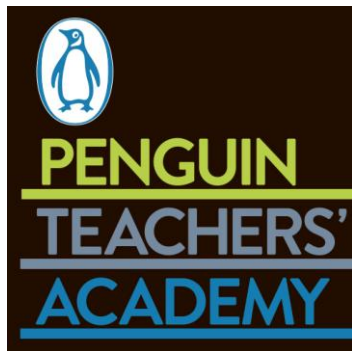




A Patch from Scratch By Megan Forward

**Teachers Notes
By Laura Gordon**

Overview

A Patch from Scratch is a beautifully illustrated picture book about one family's desire to "live more like people on a farm". The narrator is a little boy who carefully explains the process he goes through with his mum and dad and big brother to turn their suburban backyard into a vibrant source of food. They buy chicks, build a chick pen, and with some help from their neighbours and their family, they plant lots of fruits and vegetables. The two boys are allowed to make lots of decisions and get involved with building the chicken coop, the frames for the vegies and the garden beds. It is hard work and they go through the trials of pests and waiting for things to grow. They eventually have success, so much success that they invite lots of friends and family over to share their bounty with.

The opening quote comes from the CEO of Stephanie Alexander's Kitchen Garden Foundation. This text would be a perfect introduction to students who have just started at a school that participate in the Kitchen Garden program, or for other students who want to develop an understanding and appreciation for where food comes from. Schools that don't have access to their own garden beds could use pots outside classrooms or encourage families to become involved at home.

This text is highly accessible for all primary students and could be used to suit the curriculum in a range of key learning areas. This text might form the introduction to a cross-curricular unit on sustainability as encouraged in the current Australian Curriculum. There are obvious links to SOSE, Health and Science. But every KLA easily links to the concepts explored in this text. Art, Literacy, Mathematics, Technology and Languages other than English are all highly relevant to ideas about growing our own food, life cycles of plants and animals, creating a self-sufficient lifestyle and understanding where food comes from.

The following learning activities are designed to take place after children have read the book together as a class. The activities vary in difficulty and can be used as group or individual tasks. As this text could suit students from Junior Primary to Junior Secondary teachers can adapt any of these ideas to suit the varying abilities of their students.

Introductory activities

Cover – Invite students to list as many adjectives as they can for the cover of the text. Words like ‘earthy’ or ‘natural’ might come up. Ask students to consider the author/illustrator’s intention and how the colours and subject matter of the cover might suit her philosophy or intention. Younger students will naturally offer their own experience, but older students might take some more coaxing to share their own ‘patch’ experiences.

Title page –

“Let’s go on a journey together. Let’s find a patch of dirt in a bright sunny spot. Let’s dig, plant, water and see if we can become friends with the earth under our feet. Let’s build a patch from scratch.”

Invite students to research what a ‘kitchen garden’ is and then what Stephanie Alexander’s Foundation is designed to do. Whether or not the school is part of this specific program, this text provides the perfect opportunity to create their own version of a kitchen garden on whatever scale is suitable. In fact, the learning activity might be the preparing, planting and harvesting of their own vegie patch and this text is merely the introduction to this. Alternatively, this text might form part of an extensive cross-curricular study into the way food is produced and students might choose to focus on the way ordinary people can use their gardens to become more self-sufficient and sustainable.

- **SURVEY:** Students could survey their classmates on who grows their own fruits and vegies at home, who has animals that provide a food source and what kind of produce their class could share. They can graph this information, or extend the survey to a wider share of the school.
- **FOOD JOURNEYS:** Students could also investigate where their peers' food comes from. Choose one food and research the journey it might have been on to get to their lunchbox. For example; an apple, strawberries, the bread from their sandwich etc. This information could then form an oral presentation to their class, be used to create a visual diary or flow chart or form a class diary titled ‘Where our food has come from.’

