



## STORY SUMMARY

Join author Bethiny Stark in a nostalgic childhood journey back to one of her favorite places in the world: her Great-Uncle Gus's urban garden in New York City. Readers will feel like they are right there with her in the garden planting, watering, inspecting, and harvesting vegetables and flowers.

Share in the many life lessons that are cultivated working in this backyard garden with Bethiny. The author's memoir further describes an appreciation and respect for nature in little and big ways, as well as understanding what makes a healthy garden grow. As a sensory guide to read and experience with loved ones, this book covers a range of mindful descriptors and interesting facts about gardening. Most importantly, this is a story of family bonding, learning from past generations, all while sharing and appreciating the adventures of tending to an organic garden in the Bronx in New York City.

*Bethiny Stark is technically an adult, but she still enjoys doing a lot of the same things she did when she was a kid: reading, singing, storytelling, and of course, being outside in nature, especially at the beach or spending time in the forest as a Virginia Tree Steward. After studying speech pathology and early childhood education, as a grown-up she's worked many advocacy roles for children with disabilities, once serving as an Inclusion Specialist for the Girl Scouts and an Inclusive Children's Yoga Teacher over the years. She still loves to use the skills she learned growing up to tend to her garden with her husband, James, throughout the seasons. Every year, their most prized plants are their tomatoes of many varieties - she loves using those juicy tomatoes in home-cooked sauces and other special recipes to share with her family. She also enjoys creating as an artisan and voice actor, and has worked and weaved within the healing arts throughout her life as well. She lives in the mountains with James and their dog, Spartacus.*

Illustrated Narrative Ages 6-12 ISBN: 979-8387188695 Pages: 35

Juvenile Nonfiction/Biography and Autobiography/General

Juvenile Nonfiction/Concepts/Senses and Sensation

Juvenile Nonfiction/Family/Multigenerational

Juvenile Nonfiction/Gardening

## LEARNING CORRELATIONS

Literacy Skills: Comprehension

Math: Geometry, Design, Mapping

Science: Plants, Gardens, Health, Nutrition

Social Studies: Family, Cultures and Traditions, Urban and Rural Society

Writing: Biography/Autobiography, Sensory Writing



## THEMES/TOPIC CATEGORIES

Family, Multigenerational, Values, Traditions, Cultures

Gardening, Vegetables, Plants, Urban

Gardening, Plant Life Cycles, Garden Design

Biography, Memoir

Descriptive Writing, Sensory Writing

Food; Cooking, Preparing,

Health, Nutrition,

Creating Recipes



ACTIVITY	EDUCATIONAL AREA	SKILLS AND LEARNING PRACTICE
Character Analysis Character Traits Chart Sensory Mapping	Comprehension Reading Sequencing, Writing	Character Analysis Tasks, finding evidence in the story, influences and motivations, sequencing, retell in writing
Daily/Weekly Plant Journal Activity Plant Systems Presentation	Science	Plant Growth Process, Pollination Role, Outdoor Exploration
Bronx vs Rural Community Gardens Research, Mapping Activity	Social Studies	Compare and Contrast, Research Skills, Mapping for Society
Garden Collage Sensory Poetry	Art and Sensory Writing	Art/Digital Art Skills and Learning, Creative Writing
Garden Design	Math	Area and Perimeter Learning, Estimating and Calculating
Family Interviews Family Tree Project	Social Studies, Traditions and Cultures	Speech and Communication, Organizing Text, Reflection Journaling

### Related Materials

"Brown Girl Dreaming" by Jacqueline Woodson

"The Gardener" by Sarah Stewart

"The Watcher: Jane Goodall's Life with the Chimps" by Jeanette Winter

"My Name Is María Isabel" by Alma Flor Ada

"The Year of the Garden" by Andrea Cheng

"Eliza's Cherry Trees: Japan's Gift to America" by Andrea Zimmerman

"A Seed Is Sleepy" by Dianna Hutts Aston



## Character Analysis Project - Character Traits Charts

**Objective:** Students will analyze the characters in the story, focusing on their relationships, traits, and development.

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” student copies. Book by Bethiny Stark (available [holycowpublications.org](http://holycowpublications.org) or Amazon.com, Character Traits Charts (provided below))

### **Procedures:**

- Students will have read the book “Garden Days in the Bronx”
- Conduct a book discussion as a class prior to the assignment. Using the Discussion Prompts (provided) review the memoir, especially the characters and their relationships in depth.
- Have students fill out the **character traits charts** of Bethiny, mother, great-uncle, and great-grandmother. Each student will write traits that describe each character and provide examples from the book that support their descriptions.

