



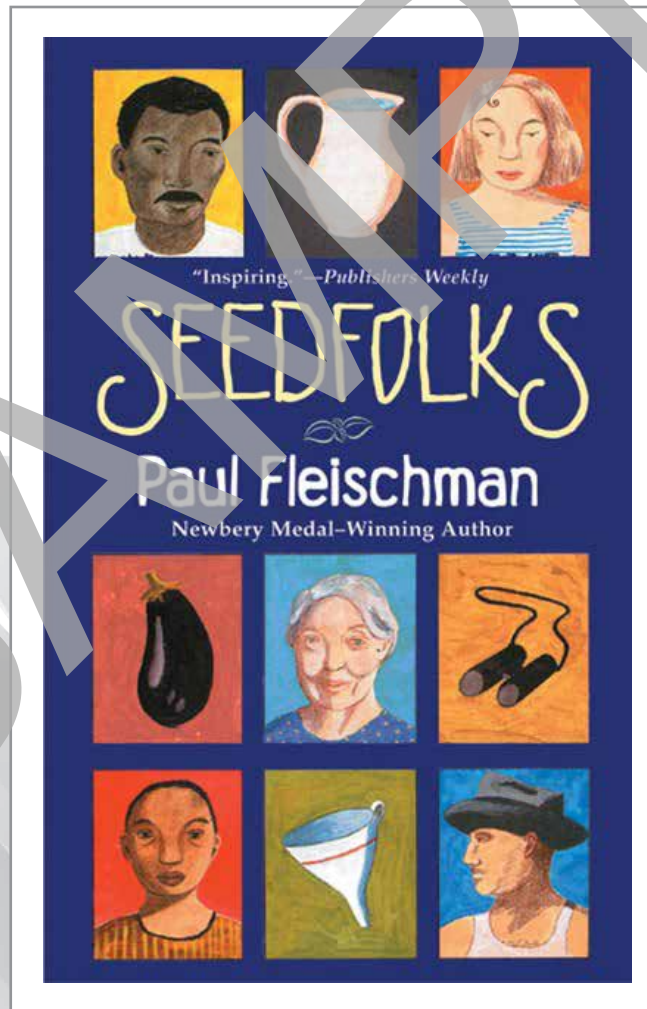
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Seedfolks

Paul Fleischman



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Seedfolks

Paul Fleischman

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Predicting, brainstorming,  
research

### Comprehension

Pros/cons, compare/contrast

### Writing

Freewriting, poem, letter,  
essay, fiction, brochure

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion with classroom  
guests, interview

### Vocabulary

Synonym, antonym, word  
map, glossary, word scramble

### Literary Elements

Character analysis, story  
map, conflict, point of view,  
metaphor, simile

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—multicultural  
issues; Art—collage, sketch,  
caricature; Science—  
horticulture; Drama—skit;  
Music—jazz (Miles Davis)

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** a vacant lot turned garden in modern-day Cleveland

**Point of View:** first person from 13 different viewpoints

**Themes:** suspicion, tolerance, community, redemption, hope, new beginnings

**Conflict:** person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. nature, person vs. society

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** alternates between despairing and hopeful

**Date of First Publication:** 1999

## Summary

A group of people—different in age, race, culture, and circumstance—resurrect a dirty, vacant lot in their neighborhood. The lot is turned into a garden, and each person contributes in some way, either as a planter or as an observer. Although each person has his/her own story, the garden inadvertently connects the individuals of the neighborhood. The garden soon becomes the focal point of the neighborhood, and the lives of the people participating in its development are forever changed.