VEGETABLE GAMES –

Fruit Salad – All students sit on a chair in a circle. The teacher gives each student one of three fruits e.g. apple, watermelon, orange. Remove one chair and that student stands in the middle of the circle. They can call out one fruit and all of those students who are that fruit must leave their chair and move to another one,

but they cannot sit in the chair either side of where they are sitting. The student in the middle tries to steal a chair. When the middle student calls 'fruit salad' everyone has to find a new chair. This is a simple, fun, noisy movement game.

Veggie mumble jumble – Each student chooses a fruit or a vegetable. The class sits in a circle. A student says their chosen veggie name twice and then someone else's veggie name twice. However, they must use their lips to cover their teeth. If they laugh and reveal their teeth, they are disqualified. You can increase the difficulty by also banning any pointing of fingers etc. It is funny and silly and can be used for all ages as an icebreaker.

Close reading of the text – Learning Activities according to page numbers

P1&2 – Place. What kind of place does this picture represent? How does it feel? Who lives here? Who is telling the story? What does he mean "live more like people on a farm"?

P3 – Home grown. List all the advantages of buying fruit and vegies from the shops and all the advantages of growing them at home. Compare the taste of something – perhaps a strawberry or tomato – grown at home and one bought from a supermarket. Consider 'ugly' fruits and vegetables and investigate what happens to the produce that looks unusual. Jamie Oliver is prolific in supporting the sale of these products in supermarket chains rather than having them disposed of. His latest advertising campaign for Woolworths 'The Odd Bunch' is attached below.

[The Odd Bunch](#)

P4 – My favourite veggie. Using everyone's name in the class on a big list, draw beside their name their favourite fruit or vegetable that they would like to grow in their backyard if they could. Once everyone has chosen their own fruit and vegetable, students can research how to grow it. Firstly, as a class make a list of questions they might like to investigate to have the best success of growing it. For example, what time of the year does it grow, how does it grow, does it have a companion plant, does it grow well in the place they live according to the climate? Then students work individually or in groups to write an instructional writing piece on growing that particular veggie.

P5/6 – Chickens. Keeping chickens as pets provides a range of learning experiences for children of all ages. Create a fact sheet of the types of chickens you can have as pets, what they eat, their lifespan etc. Design a chook pen, or palace if they prefer. Older students could draw a plan after doing some research and make a small model of their design.

P7 – Map it out. Draw a map of the school and consider some possible places for vegetable gardens and chook pens to go. Students can then draw a map of their own house and take it home to consider where they could build their own patch. Add the possible places to the map they have drawn.

P8 – Drip Irrigation. The illustration on page 8 has a book with a picture of a Drip Irrigation System on it. Investigate what this is and why farmers might use it.

P9 – Compost. Write a recipe for compost. Turn this into a poem – might be acrostic, haiku, limerick, rhyming or free verse.

P11 – Nostrils on duty. “Dirt has its own smell.” Collect some small glass jars and cover the outside so the students cannot see the contents. Fill each jar with different natural substances. Create a station for each jar where the students put on blindfolds and smell the jar. They then write all the words down for that jar that describe the smell. They move around the room to all of the stations and record their adjectives. As a class share their responses to each station and try and guess the substance. You might include dirt, mint, compost, chook poo, worms etc. Their list of adjectives is then used to inspire a writing piece of any kind.

P13 – Treasure Hunt. “It’s like finding a treasure”. Set up a treasure hunt. Use plastic eggs that you can put clues inside, or use hard-boiled eggs with letters written on the outside. Different coloured pens could distinguish the words from each other. Once all of the eggs have been found, students have to use the letters to answer a riddle. Choose a riddle that has come from the student’s learning.

P14 – Bees. There is a range of opportunities for investigation and research in this book and bees is one of many topics that students could delve much further into. Native bees provide a unique contribution to local produce and have a special role in the fertilization of bush tucker. Students need to write their own ten questions they have about bees and then use a range of resources to answer them. Invite a beekeeper to come and speak to the class and answer these questions. The information could be presented using various ICT programs, oral forums, a poster design suitable for younger year levels, or filmed as a mini documentary.

