



The Last Garden



by Rachel Ip, illustrated by Anneli Bray

Classroom notes prepared by Clare Hardy and Rachel Ip

Introduction

The Last Garden is a picture book which has many rich themes to explore in the classroom with a wide age range of children, from Key stage 1 to Key Stage 3. Alongside the [guided reading notes](#), some of these ideas can be adapted to suit different age groups.

Themes: hope; resilience; gardens; conflict and migration; gardens made in wartime.

About *The Last Garden*

The Last Garden follows the story of a little girl who tends *The Last Garden* in a war-torn city. As the city breaks, everyone is forced to leave and soon the girl must leave her beautiful garden behind. Whilst the garden is left alone, its seeds scatter throughout the city and roots begin to take hold.

Slowly, as people return, the city begins to bloom again, and the girl comes home to her garden.

The Last Garden was inspired by real gardens made in wartime.

About the author – Rachel Ip

Rachel is a picture book author from the UK who has lived in Hong Kong for the last 13 years. She loves the way picture books can delight and surprise you, make you laugh, and make you wonder.

She has always loved languages and linguistics and her stories are often inspired by real-world events or experiences.

About the illustrator – Anneli Bray

Anneli is an illustrator, artist and maker from the North West of England. Growing up near the Lake District, adventure was never too far away and she was heavily influenced by Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, Tove Jansson and the wonder of nature.

The classroom resources cover four main topics:

- Visual literacy
- Gardens and growing
- Poetry and creative writing
- Migration

Additional resources

- [Guided Reading Questions](#)
- [Photographs of wartime gardens](#)* (slides and speaker notes)
- [Borrowed words](#) Word Cloud

*These photographs have been approved for use in classrooms and educational environments but can't be used for commercial purposes.





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Visual literacy (KS1 and KS2)

OBJECTIVES:

- To explore how illustration adds layers of meaning to the story

OUTCOMES:

- A discussion about how meaning is conveyed through illustration
- A discussion about gardens in wartime, throughout history

TASK 1 - Reading the pictures

Looking at the illustrations, discuss how the illustrator uses colour to convey a change of mood or tone in the story.

In the opening scenes, how does the colour of the garden contrast with the rest of the city?

Zara is often pictured with a soft toy, which is not mentioned in the story. Encourage students to think about why the toy is important to Zara.

Why has the illustrator included the bird and the cat? How do they add to the story? (Zara is never alone, she always has either her friends, animals or toy with her.)

Compare and contrast the opening city scene and the final city scene. How has the illustrator shown the city coming back to life?

TASK 2 – Photographs of wartime gardens

In small groups, share printed examples of the [Photographs of Wartime Gardens](#). Ask the children to infer where and when the photo may have been taken, who may have planted the garden?

Discuss in groups why these gardens were made, and how they might be/have been helpful and important to the individuals or communities who planted them.

After the discussions, share the full presentation and give more background about each of the photographs.



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Gardens and Growing (adaptable for all ages)

OBJECTIVES:

- To research and explore gardens locally and through history
- To understand the importance of gardens in wartime and conflict

OUTCOMES:

- Map, plan or designs for an individual or school garden
- Report or presentation about local gardens
- Set of instructions for growing a bean seed
- A school gardening initiative

Often when there is war, there are gardens. Throughout history and across the world, there are many examples of gardens made in wartime - gardens of all shapes and sizes, on football pitches and rooftops, in school grounds and on windowsills. Some created by individuals, some bringing whole communities together.

In her research for the book, Rachel found many examples of these gardens, which can be shared in the classroom for wider discussion from the below links:

[Photographs of wartime gardens](#)

<https://www.rachelip.com/post/gardens-in-wartime>

These historical and contemporary photos could be used as a prompt for creative writing, or further research into war gardens.

TASK 1 – Research local history and gardens

- Talk through the slides with photographs of wartime gardens (speaker notes are included)
 - Discuss why gardens are important in times of conflict. Encourage students to think about access to food and food security.
 - Ask students to design their own garden, what would they plant? Encourage them to plant a mixture of vegetables as well as flowers.
- Research gardens in your local area. Are there any community garden projects, gardens where people from the community with special needs work, memorial gardens? Go and visit one of these if possible.
 - Linked to the photographs of wartime gardens - are there any allotments near you? Do some research about allotments and go to visit some if possible.
 - Ask students to write a presentation or report about local gardens or allotments.