### **Discussion Prompts:**

- How does the young girl (Bethiny) feel about spending summers in the Bronx?
- What does she learn from her great-uncle and great-grandmother? How do they influence her?
- How do family dynamics play a role in her growth?
- Why do you think she gets pleasure from work like planting, harvesting, cooking, washing, etc?

### **Teacher Ideas - Traits from the book:**

- Bethiny - curious, bold, trusting, family oriented, adventurous, patient, good listener, helpful, observant, loves nature, respectful
- Mother - caring, bold, adventurous, family oriented, helpful, supportive, encouraging
- Great-grandmother- wise, nurturing, skilled cook, caring
- Great-uncle Gus - knowledgeable, hardworking, patient, family man, endearing, skilled gardener

# Character Traits

Directions: Complete the chart below to identify character traits by citing text evidence from characters in your book. Use page numbers when citing.



## Bethiny

Trait(s)	Text Evidence



# Character Traits

Directions: Complete the chart below to identify character traits by citing text evidence from characters in your book. Use page numbers when citing.



## Great-Uncle Gus

Trait(s)	Text Evidence

# Character Traits

Directions: Complete the chart below to identify character traits by citing text evidence from characters in your book. Use page numbers when citing.



## Great-Grandmother

Trait(s)	Text Evidence

## Mother



Trait(s)	Text Evidence

**Alternative Creative Writing:** Ask students to write a short journal entry from the perspective of one of the characters, explaining their thoughts and feelings about the summer garden, the visit and the relationships.

### *Character Analysis Project - Sensory Mapping*

**Objective:** Students will improve their comprehension of the memoir and understand the sensory aspects of the story.

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” student copies. Book by Bethiny Stark (available [holycowpublications.org](http://holycowpublications.org) or Amazon.com), **Sensory Map Worksheet** (provided below) Smartboard or projection device or student tablets

**Procedures:**

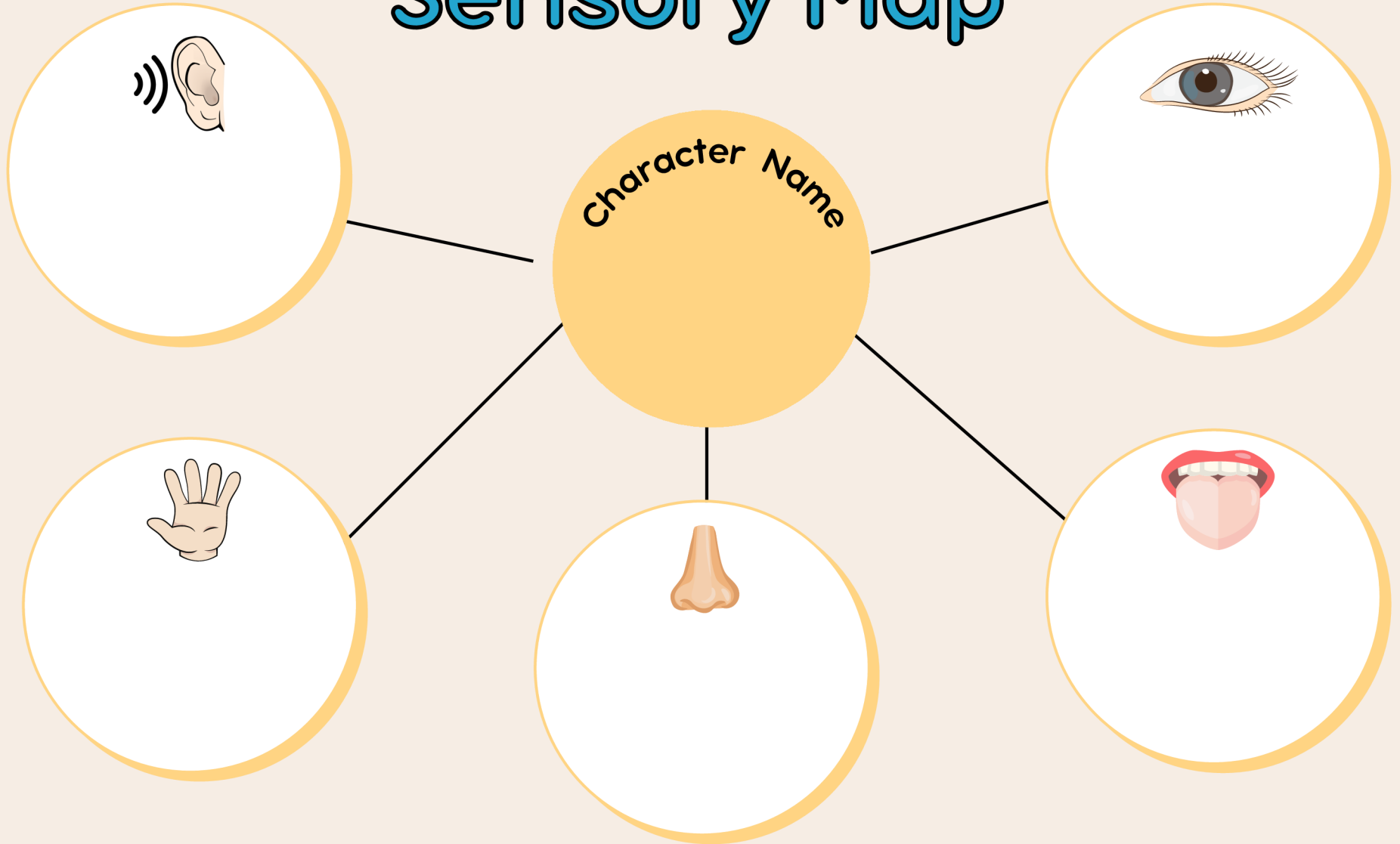
Sensory Mapping: Ask them to retell or discuss the story, ask students to identify sensory details—what the young girl saw, smelled, tasted, and heard in different parts of the story. Have each student fill out the Sensory Map Worksheet.

