donated to organizations working to keep the Earth healthy.



## about the book



While out exploring one day, a little boy named Liam discovers a struggling garden and decides to take care of it. As time passes, the garden spreads throughout the dark, gray city, transforming it into a lush, green world.

This is an enchanting tale with environmental themes and breathtaking illustrations that become more vibrant as the garden blooms. Red-headed Liam can also be spotted on every page, adding a clever seek-and-find element to this captivating picture book.

*The Curious Garden*

By Peter Brown

978-0-316-01547-9

## about the author

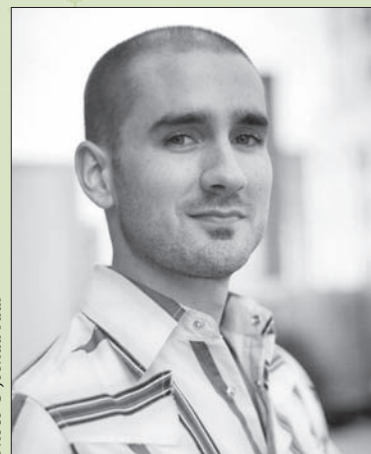


Photo © Joshua Paul

Peter Brown grew up in Hopewell, NJ, and attended the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA. He is the creator of the adorable drooling bulldog, Chowder.

He lives in Brooklyn, NY, and you can visit him online at [www.peterbrownstudio.com](http://www.peterbrownstudio.com).

## also by Peter Brown



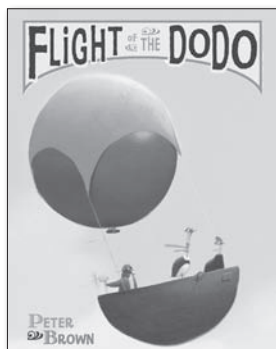
*Chowder*

978-0-316-01180-8



*The Fabulous Bouncing Chowder*

978-0-316-01179-2



*Flight of the Dodo*

978-0-316-11038-9