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TASK 2 – Writing: a set of gardening instructions

Ask the children to write a set of instructions for how to grow a bean. Look at the slide detailing the World War 2 government's in-depth instructions for growing your own vegetables for inspiration.

TASK 3 – Grow your own seed or garden

There are many ways to grow seeds or plants in school. You could:

- Design and plant your own class, year group or school garden, using containers outside the classroom, small raised beds or an area of the school playing fields if you have them.
- Give everyone a bean seed to grow. There are many sets of instructions on the web, for example:
 - <https://www.science-sparks.com/bean-in-a-jar/>
 - <https://theimaginationtree.com/growing-beans-on-cotton-balls/>
- Create your own 'garden in a jar' or 'terrarium'. Fill the bottom of a jar with a layer of coloured gravel, then approximately 4cm of soil. Plant small seedlings such as spider plants, ferns and mosses. Cover the soil in fish gravel for a lovely effect. These last a very long time if watered carefully by flicking water from your hand so they do not get waterlogged. Watch your small garden thrive!



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Poetry and Creative Writing (Upper KS2/KS3)

OBJECTIVES:

- To create poetry, inspired by the opening page of *The Last Garden*
- To explore and write poetry on the theme of migration

OUTCOMES:

- Individual or group poems

TASK 1 – Poetry

(Upper KS2)

The opening page of the book reads like a poem. With the class, explore the idea of using their own ideas to fill in the gaps differently. Ask them to think about something from their own experience or from the news to make the poem personal. This activity can be done individually or in pairs or small groups.

Explore how the poem is introducing the idea of something having gone wrong. Brainstorm situations where there has been dramatic or significant change, such as war, climate change, or deforestation.

Note how the pairs of adjectives 'grey and sad' and 'bright and beautiful' are in opposition to each other. The noun that is 'in the middle' is something that gives hope and joy, within the wider context of something that is sad. Allow for creative licence with the layout of the poem – see line 6 of the example.



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Model your own idea on the board. For example:

In the middle of our **planet** there was an **ocean**.
In the middle of the **ocean** there was an **island**.
The **ocean** was **stormy** and **wild**,
but the **island** was **tropical** and **lush**.
Once, before the **temperatures rose**,
there were **many islands in the ocean**.
Now, this was the last **island** left.

Or

In the middle of our **forest** there was a **tree**.
In the middle of the **tree** there was a **nest**.
The **tree** was **tall** and **strong**,
but the **nest** was **small** and **fragile**.
Once, before the **trees were cut down**,
there were **many birds in the forest**.
Now, this was the last **nest** left.

In the middle of our country there was a city.
In the middle of the city there was a garden.
The city was grey and sad,
but the garden was bright and beautiful.
Once, before the war came,
there were trees on every corner.
Now, this was The Last Garden left.

In the middle of our there was a
In the middle of the there was a
The city was and
but the was and
Once, before the
there were *on every corner*.
Now, this was the last left.



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TASK 2 – Poetry

(Upper KS2/KS3)

Brian Bilston – Refugee

This poem can be read start to finish, and then in reverse, with opposite meanings. Share Brian Bilston's Refugee poem¹ (start to finish) with the class, discuss the apparent negativity towards refugees. How does it make the students feel?

After a period of discussion, invite students to read the poem in reverse. Now how do they feel?

See if students can write a four or five line poem which can be read both ways.

REFUGEES

BY BRIAN BILSTON

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)

¹ <https://poetrylessons.wordpress.com/2018/09/01/refugees-by-brian-bilston/>

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Migration – (adaptable for all ages)

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the meaning of migration and its impact on people around the world
- To understand and explore the differences between migrants and refugees

OUTCOMES:

- Definitions of migration, migrant and refugee
- Word art using Borrowed Words*
- Classroom display based on Borrowed Words

*Words commonly used in English which have come from other languages.