P15 – “Rocket!” The names of vegetables provide lots of learning opportunities. **A-Z of vegies** – students write each letter of the alphabet down one side of their page. Complete this task as a think, pair, and share. Firstly, they work as individuals, and then combine their answers with a partner and then two pairs join up to make a group of 4. Students need to think of a vegetable – or fruit – that starts with each letter of the alphabet. Give them as long as is appropriate for their age.

A – avocado

B – Bok Choy

C – Cucumber

Memory game – students use 10 of the vegetables they previously listed to make their own memory game. They need to draw a picture of the vegetable and write its name on two cards. Once complete they shuffle the cards and lay them face down on the table. With a partner they take it in turns to flip two cards and try and match pairs.

P 15 – 18 Seedlings – purchase a packet of seedlings for each student and a portable planting pot for them. Have each student pot their own seedling and find an appropriate place for them. Create a watering roster and choose a time of the day that the students can visit their seedling to check on it. Students create their own 'Plant diary' to record their observations and use this to compare the different progress of the various seedlings.



P17 – Companion Plants – Once students have received their seedling they can do some research into what a companion plant is and whether or not their seedling has one.

P19 – Weeds. “If there’s a plant growing where you don’t want it to grow, it’s called a weed.” This definition encapsulates the philosophy of this author and invites students to consider the role everything plays in the garden. It doesn’t demonise the ‘weed’ just recognizes it is in the wrong place. Invite students to write their own definitions of all the key words in this picture book e.g. vegetable, patch, plant etc. Post the definitions around the room and attribute them to the child who has come up with it.

P22/24 – Pests. The children in the story discover that insects have stolen their food. How do they solve the problem? Students can investigate how farmers with large crops prevent their food being ravaged by pests and compare it to this family. Another consideration is the way indigenous communities deal with pest prevention and whether native bush food has adapted better to local pests. Discuss the choices about choosing not to use chemicals on fruits and vegetables. Older students could even engage in a simple class debate on the issue of

Practical learning activities

If time, space, facilities and budget allow, the best practical activity would be to have students create their own 'patch from scratch' in the schoolyard somewhere. If it isn't possible to create a new one, or a permanent one, then even using various sized pots would allow students to engage in the act of growing and planting. Recycled materials also work as pots and add to the notion of sustainability.

Some communities have their own community garden where local people are encouraged to plant, grow, share and eat their own food. Taking students to this garden, or inviting someone from the organization that cares for the garden might be an alternative to creating a space on site.

Some families would already have their own homegrown food that they might like to bring in and share. While other families might like to create their own 'patch from scratch'. Ensuring the class communicates with their students' families about this particular unit on sustainability will help to build integral links between home and school.

- **HARVEST MARKET:** Students could create a 'Harvest Market' where families are invited to bring anything from home that they have grown. They could sell or swap their wares or use the produce to make other products. This could be used as a whole school event to welcome new families, raise funds or establish a more sustainability within their school.

Literacy based learning activities

A Patch from Scratch is such a simple text, yet it provides numerous opportunities for students to engage in reading, writing and speaking learning activities. Adapt it to suit the area of literacy your students are currently exploring, or extend any of the activities above to provide genuine literacy based tasks.

Instructional writing

Students could write a 'how to' guide for building a vegetable patch, designing and constructing a chook pen, a recipe to cook some of the produce or some tips to protect your garden from pests. The additional pages at the end of the book provide some appropriate examples.

Creative Writing

Primary students in particular have rich and vivid imaginations. They will provide many of their own creative writing ideas but here are some possibilities;

- From the ground to my lunchbox, what it feels like to be an '_____'
- Choose another perspective from the story and write a diary entry or conversation from their point of view.

- A day in the life of a caterpillar.
- Story starters; 'This could not be happening, not today.'
'I could not believe my eyes.'
'There's no such thing as garden fairies.'
- Page 29 'Did you know...?' Write a story about a family from another place or time or don't have access to a supermarket. How do they use their land to supply themselves with everything they need?

