

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman (1997)
Synopsis, Discussion Questions and Activities

Meets the following standards of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (grades 6-8):

Science and Technology and Engineering Education

- 3.1.6.A1

Environment and Ecology

- 4.4.6.A

English Language Arts

- CC.1.3 Reading Literature

Reading and Writing in Science and Technical Subjects

- CC.3.5 – Reading Informational Text

Mathematics

- CC.2.3.7.A.1



SEEDFOLKS TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Enclosed in this toolkit, you will find discussion questions and activities designed to accompany the middle school level book titled *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman.

The toolkit materials are divided into the following sections.

1. Synopsis of *Seedfolks*
2. Discussion questions for each chapter
3. Activities for middle school students for participation in your library
4. Extended activities for students to do in the library or complete at home
5. Appendix: lima bean seed diagram and embedded pdf files for remainder of activity components

It is preferable for the students to read *Seedfolks* prior to participating in your discussion questions session and activities. They will therefore be better able to select a character for the “Designing a Seed Packet” activity and have a better understanding of the author’s themes.

Preparation of Activity Sheets

After reviewing all the provided activities, select which of the following preparations you will need to do based upon the activities you want to use with the students. Provide color pencils/crayons as needed.

- Print Study Sheets 1 and 2 and Study Sheets 3 and 4 in color on card stock.
- Print Matching Cards in color on card stock and cut out.
- Print Plant Photograph Cards in color on card stock.
- Print Plant Name Cards and Plant Seed Cards in color on card stock and cut out.
- Print Bingo game cards and Clue Cards on card stock and cut out.
- Suggested materials lists can be found with each extended activity.
- The suggested Extended Activities may be used as take-home activities.
- Please provide books about seeds and/or plants for students to use for the “Designing A Seed Packet” activity research.



SYNOPSIS

How can 13 individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and age levels living in inner city Cleveland, Ohio come together to form a community? To find out the answer to this question, *Seedfolks*, by Paul Fleischman is a must read! These diverse individuals don't speak the same language and resort to pantomime in order to communicate. Despite their language barriers, they gradually become a unified community as a result of the innocent action by a 9 year old Vietnamese girl named Kim. Kim plants lima bean seeds in remembrance of her deceased father and his love of gardening in Vietnam. The location of her attempt to grow lima bean seeds is in a trash-strewn vacant lot located near her apartment building. Her innocent action sparked this diverse group of 13 Cleveland apartment dwellers to come together to create a community garden and a special bond never before imagined. These residents become known as "seedfolks" -- because they were the first to create an inner-city community garden. Kim's simple act of planting lima bean seeds 'sprouted' into a beautiful unfolding of the best of humanity's qualities. However, it was no simple feat to clean up a vermin-laden, trash-strewn eyesore city lot and create a beautiful community garden with individual plots. The determination and motivation of these individuals and the bond they formed against all odds was transformative!

The reader learns about the 13 individuals' life stories, personalities, and motivations for planting seeds via a short chapter about each one. Although *Seedfolks* primarily delves into the character study of the 13, the common theme revolves around how each individual finds new purpose and meaning in life as well as experiencing a sense of belonging by creating a community garden. Planting seeds holds special meaning and purpose for each one. They not only experience individual transformations, but they gradually open up to others in the community garden and come to realize their involvement is for the good of all. It's amazing how all this positive personal, civic, and social change is the direct result of planting seeds and reaping the benefits in more ways than one!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each chapter in *Seedfolks* focuses on an individual character. Please refer to the designated chapter in order to answer the discussion questions for each character.

Kim (pp. 1 - 4) Kim is a nine-year girl from Vietnam whose father died in Vietnam before she was born. To mark the anniversary of his death, Kim decides to show that she, too, can be a wonderful farmer like her father. In his memory, she plants lima bean seeds in a most unusual place in the city of Cleveland—a vacant lot a half block from her apartment building.

1. What obstacles must Kim face when planting her lima bean seeds?
2. Why do you think Kim selected this vacant lot location to plant her lima bean seeds?
3. Why did Kim select lima bean seeds?
4. How did she know how to plant and care for the seeds?