TASK 1: Researching and creating definitions of words related to migration

(KS1 and 2)

Discuss the meaning of the word migration. Ask the children to write their own definitions. Share the definitions and agree a class definition.

- **Migration** – the act of moving from one place to another, often in large numbers. Migration can be within countries or between countries. People have migrated extensively throughout history.

Discuss the difference between a **migrant** and a **refugee**. Ask the children to write their own definitions. Share the definitions and agree a class definition.

These two words are sometimes used interchangeably in the media, but this is confusing, as there is an important legal² difference between the two.

- **Migrant** - A person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions. Migrants can return home safely and will continue to receive the protection of their government.
- **Refugee** - A refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because it is not safe for them to live there. Refugees are specifically defined and protected in international law. It is too dangerous for them to return home, and they need to seek safety and sanctuary elsewhere.

² <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html>

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TASK 2 – Borrowed words

(KS1/KS2)

Migration is ingrained in history, culture and language. Many English words come from contact with other languages and have been absorbed into English over time. These words are “borrowed” and sometimes called “loanwords”.

- Share the ‘Borrowed Words’ word cloud below or [download and print the document here](#). In partners, ask the children to identify where each of the words come from, giving reasons for their answers.
- Take a word each and illustrate it for a classroom display of Borrowed Words with the word and country of origin labelled.
- Look on a globe/map to identify where these countries are in the world and compare to the children’s country of origin.
- Ask different pupils to create a piece of word art, using words from a specific country for a display. Older children could try fitting them together like a crossword answer.
- Can the children think of other words that may come from other languages?



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Additional resources:

UNICEF resources (Upper KS2/KS3)

- Work through the 'Forced to Flee, Children on the Move' UNICEF teaching resource.
 - https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/09/20180926_Forced-to-flee_final3-1.pdf
- In this moving UNICEF video (Upper KS2/KS3), Harry and Ahmed tell their stories of being child refugees. Though generations separate them, there are many parallels between their stories as child refugees. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTk7a1s8vR8> **Please watch this video before sharing with students.**

UNHCR resources (adaptable for all ages)

UNHCR has a range of teaching resources across all age-groups:

<https://www.unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html#words>



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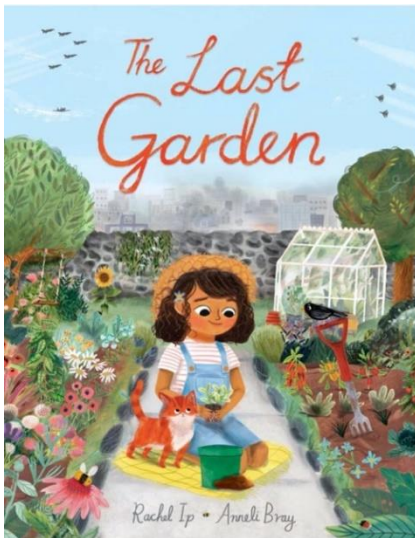
Suggested Questions for Discussion

Prepared by Clare Hardy and Rachel Ip

As you read through the book together, take time to pause and ask questions to encourage the children to look at what they can see on the page.

These questions are suggestions and range in complexity and sophistication, so you can choose the appropriate ones for the age and ability of the children you are sharing the book with.

Front Cover



1. What do you think this book is about?
2. What do you notice in the sky?
3. What can you see behind the garden?



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The Last Garden



Pages 1 – 2



1. Can you spot the garden?
2. Why is this garden special?
3. What is happening in the city around the garden?
4. What has happened to the houses at the back of the picture? Why is this happening?
5. What two words (adjectives) describe the city?
6. What two words (adjectives) describe the garden?
7. Why is the city grey and sad now?
8. Can you think of any places in the news at the moment where this story could be set?