**Alternative for students with differing abilities:** Ask students to pair up and list or discuss the senses and write or find and discuss evidence from the story where the senses are detailed.



# Garden Days in the Bronx

## Sensory Map





## **Science; Daily/Weekly Plant Growth Journal**

**Objective:** Students will learn about plant life cycles and the role of pollinators, using the garden from the story as a reference.

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” student copies. Book by Bethiny Stark (available [holycowpublications.org](http://holycowpublications.org) or Amazon.com), seeds or seedlings of plants (vegetable or otherwise), student journals

### **Plant Growth Experiment:**

- Have students plant seeds (e.g., tomatoes, beans, or lettuce) in small pots.
- They will observe and document the plants' growth stages: germination, growth, flowering, and fruiting. Encourage them to compare these stages with the garden in the book. Document the changes in growth in journals.
- Teach the systems of a plant (optional presentation below)

### **Alternative Science Lesson Ideas:**

- Pollinator Role Play: Discuss the role of bees and butterflies in pollination, which is briefly mentioned in the book. Have students research how pollinators help plants grow and create a visual diagram showing the process.
- Outdoor Exploration: If possible, take students on a nature walk to identify local pollinators and plants. Ask them to bring their observations back and compare them to the garden in the Bronx.

## **Science; Plant Systems Presentation ages 8-12**

**Objective:** Students will understand how a plant grows and the parts of a plant - the systems that allow the plant to develop.

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” Book. Plant Systems Presentation (provided below)

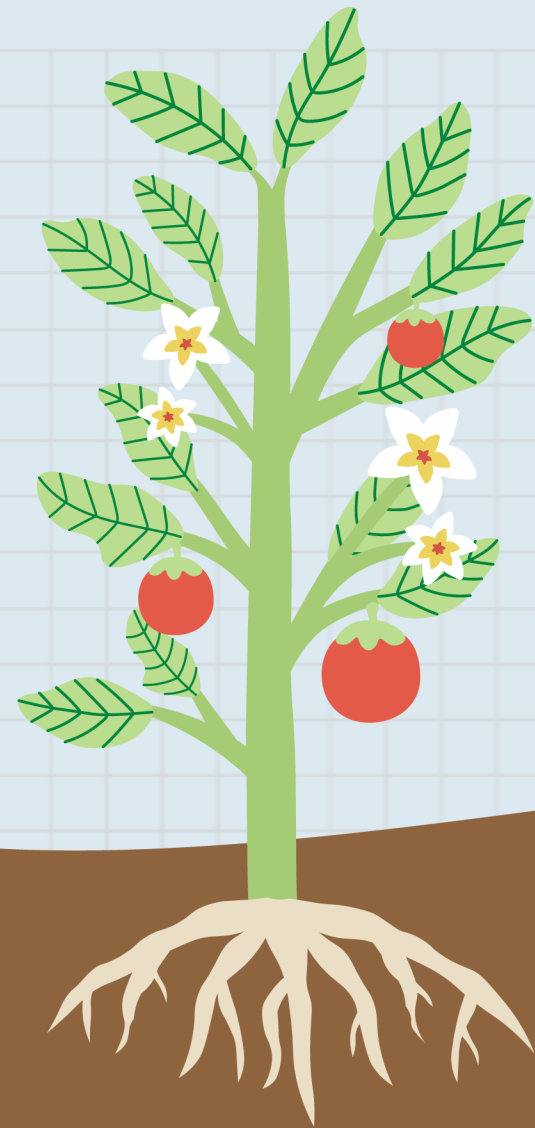
**Procedures:** After reading “Garden Days in the Bronx” engage in conversations about planting and growing trees, vegetables, bushes, wildflowers, and flowers. The first page of the presentation allows for review of the basics of plant growth; sunlight, water, soil, nutrients. This presentation is the next level of plant growth learning - stem and root systems.