Ana (pp. 5 - 10) Ana is an elderly woman from Rumania (now called Romania) who moved to Cleveland in 1919. Ana’s daily life consists of watching apartment dwellers in the building across the street through their windows. One day she saw a young girl hiding behind an old refrigerator and digging in the dirt in the vacant lot nearby. Ana views this action as suspicious and her curiosity is sparked when she realizes the young girl is burying something. Ana decides to investigate, digs into the dirt, and discovers that white bean seeds have been planted.

1. Why did Ana feel suspicious about Kim’s behavior?
2. How did Ana feel when she uncovered the white bean seeds? Why?
3. Why would she have carefully replanted the bean seeds?
4. What do you think prompted her to care about the bean seeds?

Wendell (pp. 11 – 16) Wendell is a school janitor who grew up on a little farm in Kentucky. Wendell has become afraid to answer phone calls, especially in the middle of the night, because he received the call about his son being shot in the street, and his wife dead in a car accident. He looks after Ana a little, and reluctantly takes her distress phone call about the plants dying. Ana explains that “the girl” hadn’t been in the lot for four days. Wendell helps water the plants because Ana twisted her ankle and can’t manage the stairs.

1. How did Ana convince Wendell to water the bean seed plants?
2. Why does Wendell realize what is happening to the bean plants?
3. What prompted Wendell to go buy a shovel?
4. Will Wendell become invested in growing a garden? Why or why not?



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5. Wendell states “But a patch of ground in this trashy lot—I *can* change that.” What is his motivation in making this statement?

Gonzalo (pp. 17 – 22) Gonzalo is an eighth-grade boy who immigrated to the United States from Guatemala and learned English in two years by watching cartoons on TV. Gonzalo is “supposed to baby-sit” (p. 19) his Tio Juan, the oldest man in his former pueblo, who has come to live with Gonzalo’s family. He cannot speak English and Gonzalo’s mother is the only person who understands him. Tio Juan is prone to wandering and Gonzalo finds him standing in front of a vacant lot watching a man with a shovel. Tio Juan wants to plant seeds too and instructs Gonzalo on how to go about planting.

1. Gonzalo witnesses a behavior transformation in his Tio Juan once he begins gardening. What changes did he observe?
2. What were the reasons for Tio Juan’s transformation?
3. Gonzalo states “...I realized that I didn’t know anything about growing food and that he knew everything.” (p. 22) Do you think this realization sparked an interest in gardening for Gonzalo? Why or why not?
4. Even though Tio Juan could not read English, he knew how to plant the seeds and what they were. How did he know this?

Leona (pp. 23 – 28) Leona is an African American woman who grew up in her grandmother’s house in Atlanta and remembers her love of goldenrod tea and that “she didn’t need no other medicine.” (p. 23) Leona was thinking of her grandmother while walking home from the grocery store one day when she came across the vacant lot and thought the three people in different areas of the lot were looking for money. She realized they were actually gardening. She was distressed by the piles of garbage and foul odors and decided to take action by visiting the Public Health Department, and convinced them, in a most interesting way, to clean up the vacant lot. Once her clean up mission was completed, she was able to plant “...a patch of goldenrod right here.” (p. 25)

1. What were the different examples mentioned about the importance of goldenrod?
2. How did the memories of Leona’s grandmother trigger her interest in the developing garden?
3. Leona put in a lot of effort to affect change in the vacant lot. Why do you think she felt so strongly about completing her clean up mission?

Sam (pp. 29 – 35) Sam is a retired seventy-eight-year-old Jewish man who loves to smile, start conversations with people he doesn’t know, and his hobby is studying words and their derivations. Sam is drawn to the developing community garden. He used to garden when he was a kid, but realizes his physical condition now prohibits him from gardening. So he hires a Puerto Rican teenager to do the



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gardening for him. The teenager wanted to grow marijuana to sell, but Sam convinces him to grow pumpkins to sell at Halloween because he could earn more money that way and stay out of jail.