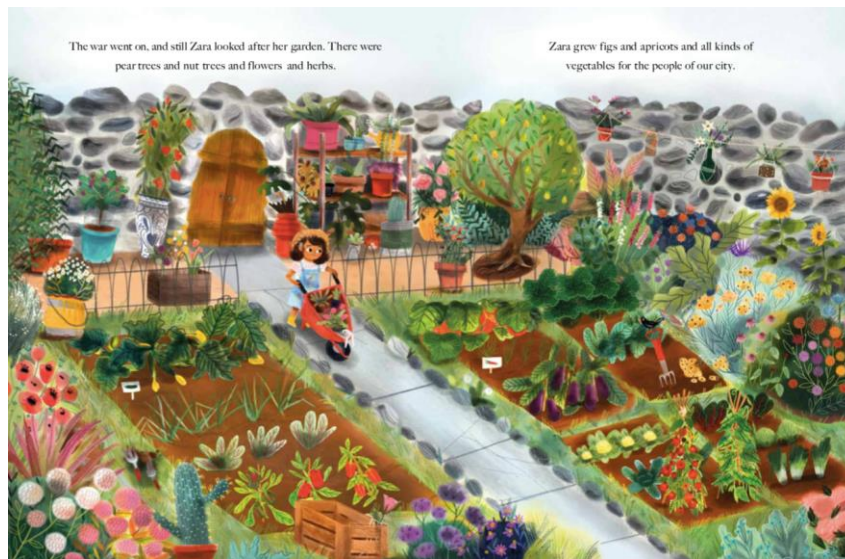
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The Last Garden



Pages 3 - 4



1. What can you see on the fork / in the wheelbarrow? What is hiding under the shelves at the back?
2. Ask the children to point to plants they can identify - Can you find the...aubergines, leeks, sunflowers, pear tree, etc...?
3. What season is it in the garden?
4. Can you think of other special gardens in any other books you have read?
5. How do you think Zara is feeling?
6. Have you ever grown anything?
7. Do you have a garden or a green space where you can go? How do you feel when you are there?
8. Turn back to the previous page and look at the garden in the context of the city. What do you see all around the garden?



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Pages 5 - 6



She let us climb trees and build dens.

Sometimes we picked fruit and helped her water the plants.



We took Zara's flowers home to our broken houses.

We brought her figs and pears to our friends in hospital.



Ask what they can see and let the children explore the pictures for themselves. After they have offered ideas, ask more specific questions to draw out what they haven't noticed for themselves.

1. Can you spot Zara...her rabbit...the bird...the cat?
2. What did the children do in the garden?
3. What kind of a girl was Zara? In what ways was she kind? Encourage them to discuss: She let them play in her garden and she let them take flowers to brighten up their homes and produce from the garden to people in the hospitals

These two questions offer an opportunity to discuss war at an age appropriate level:

1. What adjective is linked to 'homes'? Why were they broken?
2. Why do you think their friends might have been in the hospital?



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Pages 7 - 8



1. Can you spot the bird? What do you think he is thinking?
2. Why are all the people inside their houses, looking out?
3. What do you think the people are feeling as they look out of their windows?
4. What is the change in atmosphere on this page?
5. How has the illustrator conveyed this to the reader? Encourage them to discuss: Darker colours; the weather has turned stormy; the words look like they are falling, like the bombs; the tiny faces at the window are huddled together; the playground has been destroyed; nowhere is safe in the city



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Pages 9 - 10



1. What is happening in the garden?
2. Can you spot the bird... Zara.... her rabbit...the cat?
3. What words can you use to compare the city with the garden?
4. What season is it in the garden now?
5. What have the children used to plant their seeds in?
6. Why is the garden particularly important to the children now?
7. What do the words 'bruised and tender' show about the plants? Why does the writer include this description of the plants growing in the garden?
8. Why were the children planting seeds in the garden during a war and there was so much destruction around them? This is an opportunity to explore how food supplies can be cut off during times of conflict; how people find solace in gardening and nature in times of stress and how planting seeds can be seen as acts of hope – the seeds will take time to grow, so it is an act of faith that the seeds they plant will not be destroyed and that the garden will remain as a place to come for the children