Plants

and their

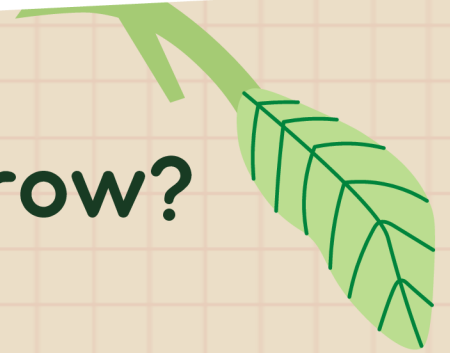
Systems





Have you ever planted something?

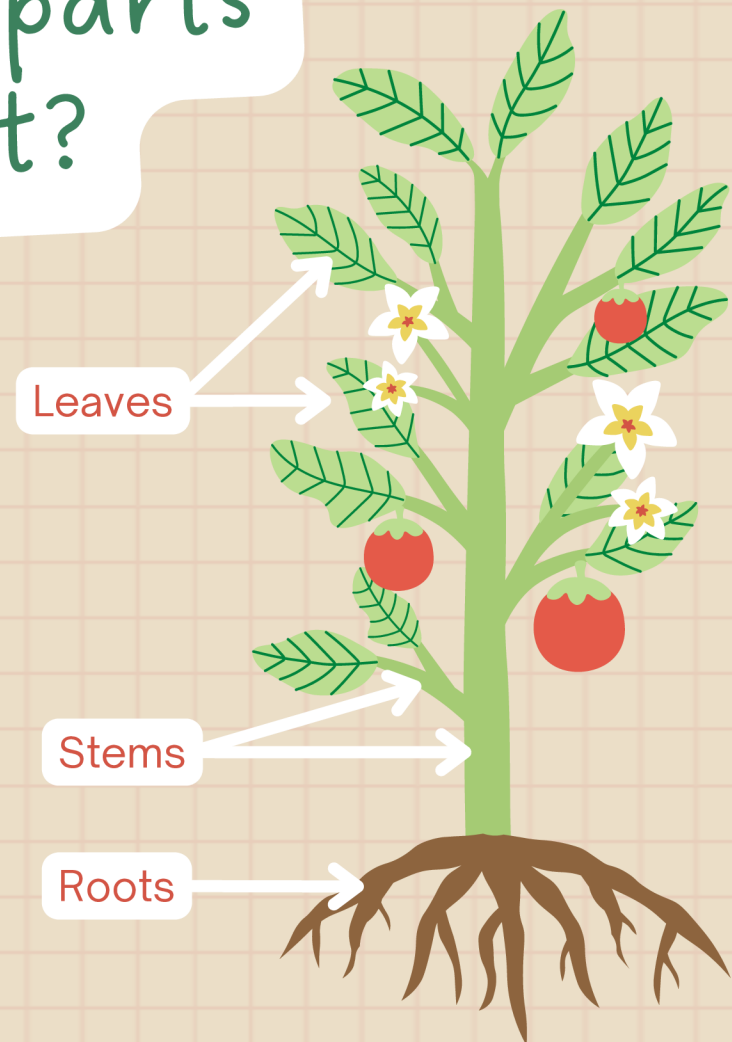
What did you do to make it grow?



# What are the main parts or organs of a plant?

Similar cells working together form **tissues**

Tissues work together to form **organs**





Plants have two main systems.

R \_ \_ \_ System

S \_ \_ \_ \_ System

Can anyone guess what these systems are?