1. Although Sam is physically unable to plant seeds and tend a garden plot, what do you think motivated him to participate in the developing community garden?
2. One of the obstacles the new gardeners faced was getting a water source. What plan did Sam devise to help overcome this obstacle? Was this effective? Why?
3. Sam states, “From Paradise, the garden was turning back into Cleveland.” (p. 35) What did he mean by this statement?

Virgil (pp. 36 – 44) Virgil is a fifth-grade boy whose country of origin is Haiti. His father drives a taxi in Cleveland and is always day-dreaming about ways to make more money. Virgil and his dad were watching some men clearing the trash and garbage from the vacant lot. According to Virgil, “My father hadn’t been smiling to himself about some little garden. He was thinking of a farm, to make money.” (p. 39) When they don’t have success growing lettuce, Virgil realizes that he and his father don’t know much about plants.

1. Virgil hoped that they would plant pole beans, but his father had another vegetable in mind—lettuce. What prompted Virgil’s father to select lettuce to plant?
2. Why weren’t Virgil and his father successful in planting lettuce?
3. Virgil felt that “lettuce was like having a new baby in the family. And I was like its mother.” (p. 42) What did he mean by these statements?

Sae Young (pp. 45 – 50) Sae Young, a woman from Korea who moved to the United States with her husband to find work, bought and ran a dry-cleaning shop. Her husband died at age thirty-seven of a heart attack, but Sae Young continued to run the dry-cleaning business. One day she is robbed by a man with a gun and knocked unconscious. Once she recovered, she became afraid to go out of her apartment and is afraid of people. It took two years for her to slowly get better and venture outside. One day she passed by the new garden and sees Kim and others working there. She decided she would dig a little garden and grow hot peppers as she did in Korea.

1. Sae Young had become reclusive as a result of her terrifying experience in her dry-cleaning shop. How did seeing the developing community garden, and the people working in their garden plots, change Sae’s outlook on life?
2. Why did Sae Young select hot peppers to grow in her small garden plot? Was she able to share her knowledge of hot peppers with anyone?
3. What action did Sae Young take to help solve the gardeners’ water source problem?
4. How did Sae Young’s action change her?



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Curtis (pp. 51 – 58) Curtis is a 28 year old attractive, athletic African American who returned to Cleveland after living in Cincinnati for five years. He tries to revive a relationship with his former girlfriend, Lateesha, but she still harbors a grudge and snubs him even though five years have gone by. Lateesha lives across the street from the community garden. Curtis remembers that Lateesha “...had a serious thing for tomatoes.” (p. 53) To try to win her back, Curtis decided to plant beefsteak tomatoes to attract her attention. He selected a garden plot right next to the sidewalk which was in plain view of her apartment. He wanted her to know that he hadn’t forgotten how much she loved tomatoes and that he was still waiting for her.

1. Curtis explains that he has never grown anything before. How does the emergence of yellow flowers on his six tomato plants create an enthusiasm for gardening?
2. Curtis learns there can be possible problems when growing tomatoes. How does he react to this information from the other gardeners? What does he worry about?
3. How does Curtis attempt to overcome some problems he is encountering with growing tomatoes?
4. When Curtis discovers that some of his largest tomatoes are disappearing, how does he try to remedy this problem? Is he successful? Why?

Nora (pp. 59 – 65) Nora is a British nurse who takes care of an elderly African American man named Mr. Myles. Mr. Myles has lost his ability to speak due to a second stroke, and Nora observes that his interest in the world is diminishing. As Nora wheels Mr. Myles’ wheelchair past the community garden one day, he expressed an interest in watching the different gardeners. Using his arm to communicate with Nora, he directs her to wheel him into the garden. Despite the fact that Mr. Myles is wheelchair bound, Nora devises a clever way for him to plant seeds.

1. Nora realized it would be a problem for Mr. Myles to plant seeds. What solution did she devise to solve this problem? Was this a successful solution? Why?
2. Mr. Myles selected flower seeds to plant from the seed packets Nora purchased. What does Nora think is the reason he did not select vegetable seeds? Why?
3. As Nora observes the positive effects planting and growing flowers have on Mr. Myles, she recalls a fact about ancient Egyptians. What fact does she recall? How does this fact relate to Mr. Myles?
4. Nora realizes that all the gardeners share common ground in many ways. One of the ways is sharing “...the same parental emotions toward our plants.” (p. 65) What does she mean by this statement? Explain your reasoning.