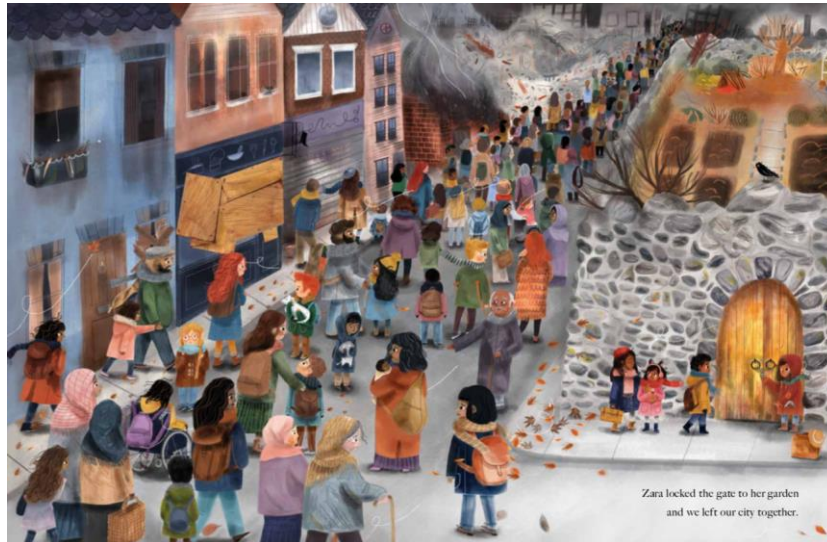
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Pages 11 - 12



1. Give the children time to absorb in detail what is happening on the page, then ask them to say what they notice in turn. Use leading questions to ensure that they haven't missed anything.
2. Can you spot Zara? What is in her pocket? Why do you think she wants to take her toy rabbit with her?
3. Can you spot the bird?
4. Why is Zara locking up the garden?
5. How do you think the people are feeling?
6. Why is the garden no longer bright and cheerful like before?
7. What is the boy with red hair carrying? You could think about the idea of people choosing what to take and what to leave. What would we take with us? With older children this could lead to thinking about having to weigh up the emotional and the practical in what we would take - link to Zara taking her toy rabbit to give her comfort, but how people would have needed to take food, maps, medicines, sensible clothes, etc
8. What are the ages of the people in the crowds leaving? Notice the range of ages and the girl in the wheelchair. Notice that they are all walking – discuss the difficulties that the elderly, the very young and those with disabilities may face in particular. Explore why they are not driving or taking a plane. Roads may have been damaged; people may be unable to afford transport because of the effects of the war



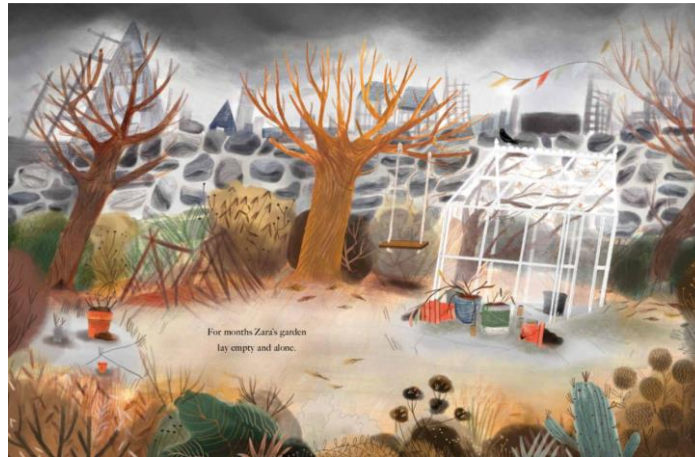
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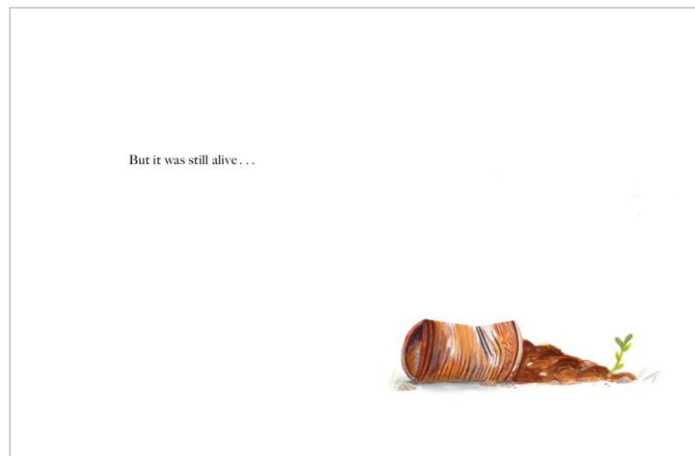


Pages 13 – 14



1. What season is it now in the garden?
2. How has the garden changed?
3. What describing words or phrases can you come up with to describe the garden?
4. What do you notice about the city beyond the walls?

