HOW THE STORY GROWS
Jack plants a garden in the spring, and the book follows the development of his garden over the growing season. From a literary perspective, two key elements make this book worth reading: the cumulative text and the informative illustrations. Keen readers will notice the two ways that the color-pencil illustrations in this book offer information; each page contains a central, framed box and within it Jack’s garden forms pictorially showing one growing season in a straightforward, sequential manner. Illustrations around the border edge of this box are done in a style reminiscent of a field guide, and show details and close-ups that expand the content. These border illustrations provide the opportunity to delve more deeply into aspects of the natural world such as insects, plant development, cloud formation, and floral diversity.

This cumulative tale about Jack’s garden invites multiple readings, and definitely some fun with choral reading. Borrowing from the pattern of the classic tale, “The House That Jack Built,” the text builds by adding a line on each page, incorporating gardening vocabulary describing the sequence of the growing garden which is shown in the accompanying illustration. This style lends itself to reading aloud, and helps new readers to recognize the text-illustration connection, offering reading support through the use of repetition and predictability. The length and complexity of the text parallels the growth of the garden. In the spring, the garden is described in a single sentence, “This is the garden that Jack planted.” Over the summer, the garden grows, and in a synchronous manner, the text lengths.

THE BIOLOGICAL BACKSTORY
This is truly a gardener’s book with illustrations and text that accurately represent the key biological and gardening events of a growing season. The story, and more specifically the illustrations within the border, can be used to explore the fundamental elements of plant growth, gardening, and the plant life cycle. For example, readers learn what is required to start a garden and that plants need soil, water, and light to grow. Additionally, the plant life cycle is beautifully and accurately illustrated as Jack’s garden moves from seeds to seedlings to mature, flowering plants which

EXTENSION OBJECTIVES
Students will discover how terminology can affect the readers’ understanding of the content within the book.

BUDDING VOCABULARY
Cumulative: growing in quantity
Synchronous: happening at the same time
Generic: relating to or descriptive of a whole group
Specific: detail(s) about one part of a whole group
produce the next generation. On this merit alone, this book is useful; however, what we really love is how Jack’s Garden provides a glimpse into the complexity of nature. This idea is developed through the illustrations around the borders. For example, in late summer, there is an image of Jack’s garden with a ladybug (sometimes called ladybird beetle) and drawings of different types of ladybugs around the border. Readers can learn that “ladybug” is a generic term for a group of insects with almost 5,000 varieties. This style of moving from the generic to the specific helps convey that the natural world is both diverse and complex. Implicit in the border illustrations is that these same creatures, or processes, are present, although unseen, in Jack’s garden.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES
Descriptive words enhance our language and can improve students’ writing. By offering clear descriptions, we can better portray our thoughts and give our audience a more comprehensive understanding of the subject we are discussing.

Show students how the primary text of Jack’s Garden gives generic information such as, “These are the seeds that fell on the soil…” Then look at the border on that page where more specific details are given of the kinds of seeds planted. In this activity students will use generic and specific descriptive words to give a clear picture of something they see in the garden.

EXPLORATION
1. Take students to an area of your site with a lawn or other green space. Ask them what they see. Students will probably give a general description (i.e., grass, a tree, etc.). Next have students sit down and look more closely to identify other things in the area. Look for individual weeds, insects, and other inhabitants that exist within the lawn.
2. Explain to students that these specific details are often overlooked but contribute to the overall picture of this green space. See if you can identify the role of each of the things you observe. For example, what is the role of earthworms? One possible response is: they burrow through the soil and create air space so plant roots can grow.

TALKING POINTS
Use the following with students to draw out the literary and biological themes in the featured book:

Words matter. The generic and specific terminology used in Jack’s Garden helps readers deepen their understanding of the content. Have your students close their eyes as you read the following two statements: “The garden is filled with beautiful plants” and “The garden is filled with beautiful roses, sunflowers, and tomatoes.” Ask, “How does each sentence change what you picture in your mind?” Have your students practice making sentences using generic and specific terms relating to your school garden.