Maricela (pp. 66 – 72) Maricela is a pregnant 16-year-old from Mexico who is participating in a program for pregnant teens. They receive rides to the doctor and help with getting their G.E.D. at home. Penny is a woman who helps the teens and gets a garden spot for the girls in the teen program. Penny selects radishes for the girls to grow and Maricela is resistant because she dislikes radishes. Maricela is



not happy with her pregnancy predicament or with growing radishes and then Swiss chard. Maricela unexpectedly learns a valuable lesson from Leona.

1. What was Penny’s motivation in having Maricela and the other two girls grow radishes? Did her reason for having the girls participate in the community garden have any effect on them? Why or why not?
2. Maricela learns some interesting facts about goldenrod from Leona. What information did Leona share with her in the garden, and does this impact Maricela’s outlook? Why or why not?
3. Maricela learned about nature from Leona. How has the experience of growing plants from seeds change Maricela’s perception of her situation and her attitude about her baby?

Amir (pp. 73 – 81) Amir is an immigrant from Delhi, India who arrived in the United States in 1980. He manages a fabric store because he is very aware of colors. The community garden reminds him of the colors and details of his parents’ Persian rugs in India. Amir states, “Those rugs were indeed portable gardens.” (p. 74) He is dismayed by how unfriendly people are in the United States, and how no one in his neighborhood had spoken to him before he participated in the community garden. He sees a more positive side of the people who are gardening alongside him. He is growing eggplants in addition to other vegetables. The purple color of the eggplants stands out as the only purple plant in the entire community garden.

1. Amir’s perception of the other gardeners changes as a result of his growing eggplants. Why and how does his perception change? Give some examples.
2. What changes in people does Amir witness when problems arise in the garden?
3. One of the gardeners, an old woman, praised Amir’s eggplants. Although she is quite friendly with him now, he reminds her of an incident that happened in his store with her a year ago. What was the incident, and how does Amir credit the garden with changing people’s attitudes?

Florence (pp. 82 – 87) Florence is an African American woman whose great-grandparents, freed slaves back in 1859, traveled by foot from Louisiana to Colorado to get as far away as possible from cotton-growing country. Florence, her grandfather, father, and her sisters were “the first black family in the whole county.” (p. 83) Florence’s father refers to his family as “seedfolks, because they were the first of our family there.” (p. 83) Florence views the gardeners who started the community garden on Gibb Street as Seedfolks. Florence moved to Cleveland because her husband was from there, however he is a city person and Florence grew up in the country. Due to the arthritis in her hands, Florence is unable to garden so she resigns herself to “being a watcher.” (p. 84)



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1. Florence becomes protective of the garden even though she does not have a garden plot. What prompts her protective feelings toward the community garden?
2. What actions does Florence take to protect the garden?
3. During the winter months, Florence goes for walks infrequently and passes by the empty garden. She felt disappointed that the garden was still empty as the weather started warming. What does she finally observe that gives her a sense of hope?
4. In Florence's opinion, what positive effects does the community garden have on the Gibb Street neighborhood? Give examples.



Community Read
Read. Think. Engage.

ACTIVITY 1 -- Designing a Seed Packet

1. Select a character from the book *Seedfolks*.
2. Use the seed packet template to create a seed packet, by cutting it out and folding it in half.
3. You will need to include the following information on your seed packet:

Front of packet:

1. Character's picture (draw your character's head) and name.
2. A small drawing, in color, of the mature plant.
3. A brief explanation of why you think your character selected the seeds he or she planted.

Back of packet:

Learn some interesting facts about your character's plant. Include this information on the back of the seed packet. Some ideas for information to include are:

- Botanical name of the plant
- Size of the plant at maturity
- Possible uses for the mature plant
- Time of year for planting the seeds
- Is the plant a fruit or a vegetable?
- What type of fertilizing does the plant need?
- How long is the germination time?
- What part of the mature plant is edible?