## About the Author

Paul Fleischman, the son of Newbery Medal-winning author Sid Fleischman, grew up in Santa Monica, California. He attended college at the University of New Mexico and after graduation worked as a bookstore clerk, library shelver, and proofreader. Paul says that “words are my world,” and it was this feeling that led him to establish The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to English, a group dedicated to ensuring the correct use of grammar. He has a passion for history and music—prevalent themes in his novels—as well as theater. He writes many of his novels in a way that allows them to be performed as plays or skits. Paul and his wife have two sons, Seth and Dana, and currently live in Aromas, California. His novel, *Seedfolks*, won the Buckeye Children’s Book Award. Some of Paul’s other award-winning works include *Bull Run*, winner of the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction; *Graven Images*, a Newbery Honor book; *A Fate Totally Worse Than Death*, winner of the Children’s Choices Award; *Saturnalia*, winner of the Boston Globe-Horn Book Fiction Honor Award; and *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*, winner of the Newbery Medal. In addition to young-adult fiction and poetry, Paul writes picture books, nonfiction, and plays.

## Kim–Wendell

Kim is a young Vietnamese girl whose father died before she was born. Because her father was a farmer, Kim plants lima bean seeds in a vacant lot near her apartment to make her father proud. She hopes the beans will grow so her father will “see” her accomplishment.

Ana likes to watch people in other apartments, and she notices Kim in the vacant lot. She believes Kim is burying something illegal, and she goes to the lot and digs up Kim’s seeds. Horrified at her mistake and the ruined plants, Ana reburies the seeds and waters them.

Wendell is not fond of receiving phone calls because of the bad news they almost inevitably bring. He found out about the deaths of his son and wife via telephone. He is not pleased when Ana calls to ask for help to save Kim’s dying bean plants. However, he goes to the vacant lot and rescues the plants. Kim sees him and is afraid, but she later imitates his watering methods. Wendell realizes that a garden is one thing in his life he can change and improve. He decides to plant something of his own in the lot.

### Vocabulary

altar  
stern  
incense  
gnawing  
vowed  
thrive  
vacant  
lad  
parole  
wilted

### Discussion Questions

1. For what does Kim wish as she looks at the photograph of her father? How does Kim perceive her father? *(She wishes her father’s eyes would move and look at her. She wants her father to notice her. As evident by her description of the photograph, Kim sees her father as having been a strict, serious man.)*
2. Describe the place where Kim goes to plant her seeds. Why do you suppose Kim chooses this place? *(It is a vacant lot filled with trash and abandoned items. There is an old couch where people can be found sleeping, a rusty refrigerator, and rats that feast on the trash in the lot. Kim is afraid to walk into the lot. Answers will vary.)*
3. How does Kim feel when she thinks of her father? *(She is saddened by the fact that she has no memories of him. She worries that since her father died before she was born, he does not know or recognize her.)*
4. Explain Kim’s rationale for planting the bean seeds. *(Kim’s father was a farmer, and she wants to grow something to make him proud. She believes that if he sees her plants growing, he will know that she is like him and therefore recognize her as his daughter.)*
5. What does Ana believe Kim is doing in the vacant lot? What does this assumption reveal about Ana’s character? *(Ana sees Kim crouched down in the vacant lot and thinks she is burying something illegal. Because Ana watches the goings-on of the city outside her window and sees a lot of mischief, she assumes Kim is doing something wrong. Her assumption shows that she is nosy and suspicious.)*
6. How does Ana discover her mistake regarding Kim’s activities? Why do you suppose she reacts this way? *(Ana goes to the vacant lot intending to dig up whatever Kim had buried. When she digs into the soil, she finds the bean seeds and realizes that Kim planted them. Answers will vary but should include that Ana is self-assured and judgmental. She wants to take credit for revealing Kim’s unsuitable behavior.)*