**Hint:** these words rhyme!

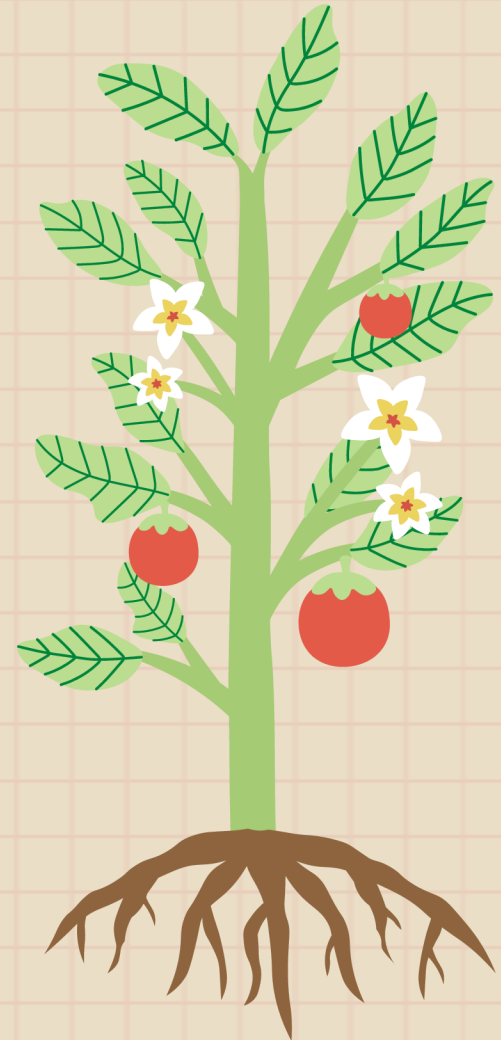


## Shoot system

the aerial part of the plant, which grows or "shoots" upwards

## Root system

composed of the organs that grow beneath and into the ground

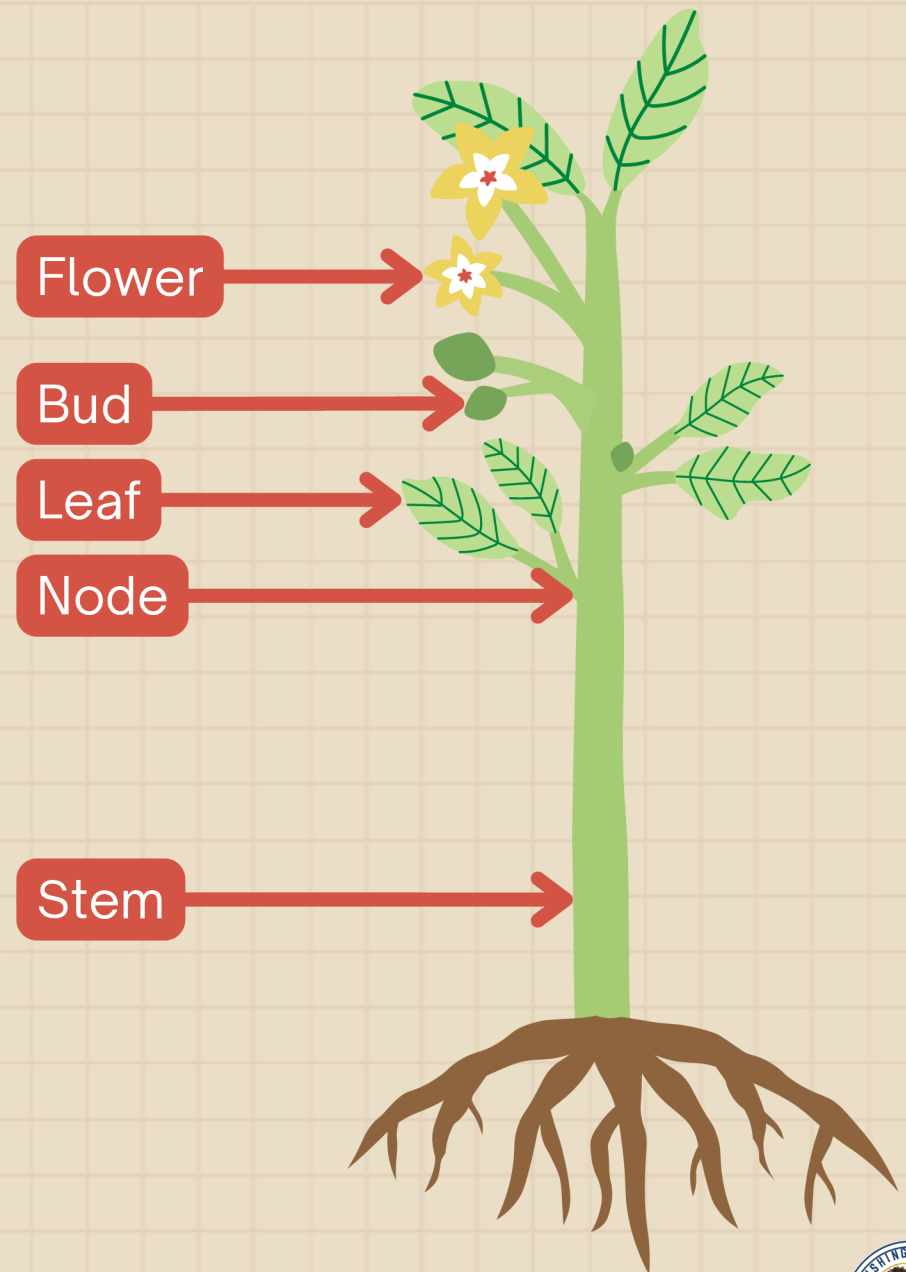


# Shoot System: Major Functions

Provides structure by holding it upright (stem)

Transports fluids throughout the whole plant (stem)