Pages 15 – 16



1. What is growing in the rusty tin can?
2. What does this seedling represent? Discuss how the seed is growing, even though there is so much destruction around it. It is almost defiant – the beautiful green seedling growing from a rusted, bent can, showing that maybe the city can re-grow one day from the rubble

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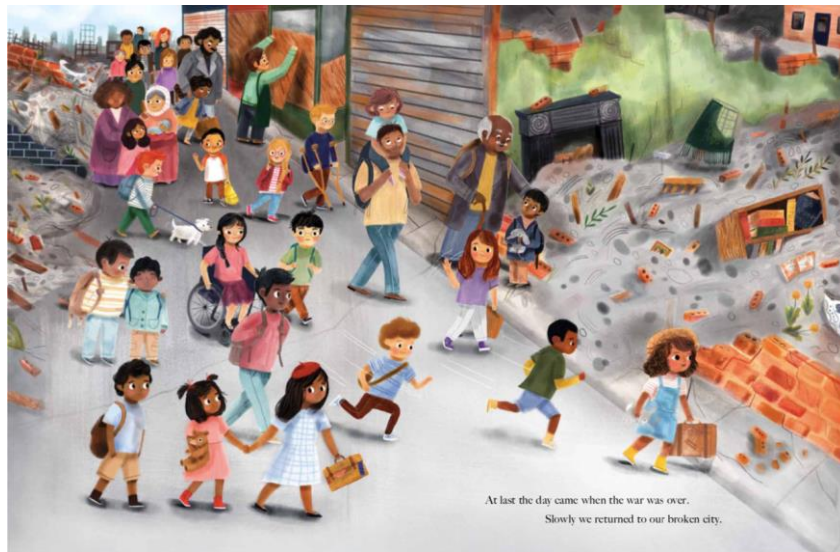




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Pages 17 – 18



1. Can you spot Zara? What is she carrying?
2. What is the man in the green apron doing?
3. In amongst the rubble, there are lots of flowers growing. Where could those seeds have come from?
4. What do you think the people are feeling? With older children you can move past feelings of relief and happiness to explore the job ahead of rebuilding the city – you could encourage the children to come up with ideas about defiance, resilience, working as a community. They will be pleased to be home, but there is much work to be done to restore their homeland
5. Why do you think the author said that people returned ‘slowly’? Discuss ideas about how people may have been scared to return until they were sure it was safe; that people may have had long or difficult journeys back



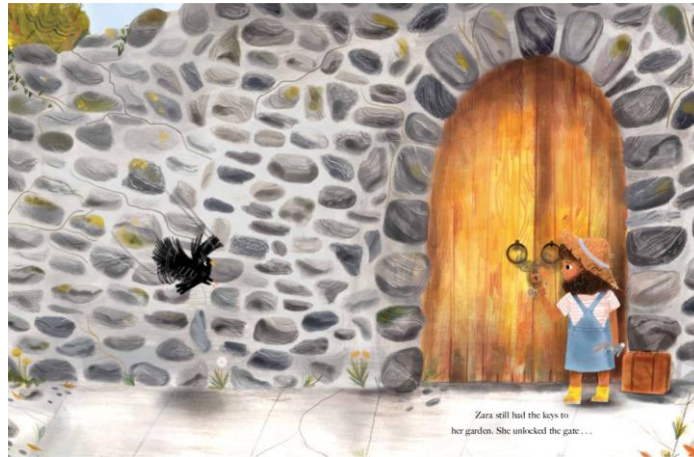
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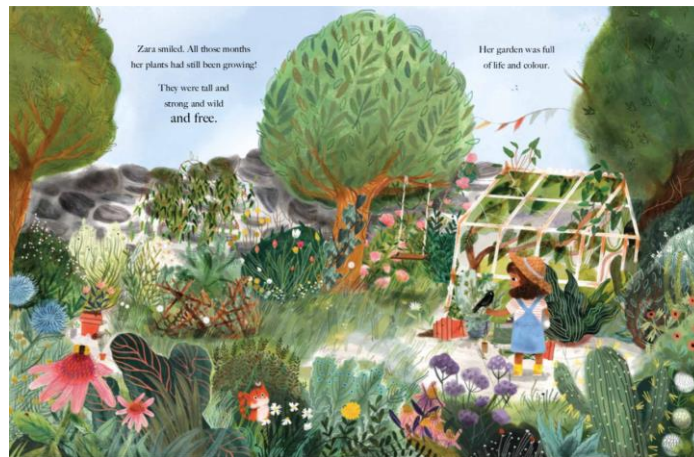