7. Why is Wendell angry that Ana calls him? (*He hates phone calls because they always seem to bring him bad news. Ana's phone call awakens him, and she frightens him by demanding that he come to her apartment quickly.*)
8. Why do you suppose Kim is afraid when she sees Wendell? Why doesn't Wendell speak to her? (*Answers will vary.*)
9. Analyze Wendell's statement: "Better to put my time into [changing the lot] than moaning about the other all day" (p. 15). (*Wendell has had a lot of heartache in his life and so has become pessimistic and cynical. However, seeing Kim work in the vacant lot, he realizes that he can make something in his life better—even if it is only a small area of soil—instead of complaining about everything else.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Discuss the author's use of similes and metaphors throughout the novel. Use the Metaphors and Similes chart on page 22 of this guide to keep a list of literary devices as you read the book.
2. Literary Analysis: Begin a Story Map like the one on page 23 of this guide. You may use your own paper for this activity, which will continue as you read the novel.
3. Art: Sketch one of the following: (a) Kim's family altar (b) Ana's view of the vacant lot (c) the area of the lot where Kim has planted her seeds.
4. Research: Research effective watering methods for small vegetables, such as lima beans. Create either a poster or brochure showing proper instructions for the care of small vegetable plants.

## Gonzalo–Leona

Gonzalo lives with his Spanish-speaking family in an apartment near the vacant lot. He feels as though he has become the adult and his parents have become like children, since they cannot speak English and are unable to function on a daily basis. He is placed in charge of his uncle and one day notices him missing. His uncle has gone to the vacant lot and is trying to help Wendell with his planting. Gonzalo is embarrassed, but he later sees how being in the garden makes his uncle very happy.

Leona plans to plant goldenrod in the vacant lot to honor her deceased grandmother. When she notices how dirty and smelly the vacant lot is, she begins making phone calls to have someone clean up the lot. After many phone calls with no results, Leona decides to meet someone in person in hopes of achieving her goal. She visits the health department with a bag of trash from the vacant lot. The smell of the garbage gets the desired results; Leona convinces the city to clean the vacant lot so neighborhood residents can use it as a garden.

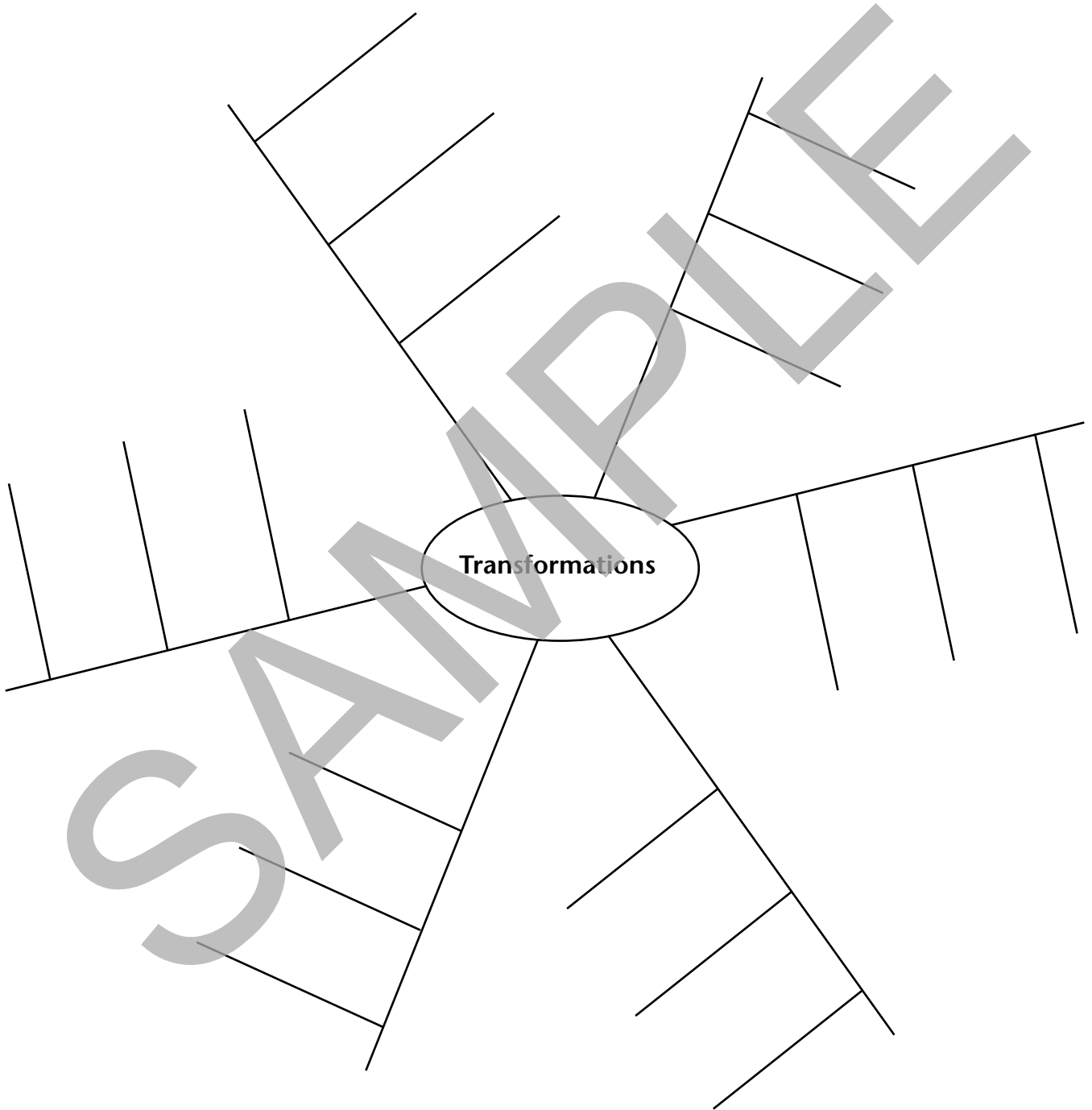
Vocabulary
equation
bodega
pueblo
gestures
trowel
troughs
citizens
maggots
receptionist