collect sunlight and make food by photosynthesis (leaves)

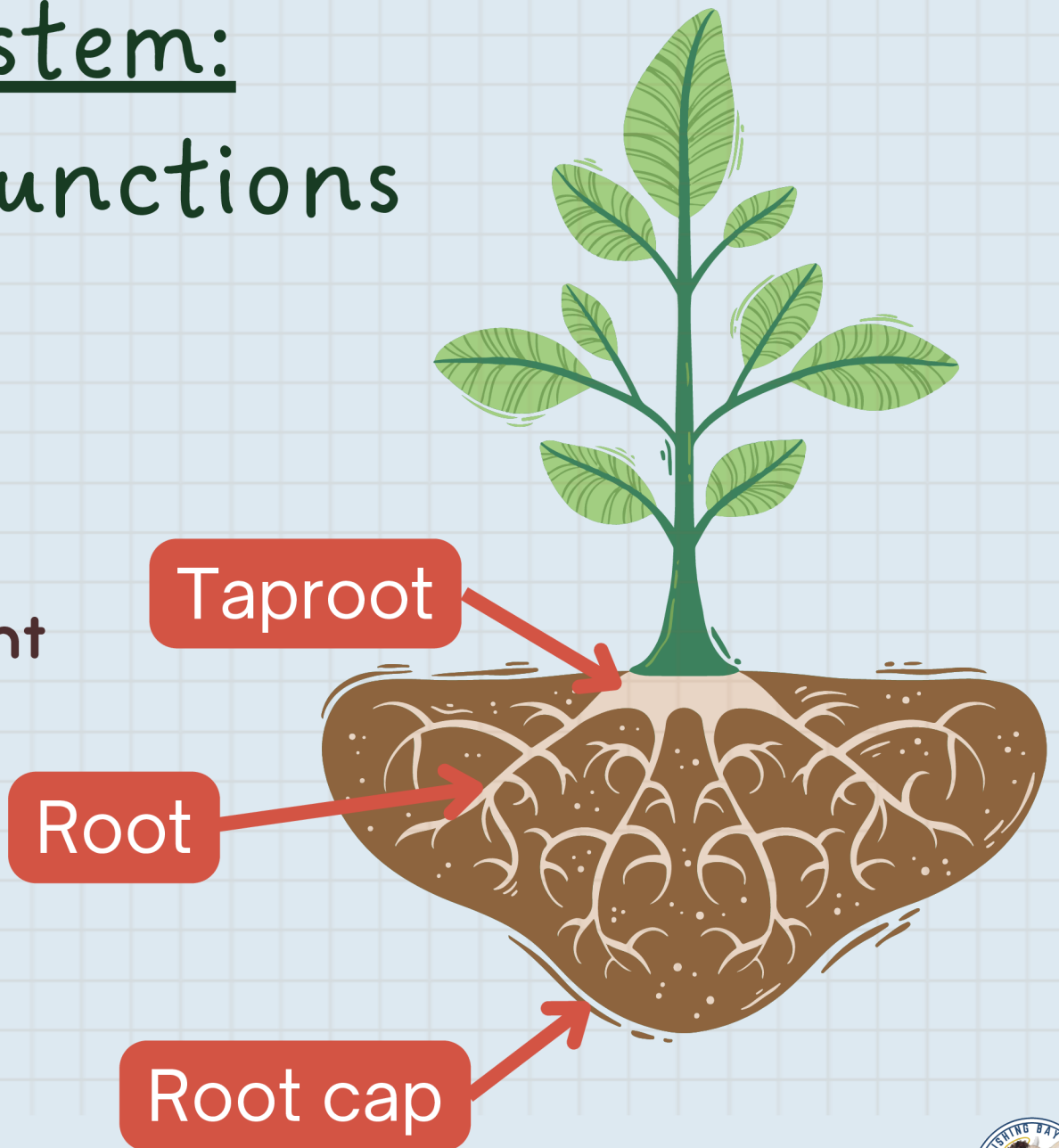


# Root System: Major Functions

Absorbing water  
and minerals

Anchoring and  
supporting the plant

Storing food





# Shoot System Grows Upward

the plant "shoots" up towards the sunlight, which allows the system to facilitate photosynthesis in the leaves.