Pages 19 – 20



1. Who has come to see Zara?
2. What do you think Zara will find when she enters the garden?

Pages 21 - 22



1. Can you spot Zara...the bird...the cat?
2. Why is it significant that the garden had been growing tall and strong while Zara was away?
This question helps to delve deeper into the idea of resilience and the ability to live and grow in the most difficult of circumstances
3. What do you think the author meant when she said the plants were free?

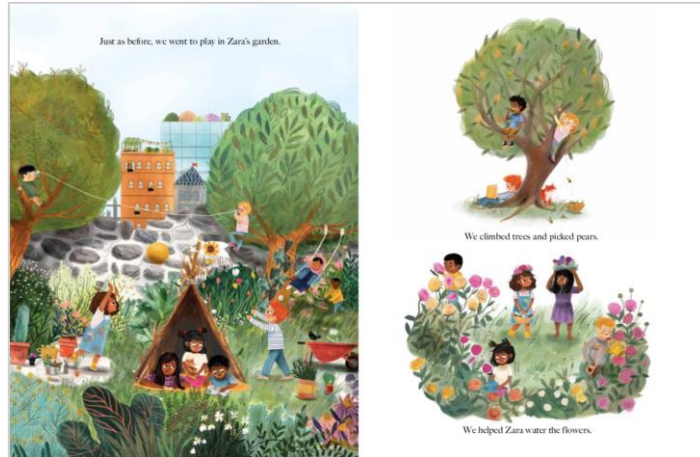
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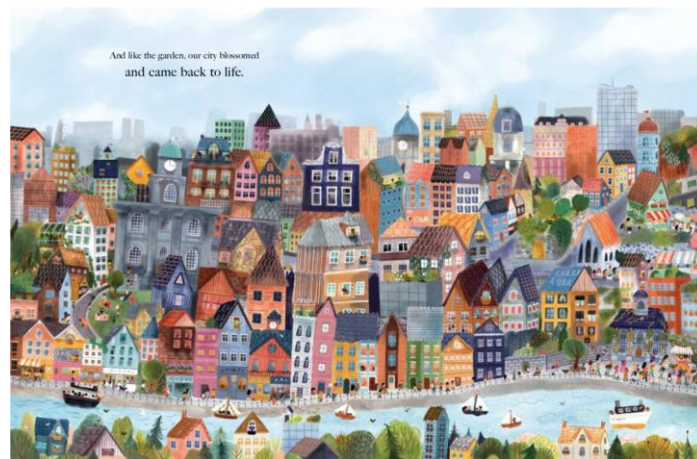


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1. Can you spot the bird...the cat...Zara...the rabbit?
2. What are the children doing in the garden? Encourage them to be specific
3. How do you think they feel to be back in the garden?
4. What do you notice about the city outside the walls of the garden?

Pages 25 - 26



1. Explore the signs of regeneration in the city
2. Compare with the picture of the city on the opening page. Note the still-damaged buildings at the back of the picture showing that it takes a long time for a city to completely recover from devastation by war

Pages 28

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1. At the end of the story, Zara is playing in the garden with her rabbit, the cat and the bird.
2. How do you think Zara is feeling?



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