### Discussion Questions

1. How did Gonzalo learn to speak English? (*He learned English on the playground and from watching TV, especially cartoons.*)
2. How does Gonzalo feel about his father and uncle? Why does he feel this way? (*He believes both men have become like babies again since arriving in the United States. Since neither man can speak English, both are practically helpless and depend on Gonzalo to perform everyday functions for them. He feels as though this makes him the adult, while his father and uncle have reverted to being children.*)
3. What happens to Gonzalo's uncle? Where does he go? (*Gonzalo's uncle wanders away from the apartment, and Gonzalo cannot find him. He goes into the vacant lot, where Gonzalo finds him trying to communicate with Wendell.*)
4. How does Gonzalo's uncle react upon reentering the vacant lot? (*He is very excited about being there. He looks at the sun. He feels, smells, and tastes the soil. In contrast to when he begins planting the seeds, he is extremely focused and aware.*)
5. Why do you suppose Gonzalo's uncle is able to be happy when in the vacant lot? (*Answers will vary but should include that he does not feel pressured to speak, so his language inadequacies are not evident. He knows about planting seeds, so he feels confident instead of childish.*)
6. What is Leona's problem with the vacant lot? How does she intend to solve this problem? (*She is concerned about the amount of trash in the lot, as well as the awful smells. Leona plans to call city officials and ask them to clean up the lot.*)
7. What is Leona's ultimate realization about the vacant lot? What does she do? Do you agree with her actions? Why or why not? (*Leona realizes that no one will pay attention to her as long as she is just using the telephone. She visits the health department and brings along a bag of smelly trash from the lot, forcing people to notice and listen to her. Answers will vary.*)

## Attribute Web

**Directions:** Use this web to list different kinds of transformations (on the long spokes) and of the transformations, success is the cause of nature or nurture (on the short spokes), and explain why.





# Vocabulary Word Map

**Synonyms**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Antonyms**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**WORD**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Definition in your own words**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Used in a sentence**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SAMPLE