Humans and nature both play a role in gardens. While much of gardening is a human endeavor it is equally driven by nature. This is represented in the text by the fact that the main character, Jack, only appears on five of the pages. Have your students identify the natural elements (i.e., seeds, rain, pollinators) in the book and their respective roles in the garden. What would happen to the garden if one or more of these were absent?

Rhythmic and cumulative text. After reading Jack’s Garden, ask students what they notice about the way the text is written. The cumulative pattern where one detail and line is added with each page makes this a predictable and inviting text for students to participate in reading.
3. Next, if you have an outdoor school garden take students there; otherwise you can go to another natural area. Have students identify something they see in this location that interests them (i.e., cardinal, sunflower, large rock, etc.).

4. In their journal, have students write a description of this object. Older students can use complete sentences; younger students can list descriptive words. Have students start their description with more general terms and then use more specific details as they progress. Make sure students don’t use the actual name of the object, but only describe it.

5. Tell students they are going to be placed with a partner who will listen to their descriptive list one word/sentence at a time. The partner is going to try to guess what the object is based on the descriptive words. The idea is to figure out what the object is with as few clues as possible.

6. In pairs, one student should share their description one word/sentence at a time. The other student should try to guess what object their partner is alluding to based on the description. If he/she cannot guess the object, the partner should give the next descriptive word on the list until either the partner guesses correctly, or the name of the object is shared.

**Examples of a Descriptive Word List**

| Small | Living | Wings | Animal | Two Legs | Bird | Blue | Blue Jay |

**DIGGING DEEPER: EXPERIMENTING WITH CONTAINERS**

Observe characteristics of similar things in the garden. Put students in groups and assign each group to one thing (i.e., birds, insects, plants, etc.). Students should generate a list to distinguish between the different species within their category. For example, identify differences between cardinals, blue jays, crows, etc. in the bird group. Identify differences between praying mantises, ants, crickets, etc. in the insect group. Once students have made their own distinctions, introduce a field guide for each category so students can learn how these species are typically distinguished: by marks, colors, sizes, shapes, behaviors, etc.

**STANDARDS**

**Science**

*Characteristics of organisms:* Explore this idea on the page with plants and ladybugs. For example, while varied, all of the plants have leaves and are green while all the ladybugs have the same shape and wings.

*Life cycles of organisms:* The book depicts the plant lifecycle beginning with seeds that develop into mature flowering plants that are reproducing.

*Organisms and environment:* The illustrations accurately represent that a thriving garden is a habitat for a diverse range of organisms that each contribute to the health of the garden.

**Literature**

*Key Ideas and Details:* Comparing the two ways that the illustrations are presented emphasizes the main idea (within the box) and the details (outside of the border)

*Range of Text:* The narrative text is presented in cumulative form.

*Foundational Skills:* Repeated choral reading of this rhythmic text helps develop fluency.

*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:* Use of generic and specific terms in communication.

*Comprehension and Collaboration:* Asking and answering questions about descriptions to identify objects in the garden.

Books in Bloom references the Common Core State Standards and the National Science Education Standards.
Have the groups create their own field guide for the categories they observed in the garden. These could serve as an educational piece to display in the garden or could be included in a school garden brochure or newsletter.  
*The above text is adapted from KidsGardening Curriculum Connections, Cultivating Keen Observers.*

**RELATED TEXTS**

- **How Groundhog’s Garden Grew**  
  Author: Lynne Cherry  
  Illustrator: Lynne Cherry  
  ISBN: 978-0439323710

- **Whose Garden Is It?**  
  Author: Mary Ann Hoberman  
  Illustrator: Jane Dyer  
  ISBN: 978-0152026318

**LOOKING AHEAD!**

The next issue of Books in Bloom will feature...

- **Grandpa Green**  
  Author: Lane Smith  
  Illustrator: Lane Smith  
  ISBN: 978-1596436077

**ABOUT BOOKS IN BLOOM**

Lesson plan developed by Mark Lubkowitz and Valerie Bang-Jensen for Books in Bloom, a feature of the Saint Michael’s Teaching Gardens, in cooperation with NGA Education Staff.

[www.smcvt.edu/teachinggardens/](http://www.smcvt.edu/teachinggardens/)

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