Some sources to use to research information on your plant:

- Various reference books and databases in your local library.
- <http://www.softschools.com/facts/plants/>
Click on the blue "A to Z" tab/button to alphabetize the plant names. This site has most of the plants named in *Seedfolks*.



ACTIVITY 2 -- Exploring Seed Information

A. Matching Plant Name Cards and Plant Photograph Cards

1. Divide students into two groups
2. Give each group Study Sheets 1 and 2 to review, then set aside
3. Divide Matching Cards Set A into Plant Name Cards and Photograph Cards
4. Give one group the Plant Name Cards and the other group the Photograph Cards
5. Ask each student to find his/her match (an answer key is provided)

Variation: (Can be played like the “Memory” board game.)

1. Divide students into groups
2. Give each pair or small group a partial set of the Matching Cards Set
3. With right sides up, match the name of the plant to the picture of the plant
4. Turn the cards over so the content is not visible
5. Take turns turning over two cards attempting to find a match
6. Continue taking turns, finding matches until all cards are gone

B. Matching Plant Name Cards and Seed Photograph Cards

1. Divide students into groups
2. Give each group Study Sheets 3 and 4 to review, then set aside
3. Divide Matching Cards Set B into Plant Name Cards and Seed Cards
4. Give one group the Plant Name Cards and the other group the Seed Cards
5. Ask each student to find his/her match

C. Bingo

1. Distribute the Seed Bingo Cards Versions A and B, or let students create their own on blank card.
2. Select a student to read Plant Clue Cards
3. Clues are read one at a time until a student covers four spaces in a row, diagonally or horizontally



ACTIVITY 3 – Seed Sorting by Their Characteristics

A. Practice Sorting by Characteristics

Select an observable characteristic upon which to sort your students.

Example: ‘those wearing a shirt with words’ and ‘those wearing a shirt without words’

1. Divide students into the observable characteristic groups
2. Have each of these groups create another subgroup using a different observable characteristic
3. Each group explains the reasons for their sorting process with the others
4. Repeat steps two and three until groups can no longer be sorted

B. Sorting Seeds by Their Characteristics

1. Divide students into groups
2. Give each group a set of Seed Photograph Cards (from Activity 2-B)
3. Ask each group to sort their seeds by observable characteristics. For **Example:** size, color, shape, etc.
4. Each group explains the reasons for their sorting process with the other students.



ACTIVITY 4 – Design a Garden Plot

Suggested Materials: white drawing paper, rulers, a variety of seed packets, colored pencils/crayons

Imagine you live in the Gibb Street neighborhood and you have a garden plot in the Community Garden. What will you plant?

1. Make an outline that represents your plot. The dimensions are 4 ft. by 10 ft. This size is too large for a standard sheet of paper. How will you draw your garden plot to scale? Use a ruler to calculate your scale.
2. Even in the height of summer, the sun will not be directly overhead, therefore taller plants will block the sun from smaller plants. Consider this fact when deciding the placement of your plants in your plot.
3. Referring to the seed packets, select at least four different plants to use in your plot design.
4. Consider the following information mentioned on the backs of the seed packets to help you plan your garden plot.
 - Spacing
 - Height
 - Sun exposure



EXTENDED ACTIVITIES: These activities may be used either in the Library or as take-home activities.

Science: What are the Parts of a Seed?

Suggested Materials: Diagram of a Seed page, lima bean seeds, white paper, crayons and/or colored pencils

- Use lima bean seeds that have been soaked in water for 24 hours
- Dissect a lima bean by carefully opening and examining the parts of the seed
- Draw and label the seed parts referred to on the “Diagram of a Seed”

Science: Germinate Seeds

Suggested Materials: a variety of seed packets (refer to packets for information on germination times), cotton balls (to hold moisture), small zipper-sealed bags, spray bottle with water

- Spray cotton ball with water until wet but not dripping. Put cotton ball & seed into zipper-sealed bag.
- Design an experiment to determine under which conditions seeds germinate
- Suggestion: in the light or in the dark; cool temperatures or warm, etc.
- Suggestion: turning the germinating seed upside down

Science: Sink or Float

Suggested Materials: various fruits or vegetables, pan of water

- Predict whether a fruit or vegetable will sink or float when placed in water
- Test the fruit or vegetable in the water
- Discuss why some float and some do not float
- Compare the prediction to the actual result

Social Studies/ Mapping

Suggested Materials: United States map, world map

- Locate Cleveland, Ohio on a United States map
- Select a character from Seedfolks. Read to discover his or her country of origin
- Locate the character’s country of origin on a world map



Math: How Big Is It?