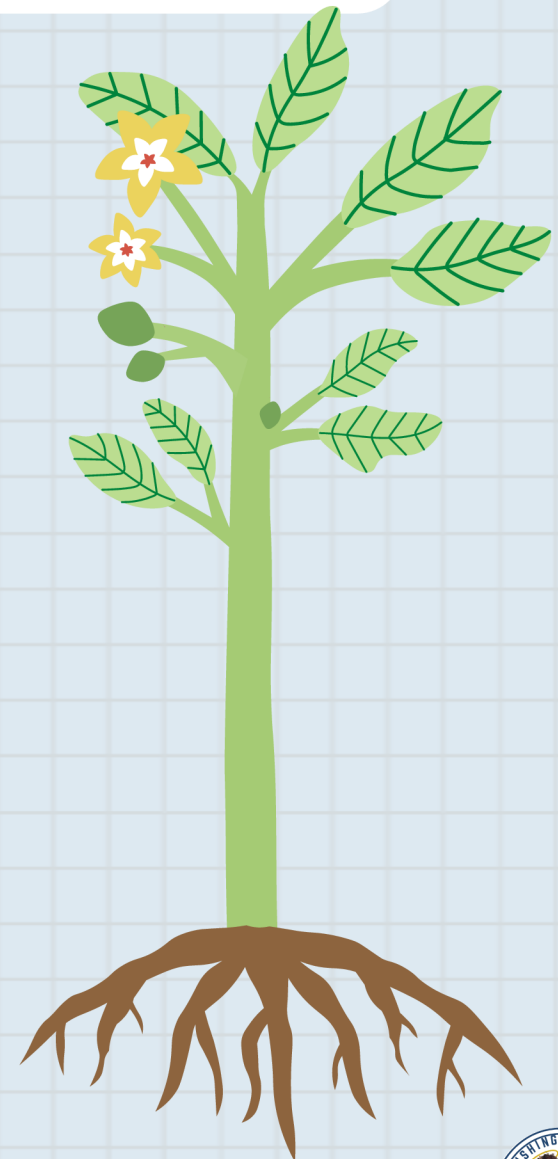
The absorption of oxygen and sunlight happens here.

# Root System Grow Down

The root cap protects the roots. It also helps the root sense gravity!

New roots are continually growing

Thicker roots absorb nutrients less but stores fluids and food better



## Visual Arts and Sensory Writing - Garden Collage and Sensory Poetry

**Objective:** Students will develop their descriptive writing and artistic skills by focusing on sensory details inspired by the garden scenes in “Garden Days in the Bronx”

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” book available on [holycowpublications.org](http://holycowpublications.org) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), Books of sensory poetry most likely available at your library (**list provided below**)

**Procedures:**

- Start by finding the sensory descriptors in the book “Garden Days in the Bronx.”
- Allow the students to grasp the knowledge of the five senses and ways to describe them specifically.
- Read aloud several poems of your choosing from the list of books provided below.
- Have the students take 30 minutes to select from the books to read silently or choose one to read to the class.
- Have students write poems using each of the five senses to describe the garden from the story. Encourage them to use specific, vivid language to paint a mental picture of what it was like in the Bronx garden.

**Create a Garden Collage:** Students can create a sensory collage using images, leaves, seeds, and other materials that represent the sensory experiences of the story. This could also be a digital collage using online tools if physical materials aren’t available.

**Alternative Science Lesson Ideas:**

- Pollinator Role Play: Discuss the role of bees and butterflies in pollination, which is briefly mentioned in the book. Have students research how pollinators help plants grow and create a visual diagram showing the process.
- Outdoor Exploration: If possible, take students on a nature walk to identify local pollinators and plants. Ask them to bring their observations back and compare them to the garden in the Bronx.

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF SENSORY POETRY

"Outside Your Window: A First Book of Nature" by Nicola Davies

Sensory Appeal: Focuses on sensory experiences in nature, bringing the environment to life for children.

"Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems" by Paul B. Janeczko

Sensory Appeal: These short, vivid poems focus on moments filled with sensory detail, such as the sight of fireflies, the warmth of summer air, and the taste of fresh snow.

"Water Rolls, Water Rises / El Agua Rueda, El Agua Sube" by Pat Mora

Sensory Appeal: Focuses on the sensory experience of water and its movement through different landscapes.

"Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors" by Joyce Sidman

Sensory Appeal: The poems engage multiple senses as they describe color in terms of sound, taste, and touch, creating a multi-sensory experience for young readers.

"When Green Becomes Tomatoes: Poems for All Seasons" by Julie Fogliano

Sensory Appeal: Each poem is deeply connected to nature and evokes the sensations of different times of the year.

"In the Tall, Tall Grass" by Denise Fleming

Sensory Appeal: The vibrant language and illustrations evoke sights, sounds, and textures of the natural world in a playful way.

"A Stick Is an Excellent Thing: Poems Celebrating Outdoor Play" by Marilyn Singer

Sensory Appeal: The poems are filled with sensory details that bring outdoor activities to life.

"If You're Not From the Prairie" by David Bouchard

Sensory Appeal: Through rich, descriptive language, the book immerses readers in the sensory experiences of prairie life.

"Daniel Finds a Poem" by Micha Archer

Sensory Appeal: Focuses on how sensory observations can turn into poetic expression, helping children appreciate the details in their environment.



## Math: Garden Planning; Ages 8-12

**Objective:** Students will apply basic math skills by designing their own garden layout. Students will learn and apply the usage of area and perimeter. Students will practice and understand measurement.

### **Procedures:**

- **Garden Design:** Provide students with graph paper and have them design a garden, deciding how many rows of plants to include, how much space each plant needs, and what types of vegetables or flowers to plant.
- **Area & Perimeter:** Teach students how to calculate the area and perimeter of garden beds. They can use this to figure out how many plants fit into their designed space.
- **Estimation:** Introduce estimation by having students estimate how many seeds might be needed for a garden plot and how long it would take for each plant to grow and be harvested.

### **Gardening Videos for Students:**

"Backyard Gardening for Kids | Episode 1 - Starting a Garden" by The Gardening Channel with James Prigioni

**Overview:** This is the first episode in a kid-friendly gardening series where the host walks viewers through how to start a garden in the backyard. It covers selecting a location, preparing the soil, and choosing plants that are easy for kids to grow.

**Key Features:** Step-by-step instructions, focused on making gardening fun for kids, with a focus on hands-on learning.

(Available on YouTube via The Gardening Channel)

"Grow Your Own Vegetables | Kids Gardening Lesson" by Natural Learning Early Childhood Education

**Overview:** This video is perfect for young learners and focuses on teaching children how to grow their own vegetables in a small garden. The video explains the importance of sunlight, water, and soil, as well as how to plan the layout of a garden.

**Key Features:** Simple explanations, colorful visuals, and an emphasis on the importance of sustainability and healthy eating





## ***Social Studies: Bronx (Urban) vs. Rural Gardening***

**Objective:** Students will explore the contrast between urban and rural environments and how gardening can take place in different settings.

**Materials:** “Garden Days in the Bronx” student copies, Compare and Contrast Worksheet (provided below)

**Procedures:**

- Have students compare the Bronx garden in the story with a garden in a rural area.
- What are the differences in space, challenges, and types of plants grown?
- Have students fill out the Compare and Contrast Worksheet (provided below)

**Community Gardens Research:** Introduce the concept of urban community gardens. Students can research community gardens in cities like New York. How do these gardens support local food systems and bring people together?

**Mapping Activity:** Create a map of a city neighborhood, and ask students to imagine and design where gardens could be placed. What spaces can be repurposed for green areas?

## ***Optional Lessons:***

### ***Nutrition & Cooking: From Garden to Table***

**Objective:** Students will explore healthy eating by learning about the vegetables grown in the story’s garden and how they are prepared.

**Activities:**

- **Recipe Research:** Ask students to research simple recipes using vegetables mentioned in the book, such as tomatoes, beans, or cucumbers. They can create recipe cards, decorate them, and share them with the class.
- **Food Group Sorting:** Students can categorize the vegetables mentioned in the story into different food groups and discuss how these foods contribute to a healthy diet.
- **Cookbook Project:** As a class, create a cookbook of recipes inspired by the book. Each student can contribute a recipe, complete with illustrations or photos of the ingredients.

# Garden Days in the Bronx

## COMPARE & CONTRAST

URBAN GARDEN

SIMILARITIES

RURAL GARDEN