Poetry

Acrostic– using the name of a fruit or vegetable

Limerick – a funny rhyme about something growing in the garden

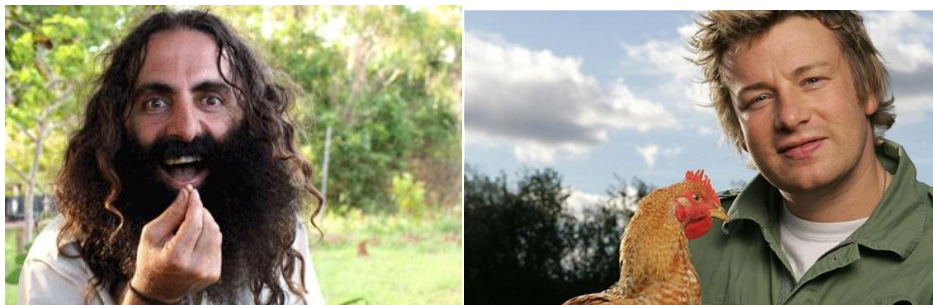
Haiku – Three line poem, 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables about the growth, or change of season, or harvest etc.

Oral Presentation

In small groups or as individuals students could research an area of their choice and present their findings to the class. They may use technology to support the presentation, or film an interview or tour of a vegie garden and show this to their peers.

Letter

If the class decides to build a patch or organize a Harvest Market or invite someone to speak to them, the students could write the letter requesting permission to do so. They might write to someone like Jamie Oliver or Stephanie Alexander or Costa Georgiadis to chat to them about the work they are doing encouraging young people to grow their own food.



Research and investigation

This text will also spark the interest of students in a number of ways that will inspire them to want to find out more. Let the students drive the direction of the investigation and encourage their questions and fact finding. As a whole class you might pursue the research and investigation required to create a patch from scratch. Small groups could work on different tasks to gather the information you need before you begin. The opportunities for cross-curricular learning are abundant in this area. The following are some other suggestions of where this text might take student learning.

Ad campaign – Once students have discussed the value and benefits of growing their own food, they might design an advertising campaign that would encourage other people to also have a go. As a television or online commercial, students could write, cast, rehearse, direct and film their own short advertisement. Hold a screening to view the finished products.

Life cycle of fruit, vegetables, bees, insects – Students could work independently or in a small group to select one of the fruits, vegetables, insects or animals from the text to investigate the life cycle. They present this in a graphic form, supporting the visuals with written text as appropriate.

The food journey of a carrot – compare to an odd looking carrot. There is considerable research into the amount of waste being created from vegetables that are not deemed attractive enough to be sold in major supermarket chains. Students could research how a vegetable is grown and compare the journey of the vegetable that makes it to the shelves of their local supermarket with the one deemed too 'wonky'. Students could also consider what alternatives there are to turning these odd vegetables into landfill, as has so often been the case.

Cultural studies – Depending on the language students study within LOTE, they could be encouraged to investigate the way people from that country or culture use sustainable methods to grow and source food. Students may discover different fruits and vegetables and methods for growing these in other climates, as well as other names of these foods and ways to eat them.

This key learning area also provides the perfect place to explore native Australian food used by local indigenous cultures. Students could eat some bush tucker, compare the bush versions of this food to the versions they are used to eating and do some research into whether it is easier to grow these native species. It would be worthwhile having students listen to indigenous people share their own experience of cooking and eating bush tucker. Students could explore the way the harvesting and gathering of this food has changed and what impact this has had on the lifestyle and nutrition of indigenous people.

Further Reading

Megan Forward has included her own list of suggested titles for further reading and information on page 29. Her own website has great ideas as well.

<http://meganforward.com/apatchfromscratch/>

Other websites and titles include:

[Children's Books Daily - sustainability in the classroom](#)

<http://www.qecsn.org.au/> (Queensland Early Childhood Sustainability Network)

[Jamie Oliver](#)

[Costa Georgiadis](#)

<https://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au>