Suggested Materials: various fruits or vegetables, flexible tape measure

- Predict the circumference of a fruit or vegetable
- Measure the circumference
- Compare the estimate to the actual circumference

Math: How Many Seeds?

Suggested Materials: a fruit or vegetable known for having numerous seeds

- Predict the number of seeds in a fruit or vegetable
- Have an adult cut the fruit or vegetable in half. Does your prediction change?
- Determine a method to obtain the number of seeds and count the actual number
- Compare the estimate to the actual number

Art: Draw the Inside of a Fruit or Vegetable

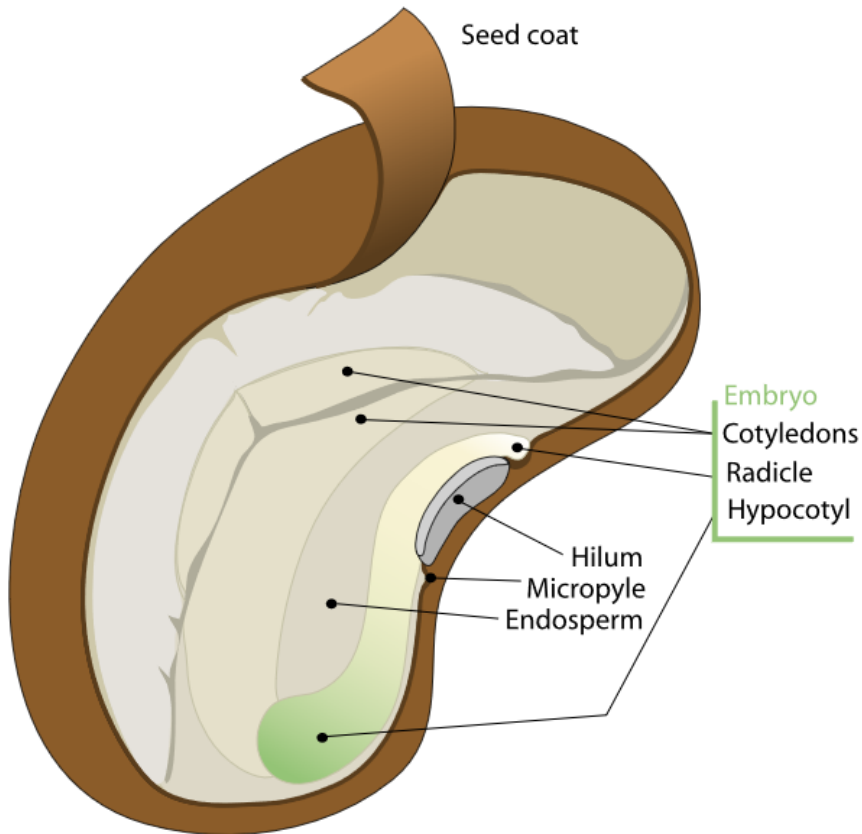
Suggested Materials: a precut fruit or vegetable, drawing paper, crayons and/or colored pencils

- Draw what you think the inside of a fruit or vegetable might look like
- Have an adult cut the fruit or vegetable in half
- Draw the picture again
- Compare the two drawings



APPENDIX

LIMA BEAN DIAGRAM



Cotyledon: The “seed leaf” that stores food and protein.

Endosperm: A source of stored food, consisting primarily of starches.

Hilum: The mark left on the seed where the seed was attached to the plant.

Hypocotyl: The stem of the seedling.

Micropyle: A tiny opening in the ovule of a seed plant through which the pollen tube usually enters.

Radicle: The root of the seedling, it emerges first from the seed.

Seed Coat: A protective layer around the seed.

